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למלחמת יום הכיפורים

"The contribution of academic experts in formulating and disseminating the Israeli perception of the conflict with the Arabs, during the period between the War of Attrition (August 1970) and the Yom Kippur War (October 1973)"
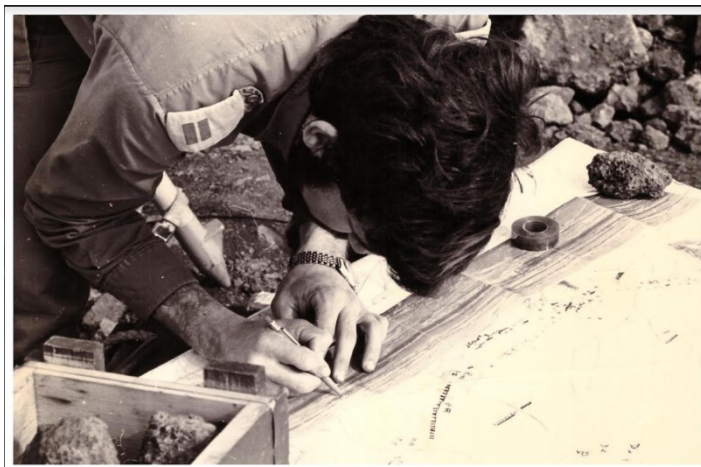
Ph.D. thesis – the English abstract

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Dr. (B.G. retired) Joseph (Yossi) Ben ari
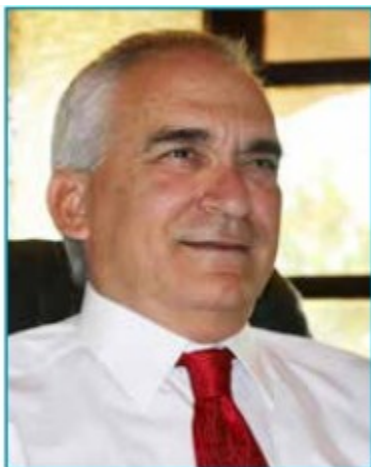
Dr. (B.G. retired) Joseph (Yossi) Ben ari, today

Lieutenant (res.) Yossi Ben ari, draws down the picture of Syrian forces deployment along the new border line of the Golan Enclave (the winter of 1973-4)(Malam archive)

Rationale:

This paper characterizes the works of academic experts, analyzing the formulation and dissemination of the Israeli concept of the conflict with the Arabs, during the period preceding the Yom Kippur War.

Following the publication of the findings of the Agranat Commission, voices were heard advocating that that the IDF Intelligence Branch should not be viewed as the sole element responsible for the failure of the war. Blame and responsibility were placed at the doorsteps of additional elements, both establishment and public, which brought Israel to the very brink of its existence, demise, perhaps the most serious crisis in its entire history. This study therefore begins with the assumption that the formulation and dissemination of the Israeli concept regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict during the period between the end of the War of Attrition (August 1970) and the Yom Kippur War (October 1973), was not the sole legacy of any one influential body but rather the result of the actions and blunders of a number of elements, and not less important – the outcome of the friction between them during that period.

In order to identify and mark the "players" who had any connection with the issue at hand, this study presents a model which describes the various elements which influenced Israel's understanding of the conflict at that time. The model maintains that the formulation and dissemination of Israel's concept was influenced by, among others, academic experts (historians of the modern Middle East [Orientalists], and other researchers in the academic community who studied the Arab-Israel conflict). This study concentrates in its entirety on this group only.

In this connection the purpose of the study is to describe the central characteristics of the works of academic experts in analyzing the Israeli concept of the conflict. An additional purpose of the paper is to analyze the findings, in such a way as to characterize, in general, the nature of the concept's failure, on the eve of the Yom Kippur war. The original intention of this paper was to locate the statements relevant to this group of academics and test them in light of the "concept" as defined by the Agranat Commission: that Egypt would not go to war until it has the aerial ability to attack deep inside Israel; and Syria would not go to war without Egypt. An initial study of the research material showed that one must clearly differentiate between the professional failure of the Intelligence Branch in sounding the warning of war because of the erroneous intelligence "concept", and the "true concept" which led to the Israeli failure: its deeply mistaken understanding of the conflict with the Arabs, in the way it judged itself and its enemies in the years leading up to the war.

The Egyptian flag

The central argument in this study is that the considerable gap between the Israeli self-image and its view of the Arab countries (as reflected in statements by academic experts at the time) influenced the formulation of the mistaken understanding that led to the failure of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. It was not only the fault of the intelligence "concept".

The central questions in the light of which the conclusions of this paper will be drawn will deal with two sides of the same coin: first, how those academic experts painted Israel's power and ability in their writings, and second, how they described Israel's neighbors, particularly Egypt and Syria.

The Syrian flag

The texts written by the academic experts under review will in fact be viewed through the prism of the gap between the images – that of Israel's self-image and that ascribed to its enemies.

Ma'ariv daily newspaper headline, describing the opening of the war

The desire to try to understand the input of the academic experts in this connection was born out of a number of considerations. The one, the historical importance of the issue: despite the centrality of the Yom Kippur war in Israel's ethos, academic research into the matter is still limited in scope and depth. The broad interest in the war thirty years hence has indeed spawned a number of new research papers, but this adds an additional "brick" to the study of the events at the time. To this one should add the fact that this special view – as seen by the academic experts – has until this day not received the attention it deserves. This point is driven home further in view of the feeling that at the time the academic experts enjoyed public attention and prestige, both due to their professionalism and the fact that they were considered clean of any political approach. Another justification for pointing attention in this direction is drawn from the feeling that "members" of this non formal "group" constituted an important axis around which the broad view of various elements in Israeli society was formed at the time, at the various levels between the public at large and the decision makers at the national level.

Another consideration has to do with the question of professional and personal responsibility on the part of the academic experts with regard to the messages that they express. Unlike the "professional analysts" (researchers in the intelligence community who receive little public "acclaim" following their successes, but who come in for scathing criticism for every failure), the community of academic experts in Israel was at that time (just as today) not responsible formally in any way for fashioning and assessing the national situation. It was therefore not investigated after the war by the Agranat Commission. It is worth noting this unbalanced

Agranat Commission of Inquiry members (Malam archive)

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reality in which academic experts enjoy a most unique privilege: they may express any opinion but are not held accountable, nor do they have to pay the "personal price" for their mistakes.

An outcome of the above is the last consideration: it has to do with the implications of the historic issue for the current situation in Israel. It would appear that during the years following the Yom Kippur War, the presence of academic experts in Israeli public life, and their inputs with regard to issues relevant to the state's national security received added strength. This trend was apparently further sharpened, particularly due to the wider use of the electronic media, as well as by the growing interest among broader parts of the public to become acquainted with, and to study in

depth, the events and phenomena connected with the security of the state and its residents. The public criticism which developed in the wake of the 1973 war only strengthened this trend.

The method and outlay of the research:

this study is for the most part historical research. However, without a doubt it includes a number of additional disciplines. It also deals for example with the involvement of intellectuals in politics, it touches on political thought, political science; analysis of statements by experts to the press at the time touches on the field of communication; study of the information activity in the IDF touches on the field of sociology; the crystallization of a position or views touches on the field of psychology. This is then an interdisciplinary multi-faceted study.

In essence this paper is mainly naturalist-qualitative, and it focuses on an event study of the event: the attitude of academic experts to the issue of the conflict during the years prior to the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. In places where it was possible, a research effort was made to collect and analyze quantitative data and these were of course used in the presentation. The quantitative findings express an added dimension of qualitative findings regarding subjects under study, and further enhance them.

The central method applied here is a review of written texts: the study deals with presentation and analysis of historical documents written by the community under review, its attitude to the conflict in the years 1970-1973. This is done with a retrospective view, taken at the present time.

Special importance here should be attached to the uncovering of new archival texts, in other words prime sources which remained unpublished hitherto. The character of the research which dealt with analyzing non-classified material allowed its separation and withdrawal from the world of classified material concealed in the IDF's and its Intelligence Branch archives. This then was the first opportunity to study texts related to the connection between the world of academic experts and the Intelligence Branch, or such that were produced in the IDF's information system. These, in addition to prime overt material to be found in various libraries and archives (such as the State archives; the Tel Aviv University archives; daily press and Foreign Ministry libraries), opened a rare window of opportunity to understand the academic perception of the conflict, in particular, and the intellectual and social atmosphere on the eve of the war, in general.

IDF's Intelligence branch embalm

The first chapter of the study will deal with the family group of intellectuals (in general); this includes the sub-group of academics ("orientalists" and others who made statements regarding the conflict). The discussion about intellectuals will present the interface which occurred between them and elements acting outside the "academic ivory tower" at a time when academics were penetrating the political activity.

In addition to the first chapter the work includes five chapters of substance analysis which deal with the various aspects of the subject under study. The first chapter reviews the work relations between the IDF's Intelligence Branch and academic experts (mainly researchers in the "Shiloah" Institute for Middle Eastern and African Studies). Alongside the historical review of the relations between the sides, the chapter presents and analyzes the academic writings of the institute for the purposes of the Intelligence Branch; the research activity of academic researchers – "orientalists" and others – as reservists in the framework of the Intelligence Branch; and the inputs of academic experts from abroad for the sake of military research.

The second chapter reviews the input of the community of academic experts in perceiving the Arab-Israeli conflict in the entire IDF framework. The study was carried out through methodical research of publications written by, among others, people of the above-mentioned group, publications which were periodically disseminated throughout the IDF. These were apparently important means of influencing the outlook of IDF officers and men alike. The paper will also include a look into how the conflict was studied in the important education institutes of the army at that time.

The third chapter scrutinizes the input of academic experts, as reflected in the military publications disseminated throughout the regular army, and also to its reservist officers. These publications were also available to interested parties among the public at large.

The fourth chapter looks closely at the work of the population under study in Israeli information publications at home, but in particular outside the country – it reviews the input of academic experts in the daily written media. The central theme in this chapter is the analysis and comparison of the writings of Professor Yehoshafat Harkavi and Professor Shimon Shamir, as published in the daily press during that period. These two men were indeed the central figures in the public discourse at the beginning of the

1970s, however the chapter also deals with the statements of other academic experts which also appeared in the daily press.

The final chapter sums up the central findings of the preceding chapters and once again looks into how these understandings fare in the face of the conjecture regarding the nature of the perception/"the true concept", which led to the failure of the campaigns around the Yom Kippur War (the gap between the self-image and perception of the Arab countries as a stabilizing element in the mistaken Israeli understanding of the conflict in the years preceding the war). This chapter will also endeavor to determine the background of the failure of the orientalists' assessment and whether one can apply its conclusions to this period as well.

The model:

In an effort to simplify the discourse regarding the question of responsibility for Israel's failure in the Yom Kippur War the research presents a model of eight elements which influenced the formulation of the Israeli perception of the conflict in the years preceding the war, and apparently other issues to do with Israel's national security. This model, with certain amendments can in fact serve for the current period as well. According to the model the "players" who had a role in the process may be divided into two groups: the establishment group and the public group.

PM Golda Meir and President Anwar Sadat, (Malam archive)

One element of the establishment group consists of the senior leadership in the country. The leadership is the prime minister alone, or in the wider context – the members of the "kitchen cabinet"/government cabinet. The ministerial defense committee, the government in its entire plenum, or any other combination that includes other outside elements who are not government ministers.

The second element in the process consists of the political system in the country. This includes the political spectrum, somewhat local/regional, but mainly - on the national level – the various political parties representing their political ideologies. The major strength of this element lies in the Knesset (parliament) and it receives expression in its various frameworks – the plenum

(in cases when a decision is required on questions of national security), but no less – in parliamentary committees.

The third element is the security-political executive whose actions in this connection were the very reason for its existence. The major components of the executive are the defense ministry and the IDF of course. It is no secret that since the establishment of the state the IDF has been a decisive and influential factor in formulating and directing national security policy. In the period under study the defense minister and chief of general staff (CGS) were the main influential factors in the security establishment, but one should not discount the importance of the commanders of the army's various branches, command generals, and the general staff. Over the years other elements gained power in view of the security-political developments which allowed for this. Thus, one may view the relative centrality of the Israel Security Agency (ISA) [formerly the General Security Service (GSS)] In dealing with the Intifada; the foreign ministry in the decade of the political process; or the National Security Council as a relatively new component, which at certain times was included, as it still is, in the political process. In any event however these cannot outweigh the centrality of the defense ministry and especially that of the IDF, since the establishment of the state.

The fourth element is the intelligence community, the basic supplier of regular information, overt and intimate, in the decision-making processes ("the oil that greases the wheels of the system"). Ostensibly this community is part of the security establishment, but given its centrality and the special status it receives at certain levels of the decision-making system this model grants it special and independent status. In the period under review the IDF's

M.G. Eli Ze'ira, IDF's DMI (Malam archive)

Intelligence Branch had special and independent status in the intelligence community. In the period under review the IDF's Intelligence Branch was of course a prominent factor in the intelligence community in Israel. The head of the Intelligence Branch had special status and served then, as today, as the intelligence officer of the army, the CGS, the Defence Minister, and the country's senior leadership (in its various decision-making compositions). The Intelligence Branch was at that time the central assessment factor, if not the exclusive one. Alongside it the Mossad also played a certain role, at least as a collection agency.

In recent decades the ISA too was prominent as an intelligence collection agency, investigating and assessing (in addition to its work as an operational and preventive body), "competing" with the Intelligence Branch for superiority in handling the Palestinian issue.

The public group: the media was and still is the fifth element in the process of formulating the national security outlook. It was of great importance in formulating and disseminating concepts

in the period under review and it became even more important over the years. The media crystallizes and carries a twofold message: the one by virtue of itself – based on its journalists and spokespersons; the other as a platform, stage and mouthpiece for outside elements to make use of. Here can be found representatives of all four elements mentioned above, as well as representatives of the sixth factor – the Israeli intellectual world, including its academic experts, the subjects of this study. Over and above regular academic activity (beginning with publication of professional periodicals, and including participation in conferences), the members of this group find the media to be their almost exclusive means of expressing their messages regarding the formulation and spreading of ideas and stands relevant to national security. In principle members of this group can wield their influence by participating partly or in full in the leadership (both in an advisory and decision-making capacity, and also in accepting executive positions "full-time". However only a few of them choose this course, while most of them prefer to express their stands through the media.

The public at large, with all its stands, views and opinions on national security, makes up the seventh element. It is accepted that the Israeli public is the broad base of the whole pyramid, a passive group, whose opinions are governed in accordance with the messages it receives from representatives of the other influential elements. However, the public should be also considered as an active "player", whose opinions carry weight in the final process of formulating political-security concepts. These concepts are assimilated through various channels (elections to the Knesset, the public's dialogue with its elected members, the media's statements, opinion polls), leaving an impression which cannot be overlooked.

The eighth and final element, perhaps to be found as a circle or an outside envelope of all the others is the socio-cultural existence in Israel. There are those who believe that the cultural atmosphere in Israel in the late 1960s and early 1970s fed the various elements who played a part in the decision-making processes between the two wars (the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War), influencing what was to be a strategic surprise.

President Anwar Sadat in his war room
(Malam archive)

It is doubtful if one can identify how the Israeli concept of the Arab-Israel conflict was crystallized in the years leading up to the Yom Kippur War. It is difficult to establish the "dominant grading" of the various influential elements in formulating the political-security "concept" in Israel. In addition to the difficulty in identifying clear parameters for establishing the relative weight of each of the "players", one should also take into account that the period

under review was very drawn out and intensive, causing the representatives of the various elements to change their stands (be this because of the differences between the various representatives of each of the above mentioned elements, or because representatives changed, and also because of alteration of a representative's opinion as a result of the period). This constraint certainly hampers still more any attempt to find the "blameworthy". For all that the proposed model does not contend with the dilemma of the main influential factor/s.

The model does lay down that the perception of the Arab-Israel conflict at that time was formed not only from the direct inputs of each of the "players" who participated in the process but also from the indirect inputs of those elements, which received expression through the constant friction between them.

Moreover, it would appear that the influence of the "Players" in this octagon was not uni-directional (from the "players" into the melting pot of the "concept of the conflict"). This influence also acted in the opposite direction, from the concept outward, back to the very elements of the system. In other words, each and every one of the eight elements participating in the process who played a role in formulating the perception of the issue put in its own understanding of the concept, but also fed off it, both by virtue of the contribution of each one's understanding, the connection between them.
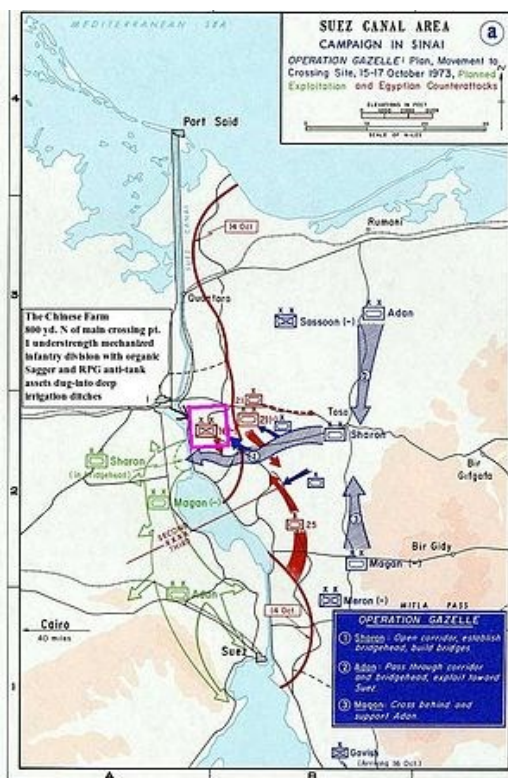
It would not come as a surprise that the mutual and continual feeding of data and the assessments between the various elements, and the "circular motion" of each of the "players" caused some attrition to their original messages and opinions, given the assimilation of other influences. Their exclusiveness was therefore harmed to no small extent. This dynamism which was never arrested or ever ended in the years between the end of the Six Day War and the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War created a broad base for perceiving the conflict, quite communal among those who participated in the process.

The group under study here, intellectuals, academic experts, made its input in two central channels: one directly opposite the establishment by means of personal or outside advice, participating in various levels of activity, and via academic publications; the other, apparently the more important, through the media which it used as a "springboard" to reach all the other influential elements. The public at large should receive special mention, given that its exposure to this sort of message from the experts through the media strengthened its input and influence on the other elements.

Each element of this octagon in crystallizing a stand therefore influenced in turn every one of the other elements, and of course was also influenced by them. The eighth element, the socio-cultural existence was indeed the platform on which the others grew, and it embraced them to an extent that hampered breaking out of the frameworks of dominant thought at that time, thus not allowing a breakaway in time.

The findings: a general review of the materials in the study brings out ten major errors of thought characteristic of the various documents.

1. An extreme underassessment of the Arab countries in general, and Egypt in particular. This discredit found expression in the attitude towards Arab armies, governments, companies, their education and technological ability, and even the future generation, perceived as not standing a chance in coping with the challenge of modernization, to the extent that could place the Arab countries on the same level as the Israeli society.

Egyptian deployment east of the Suez Canal (Malam archive)

2. A cavalier attitude towards Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. Ever since succeeding Nasser as president of Egypt, Sadat was considered in Israel as "empty-headed", lacking any talent or ability to lead Egypt after Nasser (not to mention the entire Arab world) and bring it to resolve the problem of the conflict with Israel. Surprisingly this perception of the Egyptian president remained unchanged until the actual outbreak of the war itself, despite the "signs" to the effect that he was able to make strategic decisions both in domestic and foreign spheres (for example his removal of the opposition to his regime – the Ali Sabri gang, his removal of War Minister Sadiq who failed to prepare the army for war, and his expulsion of the Soviet advisers back to the Soviet Union).

3. This was also the attitude towards the Arab world in general, perceived as a very weak body, unable to provide any political-security-economic assistance and backing to the Arab confrontation countries. The reality of the war (sending expeditionary forces) and its aftermath (extreme step-up of the oil embargo) brought home the extent to which this perception was mistaken.

4. On the other hand, this study identified prominent expressions of the Israeli intoxication with its own power on every level: economic, educational, technological, not to mention military. In describing and assessing the situation, one can note the feeling of security and self-satisfaction evident in arrogant statements.

5. The members of the group under study departed from their professional mandate and made net assessments whose conclusions pointed to Israel's total superiority in every parameter in comparison to the Arab side. In general, it is evident that the professional assessment and explanation of the Arabs' ability was affected to a great extent by the perceptions and assessments of Israel's political ability in general, and that of the IDF in particular.

6. Based on this analysis, as well as on other factors and considerations (for example – the Egyptian and Syrian armies have no military option) the various theories sharpened the assessment which identified the conflict as one that does not involve any confrontation initiated by the Arabs with the purpose breaking the ongoing political deadlock in relations with Israel (unless a confrontation is launched as a result of an erroneous decision by the Arab side…). In those places where such a possibility was raised, pointing to very tangible signs of Arab preparation for war, it was immediately discarded (reasoning the various Arab weaknesses mentioned above) or not significantly placed on the agenda.

7. The Israeli side never looked to the possibility that there was another way, of a military nature, to break the stalemate. The option, that even a modest military victory would create a regional and international lever allowing Egypt to retake what it had lost in the Six Day War, did not come up in Israel's thinking, and this is reflected in the reviewed texts. On those very rare occasions when various articles pointed to the "true scenario" which developed on 6th October, 1973, they did not create any real impression. The Arab concept according to which they must achieve victory, even token, on the battlefield with Israel, allowing to erase the disgrace of the Six Day War, and the rehabilitation of Arab pride (as a necessary condition for any peace agreement with Israel) did in fact come up in commentaries following the Six Day War. It may be that the attention which these statements received was so minor that as the years went by that concept was totally dismissed in the assessment of any possible Arab action.

8. The international community was perceived as a constraining element which would not allow any confrontation in the Middle East. This was so against the background of the "detente" and the atmosphere of reconciliation which developed between Washington and Moscow, including the summit meetings between the two presidents in the period prior to the war. The expulsion of the Soviet advisers

Leonid Brezhnev- USSR Chairman (Wikipedia)

Richard Nixson - US President (Wikipedia)

from Egypt and the bad relations between Cairo and Moscow were mistakenly interpreted as harming Egypt's ability to initiate a confrontation, which the Soviet Union was against in any case. On the other side, too much importance was attached to the "insurance policy" on tensibly granted by the United States to its "client" in the region, a policy which would further strengthen the Israeli deterrent and remove any thought among the Arabs of initiating a violent confrontation.

9. Given the firm opinion that a war was not in the offing, writers in general viewed an Israeli-Arab political settlement as the most likely path. Possibly the buds of a "peace drive" in the Arab world which received a little too much prominence, also contributed to this assessment.

10. At the same time, it was noted that in view of the political-military balance of power, Israel need not hurry to move towards any settlement which would require it to be the "giving side". At the time, the theory was that it was up to the Arabs to take the first step, recognizing Israel's special security needs, and taking them into consideration. One can also identify the approach according to which if the Egyptians, the dominant factor in the Arab world, do not agree to direct negotiations and an interim settlement, it is preferable for Israel to preserve the "Status-quo", to sit idle, and leave the situation be, since "our situation has never been better".

Going by the general review one may note that the Israeli judgement of the conflict, and the attitude of sitting idle, allowed other issues onto the Israeli agenda. The attention to other problematic issues apparently caused further erosion of the public interest, at various levels, to recognize, study, and absorb the issue of the conflict. The subject which "starred" at the top of Israel's agenda after the Six Day War, slowly subsided to evoke marginal interest, and the "dormant" reality received the attention of only a few.

The erroneous commentaries and disregard of reality as described above helped bring into clearer focus the faulty construction of Israel's concept of the conflict. It may be described as a triangle:

One segment was based on the warped concept that since the establishment of the state, Israel's position had never been better, and that it could view itself as a significant regional power.

The second segment expressed total disdain for the Arab world, viewed in any dimension (the inter-Arab level of ability, that of each of the countries, and the senior political leadership) as an impotent organ.

The third segment of this faulty triangle had to do with understanding the international arena and its implications for the region: the interpretation of the detente between the super powers as such that would not allow the development of any violent confrontation between the sides in the Middle East. In other words, a military option was out of the question.

The closure of these three segments leaves in the center of the triangle the obvious conclusion: the option of a political settlement as the only possible way out of the deadlock in which the conflict finds itself; and of course – placing the burden of making initial concessions on the Arab side.

These findings strengthen the claim that appears in the opening section of the study, according to which the gap between Israel's self-image and the manner and way in which Israel perceived the Arabs at the time (certainly not only the "intelligence concept") was the factor which led to the erroneous understanding of the conflict. The outcome was the failure, the surprise, when the !973 Yom Kippur War was launched. It should further be added that the "heart of the triangle" - the obvious conclusion constrained by its segments, as to how Israel must act strategically can be viewed as the very same gap between the "self" image and the perception of the "other" side. By the same token the findings of the study require that the international arena be viewed as an additional element in Israel's perception of the conflict.

It would not be too far-fetched to claim that the Israeli judgement of the Arab world as expressed in the analysis of statements by academic experts, mentioned here, indicates to no small extent the "orientalist" influence (as put forward by Professor Edward Said) on the Israeli orientalists.

It could very well be that the learning patterns in Middle East research circles and institutes in Israel are totally modernistic in approach, based on professional and ethical principles whose purpose is to refrain from any judgement which is not professional. However, the writings of academic experts and their (erroneous) conclusions in connection with the study raise the question as to how much the "orientalists" at the time were free of the bonds of "orientalism". Israel's wonderment and self-praise characteristic of the writing on the one hand, and the deep discredit of the Arab world on the other, underline the common denominator of the feeling of total superiority over the other side: is this not an orientalist pattern?

M.G. Itzhak Hofi (Haka), commander of the northern command, briefs L.G. David El'azar, IDf's CoS (Malam archive)

The place of academic experts in the public discourse – implications for the current period:

it may be recalled that in the introduction to this study it was claimed that one of the main reasons for choosing the subject was the feeling that the involvement of academics in political current affairs and the public discourse in Israel

Was quite irregular (freedom of expression as opposed to responsibility for things debate during such periods as the "Peace for Galilee" operation (1982), and the Gulf War (1991), but said). On the other hand, their presence there only increased over the years.

Thirty years hence it is clear that academics had a dominant presence in the public security-political debate during such periods as the "Peace for Galilee" operation (1982), and the Gulf War (1991), but received significant expression especially around the beginning of the political process with Arab countries in the early 1990s. At that time prominent members of the group (such as Dr. Yair Hirshfeld, Dr. Ron Pundak, Dr. Yossi Beilin) played an active and notable role in initiating the process, providing it with substance

(Malam archive)

(beginning with Professor Itamar Rabinovitch, Israel's ambassador to the United States and the person who headed the delegation to the political talks with the Syrians, and including Professor Shlomo Ben –Ami, Foreign Minister in the Barak government, who also played a central role in the talks with the Palestinians at Camp David and Taba) and presenting it to the public. This they did both as professional observers who expressed their opinions on what was happening in the framework of the public discourse around the process. They also joined in the work, whether on a part time basis, or full-time.

It would seem that after the confrontation with the Palestinians began in late September 2000 (the Al-Aqsa Intifada) this group lost prominence but did not disappear. It is apparently less involved in formal political activity. The attention it received in the past from the political system has waned, and today "opposition" academics such as Professor Arnon Sofer are prominently involved.

L.G. (ret.) Bar-Lev and M.G. Sharon, Sinai (LA'AM)

The rising graph of involvement on the part of academic experts in the public discourse shot up during the American offensive in Afghanistan, and reached its peak with the American campaign to liberate Iraq, in the Spring of 2003. This may have been because the public was kept in the dark about the American actions on the battlefield, and being concerned about the events, had difficulty in understanding what was indeed happening, keeping their eyes glued to their TV sets and listening to their radio receivers. Almost every academic expert had something to say on the subject, even if his field of expertise was only remotely connected. This war revealed, perhaps for the first time, that academic experts can vent their views on subjects about which they really have no expertise. Statements were also made by members of the group, illustrating a lack of any relative advantage they may have had

over military-security commentators or other media commentators, or for that matter over the public's common knowledge.

There is no doubt that the vast importance of the group of academic experts was only heightened, due to a number of reasons:

M.G. Dan Laner (left), and M.G. Moshe-Musa Peled (right),

two division commanders, meet at the Golan battlefield. **(Malam archive**

First, unlike various newscasters and commentators, academic experts were and still are "professional intelligence officers of the public" – a huge population which is not exposed to information and assessments of the secret intelligence services, and is eager for an authoritative opinion from someone really in the know, so that it can plan its actions accordingly

Secondly, the plethora of electronic media channels again and again brings the academic experts to the screen, by this means putting them in the center of the public stage, regularly broadcasting their messages, their views and assessments for all to hear. Given the media pressure, members of this group are required, fairly comprehensively, not only to comment on the actions of the other sides and evaluate their future intentions, but also to recommend to the State of Israel and its executive systems as to the proper courses of action it should take.

Thirdly, as in the past, people of this group may be in contact with their colleagues on the Arab side, under the cloak of academic/scientific legitimacy. Even if these contacts are not formal and lack any operative content, they can nevertheless serve as conduits for passing on messages and recommendations. This could help advance political contacts, and when suitable, sprout new initiatives and developments.

A fourth reason for the importance of the academic experts can be found in their professional and expert level. The development and depth of activities of new university research institutes in recent years only enhances the definite advantage of the academic experts, in comparison to other groups, including those to be found inside the security-political establishment. The accumulation of knowledge and experience over many years in the various fields of expertise on the one hand, and the ability to deal with every issue unfettered by political constraints on the other, could in future bring them to the forefront of political-security activity, not only as independent initiative on the part of members of the group, but also as the answer to the requests of the various establishment elements.


B.G. Refa'el-Raful Eitan, commander of the 36ᵗʰ armored division, discuss the battle situation with his staff officers (Malam archive)

It is interesting to note that extremists have recently claimed that the role of the "extended family" of intellectuals throughout the world has changed when it comes to friction with the political system. They are now "receiving the classic functions of the politicians" This approach upsets the allocation of functions between power and knowledge. but it does not appear, at least for the time being, that this has indeed caught on in this area.

In view of the significant importance attached to the formulation and dissemination of the national security concept the question may be asked as to what can be done to improve the input of members of the group, be it in their contacts with establishment elements, or with the public at large.

In principle one can adopt the approach of Professor Avi Ravitzki with regard to the proper manner of relations between the academic experts and the decision makers. According to this approach every political leadership should have at its side a spiritual-cultural leadership, a sort of "prophet in the king's court" with whom it maintains a regular dialogue. Unlike the leaders who are in over their heads with the day-to-day affairs, the great advantage of the "additional leadership" lies in its ability to glide through other worlds, to identify alternative possibilities regarding current security-political concepts, and to bring them up to the decision makers. This is in fact the main advantage of the "knowledge community" when it comes in contact with the decision makers.
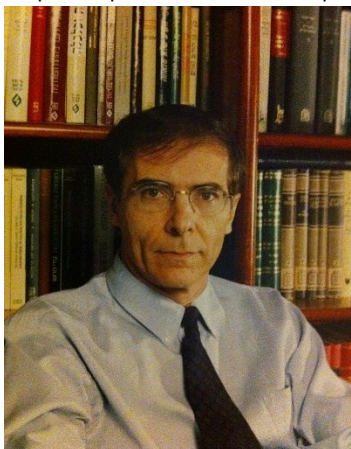
Pro. Aviazer Ravitzki (Wikipedia)

On the practical level one is hard put it to accept the approach of Professor Asa Kasher, which maintains that the academic expert who holds a position of influence is automatically held responsible. He claims that the very fact that the academic expresses his opinion in a decision-making forum, invests him with a position of influence. Kasher then believes that the expert giving the advice should be aware of the extent of his influence over the

Pro. Asa Kasher (Wikipedia)

decision makers, and he should be endowed with a fair measure of self-criticism: if he is not absolutely sure about what he says, he should better not say anything at all.

In Kasher's opinion, in cases when an academic expert was party to the creation of a "concept" which led to a resounding failure, accompanied by many casualties and a changed country (as happened as a result of the Yom Kippur War), he must – like any other element in the system – be investigated for his part in accepting responsibility for the matter. Should the investigation reveal responsibility on his part (for example – a negative contribution to the formulation of a bad "concept"; dogmatism; a fancy for his own opinion; poor analysis) the possibility should be checked to see if he can correct his mistakes, otherwise his punishment will be that he is no longer to be relied upon.

Given the media's yearning for any statement from the experts, and the lack of any effective sanction against anyone who is mistaken (even those who make a radical or misleading mistake) there is not course to be taken other than to return the "ball" to the court of the people involved. Since the members of this group are not held to formal account by their "expediters" in the academic institutes which employ them they must themselves hone their self-criticism. This they should do over a period of time both prior to any appearance they are

to make, and also check themselves professionally and personally after they have appeared. Such a self-examination can make it abundantly clear to the academic expert whether he is suited and sufficiently talented to offer messages which contribute to the crystallization of the establishment-public consciousness.

It is noteworthy that specifically because of the level of intellectual honesty expected of the academic experts, perhaps more than any other professional, one may expect those belonging to this group to be responsible, in the full meaning of the word, for anything they might say. The importance of the message these experts drive home to the public with which they come in contact only strengthens their personal obligation to find a way to the public ear to admit the mistakes they made and to correct their message, to allow the various communities which use them to remodel their outlook, as much as possible in alignment with reality.

On the other hand, those (in particular the media) who provide the stage for the dissemination of the messages should adopt the necessary tools to professionally check these messages. Programs in the media itself which deal with checking substance, could significantly improve the situation, both by deterring some experts not deserving of a stage, and also by refining the obligation of those in charge of the mouthpieces to check out, in advance, as to who deserves a hearing and will not disgrace them.

In conclusion, the study is indeed specifically historic, but its findings and implications are most relevant for the current reality. It is therefore possible that it may in some way contribute to the recognition of failures attached to the interaction between academic experts and the establishment and public, as a dimension in placing the phenomenon in its right perspective.

It would be a great achievement if this study and its findings can lead to a little more modesty, self-criticism, directing experts to concentrate only on fields in which they have professional knowledge, and to sharpen the awareness of members of this important group when airing their views to the public. It would also be a blessing if this study can act as a "warning light" to the listening public when it comes to judge the messages of this important and special group.