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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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## **Perceptions and Misperceptions: Influences on Israeli Intelligence Estimates During the 1982 Lebanon War**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Israel's Lebanon War of 1982 has been seen as one of the most traumatic experiences for the Jewish state. Many studies have been conducted on the immediate events surrounding the war in an attempt to explain where Israel went wrong. While many of these explanations are valid, it will be argued here that Israel's main failure was the incorrect evaluation of its junior ally, the Lebanese Maronite Christians, and that this flawed intelligence estimate had its roots in a long-standing misperceived Israeli-Maronite relationship.

The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was aimed at restructuring the Middle East in Israel's favor by forging a new political order in Lebanon. The linchpin of Israel's entire strategy was the Maronite community under the leadership of Bashir Gemayel, who was to become Lebanon's new president. Gemayel then would make Lebanon into a Maronite Christian state which would sign a peace treaty with Israel. Together Israel and the Maronites would defeat the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Syrian forces in Lebanon. This would remove Syria as a credible threat and enable Israel to transfer its own Palestinians from the Occupied Territories into Jordan.<sup>1</sup> In short, with the help of its junior ally, Israel sought to create a new regional balance under Israeli hegemony.

In simplified terms, Operation Peace for Galilee (as the invasion was code-named) was based on a combination of misconceptions about Israel's alliance with the Maronites in Lebanon and an overestimation of Israel's military capabilities, underlined by the mistaken belief that force could achieve real peace. Israel saw Lebanon as a Christian state and the Maronites as the predominant community backed militarily by the Lebanese Forces. Moreover, Israel perceived the Maronites it was liaising with as representative of the community and as reliable.

To fully understand this failure in Israel's national intelligence estimates, not only the actual misconceptions but also the process of intelligence evaluation needs to be analyzed. Moreover, within this framework, it is essential to examine the signals as well as the noise that obscures them and can prevent them from being understood. In the Lebanon War, as in other historical examples, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis,<sup>2</sup> the Yom Kippur War,<sup>3</sup> or the US failure to predict the Iranian Revolution in 1979,<sup>4</sup> the intelligence failure was not due to lack of information about the adversaries, but to an

incorrect evaluation of the available information, noise, false signals or deception, misconceptions and ideology.

Indeed, the intelligence estimates underlying the Israeli invasion of Lebanon were the result of several basic factors conducive to incorrect evaluation. These factors, for the purpose of this analysis, are divided into: internal or psychological factors influencing intelligence evaluation; external or institutional factors bearing upon intelligence estimates; and, problematic factors arising with the intelligence estimates themselves.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE ISRAELI-MARONITE ALLIANCE**

The basis for Israel's incorrect intelligence evaluation was the Israeli government's perception of Lebanon as a non-Arab, non-Muslim state and its perception of the alliance with the Maronites as a viable foreign policy. However, since its creation in 1920 by the French mandatory power, Lebanon never had been a purely Christian state and the Maronites were not the Lebanese government. Instead, Lebanon had a delicately balanced system of confessionalism based on the National Pact of 1943, which was designed to bridge the gaps between the 23 religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>5</sup> Distrust between the communities and the absence of a Lebanese national identity created a situation in which the minorities often sought alliances with powers outside of Lebanon, in order to ensure their dominance within. This inherent weakness "invited" foreign states to cultivate ties through sentimental, educational, religious ties, or simply monetary inducements to further their own interests within the Lebanese political arena.<sup>6</sup> Israel was one of them.

Israeli-Maronite relations date back to 1920 with the first Treaty of Cooperation between the Zionist Organization and Maronite representatives.<sup>7</sup> In the 1930s, the Maronite Church became actively involved in deepening relations with the Jewish community in Palestine in an attempt to formulate an alliance against Islam. Fear of loss of ethnic and religious identity in a "vast sea of Muslims" led to the concept of a natural alliance between ethnic and religious minorities. This concept was embraced by both the Maronite Church and the emerging *Yishuv* (Jewish population of Palestine). Indeed, Maronite Patriarch Antun Arida pursued a general partnership and Maronite politician Emile Eddé envisaged a political and even military union.<sup>8</sup> When Eddé became president of the Lebanese Republic in 1936 he was presented by the *Yishuv* with a draft Treaty of Friendship.<sup>9</sup>

A further manifestation of the budding minority-alliance was President Eddé's support of the Peel Commission report in 1937, which recommended the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>10</sup> In 1946, Arida went to Jerusalem where he signed an agreement on behalf of the Maronite Church with Chaim Weizmann on behalf of the *Yishuv*.<sup>11</sup> This agreement reciprocally recognized the Jewish demand for independence in Palestine and the independent "Christian character" of Lebanon.<sup>12</sup> A year later, in 1947, the Maronites' recognition of a Jewish state motivated the Maronite Archbishop of Beirut, Ignace Mubarak, to submit a memorandum to the United Nations supporting the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>13</sup>

The relationship between the Maronites and the *Yishuv* evolved around several concepts, the most important of which was the notion of a "natural" alliance between Israeli Jews and Lebanese Christians. This "naturalness" implied a reliability beyond the actions and statements of both allies. As such, the concept became ingrained in Israeli thinking and the alliance was accepted, often unquestionably, until 1982 when it became clear that the Maronites were not as reliable as perceived, nor was an alliance with them natural.

The years immediately following the creation of the State of Israel further contributed to the concept of forming alliances with non-Arab minorities and non-Arab states. One policy based on such Israeli thinking was the Periphery Doctrine, which aimed at bypassing hostile Arab neighbors by creating alliances with states on the periphery of the region, such as Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup> It also aimed at minorities on the "ethnic periphery" of the core states, such as the Maronites.<sup>15</sup> At times, it seemed to many Israelis that the Lebanese Maronites were the only "friends" Israel had. So much so, that popular wisdom had it that Lebanon would be the second state to sign peace with Israel, the first being Jordan.<sup>16</sup>

The Maronites remained in contact with Israel throughout the 1948 war and with the new power of Israeli statehood plans for a Maronite revolt in conjunction with an Israeli invasion were raised several times from 1948 to 1950.<sup>17</sup> Israel decided against such action and instead confined itself to supporting the Maronite Kataib party financially for the 1951 parliamentary elections.<sup>18</sup> However, in 1954, when Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion felt that Israel had become too isolated, he decided to take a more active approach toward the Maronite ally and push the Maronites with the help of an Israeli invasion of South Lebanon into proclaiming a Christian state which would be at peace with Israel.<sup>19</sup> With his Chief-of-Staff Moshe Dayan, Ben Gurion planned an Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1955 to establish a Christian regime in Beirut. This plan was directly linked to a possible Iraqi invasion of Syria, which would provide an excuse for the Israeli intervention. In 1956, Ben Gurion included the yet unexecuted invasion of Lebanon plans into his Sinai campaign. The plan called for an Israeli ouster of Egypt's President Gamal Abd-el Nasser, followed by the invasion of Lebanon to coincide with a Maronite revolt in Beirut. Israel would then firmly establish the Maronites in power and make Lebanon a Christian state. The next step was to partition Jordan and give the eastern part of it to Iraq while Israel would expand its borders to include Jordan's West Bank. However, as a result of intervention in the Suez-Sinai campaign by the United States, which had been unaware of Ben Gurion's broader plans, the invasion of Lebanon, once again, remained only a plan.

In 1958, during the first Lebanese civil war, a different form of Israeli intervention was implemented. The Kataib had appealed for help to its Israeli ally.<sup>20</sup> Israel's response to this appeal and to the perceived threat of a Nasserist take-over of the region through Lebanon, was to provide the Maronites with arms via the border town of Metulla.<sup>21</sup> In addition, Israel gave artillery support to the Lebanese Army battling Nasserists in South Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> An emergency invasion plan, should all other support fail, had also been drawn up.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, during the first decade of Israeli statehood, it can be seen that Israel's natural response in aid of its natural ally, the Maronites, had been an invasion plan of one form or another. This, no doubt, shaped the thinking on Lebanon and the Maronites, and influenced intelligence estimates as well as policy-making in the early 1980s. Indeed, the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee could be described as the typical Israeli response to a "Lebanese problem": relying on the Maronites as the natural ally and invading in order to uphold Maronite hegemony with the final aim of establishing peace.

The period between the two Lebanese civil wars (i.e., between 1958 and 1975), was rather uneventful. Israeli-Maronite relations fell to an all-time low with only sporadic personal meetings, mostly abroad. In the interval, particularly after 1970, the Palestinian presence in Lebanon increased dramatically. Along with changing Muslim vs Christian demographics, this helped to destabilize Lebanon, which descended into civil war. Thus, in 1975, at the first sign of trouble for the Maronites in Lebanon, the alliance was restored with even greater intensity. Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin decided to supply the Kataib with military aid, largely a policy of "helping the Maronites to help themselves."<sup>24</sup> This changed in 1977 with the election of the right-wing Likud government headed by Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Begin saw greater Israeli involvement as a moral obligation. His decision to intervene more overtly was furthered by the appointment of Rafael Eitan as chief-of-staff in 1979 and Ariel Sharon as defense minister in 1981. Indeed, Sharon evolved into a key figure in the Israeli-Maronite alliance, as he planned the invasion with Maronite Lebanese Forces commander Bashir Gemayel long before the Israeli Cabinet was presented with the plans. The joint Israeli-Maronite aims of Operation Peace for Galilee were the elimination of the Palestinian presence and influence from Lebanon, the creation of a new political order in Lebanon by establishing a purely Maronite government under Bashir Gemayel, and the expulsion of Syrian troops from Lebanon.<sup>25</sup> The invasion plan was based on Israeli-Maronite cooperation to achieve these joint aims. Yet, the operation turned into Israel's greatest failure, the reasons for which can be found in the incorrect evaluation of information on Lebanon and the Maronites.

## **INTERNAL OR PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS INFLUENCING INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES**

It is inevitable that the gathering as well as the evaluation of any data will be influenced by the psychological character of the intelligence officer. Images, perceptions, world view, ideological bias and wishful thinking all help to determine which facts the observer will notice and which he will ignore. They also influence the importance attached to selected data and the patterns drawn. Indeed, actors in the "game" of intelligence do not respond to the *objective* reality but to their individual *subjective* perception of that reality.

Israeli intelligence officers were not immune to the influence of these human propensities. In their deliberations they too have tended to convey to each other oversimplified images embodied in long-standing ideological stereotypes instead of seeking to apply to the issue at hand varied concepts derived from open-minded inquiry.<sup>26</sup> Subtly intelligence became politicized by unquestioned policy assumptions. Israeli intelligence repeated mistakes the US had made only a few years earlier in the case of

Iran where "long standing US attitudes towards the Shah inhibited intelligence collecting, dampened policy makers' appetite for analysis . . . and deafened policy makers to the warnings implicit in available current intelligence." <sup>27</sup>

The images underlying the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 are of particular interest as they were of an ally rather than of an enemy. Indeed, the war failed largely because of the reliance on a cooperation which did not materialize. Moreover, considering that the Maronites were not the enemy, the gathering of intelligence data should have been easier, more accessible, and more varied. Ironically, it was the closeness to the Maronites and the vast amount of information relating to them that hindered the correct evaluation.

Israel's relations with the Maronites had been conducted by the Mossad since the 1960s. The image of the Maronites and Lebanon held by Mossad officers was essential to the incorrect estimation of the reliability of Israel's junior ally. The image of the Maronites was that of a cohesive, homogeneous non-Arab, non-Muslim, Western community in Lebanon. Some Mossad officers did not even see the Maronites as Arabs but rather as the heirs of the ancient Phoenicians. <sup>28</sup> They held the majority of political power and could strike a peace agreement with Israel. Their future could only be with Israel if they wanted to maintain their cultural, religious and ethnic identity. Along the same lines, the image of Lebanon was that of a Levantine country rather than a Middle Eastern one. Lebanon was pro-Western, democratic and basically Christian. Most importantly, Lebanon had always been on friendly terms with Israel.

Oversimplified images such as these influenced the evaluation of intelligence data in no uncertain terms. Indeed, such images served as screens for the selective reception of new messages, and they often controlled the perception and interpretation of those messages which were not completely ignored, rejected or suppressed. <sup>29</sup>

The reasons for full support of such an alliance as advocated by Mossad director Itzhak Hofi have been speculated on many times. Some say, it was a psychological syndrome resulting from the ability to go beyond the border and talk to people who were formally Arabs but were really like Israelis. <sup>30</sup> The widespread belief was that "your enemy's enemy was your friend." Theories such as these were and still are a product of the collective wisdom, knowledge and experience of the intelligence gathering organization. Improper use of evidence made in connection with these theories can be traced to the hypothesis that actors tend to overlook the fact that evidence consistent with their theories may also be consistent with other views. <sup>31</sup> Indeed, the data on the Maronites supported the Mossad's theory of minority-alliance, yet it also supported the views of Israeli military intelligence, who objected to such an alliance. Institutional rivalry and group dynamics to be discussed later as well as personal ideology of the decision makers led to ignoring military intelligence concerns.

One explanation offered for the Mossad's misinterpretation of the facts is that the longer an agent is with his hosts the more he gets drawn into accepting their way of thinking. Another explanation is that the Mossad presented to Israeli decision makers exactly the



picture the Maronites wanted it to present.<sup>32</sup> Others claim it was a natural development resulting from a good working relationship.<sup>33</sup>

All of these explanations are valid and true. The history of friendship, the ability to reach out, and sympathizing with the host community show how some signals were perceived strongly and others not at all. Yet, the root problem was on the conceptual level. In short, Mossad officers could only come to sympathize with their hosts and see a full alliance as a natural development because they perceived the Maronites as another non-Arab non-Muslim minority which had common interests with Israel. And, since actors tend to perceive what they expect to perceive, a signal in accord with the receiver's expectations can be quite subtle and still have the desired impact.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, such signals may be perceived even if they were not sent. Signals that go against this view have to be much clearer to be noticed, let alone understood. And few incentives exist for challenging accepted assumptions.<sup>35</sup> Thus, uncomfortable evidence, such as Pierre Gemayel's and Amin Gemayel's relations with Syria or later Bashir Gemayel's reneging on his promise to sign a peace treaty at his meeting with Begin in Nahariya on 30 August 1982, were suppressed.

Ideology also influenced the incorrect evaluation of the data at the highest level, by the prime minister, defense minister and chief-of-staff. The political climate after the 1981 cabinet reshuffle was "hawkish" and interventionist. The delicately crafted system of checks and balances that had been maintained to one degree or another in all previous Israeli governments was conspicuously absent in this one.<sup>36</sup> No doubt, this climate at the top also affected the attitudes and estimates of the intelligence personnel, who had to be close to policy makers in order to provide the informational base. However, close links may corrupt intelligence by the very process it seeks to serve.<sup>37</sup> Such corruption comes from policy makers such as Begin, Sharon and Eitan who tended to be ideologically motivated, driven to action and because of pressures to succeed, impatient with those they perceived to be impeding their progress.<sup>38</sup> These characteristics tend to filter down to their staffs which then often take on the political coloration of their bosses.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, in the case of the Shah of Iran, American political leaders seemed to demand only good news from Iran about US intelligence. Intelligence agencies were prone, albeit unconsciously, to reporting what they thought or knew leaders wanted to hear.<sup>40</sup> Israeli intelligence in the case of Lebanon and the Maronites was not immune from this syndrome of producing "intelligence to please."

Both major Israeli ideologically-based miscalculations concerned military possibilities. Hawkish Defense Minister Sharon's maxim was that Israel could use force to create political facts. Accordingly, he accepted Bashir Gemayel's claims of the Lebanese Forces' strength and willingness to fight. With the help of the Maronites Sharon set out to restructure the Middle East in Israel's favor through military victory. However, his erroneous interpretation of the Lebanese situation was to turn a military victory into a political disaster for both Israel and Lebanon.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the war mirrored faithfully both Sharon's personality and his world view. He believed that Israel should use military power to change the political make-up of the Middle East. The resulting Israeli hegemony would then be able to offset any possible negative change in the balance of

power between Israel and its neighbors in the future. <sup>42</sup>Such overconfidence in Israel's military capability was matched by overconfidence in the Mossad's intelligence estimates, giving way to the tendency to be too certain about the accuracy of its appraisal. Intelligence officials, in general, seem to overestimate the accuracy of their judgements and having more information such as the Mossad had through its close relations with the Maronites served to increase this confidence while not increasing accuracy. <sup>43</sup>

In retrospect, exposure of the IDF commanders and heads of intelligence and, more importantly, the Israeli decision-making elite to the Maronite leadership paved the way for the Maronites to influence decision-making in Israel at the highest level. <sup>44</sup> And this made Israel particularly vulnerable to deception that reinforced prevailing incorrect views. <sup>45</sup> Thus, the invasion was planned on the basis of false perceptions, first, of the abilities of the Lebanese Forces politically and militarily, and second, of Israel's ability to achieve political gains through the use of force. <sup>46</sup>

## **EXTERNAL OR INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES**

The most obvious external influences on the formulation of national intelligence estimates are the bureaucracy and the organizations themselves. Institutional factors increase the human and psychological propensity for error, as a circular process often evolves. A policy is adopted, intelligence officers are sent out to gather facts pertinent to the policy, the favorable information is passed on and more reports favoring the policy are written. <sup>47</sup> Indeed, the very act of laying out collection priorities and terms of reference for the analyst politicizes the intelligence process.

It reduces the autonomy of the analyst and establishes criteria of acceptance independent of, and superior to, professional expertise. In the absence of such guidance, the analyst may produce quality intelligence, but . . . faces the heightened risk of having it dismissed as irrelevant to the policy question at hand. <sup>48</sup>

In the case of the Maronites, the policy of minority-alliance was adopted. Diplomats and intelligence officers were sent out to make contacts and brought back reports on those elements which were in favor of the alliance. This, in turn, created the belief in the existence of much larger Maronite support for such an alliance than actually existed.

Loyalty to the intelligence service also plays a role in bringing back more favorable information once the organization in this case the Mossad has adopted a certain policy. Uncomfortable facts are underplayed and interpretations not cast in the mold will be treated as second-class analysis. <sup>49</sup> In this way all organizations operate as filters and information is condensed as it passes through the hierarchy. So, by the time it reaches the decision maker it has been filtered many times. <sup>50</sup>

An additional institutional factor filtering information is intra- and inter-service rivalries which are occasionally carried to the point of withholding secret data. The intelligence estimates preceding the Israeli invasion of Lebanon reflect a classic case of inter-service



rivalry, between the Mossad and military intelligence. This rivalry provoked loyalty to the particular intelligence agency rather than to the intelligence community or the government as a whole. As a result, the intelligence process was vulnerable to distortions away from the national interest and toward petty bureaucratic goals. <sup>51</sup>

The Mossad, as already mentioned, had been in charge of the minority -alliance with the Maronites since the 1960s. Military intelligence did not get involved until the arms transfers from 1975 onwards and even then only to a very limited extent, dealing mainly with South Lebanon. Thus, intelligence estimates referring to Beirut and to the alliance were definitely considered the Mossad's territory and expertise. This expertise was one of the reasons decision makers gave more weight to the Mossad's evaluations, paying little attention to military intelligence concerns.

Yet, the absence of the closeness to the junior ally and the lack of historical experience and conceptual framework gave military intelligence officers a more objective view of Lebanese realities and the junior ally's reliability. Indeed, military intelligence officers had warned time and again that the Maronites were not reliable and warned against an alliance of any sort. <sup>52</sup> The head of military intelligence, Yehoshua Saguy, opposed the invasion of Lebanon. He claimed that the "junior ally was a dubious one." <sup>53</sup> During the Zahle Missile Crisis of 1981, General Saguy had already suspected a plot to draw in Israel, but Prime Minister Begin had rejected his assessment. <sup>54</sup> Saguy had opposed the Israeli air strike against the Syrians recommended by Eitan. Later on, while Sharon lectured to the cabinet about his "grand strategy," which included taking Beirut, Saguy countered: "We'd only get bogged down." <sup>55</sup>

With a clearer and more realistic conception of Lebanon, he commented that even if Bashir Gemayel was made president, the Maronites would still have to maintain their allegiance to the Arab world. As far as the Maronites were concerned, the Israelis were just a tool for purging Lebanon of an evil. They would not make peace with Israel. <sup>56</sup> In April 1982, high-ranking IDF officers were dispatched to Beirut to coordinate plans. In May, Saguy's intelligence assessment was as follows: a clash with Syria was unavoidable; the Lebanese Christians would not do anything to help; the lack of consensus within the IDF would become a problem; and the PLO infrastructure could not be destroyed in this way. <sup>57</sup>

The low opinion military intelligence had of the Lebanese Forces was overshadowed, since 1981, by the fact that the Israeli-Maronite relationship had become a largely personal one between Ariel Sharon and Bashir Gemayel. <sup>58</sup> For Sharon intelligence data had become a political resource. It did more than simply rationalize the decision-making process. <sup>59</sup> The information he chose to pay attention to enhanced his authority, shaped his, Eitan's and Begin's careers, and served as an instrument for building public support for the triumvirate's policies. With Sharon, Eitan and the Mossad advocating the reliability of the Maronites, the influence of military intelligence declined. Begin, who was incapable of forming a realistic assessment on his own, was not inclined to believe military intelligence's evaluation, as it contradicted his own plans. <sup>60</sup>

Additional warnings about the Maronites and misconceptions underlying the invasion plan were pointed out by Amir Drori, the commander of Israel's Northern Command, who had supervised weapons transfers to the Maronites in the late 1970s. Not only did he raise the possibility of operational problems for both a limited invasion and a full-fledged one, he also said that "it was out of the question to depend on the Christians. From a military standpoint, they were in very poor shape."<sup>61</sup> Their capability was limited solely to self-defense, and they could not be expected to participate in a mobile war. Other warnings against close cooperation came from Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Zippori, as early as the Zahle Crisis. However, Zippori's protests fell on deaf ears, as he was known to have had long-standing personal differences with Sharon and Eitan. So whenever he raised objections, many interpreted them purely as an expression of this vendetta.<sup>62</sup>

A further reason the Mossad's estimate was preferred to that of military intelligence was because it coincided with the views of the three key decision makers: Prime Minister Begin, Defense Minister Sharon and Chief-of-Staff Eitan. In particular, Begin's background as the commander of the underground organization Irgun during Israel's liberation struggle, led him to be more receptive to the Mossad's mode of thinking because of its similarity to the activity he had been engaged in.<sup>63</sup> More importantly, though, the prominent and widely-known views of the key decision makers also influenced Mossad officers to produce evaluations which were "politically correct." This phenomenon is often referred to as groupthink.<sup>64</sup> The rigidity and closure fostered by groupthink, cognitive consistency, overconfidence, and wishful thinking amplified by idiosyncratic personal needs for power and control, proved to be particularly harmful.<sup>65</sup>

Intelligence evaluation is a group product. It is affected by the dynamics within the group but also by the decision-making dynamics imposed upon the group. These often create a disposition to focus on one option and to stress consensus and underplay personal doubts.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, a secure framework of shared norms and assumptions is generally established and adhered to even if individuals differ with the collective wisdom. Begin, Sharon and Eitan operated within such a closed ideological system, which made them disregard the counsel of most experts. Moreover, if the intelligence service as a group is dominated by a group of powerful decision makers, it will become the prisoner of these decision makers' images, dogmas and preconceptions. Close consideration of the relationship between Mossad officers and policy makers reveals that the Mossad indeed had an ideological framework "imposed" upon it. The decision-making system had become incapable of absorbing information that would challenge the assumptions held by the policy makers.<sup>67</sup> And the temptation to tell a "chief" in a powerful position the things he most likes to hear was a trap Israeli intelligence officers like those of other nations before them had fallen into.<sup>68</sup> Consciously or unconsciously information, analyses and estimates were slanted so that they would fit the established policy. The shared norms and assumptions which underlay the consensus and which virtually cut off the dissenting voice of military intelligence were as follows: the Maronites were Phoenicians or at least non-Arabs;<sup>69</sup> they were vital to Israel's goals; they were friendly and could be manipulated;<sup>70</sup> Lebanon was to become an independent state that would live in peace with Israel;<sup>71</sup> and the prime purpose of the war was to establish a new political order.

With such views prevalent at the top there could be no restraining force when the invasion plan was laid on the table. Nor is it difficult to see how objections were brushed aside and other intelligence estimates were streamlined into the group dynamics.

## **PROBLEMS WITH THE ESTIMATES THEMSELVES**

In addition to psychological and institutional influences, failures can result from the uncertainty of the estimates themselves. Indeed, the most difficult task in intelligence evaluations is that of estimating another actor's intentions, be they the enemy or the junior ally. In assessing intentions, intelligence analysts employ models, theories or conceptions that are the functional equivalent of an ideology.<sup>72</sup> As shown earlier, the problems with models, theories and conceptions are numerous. The most common mistakes are the uncritical interpretation of the enemy's (or in this case, the junior ally's) expressed intention, and the misunderstanding of the "foreigners" conceptual framework. In short, the most common failure is the failure to understand properly the assumptions or interpretations of the situation upon which "foreigners" base their decision.<sup>73</sup>

So-called "behavioural surprise" occurs when the opponent's or the ally's behavior is incompatible with the set of expectations.<sup>74</sup> This occurs when the set of expectations is unrealistic because intelligence bodies are strongly influenced by international images of the outside world that, more often than not, are based on myth and wishful thinking rather than on objective perception.

Israel made both of the above mentioned mistakes with regards to their Maronite allies. Intelligence officers assessed them relatively uncritically, as the Maronites were seen as an ally rather than an enemy. More importantly, though, Israeli decision makers and intelligence personnel did not understand the Maronites' conceptual framework, and thus failed to understand their intentions. This can be seen, with retrospective wisdom, at many points in Israel's relations with the Maronites.

In 1981, during the Zahle Missile Crisis, none of the Israelis assumed that Bashir Gemayel, who believed that only direct Israeli intervention could help the Maronites, had actually sought confrontation with the Syrians in order to draw in Israel.<sup>75</sup> Instead, Israel perceived that Maronites were under threat by Syria and saw it as their own, uninfluenced, decision to intervene.

Israeli misreading of Maronite intentions became even more evident during the actual invasion in 1982, as reflected in Maronite non-cooperation once the war had started. In January 1982, Ariel Sharon had made a secret visit to Beirut during which he went over the invasion plans with Bashir Gemayel.<sup>76</sup> He left Beirut in the belief that the Lebanese Forces, as agreed upon, would take responsibility for the capture and control of West Beirut.<sup>77</sup> On 4 June 1982, Bashir Gemayel received news that the operation was to begin and he was asked to have his men open fire along the Green Line and to permit Israeli combat teams to land at Jounieh. He refused both requests.<sup>78</sup>

On 11 June 1982, after a Lebanese Forces liaison officer had joined the Israeli paratroopers moving toward Beirut, Sharon preceded his troops to meet Bashir Gemayel in order to determine precisely where the two forces would link up.<sup>79</sup> Up to this point Sharon had thought it unnecessary for the IDF to occupy the city as well. This was to be left to the Lebanese Forces with air and artillery support from the IDF. But when the forces joined up at Ba'abda, Bashir Gemayel made it clear to Sharon that he did not see things that way. He had no intention of fulfilling Israel's expectations.<sup>80</sup> Bashir Gemayel tried to "worm his way" out of his commitment, while the Lebanese Forces' inaction stood out against the background of intense fighting. Nevertheless, on 13 June, Israeli troops linked up with the Lebanese Forces in Beirut.<sup>81</sup> The following day, Sharon and Gemayel met in Jounieh. Bashir Gemayel stated that he was willing to aid the IDF short of going into combat.<sup>82</sup> Effectively, this meant reinforcement of the Green Line and making sure no PLO fighters escaped to Tripoli; the "dirty work" was left to the Israelis.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, previous Israeli *military* intelligence predictions had proved correct: the link-up with the Maronites was not the culmination of the operations; it was the beginning of a long siege. Indeed, the geographic link-up was seen as the ultimate evidence of the failure of the minority alliance.<sup>84</sup> Whatever the understanding between Sharon and Bashir Gemayel had been, the leader of the Lebanese Forces had no intention of storming West Beirut, and his forces' military activity remained negligible.<sup>85</sup> From the Israeli government vantage point, the Lebanese Forces were to help liberate their country and pave their own road to power. From Bashir Gemayel's point of view, however, if Israel wanted to become a regional actor and bring about political changes through a military campaign, it ought to pay the price that the capture of West Beirut was bound to extract.<sup>86</sup>

## MISCONCEPTIONS AND FAILURES

The failure of the invasion can be seen as the result of a number of misconceptions by the Israelis. The most prominent misconceptions underlying Israel's policy were: that Lebanon had a Christian majority, that the position of the president was a strong one, that the Lebanese Forces were powerful, that the Maronites wanted a Christian state, that the Maronite faction they were liaising with represented all Maronites, and that the Maronites were reliable.

During the period of the *Yishuv* it was widely accepted, with the exception of those Jewish Agency members who had actually studied Lebanon in detail, that Lebanon was a Christian country. The Muslims were disregarded as an insignificant and powerless minority. Exactly this misperceived Christian character of Lebanon led Ben Gurion to believe that Lebanon was the weakest link in the Arab chain and that Lebanon, with Israeli help, could be made into an ally. The perception of Lebanon as a Christian country was accepted by most Israeli decision makers succeeding Ben Gurion. It was a classic case of carrying past images over into the present.<sup>87</sup>

A critical analysis of the demographic realities of Lebanon, however, would have shown the opposite to be true as early as the first Lebanese civil war, which should have been a warning light. Israeli decision makers did not realize until the second civil war of 1975 that the balance had shifted, but believed that with Israeli help and the removal of the Muslim Palestinians the situation could easily be rectified.

Much of the misconception of the strength of the Christian community in Lebanon was based on the misconception of the strength of the presidency. The fact that Lebanon's president had to be a Maronite was seen as a reflection of Maronite superiority. It was generally believed that the Lebanese president was the main representative of Lebanon and the main foreign policy decision maker. Thus, relations with the president came to equal interstate relations. Friendly contacts with President Emile Eddé in 1936, President Camille Chamoun in 1958 and President-elect Bashir Gemayel in 1982 served to support this belief. Indeed, according to Begin the Lebanese Constitution gave the Maronites an unchallengeable status in Lebanon.<sup>88</sup>

However, closer analysis of the position of the president in the Lebanese political system shows that the presidency is not a strong position in absolute terms. Indeed, the president cannot form a government without a Sunni coalition partner, represented by the prime minister, nor can he push through major foreign policy decisions regardless of Lebanese public opinion. These weaknesses were reflected in the 1952 presidential crisis, in the 1958 crisis when Camille Chamoun was forced to back down in favor of a less pro-Western candidate, and in the 1970s during Suleiman Franjeh's presidency in which he was able to maintain control only through a powerful coalition with the traditional Sunni *zu'ama*. Illusions of strength and independence were supported only by Fuad Chehab's military government and this, it has been claimed, largely contributed to Lebanon's disintegration. Thus, instead of being strong and independent as perceived by many Israeli decision makers, the presidency was a position of *relative* strength, but not strong enough to carry an alliance with Israel, as shown by the experience with Bashir Gemayel and later with his brother Amin.

Directly related was the misconception that the Maronites as a whole wanted a Christian state. Israeli decision makers were deceived by the Maronites' talk of alliance and planning revolts as an expression of longing for a state of their own. During the French Mandate period when the borders of the future Lebanese state were being discussed, the Maronites had turned down the option of a small Lebanon and decided to include the Muslim hinterlands to make the new state economically viable. The reasons for entering into relations and a loose alliance with Israel were a result of the Lebanese political system itself, in addition to some Maronites' romantic notions of Phoenicianism.

The Lebanese system was set up in a way that no community had an absolute majority. Thus, almost every single Lebanese community made alliances with outside forces in support of its position. Such alliances were not to overthrow the delicately balanced Lebanese system, but to give one community sufficient leverage to dominate that system without collapsing it. Accordingly, the Israeli support was to be sufficient to assure Maronite dominance, but was not intended for open cooperation and Israeli presence in

Lebanon. Until 1982, Israel served exactly that function for the Maronites. However, lured by Bashir Gemayel who was sending mixed messages, and propelled by Ariel Sharon who had greater plans in mind, Israel invaded Lebanon and found that the Maronites were not only unwilling to fight for re-establishment of their dominance, but were also reneging on the peace plans and coalescing with the Muslims.

The Maronites did not see Israel as a strategic ally, but rather as a tactical ally. They wanted Israel and Syria to neutralize each other. Israel did not realize this, as it was ideologically committed to the Maronites as "natural allies." Moreover, some Israeli politicians failed to understand the intricacies of shifting alliances in Lebanon. This resulted in the simple view that Christians were "better" than Muslims.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Israel believed that a predominantly Maronite regime could be erected in Lebanon and that the Maronites, as a whole, wanted one.<sup>90</sup>

A further misconception was the Israeli perception that the Maronites they were relating to were, in fact, representative of the whole Maronite community. This misconception can be traced back as far as the *Yishuv*, when the fact that different Maronite factions existed was ignored. The Jewish Agency had signed a treaty with the Maronite Church, so it is not difficult to see where this perception came from. The Maronite Church, of course, like any other religious institution, claimed to speak for all of its members and such religious authority is easily accepted. In addition, throughout all phases of the minority-alliance the Kataib supported this claim that the pro-Israeli faction was the representative of the Maronites. For Israeli decision makers this fitted well into their own plans, and as they, with the exception of Rabin, lacked understanding of Lebanon's political realities they did not pay much attention to details and often disregarded warnings.

Maronite reliability as an ally was approached in a similar fashion. Warnings, presented by Moshe Sharett (the head of the Jewish Agency's political department) during the *Yishuv* period and by the Foreign Ministry and military intelligence during the 1950s and later, were seen as excessively cautious. The Maronites were regarded as reliable, because from the *Yishuv* onwards they supported the Zionists' aims for statehood, petitioning the Anglo-American Commission and then the United Nations to that effect. Then, in the face of Arab hostility, they had continued to have relations with Israel. Disregarding the fact that Israel was also serving Maronite needs, this relationship was, in a sense, proof of Maronite reliability. Moreover, the Mossad, which was responsible for these relations, had decided that they could be trusted and presented them to Israeli decision makers as reliable. As already mentioned, such a perception was most likely due to the over-identification of Mossad field agents with their hosts' plight.

Thus, the Maronites were presented as reliable, but this reliability had its limitations. Israelis directly involved with the Maronites developed a very personal and subjective affinity to the problems of the Maronites which exceeded reality. Moreover, the majority of policy makers were "mesmerized" by their junior ally.



The non-cooperation of the Maronites during the invasion can be seen as a manifestation of their non-reliability. However, the non-cooperation also reflects a deeper misunderstanding between many Israelis and Lebanese Christians. The Israeli side had the impression that the Maronites wanted Israel "to do their dirty work" for them. The Christians held that Israel was ultimately responsible for the refugee status of the Palestinians and all the misfortune pursuant on this in Lebanon. Accordingly, they thought it only right that Israel should do something to mitigate this misfortune. <sup>91</sup>

The final contribution to the overall failure in Israel's national intelligence estimates was the Israeli belief that military power could be translated into political gains. This belief was very much a part of Ben Gurion's approach to the Middle East as a region. He was convinced that the Arabs only responded to force and that the 1948 war had shown that the military action of a few months had achieved more than the diplomacy of the preceding decades. This debatable view was institutionalized during Ben Gurion's premiership and relied upon heavily by his successors as a means of dealing with neighboring states in the absence of direct inter-state relations. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, this very view was the foundation for Begin's, Sharon's and Eitan's policies of faits accomplis. Indeed, Sharon was convinced that military gains during Operation Peace for Galilee would have sweeping political results. Had he considered Israel's past attempts of translating military gains into political ones, he would have realized that Israel had never been very successful. The ultimate Israeli goal was and is peace, recognition and security. Neither the 1948 war, the 1956 Sinai Campaign, the 1967 Six Day War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, nor the 1982 invasion of Lebanon accomplished this goal. In fact, the opposite can be argued; Israel's wars and Israel's acquisition of territory to enhance its strategic depth were seen by the Arabs as proof that Israel was expansionist and did not want peace. And according to this logic, the Arab states needed to continue fighting Israel, which, in turn, did not bring Israel any closer to peace, recognition and security.

## CONCLUSION

Israel's failure in national intelligence estimates is an important case study as it reveals how crucial a correct evaluation of an ally's (as well as an enemy's) capabilities and intentions can be. The invasion of Lebanon and the plan to restructure the Middle East did not fail because of Syria, the PLO or even the Maronites, but because of Israel's misperception of the Maronites. It failed because Israel had based the success of the entire operation on this false perception, and a policy relying on faulty intelligence is unlikely to succeed, no matter how much military force is used.

The question remains of how such pitfalls in intelligence estimation can be avoided. One answer would be to make assumptions and theories as explicit as possible so that when a piece of information does not fit it will become obvious. <sup>92</sup> There is also the need to apply several different theories with the aim to disprove them. In other words, there is room for the institutionalization of a process of confrontation of all ideas within the different intelligence services. <sup>93</sup> In addition, the analyst must also step back from his or her own experience and culture, and include the emotional and apparently irrational among the forces which might produce a surprise result. <sup>94</sup> Moreover, the intelligence community

must accept the responsibility not only to deliver an effective analysis to the decision maker's desk, but also to ensure that it goes into the heads of decision-making officials. <sup>95</sup> And finally, the relationship between intelligence personnel and decision makers needs to be reevaluated. Operation Peace for Galilee illustrates not only the mistake of subordinating intelligence to a dominant and centralizing political authority, and the problem of dependence by the political authorities on a single source of intelligence evaluation, <sup>96</sup> but also the danger of subordinating diplomacy to military force.

## Endnotes

I would like to thank Avi Shlaim and Charles Townshend for their useful comments and suggestions.

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