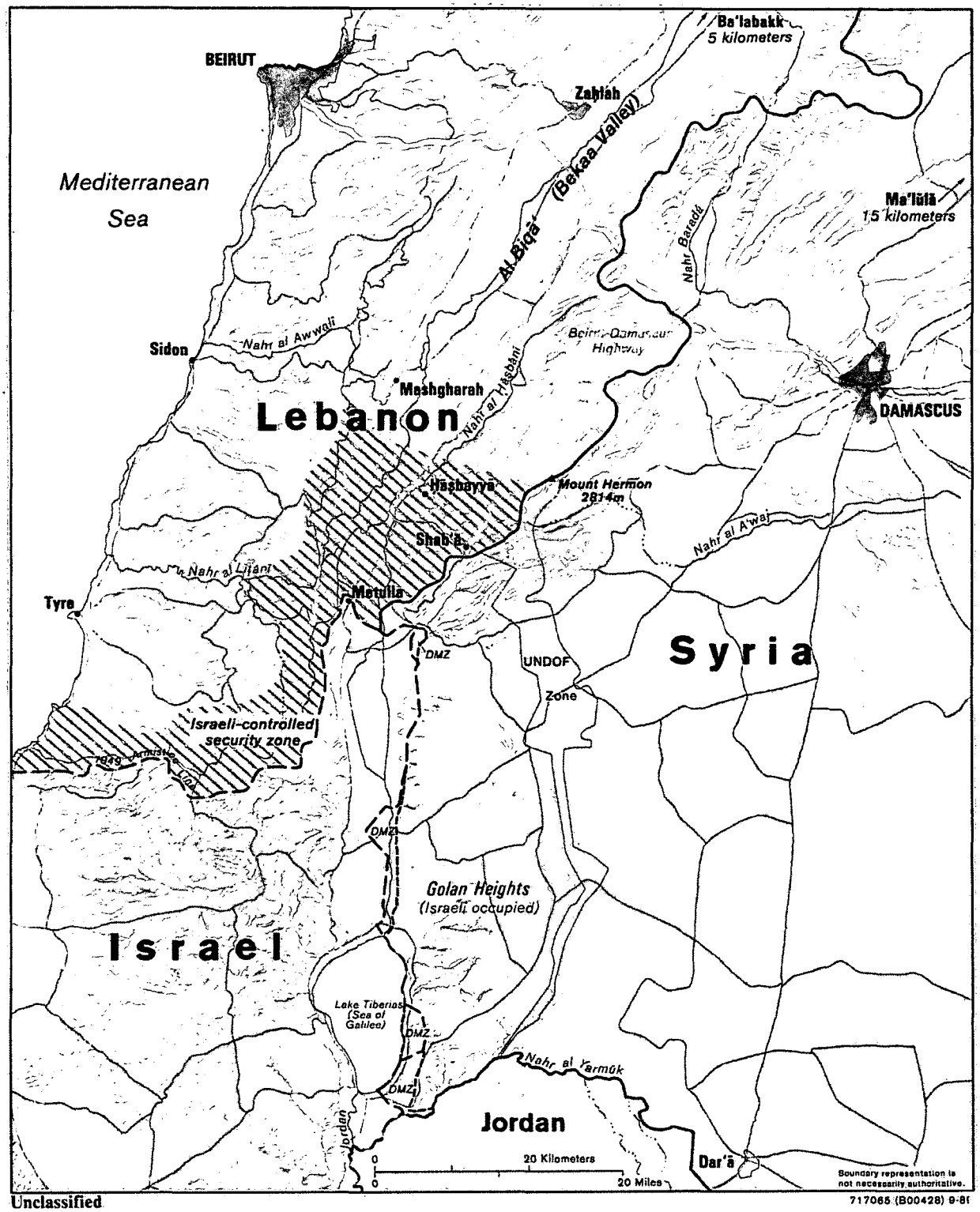
THE CARLISLE PAPERS: IV

For a fourth year, the Editorial Board of *Studies in Intelligence* is publishing papers drawn from a Conference on Intelligence and Military Operations conducted by the US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. The fourth annual conference, held 9-11 May 1989, brought together an international group of scholars to discuss the role of intelligence in strategic assessment, low-intensity warfare, military operations, politics, deception, strategic surprise, and on the battlefield in the age of high technology. Representative of the material offered at the conference are two papers presented here:

— Early Warning Systems, by (b)(6)

— From the Okhrana to the KGB, by (b)(6)



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EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

(b)(6)

The period of unusual tension in Israeli-Syrian relations described in the following account came to a close in the summer of 1986, but the situation on the two countries' common border continues to be fraught with danger. In the fall of 1988, Israeli leaders issued a number of declarations reaffirming their perception of a Syrian threat and the concomitant need "for overall watchfulness, for intelligence alertness and for constant battle-readiness on the Golan Heights."[1] The inauguration of an Israeli program to place satellites in orbit over the Middle East, some of which would have a surveillance capability, can be partly seen in the context of this imperative. A few days before the launch of Ofeg 1, Chief of Staff Shomron justified the investment in early warning systems costing hundreds of millions of dollars by saying that the alternative would be to keep Israeli troops on constant standby.[2]

From September 1985 to June 1986, the Israeli Army was on heightened alert on at least five separate occasions as a result of forebodings of a possible Syrian attack. This was after Israel's final withdrawal from most of Lebanon in June 1985, three years after the 1982 invasion, when presumably tension with Syria should have decreased. The Syrian Army responded by taking precautionary measures, and tension rose dangerously. The slightest miscalulation could have resulted in war.

But Syria was not immediately "heading for war," as the frequently expressed Israeli slogan claimed. Indeed, in early 1987 Israel reached this conclusion. Why was it, then, that Israel so seriously misjudged Syria's position? What were the causes of Israel's repeated alarms? Had Israel replaced the fatal complacency of the pre-October 1973 war period by a no less precarious tendency to "cry wolf?"

Israeli Threat Assessments

The military intelligence branch of the general staff, Aman, is the largest and most powerful of Israel's intelligence agencies. It bears responsibility for the national security estimate, and it exerts strong influence over government thinking on all matters pertaining to the Arab world. Whenever there is a convergence of opinion among Israeli ministers and senior Army commanders on some Middle Eastern issue, the odds are that it derives from a military intelligence assessment, and this helps to piece together Aman's views. Aman's opinions are also more directly available from the occasional briefings given by the Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) and senior intelligence officers.

The work of Israeli intelligence has always rested on the assumption that some or all of Israel's neighbors are bent on its destruction. Because of its small population, Israel is obliged to rely in a national emergency on the mobilization of the reserves. And a timely mobilization requires an effective early warning system, which is maintained by the intelligence corps and the intelligence branch of the general staff. Since its failure in October 1973 to provide sufficient advance warning of the impending Egyptian-Syrian attack, Aman has placed redoubled emphasis on the accurate detection of threats to national security to ensure that the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) are not caught off guard again.

Following the Yom Kippur War and the Agranat commission of inquiry into the "blunder," various structural changes were introduced into the work of intelligence. There was

to be greater coordination between military intelligence officers at the general staff and command levels; field intelligence-gathering capabilities were improved; new rules for the distribution of intelligence material were determined; a devil's advocate unit was set up within the intelligence branch charged with presenting counter-arguments to the prevailing consensus; the burden of administering the intelligence corps was removed from the shoulders of the DMI by the appointment of a separate chief intelligence officer with his own staff; and intelligence pluralism was fostered by strengthening the Foreign Ministry Research Department (henceforth known as the Center for Research and Policy Planning) and by establishing an independent evaluaton unit within the Mossad.[3]

But the most interesting change concerns the new analytical procedures proposed for the assessment of threat and the consequent sounding of an alert. On the eve of the Yom Kippur War, numerous indicators available to Israeli intelligence pointed to the readiness for battle of the Egyptian and Syrian Armies. However, these were disregarded because of the assumption that Egypt would not dare to attack Israel without a long-range aerial strike capability and that Syria would not go it alone. To this was added the failure to envisage the possibility that President Sadat might eschew a war aimed at recapturing the whole of the Sinai Peninsula in favor of a limited war intended to catalyse a political process. A successful Egyptian campaign of deception reinforced the Israeli conclusion that the Egyptian Army was engaged in exercises.[4]

As a direct result of this error, serious doubt was cast on the wisdom of relying on an appraisal of enemy intentions for a threat assessment. The Agranat report proposed that threat should not be assessed on the basis of what were at best subjective judgments about intentions, perceptions, or policy trends in the enemy camp. What really counted was the opponent's preparedness for attack on the ground. Only information, then, about the enemy's order of battle was to be relied upon in reaching an assessment of threat.[5]

The case for redefining the work of intelligence along these lines was cogently argued by Yitzhak Rabin, chief of staff in 1967, prime minister responsible for inmplementing the recommendations of the Agranat report in 1975 and 1976, and defence minister at the time of the war scares of 1985 and 1986: [6]

> Concerning intelligence, there is room to distinguish between two interconnected systems: One system—the reception of data on what is happening in enemy countries and their armies, the influence of the superpowers and other factors, the analysis of the options available to the enemy to go to war against us; the second system—the matter of intentions. In everything connected to data, to the analysis of options, I think that over the years military intelligence has been outstanding, with impressive achievements, providing facts that it would be hard to improve on, in everything connected with the size of the enemy's forces, their quality, deployment, possibilities. The matter of intentions is less dependent on the military echelon, in enemy countries as well. It is the political echelon that decided to exploit military options, in other words, to go to war. Here a difficulty arises. We are speaking of totalitarian regimes where, on occasion, the final say is that of a single individual. Therefore, it is much harder to acquire factual information on intentions. As an intelligence consumer, as chief of staff and prime minister, I wanted to get both things. But at the same time I always said and was always convinced that, as far as enemy intentions were concerned, intelligence estimates should not be considered immutable dogma. *It is the political echelon that has to make its own estimate of enemy intentions in the course of discussions with the intelligence community.*

If threat assessment was to be grounded in information on enemy capabilities rather than intentions, Aman's role would be to determine whether or not certain pre-established criteria had been fulfilled. Only one narrow question would concern it: Had the enemy acquired the option of launching an attack? Judgment of whether or not he actually intended to implement that option would supposedly be transferred to the surer grasp of the politicians. Aman would be deprived of the kind of discretion that it was alleged to have abused in 1973.

A close monitoring of the enemy's order of battle would aim at detecting early warning indicative signs of enemy military preparations. Indicative signs are involuntary and unavoidable actions taken by an opponent as he readies his forces for war, and they can be divided into circumstantial and immediate signs. Circumstantial signs are changes in enemy dispositions or capabilities that would put him in a better general position to launch an attack. These might include a redeployment of enemy forces, an increase in his mobilized strength on the front, or the emplacement of new weapon systems.[7]

The definitive estimate of an impending attack would depend on the detection of certain indications that the enemy had actually begun his countdown to war. These immediate indicative signs might include the cancellation of leave, civil defense preparations, the evacuation of civilian hospitals, adoption of characteristic deployment patterns determined by offensive military doctrine, the issue of specified types of battle equipment, the activation of certain communication networks, a change in the pattern of radio traffic, the movement of forces and equipment to prepared jumping-off points, and so on at each stage of the countdown, at all command levels, and in every branch of the services.

In practice, a doctrinaire application of the Agranat approach was hardly feasible under all conditions. As General Ehud Barak, DMI from 1983 to 1986, argued in an important article, preoccupation with the eventuality of an all-out attack overlooked Aman's obligation to provide warning of limited "smash and grab" or terror operations from which an enemy such as Syria might obtain substantial political benefit but which would not require the sort of advance preparation detectable by monitoring his order of battle.

Another major problem, overlooked by Agranat, Barak pointed out, was the practical impossibility of establishing an infallible early warning system. Sophisticated equipment was subject to technical failure or the vagaries of the weather, and the effort put by Israel into collecting information was matched by an equal enemy attempt to frustrate that effort. The fruits of surprise, Barak added, had proven so great in 1973 that the Arabs could be expected to try to repeat and even improve on that performance in the future. Finally, reliance on indicative signs also had its drawbacks; a state planning to go to war could make many of its logistical preparations well ahead of time and thereby deprive the opponent's intelligence of vital pointers. Barak concluded that, in current circumstances or with any additional investment of men and equipment, Aman could not promise with absolute assurance to give, say, five day's advance warning of an enemy attack.[8]

Red Lines in Lebanon

On 10 June 1985, the Israeli Army completed the final stage of its withdrawal from Lebanon in the aftermath of the ill-fated Lebanon war of 1982. Israel had sought to arrive at an understanding with Syria regulating the presence and activities of the two countries in Lebanon, but Syria did not respond to attempts to make contact. As far as Syria was concerned, Israel was not a legitimate party to any arrangement concerning Lebanon and should withdraw its forces unconditionally.

Israel thus was obliged to revert to the pre-1982 concept of "red lines," tacit "rules of the game" defining the kind and scope of behavior permitted and prohibited to the parties on "non-zero-sum" situations of conflict. Red lines can be communicated in declaratory form, via a third party or by dint of practise. There need be no acknowledgement of their existence other than their effective operation on the ground. Nor need they entail cooperation beyond the limited sphere of their application. Their sole purpose is to avoid unnecessary abrasion while protecting the essential security interests of rivals. Although they are meant to prevent escalation to war, by indicating the limits of one's tolerance they often function as a central component in strategies of deterrence and their infringement by an opponent may be deemed a *casus belli*.

The red lines drawn by Israel in Lebanon consisted of several basic elements:

— Syria's existing sphere of influence in the country was acknowledged, but its forces were not to move south of their present dispositions into areas vacated by the withdrawing Israelis.

— Syrian ground-to-air antiaircraft missiles were not to be deployed on Lebanese soil.

— Israel reserved for its air force the freedom of Lebanese air space for aerial reconnaissance and for raids on terrorist bases.

— It was hoped that Syria might restrain guerrilla incursions against Israel out of Al Biqa' (the Bekaa Valley), which was under the control of Syrian troops.

Although Syria effectively gave tacit consent to the first three points, it never showed any inclination to accept the last one. Syria also would not bestow any kind of legitimacy on the security zone created by Israel north of the international boundary between Israel and Lebanon that was policed by troops of the South Lebanese Army with the support of the IDF.

Israeli military intelligence appraisals of Syria were dominated by a debate over the meaning of Assad's declared goal of achieving "strategic parity" with Israel. The dimensions of Syria's military buildup were clear enough: a new command and control system for Syria's air defenses and her air force; long-range SA-5 ground-to-air missiles capable of interdicting planes well inside Israeli territory; SS-21 ground-to-ground missiles capable of striking at northern and central Israel; and an increase in Syrian ground forces from six to nine divisions since 1982 that allowed Syria to put more than 500,000 men into the field.

What did it all mean? The rather moderate view of the DMI, General Barak, was that Syria sought to acquire the capability to defend itself and also to perform offensive operations without the participation of any other Arab factor. Its long-range strike capability and strategic cooperation with the USSR were intended to counterbalance Israel's strategic alliance with the US. Barak did not believe that war was inevitable. The Syrians, in his opinion, understood that although they could forecast the beginning of an all-out war they could have no assurance as to its conclusion. They knew enough about the strength of the IDF to realize that resort to all-out war would be highly problematic from their point of view.[10]

A more pessimistic interpretation was put on Syrian policy by a senior officer in the research department of the intelligence branch. He agreed that strategic parity had a defensive dimension and was intended to obviate the possibility of an imposed settlement. But he also argued that Syria "hoped to conduct an aggressive policy in the military sphere."[11] This latter view was endorsed by Chief of Staff Moshe Levi, who believed that "the Syrians will try to attack us in some form."[12] Syria said outright that it wanted to annihilate Israel, albeit under convenient conditions.

Alarm #1: September 1985

News of a security alert on the Golan front was released to the Israeli press on 3 September 1985, when the chief of staff announced that the IDF had taken appropriate steps "to deal with the possibility of a sudden attack on the Golan Heights by the Syrians." [13] The announcement would have been made to prevent the spread of exaggerated rumor among the general public in the light of preventive measures being taken and to scuttle any Syrian hopes of achieving surprise. On 10 September, Defense Minister Rabin took the grave and extraordinary step of issuing a public warning to the Syrians "lest they make a fatal mistake and initiate an ill-considered move against Israel. The outcome would be a crushing Israeli victory." [14]

The major factor causing this alarm was the completion by Syria of the redeployment of three divisions from Lebanon to permanent bases around Damascus. The bulk of the Syrian Army, comprising six armored divisions with over 2,000 tanks, was now deployed between the Golan front and the Syrian capital. This was not a sudden move, and it had been closely observed by military intelligence at least since June, when it was referred to by Barak. But with shorter lines of communication and more units available, the Syrian Army enjoyed greater freedom of maneuver than before. It had also strengthened its fortifications on the Golan and put its forces through an intensive training program described as "unprecedented in scope" by intelligence sources.[15]

No indicative signs of an imminent attack had been detected. Deputy Chief of Staff General Shomron admitted that he had "no information that would attest to a Syrian resolution to launch a war against Israel." [16] Nor did anyone believe that a Syrian attack made any kind of sense, because Syria was politically isolated and militarily inferior to Israel. But while there was nothing in its deployment to indicate an imminent attack, the Syrian Army could quickly shift to an offensive footing. General Ori Or, in charge of the Northern Command, noted that the Syrians had "the potential to be an immediate threat," and, in line with the recommendations of the Agranat commission of inquiry, IDF units had been reinforced so that Israel had "a better ratio of power in case something does happen." [17]

The September alert would seem to have been a straightforward application of the Agranat guidelines. Threat assessment, according to this version, was to be based on the state of enemy capabilities. Irrespective of the political and strategic logic of the situation, IDF intelligence doctrine, therefore, required that the transfer of Syrian forces from the Bekaa to the Golan set off the alarm. In point of fact, the Israeli assessment was less detached from surrounding circumstances than might appear at first sight and did contain an evaluation of Syrian intentions.

Assorted developments contributing to Israeli disquiet were cited in a commentary by the military correspondent of *Davar*, printed next to the report of Rabin's warning of 10 September. There had recently been, the article explained, a spate of minings and other attempted terrorist acts on the Golan by the Syrian-backed "refusal front." Moreover, Syria was constantly enlarging its influence in Lebanon and had moved its forces into Zahlah, the Christian town on the Beirut-Damascus Highway that had been the scene of a previous Syrian-Israeli crisis in 1981. The article concluded that Israel was concerned "that burgeoning Syrian strength and self-confidence might lead to Syria's feeling that she could launch a war against Israel." [18]

The points touched on in the *Davar* commentary were repeated in various statements being made at the time by senior ministers and officers, including the foreign minister, the defense minister and the chief of staff. Given the close relationship between military

intelligence and some Israeli military correspondents, it was probably an accurate reflection of Aman's views. If so, then it follows that, Agranat notwithstanding, an evaluation of both capability and intention, albeit with an emphasis on the former, had been restored to the assessment of threat.

Alarm #2: November-December 1985

Of all the episodes dealt with here, the Syrian missile crisis was potentially the most dangerous. Action and reaction followed in rapid succession, and soon a classic deterrence crisis had emerged, with both parties perceiving their credibility challenged. Only an intensive US effort at mediation over several tense weeks disentangled the situation.

Ever since the June withdrawal, the Israeli Air Force had maintained freedom of action over Lebanese territory, flying reconnaissance patrols and striking at Palestinian guerrilla targets in the Bekaa Valley. In the weeks preceding the crisis, however, Syrian planes had begun to appear, and on several occasions Israeli patrols had been broken off "to prevent an exacerbation of the situation." On 19 November, Israeli aircraft were on a routine surveillance patrol over the northern Bekaa Valley near Ba'labakk about 10 kilometers from the Syrian border. Two Syrian MIG-23 fighters were detected on an apparent interception course and were shot down while over Syrian territory on the orders of a senior commander in the air force control center. Israel later learned that the Syrians had no intention of clashing with the Israeli aircraft.[19]

At this point, a blackout was imposed by the local media on reporting of the crisis at the request of the Israeli Government. Later accounts, however, provide a skeletal reconstruction of events. On 24 November, having complained to the UN Secretary-general and warned the US that serious consequences would follow from the Israeli penetration of Syrian air space, the Syrian Government reacted with two moves. First, short-range SAM-6 and SAM-8 missile batteries and radar equipment were introduced into the area of the Bekaa Valley. Second, longer-range SAM-2 missiles were moved up to various sites on the Syrian-Lebanese border. In an atmosphere punctuated by Israeli protests and warnings, US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy hurried to the area and conducted contacts with the two sides in order to defuse the crisis. On 1 December, the shorter-range missiles were withdrawn from Lebanon. However, the SAM-2 missiles on Syrian soil were left in place. Tension remained high for some weeks, the SAM-6s and 8s were reintroduced and withdrawn for a second time, and the crisis only wound down when Israel reluctantly reconciled herself to the presence of the Syrian-based SAM-2s.

An idea of the serious effect of the crisis on Aman's perceptions of Syria can be obtained by comparing two interviews given by General Barak, one just before and one just after the events described above. Speaking on Israeli TV on 16 October 1985, the DMI reiterated the moderate assessment of Syrian intentions that he had given in June: "In our opinion, Syria is not going to go to war in the next few weeks and there is no need to run to the air raid shelters." Barak's main concern was that Syria might try to undermine political progress between Jordan and Israel. Even so, Syria had a wide range of options in such circumstances "other than beginning a conflagration with us." His perception of the Syrian leadership was of

> a group of military professionals, level-headed and experienced generals who know the balance of power exactly as it really is and who realize the risks the Syrian Army would be taking by entering into an all-out confrontation with Israel on its own. In my opinion, they will think very carefully before making such a decision.

Speaking to military correspondents on 18 January 1986, Barak adopted a much more pessimistic tone with regard to Syria. In 1986, Syria's long-term plans for building up its military power would be completed or at least highly advanced. There would be "a higher potential than in previous years for developments not necessarily presaged by past behavior." This would require maximum alertness and preparedness on the part of military intelligence. "The overall military capability that Syria is acquiring and the potential for deterioration implicit in the deployment of the Syrian ground-to-air missiles might constitute a turning point in the situation." [20]

As in the September episode, a number of factors combined to produce the latest threat assessment. First and foremost, the missile deployment was seen as a change in the *status quo* that had existed in Lebanon since June 1982, when Syria agreed to refrain from placing antiaircraft missiles on Lebanese soil. In practise, Syria had also voluntarily kept its missiles away from its side of the Syrian-Lebanese border—where they might threaten Israel's freedom of flight in Lebanese airspace. On the very day that the missiles were moved forward, a rare report, datelined Paris, had Defense Minister Rabin telling his visiting French counterpart that Israel "would not concede the right to fly in Lebanese airspace," which he described "as a vital Israeli defense need." [21] The Syrian deployment, then, threatened that right.

Despite the accidental nature of the initial incident, for which, if anything, responsibility lay with Israel, some observers believed that Syria had simply been looking for a pretext to deploy the missiles. The imputation of intentionality, the assumption that the opponent is purposefully manipulating events, is a classic psychological process associated with the perceptions of threat in an international crisis.

One military commentator, writing in mid-December, pointed out that the missile sites and dugouts had been prepared beforehand, and he went on to argue that the dogfight was only an excuse for the Syrians to implement their intentions. Syria's main motive was to assert its exclusive control over Lebanon and to deprive Israel of aerial access to vital intelligence on the terrorists and the Syrian Army.[22] The deputy chief of staff offered a similar analysis. He believed "Syria will advance and seek any opening through which it can make political or military achievements." Syria was a patient foe and would "move toward the brink very cautiously." But the situation had "potential for a deterioration" and "in the end" the missiles would be destroyed.[23]

In line with the view advanced by Barak in October that Syria had a wide range of options available to torpedo the political process between Israel and Jordan, defense "experts" quoted by another military correspondent argued that Assad had "in fact posed a direct diplomatic challenge to Israel that is far wider than just Israel's ability to patrol the skies of Lebanon." Syria did not want war. "But they also do not want movement on the peace front between Israel and Jordan, nor do they want the 'idyllic situation' on Israel's northern border to continue unchallenged." [24]

If this last point was true, and the Syrians wanted to "warm up" the northern border, the potential for escalation was grave. Evidence for this came in the form of increased attacks against the South Lebanese Army by guerrillas operating out of the Bekaa Valley. Because the effect of the Syrian missiles was precisely to restrict Israeli freedom of action against guerrilla bases in the Bekaa and obstruct intelligence gathering, the image of some concerted and malevolent scheme was reinforced. Interrogation by military intelligence of infiltrators captured during the crisis in November and December 1985 indicated that senior Syrian intelligence officers were behind the planning of the raids.[25] Particularly ominous was the capture in November of a squad belonging to the Democratic Front for the Liberation of

Palestine. Sent in this case from Syria, and trained at Ma'lula, not far from the Lebanese border, it had been intercepted in the Hermon area while on a mission to capture Israeli citizens and to negotiate the release of terrorists jailed in Israel.[26] This particular item was so sensitive that it was only reported to the public on 29 January, after things had calmed down.

Inevitably, there was concern about whether the situation might escalate to war. To add to the various disturbing items of information at the disposal of military intelligence, a large-scale Syrian military exercise was held in mid-December, and appropriate measures were taken by the IDF. But the monitoring of Syrian capabilities gave no grounds to conclude that an attack was imminent. No significant changes in Syrian deployment were observed on the Golan, nor were indicative signs picked up that might point to Syrian preparations for a surprise attack.[27]

The trouble was that the absence of indicative signs provided no comfort. Why this was so was hinted at in an article appearing in *Jane's Defence Weekly* for 28 December 1985, quoting Israeli defense and intelligence sources. The main themes of this article were to reappear on several occasions in the coming months. The article probably was intended as a signal to Syria to inform her that Israel was fully aware of her "plans." Since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, the *Jane's* piece argued, Syria had been able to concentrate its forces opposite Israel on the Golan behind a strengthened defensive line. From this new disposition it could move to the offensive "within a very short space of time," hoping to repeat the surprise achieved in 1973. The worst-case scenario described by the article was one in which Syria would try to neutralize Israel's early warning system by making its preparations for war slowly and imperceptibly. Either an all-out attack or the seizure of an Israel position, such as Mount Hermon, was possible.

Alarm #3: March 1986

The missile crisis was a turning point in Israeli perceptions of Syria. It erased the view of a Syria which, ideology notwithstanding, could be relied upon to maintain the *status quo*. The irony is that it was just at this time that external signs of a deepening economic crisis in Syrian affairs, hardly compatible with a militant foreign policy, were becoming evident. At any rate, henceforth Aman displayed an increased sensitivity to real—or apparent—threatening cues. All traces of a reliance on objective indices of capability, recommended by the Agranat report, disappeared, to be replaced by resort to a traditional and subjective appraisal of intentions. Threat *perception* then tended to overshadow threat *assessment*.

The March 1986 scare was provoked by a speech given by Assad inaugurating the newly elected People's Assembly in Damascus on 27 February. Most of the speech was dedicated to internal matters, but three items concerned Israel. First, Assad made a statement of support for armed resistance to Israel's security zone in south Lebanon. Second, there was a vague declaration of solidarity with Palestinians under Israeli occupation. But the item that galvanized Israeli observers came in a reference to the Golan Heights, occupied by Israel since 1967 and annexed in December 1981:

> Twelve million Syrian citizens are capable of regaining the Golan. We have no worries or doubts about this. If the Israelis work to put the Golan within their borders, we will work to put the Golan in the middle of Syria and not on its borders. They should remember Begin's letter to Al-Sadat before the latter's visit to Jerusalem in which he said that the enemy always came to them from the north . . . History will record that the Golan was the climax of the disaster for the Israelis.[28]

To Israeli ears, Assad's oration and particularly his affirmation "to put the Golan in the middle of Syria" sounded like a commitment to the conquest of Israel and the establishment of a greater Syria. Assad was a cautious speaker, not usually given to flights of rhetoric. Here, it seemed, was shocking first-hand evidence of the Syrian president's aggressive designs. War suddenly moved closer.

An initial expression of Israeli assessments came from the new commander of Northern Command. Syria, he stated, was preparing for a possible full-scale confrontation with Israel. And the war would not be an easy one for the IDF. General Barak, who became commander of the Central Command in January, saw Syria "deploying its forces with the aim of imposing its views on the future of the Golan Heights from a position of power and under the appropriate conditions, namely through use of force." Defense Minister Rabin told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, in a briefing supposed to be confidential, that the situation on the Syrian border was "worrisome" and that Israel had to be alert to the possibility of Syrian aggression. Confirming that preventive measures had been taken by the IDF, he noted that "the Syrian president's aggressive talk demands that we forestall a war we do not want." Prime Minister Peres agreed that Assad's speech had a "warlike character." Syria's economic crisis was fraught with peril for Israel. Once Assad achieved strategic parity with Israel, it was not inconceivable that he would want to act.

An additional hint of Aman's likely thinking came in the form of an article in the *London Sunday Telegraph*. The article quoted "a highly placed political source" in Jerusalem as saying that the danger of an imminent Syrian offensive was "very realistic." "Israeli analysts" agreed that Assad "may now have realized his goal of achieving military parity with Israel" and wanted to propel himself "into a position of leadership in the Arab world." They suggested that "the grave economic crisis facing Damascus" might incline Assad to "initiate hostilities" as an escape from his problems. Although he was "unlikely to launch an all-out war," it was possible that he would "attempt a limited, lightning land grab to establish a stephold on the Golan Heights." He would then try and hold out until the international community imposed a cease-fire. Diplomatic pressure could then be exerted to restore the entire area to Syrian control.[29]

A more elaborate version of this same scenario came in an article by the veteran military correpondent of *Ha'aretz*, Ze'ev Schiff, probably Israel's best-informed civilian expert on intelligence matters. Schiff's analysis indicated serious concern that the intelligence corps could no longer provide early warning. Syria, he argued, could deny to Israel "some of the early signs indicating preparations of an impending attack" needed to call a preventive alert. Whenever Assad saw fit, he could launch a surprise assault using infantry and armored divisions already deployed near the border. Long-range missiles could hinder a mobilization of the reserves, and helicopter-borne commandos could attack targets deep inside Israel. An increasingly sophisticated Soviet arsenal and proven staying power put Syria in a position where it would soon be able to fight Israel without support from other Arab countries.[30]

One of the puzzling features in Assad's thinking not yet satisfactorily resolved in Israeli analyses was the connection between Syria's known economic plight and the seeming bellicosity of Assad's 27 February speech. More light was shed on the matter in a second speech given by Assad on 8 March, when his theme was the need for economic sacrifice in the face of Israeli military might.[31]

> We are prepared to live a most frugal life because nothing means more to our people than the land and dignity, which we must preserve and defend. Our rapacious, aggressor enemies, who came from all parts of the world to occupy our land and to

> fight us and to live a harsh, frugal life, in addition to exposing themselves to killing and bloodshed, must know that we are more prepared to live such a harsh life and to offer our blood . . .

As Israeli analysts mulled over the meaning of the speech, a contrary hypothesis offered itself: that Assad's speech was intended less as a declaration of war than a patriotic clarion call to exhort his people to buckle down to economic deprivation and to dissuade his financial backers in the Persian Gulf states and Saudi Arabia from reducing financial aid.

On 11 March, *Tishrin*, the organ of the ruling Ba'ath Party, published an explanatory commentary:

> While it is true that the battle for liberation requires sufficient preparations and that Syria is proceeding on the path of completing its preparations and ensuring the requirements of victory in this battle, the other battle of development and reconstruction is no less important.

Against a background of almost daily power cuts in the cities and a fall in foreign currency reserved to an emergency 20-day level, Syria's economic plight could now be seen for what it really was, a severe obstacle to military adventurism.

Belated acceptance of this corrected assessment came in the remarkable form of an item on the main evening news on Israeli television. (All news reports in Israel on security matters are subject to the military censor.) "The intelligence establishment," the report ran, "believes that President Assad's sharp speeches over the past few days are aimed more at domestic needs, because of the economic crisis, than at raising the tension in relations between Syria and Israel." [32] Because the military intelligence branch bears overall responsibility for Israel's national security estimate, the reference to "the intelligence establishment" implied a clear acknowledgment of error on the part of Aman.

The view that Syria was on the verge of economic catastrophe and that it was therefore unlikely that it had decided to attack Israel was soon reflected in ministerial statements. This did not spare Aman from criticism for its initial oversight. A well-informed veteran correspondent launched a barely concealed attack on the research department of military intelligence. It was, he wrote, "on a constant downswing. The ill-considered reaction to Assad's two speeches is only the latest example of this." [33]

Alarm #4: May 1986

Despite the seeming victory in March of the "optimistic" interpretation of Syrian intentions, there is evidence of a continuing and lively debate. Defense Minister Rabin remarked that the fundamental question, to which there was no sure answer, was "where is Syria heading?" He was "plagued with more and more questions about this." The main factors were Syria's economic difficulties and signs of domestic instability, such as terrorist operations against the Syrian Army. Could Syria, under these circumstances, sustain its policy of military growth? [34]

A curious report was also broadcast on Israel radio in Hebrew, citing unspecified "sources," which claimed that the Syrian authorities had decreased their financial allocation to their agents in the Golan Druze villages by a third to a half. This was "apparently . . . a result of the worsening economic situation in Syria." [35] Presumably, the implication was that if Syria was cutting back on its intelligence gathering on the Golan, it could hardly be planning a war. Was this a tendentious leak by one side in the controversy?

At the beginning of May, the pessimistic reading of events regained the upper hand—with a vengeance. On 8 May, Prime Minister Peres came out with another Israeli warning to Syria, cautioning President Assad "against any adventures" in the light of his "domestic situation." [36] Other messages were passed on through the good offices of the US. The Syrians now had their own reasons to fear an Israeli attack. The US had recently launched airstrikes against Libya for its support of international terrorism. There was evidence that Syria was deeply involved in the same game. In an interview on 23 April, Defense Minister Rabin had hinted that a preventive war was under consideration, while ostensibly denying that there would be "any merit" in it.[37] The situation became so tense that a report was broadcast on CBS television on 9 May, citing "American and Western European intelligence experts," that Israel was "preparing a major military strike against Syria." [38]

Another threat assessment, another alert. The reasoning behind the latest alarm was soon revealed. As on previous occasions, a coherent pattern had been perceived in the conjunction of diverse trends. First, there was the unresolved puzzle of the Syrian economy. One school of thought in Israel continued to insist that Assad might launch a military adventure to divert attention from his country's dire economic predicament. Second, information had reached Israel from the UK that the foiled attempt to blow up an El Al Boeing 747 departing from Heathrow Airport in November 1985 "was worked out and implemented under the responsibilities of an authoritative Syrian body." Such a move, in Rabin's words, would have been "a grave novelty." [39] In Israeli eyes, the blowing up of an Israeli civil aircraft by a Syrian agent's bomb was scarcely different from its downing by a Syrian jet. One possibility was that the Assad regime had lost control over its intelligence agencies. Another was that the planned disaster was intended as a provocation or a deception preceding a major war. In October 1973, after all, a terrorist act against Soviet Jewish emigrants in Austria had diverted the attention of Israel's top leadership on the eve of the Yom Kippur War.

The third element of the pattern, and the catalyst of the threat assessment, was information that fortication and construction work being carried out in Lebanon by the Syrian Army in the southern sector of the Bekaa Valley had reached an advanced stage. Since January, Syria had been working on tank dugouts and antiaircraft defense ditches south of its previous positions, in areas occupied by Israel before the withdrawal. No movement of Syrian forces had yet occurred, but there were those who thought the fortications would change the strategic balance.[40] The earthworks, then, could be interpreted as a potential infringement of the *status quo* and an augury of the sort of redeployment the Agranat report had deemed to constitute grounds for a security alert.

Senior Israeli commanders openly claimed that the fortifications were another step in Syria's preparations for war. Both Syria's defensive and offensive capability would be improved. There was no warning of an "immediate threat," but the "potential" for one did exist. Since the shooting down of the two jets on 19 November, the Syrian Army had been on a constant alert. "The transition from this state of readiness to an actual initiation of operations," Israel's chief of staff argued, was "easier both technically and psychologically." He accepted that the timing was wrong for the Syrians. On the other hand, there was a variety of reasons why they might say, "Well, if this is going to be the situation anyway, then let us go ahead and launch a war." [41]

Alarm #5: June 1986

A final, albeit minor, alert in the series took place in mid-June 1986. No Israeli objection was initially raised when Syrian troops entered the south Lebanese town of Mashgharah in an

operation against radical Hizballah forces. However, there was strong objection to the additional deployment of four tanks. This was considered to be an infringement of the "red line" indicating the limit of Syria's military presence in Lebanon, following the Israeli withdrawal in June 1985. It might also be seen as part of a pattern of encroachment southward. Syrian tanks were moving close to the dugouts prepared over the past few months but not hitherto manned.[42]

Israel's reaction to this perceived incursion, according to Lebanese sources, was to declare a state of alert and dispatch reinforcements to its security zone in southern Lebanon. Convoys were observed passing through the "good fence" at Metulla travelling north, and new positions and observation posts were said to be under construction on the Hasbayya-Shab'a sector, about 10 miles south of the area of Syrian activity.[43]

On this occasion, no public warning was issued by Israel, though other channels may have been used. A puzzling report appeared in *Jane's Defence Weekly* for the week ending 28 June that claimed that Syria was seeking support from neighboring Arab states for a limited war against Israel on the Golan Heights later in the year. Citing "moderate Arab sources," the report noted that Syrian officials and military officers had visited a number of Arab capitals, including Tripoli and Amman, to seek support. In a scenario remarkably similar to that sketched by *Jane's* in December and well-informed Israeli commentators in March, Syrian plans were said to center on a surprise attack launched by forces already in place in order to avoid triggering a prewar Israeli mobilization. The assault might last as little as 36 hours, after which a standstill cease-fire would be sought at the UN. Syria's military buildup and domination of events in Lebanon, the article continued, had apparently given Assad confidence to contemplate a short and limited war.[44]

There must be more than a suspicion that this report, together with others on similar lines, reflected thinking in Israeli circles and was intended to warn Syria off. It is hard to believe that Syrian envoys would be sent on a tour of Arab capitals ostentatiously seeking support for an offensive, the success of which would depend on Israel's being caught unaware. Pro-Western Jordan was certainly not a party that the Syrians would want to confide their most closely guarded secrets to. No, the *Jane's* account fitted into a campaign conducted for months by Israel through diplomatic channels and the media to inform friendly governments of its fears and hostile governments of its vigilance. Underlying the campaign was the genuine fear that Syria, under the slogan of "strategic parity," was preparing for war and that, when it was ready, it would seek to overwhelm Israel with a surprise assault.

Reduced Tension

Following the Mashgharah alert, there was an easing of much of the immediate tension between Israel and Syria. The surprise-attack scenario was sketched out in the international press for the last time on 20 July 1986. Reports of threatening deployments ceased to appear. At the end of January 1987, the military correspondent of *The Jerusalem Post* reported a recent analysis of developments in Syria that portrayed "a weak, divided, isolated and economically shaky country ruled by an ailing president whose iron grip is beginning to slip." A "scholarly" source is cited, but no further details are given of the authors, publication, or research institution.

On the military side, the report noted that the Syrian armed forces seemed incapable of absorbing the huge quantities of equipment they had received since 1982. Some weapon systems known to have been in the pipeline had been delayed or canceled. Syria's involvement in Lebanon had had a deleterious effect on the training and morale of the army. Assad

continued to be unwell, and political intrigue was rampant. The economy was a major problem. Syria's currency reserves were low; budgetary constraints had necessitated major cuts in defense spending. In recent months, economic pressures had become extremely grave, and, as a result, internal unrest was increasing. A further deterioration was predicted for 1987, with no resources available to bring about an improvement. All in all, given Israel's clearcut military superiority and Syria's regional isolation, it was considered "highly improbable" that Assad would risk war in 1987. The view that Assad would do so in order to deflect attention from his internal problems and mobilize the Arab world behind him was rejected.[45]

Within a week, the main themes of this "scholarly analysis" began to appear in ministerial statements. The tone was set by a TV appearance by Defense Minister Rabin on 4 February 1987. Economic difficulties, he noted, had led Syria to reduce the size of its ground forces. The next day, Prime Minister Shamir enlarged on Syria's economic plight and gave the latest assessment of the Syrian threat: "Syria is not heading for war." [46] The army view was given in unmistakable terms by the head of the planning branch. Even before the publication of recent reports about the reduction of the Syrian order of battle, planning "had taken into account . . . the low probability of war with Syria in the coming year." [47]

Israel's Early Warning System

The first conclusion to emerge from this survey is the limited confidence that Aman had at the time in its own capacity to provide sufficient early warning. Fears about the inadequacy of the system appeared in General Barak's *Ma'arakhot* article of March 1985, and they were emphasized in remarks made by Chief of Staff Levi on 9 May 1986. However, they are implicit in the many varients of the surprise-attack scenario to be published in the press. All proceed from the the assumption that Syria might stealthily prepare its forces for an attack without triggering an intelligence alert and the subsequent mobilization of Israel's reserve forces. After the missile crisis of November-December 1985, the salience of this danger increased because of a protracted high state of alert in the Syrian Army.

It was Aman's sober awareness of the vulnerability of its early warning system that rendered it so acutely sensitive to minimal threatening cues. Given apparently reasonable grounds for suspicion, it could not afford the luxury of awaiting more definitive indicators. Aware of the endemic uncertainty of international relations and the ambiguity of most information about an opponent, it preferred to err on the side of extreme caution.

This self-critical vigilance is markedly different from the atmosphere of over-confidence prevailing in military intelligence before the October War, when the DMI gave the unconditional promise to provide sufficient warning of an impending attack to permit a timely mobilization. This reversal surely reflected an altered intelligence reality. Before the 1973 War, Israel enjoyed an overwhelming intelligence advantage over the Arab states, including Syria. This superiority was especially the case in the area of communications and electronic intelligence. In addition, Israeli victories in 1956 and 1967 had put into Aman's hands priceless information about the working of the Arab intelligence service. On the eve of the Yom Kippur War, the collection department of military intelligence was able to place an unprecedented wealth of information at the disposal of its colleagues in research.[48]

Israel's intelligence supremacy was gravely compromised, at one fell swoop, on 6 October 1973, when a batallion of Syrian helicopter-borne troops captured Israel's major listening and observation post for the Golan and Syrian located on Mount Hermon. The base, which was ideally situated to cover the whole field of battle and the approaches to Damascus, contained sensitive radar and electronic equipment of all kinds. On 22 October, it was recaptured by

Israel after a bloody battle. One Israeli soldier explained the importance of the mission with poignant simplicity: "We were told that Mount Hermon is the eyes of the State of Israel, and we knew we had to take it, whatever the cost." [49]

But great damage had already been done. Now it was the Arabs, and their Soviet backers, who had acquired access to Israel's most closely kept secrets. Shortly after the Syrian capture of the Mount Hermon position, Soviet advisers had arrived to take charge of an unprecedented intelligence haul. Some years later, General Shlomo Gazit, DMI from 1974 to 1979, admitted eliptically that Arab intelligence had been allowed to acquire a much better knowledge of the Israel defense forces and their strength and operational methods, thanks to the "interrogation of prisoners and documents that fell into its hands." [50]

Enough time probably had passed between 1973 and 1985 for Israel to regain some of its technological advantage in the intelligence field over Syria. But things could never be quite the same again. The IDF spokesman recently published a report providing information about the "enormous resources" required to maintain "a close watch over the technological advancement of the Arab countries, which is unprecedented in its scope and quality." Surveillance was complicated by the Arab possession of new ways to disrupt Israel's intelligence-monitoring systems. "In competing with these challenges, the Intelligence branch must take into account the accelerated development of the enemy's intelligence, which is constantly improving its capability and its collection means and stepping up its efforts to stop Israeli Intelligence from acquiring information." [51]

Even assuming that Israel can beat Syria in the race between the acquisition of signals intelligence and its denial via electronic deception and countermeasures, Aman labors under a serious, objective, disadvantage. Since 1967, Syria has maintained a large standing army in close proximity to any likely battle and can rapidly switch from a defensive to an offensive mode. From a standing start, the Syrian Army needs several days to prepare an offensive. But from a state of relative preparedness Assad requires hours rather than days to launch a sustainable operation.[52] Thus the challenge facing Aman is not simply to monitor developments and raise the alarm but to do it within severe time constraints.

In the light of these various difficulties, Aman can hardly afford to rely exclusively on the data being provided by its electronic monitoring stations, however sophisticated their equipment. It is bound to supplement its knowledge by other forms of intelligence gathering. Aerial photography, long-range electro-optical observation, and the dispatch of pilotless drones are vital to completing the intelligence picture of the Syrian order of battle. Syrian attempts to prevent Israeli aerial surveillance would be bound, as was indeed demonstrated in the missile crisis of November-December 1985, to arouse great disquiet and the suspicion that Syria sought to deprive Israel of information about the former's preparations for war.

Some Speculation

It may be more than a coincidence that the period of almost continuous crisis with Syria covered by this study involved the Israeli intelligence services in heavy losses of agents. From May 1985 to January 1986, eight Syrian nationals were reported by the Syrian media to have been executed on charges of spying for Israel.[53]

Jonathan Pollard, the analyst employed by the Threat Analysis Division of the US Naval Investigative Service, who was arrested in November 1985, charged and later convicted of spying for Israel, also reached the height of his activity at this time. According to a US Justice Department memorandum, Rafi Eitan, the director of the unit running Pollard, invited the

agent to Israel in July 1985. At various meetings between the two, Pollard "was encouraged to redouble his espionage efforts on the part of Israel." Following the latter's return to Washington in August 1985, "the volume of US classified documents which he routinely delivered to his Israeli co-conspirators increased substantially." Further encouragement was given to Pollard in the fall of 1985 "to accelerate his efforts."[54]

Detection of Pollard's espionage activity was the inevitable result of his regularly obtaining large amounts of information, unrelated to his professional duties, from classified repositories and removing them from his place of work. Had Pollard's handlers been less insistent and had the purloined information been used more circumspectly by Israel, Pollard might not have been apprehended. Among the voluminous material passed on to Israel was data facilitating the Israeli Air Force attack on the PLO headquarters in Tunis on 1 October 1985 and also details of Syria's chemical warfare production capability.

All this evidence is circumstantial, but the implication is that Israel was trying to supplement routine intelligence sources. It was as though unusual efforts were being made to compensate with human intelligence for gaps left by signals intelligence. One wonders whether enough information was reaching Israel using electronic and other means of remote surveillance at this period of grave tension with Syria to enable Aman to fulfill its paramount warning role with an adequate margin of safety or certainty.

The Economic Dimension

Over the years, Aman has been criticized for giving excessive emphasis in its assessments to military hardware over political considerations. After all, decisions—especially those involving going to war—are usually made by the political echelon, based on a broad consideration of the national interest rather than on narrowly military grounds. Notable errors, such as the belief that the 1956 Sinai campaign would topple Nasser from power or that Sadat would be deterred by military inferiority from going to war in 1973, and oversights, such as the failure to anticipate Sadat's 1977 peace overture, the ending of the Iraq-Iran War, and the outbreak of the *intifada,* arguably derived from insufficient sensitivity to political factors, widely defined to include social and economic considerations.

In the present case, the evidence suggests that, until late in 1986, the significance of Syria's economic crisis was incompletely understood by military intelligence. Evidence of Syria's plight was available from the IMF towards the end of 1985. The balance of payments was in serious deficit, as a result of a contraction in exports and the relentless fall in workers' remittances from abroad. Iran had suspended the supply of oil on highly favorable terms, and Syria had to spend precious foreign currency in the spot market. Drought had severely jeopardized food supplies. From October 1985, the electricity supply was cut for three hours each day.

By the spring of 1986, it was clear that Syria's GDP was actually shrinking. Overseas aid and investment plummeted, and emergency measures had to be taken to stop the slide in the value of the Syrian pound. Reports began to appear of the increasing hardships in Syria, including serious shortages of foodstuffs and cooking gas, daily power cuts, and sharply reduced industrial production.

Israeli experts seem to have displayed insufficient awareness of the true dimensions of Syria's economic crisis, until it was being openly mentioned in the international press. As late as November 1986, for example, General Amnon Shakak, General Barak's successor as chief of military intelligence, was expressing skepticism about the severity of Syria's economic problems.[55]

Inadequate attention paid to the socio-economic dimension of Syrian policy had its origins in an incomplete conceptualization of the nature of power. In an interview in June 1986, General Shakak affirmed that "Syria's internal economic weakness does not necessarily reflect a weakness on the part of its leadership." Nor did it affect the Syrian Army.[56] It was surely this assumption that underlay Aman's remarkable assessment that economic weakness might prove an incentive rather than an obstacle to Syrian adventurism.

This was tunnel vision in its most acute form: a perception that Syria was prepared to subordinate all national interests to the single goal of attacking Israel; that social wellbeing and political stability might rate lower than military gratification; and that Syrian priorities, morale, and armed might could remain unaffected by the state of the economy and society. What conceivable sense did it make for Assad to resort to war when his treasury was empty, his economy shrinking, external debt burgeoning, and the people hungry? How precisely would an unpredictable military adventure "divert the attention" of the Syrian people from a shortage of bread and onions? Given the realities in the Persian Gulf and the oil market, why should a war loosen the Arab oil-producers' purse strings? It was fantastic to propose as the basis of a national intelligence estimate the argument that Assad might seek to solve his economic and social problems at the cost of the demolition of his industry and infrastructure by the Israeli Air Force.

Capability Versus Intention

The main recommendation of the Agranat report concerning the analytical procedures of the research department of military intelligence was to switch from a threat assessment deriving from an overall evaluation of capability and intention to one relying on indicative signs of enemy preparations for war on the ground. On the basis of the foregoing cases, our second conclusion has to be that Aman was obliged by force of circumstances to revert from a strict implementation of the Agranat recommendation to a traditional, integrated approach.

In four out of the five cases "circumstantial," though not "immediate," indicative signs triggered the threat assessment. In September 1985, it was the redeployment of two Syrian divisions from Lebanon to the Golan accompanied by an "unprecedented" and intensive retraining program. In November 1985, it was the introduction of antiaircraft missiles into the Bekaa Valley and along the Syrian-Lebanese border. In May 1986, it was the completion of fortification and construction work in the Bekaa Valley beyond the area occupied by Syria in June 1985, when the IDF withdrew. In June 1986, it was the appearance of Syrian tanks at Mashgharah over the existing red line delineating the *status quo*. Even in the instance of Assad's "Golan" speech, the Syrian leader's seemingly bellicose declaration could be interpreted as an "indicative sign," albeit of a political kind.

By themselves, though, these indicative signs were incomplete and ambiguous. All were explicable in less sinister ways. One could be seen as a reflexive response to Israeli conduct, the other as part of a program of routine redeployment. All could be read as either defensive or offensive preparations—or both. It is true that what lent them particular point was the looming shadow of Assad's extraordinary and single-minded dash for "strategic parity." But even this long-term program was open to alternative interpretations.

If one accepts the Israeli assumption that war is an ever-present possibility and that Syria is not reconciled to the existence of Israel and, sooner or later, has to go to war to regain the Golan Heights, then any change in Syria's order of battle bears a potentially minatory significance. In a constantly shifting military context, however, where armies are constantly seeking to improve and strengthen their dispositions, fieldworks, level of training, and

armanents, it is impractical to rely exclusively on indices of capability, except in particularly blatant cases. One is bound to supplement an inherently ambiguous interpretation of the meaning of the enemy's order of battle with an evaluation of his possible intentions in the light of other kinds of evidence.

Examination on the basis of admittedly incomplete data of Aman's assessments of threat in the episodes in question suggests that all rested on an integrated analysis combining consideration of capability with that of intentions. Research into the perception of threat in international relations indicates that anticipations of impending harm invariably entail the apprehension by the observer of a certain order or *gestalt* amid diverse and ambiguous items of information. The cases examined here proved no exception to this tendency. When Syrian encouragement for guerrilla incursions against Israel's security zone in southern Lebanon, support for terrorism outside the Middle East, opposition to Israeli-Jordanian contacts, harsh anti-Israel rhetoric and various other symptoms were combined with some change in deployment, the tendency was to piece it all together into a pattern of menace.

In my view, there are three necessary conditions for threat perception: an assumption of the rival's hostility, the vital nature of the issue or area under observation, and a subjective sense of vulnerability. The observer's sensitivity may be accentuated by idiosyncratic factors and shared national experiences, such as war or some other traumatic event. There is no doubt that in the case of Israel the threshold of threat perception is lowered by memory of the Nazi extermination and previous Arab-Israel wars, especially the 1948 war of independence and the surprise of Yom Kippur 1973.

Against the background of these necessary but not sufficient preconditions, the event completing the *gestalt* and thereby triggering the threat perception is often found to be a violation of the "rules of the game," the normative framework ordering the relations between the parties. Rules of the game consist of the *status quo*, as well as explicit and implicit permissions and prohibitions. Israeli perceptions of the Syrian threat in the period in question certainly seem to exemplify this characterization. Indeed, they suggest that threat assessment by military intelligence analysts is subject to the same sort of psychological tendencies as threat perception in the sense of the subjective intuition of danger.

Also familiar from the general phenomenon of threat perception was the tendency to go beyond the evidence and project deliberate intention, planned malevolence, on random and perhaps benign events. This can be seen in the argument voiced in December 1985 that the Israeli downing of the two Syrian jets had merely served as a pretext for a move—the advancement of the missiles—prepared in advance. Another projection of this kind was the dubious argument that Assad might seek to divert attention from economic crisis by launching a war. A third was the view that Syrian activity in the southern Bekaa was part of a steady process of encroachment on the red lines *status quo*.

Whether or not a given assessment of threat was well-founded in logical terms and the extent to which it was actually vitiated by subjective distortions cannot be answered definitely without access to the sort of primary sources that are not available to the researcher of contemporary intelligence. What is clear is that, notwithstanding Agranat's structural and procedural recommendations and technical advances in intelligence-gathering equipment, there is ultimately no alternative to a sound analysis of enemy intentions, as free as possible from pathological factors. Self-consciousness about personal, institutional, and cultural biases may help, though it is hard to transcend one's deepest instincts and fears. In the final analysis, because every situation in international relations is unique, riddled with uncertainty and ambiguity, there is no foolproof analytical recipe.

False Alarms?

It is clear from the preceding account that the 1985-1986 period in Israeli-Syrian relations was marked by considerable tension and a reciprocal fear of surprise attack. First, a series of heightened military alerts on the Israeli side, based on perceptions of a Syrian military threat of varying intensity, triggered Syrian counteralerts. Second, Israeli military leaders openly admitted on a number of occasions that the early warning capacity of the IDF had been seriously impaired by Syrian countermeasures and the nature of Syria's military deployment in close proximity to the front line. Third, loose talk in Israeli military circles of the desirability of a preventive war against Syria in the light of the ultimate inevitability of war aroused serious concern in the West and presumably no less anxiety in Damascus.

All these factors should have been seriously destabilizing. Indeed, if one were to apply the logic of reciprocal expectations, it is hard to understand how war was avoided at all. The outbreak of hostilities could have resulted from one or other of the following three processes: a pre-emptive attack arising from miscalculation—or in anticipation of the other side's miscalculation—against the menacing background of an escalating spiral of alert and counteralert; a considered decision by Syria to take Israeli generals at their word when they lamented the inadequacies of their early warning system; a preventive war launched either by Israel—as openly discussed—or by Syria which, concerned by Israeli threats, would surely be sorely tempted to seize the initiative and to get its own blow in first.

Why, in spite of these factors and Syria's enormous military buildup, was a war avoided in the period in question? There are various possible answers to this question, which continues to lie at the core of the Syrian-Israeli relationship.

Despite Israeli *angst*, Syria was actually not confident of achieving surprise, and the scenarios depicting her stealthily preparing an offensive undetected were more the product of fevered imaginations than reality. On the contrary, given Israeli expectations of this possibilty and acute sensitivity after 1973 to ambiguous cues of an impending attack, even an ingenious deception campaign on the part of Syria would likely prove ineffective. Most important, the Syrians were surely well aware of this. Indeed, Syria may have been afraid to initiate genuine preparations for fear of a real Israeli pre-emption. In this regard, it should be noted that the successful deception by Syria and Egypt in 1973 was from their point of view a close-run thing and could have been aborted by a whole list of errors and misadventures that subsequently came to light. To launch a surprise attack against an alert opponent, one has to be highly confident of success, utterly desperate, prepared to run abnormally high risks, or rate the retrieval of one's national honor above the possibility of defeat. It is doubtful whether any of these conditions existed in the case of Syria in the period in question.

In the Middle East, with its notorious penchant for conspiracy theories, the Israelis' complaints about the inadequacies of their early warning system were not taken by Syria at face value but were understood as cunning provocations intended to tempt Syria into a rash move that Israel could then exploit for a pre-emptive attack along the lines of June 1967. Alternatively, but no less beneficial to Israel, her claimed lack of confidence in her famed intelligence services was taken as added evidence of hyperalertness and a declaration of determination to try even harder to get it right in the future. From this perspective, it is not tortured soul-searching about one's failings that encourages an enemy but rather complacent trumpetings about one's strong points. The latter, after all, can often be outflanked.

Israel's alerts were not "false" in the usually accepted sense. That is, Syria was not planning an attack but was testing Israeli alertness. Israel's early warning system passed the test

with flying colors. It should be noted that Syria may have perceived Israel's prompt reactions to be proof of the effectiveness of her early warning system, whether or not the test was deliberate or accidental. So what may at one level seems to be evidence of a precarious stability was actually stabilizing, in that it reinforced the deterrent capacity of the IDF. This would tend to challenge the common assumption that the likelihood of war increases in direct proportion to the number of crises between the opponents—a view seemingly corroborated by experience of the periods preceding the two world wars, but which may have lost validity in the light of modern surveillance technology.

If it is accepted that the "false" alarms that characterized the 1985-1986 period improved rather than diminished Israel's deterrent posture, then it may be that one has to look anew at the very utility of the concept of the false alarm. An imminent enemy attack may be called off precisely because of its detection, thereby apparently "falsifying" what was really a fully justifiable alert.[57] We may add to that the corollary that even an empty alert may sometimes be justified if it provides a disincentive to an opponent gambling on achieving surprises. Alarms, then, may be compared to forecasts. Their justification is not whether the event they anticipate indeed occurs but whether they were logically well formed at the time they were made on the basis of available evidence and were useful to decisionmaking. One can only verify with certainty an intelligence estimate after the event, by which time it is too late.

Furthermore, the usual assumption that "crying wolf" diminishes one's credibility and fosters complacency also requires qualification. It may hold under certain defined conditions, for instance, if the intelligence agency supplying the estimate has a less than impeccable reputation or if the premise that there is to be some kind of attack under all circumstances—and only the timing is in doubt—is far from unquestioned. In the case of an actor with a chronically lowered threshold of threat perception or some kind of obsession and whose only doubt is not if but when, recurrent alarms may heighten and not reduce sensitivity. The oft-cited example of the October War surprise, which was preceded and assisted by the "false" alarm of May 1973, should perhaps be seen as a limiting rather than paradigmatic case. At any rate, it is clear that additional, comparative research is required here.

NOTES

1. Prime Minister Shamir in *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 28 Aug. 1988; Defense Minister Rabin in *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 September 1988.
2. Chief of Staff Dan Shomron in *Davar*, 11 Sept. 1988. (*Davar* is the semi-official organ of Rabin's Labor Party.)
3. The Agranat Report, (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975); Prime Minister Rabin to the Knesset, in *Ha'aretz*, 27 May 1976; Ha'aretz Nov. 1976; Shlomo Gazit in *The Jerusalem Post* Magazine, 16 April 1982.
4. Reuven Pda'tsur, "Improvement is Possible," *Ha'aretz*, 18 Apr. 1985. See also Michael I. Handel, "Perception, Deception and Surprise: The Case pf the Yom Kippur War," Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems, Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute, The Hebrew University, 1976.
5. Ze'ev Schiff, "A New Page Opens in Current Security," *Ha'aretz*, 4 April 1975.
6. Interviewed in *Yediot Ahronot*, 24 April 1984. My emphasis.
7. Ze'ev Schiff, op. cit.
8. Ehud Barak, "Problems of Intelligence Work 1985," *Ma'arakot*, No. 298, March-April 1985.
9. Ehud Barak interviewed on Israeli TV, FBIS, 17 Oct. 1985.
10. Barak interviewed in *Ha'aretz*, 6 June 1985.
11. Interview in *Davar*, 7 June 1985.
12. In an address on 7 June 1985. FBIS, 11 June 1985.

13. *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 Sept. 1985.
14. *Davar*, 11 Sept. 1985.
15. Yitzhak Rabin in FBIS, 5 Sept. 1985; *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 Sept. 1985.
16. FBIS, 13 Sept. 1985.
17. FBIS, 12 Sept. 1985.
18. *Davar*, 11 Sept. 1985.
19. Air Force Commander General Lapidot interviewed on Israel radio, 19 Nov. 1985, FBIS, 20 Nov. 1985.
20. *Ha'aretz*, 19 Jan. 1985.
21. *Al Hamishmar*, 24 Nov. 1985.
22. *Yediot Ahronot*, 16 Dec. 1985.
23. FBIS, 18 Dec. 1985.
24. *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 Dec. 1985.
25. *Al Hamishmar*, 16 Dec. 1985.
26. FBIS, 30 Jan. 1986.
27. *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 Dec. 1985, quoting "senior military and diplomatic sources."
28. FBIS, 28 Feb. 1986.
29. The *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 Mar. 1986.
30. *Ha'aretz*, 17, 18 Mar. 1986.
31. FBIS, 10 Mar. 1986.
32. FBIS, 21 Mar. 1986.
33. *Ma'ariv*, 2 Apr. 1986.
34. Interviewed in ibid, 23 Apr. 1986.
35. FBIS, 7 Apr. 1986.
36. Ibid, 8 May 1986.
37. *Ma'ariv*, 23 Apr. 1986.
38. FBIS, 9 May 1986.
39. Interviewed on IDF radio, 11 May 1986; in FBIS, 12 May 1986.
40. *Ma'ariv*, 6 May 1986.
41. General Amir Drori, Israel radio 16 May 1986; in FBIS, 16 May 1986; General Moshe Levi, IDF radio 9 May 1986; in FBIS, 9 May 1986; and on Israel radio 20 May 1986; in FBIS, 20 May 1986.
42. *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 June 1986.
43. FBIS, 19, 26 June 1986.
44. *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 28 June 1986.
45. *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 January 1987.
46. Israel domestic radio, 6 Feb. 1987.
47. General Avihu Bin-Nun, interviewed on Israel armed forces radio, 11 Feb. 1987.
48. See Uri Dan, *Ma'ariv*, 23 April 1976; Shlomo Nakdimon, interview with Brigadier Yoel Ben-Porat, head of the collection department of Aman in 1973, *Yediot Ahronot*, 21 Oct. 1983.
49. Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984, pp. 305-6).
50. *Ma'ariv*, 12 June 1978.
51. FBIS, 18 June 1987.
52. General Ehud Barak interviewed on Israeli TV, FBIS, 17 Oct. 1985.
53. FBIS, 9 Jan. 1986.
54. "The Pollard Case: Government's Memorandum in Aid of Sentencing," *American-Arab Affairs*, Fall 1987, No. 22, pp. 136-7.
55. *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 Oct. 1986.
56. *Bamahane*, 11 June 1986.
57. Arie Ofri, "Crisis and Opportunity Forecasting," *Orbis*, 26:4, Winter 1983, pp. 821-828.