National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths

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This article presents a first of its kind typology of Israeli national security decision-making processes, focusing on five primary pathologies and a number of strengths. It will demonstrate that these pathologies are the product of an extraordinarily compelling external environment and domestic structural factors: chiefly, the extreme politicization of the decision-making process stemming from the proportional representation electoral system, the consequent need to govern through coalition cabinets, and the absence of effective cabinet-level decision-making support capabilities.

Ever since Israel's establishment in 1948, it has confronted an external environment whose primary characteristic has been perceived as one of nearly unremitting and overwhelming hostility. Repeated wars, perpetual hostilities at lower levels, the failed peace processes with the Palestinians and Syria, and even the "cold" peace with Egypt and Jordan have reinforced this image. As a result, national security has been at the forefront of Israeli political life for six decades.

Israel has responded to these circumstances on two levels: by building up a disproportionate defense capability to forestall the threats to its security and by developing a "hunkering down" national security decision-making style geared to a "garrison democracy."[1] Indeed, by the 1970s and 80s, Israel's national security establishment (armed forces, intelligence services, defense and foreign ministries, defense industries) had not only earned a reputation for quality, but had even become one of the world's largest in absolute numbers. In the period since, the defense establishment has developed further, both in size and organizational complexity.

The literature on government and politics in Israel is extensive, though skewed in its emphasis. Almost all studies by journalists, practitioners, and even scholars have taken a clearly historical and case-study-oriented approach, with virtually every event, incident, and major development in Israeli history extensively chronicled. A fair amount of attention also has been given to the formal structures and institutions of Israeli governance and politics. Little attention has been devoted, however, to the processes

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1. Term used by J.C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (Boulder: Westview, 1982).

of Israeli national security decision-making and to an attempt to develop an overall typology thereof.[2]

This article seeks to close the gap and to present a typology of Israeli decision-making, focusing on five primary pathologies. It will seek to demonstrate that these pathologies are largely the product of two primary factors and the interplay between them: an extraordinarily compelling external environment and domestic structural factors, chief among them the extreme politicization of the decision-making process (DMP) stemming from the proportional representation (PR) electoral system and consequent need to govern through coalition cabinets.

ENVIRONMENTAL SOURCES OF ISRAELI NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION-MAKING

DECISIONS ARE CRITICAL AND FATEFUL

For nearly 60 years, and in the pre-state days as well, Israeli national security policy has been predicated on a broad national consensus, which holds that Israel faces a realistic threat of genocide, or at a minimum, of politicide. Indeed, the dangers and degree of external threat posed by the hostile security environment over the years are so extreme that they bear little substantive comparison to other countries.[3]

In recent years, the threat of all-out conventional warfare has receded greatly (despite the 2006 war in Lebanon), and the war in Iraq eliminated the feared Iraqi WMD threat to Israel. Nonetheless, Iran's nuclear program continues to be perceived as an imminent existential threat, and additional threats, severe if not existential, also persist, including Syrian WMD capabilities, Hizbullah's massive rocket arsenal (as amply demonstrated in the recent fighting), and ongoing terrorism. The second Intifada, though not a major military threat in the conventional sense, was perceived by many in Israel as a challenge to the very fabric of its society. Experience has demonstrated further that national security decisions contain the potential for transforming the nation's future course and fundamental character, as was the case following the 1967 Six Day

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2. Lewis Brownstein's interesting, though unfortunately brief article is an early exception to this rule. "Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (1977), pp. 259 – 279. Yehuda Ben Meir's work on national security decision-making in Israel was a major step forward and set out many of the issues of importance, *National Security Decisionmaking: The Israeli Case* (Boulder: Westview, 1986). The first major breakthrough in this area came with the publication of Yehezkel Dror's *Memorandum to the Prime Minister: Book Two* [*Tazkir Lerosh HaMemshala*] (Jerusalem: Academon, 1989) and his *Grand Strategy for Israel* [*Istrategia Rabati Leyisrael*] (Jerusalem: Academon, 1989). More recent works of note in this regard, though of more limited perspective, are Ben Meir's *Civil-Military-Relations in Israel* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1995); Yoram Peri's recent *Generals in the Cabinet Room* (Washington, DC: US Institute for Peace Press, 2006); and Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 2006). See also, Michael Brecher's works *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale, 1972) and *Decisions in Crisis* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980).

3. Yehezkel Dror, *Improving Policymaking and Administration in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Haminhal, 1978), p. 158.

War and 1993 Oslo Accords.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS NOT MALLEABLE

A second perception, which had an overwhelming impact on Israeli policy until the late 1970s and to a lesser, though still significant, extent to this day, is the view of Arab hostility as being so pervasive and extreme as to preclude any ability to materially alter the nation's circumstances through either military or diplomatic means. Following the Sadat peace initiative, Israel's strategic environment came to be perceived as considerably more complex and nuanced, providing greater opportunities and room for maneuver than was thought previously, while the national consensus regarding the nature of the threats Israel faced unraveled. Nonetheless, the fundamental perception of Arab hostility has persisted, and a large segment of the political spectrum continues to perceive a very limited range of military or diplomatic options.[4]

A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT WORTHY OF A MAJOR POWER

Although a very small nation, Israel faces numerous and complex national security "environments" — diplomatic, political, economic, technological, and military. Though true to varying extents of all states, Israel is affected by changes in a far broader external environment than most and to a far greater extent. Indeed, by the 1990s, Israel's national security environment had come to extend far beyond its borders and "natural" interests in the Middle East, and began to encompass "the world." Ties with traditional partners became increasingly complex as well. The following are a few examples to illustrate:

• The strategic WMD threats posed by Iran, Iraq, and Libya in the so-called second- and third-tier confrontation states came to be viewed as the primary danger to Israel's security, presenting unprecedented challenges.

• Ties with the United States grew even deeper, requiring new areas of expertise and ways of thinking. From a comparatively simple dependency relationship, Israel-US ties now included cooperation in state-of-the-art arms development and Israel sought to become a "strategic partner." Joint counter-terror and counter-proliferation efforts raised bilateral cooperation to new levels. Moreover, the continually deepening role of the US in the Middle East meant a new set of considerations for Israel, as did US concerns regarding its newly expanding ties with nations such as China and India.

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4. Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, "Democracy and National Security in a Protracted Conflict," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Vol. 51 (Summer 1984), p. 5; and Dror, *Improving Policy Making*, pp. 159, 162-163.

• Long-standing, often problematic, relations with Europe became increasingly complex, as the EU's role in the region grew, and Israeli-European relations took on a whole new range of issues with which Israel had limited experience (including the political, economic, and social ramifications of a major upgrading of the relationship, or establishment of ties with NATO). Relations with individual European states also expanded, including strategic dialogue.

• The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the establishment of relations with Russia, the arrival of one million Russian immigrants to Israel, and a fundamental change in Russia's role in the region. Israel faced a new necessity to take Russia's interests into account.

• The Far East became an area of considerable Israeli interest, due to North Korean nuclear and missile proliferation, the establishment of relations with China — with whom economic ties expanded rapidly, but whose proliferation policies and problematic relationship with the US were sources of friction — and expanding ties with Japan.

• The Subcontinent also became a focus of interest, due to Indian and Pakistani proliferation and the rapidly expanding strategic relationship with India. Terror in South America and Africa brought these regions into greater focus as well.

• For both economic and military reasons, Israel found it necessary to compete at the forefront of military technology, becoming one of the few countries in the world capable of producing combat aircraft and satellites, as well as the Arrow anti-missile system, and generally a world leader in hi-tech. As Israel's economy advanced, its interest in global economic trends and international economic fora, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), also grew.

Growing environmental complexity led not just to new areas of interest, but to far more complicated decisions themselves. Thus, by way of illustration, the comparatively simple Uzi submachine gun development program of the 1950s was succeeded by the development of the Lavi fighter in the 80s and the Arrow system in the 90s. Similarly, Israeli responses to cases of Arab belligerence evolved from the simple retaliatory raids of the 1950s, to the complex web of regional and global considerations involved in the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars, when an Israeli response could have had global repercussions. The comparatively simple attempts to thwart Egyptian missile development efforts in the 1950s were succeeded by the intricate and conflicting array of US, Russian, and European interests involved in the Iranian missile and nuclear programs in the 1990s and early part of this decade.

EXTREME UNCERTAINTY: CHANGE IS RAPID AND SHARP

Israel's national security environment is extraordinarily volatile, extreme both in the sweeping breadth of change in threats and opportunities, as well as in their frequency, and is characterized by an extremely high degree of uncertainty. Indeed, it has been claimed, with only some hyperbole, that crises are the expected situation in Israel.[5] By way of example, the decade between 1995-2005 included the peace processes with the Palestinians (Oslo II Accords, Camp David Summit, Gaza Disengagement Plan) and Syrians (the overtures under Israeli Prime Ministers Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Binyamin Netanyahu, and Ehud Barak, culminating in the failed Shepherdstown and Geneva summits), the second Intifada and unprecedented domestic terror attacks, the evolution of the Iranian and Iraqi WMD threats and war in Iraq, and withdrawal from Lebanon and the development of a massive rocket threat from Hizbullah, which was used extensively in the recent fighting. A variety of domestic developments with major implications for national security policy also took place, including the Rabin assassination in 1995, rapid cabinet turnover (seven governments in ten years), the growing size and strength of the settler movement, and rapid economic development, particularly of the hi-tech sector.

STRUCTURAL SOURCES OF NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION-MAKING

COALITION-CABINET GOVERNANCE

The single most important structural determinant of Israel's national security decision-making process is the PR electoral system and the consequent need to govern through coalition-cabinets. An historical outgrowth of the Zionist movement's highly ideological nature, the PR system was first adopted as a means of incorporating as many groups as possible under its organizational umbrella and later continued after independence. By giving all a voice, it was hoped that maximal unity could be achieved. In reality, the PR system not only reflects the existing diversity of views, but further amplifies it considerably, especially given the extremely low electoral threshold (only 1% until the 1990s and currently 2%). The system thus ensures that the Knesset is split between a plethora of parties, each of which represents the ideological beliefs and interests of narrow constituencies.

The party split in the Knesset also is expressed in the cabinet, as no party has ever been able to form a government on its own. Governance is thus, *a priori*, a nearly all-consuming exercise in coalition management, including ongoing maneuvering and ideological compromise, in an attempt to keep the coalition together. In recent de-

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5. Dror, *Grand Strategy*, p. 69.

cades, cabinet coalitions have become increasingly fractious and unstable.[6]

Ministers are appointed primarily on the basis of their party's and their own personal political clout, rather than their professional expertise, managerial abilities, or personal inclinations. These are generally taken into account, if at all, only *after* the ministries have been divvied up in the coalition negotiations. Until the recent appointment of Amir Peretz, the position of Minister of Defense was an exception to this rule, whereas the Foreign and Finance Ministers, and even Minister of Justice, have long been victims of the "spoils system."

As political figures in their own right, ministers do not serve at "the Prime Minister's pleasure" and are not necessarily beholden to him. Ostensibly just first among equals, the prime minister has few prerogatives of office and formal sources of influence over ministers. While de facto political clout is a decisive factor in all systems of government, the formal authority of the Israeli prime minister is particularly circumscribed. Prime ministers such as Menachem Begin, who were in firm control of their party and who led relatively cohesive coalitions, were very powerful executives, capable of promoting even highly controversial policies. Others have been far weaker and at the mercy of the contending forces within the coalition and without. Peres, Netanyahu, and Barak saw their political support bleed away and lead to the collapse of their governments. Ariel Sharon had to ride a political roller coaster to force through the Gaza Disengagement Plan, demonstrating both the strengths and weaknesses of his office.

Over the years, the size of the cabinet has increased, with the creation of new ministries and the appointment of "Ministers Without Portfolio" as a means of increasing the number of cabinet-level positions available for coalition formation. Since the 1980s, the number of ministers has fluctuated, reaching an unmanageable number in the low to upper twenties. Given the cabinet's size, a sub-cabinet defense committee (known today as the Ministerial Committee on Defense or MCOD), has been convened throughout most of Israeli history as a means of conducting more discrete, effective, and expedited deliberations.

The Knesset is a Virtual Legislative Branch

Under Israel's coalition-cabinet system, the cabinet, by definition, almost always enjoys an automatic parliamentary majority, in effect negating the principle of

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6. Until the Labor Party's fall from office in 1977, following 29 years of uninterrupted rule, Israel's coalitions were all centered around a loose alliance between Labor and the then-moderate National Religious Party (NRP). Since that time, the degree of ideological congruence within governing coalitions has decreased markedly: Begin's first Likud–led coalition included the dovish Democratic Party for Change, while the 1980s were witness to six years of Labor-Likud "National Unity Governments." The first Shamir coalition included Likud and the right-wing fringe party Moledet, the Netanyahu coalition included Likud, NRP, Shas (a Sephardic religious party), and Israel Bealiyah (a Russian immigrant party). The Rabin coalition included Labor and both the dovish left wing Meretz party and Shas. Barak's coalition included Labor, Meretz and, initially, Shas, NRP, and Israel Bealiyah. The three Sharon coalitions have ranged from narrow Likud-Labor cabinets, to a Likud, Shinui (a centrist party), NRP, and radical right-wing Ichud Leumi combo.

separation of powers and denying the Knesset a significant oversight role. Thus, with the rare exception of issues of supreme importance and fundamental partisan discord, such as votes on the Camp David Accords or the Gaza Disengagement Plan, the Knesset's actual impact on national security policy is negligible.

Meetings of the Foreign and Defense Affairs Committee (FADAC), which, along with Finance, is considered one of the Knesset's two most important and prestigious committees, tend to feature raucous debates along party lines, like those of the Knesset as a whole, rather than serious deliberation. Committee members are almost entirely preoccupied with their political activities — which, unlike parliamentary achievements, are the primary basis of their future Knesset membership and possible promotion to ministerial positions — and thus have little time, and even less incentive, to take on the politically unpopular task of challenging the national security establishment. More-over, the committee lacks any staff of its own, making it almost entirely dependent on the national security establishment for information and thereby further limiting its oversight capabilities. Officials appear before the committee only with the approval of their respective agency heads, and information presented is cleared in advance, typi-cally in a manner designed to obfuscate, at least as much as to clarify, and to make the committee's ability to delve into sensitive issues that much more difficult.

Nonetheless, in recent years, more information has been presented to the FADAC than was the case in the past, primarily to its subcommittees (e.g., Intelligence, Pro-curement, etc.), in which secrecy is generally observed and some substantive debate does take place. Some attempts also have been made in recent decades to conduct more substantive work, primarily by Chairmen of the FADAC such as Dan Meridor and Yuval Steinmetz, but these have been sporadic and have either not been brought to fruition or have failed to have an actual policy impact. The committee thus remains, on the whole, of little influence.

WEAK POLICY FORMULATION AND COORDINATION CAPABILITIES

Neither the prime minister nor the cabinet have significant policy-making ma-chinery at their disposal. Prior to the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) in 1999, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) traditionally consisted of just a handful of advisers (a Chief of Bureau, Foreign Affairs Adviser, and Military Secre-tary) who usually served more as aides, responsible primarily for the prime minister's day-to-day needs and certainly lacking the capacity to conduct systematic policy for-mulation and coordination. The Cabinet Secretariat, the sole support mechanism serv-ing the cabinet, is a purely administrative unit, responsible for the technical flow of issues and documents.

To date, the NSC has had little impact on the work of the PMO or cabinet, as the prime ministers in office since its establishment (Barak, Sharon, and now Ehud Olmert), have chosen to continue working through the traditional advisers and processes. The NSC has only a small staff and embryonic policy formulation capabilities; with the exception of a few issues, it has been relegated to a largely inconsequential position. The PMO and cabinet thus lack the organizational capabilities necessary to conduct

systematic policy assessment and formulation, inter-ministerial coordination, and to follow-up on implementation, and remain almost entirely dependent on the various ministers and bureaucracies. In some ways the dysfunctional nature of the PMO has even worsened in recent years, as lines of authority have blurred and competing appointments were made.[7]

To further exacerbate matters, the policy planning and formulation capabilities in the civilian national security bureaucracies remain weak. The Foreign Ministry lacks the personnel and organizational processes needed for systematic policy formulation and focuses on the day to day management of Israel's foreign relations. Its Policy Planning Division remains an organizational backwater, whose outputs are almost totally dependent on the individuals composing it, with few permanent and structured procedures to ensure relatively constant and uniform performance. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) is also almost totally devoid of policy formulating capabilities. Only the IDF has a highly effective policy formulating mechanism, in the form of its Planning Branch. Established after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Planning Branch deals not only in military planning for the General Staff, but in strategic politico-military planning, geared largely to the needs of the PM, Minister of Defense, and cabinet. Though somewhat constrained by its nature as a military unit, the Planning Branch has fulfilled many of the functions of an NSC, both prior to the latter's establishment and in practice ever since.

The MoD, in recognition of the weakness of its policy planning capabilities and consequent dependence on the IDF Planning Branch, decided in 2003 to rectify this anomaly by taking over the latter's politico-military planning functions. As of this writing, this important reform has been only partially implemented and so far has succeeded primarily in downgrading the capabilities of the Planning Branch, without a commensurate improvement in the MoD's.

GROWTH IN SIZE AND SOPHISTICATION OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY MACHINERY

Notwithstanding the weaknesses in policy formation and coordination, the national security bureaucracy and related organizations have grown tremendously in recent decades, in size, organizational complexity, and processual sophistication. New organizational structures have been added, existing ones greatly expanded, and staff work within agencies has improved markedly, along with intensive usage of information technology (IT) capabilities and increasing levels of professionalism. To cite just

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7. Barak appointed the head of a Politico-Military Staff and special advisers. Under Sharon, the Chief of Bureau, Dov Weisglass, became the primary player and *de facto* National Security Adviser, even after he ostensibly resigned (but in practice remained fully engaged), leaving the Foreign Affairs Adviser, Military Secretary, and National Security Adviser to compete for influence in secondary areas. At one point in 2005, a fifth player joined the fray in the PMO, with the appointment of a Head of the Prime Minister's Strategic Affairs Department. Netanyahu, Barak, and Sharon all relied on their private lawyers, who were long-term acquaintances, for sensitive tasks, in some cases appointing them to senior staff positions.

a few examples, the IDF Planning Branch became a primary player in the IDF and at the cabinet level; the intelligence community as a whole grew greatly in size and capabilities and the Mossad, Shin Bet (and Foreign Ministry) each established new research divisions; and the NSC and MoD politico-military policy planning branch were established.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: HOW THE SYSTEM ACTUALLY WORKS

The previous section presented Israel's unusually volatile, complex, and danger-fraught external environment, as well as some of the structural dimensions affecting Israeli national security decision-making, including the PR system and developments in the national security machinery. The following section presents the effects of these variables on the DMP and the resulting pathologies.

PATHOLOGY 1: A SHORT-TERM PERSPECTIVE PREDOMINATES

The persistent threat of imminent or actual hostilities has led to a nearly total preoccupation in Israel with the "thundering present"[8] and to the development of a national security decision-making process geared toward *ad hoc* solutions to immediate problems. Many of the issues Israel faces present only a narrow range of options, require clear and immediate decisions in a highly charged and uncertain atmosphere, and do not lend themselves to incremental decision-making.

The resulting short term perspective is manifested by a pronounced tendency toward:

Reactive Decision-Making

Since the environment is perceived as being almost completely unmalleable, yet extremely dangerous, Israeli decision makers largely have come to accept their inability to foresee and shape Israel's external relations and have adopted a reactive "sit back and wait to see how things develop" approach. Indeed, some observers believe that *the* most conspicuous element in Israeli decision-making is its essentially reactive character.[9] Nevertheless, some radical departures in Israeli policy have taken place over the years, suggesting a more complex picture and a proactive ability to take bold

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8. Dean Acheson's term, quoted in Henry M. Jackson, ed., *The National Security Council* (NY: Praeger, 1965).

9. Avi Shlaim and Avner Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," *International Affairs*, Vol. 56 (1980), p. 242; and R. Bilski, ed., *Can Planning Replace Politics* (Hague: Martinus Nijoff, 1980), p. 115.

initiatives, at least under certain circumstances.[10]

Crisis Management and Iltur *(Improvisation) are the Rule*

Iltur prevails rather than forethought, planning, and prevention. To a large degree, crisis management and improvisation were an unavoidable outgrowth of Israel's national security environment, particularly in the early decades after independence, when resources were extremely scarce and institutional capabilities and standardized procedures far more limited. A necessary evil at the time, they succeeded above and beyond any reasonable expectation and have remained a primary characteristic of much of Israeli decision-making to this day, indeed becoming a national hallmark, sphere of excellence, and virtual faith. In too many areas, however, trial-and-error decision-making and "fire-fighting" are the norm, and policies are tried and abandoned as events develop, without forethought, systematic analysis, and a basic strategic framework, the recent war in Lebanon being a case in point.[11] Though not unique to Israel, the degree to which these trends are manifested is certainly unusual.

In a politically polarized society, *iltur* has the great virtues of enabling action without requiring the clear articulation of objectives and prior choice between policy options, and of facilitating flexibility in times of change and crisis. In recent years, however, Israel's ability to improvise has decreased, as issues have become far more complex, requiring lengthy, systematic planning and implementation, and as the cost of error has grown and often become unacceptable.[12] Moreover, the end of a revolutionary period and development of the differentiated bureaucratic organs of statehood inherently reduce the latitude for improvisation.

Even in the best of circumstances, Israel's highly compelling and volatile external environment would lead to decision-making with relatively short-term perspectives. This fundamental constraint is further exacerbated by rapid coalition turnover, which compels ministers to focus on the immediate electoral ramifications of their actions, rather than on effective governance, by the weakness of policy formulating bodies, and by factors further elaborated later, such as decision makers' basic lack of faith in policy planning. The bottom line is that for reasons inherent to both its governmental structure and environment, the DMP in Israel is focused almost entirely on the short term and thus on the operational agencies, rather than on those involved in policy formulation. Little attention is accorded to basic and long-term issues, and a short-term perspective predominates, which in turn further limits the ability to shape the environment.

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10. Rabin's acceptance of Oslo and willingness to withdraw from the Golan, Barak's withdrawal from Lebanon and dramatic proposals at Camp David in 2000, Sharon's Gaza Disengagement Plan, and Olmert's West Bank "consolidation," are but a few examples thereof.

11. Dror, *Improving Policymaking*, pp. 175-176; and Dror, *Memorandum to the Prime Minister*, p. 56.

12. See, for example, the above comparisons of the Uzi and Arrow programs, and of the ramifications of retaliatory policy in the 1950s and 1990s.

PATHOLOGY 2: EXTREME POLITICIZATION OF THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Due both to the nature of the PR system, as well as to the need to achieve consensus within the governing coalitions and their component parties, the DMP in Israel is extremely politicized. To this, one must add the unique circumstances of Israel's establishment, including the Holocaust, repeated wars and the ongoing security situation ever since, and the fact that Israel remains divided to this day over fundamental issues of its national existence, such as the status and future of the West Bank. As a result, Israel also remains exceptional among democracies in the degree of ideological fervor that continues to pervade its political life, even if Zionism's ideological intensity has decreased significantly since its early years. Issues of national security are thus commonly argued in highly ideological and partisan terms that exceed their objective weight and arguments are even made in terms of national survival, despite the many cases where this was not truly at stake.

Politics are of course a major and legitimate consideration for leaders everywhere; it is the degree of politicization in Israel that makes its DMP unusual.

Political Considerations Reign Supreme

On many issues of national security, the influence of political and ideological considerations is overwhelming, regardless of their objective merits, as they become the subject of partisan squabbling. This has the practical effect of foreclosing certain options, or of channeling them in given directions, not only on inherently charged ideological issues, such as the various peace processes or future of the settlements, but even on ostensibly technical and financial decisions, such as the development of major weapons systems.[13] Indeed, political and ideological considerations permeate the entire DMP at the national level, often superceding all calculations of strategic interest.

Party Politics, Not Governance

For most ministers, party politics demand a disproportionate share of their time, and indeed, are a primary focus of activity. Typically political figures in their own right, rather than professional or even political appointees, ministers must continually jockey to shore up their positions and ensure their political futures. With an extraordinarily frenetic 24/7 news cycle, volatile party politics, and short terms between elections, many ministers' time must be devoted to intra-party politics no less than to the affairs of their ministry and of state. Indeed, ministers' future political careers usually

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13. The final decision to kill the multi-billion dollar development program for the Lavi fighter was made on a purely partisan basis, without regard for the financial, technological and operational considerations presented. See Charles D. Freilich, *Messianism and Realism: National Security Decision Making in Israel* (NY: Columbia University dissertation, 1992).

have far less to do with how effectively they run their ministries than with how well they pander to their party's constituency. Though the Defense Minister, and to a lesser extent, the Foreign Minister, are expected to remain at least partially above the political fray and are held somewhat more accountable for how they conduct ministerial duties, they too must devote an inordinate amount of time and attention to party politics.

The Coalition Above All

Maintaining the coalition often becomes an end in itself, and is, in any event, a full-time preoccupation.[14] Coalition politics lead to a marked propensity for the cabinet to act as a forum for ironing out the differences dividing its coalition components (or for obfuscating them and reaching livable compromises), rather than as an executive body. The need for compromise and consensus greatly limits the "search" for options and leads to a marked decrease in attention to long-range and fundamental issues. A strategy of procrastination, incrementalism, partial solutions, and paralysis often results, even on issues of grand strategy; there is a tendency to wait for issues to degenerate into "no choice" situations that force action and require sudden improvisation. The breakdown in the "national consensus" since 1967, on even the most fundamental issues (e.g., the future of the Territories), has further exacerbated the problem and become one of the major impediments to the government's ability to adopt decisive and more far-reaching policies.[15]

Life in a Political Fish Bowl

The politicized nature of the DMP, reinforced by short-term perspectives, dictates the political wisdom of avoiding clearly defined policy objectives and of maintaining constructive ambiguity. The resulting tendencies are:

- ***"Tacticalization of Strategy" and "Dynamic Incrementalism."*** These tendencies result in the consideration of each issue separately, in an "atomistic" fashion. Major policy achievements are typically the cumulative, incremental — often unintended — outcome of a series of *ad hoc* solutions to immediate needs, rather than of a consciously and deliberately chosen course of action. Decision-

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14. Former Defense Minister Moshe Arens (interview by author, June 21, 2006), former Acting National Security Adviser Gideon Sheffer (interview by author, January 21, 2006) and former Director General of the Ministry of Defense, National Security Adviser, and Air Force Commander David Ivry (interview by author, June 4, 2006) all share this view. See also Shlaim and Yaniv, *Domestic Politics*, p. 250; Dror, *Improving Policymaking*, pp. 32, 34, 84; Dror, *Memorandum to the Prime Minister*, p. 57.

15. Shlaim and Yaniv, *Domestic Politics*, p. 250; Dror, *Improving Policymaking*, pp. 32,34,84; Dror, *Memorandum to the Prime Minister*, p. 57.

making is thus characterized by the tactical, rather than the strategic, and by a form of "dynamic incrementalism."[16] By way of example, fundamental aspects of the Gaza Disengagement Plan remained unresolved immediately prior to its implementation, raising questions regarding the basic decision to adopt the policy.[17]

• *Avoidance of Staff Work.* To illustrate, Sharon decided on the Gaza Disengagement Plan without consulting the national security bureaucracy on the options open to him, turning to it only after the fact, for its input on the best ways to implement the course he already had settled upon. He also quashed a major new policy formulation process initiated by the NSC — an annual net assessment of Israel's strategic posture — apparently over concern that its findings and recommendations might impose constraints on his freedom of maneuver, especially after some of the first report's findings were published in the press. Similarly, Begin went to Camp David (1978) without the benefit of any preparatory staff work and quashed the one major study conducted by the IDF prior to the summit. Extensive staff work was conducted at the bureaucratic level prior to the 1982 War in Lebanon, but was kept from the cabinet by Begin and Sharon. Barak made momentous decisions on the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese fronts on the basis of his own assessments and preferences. Preparatory staff work prior to Barak and Sharon's meetings with foreign leaders was similarly limited.[18]

Prior to the establishment of the NSC in 1999, the lack of systematic staff work could have been attributed at least partially to the absence of a PM/cabinet-level policy staff, but even then means could have been found to ameliorate the problem, had the desire so existed. Furthermore, the NSC has had virtually no

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16. Y. Ben Meir, *National Security Decisionmaking*, p.71; and Dror, *Memorandum, to the Prime Minister*, pp. 57, 126, 178.

17. For example, the future of the "Philadelphi Axis" (the Israeli security corridor along the old Gaza-Egypt border) and as a result the entire future security regime which, indeed, subsequently collapsed; the future of the border passages between Gaza and Israel, and thus the future commercial regime between the two, which also failed; the status of the remaining Israeli "assets" in Gaza, following the withdrawal, including private homes and the especially sensitive issue of synagogues. The vital issue of the "day after," i.e., the future of the negotiations with the Palestinians, also remained unknown, except, possibly, to the Prime Minister.

18. Preparation of Barak and Sharon's meetings with foreign leaders typically consisted of one, or occasionally two, meetings of the PM's staff with representatives of the various agencies. Background papers and talking points, prepared on the basis of a brief, terse request from the PM's office, were generated on a "production line" basis, in the absence of a true understanding of the PM's goals and areas of flexibility. Moreover, numerous overlapping documents were typically submitted by the different agencies which, having received only limited advance notice, were usually forced to prepare them at the last minute. As a result, the PM's Foreign Affairs Adviser was left with little time to sift through the various documents and integrate the differing approaches; and thus, little use was made of all the work done. Cognizant of this situation, the agencies adjusted their efforts, while the expectations of the PM's staff were presumably scaled back as well.

impact on the operation of the PMO, not least of all due to its marginalization by the prime ministers in office since its establishment. Prime ministers have even manifested a systematic preference to refrain from availing themselves of the staff work conducted within the national security bureaucracies themselves. The problem then is not one of organizational capability, but of a fundamental and conscious decision on the part of nearly all prime ministers to refrain from systematic staff work. The fear of leaks, of the politicization of the issue and of a consequent loss of freedom of maneuver, apparently has outweighed their calculus of the potential benefits attendant to systematic policy formulation processes.[19]

PATHOLOGY 3: DETERIORATING GOVERNMENTAL CAPABILITIES: IS ANYONE AT THE HELM?

The Prime Minister is in Charge — Sometimes

With highly circumscribed formal sources of authority, the prime minister's ability to lead is primarily a function of his intra- and inter-party political skills and his ability to use the prestige of office to generate support for preferred policies. While some prime ministers have managed to dominate the political system and lead major changes, their formal sources of authority are simply too limited and leave them overly beholden to considerations of party politics. Indeed, on more than one occasion, prime ministers have had to rely on other coalition parties, or opposition parties, to pass historic legislation for which they were unable to garner their own party's support.[20] An inherent characteristic of the coalition system, the weakness of the prime minister's office has become a growing problem in recent times, as party coherence has diminished and the overall politicization of the DMP has increased. This has led not just to repeated cabinet crises and attenuated terms of office, but to increasingly detrimental consequences for the prime minister's ability to govern even on a day-to-day basis, let alone to chart a new course for the nation in the long run. The prime minister's ability to lead and effectively govern is further limited by the failure, time

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19. Many of those interviewed by the author addressed prime ministers' tendency to avoid systematic staff work, with various nuances, including former Minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak (June 15, 2006), former Defense Minister Moshe Arens (June 21, 2006), former Director General of the Ministry of Defense and National Security Adviser David Ivry (June 4, 2006), former National Security Adviser and Deputy Chieff of Staff Uzi Dayan (generally concurs, but is less emphatic) (May 23, 2006), former Political Adviser to Prime Minister Peres, Nimrod Novik (January 26, 2006) and a senior defense establishment official (personal communication, June 4, 2006). According to a former senior cabinet minister and expert on strategic affairs, the impact of the fear of leaks is true in all areas, but especially in national security matters (personal communication, interview, May 30, 2006).

20. Begin needed the support of the then-opposition Labor Party to attain Knesset approval for the Camp David Accords, while Sharon needed Labor and opposition parties to obtain approval for the Gaza Disengagement Plan.

after time, to conduct any prime ministerial/cabinet-level policy planning of consequence.

The Cabinet is Not in Charge Either

If the prime minister's authority is circumscribed and the policy-making machinery at his disposal limited, the cabinet has become an almost entirely dysfunctional policy-making forum, for a variety of reasons:

• The cabinet's size has become unmanageable, rendering it unable to hold effective deliberations. Moreover, cabinet meetings tend to consist largely of political grandstanding, rather than true policy deliberation, as nearly all ministerial statements are made with an eye to their press coverage, and indeed are designed to be leaked immediately.

• The ostensible solution to the problem of cabinet size and secrecy, the convening of the Ministerial Committee on Defense, has been undermined by the insistence of most coalition parties, and many ministers, that they be included in this politically prestigious forum. A problem of size and discretion has thus arisen regarding the MCOD itself, which at least partially negates its *raison d'être*.

• Cabinet ministers are professional politicians, not experts in their spheres of responsibility or in management, thereby raising questions of basic competence to deal with the issues at hand. Generally highly experienced politically, and in some cases professionally as well, the cabinet is dysfunctional if for no other reason than that the input of the Ministers of Agriculture and Health, for example, is not needed on national security issues.

• The cabinet has become a conglomerate of semi-autonomous ministerial fiefdoms, with the principle of "collective responsibility" no more than a vague memory. Given the minimal "political glue" holding the coalition together, ministries "belong" to the minister and/or party they are headed by. Rather than serving as members of an integrative deliberative body, ministers tend to be united by a common fear that delving too deeply into the affairs of other ministers will lead to a similar response being directed against them and possibly stymie their attempts to promote preferred policies within their ministerial purview. A "live and let live" spirit of accommodation thus prevails, with each minister free to run his or her ministry with a high degree of autonomy — both from other ministers and the prime minister.[21]

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21. Dror, *Improving Policymaking*, p. 34.

 • The cabinet devotes an inordinate amount of time to issues of dubious or secondary importance, micro-managing details best handled by the professional bureaucracy, and leaving insufficient time for serious consideration of major issues.[22] Furthermore, there is often only a loose connection between cabinet decisions and the allocation of the resources needed to implement them, and decisions often are made for purely symbolic reasons. Indeed, it is an open secret that a substantial majority of cabinet decisions are never implemented and that they were adopted from the outset with no intention of actually implementing them.[23]

The limitations of the cabinet and MCOD as effective decision-making fora are, as in the case of the prime minister himself, further exacerbated by the lack of an effective cabinet-level policy staff. With little preparatory staff work and documentation, even basic data is often unknown to ministers and cabinet meetings are devoted largely to a presentation of the situation, rather than to policy deliberation. In the absence of an "honest broker," policy proposals are usually presented by the policy advocate, typically the relevant minister, ministry official, or the prime minister, who invariably presents just one favored option, which the cabinet can either accept or reject. Unsurprisingly, alternative policy objectives and options are generally not presented, or are done so in a perfunctory manner, without a serious and systematic attempt to assess the differing courses of action and to integrate the different aspects of the issue from a broad national perspective. When policy options are generated within the bureaucracy, differences are often ironed out prior to the meeting of the cabinet, which remains unaware of them, or indeed, of their very consideration. In any event, in the absence of a policy staff, the cabinet has no independent capability of assessing the data and options presented. Ministers thus have to rely on their general knowledge and the information they are able to glean from the press and casual conversations, often with interested parties. Intuition, hunches, and preconceptions replace serious consideration.[24]

The annual deliberations on the defense budget — by far the largest component in the national budget — are a recurring example of the cabinet's inability to deal with complex national security issues.[25] Each year, the MoD and IDF mount a public relations campaign, which at times borders on scare tactics, to generate public support for their budget request. This is then followed up by cabinet meetings, in which the Minister of Defense and IDF "brass" present indigestible mounds of data and

22. Government of Israel, Comptroller General, Report 53, 2002, p.17.

23. A commonly used figure in the Israeli bureaucracy is that 70% of cabinet decisions are not implemented. This is a rough estimate used anecdotally.

24. Government of Israel, Comptroller General, Report 53, 2002, pp. 17-18, former Acting National Security Adviser Gideon Sheffer (interview by author, June 21, 2006), a former senior minister (personal communication, May 30, 2006).

25. Interviews by author with former Chiefs of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak (June 15, 2006) and Moshe Yaalon (July 20, 2006), former Defense Minister Moshe Arens (June 21, 2006).

assessments, with the aid of the latest technological imagery, to scare, dazzle, and cajole the assembled ministers. It is a "fixed" game and ministers simply lack the ability to question the budget demands presented; given public opinion, they tend to have little desire to do so in any event.

At the same time, to the ministers' credit, it must be said that the reports reaching them suffer from a number of major deficiencies. Government ministries and agencies, including the intelligence community and defense and foreign ministries, are often not fully apprised of Israel's own intentions and capabilities. They thus generate reports that are at least in partial ignorance thereof, or which are not tied directly to the cabinet's agenda and consequent need for certain kinds of information at given times. Furthermore, a plethora of often overlapping assessments reaches the decision makers, typically geared to immediate developments, rather than national-strategic policy formulation. In addition, not all ministers are privy to all reports for security reasons, and so do not share the same information base and consequent expectations, or "evoked set."[26] Many ministers thus have no recourse but to rely on the oral presentations made to the cabinet and on informal talks with "informed" sources, within the government and without.

No Effective Policy-Making Forum Exists

The failings of both the cabinet and MCOD as decision-making bodies, have led to a propensity on the part of prime ministers to formulate policy on their own, in small *ad hoc* fora, with only a few trusted confidantes.[27] Though this approach may have the advantage of efficiency, it does not provide for effective policy formulation, the political integration necessary in a coalition system, or the policy integration essential in any government. With a weak prime minister and dysfunctional cabinet, Israel simply does not have an effective statutory forum for national level decision-making.[28]

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26. Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

27. Golda Meir had a "kitchen cabinet;" Rabin and Peres tended to work things out between themselves; and during the National Unity Government, Shamir convened a "Premiers' Forum" (composed of Rabin, Peres, and himself); Sharon had a "ranch forum;" and Olmert a "Group of Seven" (ministers).

28. A number of those interviewed by the author are critical of the cabinet as a decision-making forum, *inter alia*, former minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak (June 15, 2006), former Defense Minister Moshe Arens (June 21, 2006), former Director General of the Ministry of Defense and National Security Adviser David Ivry (June 4, 2006), former National Security Adviser and Deputy Chief of Staff Uzi Dayan (May 23, 2006), former Political Adviser to Prime Minister Peres Nimrod Novik (January 26, 2006), a former senior cabinet minister (personal communication, May 30, 2006), former Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon (July 20, 2006), and former Foreign and Finance Minister Silvan Shalom (June 13, 2006).

There is No Policy

Given the limited authority of the prime minister, the dysfunctional nature of the cabinet, and the generally rough and tumble exigencies of Israeli coalition politics, policies are rarely formulated, even on issues of importance, let alone articulated (publicly or internally). Policies, as noted, are also dynamic and incremental, evolving over time and on a trial-and-error basis. Hard to accept as this may be, on most issues there is quite simply no Israeli policy, and ministries and agencies, and often the entire system, operate in virtual ignorance, relying on their own "guesstimates" of what they believe policy to be. Typically reflecting the simple absence of a systematically formulated policy beyond the prime minister's private thoughts or partially articulated public positions, as well as the fact that the prime minister and other ministers often express conflicting policies, this also reflects a conscious decision on the part of prime ministers to avoid articulating policy. Time and again, Israeli prime ministers have manifested a clear preference for "keeping their cards close to their chest" and foregoing the benefits of systematic policy formulation work over the loss of freedom of maneuver and politicization attendant to it. The absence of an effective policy-making machinery, such as a robust NSC, and consequently of policy statements such as Presidential Policy Directives or White Papers, is a reflection of the problem and further exacerbates it.

By way of example, the Foreign Ministry was almost completely in the dark regarding the intricacies and negotiating requirements of the Gaza Disengagement Plan, and unable to play a significant role in its formulation, or even to effectively present it abroad. The MoD and IDF also were brought in at a comparatively advanced date. Foreign embassies and officials wishing to understand Israeli policy have long been cognizant of this absence of coherent policy and consequently have adopted a "polling" approach — i.e., canvassing opinion among a comparatively large cross-section of agencies, officials, and ministers — in the hope of gaining an overall impression of possible directions and who might be responsible for their implementation.

The System is Under Tremendous Pressure

A final reason for the growing crisis in governability is the tremendous time pressure and stress the entire system is under, due to the discrepancy between the vast number of demands placed on it, the pace of change, and the resources at its disposal. Furthermore, despite the quantitative and qualitative growth in the national security bureaucracies in recent decades, capabilities remain thin: in some areas they are still lacking almost completely, although mostly the problem is too few people, with insufficient expertise, facing too many demands.

PATHOLOGY 4: THE DMP REMAINS UNINSTITUTIONALIZED

While the true flow of power and decision-making varies by leader and issue in

all governments, time, experience and tradition tend to produce accepted norms, practices, and established standard operating procedures (SOPs). Though this is true, of course, in Israel as well, a primary characteristic of Israel's DMP is its comparatively fluid, informal, and uninstitutionalized nature.[29]

Highly Idiosyncratic, Personalized Decision-Making

The personal policy preferences of the prime minister and senior ministers often have an inordinate impact on the DMP in Israel. To illustrate, then-Defense Minister Sharon decided on the 1982 invasion of Lebanon despite broad opposition from the cabinet and national security bureaucracy, as did Barak in deciding on Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon 18 years later. Begin, Rabin, Barak, Sharon, and Olmert adopted radically new positions on the peace process solely, or almost solely, on their own cognizance. Earlier research already has demonstrated the disproportionate nature of individual preferences even on such technological and financial decisions as major arms development plans.[30] Among the reasons for this idiosyncratic dimension:

- ***Expertise and Confidence.*** Israeli leaders usually have had long experience in national security affairs, often having come up through the political and/or military establishment and having served in more junior cabinet positions. As a result, they typically have long-standing familiarity with the primary national security issues, and often have strongly held positions. In recent decades, as the issues Israel faces have become increasingly complex, going beyond the comparatively familiar ones of the Arab-Israeli conflict, decision makers' need for expert advice undoubtedly has grown. On the core issues, however, they appear to believe, in many cases with considerable justification, that their own knowledge and experience exceeds that of the senior officials reporting to them. They thus have tended to downplay the importance of consultation and preparatory staff work, relying primarily on their personal judgment and relegating senior officials and advisers to the level of "aides." By contrast, an American president, with global concerns, cannot possibly have a comprehensive grasp of all the important issues he faces, no matter how great his experience, and must rely to a far greater degree on his senior officials and advisers.

- ***Limited "Culture of Consultation."*** Cultural differences further accentuate the objective differences in the comparative need for consultation. Israeli history celebrates the spirit of "can do" leaders, who press forward without regard for constraints; indeed, Israel itself is portrayed as a victory produced by the deter-

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29. Interviews with the author of former Minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak (June 15, 2006) and former National Security Adviser and Deputy Chief of Staff Uzi Dayan (May 23, 2006). See also Ben Meir, *National Security Decisionmaking*, p. 68.

30. Freilich, *Messianism and Realism*.

mined few over insurmountable odds.[31] Moreover, many decision makers, having had long careers in the defense establishment, or at least having spent years in military service, have internalized its highly mission-oriented ethos. "Experts," who tend to see shades of gray and to focus on complexities and constraints, rather than action, have thus long been held in some contempt, and a "culture of consultation" at the senior levels is far less developed in Israel than in other countries. It may not be a coincidence that it was Netanyahu — arguably the least experienced prime minister to date, but who had grown up in the US — who finally established the NSC, 50 years after it was first proposed.

 • *Limited "Checks and Balances."* As noted, the MoD and MFA's policy formulating capabilities remain limited, as do the NSC's, while the IDF Planning Branch is a clearly subordinate military unit. They thus lack the bureaucratic stature that might enable them to serve as an even partial curb against excessive individual preference, haste, or whim on the part of decision-makers. In any event, whether this is their appropriate role is debatable.[32] Given the lack of a consultative culture, the only remaining "checks and balances" are the political process, the need for cabinet and Knesset approval, and the judicial system. All are often highly effective means of curbing excess, but commonly come to bear only after the essential parts of a new policy already have been formulated and even implemented.

Oral and Personal Communications

The DMP in Israel is based to an unusual degree on personal relationships and oral communications, with comparatively little documentation. The senior bureaucracy is relatively small and officials and ministers often have known each other for years, thus creating a highly effective informal flow of communication, or an "old boys network." Phone calls between senior officials, or one-time meetings with minimal preparation, are often all that is needed to formulate positions. Even in meetings of the cabinet and ministerial committees, as well as closed consultations held by the prime minister, presentations are typically made orally, with limited supporting documentation, such as policy papers setting out objectives and options. In those cases where documents are circulated, this is often done either at the time of, or immediately prior to, the meeting, thereby (not unintentionally) precluding serious study of the issues and the formulation of substantiated counter-proposals. Even more disturb-

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31. The national ethos celebrates the famous statement by Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, "if you will it, it is not a fantasy," while many are familiar with the story of Ben Gurion's decision in 1948 to declare independence, despite the fears of many of his advisers.

32. Many supporters of the establishment of the NSC in Israel viewed it as a means of curbing the prime minister's and senior ministers' freedom of maneuver. The invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was considered a primary case where an NSC might have served as a counterbalance to the prime minister and defense minister's decision to invade and thus could have prevented the war.

ing is the finding that even those documents that are circulated in advance are often *not* read by the ministers — thus necessitating recourse to oral reporting.[33]

The oral nature of cabinet communications has a number of detrimental effects, including: the submission of numerous issues to the cabinet that could have been dealt with by senior officials or cabinet committees, had they been elucidated fully prior to the meeting; a lack of precision in the data and policy proposals presented; and further extension of the already intolerable length of meetings, in which perseverance and stamina are at least as important a source of policy influence as substance.[34]

Disconnect Between Policy Inputs and Policy Planning/Formulating Processes

A further aspect of the uninstitutionalized aspect of Israeli decision-making is, as already noted, the absence of virtually any systematic policy planning and preparatory staff work at the level of the prime minister and cabinet. Even where preparatory staff work is conducted, there is a severe disconnect between the information generated and the policy formulation process. For example:

• Israel's information gathering capabilities in the areas of foreign and defense affairs (Foreign Ministry, intelligence, and other agencies) are generally considered to be highly developed. Yet little effort is made, particularly of a proactive character, to turn this information into the systematic generation of policy options. To the limited extent that policy options are generated, they tend to be *post facto* — i.e., how to cope with an already evolving situation — rather than to shape the course of events in advance. Though particularly pronounced at the cabinet level, this tendency is prevalent throughout the bureaucracy, which is geared to react to events, rather than to generate policy options in order to preempt and shape them. The work of the IDF Planning Branch is a partial exception to this general rule.

• The budgetary process is primarily a function of political considerations and clout, rather than a substantive consideration of alternative uses of resources. The defense budget, as described above, is a case in point. Based on the requirements presented by the MoD/IDF, the Ministry of Finance typically makes an arbitrary cut in the defense budget request, based on its assessment of what it can get away with or "what will fly," rather than what is truly needed. The compromise typically worked out, which often requires the intervention of the prime minister and additional ministers, is based on political compromise rather

33. Interview by the author with former Minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak, (June 15, 2006); former Minister Gad Yaacobi, (March 24, 1991); Dror, *Memorandum, to the Prime Minister*, pp. 177, 179; Avi Shlaim and Raymond Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice and Consequence," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, (1978), pp. 513-515.

34. The regular weekly meeting typically lasts some five hours, while meetings on more important issues, or at times of crisis, can last double this time and even go through the night.

than any systematic attempt to maximize benefits by consideration of budget-ary alternatives for the defense establishment, or the government as a whole.[35]

Insufficient Coordination

Closely related to the absence of clearly articulated policy and of an effective prime ministerial/cabinet-level policy staff is the problem of insufficient coordination, in terms of policy formulation, follow up on implementation, and ongoing inter-agency operations. As issues have grown in complexity over the years and the bureaucracy has grown in both size and complexity, the need for more effective inter-agency coordination has grown substantially, but the inter-agency machinery has not.[36] Al-though a common pathology of governments everywhere, the coordination problem in Israel is exacerbated by:

• The aforementioned uninstitutionalized nature of decision-making.

• The fear of leaks and politicization, which leads prime ministers to refrain from necessary consultation and coordination.

• The flexibility of SOPs in Israel. In recent years, there also has been an increasing tendency on the part of prime ministers to adopt the time-honored tradition of overlapping assignments and lines of authority, with ministers and officials often charged with tasks outside their areas of expertise or responsibil-ity.[37]

To this we must add the turf and budgetary battles typical of bureaucracies everywhere, further fueled by a feeling on the part of some agencies (especially the Foreign Ministry and parts of the intelligence community), that their areas of respon-sibility have been encroached upon or that they have been marginalized. At the same time, it must be noted that the severity of the threats Israel faces, as well as an

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35. Former Defense Minister Moshe Arens, as well as former Minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak and former Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon, were highly critical of the defense budget process in the cabinet. Interviews by the author, respectively, June 21, 2006, June 15, 2006, and July 7, 2006.

36. It has been noted wryly in Israel that only the US ambassador, who usually has excellent ties and sources of information in all branches of the Israeli government, actually knows what is going on and is thus, at least ostensibly, capable of fulfilling the necessary coordinating function.

37. Recent examples include the role played by then-Minister of Justice (now Foreign Minister) Tzipi Livni, during 2005 in overcoming the political obstacles to the Gaza Disengagement Plan; the special role played by Shimon Peres, Deputy Premier in the Sharon government (2003-2006), in affairs having to do with the peace process and the establishment of a special ministry for him, the Ministry of Regional Cooperation, during the Barak cabinet (1999-2001); and the ongoing preeminent role played by Sharon's "former" Bureau Chief, Dov Weisglass, even after ostensibly resigning. Former Minister of Justice Haim Ramon played an important role in promoting Olmert's West Bank "consolidation" plan, both in behind the scenes politicking and through substantive responsibility for policy development.

ongoing shared commitment to a few fundamental principles, have forced a certain degree of discipline on the system which may keep bureaucratic battles from reaching the extremes often found in other countries.

Flexibility and Rapidity

A corollary of the lack of institutionalization — and an important advantage — is the system's remarkable ability to respond rapidly and flexibly to the continually changing environment.

PATHOLOGY 5: PREDOMINANCE OF THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT AND ITS CONSIDERATIONS

The defense establishment, and especially the IDF, remain the most influential player in the national DMP, with by far the most developed policy assessment, formulation, and implementation capabilities.[38] As such, it is hard to speak of the defense establishment's capabilities in terms of pathology as it is a vital national asset. It is the weakness of the civilian bureaucracies and imbalance in influence that are problematic. In addition to the extreme character of the threats Israel has faced, which has led to a subordination of foreign policy to security considerations, the following factors account for this imbalance in capabilities and consequent influence over policy:

Professional Expertise

In many areas, extending far beyond commonly accepted spheres of military competence, the IDF is either the sole entity capable of supplying information, analysis, and policy advice to the prime minister and cabinet, or the primary one. No other institution can compete with the Intelligence, Planning, and Operations Branches' ability to generate rapid and sophisticated staff work around the clock. Moreover, the Chief of Staff and other senior officers frequently appear before the cabinet and act as senior advisers on defense and foreign policy matters.

The "Closed Circle"

The IDF has primary influence over all stages of the decision-making process: situational assessment, policy planning, and actual implementation.

• **Intelligence Assessment.** Military Intelligence is responsible for the National Intelligence Assessment and is the only intelligence service capable of generating comprehensive politico-military assessments. None of the research divisions

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38. Former Foreign and Finance Minister Silvan Shalom interview (June 13, 2006); a former senior minister (personal communication, May 30, 2006).

of the other services or the Foreign Ministry rivals the primacy of Military Intelligence.

• **Strategic Planning.** The Planning Branch, similarly, remains the primary strategic planning entity and the only one with a comparatively full picture of the capabilities and intentions of both Israel and its adversaries.

• **Diplomacy in Uniform.** Over the years, many of the diplomatic contacts with Arab and other states have been conducted by the IDF, thus providing it with a leading role in foreign policy as well. Beginning with the Armistice Agreements of 1949, the IDF played a major role in all of the peace talks, including the Camp David Accords of 1978, as well as the talks with the Palestinians, Syrians, and Jordanians since the 1990s. Military cooperation has also been an important means of fostering relations with foreign countries.

• **Military Government.** The IDF's responsibility for civil administration in the territories occupied since 1967 has afforded it with primary influence over this entire range of issues, many of a purely civilian and particularly sensitive character.

• **IDF Doctrines and Operational Control.** These create constraints for political leaders, which include Israel's first-strike preemptive doctrine.[39] The generally offensive approach colored Israel's ability to show restraint during the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars, as it did during Israel's responses in Lebanon from the late 70s through the 2006 War and the two Palestinian Intifadas. Even at relatively low levels, military commanders are given broad discretion and room for maneuver. Although this approach has proven itself effective in exploiting success on the battlefield, it also has proven problematic. In the 1967 Six Day War, for example, battlefield commanders raced for the Suez Canal, with fateful consequences for Israel's future, whereas then Defense Minister Moshe Dayan had intended to stop the advance at the Sinai passes.[40]

• **The IDF as a Pressure Group.** The IDF's institutionalized role in national security decision-making, as well as the high accessibility and close links afforded by the small size of the political and military elites and close connections between them, make it a highly influential pressure group. Virtually all ministers have served in the IDF, both as conscripts and reservists, and many are former senior officers, making the "old boys network" nearly all-pervasive. Furthermore, a disproportionate share of the national labor force is employed by the military and military-related industries, thereby making the IDF, and the

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39. Horowitz and Lissak, *Democracy and National Security*, p. 19.
40. Horowitz and Lissak, *Democracy and National Security*, p. 19.

defense establishment as a whole, a major economic force.

- ***Unity of Command.*** The IDF General Staff, unlike the US Joint Chiefs, is a unified military structure under the direct command of the Chief of Staff, who has clear and final authority in all areas. The positions of the Chief of Staff thus reflect, with few exceptions, the collective judgment of the senior military leadership, which typically presents a united front that the cabinet finds difficult, if not impossible, to reject. Though the various services do vie for budgets and other resources, the degree of inter-service rivalry that has plagued other military establishments would appear to be rare.

- ***Imbalance Between the IDF and MoD.*** The nature of the division of authority between the IDF and the MoD is a further source of IDF influence. Instead of the IDF being subordinate to the MoD, the division is in fact a complementary one. The IDF has authority for all matters of military organization and force structure, training, doctrine, intelligence, logistics and procurement plans, personnel, strategic planning, and operations. The MoD is responsible for the defense budget, arms procurement, and exports; its role has been limited, for the most part, to the implementation of policies favored by the IDF. Furthermore, the IDF is directly subordinate to the Minister of Defense, not the Ministry, which was neither authorized to exert supervision over the IDF, nor structured to do so in terms of organizational capabilities. Recognition of this imbalance and of the MoD's inability to fulfill a ministerial oversight role led to a series of structural reforms in 2003. These included the aforementioned establishment of a politico-military planning branch, as well as two additional branches designed to strengthen its abilities to deal with defense-related economic and social issues. As of this writing, these changes are still very much in the initial stages of implementation.

SOMETHING MUST BE RIGHT: SUCCESS DESPITE THE SYSTEM?

The myriad pathologies described above notwithstanding, Israel has in many ways been an historic success story. Its very survival, despite all odds, in itself borders on the miraculous, but more substantively, Israel has been hailed as a "text book case" of successful national development, in political, economic, and social areas. This is certainly the case in national security affairs, in which Israel has developed clearly disproportionate capabilities. Israel must, therefore, be doing something right. Some believe its success to be in spite of the system (structure and processes),[41] whereas this article will argue that this success is also due to the system's ability to cope with its own failings and turn them into short term, tactical advantages.

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41. For example, former Acting National Security Adviser Gideon Sheffer (interview with author, June 21, 2006).

SMALL, TIGHTLY KNIT ESTABLISHMENT, EASE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Israel's national security establishment, at least at senior levels, is compara-tively small, and most officials come to know each other personally. The "old boys network" facilitates development of a "common language" and understanding of the issues and, further, creates a level of personal and professional intimacy. Perhaps most important of all, it enables ease and speed of communications through informal, personal ties that cut through various areas and levels of responsibility. Furthermore, the comparatively small size of the establishment makes it easier to identify those who are responsible and capable of dealing with an issue.[42]

RAPID AND FLEXIBLE RESPONSE IS THE SYSTEM'S GREATEST STRENGTH

The uninstitutionalized, informal, and improvisational nature of the Israeli DMP is, as presented above, a primary pathology. At the same time, given that this is the state of affairs, as well as the extraordinarily frenetic character of Israel's environ-ment, the ability to improvise, change gears, and rapidly adapt to changing circum-stances is a vital necessity and has become a sphere of national excellence.

Time and again, Israel has had to face sweeping changes in its environment, forcing it to regroup, rethink its basic strategy, and gear up for new capabilities. The hardening of political positions following the 1973 War and the consequent huge mili-tary build-up were soon followed by the need for a basic change in outlook, as peace talks began with Egypt in 1977, culminating in the 1978 Camp David Accords and full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1982. In 1981, Israel was forced to cope with a new, even existential, threat in the form of Iraq's nuclear program and shortly thereafter, in 1982, found itself mired in a conventional war in Lebanon. In 1987, it had to gear up for a new type of warfare with the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada.

The 1991 Gulf War posed unprecedented challenges, in terms of the threat and possible responses, but also paved the way for the Madrid Conference and broader peace process. The Oslo Agreement followed in 1993, with Israeli recognition of the PLO and the Palestinian right to a state. Israel again prepared for peace with the Palestinians at Camp David in 2000, and made dramatic concessions, only to see a breakdown in talks and the onset of the second Intifada. The belief that there was no hope for negotiations led to unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, which had been previously anathema to Israeli strategic thinking, and to Olmert's declared intention to do so from most of the West Bank; a dramatic move which has been derailed by the fighting in Lebanon that took place in the summer of 2006. Peace talks with Syria during the 1990s forced Israel to come to terms with the ramifications of a virtually complete withdrawal from the Golan, but also with the failed Geneva summit. The 1990s were also a period of intensive Israeli efforts to prepare for the Iraqi and

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42. Former National Security Adviser and Deputy Chief of Staff Uzi Dayan (interview with author, May 23, 2006); interview with a senior defense official (personal communication, June 4, 2006).

Iranian WMD threats, requiring major changes in doctrine and procurement.

DYNAMIC, PRAGMATIC DECISION-MAKING

Though government policy is often highly charged ideologically or politically, especially on such issues as the future of the West Bank or defense budget, the national security establishment itself takes a distinctly pragmatic approach. While normative or ideological considerations cannot always be divorced from professional ones, the national security establishment, and certainly the IDF, tends to view issues from an analytical problem-solving perspective. Thus, for the most part, the IDF has focused on the purely military ramifications of various options for a peace settlement, has taken a practical approach to administering the Territories, and has objected to what it considered to be politically motivated considerations regarding the procurement or development of weapons systems. Similarly, it has refused to become engaged in such politically charged issues as the possible induction of Orthodox conscripts.

In fact, decision-making that is dynamic and pragmatic, rather than ideological is a primary characteristic of much of the political leadership as well. Thus, numerous Israeli leaders have demonstrated an ability to radically change existing policies, even those based on long and deeply held ideological convictions or strategic outlooks when either necessity or opportunity warranted. Thus, Begin withdrew from Sinai, Rabin and Peres accepted the Olso Agreement, sought to embrace Arafat and, like Barak and Netanyahu, explored possible full withdrawals from the Golan Heights. Barak unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon and was willing to forego almost all previous Israeli positions at Camp David in 2000, Sharon unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, and Olmert announced his intention of unilaterally withdrawing from the West Bank.

HIGHLY POROUS POLITICAL/MILITARY RELATIONS

The Israeli national security establishment, much like all organizations, has its own norms, axioms, and ways of thinking. It is, however, *not* a closed elite, removed from political, social, and economic trends in broader society. Indeed, civil-military borders are highly porous. A largely conscript and reservist army, the IDF's regular elements are in constant contact with recent, or soon-to-be-again, civilians. In the virtual absence of closed military living communities, regular military personnel and their families are fully integrated within civil society, shopping, recreating, sending children to school and spouses to work, and sharing the feelings and tribulations of the broader population. Officers are in frequent contact with civil and political leaders and their turnover rate is high, with most officers retiring at relatively young ages, thus facilitating the flow of new ideas and helping reduce the danger of long-established mindsets.

EXTERNAL TRANSPARENCY

Israel's courts intervene in IDF and other governmental security decisions, unlike few, if any, other judiciaries in the world, thereby setting limits to what can and cannot be done. Israel is analyzed and often skewered by both its domestic and the international media as perhaps no other nation, and press coverage serves as a primary means of gauging reaction to policy. Short-term difficulties aside, the Israeli national security establishment is greatly affected, and in some ways strengthened, by its exposure and relative transparency before this external system of normative, media, and professional scrutiny.

The national security establishment as a whole is in continual contact with the international community at all levels — politico/military, diplomatic, scientific, and otherwise — exposing it to an ongoing exchange of ideas, feedback, and constraints. Exchanges with friendly governments, or individual leaders and officials, can often serve as an important input into the Israeli DMP and serve as a "reality check." Indeed, information and policy exchanges with the US are so extensive that, on many issues, US policy-making capabilities almost become an extension of Israel's. "What the Americans think" is the single most important consideration in virtually all policy deliberations, exposing the system to additional approaches and options and setting limits regarding what should and should not be done. Finally, and possibly most importantly, Israel enjoys the fundamental strengths of a healthy and vibrant democracy, in which media, political, social, and public criticism may not prevent errors in the short run, but "straighten the politicians out" in the long term.[43]

CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

If the DMP at the cabinet level, as a whole, remains fundamentally dysfunctional, and the national security bureaucracy suffers from structural lacunae, it nonetheless has a number of spheres of excellence. Thus, the defense establishment, but not the Foreign Ministry, does have an orderly, systematic DMP and a focused effort is made to utilize the information available and to generate appropriate options, both for its own use and as inputs into decision-making at the cabinet level. The problem begins primarily once issues reach the cabinet. Within the defense establishment, the intelligence community, the Air Force, and various other units are important spheres of excellence. This, however, is operational excellence, not cabinet level policy-making.[44]

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43. A senior defense official, (personal communication, December 12, 2005 and June 4, 2006).
44. Former Minister and Chief of Staff Amnon Shahak, (interview by author, June 15, 2006).

HIGH MOTIVATION AND QUALITY OF PEOPLE

If the DMP itself is faulty, this is at least partly overcome by the quality of the people involved, their deep motivation based on a shared sense of extreme, even existential threat, and belief in the fundamental righteousness of the cause and consequent commitment to common goals. Human and bureaucratic infighting aside, at the senior levels, long years of familiarity and expertise on the primary issues of national security help overcome the lack of sufficient staff support and faulty DMP. [45]

CONCLUSION

"The Lord is our shepherd" says the Book of Psalms, and fortunate this is, for no one else in Israel has the overall authority and structural capabilities needed for effective decision-making. Nearly 60 years after independence, the same basic national security bureaucracy that so successfully gave rise to the nation in its formative years is still largely intact. Though its size and sophistication have changed beyond recognition, the structures and dynamics of decision-making at the prime ministerial and cabinet level remain essentially unchanged. The demands placed on the system by Israel's ever volatile and increasingly complex external environment, however, have grown unrecognizably, creating an untenable gap with the system's ability to cope. Though reform is thus recognized by many as essential, the dysfunctions of the PR electoral system, which are largely the source of the system's structural and processual failings, are also those that have prevented this from happening.

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45. Interviews by author with Acting National Security Adviser Gideon Sheffer, (June 21, 2006); former National Security Adviser and Deputy Chief of Staff Uzi Dayan, (May 23, 2006); a senior defense official (June 4, 2006); former Defense Minister Moshe Arens, (June 21, 2006); and a former senior cabinet minister. (May 30, 2006).