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Clément Renault

Research Fellow Intelligence, War and Strategy at IRSEM



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Israeli Intelligence Services
and the Failure of October 7

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Spying Without Seeing

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and the Failure of October 7

Clément Renault

*Research Fellow Intelligence, War and Strategy
at IRSEM*

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Biography



Clément RENAULT



clement.renault@irsem.fr

Dr. Clément Renault is Senior Research Fellow in Intelligence, War & Strategy. His research lies at the intersection of intelligence and strategic studies and focuses on three main areas of inquiry. First, he examines the relationship between intelligence and decision-making, exploring how intelligence assessments are produced, interpreted, and used by policymakers. Second, he studies the adaptation of intelligence bureaucracies to current changes in the international order, focusing on how shifts in the strategic environment reshape their structures, priorities, and institutional practices. Third, he investigates the use of covert action and clandestine operations as instruments of state foreign policy alongside diplomacy and military force.

Clément Renault was educated in the United Kingdom and holds a PhD in War Studies from the University of Glasgow. He is a Visiting Fellow in the Department of War Studies at King's College London and teaches at Sciences Po. He also holds a master's degree in international security from the University of Kent's Brussels School of International Studies, as well as bachelor's degrees in modern literature from the Institut Catholique d'Études Supérieures (ICES) and in philosophy from Université Paris Nanterre. With more than a decade of experience in international security, he has worked for the European Commission and the United Nations in West Africa, and has served as an analyst and strategic adviser to the French Ministry of the Armed Forces.

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Abstract

The October 7, 2023 attack carried out by Hamas against Israeli territory constitutes one of the most serious intelligence failures in the history of the State of Israel. The event marked a profound strategic rupture that called into question the doctrinal foundations upon which Israeli security policy toward the Gaza Strip long rested. Drawing on the analytical tools developed in the literature on intelligence failure, this study offers a systemic interpretation of this strategic surprise. It demonstrates that the causes of the October 7 failure lay in a combination of shortcomings in intelligence collection, the persistence of unchallenged analytical assumptions, bureaucratic routines, and dysfunctions in the relationship between intelligence services and political authorities. It also shows that the operation under way in the Gaza Strip since October 27, 2023 has reshaped the division of responsibilities among the services, and that the major successes of the operations conducted in 2024 and 2025 against Hezbollah and Iran, while demonstrating a high degree of technical proficiency and confirming the offensive power of Israeli intelligence, should not be confused with a genuine incorporation of the lessons of the October 7 failure.

The purpose of causal inquiry is to uncover the structure of the course of history, to disentangle the web of major causes and discrete events. For the most part, facts enable us to recover this interweaving of initiatives and necessities, accidents and fatalities, which forms the fabric of human history and which the historian's curiosity seeks to reconstruct.

Raymond Aron, *Dimensions de la conscience historique*, 1961

Introduction

At 6:30 a.m.¹ on October 7, 2023, Hamas launched an attack of unprecedented scale against Israel, named Operation Al-Aqsa.² The coordinated offensive began with the launch of approximately 4,300 rockets, followed by breaches of the wall separating Gaza from Israel using vehicles and motorized paragliders.³ In the hours that followed, 6,000 Gazans crossed the border through 119 entry points, including 3,800 members of the Nukhba force, Hamas's elite military unit, who stormed Israeli military bases as well as 21 civilian communities.⁴ Within a few hours, Operation Al-Aqsa resulted in the deaths of 1,200 people, including 695 Israeli civilians, among them 36 children, 373 members of the security forces, and 71 foreign nationals. During the attack, 250 people were also taken hostage by Hamas and brought into the Gaza Strip; multiple rapes and sexual assaults were committed, as were numerous acts of mutilation of bodies and corpses.

In response to this unprecedented terrorist attack, the Israeli authorities launched a large-scale military operation in the Gaza Strip beginning on October 27, 2023.⁵ By the summer of 2025, its successive phases had resulted in the deaths of approximately 60,000 people, including 8,900 members of Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad – meaning that 83 percent of those killed were civilians – and in the

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1. Yaniv Kubovich, "The First Hours of the Israel-Hamas War: What Actually Happened?," *Haaretz*, 17 October 2023.
 2. Toi Staff, "Report: New IDF assessment shows some 6,000 Gazans invaded Israel on Oct. 7," *The Times of Israel*, 31 August 2024.
 3. "Israel social security data reveals true picture of Oct 7 deaths", *France 24*, 15 December 2023.
 4. "Mission report – Official visit to Israel and the occupied West Bank, 29 January – 14 February 2024," Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC).
 5. Emma Graham-Harrison, Yuval Abraham, "Revealed: Israeli military's own data indicates civilian death rate of 83% in Gaza war," *The Guardian*, 21 August 2025; Joseph Krauss and Sarah El Deeb, "Gaza is in ruins after Israel's yearlong offensive. Rebuilding may take decades," *Associated Press*, 9 October 2024.

total or partial destruction of nearly 70 percent of Gaza's infrastructure. Yet the war triggered by the October 7 attack has now extended far beyond the Gaza Strip.¹ In September 2024, Israel intensified its operations against Hezbollah, first through a major covert operation targeting the organization's communications systems, and then through the targeted killing of the Shiite movement's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, ending his 32-year leadership and profoundly weakening the organization.² These operations were followed in October 2024 by an intense military campaign in southern Lebanon. At the same time, Israel continued to confront other hostile actors, including the Houthis and Iraqi militias, while remaining in a state of permanent tension and deterrence with the Iranian regime.³ In April and October 2024, the antagonism between Israel and Iran resulted in ballistic missile attacks followed by retaliatory strikes.⁴ In June 2025, Israel, jointly with the United States, carried out a series of strikes against military bases and nuclear sites belonging to the regime of the mullahs, the actual effectiveness of which remains the subject of divergent assessments. The October 7 attack sent a profound shock wave through Israeli society and, nearly two years later, has contributed to a major transformation of the regional balance of power and of the actors within it.

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1. Sheera Frenkel, Ronen Bergman and Hwaïda Saad, "How Israel Built a Modern-Day Trojan Horse: Exploding Pagers," *The New York Times*, 18 September 2024; Dan Sabbagh, "Deep intelligence penetration enabled Israel to kill Hassan Nasrallah," *The Guardian*, 30 September 2024; see also: David V. Goe, Elena Grossfeld and Marc Polymeropoulos, "Is Israeli Intelligence Back on Top?," *Foreign Policy*, 10 October 2024.
 2. Peter Beaumont, Andrew Roth and William Christou, "Israeli military says it is carrying out 'limited' ground operation targeting Hezbollah in Lebanon," *The Guardian*, 1 October 2024.
 3. Pascal Brunel, "Pourquoi Israël peine à endiguer les attaques des Houthis yéménites," *Les Echos*, 27 December 2024; Elise Vincent, Chloé Hoorman and Ghazal Golshiri, "Les frappes de l'Iran sur Israël ont illustré les forces et les faiblesses militaires de la République islamique," *Le Monde*, 4 October 2024.
 4. Clément Renault, "The Intelligence Behind the Strike: Was Everyone Wrong About Iran's Nuclear Program?," *The Cypher Brief*, 23 June 2025; James Glanz, Samuel Granados, Junho Lee, Eric Schmitt and Marco Hernandez, "The Invisible Target in Iran," *The New York Times*, 20 August 2025.

Many aspects of the October 7 attack remain uncertain, obscure, or contested. According to US intelligence services, Hamas itself may have been surprised by the ease with which the attackers crossed the barrier between Gaza and Israel and by the slowness of the Israeli response.¹ Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds offer a slightly different interpretation, arguing that 'the initial planning documents indicate that Hamas intended to fortify the positions it had seized and to use hostages to complicate the Israel Defense Forces' (IDF) efforts to retake them.'² They therefore assess that the chaotic massacre, largely perpetrated by approximately 1,000 Gazans who followed Hamas assault forces through the barrier, 'diverted efforts away from preparing a deliberate defence.'

The reasons for Israel's failure to anticipate and prevent the October 7 attack have generated a similarly wide range of interpretations. From the first hours of the attack, debates emerged over responsibility and the causes of this security breakdown, which was quickly described as an intelligence failure. Many analyses identify as the first factor a flawed strategic assessment by Israeli intelligence services, based on the conviction that Hamas had been weakened and contained by successive targeting campaigns and was therefore incapable of planning and conducting a large-scale military operation against Israel.³

A second category of analyses tends to place responsibility for the failure on the political authorities, first and foremost Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. His government, dominated within the governing coalition by the far right, is said to have underestimated the threat and disrupted the intelligence and security services by pursuing

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1. Jacques Follorou, "Attaque du Hamas contre Israël: ce que les services de renseignement américains ont dit à leurs homologues européens," *Le Monde*, 24 October 2023.
 2. Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds, "Tactical Lessons from Israel Defense Forces Operations in Gaza," RUSI Occasional Paper, July 2024.
 3. Elena Grossfeld, "What Israeli Intelligence Got Wrong About Hamas," *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2023; Amy Zegart, "Israel's Intelligence Disaster," *Foreign Affairs*, 11 October 2023; Daniel Byman, "An Intelligence Failure in Israel, but What Kind?," *Lawfare*, 10 October 2023.

an ideological agenda that generated tensions with the intelligence community, tensions that were exacerbated in early 2023 by the attempted reform of the judicial system.¹ These tensions are said to have seriously eroded trust between intelligence producers and consumers. They would also have politicized their relationship and significantly impaired both the transmission of intelligence and the extent to which it was taken into account.²

Finally, a third category of analyses focuses more closely on shortcomings in the collection and processing of intelligence on Hamas, emphasizing in particular the excessive confidence placed by Israeli services in technical intelligence.³

Since October 7, 2023, attempts to produce a critical, systematic, and academic analysis of the event have remained rare. The scholar Avner Barnea, for example, argues that the Israeli services were completely surprised and at no point possessed intelligence capable of warning them about the scale and imminence of the forthcoming attack (warning intelligence).⁴ A second attempt was undertaken by Janice Gross Stein, based on an analysis of Israeli civil-military relations, the psychology of decision-makers, and organizational pathologies within the intelligence services.⁵ Finally, in October 2024 Michel Wyss published in CTC Sentinel a nuanced and multifactorial analysis of the October 7 failure, arguing that 'Israel's inability to detect the

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1. "Former intelligence chief says Netanyahu's judicial overhaul could cause civil war," *Middle East Eye*, 20 July 2023.
 2. Janice Gross Stein, "Bringing Politics Back In: The Neglected Explanation of the Oct. 7 Surprise Attack," *Texas National Security Review*, 7:4, Fall 2024, 73–93; Jessica Davis, Tricia Bacon, Emily Harding and Daniel Byman, "Experts React: Assessing the Israeli Intelligence and Potential Policy Failure," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 25 October 2023.
 3. Uri Bar-Joseph and Avner Cohen, "How Israel's Spies Failed – and Why Escalation Could Be Catastrophic," *Foreign Policy*, 19 October 2023; Jeff Stein, "The Spies of Hamas," *Military.com*, 6 November 2023; Calder Walton, "Four paths to Israel's intelligence failure," *Engelsberg Ideas*, 12 October 2023.
 4. Avner Barnea, "Israeli Intelligence Was Caught Off Guard: The Hamas Attack on 7 October 2023 – A Preliminary Analysis," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 37:3, 2024, 1056–1082.
 5. Janice Gross Stein, "Bringing Politics Back In," 73–93.

imminent attack was not the result of a single glaring failure, but rather the product of a multitude of problems at different political and military levels and within several intelligence services.¹

This study builds on these initial works but seeks to deepen the analysis considerably. Several factors justify this undertaking. First, additional sources emerged during 2024 and early 2025. The October 7 attack has not, to date, been the subject of an official commission of inquiry in Israel, but military intelligence, Aman, and the domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, published their internal reports on the October 7 attacks on February 28 and March 4, 2025, respectively.² In addition, several senior Israeli officials resigned or were removed from office in 2024 and 2025 and, through their public statements, provided further information. These include Major General Aharon Haliva, director of Aman until April 2024, and Ronen Bar, director of Shin Bet until April 2025.³

With the exception of Michel Wyss's article, however, these works draw only modestly on the extensive academic literature devoted to strategic surprise and intelligence failure. Yet this is a central and highly developed research theme within intelligence studies. Over time, the literature has grown increasingly rich through analyses of failures as diverse as Pearl Harbor,⁴ the Yom Kippur War,⁵ the Iranian Revolution,⁶ Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and the September 11,

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1. Michel Wyss, "The October 7 Attack: An Assessment of the Intelligence Failings," *CTC Sentinel*, October 2024.
 2. Aman report on October 7 (in Hebrew): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1adxtbFqEpwJHKsSs_6fhm-Sct_DMR151/view?usp=drive_link; Shin Bet report (in Hebrew), available here: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25551448-yqry-tkhqyr-shyrvt-hbytkhvn-hkllly-710/>
 3. David Gritten, "Israel military intelligence chief quits over 7 October," BBC, 22 April 2024.
 4. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, Stanford University Press, 1962.
 5. Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources*, State University of New York Press, 2005.
 6. Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, Cornell University Press, 2011.

2001 attacks,¹ providing a substantial critical framework for examining and analysing the processes, errors, and organizational dysfunctions of intelligence institutions and activities.²

October 7, 2023 was a major trauma for Israel and a historic failure for its intelligence services, on a scale at least comparable to that of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Yet there is nothing in this failure that cannot be understood and analysed in light of the rich literature on intelligence failures. This study therefore seeks to study the October 7, 2023 attack and to identify the failures of Israeli intelligence to anticipate and prevent it by drawing on that literature. History, of course, never repeats itself in identical form, and every case study is shaped by contingencies of its own. But the work of earlier scholars helps to direct our attention and to identify where analysis should be focused in order to understand the deeper causes of the failure.

This study is based on a corpus of diverse primary sources (official reports, government data, public statements, official communiqués, and press interviews), together with the secondary sources discussed above. It is organized into three main parts. The first examines the doctrinal frameworks of Israeli strategy toward Gaza and the intelligence arrangements that derived from them. It also analyses the evolution of Hamas and its capabilities, thereby describing the dialectic that developed between the respective strategies of the two actors up to the eve of October 7. The second part conducts an autopsy of the failures of Israeli intelligence services to anticipate the Hamas attack. It examines, in turn, intelligence collection; the interpretation and analysis of the intelligence available; bureaucratic failures; and shortcomings in the decision-making process and in the relationship between intelligence services and political authorities. The third part considers Israeli strategy since October 7 and the role assigned to the intelligence services within it. It studies the

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1. Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, Princeton University Press, 2007.
 2. Glenmore S. Trenear-Harvey, *Historical Dictionary of Intelligence Failures*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014.

relationship between the services and political authorities since October 7 and the significance of the operations conducted against Hezbollah and Iran in April 2024 and June 2025, seeking to assess the extent to which those operations bear the imprint of lessons drawn from October 7, 2023.

I. Actors and Strategy: Israeli Intelligence Against Hamas

Every intelligence activity involves at least two actors: the one collecting information and the one being targeted. It is therefore essential to understand the respective strategies and agency of each actor in order to grasp the determinants of their actions and to identify the factors that contribute to intelligence failure. As Michael Handel once observed, 'what the enemy does only makes sense in relation to the actions or plans of one's own forces.'¹ This first part therefore analyses the actors and their respective strategies up to October 7, 2023.

The Architecture of Israeli Intelligence

Ever since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Jewish leaders recognized the strategic importance of intelligence to its survival in a hostile regional environment. Under the impetus of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, a unified intelligence structure was established, initially centred on the military apparatus in the context of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and then progressively reorganized around three main services. Since 1951, Israeli intelligence has been structured around a division of responsibilities between Mossad, Aman, and Shin Bet (also known as Shabak or Israeli security Agency), which together form the pillars of the State of Israel's national security apparatus.²

Mossad is Israel's foreign intelligence service. Directly subordinated to the prime minister, it is responsible for collecting intelligence by clandestine means outside Israel's borders and for conducting covert

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1. Micheal Handel, *Intelligence and Military Operations*, Routledge, 1990, 1.
 2. For a history of Israeli intelligence services, see: Ian Black & Benni Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services*, Grove Press, 1994.

operations – designated as “Special Operations” – for purposes of disruption and influence.¹ Its personnel are estimated at approximately 7,000. In its intelligence collection and processing mission, Mossad relies on four principal types of collection capability. Human intelligence (HUMINT) is first and foremost Mossad’s traditional area of strength and is managed by its principal directorate, Tzomet. As with other foreign intelligence agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, or MI6), and France’s Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE), Mossad’s handling of human sources abroad is conducted primarily by case officers declared to the local authorities.

Within Mossad, however, traditional human intelligence is combined with a particularly advanced expertise in operational intelligence, which constitutes one of the pillars of its activities abroad. Operational intelligence relies in particular on officers deployed under so-called “deep cover” – that is, using fully constructed fictitious identities designed for long-term use. These officers are trained to conduct clandestine operations abroad in hostile environments or in countries subject to intense local counterintelligence scrutiny, without the benefit of direct diplomatic support. Their mission also includes recruiting human sources, but above all establishing cover structures and economic and financial arrangements and, in some cases, preparing offensive operations.² Mossad places particular emphasis on the quality of recruitment and the durability of these cover arrangements, which enable deep penetration of the environments being targeted. This capacity for human action at a distance constitutes a strategic asset for Israel, illustrated in particular by the operation against Hezbollah pagers and electronic devices in September 2024 and by the precision of strikes against senior members of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in June 2025. Such operations were made possible by the existence of these undercover networks.

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1. For a history of Mossad, see: Gordon Thomas, *Gideon’s Spies. The Inside Story of Israel’s Legendary Secret Service the Mossad*, JR Books, 2008.
 2. Ahron Bergman, “Inside Mossad,” *Engelsberg Idea*, 27 November 2023.

Mossad also possesses autonomous signals intelligence (SIGINT) capabilities that complement those of Aman's Unit 8200.¹ These technical means enable, among other things, the interception of communications abroad in areas and against adversaries of direct concern to the State of Israel. As an extension of these activities, Mossad has invested heavily in offensive cyber intelligence.² This expertise has translated into the development of some of the most advanced cyberwarfare capabilities among intelligence services. The emblematic example of these offensive cyber capabilities remains Stuxnet, the cyber operation against the centrifuges of Iran's nuclear program launched from 2005 onward in cooperation with the National Security Agency (NSA) and the CIA. The operation illustrates Mossad's ability to combine SIGINT, cyber operations, and covert action within an integrated approach to offensive intelligence.³

These Mossad capabilities, however, do not extend to the Gaza Strip and concern Hamas only indirectly. Within the institutional architecture of Israeli intelligence, responsibility for the Gaza Strip is shared between the domestic intelligence service, Shin Bet, and the military intelligence service, Aman. Mossad's role regarding Hamas is limited to the activities assigned to it in the field of secret diplomacy. Mossad is responsible for unofficial exchanges with Hamas officials in the organization's Doha office in Qatar and for clandestine relations with states with which official diplomatic relations are suspended or severed.

Shin Bet is Israel's domestic security agency. It too is directly subordinate to the prime minister, and its principal mission is to combat domestic terrorism and counterespionage. Its responsibilities include the protection of sensitive infrastructure, the surveillance of radical

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1. John Reed, "Unit 8200: Israel's cyber spy agency. Former insiders and whistle-blowers provide a view of the formidable military intelligence outfit," *Financial Times*, 10 July 2015.
 2. Eviatar Matania, Amir Rapaport, Claire Darmon, *Cyberpower – Israël, la révolution cyber, et le monde de demain*, Les Arènes, 2022.
 3. Jon Lindsay, "Stuxnet revisited: From cyber warfare to secret statecraft," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Published online, 11 April 2025.

groups, whether Arab or Jewish, and the security of the government and national institutions. Shin Bet is organized into several divisions, including a department responsible for monitoring Palestinian terrorist organizations and another specializing in countering foreign espionage.¹ Its effectiveness has at times been called into question, notably after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, but it nevertheless remains a powerful service with substantial intelligence capabilities.²

Shin Bet plays a central role in monitoring, identifying, and neutralizing the terrorist threat emanating from the Gaza Strip. The service focuses on tracking clandestine infrastructure, mapping chains of command, and identifying operational leaders of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. To this end, it relies on its human intelligence capabilities inside the Gaza Strip as well as on technical collection.³ Shin Bet possesses significant signals intelligence capabilities, primarily directed toward intercepting communications within the Palestinian territories, both in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The service operates in close synergy with the Israeli military's Unit 8200, which provides technical infrastructure and expertise in large-scale data processing. Shin Bet thus exploits telephone intercepts, radio monitoring, emails, and instant messages to detect weak signals, locate dormant cells, or monitor the logistical networks of armed groups.⁴ These technical capabilities are most often employed in support of targeting operations, enabling the identification of specific suspect profiles and the anticipation of emerging threats.

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1. See: Dror Moreh, *The Gatekeepers: Inside Israel's Internal Security Agency*, Skyhorse, 2015.
 2. Rebecca Trounson, "Agency Not Told About Rabin Killer, Report Says," 14 November 1997.
 3. Uri Bar-Joseph and Avner Cohen, "How Israel's Spies Failed – and Why Escalation Could Be Catastrophic"; Michel Wyss, "The October 7 attack: an assessment of the Intelligence Failings," *CTC Sentinel*, October 2024, 4.
 4. John Reed, "Unit 8200: Israel's cyber spy agency. Former insiders and whistle-blowers provide a view of the formidable military intelligence outfit," *Financial Times*, 10 July 2015.

Shin Bet's responsibility for monitoring the terrorist threat from Gaza increased markedly after Israel's unilateral military withdrawal in 2005 and then after Hamas seized control of the enclave in 2007. During the period of occupation, from 1967 to 2005, intelligence on Gaza had primarily been the responsibility of the Israeli military and Aman. Disengagement led to a redefinition of missions, now divided between Aman, responsible for the strategic and military dimensions of the Gaza Strip, and Shin Bet, which was assigned responsibility for the domestic and terrorist threat. Within this framework, Shin Bet plays a central role in conducting targeting operations in close cooperation with Aman and the IDF.¹ The killing of Ahmed Jabari, head of Hamas's military wing, in November 2012 is an emblematic example: this targeted strike, which opened Operation Pillar of Defense, was made possible by close coordination among Shin Bet, Aman, and the Israeli military.²

Aman, Israel's Military Intelligence Directorate, nevertheless retains a leading responsibility for surveillance of the Gaza Strip, particularly in its military, technological, and cyber dimensions. Historically involved in managing intelligence on the territory, Aman's role after the 2005 withdrawal was refocused on monitoring conventional and asymmetric military threats, operational planning, and the coordination of joint military intelligence.³

Aman possesses substantial technical intelligence capabilities, particularly in satellite imagery and signals intelligence. Unit 8200 occupies a central position in this system. It is responsible for the mass collection of electronic and cyber data, including communications interception, monitoring of the digital networks used by armed

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1. Uri Bar-Joseph and Avner Cohen, "How Israel's Spies Failed – and Why Escalation Could Be Catastrophic."
 2. David Gritten, "Obituary: Ahmed Jabari, Hamas commander," BBC, 14 November 2012.
 3. Michel Wyss, "The October 7 Attack: An Assessment of the Intelligence Failings," 4.

groups, and technical mapping of their infrastructure.¹ Endowed with considerable human and technological resources, Unit 8200 is often described as one of the pillars of the Israeli intelligence ecosystem. Its expertise also extends to offensive cyber operations, including intrusions into Hamas computer networks, the disruption of communications systems, and the manipulation of information to interfere with the coordination of adversary operations.²

Aman also coordinates military intelligence as a whole and is responsible for assessing the operational capabilities of Hamas and its armed wing through the production of strategic assessments for the government and the armed forces. Its interaction with field units is therefore crucial, particularly with special forces.

The tripartite organization of Israeli intelligence among Mossad, Shin Bet, and Aman rests on a clear functional division of labour, with services specializing by geographic area and type of threat. In the context of the Gaza Strip and in relation to Hamas, Shin Bet and Aman are primarily responsible for operational monitoring and threat anticipation. This architecture is nevertheless characterized by the absence of a central analytical coordination structure comparable to the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) in the United States or the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the United Kingdom. Mossad and Shin bet are directly subordinated to the prime minister, an arrangement that can foster operational efficiency and responsiveness but may also encourage competition, bureaucratic compartmentalization, and a degree of vulnerability to political interference. It was within this institutional arrangement that Israel's intelligence strategy toward Hamas developed prior to the October 7, 2023 attack.

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1. Itai Shapira and David Siman-Tov, "Israeli Defense Intelligence (IDI): adaptive evolution in the interaction between collection and analysis," *Intelligence and National Security*, 38:3, 2023, 407–426.
 2. On the architecture of Israeli SIGINT and Unit 8200's capabilities, see the Snowden documents: "NSA and Israeli intelligence: memorandum of understanding," Documents Snowden, *The Guardian*, 11 September 2013.

Israeli Strategy and the Use of Intelligence Toward Gaza and Hamas

Israel's security doctrine toward Hamas gradually took shape in response to developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to organizational changes within the Islamist movement. Whereas Hamas was initially perceived as a local terrorist actor confined to low-intensity operations, its growing military and institutional strength – particularly after it took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007 – led Israel to reconfigure its security approach. Before October 7, 2023, this strategic reorientation rested on four principal pillars: deterrence, containment, targeted killings, and the exploitation of intra-Palestinian divisions.

Deterrence constitutes a fundamental component of Israel's security doctrine toward Hamas. It rests on the principle that any aggression directed against Israel must trigger an immediate, massive, and costly response. The objective is to impose a high strategic cost on any hostile action by degrading the adversary's military capabilities and projecting an image of responsiveness and technological superiority. This posture requires not only constant military superiority but, above all, the ability to mobilize precise operational intelligence rapidly in order to identify, locate, and strike adversary targets with maximum effectiveness.¹ This pillar was repeatedly demonstrated in confrontations with Hamas in 2008–2009 (Operation Cast Lead), 2012 (Pillar of Defense), 2014 (Protective Edge), and 2021 (Guardian of the Walls), during which the Israeli military systematically responded to attacks – rocket launches, terrorist attacks, and infiltrations – with targeted air strikes against military infrastructure, tunnels, command centers, and key members of the Hamas leadership.

Israeli deterrence also has a psychological dimension. The public demonstration of new surveillance or strike technologies, together with the targeted release of information about Israel's ability to

1. Shmuel Bar, "Israeli strategic deterrence doctrine and practice," *Comparative Strategy*, 39:4, 321–353.

penetrate Hamas networks, forms part of a strategy of moral and cognitive pressure. The objective is to foster among the adversary a permanent sense of vulnerability, with the aim of encouraging a form of strategic self-restraint, moderation, or withdrawal.¹

The second pillar of Israel's strategy toward Hamas is the containment of the Gaza Strip. Introduced after Hamas seized power in 2007, this containment took the form of a land, sea, and air blockade. The severity of the blockade evolved over time, with successive phases of closure and partial opening between 2007 and 2013 and between 2013 and 2023.² On land, crossing points between Gaza and Israeli territory were tightly controlled, filtering the movement of goods and people.³ These restrictions contributed to the emergence of an underground tunnel network linking Gaza to the Sinai, used to smuggle goods, weapons, and fighters. Despite repeated Israeli efforts to detect and destroy these tunnels, particularly during the successive military operations discussed above, the estimated scale of the underground infrastructure – nearly 500 kilometres – makes its complete eradication extremely difficult.⁴ At sea, Israel imposes a strict naval blockade on the Gaza Strip, preventing vessels from crossing a defined security zone. This measure is intended in particular to prevent clandestine weapons deliveries.⁵ At the same time, the airspace above Gaza is largely controlled, preventing air traffic and, notably, seeking to block the use of drones, guided missiles, and other sophisticated combat systems.⁶

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1. Amir Lupovici, "Deterrence and Fear: Incorporating Emotions into the Field of Research," *E-International Relations*, 20 August 2020.
 2. David Poort, "History of Israeli blockade on Gaza," Al Jazeera, 2 November 2011.
 3. "La bande de Gaza: un territoire fermé sur lui-même par une frontière hermétique et militarisée", Centre national d'études spatiales (CNES).
 4. Toi Staff, "Gaza tunnels stretch at least 350 miles, far longer than past estimate," *The Times of Israel*, 16 January 2024.
 5. Noam Amir, "Smuggling attempt foiled: Israel seizes 4 tons of Gaza-bound chemicals used in rockets," *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 May 2016.
 6. Jonathan Cook, "Gaza: Life and death under Israel's drones", Al Jazeera, 28 November 2013.

Beyond this physical architecture, however, Israel's containment strategy before October 7 also relied on high-intensity technological surveillance, drawing on signals intelligence, imagery intelligence, and substantial cyber capabilities. The smart barrier system known as the "Iron Wall", deployed along the border between Gaza and Israel, combines sensors, radars, thermal cameras, drones, and artificial intelligence to detect suspicious movement.¹ This technological envelope creates an almost constant surveillance environment in which every signal can potentially be exploited for targeting or warning purposes. The containment of Gaza was therefore not merely an instrument of logistical and economic pressure. It was above all an intelligence-centred security system designed to prevent incursions, anticipate threats, and keep the Gaza Strip under constant surveillance.²

Targeted military operations constitute the third pillar of Israel's strategy against Hamas. Commonly referred to as "targeted killings", these operations seek to eliminate strategic figures within the movement, whether military commanders, political leaders, or technical experts.³ Israel has long employed such operations to pursue several objectives: disrupting chains of command, weakening operational capabilities, undermining internal morale, and contributing to deterrence against both Hamas members and their external supporters.⁴ Among the most emblematic examples are the killings of the movement's founder and spiritual leader, Ahmed Yassin, in March 2004, and of his successor, Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, in April of the same year.⁵ The implementation of these strikes systematically involves close coordination between Shin Bet and Aman for target identification,

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1. Andrei Popoviciu and Lubna Masarwa, "Gaza: What the iron wall built by Israel means for besieged Palestinians," *Middle East Eye*, 11 December 2021.
 2. Toi Staff, "Years of subterfuge, high-tech barrier paralyzed: How Hamas busted Israel's defenses," *The Times of Israel*, 11 October 2023.
 3. Paul Gaston Aaron, "The Idolatry of Force: How Israel Embraced Targeted Killing," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 46:4, 2017, 75–99.
 4. On the history of Israeli targeted killings, see: Ronen Bergman, *Rise and Kill first: The Inside Story and Secret Operations of Israel's Assassination Program*, Random House, 2018.
 5. "Hamas chief killed in air strike," BBC, 22 March 2004.

localization, prolonged surveillance, and prioritization. These operations rely on multi-source intelligence collection and advanced technologies designed to achieve the highest possible degree of precision. Although they follow a logic of preventive neutralization, they have generated recurring ethical, legal, and strategic debate.¹ Their long-term operational effectiveness also remains contested: while they can achieve immediate tactical objectives, they may also provoke retaliation, fuel radicalization among Palestinian populations affected as collateral victims of the strikes, or strengthen Hamas's legitimacy among segments of its constituency.²

The fourth pillar of Israel's strategy toward Hamas rests on a logic of deliberate fragmentation of the Palestinian political arena, intended to prevent the emergence of a unified leadership capable of exerting influence in a negotiation process. This approach relies on the active exploitation of internal divisions between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA), as well as on the territorial separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.³ Since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007, Israel has pursued differentiated policies toward the two territories. While the West Bank was the subject of security cooperation with the PA within the framework of the Oslo Accords, Gaza was subjected to a strict blockade accompanied by recurrent targeted strikes. This dual treatment deliberately sought to deepen the political and institutional divide between the two Palestinian entities, making the formation of a national unity government more difficult and weakening the legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership as a whole.⁴

This strategy, however, was not limited to a macro-political logic. On the ground, Israel implemented policies of intra-Palestinian

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1. On this point, see: Amélie Férey, *Assassinats ciblés. Critique du libéralisme armé*, CNRS Editions, 2020.
 2. Tamar Meisels, Jeremy Waldron, *Debating Targeted Killing: Counter-Terrorism or Extrajudicial Execution?*, Oxford University Press, 2020.
 3. Tamer Qarmout, "What is behind the Palestinian split and what makes it difficult to end? A historical institutional analysis from a settler colonial lens," *Third World Quarterly*, 44:4, 2023, 686–704.
 4. "The Israeli Government's Old-New Palestine Strategy," *International Crisis Group Middle East Briefing*, 86, 28 March 2022.

differentiation that played on social, economic, and territorial fault lines. In the West Bank, the work-permit system, restrictions on movement, and differentiated security practices across Areas A, B, and C helped sustain dynamics of competition and even mistrust among different communities and factions.¹ This strategy of division obviously entails risks and structural limitations. By seeking simultaneously to weaken Hamas through military operations and the Palestinian Authority through diplomatic and financial marginalization, Israel deliberately deprived itself of credible interlocutors for any long-term political settlement.² Moreover, growing radicalization among segments of the Palestinian population, fuelled by a sense of abandonment, economic insecurity, and the absence of political prospects, contributed to the persistence of a potential for security destabilization.

Finally, the instrumentalization of Hamas's governance of Gaza was at times incorporated into Israel's domestic political logic, particularly under successive governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu. Journalistic investigations have highlighted the existence of channels of covert financial support to Hamas through Qatar, intended to keep the organization in a position of constrained but persistent power and threat, thereby helping to justify a hard-line security posture.³ This double game – seeking to contain Hamas while preserving its capacity to cause harm – was certainly not the cause of the October 7, 2023 attack, but it contributed to creating a sense that the threat was under control and manageable, within which the Islamist organization was able to conceive and implement a large-scale offensive.⁴

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1. Leila Farsakh, "Palestinian Economic Development: Paradigm Shifts since the First Intifada," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 45:2, 2016, 55–71.
 2. Ahmed Abou Artema, "Israel's divide, rule and erase strategy is failing," *Al Jazeera*, 26 May 2021.
 3. Mark Mazzetti and Ronen Bergman, "'Buying Quiet': Inside the Israeli Plan That Propped Up Hamas," *The New York Times*, 10 December 2023.
 4. "Israeli far-right Minister Bezalel Smotrich described Hamas as 'asset' in unearthed tweet," *The National*, 23 January 2024.

An analysis of Israel's strategy toward Gaza and Hamas reveals the approach of a state actor endowed with substantial military, technological, and institutional resources and structuring its security policy around the pillars of deterrence, containment, targeting, and division. By contrast, Hamas, as a non-state actor, progressively developed a strategy of adaptation to these constraints. Understanding the October 7 attack therefore requires an analysis of this strategic interaction, marked by a constant dialectic between Israeli control and Hamas's strategy of circumvention.

The Evolution of the Threat and Hamas's Operational Capabilities

The evolution of Hamas's operational capabilities is a central factor in understanding both the growing security threat to Israel and the strategic context that made the October 7, 2023 attack possible. As a non-state actor confronting an adversary with overwhelming military and technological superiority, Hamas gradually developed a strategy of adaptation and circumvention built around four dynamics: military and financial support from Iran; the creation of a local arms industry; the increasing professionalization of its fighting forces; and constant adaptation to Israeli doctrines, including in the technological and intelligence domains.

Iranian support played a decisive role in Hamas's rise in power. Since the 1990s, the Islamic Republic has regarded Hamas as a strategic partner in its policy of hostility toward Israel and as an instrument of regional influence. This relationship took the form of weapons transfers, financing for military infrastructure, the sharing of technical expertise, and training provided by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or Hezbollah.¹ Militarily, this support included the provision of medium and long-range rockets such as the Fajr-5, Kornet anti-tank

1. "Captured Documents Show Iranian Support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip," *The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center*, 18 November 2024.

missiles, and armed drones. These systems progressively expanded the geographic range of Hamas strikes and enabled the organization to threaten Israeli urban centres directly.¹ Tehran also facilitated the clandestine movement of components through routes crossing Jordan, Syria, and Sudan, thereby circumventing the Israeli blockade.²

Beyond weapons transfers, the strategic partnership between Iran and Hamas gradually deepened through training programs for Hamas personnel at military camps in Iran, Lebanon, and Syria. These courses covered a wide range of areas: urban guerrilla warfare, the use of improvised explosive devices, sabotage operations, electronic warfare, and the tactical employment of drones.³ This cooperation contributed to the professionalization of Hamas military cadres, particularly members of its armed wing, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. In addition, for several years Iran provided Hamas with substantial financial assistance to support the administration of the Gaza Strip and the development of its military wing, estimated at several tens of millions of dollars annually. These funds helped finance the construction of tunnel networks, the purchase of equipment, and the maintenance of command and communications structures.⁴

The alliance nevertheless went through periods of tension, notably during the Syrian war. Iran's alignment with Bashar al-Assad's regime prompted debate within Hamas and created difficulties for the movement as it sought closer relations with countries in the Sunni camp.⁵ This divergence led to a temporary reduction in Iranian support in the early 2010s, before a gradual rapprochement driven by the shared

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1. "Report: Hamas testing new long-range rockets that can reach Tel Aviv," *The Jerusalem Post*, 31 December 2013.
 2. "Captured documents reveal how Iran smuggles weapons via Syria and Jordan," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 22 December 2024.
 3. Ido Levy, "How Iran Fuels Hamas Terrorism," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1 June 2021.
 4. "Captured Documents Show Iranian Support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip," The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 18 November 2024.
 5. "Le Hamas écartelé entre axes chiite et sunnite dans le conflit en Syrie," *L'Orient le Jour*, 19 June 2013.

strategic objective of weakening Israel. Despite these fluctuations, Iranian support remained an essential lever in the structural strengthening of Hamas.

Faced with the restrictions imposed by the Israeli blockade and the disruption of smuggling networks, Hamas also invested heavily in local weapons production. This strategic choice responded to a dual imperative: securing the movement's military autonomy and ensuring continuity in its operations. Clandestine workshops were established in Gaza capable of producing a diverse range of military equipment, from homemade rockets and drones to mortars, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and anti-tank systems.¹ The first locally developed Hamas rockets suffered from very limited range and accuracy. Over time, however, Hamas's technical capabilities improved, leading to missiles such as the M-75, R-160, and J-80. These weapons progressively made it possible to strike Tel Aviv or Haifa from Gaza. These advances were obviously enabled by transfers of knowledge from Iran and Hezbollah, but also by Hamas's ability to repurpose diverted industrial materials, particularly through the black market.² The tunnel network beneath Gaza facilitated the movement of sensitive components from Egypt. However, the partial but repeated destruction by Israel and Egyptian forces of tunnels and supply routes forced Hamas to strengthen its production autonomy. The ingenuity of the movement's engineers thus made it possible to create dispersed underground manufacturing lines that were difficult to locate and relied on materials derived from civilian products or of foreign origin.³

As a result of these growing capabilities and sustained professionalization over the past decade, Hamas gradually reached an advanced level of military development, of which the October 7, 2023 attack was the most spectacular manifestation. Hamas's elite forces, known as

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1. Loveday Morris and Adam Taylor, "Gaza's homemade rockets still stretch Israel's sophisticated defenses," *The Washington Post*, 6 May 2019.
 2. Hollie MccKay, "A Look Inside Hamas's Weapons Arsenal," *The Cypher Brief*, 30 November 2023.
 3. Yonah Jeremy Bob, "IDF finds pieces of Hamas rockets that could reach 100 kilometers," *The Jerusalem Post*, 8 January 2024.

Nukhba, constitute the operational core of the movement. Recruited for their ideological commitment and physical aptitude, they receive intensive training that includes simulations of coordinated attacks, cross-border infiltrations, and the abduction of Israeli soldiers.¹ These operational skills are complemented by psychological and ideological training intended to strengthen cohesion and motivation among fighters, who are often prepared for suicide missions or prolonged operations underground. Their role in the October 7 attack demonstrated both their level of preparation and their ability to conduct complex operations.

Since the mid-2000s, Hamas has also developed significant intelligence capabilities.² In human intelligence, Hamas established a strategy based on targeting Arab minorities holding Israeli citizenship or maintaining close ties to that population. Such individuals offer a dual advantage: potential ideological or religious affinity that can facilitate recruitment, and an ability to travel to third countries such as Lebanon or Jordan, where contact can be established under more secure conditions. Hamas has also recruited sources among Muslim Israelis traveling to Mecca, using various forms of cover. Finally, Hamas makes full use of available technology to recruit sources through social media, forums, and groups on messaging applications, which enable geographically remote recruitment, secure handling, and the rapid and precise transfer of sensitive information.³ Although some of these activities were neutralized by Israeli counterintelligence services, the techniques nonetheless enabled Hamas to collect significant volumes of information.

Alongside these human intelligence capabilities, Hamas systematically exploited open-source intelligence (OSINT), taking advantage of

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1. James Rothwell, "Israel sets its sights on destroying Nukhba, the mysterious Hamas commando squad," *The Telegraph*, 12 October 2023.
 2. On this point, see Netanel Flamer, *The Hamas Intelligence War against Israel*, Cambridge University Press, 2024.
 3. On Hamas and Hezbollah's human intelligence capabilities, see Netanel Flamer, "Hezbollah and Hamas's main platforms for recruiting and handling of human sources after 2006," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 59:5, 2023, 842-854.

the abundance of information available online to refine its understanding of the Israeli security system.¹ The organization drew extensively on publicly accessible data from social media, government databases, academic publications, commercial satellite imagery, and poorly controlled social-media communications by Israeli forces or their relatives.² Hamas thus used OSINT to reconstruct the movements of Israeli officials, locate military infrastructure, and anticipate troop movements.

Far from using cyberspace only passively, Hamas also developed genuine offensive cyber strategies for intelligence collection. These operations primarily targeted civil servants, military personnel, and members of Israel's security establishment to obtain information of interest: force locations, travel schedules, and infrastructure plans. The information collected could be used to identify targets, but also in "leak" operations and propaganda campaigns intended to influence Israeli public opinion.³ While Hamas's early offensive cyber campaigns relied on rudimentary methods such as mass phishing emails or malicious attachments and links, its techniques gradually became more professional. Hamas learned to develop its own malware designed to infect mobile applications popular in Israel.⁴ The development of these less risky and more difficult-to-trace means of intelligence collection enabled Hamas to compensate in part for its weaknesses and limited access to Israeli territory.

Hamas thus distinguished itself over the past decade by its capacity to continuously adapt its tactics to the evolution of the pillars of Israeli doctrine. This adaptability is one of the foundations of its survival and helps explain its growing strength in the years preceding

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1. Avner Barnea, "The OSINT factor in Hamas' operational success and Israel's intelligence failure," *IntelNews*, 5 December 2023.
 2. Netanel Flamer, "The enemy teaches us how to operate': Palestinian Hamas use of open source intelligence (OSINT) in its intelligence warfare against Israel (1987-2012)," *Intelligence and National Security*, 38:7, 2023, 1171–1188.
 3. Simon Handler, "The cyber strategy and operations of Hamas: Green flags and green hats," Atlantic Council, 7 November 2022.
 4. Yossi Melman, "Hamas attempted to plant spyware in 'Red Alert' rocket siren app," *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 August 2018.

October 7, 2023.¹ The use of tunnels for logistical transport, weapons storage, and the projection of forces across the border gave Hamas a major strategic advantage in a territory under constant surveillance. The growing use of drones for reconnaissance, artillery targeting, and attack missions, drawing on Iranian or Hezbollah tactics, enabled the collection of intelligence essential to the operation. This progressive sophistication transformed Hamas into a leading politico-military actor capable of adapting its strategy to the constraints imposed by Israel. The growth of its military capabilities resulted from a combination of external support, local engineering, internal professionalization, and a detailed understanding of Israeli vulnerabilities. The causes of the Israeli intelligence services' failure to anticipate and disrupt the October 7, 2023 attack must therefore be situated within this complex dialectic between actors and strategies.

1. Nesya Rubinstein-Shemer, "'Close but no Cigar': Hamas's psychological warfare against Israel between 2014 and 2023," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 61:1, 2025, 1–17.

II. Intelligence and the Threat: Israeli Services and the October 7 Attack

The function of intelligence services is to collect, process, and disseminate information to their authorities to help reduce uncertainty in decision-making. In the words of David Omand, former director of the British signals intelligence agency, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), 'the value of intelligence lies in its ability to inform decisions by reducing decision-makers' ignorance of the reality they face.'¹ To perform this function, intelligence services rely on a range of human and technical collection capabilities. Information gathered through these different sensors contributes, through processes of assessment, cross-checking, and retasking, to developing knowledge about individuals, networks, structures, organizations, states, regions, or topics of interest to provide authorities with the most reliable possible assessment of threats. By its nature, this process involves a plurality of actors and organizations and is therefore vulnerable to failures at different levels, which may hinder the conduct of foreign policy and the management of threats by states. The causes of such dysfunctions have generated an extensive academic literature within intelligence studies. To understand the October 7 failure, this literature provides an analytical framework through which the functioning of intelligence services can be disaggregated and the precise points at which failures occurred can be identified.

1. David Omand, *Securing the State*, Hurst & Co Publishers, 2010, 22.

Intelligence Collection

Several scholars argue that the main cause of intelligence failures lies in the collection of information. The diversity of collection methods means that some threat assessments necessarily rest on access of varying reliability. Michael Herman thus emphasizes that the cause of many intelligence failures lies in the very nature of the collection capabilities available to intelligence services.¹ Erik Dahl advances a similar argument, noting that ‘the intelligence available before most surprise attacks is broad and non-specific’ and that such strategic intelligence ‘allows policymakers to see the smoke of the growing threat, but obscures the flames that alone can indicate where and when action is required.’² This collection-centred approach to failure assigns predominant importance to the nature and reliability of raw intelligence and tends to regard analysis as secondary. It privileges stronger capabilities, immediate action, and operational and clandestine collection, arguing that new accesses must be developed because only they can provide reliable intelligence. To assess the validity of this hypothesis in the case of the October 7, 2023 attack, it is necessary to examine in detail the intelligence that Israeli intelligence services had in their possession.³

On the eve of October 7, Shin Bet and Aman possessed a substantial volume of information drawn from diverse sources. Among the available indicators were, first, those collected through routine and general observation of Hamas activities in the Gaza Strip, particularly military exercises monitored throughout 2023. These drills, sometimes conducted in coordination with other armed factions such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad, simulated cross-border incursions, attacks on

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1. Michael Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.
 2. Erik J. Dahl, *Intelligence and Surprise Attack. Failure and success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and beyond*, Georgetown University Press, 2013, 2.
 3. Melvin Goodman, *Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

kibbutzim, and the abduction of soldiers or civilians.¹ Israeli surveillance systems, notably Unit 8200, closely monitored these manoeuvres. Several internal sources had warned of the danger posed by such signals.² As early as July 2023, a Unit 8200 officer identified a close correspondence between the exercises observed and an attack plan known as “Jericho Wall”, an official Hamas document already in Israeli possession that described with precision the assault as it ultimately unfolded: breaches in the fence, the use of paragliders, coordinated attacks on military bases, and hostage-taking.³ The officer renewed her warning on October 4 and 5, 2023, only days before the attack, without prompting any strategic reassessment.⁴

Among the services’ clandestine collection assets, Shin Bet also had a human source infiltrated into Hamas decision-making circles, known by the codename Mavo’ah (“the fountain”). As early as 2023, this source had provided information on the intentions and renewed strategy of Hamas’s military wing under Yahya Sinwar.⁵ Israel’s intelligence partners, particularly Egypt, which possessed its own listening channels in Gaza, are also reported to have provided similar assessments to their Israeli counterparts.⁶ Finally, a major technical signal was detected in the hours before the attack: on the evening of October 6, Shin Bet identified a sudden and large-scale activation of SIM cards in the Gaza Strip.⁷ This type of activity, characteristic of the launch phase of operations, could have justified raising the alert level.

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1. Abdelali Ragad, “How Hamas built a force to attack Israel on 7 October,” BBC, 27 November 2023.
 2. “IDF soldiers say repeated warnings of Hamas activity prior to Oct. 7 attacks were ignored,” ABC News, 28 June 2024.
 3. Ronen Bergman and Adam Goldman, “Israel Knew Hamas’s Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago,” *The New York Times*, 2 December 2023.
 4. Emmanuel Fabian, “IDF identified but ignored 5 warning signs of Hamas attack on eve of Oct. 7, its probe shows,” *The Times of Israel*, 27 February 2025.
 5. Michael Bachner, “Shin Bet dismissed Gaza source’s tip on plans, timing of major Hamas attack,” *The Times of Israel*, 27 December 2023.
 6. “Egypt warned Israel days before Hamas struck, US committee chairman says,” BBC, 12 October 2023.
 7. Amos Harel, “Israeli Intelligence Agencies Detected Israeli SIM Cards Activated by Hamas Hours Before Oct 7 Assault,” *Haaretz*, 26 February 2024.

Taken individually, each of these elements might have appeared sufficient to justify a reassessment by Shin Bet and Aman of the threat level and, accordingly, the implementation of enhanced monitoring through the precise retasking of human and technical collection systems. Taken together, they formed a coherent picture: an operation in preparation, supported both by substantial military capabilities and by evidence of intent. Yet one must guard against the retrospective illusion of obviousness or inevitability. Once the outcome is known, examining the sources invariably reveals coherence and logic; their interpretation is inevitably shaped by knowledge of what they ultimately formed part of. Thus, although Israeli intelligence services possessed significant warning indicators, the collection architecture contained structural vulnerabilities that undermined anticipation and the detection of the threat during its preparatory phase.

One of the most significant limitations in the Israeli services' collection plan was the erosion of human intelligence in the Gaza Strip. Since the unilateral withdrawal of 2005 and the transfer of responsibility from the Israeli military and Aman to Shin Bet, the capacity to infiltrate, recruit, and handle sources within the enclave had been durably weakened.¹ Access to the ground, the cultivation of local sources, and the assessment of informant reliability had become high-risk activities that could only be conducted indirectly. This human intelligence deficit reinforced an already substantial dependence on technological sensors, particularly signals intelligence capabilities.

This technological dependence, however, proved vulnerable to changes in Hamas's communications practices. In 2023, the IDF decided to end the systematic exploitation of Hamas radio communications, considered of limited value, in order to concentrate interception efforts on cellular communications.² This shift rested on a working assumption that the adversary would continue to use relatively conventional channels whose signals could be exploited

1. Avner Barnea, "Israeli Intelligence Was Caught Off Guard," 1072.

2. Michel Wyss, "The October 7 Attack," 4.

by Israeli sensors.¹ In retrospect, however, Hamas appears to have adapted precisely to this evolution by developing a strategy of information deception: mobile channels were reportedly used to disseminate false signals and conduct deceptive conversations, while genuine operational preparations were transmitted through wired communications deployed inside tunnels in the Gaza Strip and therefore extremely difficult for Israeli services to intercept and exploit.² This tactical adaptation clearly contributed to depriving Israel of essential intelligence despite the density of the technical means deployed.

These shortcomings in Israel's collection system were not accidental, but the result of a deliberate strategy pursued by Hamas's military leadership, particularly Yahya Sinwar, a central figure in the movement since his release in the 2011 prisoner exchange and his subsequent rise to the head of its armed wing.³ A former prisoner who had learned security and counterintelligence techniques in Israeli jails, Sinwar made the fight against Israeli penetration a pillar of his military leadership.⁴ Under his authority, Hamas pursued a highly stringent counterintelligence policy aimed at identifying Israeli sources, systematically dismantling informant networks, strengthening internal discipline, and imposing strict compartmentalization across chains of command. At the same time, rigorous operational procedures were introduced, particularly in communications: controlled use of telephones, preference for wired links, physically secure movement, and segmented transmission of orders.⁵ This culture of

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1. Ronen Bergman, Mark Mazzetti and Maria Abi-Habib, "How Years of Israeli Failures on Hamas Led to a Devastating Attack," *The New York Times*, 29 October 2023.
 2. Samia Nakhoul and Jonathan Saul, "How Hamas duped Israel as it planned devastating attack," Reuters, 10 October 2023; Ronen Bergman and Patrick Kingsley, "How Israel's Feared Security Services Failed to Stop Hamas's Attack," *The New York Times*, 10 October 2023.
 3. See in particular, Tarek Hamoud, "Understanding October 7 through Hamas's Adaptability and Leadership Structure," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 53:2, 2024.
 4. Adam Ragson and Ronen Bergman, "Secret Hamas Files Show How It Spied on Everyday Palestinians," *The New York Times*, 13 May 2024.
 5. Jason Burke, "Yahya Sinwar: ruthless operator who plotted Hamas 7 October attack," *The Guardian*, 17 October 2024.

secrecy was explicitly designed to neutralize Israel's technological advantage in intelligence. Israeli collection therefore confronted not only growing technical constraints but also an adversary capable of anticipating and manipulating its surveillance methods, thereby deepening Israel's operational blindness.

An examination of the Israeli intelligence collection system thus reveals an ambivalent configuration, characterized both by a high density of precise information and by persistent structural weaknesses. Eric Dahl's argument that "the intelligence available before most surprise attacks is broad and non-specific" does not appear fully applicable here. Before the October 7 attack, Shin Bet and Aman possessed a body of information capable of indicating preparations for a major operation – military exercises, technical signals, human intelligence, and external warnings – but these elements remained analytically and operationally ineffective. Despite the erosion of human intelligence in the Gaza Strip and the sophistication of Hamas's counterintelligence measures, collection shortcomings alone cannot account for the October 7 failure. Beyond the availability of data, intelligence derives its value and meaning from analytical processing, interpretation, contextualization, and integration into a coherent understanding of reality – that is, an assessment of the adversary's capabilities and intentions. Attention must therefore now shift to this level, the production of interpretation, in order to understand how such a sophisticated system could fail to generate an accurate representation of the emerging threat.

Analytical Biases and Representations of the Actors

The literature on intelligence failure contains a rich body of work and case studies on shortcomings in processing and analysis. In a seminal contribution to the field, Roberta Wohlstetter demonstrated in 1962, through the case of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, how the sheer volume of available information had paradoxically obscured

Japanese intentions.¹ An excess of information and background noise, rather than producing certainty, generated the opposite effect: confusion among analysts and an underestimation of the true significance of the information collected. Analytical error is also central to the work of Thomas Fingar, who shows how the ability to make sense of information in order to produce intelligence is intrinsically linked to the processes by which that information is exploited – that is, to the ability to organize and structure data so as to extract meaning from it.² Analytical shortcomings also figured among the conclusions of the 9/11 Commission,³ after which numerous research projects, some funded by the U.S. federal government,⁴ were launched to improve understanding of analysts' reasoning methods and thereby reduce major analytical failures.⁵ Contemporary technological developments extend these debates in new forms, particularly through questions surrounding the integration of OSINT and the use of artificial intelligence in processing and analysis.⁶

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1. Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and decision*, Stanford University Press, 1962.
 2. Thomas Fingar, *Reducing Uncertainty: Intelligence Analysis and National Security*, Stanford University Press, 2011.
 3. The 9/11 Commission Report: *Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, W. Norton & Company, 2004.
 4. Philip E. Tetlock, Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*, Crown Edition, 2016.
 5. Richards J. Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, Martino Fine Books, 2019; Katherine H. Pherson, Randolph H. Pherson, *Critical Thinking for Strategic Intelligence*, Third Edition, CQ Press, 2020; Sarah Miller Beebe, Randolph H. Pherson, *Cases in Intelligence Analysis: Structured Analytic Techniques in Action*, Second Edition, CQ Press, 2014; Randolph H. Pherson, Richards J. Heuer, *Structured Analytic Techniques for Intelligence Analysis*, Third Edition, CQ Press, 2020.
 6. Hamilton Bean, *No More Secrets. Open-Source Information and the Reshaping of US Intelligence*, Praeger, 2011; M.D. Jaeger, Dunn Cavelty, "From madness to wisdom: intelligence and the digital crowd," *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:3, 2019, 329–343; Damien Van Puyvelde and Stephen Coulthart, "Beyond the buzzword: Big data and national security decision-making," *International Affairs*, 93:6, 2017, 1397–1416; Clément Renault, "AI, intelligence processing, analysis, and decision-making in the Russo-Ukrainian war," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 39:3, 2026.

The October 7, 2023 failure will almost certainly contribute further to this literature and to the debates that structure it. Collection limitations partly explain the strategic surprise of October 7, but they cannot by themselves account for the scale of the failure. The value of intelligence depends not only on the quantity and reliability of the information gathered but also on how that information is processed and interpreted. In the case of October 7, however, analysis was deeply shaped by a set of unchallenged assumptions, in part because they were not consciously recognized as assumptions, which structured the interpretation of the available information. These pre-existing interpretive frameworks, grounded in hypotheses regarded as robust, acted as filters of perception and reduced the services' ability to detect or take seriously signals that contradicted established assumptions.

Among the most structuring assumptions was the belief that Hamas lacked the military and organizational capabilities necessary to conduct a major offensive operation. This hypothesis, deeply embedded within the services' analysis, rested on the conviction that among Israel's neighbouring adversaries only Hezbollah possessed genuinely strategic military capabilities.¹ Hamas was therefore viewed as a secondary threat – unstable but contained – with confrontation limited to periodic cycles of violence and without real ambitions for a major military operation. This interpretation strongly shaped the assessment of intelligence concerning military exercises, attack plans, and observed tactical changes: such indicators were interpreted as political posturing or symbolic demonstrations of force rather than as the precursors of a credible offensive.²

This representational bias was compounded by an equally central assumption concerning Hamas's intentions. The dominant view was that the Islamist movement had adopted a posture of deterrence and political management of the status quo, preferring to invest in consolidating its local rule in Gaza rather than undertake high-risk

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1. Aman report on October 7 (in Hebrew): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1adxtb-FqEpwJHKsSs_6fhm-Sct_DMR151/view?usp=drive_link
 2. Emmanuel Fabian, "IDF's Oct. 7 probes show it misread Hamas for years, left southern Israel utterly vulnerable," *The Times of Israel*, 27 February 2025.

military operations. This interpretation rested, on the one hand, on confidence in the effectiveness of Israel's deterrence strategy and, on the other, on assessments of the indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas, often mediated by Egypt or Qatar, which had gradually improved living conditions in the enclave, increased the number of work permits in Israel for Gazans, and stabilized, at least in appearance, local governance.¹ From this perspective, Israeli intelligence services viewed Hamas as an actor concerned not to jeopardize the gains accumulated since it took control of Gaza in 2007 – namely, its administrative, policing, and political authority over the territory. The prevailing assumption was therefore that Hamas had no interest in initiating a direct confrontation likely to trigger a massive military response and thereby endanger the institutional structure it had patiently constructed.² This interpretation strongly biased the reading of available signals because it delegitimized any hypothesis of strategic rupture as irrational or inconsistent with the movement's objective interests.

Another major analytical assumption concerned the perception that the threat was contained. This idea rested on the conviction that the security situation in Gaza, although imperfect, remained stable and under control. Sophisticated surveillance tools, early-warning systems, electronic intelligence capabilities, and routine monitoring of the Gaza population were viewed as guaranteeing mastery of the environment and therefore as capable of preventing any unexpected escalation.³ Within this framework, collected intelligence was systematically incorporated into a consolidated representation of a durable conflict equilibrium characterized by provocation and retaliation but lacking any genuine dynamic of transformation. Shin Bet's internal

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1. Gadi Hitman, "What Went Wrong? Israeli Misconceptions and the October 2023 Surprise", *Middle East Policy*, 31:3, 2024, 82-94.
 2. Peter Bergen, "Israel's costly misunderstanding of Hamas' true aims," CNN, 19 October 2023.
 3. Aman report on October 7 (in Hebrew): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1adxtb-FqEpwJHKsSs_6fhm-Sct_DMR151/view?usp=drive_link; Yaniv Kubovitch, "Years of Israeli Misconceptions, Intelligence Blunders Led to October 7 Attack," *Haaretz*, 28 February 2025.

report on the October 7 failure thus notes that “[Hamas’s] plans were not perceived as representing a tangible threat, and the series of weak signals that began in the summer of 2023 was not attributed to the materialization of that threat.”¹ This conviction consequently operated as a mechanism of cognitive dissonance, leading contradictory intelligence – whether from human or technical sources – to be systematically discounted in favour of the reassuring certainty of unchallenged interpretive frameworks. The threat was not denied, but it was regarded as structurally contained: Gaza was under surveillance and was therefore perceived as neutralized.

This accumulation of analytical assumptions was further reinforced by a confidence bias regarding the robustness of Israel’s technological security apparatus, strengthened in particular by past successes in preventing terrorist attacks and infiltrations. The belief that an event of such magnitude could not have occurred without being detected fed the conviction that, if no clear signal had emerged at the top of the analytical chain, then the attack was by definition improbable.² This circular logic contributed to discrediting isolated warnings, including those from the Unit 8200 officer and from partner services, by treating them as marginal or poorly contextualized assessments. Paradoxically, the services’ confidence in their technological intelligence system blurred warning mechanisms by preventing any serious reassessment of analytical frameworks, even as the signals became more insistent in the days preceding the attack.

Taken together, these factors underscore the centrality of unchallenged interpretive frameworks in the October 7 failure. The persistence of assumptions that were not reassessed – concerning Hamas’s presumed intentions, its military capabilities, its strategic rationality, and the stability of the status quo in Gaza – directed the interpretation of data toward conclusions consistent with established expectations and progressively rendered dissonant intelligence less visible. These

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1. Shin Bet report (in Hebrew), available here: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25551448-yqry-tkhqyr-shyrvt-hbytkhvn-hklly-710/>
 2. Toi Staff, “Years of subterfuge, high-tech barrier paralyzed: How Hamas busted Israel’s defenses,” *The Times of Israel*, 11 October 2023.

findings highlight the relevance of the analytical-bias framework for understanding the mechanisms at work in Israeli intelligence failures: cognitive dissonance, confirmation bias, interpretive routines, and representational inertia all played a clear role. Yet such biases cannot be separated from the institutional configurations in which they operate. Intelligence processing does not take place in a neutral environment but within organizational structures shaped by hierarchical dynamics, functional compartmentalization, and distributed regimes of responsibility. Understanding the conditions that made this strategic blindness possible therefore requires broadening the analysis to the bureaucratic functioning of Israeli intelligence in order to assess the extent to which coordination mechanisms, inter-service relations, and institutional logics contributed to the failure.

Organizational and Structural Problems

The dysfunctions observed in the management of Israeli intelligence in the run-up to October 7 also originated in the organizational structures within which they developed. Bureaucratic processes constitute the third major school of thought on intelligence failure. Intelligence services are first and foremost organizations, a point captured by the frequently used expression “bureaucracies of secrecy.” As such, they are subject to a set of administrative dynamics that are well known and extensively documented in organizational sociology. In her analysis of September 11, 2001, Amy Zegart demonstrated how internal dysfunctions contributed to the inadequate handling of warning signals, ranging from competition between intelligence agencies (the FBI and CIA) and personal hostility among senior officials to internal bureaucratic objectives that conflicted with the actual purposes of intelligence collection and processing.¹ Similarly, Richard Betts has shown the tendency of secret bureaucracies to privilege continuity in established and familiar operational practices, thereby generating

1. Amy Zegart, *Spying Blind: The CIA, the FBI, and the Origins of 9/11*, Princeton University Press, 2007.

institutional inertia that prevents services from adapting their methods to adversaries whose tactics are evolving.¹ Finally, numerous studies have highlighted intelligence officers' tendency to overvalue secret intelligence and to favour the use and reinforcement of their own secret collection systems.²

These characteristics were also present in the October 7 failure. In the specific case of Gaza, the division of operational monitoring between Shin Bet and Aman generated decision-making grey zones in which warnings, even when issued, were not incorporated into a unified decision-making process. This bureaucratic fragmentation made it difficult to construct a common picture of the situation. Warnings raised by certain analysts, particularly within Unit 8200, circulated through parallel channels and often failed to gain sufficient traction at higher levels of command.³ The handling of this intelligence suffered from insufficient sharing between services, facilitated by the absence within Israel's intelligence architecture of a central intelligence-fusion structure. Although formal coordination mechanisms exist within the national-security system, notably through the National Security Council (NSC) and certain joint units, they are not responsible for fusing intelligence produced by the different services and therefore struggle to provide a genuine strategic synthesis.⁴ This analytical fragmentation contributed to the functional neutralization

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1. Richard Betts, *Enemies of Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in American National Security*, Columbia University Press, 2009.
 2. Tore Pedersen and Pia Therese Jansen, "Seduced by secrecy – perplexed by complexity: effects of secret vs open-source on intelligence credibility and analytic confidence," *Intelligence and National Security*, 34:6, 2019, 881–898; Rob Johnson, *Analytic Culture in the US Intelligence Community. An ethnographic Study*, Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2005; David Gioe, Joseph Hatfield and Mark Stout, "Can United States intelligence community analysts telework?", *Intelligence and National Security*, 35:6, 2020, 885–901.
 3. Jamie Dettmer, "Our warnings on Hamas were ignored, Israel's women border troops say," *Politico*, 21 November 2023.
 4. Uzi Arad and Amos Harel, "Is There a Future for Israel's National Security Council?," The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, 5 September 2012.

of weak signals because no single entity fully assumed responsibility for aggregating, prioritizing, or translating them into action.

This dynamic was reinforced by deeper bureaucratic logics characteristic of large security organizations. Intelligence production takes place within an environment shaped by hierarchy, standardized procedures, and the management of political risk. In such a setting, transmitting a major warning is an act with significant institutional consequences and engages the responsibility of the person issuing it. This context can foster avoidance or even the neutralization of warning when it challenges dominant representations or threatens established balances within chains of command. Several high-level meetings did discuss risks associated with Hamas, including a cabinet meeting in the week preceding October 7 attended by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and the head of Aman.¹ Yet the evidence suggests that the analytical frameworks of the threat discussed above prevailed in these meetings. Organizational logic thus tended to favour the reproduction of existing diagnoses rather than the emergence of alternative scenarios that would have required a reconfiguration of security arrangements.

Aman itself had, moreover, developed attack scenarios. The “Devil’s Advocate” unit, tasked with exploring unconventional hypotheses, had produced several reports envisaging coordinated Hamas operations from Gaza, including scenarios involving the neutralization of the security barrier and mass infiltrations into Israeli territory. It repeatedly sought to demonstrate the plausibility of this hypothesis.² Yet these exercises in critical thinking, often perceived by analysts and intelligence officers as speculative and too far removed from operational realities, could likewise be readily dismissed.³

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1. Tal Schneider, “For years, Netanyahu propped up Hamas. Now it’s blown up in our faces,” *The Times of Israel*, 8 October 2023.
 2. “Head of IDF Devil’s Advocate Unit tried repeatedly in September to warn of possible Hamas attack,” *The Times of Israel*, 6 January 2024.
 3. Eyal Pascovich, “The devil’s advocate in intelligence: the Israeli experience,” *Intelligence and National Security*, 33:6, 2018, 854–865.

Moreover, the confidence of Israeli intelligence services in the power of their technological apparatus, discussed above, reflected a deeper organizational culture marked by a sense of superiority.¹ In a statement made public in the summer of 2025, General Aharon Haliva, head of Aman at the time of the October 7 attacks, stated directly that one of the system's fundamental problems lay in a shared conviction of omnipotence.² His remarks reveal a form of institutional habitus grounded in the belief of the infallibility of the Israeli intelligence apparatus, nourished by decades of technological dominance, tactical success, and unmatched penetration capabilities in the Palestinian territories.

This confidence formed part of an implicit doctrine of invulnerability: the idea that a system as advanced, experienced, and integrated as Israeli intelligence could not fundamentally misjudge the intentions or capabilities of its adversaries. This self-reinforcing sense of assurance narrowed the space for doubt, marginalized dissenting voices, and encouraged a convergent reading of events consistent with prevailing assumptions.³ In this sense, the October 7 failure was not merely the product of analytical errors or the misinterpretation of signals; it was also symptomatic of an institutional ecosystem saturated with certainty, within which the capacity for self-questioning and for imagining a surprise on a scale comparable to the 1973 Yom Kippur War had progressively eroded.

The factors examined thus far – structural weaknesses in intelligence collection, unchallenged analytical biases, and bureaucratic dysfunctions – help explain why the precursor signals of the October 7 attack were not translated into an operational warning. Yet these factors do not exhaust the explanation for the surprise. Even when

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1. To better understand Israeli intelligence culture, see: Itai Shapira, *Israeli National Intelligence Culture Problem-Solving, Exceptionalism, and Pragmatism*, Routledge, 2026.
 2. Toi Staff, "Former IDF intel chief: Oct. 7 was 'much deeper' than an intelligence failure," *The Times of Israel*, 16 August 2025.
 3. Eliav Breuer, "Oct. 7 a result of 'arrogant' groupthink instilled by Netanyahu, civil probe finds," *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 November 2024.

intelligence passes through the filters of collection, interpretation, and bureaucracy, it must still be processed and acted upon by political authorities, which alone can decide on a change in posture. The relationship between intelligence services and civilian or military decision-makers therefore constitutes a decisive link in the chain of anticipation. Understanding the conditions that produced inaction or non-response in the face of available signals consequently requires examining both the mechanisms through which information was transmitted and the political logics that governed its reception – or dismissal – at the highest levels of the state.

Political Factors and Decision-Making

The fourth major category identified by scholars as a source of intelligence failure is the politicization of intelligence services and ideological interference in decision-making. Robert Jervis devoted a substantial part of his research to analysing the relationship between decision-makers and intelligence organizations and showed how dysfunction in this relationship can lead to serious foreign-policy failures.¹ The George W. Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 is among the emblematic cases of intelligence being redirected toward ideological ends. Intelligence history contains many other examples. Joshua Rovner has likewise documented the different pathologies of what is commonly called the intelligence-policy nexus through case studies including the Vietnam War and the relationship between the Richard Nixon administration and the CIA over the Soviet threat.² Numerous other works, including those of Mark Lowenthal, belong

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1. Robert Jervis, "Why Intelligence and Policymakers Clash," *Political Science Quarterly*, 125:2, 2010, 185–204; Robert Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, Cornell University Press, 2011; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, 1976.
 2. Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts. National security and the politics of intelligence*, Cornell University Press, 2011.

to this broader body of research on politicization as a factor in intelligence failure.¹

The political dimension of the October 7 failure has already been the subject of several analytical attempts. It appears that a number of factors combined to inhibit a possible response to the intelligence available. The first concerns the nature of relations between the political authorities and the intelligence services, which had been damaged by a deteriorating institutional context.² The beginning of 2023 was marked in Israel by a major political crisis triggered by Benjamin Netanyahu's controversial plan to reform the judicial system. Perceived as a challenge to the balance of powers, the rule of law, and the democratic foundations of the State of Israel, the reform generated an unprecedented mobilization of civil society as well as important segments of the security establishment: hundreds of reservists threatened to suspend their service, former chiefs of staff publicly opposed the reform, and central figures in the military establishment warned of the damaging consequences of a loss of institutional legitimacy.³

In a letter sent to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in July 2023, Aman Research Division director Amit Sa'ar explicitly expressed concern about the effects of political polarization on Israel's deterrence strategy, warning of direct damage to the "three pillars" of national security: the strategic alliance with the United States, the internal cohesion of Israeli society, and the operational strength of the IDF.⁴ This warning, which did not alter the prime minister's determination to pass the reform, illustrates a climate of growing mistrust

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1. Mark Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy*, 9th edition, CQ Press, 2022; Stephen Marrin, *Revisiting Intelligence and Policy. Problems with Politicization and Receptivity*, edited volume, Routledge, 2023.
 2. For an analysis of the history of relations between political authorities and intelligence services in Israel, see: Uri Bar Joseph, "State-Intelligence Relations in Israel: 1948-1997," *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 17:2, 133–156.
 3. Seth J. Franzman, "As Israel's air force reservists join protests, country faces potential turning point," *Breaking Defense*, 24 July 2023.
 4. "Top intel official said to have twice warned PM of security risks posed by overhaul tensions," *The Times of Israel*, 21 November 2023.

in which the voice of the intelligence services was progressively marginalized in the face of firmly entrenched political priorities at the highest level of the state. This climate of polarization profoundly affected the relationship of trust between the security services and the executive power, weakening both the relationship itself and the usual channels through which intelligence was transmitted and received.

This political context had the additional consequence of overloading the political agenda and creating a climate of permanent crisis management that narrowed the window in which warning signals could be taken into account. The political agenda was saturated by efforts to manage protests, respond to international criticism, arbitrate tensions within the governing coalition, and preserve governmental authority in the face of growing distrust. This political and cognitive overload contributed to relegating the Gaza security arena to a secondary concern, since it was regarded as relatively contained and under control. Consequently, even when warnings from the intelligence services reached decision-making levels, they had little chance of rising to the status of a strategic priority. Senior state officials, focused on managing the domestic front, were neither institutionally nor psychologically disposed to challenge dominant security assumptions or initiate a critical reassessment of the evaluations transmitted by the services.¹

From 2022 onward, Benjamin Netanyahu also progressively recentralized strategic decision-making around his ministers and service chiefs, at the expense of collective deliberative mechanisms such as the Security Cabinet or the National Security Council (NSC). This growing centralization reduced the plurality of viewpoints in assessment processes and weakened internal checks capable of challenging dominant assumptions.² In an increasingly concentrated decision-making system involving a small number of actors, often politically and ideologically aligned, dissonant warning signals struggled to receive

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1. "Lieberman slams PM's Oct. 7 inaction: "For years, Netanyahu received warnings and ignored them," *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 September 2025.
 2. Joshua Leifer, "The Netanyahu doctrine: how Israel's longest-serving leader reshaped the country in his image," *The Guardian*, 21 November 2023.

serious attention. This mode of governance, oriented toward political coherence rather than the confrontation of competing viewpoints and the deliberate solicitation of divergent analysis as a basis for informed decision-making, limited the system's capacity to produce a critical reassessment of threat perceptions.

This deterioration in the functioning of the relationship between intelligence services and decision-makers was also underpinned by a strong convergence between the services' dominant assessments and the ideological vision of the governing coalition. The two fundamental assumptions exposed above – that Hamas was, first, contained and, second, incapable of orchestrating a large-scale attack – aligned almost perfectly with the worldview of the far-right coalition in power, for which the principal military threat was Hezbollah and the central political issue lay not in Gaza but in the West Bank, regarded as national territory to be reclaimed politically and demographically.¹ In this context, alternative scenarios emerging from intelligence had little chance of being heard because they challenged not merely a technical assessment of the situation but a structured political project built around a hierarchy of threats defined through an ideological lens.

Confidence in technological security systems, particularly the barrier surrounding the Gaza Strip, constituted another point of convergence between political leaders and the intelligence services. On several occasions, the prime minister had praised what he regarded as a strategic success in the management of Israel's southern border, declaring in 2021, for example, that "Hamas can no longer hide."² This shared faith in the effectiveness of surveillance and interdiction technologies – the barrier, sensors, drones, and SIGINT – reinforced a common sense of assurance and evidently reduced leaders' receptiveness to alarmist assessments. The threat appeared to have been neutralized in advance, not only because the adversary was considered

1. Janice Gross Stein, "Bringing Politics Back In," 83–84.

2. Yaniv Kubovich, "Disdain, Denial, Neglect: The Deep Roots of Israel's Devastating Intelligence Failure on Hamas and October 7," *Haaretz*, 9 May 2024.

weakened but because the instruments in place were assumed to guarantee permanent control over its activity.

One of the most significant political factors, however, arguably lay in the explicitly political dimension of government strategy. For many years, and even more clearly after Benjamin Netanyahu formed a new coalition government in December 2022, the existence of a Hamas that remained threatening but controlled in Gaza had become a strategic asset for Likud and its coalition partners. Relative calm in the enclave helped avoid diplomatic or domestic pressure for a peace process that might lead to a two-state solution.¹ The government's priorities lay elsewhere: accelerating the expansion of settlements in the West Bank, consolidating an irreversible Israeli presence in the occupied territories, and strengthening the project of "Jewish sovereignty" over the entire territory claimed by the most radical members of the coalition as part of Eretz Israel.² Within this framework, Gaza's apparent stability, maintained through a strategy of tacit accommodation with Hamas, including the existence of covert support, was perceived as a political lever that helped remove the Palestinian question from the political agenda.³ Any reassessment of the threat from Gaza would therefore have required not only a security reconfiguration but also a challenge to this fragile political equilibrium, something coalition leaders were not prepared to contemplate.

The failure of Israeli intelligence to prevent the October 7, 2023 attack cannot be attributed to a single factor or reduced to a simple technical or episodic breakdown. Rather, it resulted from the interaction of several levels of vulnerability: collection weakened by structural gaps and by deliberate adversary circumvention strategies; analysis constrained by deeply rooted and unchallenged interpretive frameworks; organizational dysfunctions linked to fragmented

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1. Mark Mazzetti and Ronen Bergman, "'Buying Quiet': Inside the Israeli Plan That Propped Up Hamas."
 2. "Netanyahu vows to pursue 'historic and spiritual mission' for 'Greater Israel' plan," TRT Global, 13 August 2025.
 3. Cristina Mas, "Netanyahu: 'We allowed Qatar to fund Hamas to keep the Palestinians divided'," *ara*, 22 May 2025.

responsibilities; and, finally, a decision-making process shaped by political saturation, the centralization of power, and agenda-setting dynamics that contributed to underestimating the threat. This cluster of factors, which the literature on intelligence failure helps us conceptualize, reveals the complexity of a system in which warning signals were not absent but nevertheless failed to be incorporated in ways that could prevent strategic surprise.

The effects of this strategic surprise were considerable. It profoundly shook Israeli society, strained civilian and military institutions, and led to an abrupt redefinition of the state's political and security objectives toward the Gaza Strip and its regional adversaries. This reconfiguration, initiated under the pressure of emergency, has since become part of a broader transformation of the region's security architecture.

III. Post-October 7 Challenges and Perspectives

The October 7, 2023 attack marked a major failure of Israeli intelligence, but more fundamentally it signalled the collapse of the four pillars of Israel's security strategy for managing the Gaza Strip – deterrence, containment, targeted killing, and division – on which the intelligence system itself had rested. October 7 therefore shattered far more than a security apparatus: it brought down the certainties on which Israel believed it had built its protection. The scale of this rupture requires moving beyond the events of October 7 alone to consider more broadly the consequences of this collapse for Israel's security doctrine and for the role now assigned to the intelligence services within this new strategic orientation.

From Strategic Rupture to Institutional Crisis: The Destabilization of Israel's Security Architecture

On October 7, 2023, Hamas managed within a matter of hours to circumvent every pillar of Israel's security doctrine toward Gaza: deterrence was discredited by the deliberate and planned launch of a large-scale attack and by the violence of the assault; containment was rendered obsolete by the simultaneous penetration of several thousand fighters by air and through the border barriers; targeting proved insufficient to prevent or disrupt the attack despite years of targeted neutralization operations; and, finally, the exploitation of intra-Palestinian divisions was made partly ineffective by tactical coordination among different armed factions. By striking at the heart of Israeli territory, Hamas did not merely cross every red line that Israeli intelligence had believed uncrossable; it brought about the

failure of the doctrinal pillars on which the State of Israel had based its own security.¹

The collapse of the pillars of Israel's security doctrine, combined with the shock produced by the brutality of the attack, generated a crisis of exceptional magnitude in Israel, giving rise to profound collective fear and an unprecedented institutional crisis. In the days following the attack, the first public statements by government members quickly pointed, more or less directly, to the responsibility of the intelligence services.² In response, several security officials suggested that their warnings had been ignored or relegated to a subordinate position in the decision-making hierarchy.³ This climate of mistrust materialized in a series of mutual accusations, fuelled by leaks reported in the Israeli press. Among them were allegations that members of the prime minister's entourage had attempted to obstruct access to his telephone records in order to reduce the traceability of his communications and of warnings transmitted before the attack.⁴ Whatever the underlying facts, these accusations reveal a profound breakdown in relations between the security establishment and the highest levels of the state, in which coordination mechanisms appear to have given way to logics of individual self-protection, reciprocal blame, and even sabotage – a dynamic without precedent in Israel's political and security history.

The government's repeated refusal to establish an independent commission of inquiry – whether parliamentary, judicial, or ad hoc – is another central indicator of this institutional crisis.⁵ Israeli strategic

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1. Gil Baram, Issac ben Israel, "Redefining vigilance: reevaluating the meaning of early warning in Israel's security doctrine and the October 7 attack," *Intelligence and National Security*, 40:3, 2025.
 2. "Netanyahu apologises for blaming Israeli security chiefs for Hamas attack," Al Jazeera, 29 October 2023.
 3. "Top intel official said to have twice warned PM of security risks posed by overhaul tensions."
 4. Jason Burke, "Netanyahu aide questioned over alleged tampering with 7 October phone records," *The Guardian*, 15 November 2024.
 5. Gershom Gorenberg, "Netanyahu Doesn't Want the Truth to Come Out," *The Atlantic*, 14 March 2025.

culture has traditionally treated critical review of failure as a structural component of institutional learning, as illustrated by investigations following the failure of the Yom Kippur War or the 2006 Israel-Lebanon War.¹ The absence of any institutionalized mechanism for internally assessing the causes of the October 7 failure prevents the event from being fully examined, contributing to a form of memorial and strategic impasse for the Israeli state. This refusal to establish an objective record obstructs the formal identification of responsibilities but, above all, deprives the security apparatus of a process of collective learning. By failing to probe the depth of the causes of the failure, it creates the conditions for continued deadlock. This absence of official recognition weakens Israel's capacity to produce a coherent reform of its strategy.

This institutional closure, aggravated by the October 7 failure, forms part of a broader process of power centralization that began with Benjamin Netanyahu's return to office in 2022. The progressive marginalization of collective decision-making bodies has further concentrated strategic decisions within a narrow, ideologically homogeneous circle that is relatively resistant to contradiction. This personalized form of governance has intensified considerably since October 7, with major security decisions increasingly taken through deliberations that are largely performative, weakening coordination mechanisms and deepening institutional imbalances.² The dismissal in April 2025 of Ronen Bar, head of Shin Bet, illustrates the dynamic at work: his divergence from the government's political line cost him his position, revealing the growing tension since October 7 between a duty to serve and an expectation of political alignment.³ Decisions taken within the War Cabinet, although formally collegial, most often ratify choices already

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1. Itai Shapira, "The Yom Kippur intelligence failure after fifty years: what lessons can be learned?," *Intelligence and National Security*, 38:6, 2023, 978–1002; Suzie Navot, "The Governmental Commission of Inquiry for The Second Lebanon War," *European Public Law*, 15:1, 2009.
 2. Imran Khalid, "Siege Politics: Netanyahu's crisis-driven grip on power," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 23 May 2025.
 3. Toi Staff, "'Out of deep concern for the State of Israel': Full text of Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar's affidavit," *The Times of Israel*, 22 April 2025.

made by the prime minister before the deliberations.¹ By increasing the dependence of security institutions on the executive, this evolution has transformed a system historically grounded in pluralism of views and the circulation of expertise into one increasingly vulnerable to confirmation bias and the logic of political loyalty.

The military operation in Gaza under way since October 27, 2023 illustrates all these dynamics: doctrinal collapse, a crisis of responsibility, the centralization of power, and a crisis in civil-military relations. Although the first weeks of the operation could be interpreted as a massive military response to a national trauma, subsequent events revealed a clear absence of a defined strategy. Since 2023, the political and military objectives of the war have remained vague, shifting, and at times contradictory. The stated objective, of course, remains the eradication of Hamas. Yaakov Amidror, a former major general and head of the National Security Council, explains that “this corresponds to the historic decision taken by the Israeli government immediately after October 7: this organization will no longer exist. Even if it takes ten years, we will eliminate it.”² Yet this objective has struggled to conceal a dynamic of escalation through the use of force, characterized by an unprecedented level of destruction, war crimes, and steadily increasing violations of international humanitarian law.³ Some ministers in Benjamin Netanyahu’s government no longer conceal their intentions regarding ethnic cleansing, the resettlement of the Gaza Strip,⁴ and the total destruction of any possibility of creating a Palestinian state.⁵ In the absence of a durable political horizon,

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1. Joshua Leifer, “The Netanyahu doctrine: how Israel’s longest-serving leader reshaped the country in his image.”
 2. Luc Bronner, “Frappes au Qatar: comment Israël pulvérise les perspectives de négociations sur Gaza,” *Le Monde*, 10 September 2025.
 3. “Israeli attacks on educational, religious and cultural sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amount to war crimes and the crime against humanity of extermination”, United Nations, Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 10 June 2025.
 4. Isabel Kershner, “Israeli Far-Right Minister Promotes Plan for Jewish Resettlement in Gaza,” *The New York Times*, 29 July 2025.
 5. Tom McArthur and Jon Donnison, “Israeli settlement plans will ‘bury’ idea of Palestinian state, minister says,” BBC, 14 August 2025.

and without a clear articulation between military objectives and a future framework for coexistence, the ongoing war illustrates the disappearance of strategy in favour of the brutal expression of a political impasse, in which the massive use of force only poorly conceals a refusal to think through a long-term solution to the Palestinian question.¹

Finally, this series of ruptures had repercussions far beyond institutional circles. It clearly deepened tensions among the political leadership, the military, and civil society. Several major figures from the security establishment – including former heads of Mossad, Shin Bet, and the General Staff – publicly criticized the political management of the crisis, sometimes in terms of unprecedented force in Israel.² These interventions should be analysed as symptomatic of a turning point in Israeli political-military history: they signal a loss of confidence between civilian and security elites at the very moment when national unity is a central issue for the country's resilience. This dislocation of the civil-military relationship raises fundamental questions about the future of the security apparatus and of Israel's institutional balances.³

The collapse of the doctrinal pillars of Israeli strategy, the institutional crisis that opened between the intelligence services and political power, and the absence of a transparent evaluative framework have revealed, since October 7, a profound disconnect among political objectives, security means, and strategic decision-making. This fragmentation has contributed to a prolonged dynamic of uncertainty in which the use of force has substituted for any long-term political vision. In this context, it is important to understand how the intelligence services have been employed since October 7, 2023.

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1. Patrick Kingsley, Ronen Bergman, Natan Odenheimer, "How Netanyahu Prolonged the War in Gaza to Stay in Power," *The New York Times*, 11 July 2025.
 2. Luc Bronner, "Israeli former security officials urge Trump to help stop the war in Gaza," *Le Monde*, 5 August 2025.
 3. Oded Nir, "Reading Israeli culture in the aftermath of October 7, 2023," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, published online, 23 June 2025.

A Failure (Already) Forgotten? Activities and Operations of Israeli Intelligence Services Since October 7

The launch of the ground operation in Gaza on October 27, 2023 immediately mobilized the entirety of Israel's security apparatus. The intelligence services were thus simultaneously drawn into a dual dynamic: on the one hand, they were fully mobilized to support the military effort; on the other, they were expected to assess the causes and dysfunctions that had produced the strategic surprise of October 7. This tension between operational imperatives and the requirement for introspection grew as the theatre of operations progressively widened, notably to Lebanon against Hezbollah and then to Iran. The intensity and simultaneity of these engagements produced major successes that demonstrated the power and operational effectiveness of Israeli intelligence, but they did not allow for a thorough process of evaluation.

Since October 7, 2023, there has been a partial redistribution of responsibilities among the intelligence services. The offensive launched in the Gaza Strip appears to have reaffirmed Aman's primacy in the conduct of operations and the monitoring of the territory. Although Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to state that these operations are not intended to result in a long-term occupation of Gaza, the duration and intensity of the military engagement since October 2023 have in practice amounted to prolonged and militarized territorial control.¹ Shin Bet thus appears to have receded into a more limited support role. This redistribution of operational responsibilities responds, first, to a logic of coherence with the forces deployed on the ground: in the context of a large-scale military operation, it is logical for Aman to resume leadership of intelligence operations related to Gaza. This reorganization reflects a willingness to reform operational methods, but it also illustrates the effort to centralize

1. Toi Staff, "Netanyahu: Israel to take military control of all of Gaza, but 'we don't want to keep it,'" *The Times of Israel*, 7 August 2025.

the chain of command discussed above, which tends to concentrate decision-making in the hands of a small number of political and military actors.¹ Finally, Shin Bet's gradual marginalization from the Gaza portfolio is probably not unrelated to the dismissal of its director, Ronen Bar, in April 2025. His departure, which occurred amid public tensions, largely reflected the growing disagreements since October 7 between the head of the domestic intelligence service and the prime minister. These disagreements concern strategy toward Hamas and the Gaza Strip, but more broadly they also raise the question of the uses to which political authorities may legitimately put an intelligence service in a democracy.²

The engagement of Israeli intelligence services alongside the Israel Defense Forces in the Gaza Strip since October 27, 2023 has therefore produced notable but mixed results. Israel succeeded in eliminating two central figures in the movement: Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau, killed in Tehran on July 31, 2024, and Yahya Sinwar, head of the military wing in Gaza, killed in Rafah on October 16, 2024.³ These targeted killings contributed to weakening Hamas's leadership and disrupting its chain of command, while ground and air operations simultaneously neutralized several thousand fighters. Although estimates vary between official statements and internal assessments, the latter put the number of fighters taken out of action at approximately 8,900.⁴ These losses, while difficult to verify, nevertheless affect the movement's immediate offensive potential. With regard to infrastructure, although the IDF claims to have destroyed a significant portion of the tunnel network, internal assessments suggest that only a fraction – approximately one quarter – of the

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1. Ethan Bronner, "Israeli military intelligence goes back to basics with focus on spies, not tech," *The Japan Times*, 2 August 2025.
 2. "Ronen Bar: 'Le Shin Bet s'est opposé aux transferts d'argent du Qatar vers Gaza'," *i24News*, 12 June 2025.
 3. Aleks Philipps, "Yahya Sinwar, leader of Hamas, killed by Israeli forces," BBC, 18 October 2024.
 4. Yuval Abraham, "Israeli army database suggests at least 83% of Gaza dead were civilians," *+972 Magazine*, 21 August 2025.

entire network has been rendered durably unusable.¹ These elements therefore point to a gap between the scale of the military effort, the stated objective of destroying the organization, and the actual results of the operations, raising questions about the strategic significance of these successes given Hamas's demonstrated resilience and capacity for regeneration in the past.

Alongside sustained engagement on the Gaza front, Israeli intelligence services have, since October 7, 2023, also been mobilized on other regional fronts. In September 2024, a series of coordinated operations in Lebanon marked a turning point in the nature of the targets selected. The elimination of several senior military commanders and, above all, of Hezbollah's historic leader Hassan Nasrallah on September 28, after 32 years at the head of the organization, highlighted both Israel's determination to continue its targeting strategy against its enemies despite its failure to contain Hamas and the enduring strength of its intelligence apparatus in collection and the tracking of high-value targets.²

Before the killing of Hassan Nasrallah, the defining operation of this Lebanese sequence was the attack conducted on September 17 and 18 against pagers and electronic devices used by Hezbollah members. The operation, which killed 42 people, including 12 civilians, and injured approximately 1,500, relied on an exceptionally elaborate cover apparatus involving transnational financial arrangements and a network of fake companies operating as front organizations. These clandestine mechanisms enabled booby-trapped technologies to be introduced progressively into the communications equipment used by Hezbollah operational cadres.³ An operation of this scale necessarily resulted from long-term work and relied on structures established well before October 7. It was perceived both in Israel and

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1. "Israel estimates 'only a quarter of Hamas tunnels destroyed' since war began," *Middle East Eye*, 9 April 2025.
 2. Mick Krever, "Israel killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut strike, group confirms," CNN, 28 September 2024.
 3. Sheera Frenkel, Ronen Bergman and Hwaida Saad, "How Israel Built a Modern-Day Trojan Horse: Exploding Pagers."

abroad as a demonstration of Israeli offensive-intelligence capabilities.¹ It illustrated the combined mastery of complex and sophisticated clandestine mechanisms operating in coordination with intelligence collection for targeting purposes and the use of advanced surveillance technologies.² Beyond its immediate tactical impact, the operation sent a powerful strategic signal to the broader Iranian-Shiite axis regarding the depth of Israeli intelligence penetration and its ability to operate at the very heart of adversary systems. It also reinforced, within Israeli political discourse, the image of an intelligence apparatus that remained highly effective and capable of delivering violent and precise blows against its enemies despite the lingering consequences of the October 7 surprise.

This demonstration of power was extended even more strikingly in June 2025 through a series of coordinated strikes on Iranian territory as part of an operation named "Rising Lion." The precision and execution of the operation once again demonstrated an exceptional array of intelligence capabilities.³ Targets reportedly included a ballistic-missile research centre in the Isfahan region,⁴ an underground storage site for uranium-enrichment-related components near Natanz,⁵ and Iranian generals and scientists involved in drone and missile programs.⁶ The precision of strikes at multiple locations across Iranian territory and against targets of such varied character indicates the exploitation of multiple intelligence sources by Israeli services: continuous satellite surveillance, signals intercepts, the exploitation of clandestinely

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1. Luca Trenta, "Nowhere to Hide: Israel's Pager Attacks on Hezbollah," RUSI, 18 September 2024.
 2. Richard Horowitz, "Israel's Pager Operation: Not an Indiscriminate Attack But a Strategic Success," *Just Security*, 11 March 2025.
 3. Clément Renault, "The Intelligence Behind the Strike: Was Everyone Wrong About Iran's Nuclear Program?," *The Cypher Brief*, 23 June 2025.
 4. "Israel strikes Iran's Isfahan nuclear site, buildings on fire in Tel Aviv," Al Jazeera, 21 June 2025.
 5. David Gritten, "Centrifuges at Iran's Natanz site likely destroyed, nuclear watchdog says," BBC, 16 June 2025.
 6. Callum Sutherland, "Here Are the Top Iranian Generals and Scientists Targeted and Killed by Israeli Strikes – and What We Know About Them," *Time Magazine*, 21 June 2025.

infiltrated human and technical ground sensors, and, in all likelihood, the recruitment of very high-level human sources within Iran's military and industrial establishments.¹ The coordination of these strikes also underscores the robustness of the Israeli intelligence-processing chain and its ability to transform raw data from the full range of its sensors into concrete offensive operations.

A central dimension of this operation was the support provided by the United States.² Direct U.S.³ support in the conduct of the operation suggests prior intelligence sharing for targeting, identification, and target tracking. Several open sources refer to close cooperation between Mossad and the CIA in the months preceding the operation, particularly in the sharing of technical intelligence on the movements of Iranian personnel, radar mapping, and target confirmation. Surveillance drones operating from U.S. bases in the Gulf are also reported to have provided real-time coverage in certain sensitive areas. This intelligence cooperation demonstrates a strengthened strategic alignment between the two countries on the Iranian issue. Beyond the strong official support provided to Israel by the Trump administration, it also illustrates the continuity of ties between the two countries' intelligence services in support of the war effort currently pursued by Netanyahu's government.

Symbolically and politically, these strikes obviously reinforced perceptions of Israeli operational superiority in the "shadow war" against Iran. They were widely portrayed in the international media as evidence that Israel retained the ability to conduct complex operations despite the failures revealed by the October 7 attacks. In Israel, these successes were extensively mobilized in political discourse.⁴

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1. Josh Robertson, "How Mossad worked inside Iran to launch Operation Rising Lion and the questions that remain," ABC, 27 June 2025.
 2. On this cooperation, see: "NSA and Israeli intelligence: memorandum of understanding."
 3. Nava Freiberg, "Mossad hails Israel's 'historic' Iran offensive, thanks CIA in rare public message," *The Times of Israel*, 26 June 2025.
 4. Lazar Berman, "Netanyahu claims 'historic victory,' says 'we sent Iran's nuclear program down the drain,'" *The Times of Israel*, 25 June 2025.

Yet these large-scale operations against Hezbollah and Iran belong to the realm of offensive intelligence, an area in which the power and quality of Israeli services had never been seriously called into question and whose logic – based on external action, technology, and clandestinity – remains largely disconnected from the structural issues that made the October 7 strategic surprise possible.

Moreover, a closer reading of these events calls for a more qualified assessment of their strategic significance. These operations demonstrate undeniable operational excellence, but they do not justify concluding that lessons from October 7 have been learned. First, they were largely the responsibility of Mossad, whose role in monitoring Gaza has always remained very limited. Second, however spectacular these tactical victories may be, they do not necessarily reflect changes in the analytical processes, warning systems, or institutional dynamics that failed before October 7. In other words, these operations confirm what has long been known about Israel's ability to strike its enemies with precision, but they tell us nothing about its capacity to transform its internal processes and the culture of its intelligence services for the purpose of anticipating threats.¹

Finally, these operations raise the broader question of the political handling of failure. By emphasizing these external successes on both the national and international stages, the Israeli government helps sustain a narrative of resilience and mastery that tends to push the structural causes of the October 7 strategic surprise into the background. This instrumentalization of intelligence as a lever of political legitimation obstructs the opening of a genuine public debate on the functioning of the security system, its governance, and the institutional reforms that may be required. From this perspective, operational success acts as a smokescreen: it reassures without necessarily curing, and it keeps the services focused on immediate performance in ways that leave little room for fundamental reform.

1. For an in-depth examination of the Israeli services through the lens of intelligence culture, see: Itai Shapira, *Israeli National Intelligence Culture Problem-Solving, Exceptionalism, and Pragmatism*.

Toward a Reform of Israeli Intelligence?

The context of open warfare since October 2023 has severely constrained the possibility of institutional reflection on the deeper causes of the strategic surprise. Operational urgency dominates, and the priority given to military operations prevents the distance necessary for an independent critical assessment. Attention is absorbed by management of the present, while any attempt at serious introspection comes up against the immediate imperatives of the war in Gaza and the struggle against external threats, pushing reform to an undefined future horizon. This constraint constitutes a major obstacle to opening a genuine debate about the state of the Israeli intelligence system and the vulnerabilities exposed on October 7.

The absence of a public, parliamentary, or independent examination of the causes of the failure does not mean that the intelligence services themselves have entirely failed to address them. In keeping with the demanding institutional tradition that has historically characterized Israeli intelligence, internal investigations were launched in the months following the attack. Although a significant portion of these reports remains classified for obvious reasons related to the protection of sources and methods, the elements that have been made public – and on which this study draws extensively – demonstrate a high level of self-criticism, including precise findings on analytical assumptions, organizational culture, and interactions with the political level.¹ This introspective work, conducted internally and often initiated by the senior leadership of the services themselves, reflects an institutional culture of responsibility and a genuine desire

1. Aman report on October 7 (in Hebrew): https://drive.google.com/file/d/1adxtbFqEpwJHKsSs_6fhm-Sct_DMR151/view?usp=drive_link; Shin Bet report (in Hebrew), available here: <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/25551448-yqry-tkhqyr-shyrvt-hbytkhvn-hklly-710/>

to understand the dysfunctions that occurred.¹ These reports constitute a valuable basis for possible reforms, but their internal production limits their scope, particularly with regard to the impartiality of the assessment of responsibility and the robustness of the diagnosis produced. Moreover, however relevant their findings may be, they cannot lead to concrete reforms without a clear willingness on the part of political authorities to act upon them – something that remains highly improbable in the current context of governance and sustained, intensive military mobilization.

The political authorities have in fact adopted a markedly different perspective from that of the services. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose personal responsibility for the management of the Hamas threat before October 7 is regularly raised in public debate as well as in intelligence-service reports, has firmly opposed any form of independent inquiry.² Despite repeated demands from opposition figures, former security officials, and members of civil society, no parliamentary commission, in whatever institutional form, has yet been authorized. This deliberate obstruction appears to be driven primarily by a logic of personal political self-preservation on the part of the prime minister. The prolonged war, political tensions, polarization of Israeli society, and erosion of checks and balances have therefore prevented a debate on the deeper causes of the October 7 failure. More fundamentally, this blockage reflects the growing institutional tension discussed above between a security bureaucracy subject to demands for effectiveness and a political leadership seeking protection and legitimation. The system therefore continues to operate in a state of constrained continuity, without the lessons of October 7 having been fully drawn.

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1. See also, on this point, Ofek Riemer's remarkable study: Ofek Riemer, "Learning from mistakes: the impact of the October 7 surprise attack on the youngest generation of IDF intelligence analysts," *Intelligence and National Security*, published online, July 2025.
 2. Chantal Da Silva and Yarden Segev, "Netanyahu rails against the 'deep state' in tirade rejecting court-led probe into Oct. 7 attacks," *NBC News*, 4 March 2025.

Under these conditions, the most likely scenario is that the Israeli intelligence apparatus will continue to operate without major structural reorganization in the medium term. Although recent external operations have demonstrated the resilience and undiminished technical sophistication of its offensive capabilities, they provide no answer to the systemic dysfunctions revealed by October 7. Without genuinely addressing the vulnerabilities identified in collection, analysis, coordination, and decision-making, Israeli services remain exposed to the risk of serious failures in the near future. Former Aman chief Aharon Haliva, who resigned after submitting his service's internal assessment report, concluded that "the intelligence failure was not about individuals; it was about something much deeper, extending over many years and requiring a far more fundamental correction,"¹ arguing that the entire system "needs to be dismantled and rebuilt." Moreover, the absence of political recognition of these failures weakens the capacity for institutional learning and undermines the conditions necessary to build a shared memory of the failure. In this context, reform remains not only improbable but, in some respects, undesirable for parts of the political elite, who would regard it as a direct challenge to their legitimacy. The risk is therefore substantial that the October 7 surprise, because it has not been fully analysed, will remain a historic failure whose causes have not been resolved.

The October 7, 2023 attack did not merely expose the failures of an intelligence apparatus; it profoundly destabilized Israel's entire security architecture by bringing about the collapse of the doctrinal assumptions on which its strategy toward Hamas had rested. This systemic shock opened a lasting institutional crisis marked by unprecedented tensions among political authority, the intelligence services, and the military hierarchy. Mutual accusations over responsibility, internal strategic disagreements, and the absence of transparent evaluative mechanisms deepened fractures within the state apparatus and made it difficult to formulate a unified response to the crisis. In this fragmented context, Israeli services nevertheless continued to

1. Toi Staff, "Former IDF intel chief: Oct. 7 was 'much deeper' than an intelligence failure."

deploy their operational expertise across several theatres, achieving notable successes in Lebanon and Iran. These performances demonstrate that offensive capabilities remain intact, but they do not justify concluding that the intelligence failure revealed by October 7 has been overcome. The question of structural reform of the security apparatus therefore remains unresolved, constrained simultaneously by the state of war, by logics of political self-protection, and by the absence of an institutional framework suited to genuine introspection.

Conclusion

Analysis of the mechanisms that produced the strategic surprise of October 7, 2023 reveals a systemic failure that cannot be understood through a single explanation or factor. By combining insights from the literature on intelligence failure with a detailed examination of Israeli dynamics, it becomes clear that the failure resulted from the convergence of several factors: shortcomings in collection, analytical biases, bureaucratic dysfunctions, and political failures in decision-making.

The shortcomings observed stemmed less from an absence of information than from a structural inability to interpret, prioritize, and transform it into operational warning. Multiple signals, at times precise and convergent, were either neglected or filtered through rigid interpretive frameworks that reflected excessive confidence in surveillance technologies and an underestimation of Hamas's capabilities and intentions. These clear analytical biases, deeply embedded within the security apparatus, combined with bureaucratic inertia and routines that obstructed the proper consideration of collected information. These shortcomings were compounded by political and ideological factors at the highest level of the state that contributed to reinforcing the leadership's own blindness to security warnings. The climate of institutional crisis, the saturation of the government agenda, the centralization of decision-making within a narrow circle, and the priority accorded to ideological objectives created an environment in which the dissemination and consideration of intelligence were themselves dysfunctional. Taken together, these factors reveal not a simple failure of vigilance but a collective inability to conceive of rupture – an inability produced as much by structures as by individuals and their representations.

In its complexity, this failure provides an exemplary illustration of what the literature describes as an intelligence failure: a situation in which available and technically accessible information proves insufficient to trigger a response because of interconnected shortcomings at several levels of the process. Drawing lessons from such an event

therefore requires resisting the search for a single culprit and instead understanding the structural conditions of vulnerability within which the intelligence services operated.

Yet the period since October 7 has still not opened the institutional space necessary for a comprehensive reassessment of this historic failure. Israeli intelligence services, particularly Shin Bet and Aman, have undertaken significant internal evaluation efforts. As far as the publicly released sections are concerned, these reports deserve recognition for their methodological rigor and their willingness to acknowledge major errors of assessment. They reflect a professional culture oriented toward high standards and institutional learning, but their impact remains limited in the absence of a political and institutional framework capable of translating their findings into concrete reforms. To date, no independent commission and no parliamentary oversight mechanism have been established to investigate comprehensively the causes of the failure. The government, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular, continues to reject any initiative moving in that direction.

The major successes achieved by Israeli services in Lebanon and Iran since October 7 cannot conceal the persistent failure to draw lessons from October 7 itself. Targeting operations against Hezbollah's communications systems and senior leadership, and against Iranian nuclear infrastructure, have certainly confirmed the technical performance and striking power of Mossad and military intelligence. They have contributed, to some extent, to restoring the external credibility of Israel's security apparatus. But they remain rooted in a logic of power projection and offensive action, with little direct connection to the structural failures that made the October 7 surprise possible.

The real risk for Israel and its intelligence services, therefore, is that a gaping wound may be allowed to close only superficially, sustained by the illusion that operational successes are sufficient to heal it. Without a process of institutional clarification, without public recognition of the dysfunctions involved, and without a partial or comprehensive overhaul of intelligence governance, the systemic conditions that made the original blindness possible will remain. October 7 could

thus mark not only a historic rupture but also become a blind spot in Israel's strategic memory, preventing the state from fully incorporating the lessons of its own failure. As much as it is a security challenge, this is a democratic challenge of the first order for the future of Israel.

Spying Without Seeing

Israeli Intelligence Services
and the Failure of October 7

The October 7, 2023 attack carried out by Hamas against Israeli territory constitutes one of the most serious intelligence failures in the history of the State of Israel. The event marked a profound strategic rupture that called into question the doctrinal foundations upon which Israeli security policy toward the Gaza Strip long rested. Drawing on the analytical tools developed in the literature on intelligence failure, this study offers a systemic interpretation of this strategic surprise. It demonstrates that the causes of the October 7 failure lay in a combination of shortcomings in intelligence collection, the persistence of unchallenged analytical assumptions, bureaucratic routines, and dysfunctions in the relationship between intelligence services and political authorities. It also shows that the operation under way in the Gaza Strip since October 27, 2023 has reshaped the division of responsibilities among the services, and that the major successes of the operations conducted in 2024 and 2025 against Hezbollah and Iran, while demonstrating a high degree of technical proficiency and confirming the offensive power of Israeli intelligence, should not be confused with a genuine incorporation of the lessons of the October 7 failure.