



The Role of Intelligence in Geopolitical Conflicts

Case Studies of Ukraine and Gaza

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Middle East Forum

For Policies and Future Studies

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Introduction

The armed forces are engaged in front-line battles, deploying a range of firearms and other weaponry against hostile forces. Meanwhile, a covert war is unfolding between the warring factions on a different front, characterised by secret operations that transcend borders, striking deep within enemy territory. These operations also pursue adversaries, their agents, and their enterprises worldwide. This is the intelligence war, a conflict as hazardous as traditional military warfare due to its critical role in tracking the escalation of disputes, monitoring tensions, and predicting the onset of direct military confrontations.

During wartime, the significance of intelligence agencies becomes evident as they supply the national armed forces with essential information and target lists they have compiled. Concurrently, intelligence agencies work to undermine the enemy's combat capabilities and bolster the home front. Moreover, these agencies are crucial in managing negotiations and resolving conflicts, as well as forecasting the prospects of conflict and peace and their impact on national interests and security.

With the advancement of information and communication technologies, the role of intelligence in geopolitical conflicts has expanded, becoming more sophisticated and perilous. This evolution is evident in modern conflicts such as the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza. Therefore, it is valuable to highlight the role of intelligence agencies in these conflicts, examining both their successes and failures and their effects on the parties involved. Additionally, these conflicts underscore the roles of intelligence agencies not directly involved in the hostilities but aligned with nations supporting each side. This aspect will be explored in this study with examples and evidence, especially considering that international supporters confront each other in both conflicts, directly and indirectly, within the broader geopolitical arena.





Pre-War Intelligence Roles

Providing Reports to Political Leadership and Decision Makers on the Risks and Benefits of War Initiation:



National intelligence agencies monitor escalating tensions between their country and another evaluating these tensions through the lens of national security and strategic interests. Based on this assessment, intelligence agencies gather information from various sources, conduct political and security analyses, and then submit a detailed report to the state's political leadership. This report outlines the rationale for either launching a military operation against a hostile nation or refraining from such action, with the ultimate goal of protecting the nation's security.

Before the conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalated, Russian intelligence warned the Kremlin about the growing support within Ukraine for joining the European Union, especially after the rise of a new pro-Western government in Kyiv. They also highlighted the potential threat if Ukraine accepted the United States' invitation to join NATO, which would pose significant risks to Russian national security. Russia views Ukraine as the western gateway and a crucial geographical buffer against NATO's expansion. The strategic position of Crimea, serving as an advanced naval base, provides Russia with control over the Black Sea due to its central location.

Russia is aware that losing Crimea specifically, and Ukraine generally, would benefit NATO countries, who could then encircle Russia by land and sea after establishing a NATO base in Crimea. This would hinder Russia's ability to navigate the Black Sea and access the Mediterranean Sea. Additionally, it would block the export of gas to Europe through Ukrainian territory, which constitutes 80% of Russia's gas exports. Such a situation would have severe economic consequences for Russia.



Russia perceives Ukraine as a natural extension of its strategic interests, crucially aiming to prevent its accession to NATO. This strategic imperative includes asserting control over Ukraine and blocking its path to NATO membership. Of particular importance is the strategic port of Sevastopol, where the Russian military base hosts its largest naval fleet. Protecting this base is vital for Russia, especially as the pro-Western political leadership in Kyiv seeks to annul agreements signed between President Vladimir Putin and the former Ukrainian President Yanukovich, who was aligned with Russia. These agreements, including the extension of the Russian naval base's presence in Crimea's Sevastopol beyond its original expiration in 2017 to 2042, highlight the geopolitical threat faced by Russia.





Pre-War Intelligence Roles



In response to this threat, Russian intelligence has conducted preparatory and essential special operations, crucial before any potential military action is undertaken. These operations focused on two key strategic goals:

Seizing Crimea and its vital port of Sevastopol: In late February 2014, Ukraine descended into political chaos following the ousting of President Yanukovich and his subsequent departure from the country amidst street protests. Russian intelligence perceived a shift towards pro-Western political opposition gaining power in Ukraine. Exploiting the internal turmoil and identity divisions, Russia swiftly deployed special military and intelligence forces to Crimea, strategically important for its port in Sevastopol. They secured governmental facilities and strategic sites, asserting control. On March 16, 2014, Crimea held a referendum where 95% voted to join Russia. This enabled Russia to annex Crimea, establishing a new geopolitical reality before Ukraine's new Western-leaning authorities could stabilize the situation nationwide.

Supporting rebel movements and separatists in Donbas to fragment Ukraine: Russia values the strategic importance of Ukrainian opposition to Western alignment, primarily concentrated in eastern Ukraine. Russian intelligence actively supported opposition movements, fueling escalating unrest. Pro-Russian demonstrators in Donetsk, backed by Russian intelligence, seized government buildings and declared independence for Donetsk and Luhansk on May 12, 2014. Russia aided in forming self-defense forces in Donbas to counter Ukrainian military operations.

This support extended beyond armament and training to include extensive media campaigns against Ukrainian military actions, orchestrated by Russian intelligence.





Pre-War Intelligence Roles



Russian intelligence operations in Ukraine aimed to create conditions conducive to rebellion and separatist movements as part of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy within Ukrainian territory. These efforts have historical roots in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where Russian intelligence sought to foster Russian nationalist sentiments in Ukraine. As a result, some Russian-speaking Ukrainians aligned with broader Eurasian movements, with separatist leaders in Donetsk previously trained in camps supervised by the Eurasian Youth Union, closely linked to Russian intelligence. This early cultivation of pro-Russian sentiment played a crucial role in promoting separatist aspirations in Donbas, beginning as early as 2005.

These achievements are credited to the Russian intelligence agency, which informed the Kremlin of national security threats, coordinated a comprehensive action plan with all Russian state institutions, and successfully implemented it. However, these successes are not always guaranteed due to shortcomings in intelligence work, inaccuracies in the information obtained, or conflicting reports within the state's intelligence agencies. Such discrepancies can prevent political leadership from making informed decisions. Additionally, internal state dynamics and the decision-makers themselves might be at fault; political infighting and the dominance of personal political agendas among leaders often hinder the appropriate decisions necessary for protecting national security.





Regarding the October 7th operation in the Gaza envelope, did the Israeli leadership receive warnings from its security agencies?

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has faced political crises and internal conflicts, particularly in the past four years, affecting its political, security, and military institutions.

The "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation on October 7, 2023, launched by Palestinian resistance factions, notably Hamas, intensified the disputes within the Israeli political leadership. Since then, various factions in Israel have blamed each other for the failure to anticipate the attack and the resulting losses. Amid these disputes, the Israel Broadcasting Corporation made a significant revelation, claiming that Unit 8200 of the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate prepared a document in September 2023, three weeks before the attack, titled "Detailed Raid Training from Start to Finish." The document detailed a series of exercises conducted by Hamas elite units, training on raiding military sites and kibbutzim, kidnapping soldiers, and securing them within Gaza. The first step in the exercise, as outlined in the document, involved creating breaches in a mock Israeli army site in Gaza, simulating locations near the border. The Israel Broadcasting Corporation alleged that security authorities ignored the document, adding that before the attack on the Gaza envelope, the military and security institutions were celebrating the new advanced smart security barrier, completed two years prior, which included above and below-ground walls equipped with advanced technological systems. Regardless of the accuracy of the Israel Broadcasting Corporation IPBC's information, the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation exposed either a significant Israeli intelligence failure or, at best, an institutional failure to take security warnings seriously, if the IPBC's account is accurate.





Predicting "Zero Hour" or Approximate Timings for Commencement of Military Operations:



Identifying the precise timing of an enemy's planned military operation is a crucial intelligence success. It deprives the enemy of the element of surprise and lessens the impact of the initial strike, which is often harmful due to the unpreparedness of the targeted sites and the unexpected nature of the attack. Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a group of amateurs posted videos on TikTok showing the movements and build-up of Russian forces near the Ukrainian border. Ukrainian and Western intelligence agencies quickly picked up on these videos and cross-referenced them with existing information from various sources.

In fact, Ukrainian and American intelligence had already employed a significant number of digital investigators to monitor the escalating tensions between Russia and Ukraine, aiming to predict the exact moment of the attack. These investigators used open-source intelligence to track the movements of Russian forces towards the Ukrainian border. Furthermore, both the United States and the United Kingdom revealed detailed intelligence about Russia's war plans and objectives in Ukraine, successfully estimating an approximate timeline for the Russian invasion. The United States intentionally publicised the timing of the Russian attack on Ukraine to pre-emptively thwart the Russian military strategy and negate the element of surprise.

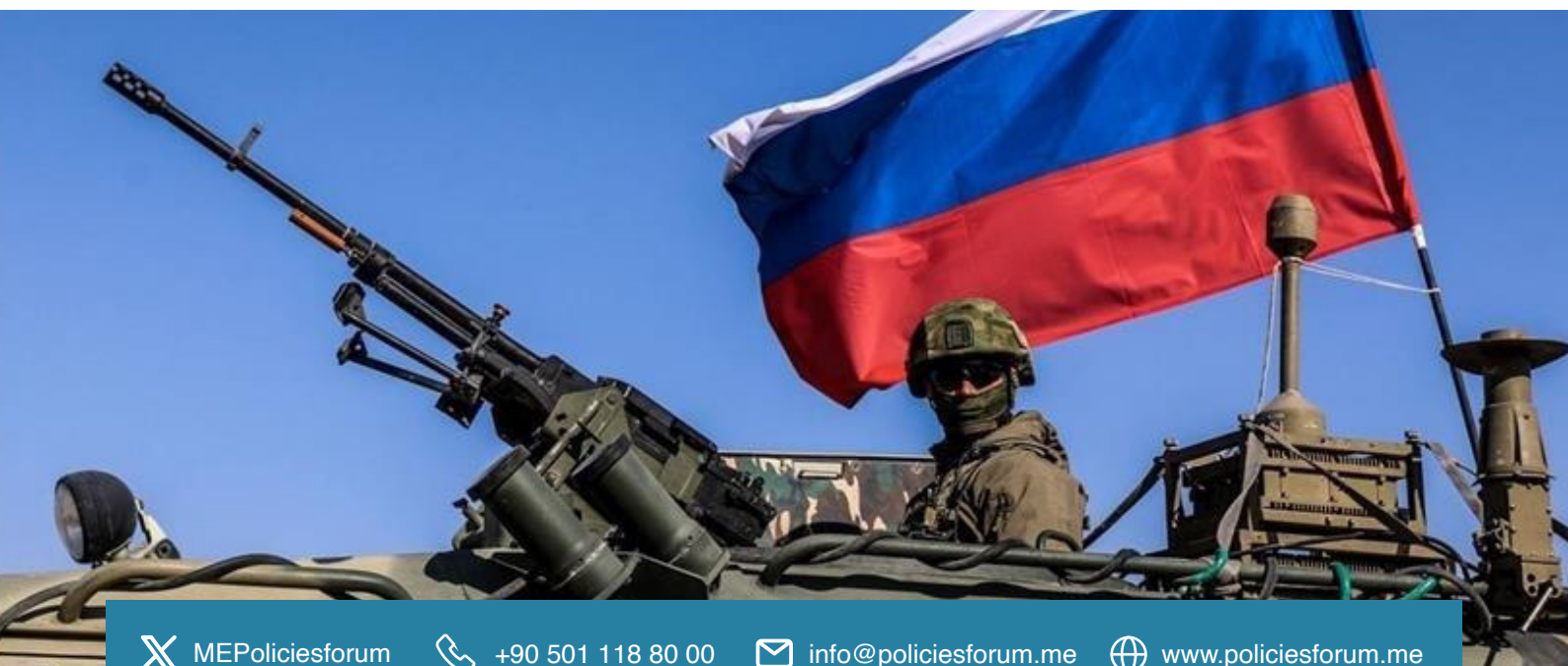


Steering Public Opinion, Propaganda Campaigns, and Media to Justify Waging War:



Entering any war or armed conflict is generally unpopular due to the human and economic costs, as well as the fear of unknown consequences. Thus, intelligence agencies often conduct media and propaganda campaigns to influence public opinion, mobilising the populace in favour of war, urging them to heed the call of duty, and preparing them for sacrifices.

Before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russian propaganda campaigns intensified to sway public opinion in favour of the war against Ukraine, a country sharing the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith, geographic proximity, and a common history with Russia. The Russian intelligence agencies focused their campaigns on accusing the Ukrainian leadership of racism and fostering neo-Nazism against Russian-speaking Ukrainians. The propaganda highlighted the alleged abuses faced by Russian nationals at the hands of so-called neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists, particularly in the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas (southeastern Ukraine), as well as in Crimea. Groups such as the Right Sector movement, the Svoboda Party, and volunteer military units that later became part of the Ukrainian army in the separatist war, like the Azov Battalion, were specifically labelled as Nazis by the Russian propaganda machine.





For months leading up to the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, Hamas highlighted the violations committed by the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, particularly in Jenin refugee camp, as well as the crimes of settlers against Palestinians in Hebron and Jerusalem, the repeated incursions into Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the attacks on worshippers there. In its statements, Hamas also drew attention to the severe blockade of Gaza, which has turned the area into a large prison. Media outlets close to Hamas and other Palestinian resistance factions criticised the international community's tolerance of the far-right government in Tel Aviv, especially after Netanyahu presented a new Middle East map at the United Nations General Assembly, which omitted any representation of a Palestinian state, the West Bank, or Gaza. They also condemned the unconditional Arab official normalisation with the occupation, warning of its potential harm to the Palestinian cause and the future of the Palestinian people. At the launch of the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation on 7 October 2023, the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, released a statement from its leader, Mohammed Deif. In the statement, Deif announced the reasons for the operation, citing the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people and stating that the Al-Qassam leadership had decided to put an end to these crimes. He declared, "The time when the occupation rampaged without accountability has ended."

In response, Israeli intelligence agencies propagated a narrative that Hamas had killed thousands of Israeli civilians at a party, in their homes, raped women, and beheaded children. This narrative initially succeeded in garnering local and international support at the beginning of the war on Gaza. However, its falsehood was later exposed by several Hebrew newspapers.



Undermining Enemy Intelligence Capabilities Prior to Military Confrontation:

In preparation for military confrontations, intelligence agencies in the involved countries initiate covert operations to dismantle enemy spy networks and thwart clandestine activities conducted by adversarial intelligence within their own territories.

During the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, the Al-Qassam Brigades stormed the "Urim Base," one of Israel's most significant intelligence and espionage installations, and the headquarters of Unit 8200, Israel's elite military intelligence unit. The Urim Base is also a global espionage centre supported by the intelligence agencies of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, collectively known as the "Five Eyes." This operation had a profound impact on Israeli military intelligence capabilities before the Israeli army's operation in Gaza, as Israel lost a valuable cache of information related to Palestinian resistance activities within the besieged Gaza Strip.

Two months after the "Al-Aqsa Flood" operation, Ronen Bar, head of Israel's internal security agency (Shin Bet), announced that Israel would pursue Hamas leaders in Qatar, Turkey, and Lebanon, even if it took years, hinting at potential assassination operations by Israeli intelligence. Following these Israeli threats, Turkey's intelligence agency, MIT, warned Israel of severe consequences if it attempted to target Hamas leaders on Turkish soil, as reported by official Turkish and Israeli media outlets. On 5 April 2024, four months after Turkey's warnings, Turkish Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya announced the arrest of eight individuals in a spy network who were gathering documents and information in Turkey for the Israeli Mossad.

Turkey, and its intelligence agency, cannot be considered allies of Hamas. However, both Turkey and Qatar play a strategic role in hosting Hamas, maintaining this position despite facing campaigns and pressures.





Meanwhile, European and American intelligence agencies, including the CIA, are considered strategic allies of their Ukrainian counterparts. In the first year of the Russia-Ukraine war, Western intelligence agencies collaborated to track Russian intelligence agents in Europe and the United States, resulting in the expulsion of over 400 Russian diplomats accused of working for Russian intelligence. These individuals were declared *persona non grata* and banned from re-entering European and American territories as diplomats. This large-scale expulsion eased the surveillance burden on Western intelligence agencies, as monitoring fewer suspects is more manageable. Investigative journalist and founder of Agentura.ru, Andrei Soldatov, confirmed that this collective expulsion significantly impacted Russian operations in Europe.

There is no neutral authority that can definitively confirm that the hundreds of Russian diplomats expelled from Western countries were all Russian intelligence agents. However, it is well-known that intelligence agents often operate under diplomatic cover. American officials stated that the expulsions were based on information gathered by the FBI regarding each individual's activities. Polish authorities also reported expelling 45 Russians for their involvement in activities that undermined state stability. Western intelligence had warned that Russian intelligence might target installations or supply convoys in Poland, a key transit route for weapons and ammunition to Ukraine.



Enhancing National Armed Forces Capabilities Through Pre-War Information Support:



No army in the world can go to war blindly. Hence, the role of national and allied intelligence agencies is to provide the armed forces' leadership with crucial information about enemy bases, weaknesses, supply routes, ammunition and weapon depots, airports, and a comprehensive list of military targets. This intelligence is gathered from human sources, such as agents and spies, or through technical surveillance methods, most notably drones and UAVs equipped with surveillance cameras.

The Ukrainian military intelligence possesses advanced UAVs, including the sophisticated PD-1 drone, capable of flying up to 18 miles. These drones are equipped with advanced electronics, infrared thermal cameras for night vision, and encrypted video links for espionage and surveillance to prevent interception. Ukrainian military intelligence used these drones to monitor Russian army movements, pinpoint their locations accurately, and identify the positions of combat units, artillery, and missiles. They also mapped out checkpoint locations and identified weak points along the front lines. At the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, social media was flooded with footage showing columns of Russian military vehicles and destroyed military sites, targeted by the Bayraktar drone obtained by Ukraine from Turkey.





There is a consensus, even among Israelis, that the military attack launched by the Al-Qassam Brigades on 7 October 2023 against Israeli military and intelligence bases was precisely targeted based on intelligence acquired by Hamas from its spies and agents within the occupied Palestinian territories.

In another intelligence breakthrough, on 18 June 2024, Hezbollah's Lebanese wing sent one of its drones, named "Al-Hudhud," which returned with sensitive images from northern Israel, specifically the city of Haifa. Hezbollah released a video showing detailed surveillance of northern Israeli areas, captured by drones that purportedly bypassed Israeli air defence systems. The footage revealed sensitive Israeli sites, including military bases, weapon depots, missile sites, seaports, and airports.

It also provided aerial views of Haifa, including the military-industrial complex, the port area hosting the Haifa military base, a petrochemical facility, the submarine command unit building, and various Sa'ar warships.

This operation occurred amidst increasing speculation about an Israeli military operation in southern Lebanon.





Training and Capacity Building of Intelligence Agencies by Allied Nations:

Intelligence agencies of allied countries collaborate to gather information about their common enemy, working together to infiltrate enemy systems and plant spies and agents within their territory. This cooperation also includes training sessions, exchange of expertise, and providing the necessary capabilities, skills, and technologies to the supported intelligence agency.

Western intelligence agencies and special forces, including the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), have overseen the training, support, and development of their Ukrainian counterparts for years. This training intensified after Russia's annexation of Crimea and included conducting special missions and covert operations. According to the American newspaper "The New York Times," the CIA supported the establishment of a secret underground centre in one of Ukraine's forests. The report detailed that the "hideout was built in the months following the Russian invasion to replace the destroyed command centre, serving as a secret nerve centre for the Ukrainian army," where teams of Ukrainian soldiers track Russian spy satellites and eavesdrop on communications between Russian leaders. The base is fully funded by the CIA and equipped with necessary resources.

In 2016, two years after Russia annexed Crimea, the CIA began training an elite Ukrainian commando force, including Unit 2245, which captured Russian drones and communication equipment. This allowed CIA technicians to conduct reverse engineering and break Moscow's encryption system.





Recruiting Agents and Spies:

Infiltrating hostile environments with agents and spies is a standard practice and is not limited to wartime scenarios alone. The war of intelligence between nations continues even in times of peace or after a conflict ends, as concerns about national security remain a primary focus for intelligence agencies. These agencies aim to monitor unspoken positions and hidden intentions.



Before any military conflict, a state intensifies its intelligence activities against the adversary, planting spies and recruiting agents within its institutions. These operatives are not only relied upon to gather information but may also be tasked with covert operations to undermine the enemy's capabilities before a war. Such operations might include sabotaging facilities, blowing up weapon depots and supply lines, and carrying out assassinations. These missions are typically executed by trained agents who are provided with the necessary cover by diplomatic missions, facilitating their activities and movements within the targeted country.

Since 2014, Ukraine has experienced an intense covert war with Russia, where both sides have attempted to recruit spies and agents against each other and eliminate the other side's operatives. This period coincided with a series of assassinations of Ukrainian officials, which were attributed to intelligence operations.





Pre-War Intelligence Roles



In Lebanon and Syria, the Israeli military has successfully carried out numerous assassinations targeting leaders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad Movement. It is evident that these operations did not solely rely on automated espionage techniques but also heavily depended on human elements, such as agents planted by Israeli intelligence in these countries. The deteriorating economic, financial, and social conditions of citizens and employees in these nations provide a fertile ground for recruiting agents, especially among active security officers suffering from declining salaries.

On the evening of 11 June 2024, an Israeli airstrike targeted a meeting of four prominent military leaders of Hezbollah in the town of Jwayya in southern Lebanon. It is well-known that Hezbollah officials are highly cautious to avoid any security breaches. Therefore, it is likely that this assassination was due to a human intelligence breach within the organization, possibly at the first or second level of its security ranks, given the sensitivity and secrecy of the meeting and the ranks of the individuals involved. This operation is distinct from the assassination of Hamas leader Sheikh Saleh al-Arouri, who was killed along with his comrades in an Israeli airstrike on an apartment in Beirut's southern suburbs on 2 January 2024. Since the military confrontations between the Israeli army and Hamas in Gaza began, al-Arouri had frequently appeared in interviews with satellite channels and news websites, which typically involve prior coordination through phone calls with the guest or their assistant to arrange the time and place of the interview. This indicates that security precautions and personal safety were not his priorities.

Conversely, the Al-Aqsa Flood operation launched by Al-Qassam Brigades on 7 October 2023 demonstrated that it was based on precise intelligence efforts concerning all the Israeli military installations and sites attacked. This implies that Hamas managed to infiltrate Israeli society and its security and defense institutions with spies and agents.





During War Intelligence Roles:

Conducting covert special operations

After the outbreak of war, intelligence agencies mobilise to participate in the war effort. They conduct highly secretive special operations targeting the enemy state's interests to weaken its military and logistical capabilities, striking behind enemy lines, within its territory, and in any location that represents a vital and strategic target for them.



During the first Russo-Ukrainian War in 2014, Western countries accused the Russian military intelligence unit, GRU29155, of carrying out a series of covert operations across Europe. These operations ranged from assassinations to acts of sabotage. Western intelligence agencies alleged that Russian intelligence was responsible for bombing an arms depot in a Czech forest in October 2014. Additionally, they accused it of poisoning an arms dealer in Bulgaria in 2018, who was using the Czech arms depot that had been bombed for supplying arms and ammunition to Ukraine. The British intelligence service also accused Russian intelligence of involvement in the poisonings in Salisbury, southern Britain. Despite the various Western accusations against GRU29155, there is no doubt that this unit successfully evacuated pro-Russian leaders and officials from Ukraine in 2014.

From 26 to 29 September 2022, a series of explosions occurred at the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, resulting from a deliberate act of sabotage targeting the Russian gas pipeline that supplies Western Europe with natural gas through the Baltic Sea. Subsequently, Russia and the United States exchanged accusations over who was behind the operation, while Sweden closed the investigations, citing the incident's location in international waters as outside the jurisdiction of its courts, without revealing details or the perpetrators.

II

During War Intelligence Roles



However, the explosions targeting the Russian gas pipelines coincided with the inauguration of the Baltic Pipe by Poland and Norway, a strategic project to transport Norwegian gas from the North Sea to Europe via Denmark, intended to replace the Russian Nord Stream pipelines. Russia protested the lack of investigative results, accusing Germany, Sweden, and Denmark of intentionally delaying the investigation to hide the perpetrators. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed dissatisfaction with what it described as the opaque nature of the investigation and the refusal to cooperate judicially with Russia.



On the morning of October 8, 2022, a massive explosion from a truck bomb shook the Crimean Bridge, which connects Russia to the Crimean Peninsula. The blast killed three people and ignited seven fuel carriages of a passing train, causing a widespread fire that extended to the parallel railway bridge and resulted in the partial collapse of the bridge. Russia accused Ukrainian intelligence of orchestrating the attack, while authorities in Kyiv considered the bridge a legitimate military target as it was used in the Russian war effort against Ukraine.

In August 2023, German intelligence arrested a captain in the German Army's procurement office named Thomas H. when he contacted the Russian embassy in Berlin and transferred classified military information. The German judiciary later accused him of sharing images of ammunition training systems and aircraft technology. The arrested captain, responsible for purchasing electronic warfare equipment used to disrupt air defence systems, later admitted in a Düsseldorf court to passing sensitive information to Russian intelligence, particularly regarding electronic warfare system.

Moreover, in early May 2024, US Department of State spokesperson, Matthew Miller announced that his country strongly condemns the malicious cyber activity conducted by the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, known as APT 28, and also known as (Fancy Bear). This activity has targeted Germany, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Sweden—nations known for their direct military and intelligence support to Ukraine.





In a special operation described by the Israeli military as successful, the Israeli war government announced on June 8, 2024, the rescue of four individuals who had been captured by al-Qassam Brigades in the infamous October 7 attack. The Israeli army stated that the hostage rescue operation was a joint effort between the Shin Bet and the military, conducted from two different locations in the middle of the Nuseirat refugee camp in Gaza.



Avichay Adraee, the Israeli military spokesperson, said that the operation was carried out in broad daylight and was complex, having been prepared for weeks, preceded by intelligence gathering on the hostages' locations. He added that the operation was highly secretive, known only to a few soldiers and military leaders, and overseen by the Chief of Staff and the head of Shin Bet. The special force comprised Shin Bet agents and the Yamam police unit, supported by a large contingent of the Israeli military and the 98th Division. However, Palestinian sources indicated the involvement of a special American unit dressed in civilian clothing, which used humanitarian aid trucks entering through a port being constructed by the US Navy on Gaza's coast before heading to the Nuseirat camp.

The Washington Post and New York Times reported that a special American team stationed in Israel provided intelligence for the rescue operation. American and Israeli officials confirmed that the involvement of US special units was limited to providing intelligence to the Israeli side. Nevertheless, Israeli-Yemeni blogger Moshe Yair posted on X about the casualties among the special forces that carried out the rescue operation, noting six soldiers killed, including one officer, and seven wounded, among them an American soldier.



Providing Information to the National Armed Forces

Intelligence agencies utilize their technical espionage capabilities and deploy spies and agents within hostile environments to collect crucial military information. This includes the locations of enemy military gatherings, weapon, fuel, and ammunition depots, key supply routes, artillery positions, missile bases, covert airfields, and other strategically important targets. After gathering this intelligence, it is relayed to the national armed forces to execute precise strikes on these vital targets.



Fortifying the Home Front and Monitoring Rebel Activity

While all state institutions are preoccupied with war and the confrontations on the front lines, intelligence agencies become the vigilant guardians of internal and military security. Military setbacks in the field can negatively impact the morale of both the army and the public. Some may exploit this discontent to stage internal protests, potentially escalating to a national security threat, especially if externally driven. This can lead to rebellion and insubordination within the armed forces, weakening the front and hastening defeat and surrender to the enemy.

The process of uncovering rebellious activity begins with intelligence monitoring discontent within the army, assessing its severity, and measuring its escalation. This is crucial to quelling any attempt to destabilize the front lines in its infancy. Any failure to detect early signs of rebellion may result in losing control over the situation, leading to costly internal conflicts. Despite their successes in various regions post the first Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, the Russian military intelligence agency (GRU) and the Federal Security Service (FSB) failed to anticipate a brief military rebellion led by Wagner militia chief Yevgeny Prigozhin in late June 2023.



During War Intelligence Roles



Despite Prigozhin's escalating rhetoric and frequent threats against the Russian defense establishment, Russian intelligence failed to gauge the threats' seriousness and their impact on national security and the armed forces' morale. On August 23, 2023, Prigozhin, along with ten others, died in a plane crash from Moscow to St. Petersburg, which Russian authorities described as an accident. In contrast, American and European officials indicated that initial intelligence reports suggested an onboard explosion likely caused the crash, implying it was orchestrated by Russian intelligence to eliminate Prigozhin, a claim Moscow mockingly denied.



In Gaza, Hamas' General Security Service managed to apprehend officers and soldiers from the Palestinian Authority's General Intelligence Service. According to a statement by the Gaza Interior Ministry, these individuals had infiltrated the Strip under orders from Major General Majid Faraj. In a statement distributed to the media, the Gaza Interior Ministry reported, "On March 30, 2024, a suspicious security force entered with Egyptian Red Crescent trucks and coordinated their actions entirely with the occupation forces to infiltrate northern Gaza, aiming to create chaos and confusion on the home front in coordination with the Shin Bet and the occupation army. Major General Majid Faraj directed the force's activities in a deceptive security manner, misleading Palestinian factions and tribes." The statement added, "The Egyptian side informed the Crossings Authority that it was unaware of the security force that took over the Egyptian trucks and disclaimed any responsibility. Accordingly, Gaza security forces dealt with these elements, arresting ten of them and thwarting their plan." The Gaza Interior Ministry emphasized in its statement that it would "strike with an iron fist anyone who attempts to act in a manner that serves only the occupation."

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah denied the allegations made in the Gaza Interior Ministry's statement.





Proliferation of Rumours, Fake News, and Counter-Propaganda

During wars, rumors, fake news, and counter-propaganda are rampant, often orchestrated or later directed and exploited by hostile intelligence agencies. Some countries may declare a state of emergency during wartime, imposing laws that restrict certain public rights and freedoms, including media and expression. Even without declaring a state of emergency, states may restrict press and media freedom, with national intelligence agencies determining what can and cannot be published, managing propaganda efforts to influence public opinion within their society and in the enemy's society. They also engage in counter-propaganda against the enemy, exposing false news.

On February 26, 2022, Anonymous, a professional hacking organization targeting systems it accuses of corruption, released a short video on its social media platforms, followed by millions worldwide. The accompanying post stated: "Anonymous has just hacked Russian government channels to broadcast the truth about what is happening in Ukraine." Anonymous typically hacks official government websites to expose corruption or intercept and disrupt TV broadcasts for the same purpose. However, this time, just two days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they intercepted Russian broadcasts to show footage revealing the horrors of the Russian invasion and bombing, and its impact on civilians, aiming to influence Russian public opinion, which shares historical, religious, and cultural ties with the Ukrainian people. Conversely, Russian intelligence used counter-propaganda against Ukraine, focusing its campaigns on the abuses faced by Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine due to their ethnic affiliations, perpetrated by groups described as neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists supported by the Kyiv government.

II

During War Intelligence Roles



At the start of the Israeli war on Gaza, Al Arabiya TV hosted Palestinian Legislative Council member Osama Al-Ali, known for his strong opposition to Hamas. In his interview, he accused Hamas leaders of fleeing Gaza before the Al-Aqsa Flood operation, adding that Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas, fled with his wife and children abroad before the operation, implying he was aware of the impending war and its horrors on Gaza and its inhabitants. This interview was widely circulated by activists and politically exploited by adversaries of Hamas to incite Palestinian and specifically Gazan public opinion against it, as well as the Arab and Islamic communities that expressed solidarity and admiration for the Palestinian resistance in Gaza. The goal of this propaganda was to undermine the credibility of the Palestinian leadership in Gaza and create a rift between it and its popular base, which suffers from killing, destruction, and displacement.

On April 10, 2024, an Israeli airstrike targeted a car in Al-Shati refugee camp in western Gaza, killing Ismail Haniyeh's three sons and two grandchildren instantly. On June 24 of the same year, another Israeli bombardment targeted a house in Al-Shati refugee camp, killing ten members of Ismail Haniyeh's family, including his sister. Neither Ismail Haniyeh nor any Hamas leaders initially refuted the widespread rumors and statements circulated by Hamas' opponents, due to security necessities and to avoid falling into the trap of revealing their families' locations. Similarly, Israeli broadcasts showed footage of a person filmed from behind walking with his family inside a tunnel, claiming it was Yahya Sinwar.



Interrogation of Prisoners, Spies, and Suspected Agents

In democratic countries that adhere to international law, intelligence agencies oversee interrogations conducted by national armed forces officers with captured enemy officers and personnel, respecting the Third Geneva Convention, which protects prisoners of war. Through these interrogations, national intelligence agencies obtain essential and useful information for military operations.



However, regarding spies (who are not protected by international humanitarian law), intelligence agencies handle their interrogation, as well as the interrogation of agents working for the enemy. This is done to uncover the full network of agents and spies and their associates within the country, to determine the type of information they have relayed to hostile entities. Additionally, intelligence agencies aim to extract information from them and work on recruiting them in exchange for their freedom, money, and other incentives they may request in return.

Espionage on Officials in Conflict-Related Countries

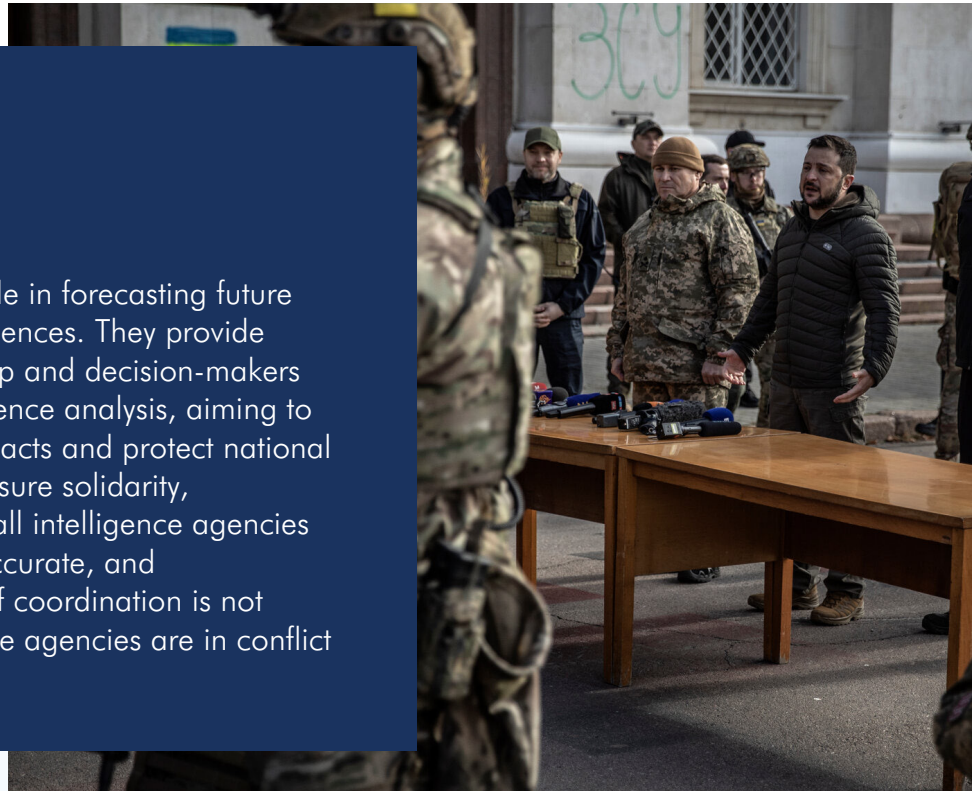
National intelligence agencies engage in espionage and surveillance of officials in both allied and hostile countries for national security reasons. This is done to monitor any new alliances or shifts in the positions of certain governments, which could impact the course of the war and the balance of power. These intelligence agencies compile reports on these matters and submit them to the country's political leadership to enable informed decision-making based on the latest developments and revelations.



The Role of Intelligence Agencies at the End of Military Confrontation

Pivotal Role in Forecasting Events

Intelligence agencies play a crucial role in forecasting future events and avoiding strategic consequences. They provide sound advice to the political leadership and decision-makers based on reports derived from intelligence analysis, aiming to mitigate the post-conflict negative impacts and protect national security. Therefore, it is essential to ensure solidarity, cooperation, and networking among all intelligence agencies within the state to produce reliable, accurate, and non-contradictory reports. This level of coordination is not possible in a country where intelligence agencies are in conflict with one another.





The Intelligence Roles in Negotiations and Conflict Resolution



Intelligence agencies play a vital role in arranging direct negotiations between conflicting parties, assisting in conflict resolution, and facilitating deals and overseeing their completion. When indirect negotiations or behind-the-scenes talks are mentioned, they typically refer to negotiations conducted by the intelligence agencies of warring states or those involved with the conflict parties. Direct negotiations between political leaderships may not always be feasible due to the immature state of conflict resolution, so each state may delegate its intelligence agency to address unresolved issues, remove obstacles, and pave the way for direct negotiations or to finalize a political or security-related deal connected to the ongoing conflict.

Failed negotiations between political leaders can have damaging psychological, social, economic, and political consequences for all parties involved. However, if the preliminary secret negotiations conducted by intelligence agencies fail, it will not negatively impact the public scene since these negotiations are not publicly disclosed.

Following the events of October 7 and the ensuing Israeli war on Gaza, Hamas proposed a comprehensive exchange deal with Israel. Consequently, the Qatari capital has witnessed ongoing meetings between the leaders and representatives of the intelligence agencies from various concerned countries to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the war in Gaza.



Managing the Intelligence Battle Post Armed Conflict

The end of a war or the establishment of peace does not signify the end of intelligence activities, whether in terms of safeguarding peace or continuing covert conflicts. Following the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in September 1978, Israel did not cease sending spies to Egypt or stop recruiting agents to gather vital information about the military, economy, and other sectors. Despite this, the intelligence agencies of both countries cooperate to protect the agreement between them and prevent a return to hostilities, notwithstanding ongoing issues in Gaza, which historically constitutes a core element of Egyptian national security. Israel has violated the agreement with Cairo, such as during the incursion of Israeli occupation forces into the Rafah crossing and the Philadelphi Route.

Discussions about the next day after the war in Gaza are omnipresent. All predictions and proposals come from the intelligence agencies of the concerned countries. However, it is evident that the Israeli intelligence agenda, which is now widely acknowledged, aims to tighten the blockade on the Gaza Strip post-war to instigate public discontent against the Hamas government. Israel also plans to drive Gaza's residents to emigrate via the seaport constructed by the U.S. Army when they find no way to restore normal life after the Israeli military has destroyed the entire infrastructure in the strip. With this strategy, Israel transitions to an intelligence war following the cessation of military confrontations, hoping to achieve through these means what it could not accomplish in the war.

