

MEI Policy Essay

National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Improving the Process

Charles D. Freilich

National security decision-making has been at the forefront of Israeli life for over six decades. Repeated wars, ongoing hostilities at lower levels, the need to confront dire and even existential threats, and various peace initiatives have all imbued Israel's national security decisions with unusual importance. Traditionally held to be primarily reactive in character, Israeli decision-making has become increasingly proactive in recent decades. At the same time, many of the diplomatic and military initiatives Israel has undertaken have gone awry, and the number of policy failures has become untenable. Indeed, Israel has suffered from a decades-long domestic political stalemate — arguably a crisis — on matters of its fundamental existence, including the Palestinian issue, with the political system unable to resolve the contending currents of opinion.

Although a very small nation, Israel has a clearly disproportionate impact on world affairs, and its decision-making processes are thus of considerable concern to the United States and the international community as a whole. Despite a uniquely close relationship with the US based on common democratic systems, cultural traditions, and a resulting bilateral presumption of mutual understanding, the reality is that relations between the US and Israel are rife with misunderstandings.

Understanding Israel's decision-making process (DMP) is thus essential. This article briefly presents the driving forces behind the Israeli DMP and argues that Israel can no longer afford the failings of its own decision-making processes. It concludes with recommendations for reforms needed primarily on the institutional level, but the electoral as well.

Earlier research¹ has established that Israel's national security decision-making processes are shaped largely by three causal factors: first, a uniquely harsh and dangerous external environment, characterized by rapid and sweeping change and only limited malleability, which greatly shapes and circumscribes Israel's national security choices; second, Israel's proportional representation (PR) system, which causes deep political fragmentation and a resulting need to govern through coalition governments, with clear consequences for the roles of the premier and cabinet; and finally, the relative weakness

Charles D. (Chuck) Freilich, a former deputy national security adviser in Israel, is a senior fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School and the author of *Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy*, Cornell Press, November 2012. He is currently working on a book on Israeli national security strategy, to be completed by mid-2014.

1. Charles D. Freilich, "National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 60, No. 4 (Autumn 2006), pp. 635–663; and Charles D. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Press, 2012).

of the primary civilian national security organs (the foreign and defense ministries and the National Security Staff²) in the national DMP, compared to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and intelligence services.

These causal factors were found to result in ten primary characteristics and pathologies:

(1) The Israeli DMP is focused overwhelmingly on the short term and is often improvisational and sequential. Long-term policy formulation is consequently minimal.

(2) Crucially, premiers manifest a clear tendency to avoid systematic policy planning, especially in the cabinet, but even more so in the Ministerial Committee on Defense (MCoD) and informal decision-making forums. Consequently, policy objectives, priorities, and options are typically not well elucidated, which greatly hinders Israel's ability to achieve its goals.

(3) The cabinet and MCoD are typically dysfunctional, and most real decision-making is thus conducted by the premier in informal forums with the defense minister, chief of staff (CoS), other senior defense officials, and, at times, the foreign and other ministers. Israel thus does not have an effective statutory forum for national security decision-making.

(4) By the time an issue reaches the cabinet, the premier and relevant minister(s) have typically settled on a preferred course of action and present just one option that can be approved or rejected. The creation of the Israeli National Security Council (INSC) in 1999 has partially alleviated this, but an insufficient consideration of options remains a basic problem.

(5) The DMP is intensely politicized, albeit less so regarding decisions to use military force. "What will fly," — in other words, the minimum consensus needed to obtain cabinet approval — rather than what may be truly required, is a primary determinant of cabinet decisions. Public opinion has a very strong impact on policy, as is appropriate for a democracy. However, given the complexity and importance of many of the issues Israel faces, and the short window of time usually available for decision-making, public opinion can also have a deleterious impact at times.

(6) Israel's premiers have few statutory prerogatives, and their actual power is unduly contingent on their political skills and coalition exigencies. Those in firm control of their parties and coalitions have been powerful leaders, but even they were often forced to go to extraordinary lengths and to take unusual political risks — including those that might have ended their political careers — in order to achieve their objectives. Other premiers have been at least partial hostages of their coalitions.

(7) The defense establishment, especially the IDF, is by far the most influential bureaucratic player. The IDF, however, is far from omnipotent; premiers act at times without its knowledge, or over its opposition.

(8) Interagency integration of policy and coordination of action is deficient, both for reasons endemic to governments everywhere and those exacerbated by the nature of the PR system. Nevertheless, the severity of the issues Israel faces does occasionally produce somewhat greater discipline than is found in other national bureaucracies.

(9) Israeli decision-making is highly idiosyncratic. Though probably true of most countries, an at least somewhat more institutionalized process may partially serve to stem individual whim.

2. The Israeli National Security Council was renamed the National Security Staff in 2008.

(10) Leaks are rampant and have an important effect on the process, i.e., how premiers handle issues in the cabinet and with their advisers. For the most part, however, leaks have been found to be primarily on the politics of the issues, such as who has taken what position, rather than hard information regarding Israeli capabilities and intentions. Leaks also appear to be far less prevalent regarding military action and affairs, although there are important exceptions. In 2011–2012, for example, considerable controversy erupted over reports of different Israeli leaders' positions regarding a possible attack on Iran's nuclear program, the greatest strategic threat facing the country. Moreover, some sensitive operational details did become public during the 2006 war with Lebanon.

Despite these pathologies, the Israeli DMP does have a number of strengths, and succeeds from time to time in turning some of its long-term deficiencies into short-term advantages. Some examples include the ability to make rapid and flexible responses, the effective nature of planning processes within the defense establishment (although not the cabinet), the generally pragmatic character of decision-making at the political level — the settlement issue being a prominent exception — and the quality and motivation of the people involved.

The INSC was established in 1999; thus, the premiers' reluctance to engage in systematic policy planning clearly no longer stems from a lack of organizational capacity, if it ever did, but from a conscious decision. Indeed, one can only surmise, controversially, that in Israel's system of coalition-cabinet government, methodical policy planning (systematic formulation and consideration of alternative policy objectives, priorities, and options) can be inimical, and at times diametrically opposed, to the premier's political needs. The following explains why.

First, by articulating objectives, priorities, and options, the premier risks a rift with coalition partners, even within his or her own party, and a consequent threat to the coalition's future. The moment an objective or option becomes known to the cabinet, certainly to the media, it is likely to become embroiled in Israel's raging political debates, and the premier risks losing control over the process. Premiers' fears of leaks, politicization, and the consequent loss of freedom to maneuver typically outweigh their assessment of the potential benefits attendant to systematic policy planning. Moreover, elucidation of objectives, priorities, and options forces premiers to confront issues and choices with which they may not wish to deal, either politically, substantively, or both. Ambiguity can be constructive, and rather than augmenting a premier's range of options, systematic policy planning may curtail it or even threaten his or her political career.

Moreover, in a politically polarized nation, improvisation and sequential decision-making have two great advantages: they enable action without the need to formulate clearly articulated and prioritized objectives and options — the very heart of the policy planning process — and facilitate flexible decision-making in times of change and crisis. The absence of clear objectives and priorities is certainly convenient for premiers and cabinets operating in a frenetic political environment, largely absolving them of responsibility for failing to meet these objectives.

The perpetual competition for political survival and the fear of leaks mean that premiers and ministers prefer to focus discussion on the means of implementing preferred approaches, rather than objectives and options — that is, to discuss the how, not

the what. Finally, given the cabinet's and MCoD's politicized nature, premiers tend to view them as forums for partisan discourse, not true policy formulation. They thus typically seek to keep important issues from these forums until they have adopted a preferred option, or until events have precluded alternatives. Substantive cabinet discussion of objectives and options is usually the last thing premiers want.

The need for reform of the DMP has been widely recognized since Israel's early years. Various recommendations have been proposed over the years, although many have either not been implemented in practice or have failed to achieve the desired ends. Much of the impetus behind these reforms came from major decision-making failures or national traumas, most prominently the 1973 Yom Kippur War and 2006 Lebanon War. The primary institutional changes to date include the establishment of the IDF Planning Branch, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) research and planning divisions, and research divisions in the Mossad and Shin Bet (the foreign and domestic intelligence services, respectively). Arguably, the most far-reaching change was the establishment of the INSC in 1999, formally enacted by statute in 2008. All of the agencies of the foreign and defense establishment have grown immeasurably in size and sophistication in recent decades.

Under the 2008 law,³ the National Security Staff (NSS) — the new name given to the INSC under the law — is responsible for preparation and coordination of all prime-ministerial and cabinet forums dealing with national security affairs, recommendation of topics and participants for these forums, formulation of policy options and recommendations, and follow-up on policy implementation. Moreover, the law took care to specify that the NSS would be responsible for four areas that had proven particularly problematic in the past: annual and multi-year politico-military assessments, staff work and options on the defense and foreign affairs budgets, formulation of Israel's defense strategy, and major defense projects.

During its first decade, the INSC was marginalized by the premiers in office and, with rare exception, was assigned few tasks of importance. With the passage of the NSS Law, however, it has now become a permanent fixture, gained a role of greater (though still limited) consequence, and may have growing influence in the future.⁴

Israel has in many ways been a model of successful development in political, economic, social, and security affairs. In recent decades, however, the decision-making system's ills appear to have caught up with Israel, and the country has repeatedly failed to achieve its policy objectives, often neglecting to formulate clear objectives even when it has had the initiative. The contention that Israel's unusually demanding external environment makes the formulation of objectives particularly difficult and circumscribes its ability to achieve them is certainly true to some extent, but far less so than in the past. Israel enjoys far greater latitude today to proactively shape its future. Nevertheless, the gap between Israel's needs and the system's ability to deliver has widened significantly, the number of policy failures has increased, and the cost has simply become too high for a number of reasons.

3. National Security Staff Law, 2008.

4. State Comptroller, "*Divuah Bikoret 'al Mo'atsa le-Bitahon Le'umi*" ["Report on the National Security Council"], September 2006, <http://www.mevaker.gov.il/serve/contentTree.asp?bookid=473&id=186&contentid=&parentid=undefined&sw=1024&hw=698>; State Comptroller, "*Divuah Bikoret 'al Yisum Hok MaLaL ve-ha-Hitmodedut 'im ha-Mashat ha-Turki*" ["Report on the Implementation of the NSS Law and the Handling of the Turkish Flotilla"], June 2012, <http://www.mevaker.gov.il/serve/contentTree.asp?bookid=615&id=0&contentid=12648&parentid=undefined&bctype=12648&sw=1440&hw=830>.

First, Israel seeks to be an international scientific, high-tech and cultural center, to serve as a spiritual home for the Jewish people, and thus to provide a Western lifestyle, promote immigration, and discourage emigration. Chronic political and strategic crises undermine these fundamental national aspirations.

Israel has not unequivocally won a major military engagement since 1967, either due to its own failings or improved Arab capabilities. Israeli deterrence was traditionally predicated on demonstrating to the Arab countries that they had no hope of victory and should therefore refrain from hostilities entirely or downscale their ambitions accordingly. The repeated failures of recent decades have undermined Israel's deterrent posture; one or two inconclusive outcomes may arguably be acceptable, but a series sets a dangerous pattern.

As the once monolithic wall of Arab hostility has cracked in recent decades, Israel's ability to affect its external environment has widened, and it has become increasingly proactive, undertaking a number of major initiatives. These include the Oslo Accords, Prime Ministers Barak and Olmert's dramatic peace offers to the Palestinians and Syrians, and Sharon's disengagement from Gaza, as well as the military operations in Lebanon and Gaza. In most of these cases, however, Israel has repeatedly failed to achieve its objectives, partly for reasons beyond its control, but also because of the failures of its own DMP.

Israel faces a variety of unusually difficult threats today; in some cases, the threats are of unprecedented complexity. Confrontations with Hamas and especially Hizbullah constitute a new and particularly difficult form of asymmetric warfare. Iran poses a threat that even a global superpower, the United States, is hesitant to confront.

The issues Israel faces have become more complex, and the cost of error has grown. As a consequence, the improvisational and sequential decision-making processes that often served Israel well in the early decades have become increasingly incompatible with the new reality it faces. Responses to strategic threats, such as those posed by Iran, take decades to develop. The comparatively "easy" parts of the peace process have long been resolved, leaving the truly complex and dangerous core issues. Developing modern weapons typically takes a decade or two, and the costs are enormous.

In today's integrated global environment, Israel's national security interests are affected by developments around the world, and its actions have global resonance. As a result, Israel's margin for error has decreased, and an already frenetic regional environment is likely to become even more so in the future.

Israel has always suffered from a major numerical disparity vis-à-vis its Arab adversaries but enjoyed a clear qualitative military advantage. As Arab societies and militaries have become rapidly more developed in recent decades, a trend that is likely to continue, the qualitative gap is closing and asymmetric warfare, now the prevalent form in the region, further undercuts Israel's qualitative advantage. Whereas Israel has achieved clear conventional superiority, it has had a far harder time developing effective responses to the threats posed by non-state actors such as Hizbullah and Hamas.

Finally, the rise of asymmetric actors and changing international norms have further complicated Israel's already limited ability to foresee the outcomes of its actions, both military and diplomatic, such as its ability to assess cause and effect relationships and to link policies with consequences.

In order to improve the Israeli DMP, the three root causes of its pathologies must be addressed: the demanding external environment, the PR political system, and the weakness of the civilian national security organs. In practice, the room for improvement on all three levels is limited.

Israel's ability to shape its environment has certainly grown over the decades, and many believe that it should be more proactive and forthcoming, primarily on the Palestinian issue. Indeed, peace with the Palestinians would have far-reaching ramifications for Israel's strategic posture, as did the limited Oslo peace process, and would significantly increase its ability to shape its regional environment. Peace, however, is unfortunately not linkely for the foreseeable future, as it is contingent on highly controversial political developments within Israel and on Palestinian positions. Moreover, Israel's environment will remain highly demanding, even after peace with the Palestinians and Syria.

Electoral reform is essential, and indeed, the only means of fundamentally addressing Israel's decision-making ills. Without electoral reform, the PR system will continue to undercut any improvements achieved either through changes in Israel's strategic circumstances or by "fixes" to institutions and processes. Having failed attempts at electoral reform in the past,⁵ Israel is not likely to make major reforms for the long term, vital though such reforms remain.

For the foreseeable future, the primary area for change is thus, by default, in regard to the third root cause: the weakness of the civilian national security organs. After nearly four decades of institutional reform, however, all of the necessary organs of government now exist, Israel has an institutionally mature national security establishment and the need and latitude for additional "institutional fixes" is thus limited. The primary focus should thus be on means of strengthening these organs' capabilities and improving the intra- and especially the interagency processes. We turn first to a number of recommendations for improvement in these areas, before suggesting some directions for more fundamental change, should electoral reform become feasible at some later date.

STRENGTHENING THE NSS

All prime-ministerial advisors responsible for foreign and defense affairs must be subordinated to the National Security Advisor (NSA) so that there is one focal point in the premier's office bearing overall responsibility for this area. The current anomaly — whereby the NSS is responsible for providing staff support for the premier's foreign policy affairs and meetings of the MCoD, while the premier's military secretary provides support for defense affairs and for the "Octet"⁶ — must end. The military secretary has no policy planning capabilities of his own, relying on the IDF for all input. The current situation thus ensures that the IDF, not the NSS, remains the premier and cabinet's primary source of policy planning in defense affairs.

5. Two general elections were held in the 1990s, in which the premier was elected directly (i.e., separately from the Knesset), before Israel returned to the original PR system.

6. The informal ministerial forum Netanyahu regularly convened for purposes of more discrete and expedited deliberations. Many premiers have convened similar forums of various sizes. Lacking in statutory authority, policies formulated in these forums have no legal basis; they typically serve as the basis for deliberations in the MCoD and cabinet plenum and thus have great importance.

Related to this, the NSS must be responsible for staffing *all* of the premier's formal and informal national security-related meetings and affairs. One comparatively easy change — of importance both in itself and also as an indication of changing mindsets — would be for the NSA to replace the military secretary as the only other participant in the premier's scheduled weekly meetings with the heads of the intelligence services, as well as in his less frequent solo meetings with the CoS.

Some of the premier's meetings with the defense and foreign ministers are overwhelmingly political in nature, and they are likely to continue to wish to preserve discretion, meeting without the presence of senior officials. Most NSAs to date, and most leaders, have viewed the NSA as a neutral civil servant, an almost judicial position in the national security area, which remains above politics. By somewhat changing this perception and recognizing the advantages of the fact that the NSA is a political appointee — someone who must be close to the premier's political thinking, but also retain professional independence and integrity, much like in the case of the American NSA — this problem could at least be partially resolved, and the NSA might be able to participate in some, if not all, of these meetings. In Israel's coalition-cabinet system, informal discussions between the premier and the defense or foreign ministers will continue to be a part of the process, and the NSS must at least be in a position to follow up on them, if not to prepare them.

The various agencies, including the MFA, Ministry of Defense (MoD), intelligence services, and especially the IDF, will have to adjust over time to a new interagency process, in which they no longer bear sole authority even for their areas of formal responsibility, and work under the guidance of the NSS. Under the existing coalition-cabinet system, the foreign and defense ministers cannot be expected to take direction from an appointed official, and even in the far more centralized American presidential system, there is built-in tension between the NSA and the secretaries of state and defense. The ministries and agencies, however, can and must be subordinated to an NSS-led process, especially in the formulation of objectives and options. Moreover, it is imperative that the NSS use its statutory authority to establish senior interagency policy planning and coordinating committees, akin to the American NSC's "deputy principals forum" and other senior forums. Now that Moshe Ya'alon has succeeded Ehud Barak as defense minister, the prospects of this happening are somewhat greater. Unlike Barak, a long-standing opponent of an NSS-led process, Ya'alon appears more attuned to the need for such policy planning forums, though it will only happen in practice if the premier also is willing to put the weight of his office behind this.

The NSS must, finally, begin fulfilling the four special areas of responsibility assigned to it by the NSS Law, i.e., annual and multi-year national security assessments, policy planning regarding the defense budget and major defense projects, and follow-up on policy implementation. The failure to do so suits the premier's political needs, but these tasks are now mandated by law and important in their own right.

The single most important improvement at the process level would be the formulation of clearly defined and actionable policy objectives, priorities, and options, along with well-elucidated end-states. No other failing has had a more damaging impact on Israeli decision-making. For the reasons mentioned earlier, however, premiers are likely to remain averse to systematic policy planning. Pending electoral reform, significant improvement in this area in the cabinet plenum and MCoD is unlikely. The greatest

room for improvement may thus be in the work of the specially constituted informal forums, such as Netanyahu's Octet and its future successors, as well as in the premier's own work, in which he has far greater freedom to institute decision-making processes that accord with his needs and wishes.

Already today, following passage of the NSS Law, the premier enjoys better policy support than in the past. A good starting point for further improvement would be those issues that are of great importance, but on which policy debate is substantive, not partisan, such as the Iranian nuclear program or Hizbullah's rocket arsenal. Institutionalizing systematic planning processes on issues such as these in the informal forums, including the Octet and the premier's small consultations, would be of great benefit in its own right, and cumulative positive experiences might have an at least partially positive spillover effect on other more controversial issues.

In recent years, the NSS has become deeply engaged in day-to-day servicing of the premier's affairs at the expense of more in-depth strategic planning. An advisory body that is not engaged in current affairs risks irrelevance, which the NSS has experienced in the past. Care must be given to ensure that the NSS retains its unique role as an in-depth strategic planning entity and does not simply become another one of the agencies in Israel dealing with the most pressing issues. Only a serious NSS-led process can provide a healthy balance to Israel's proclivity and aptitude for improvisational and sequential decision-making.

Political interests and pressures, capable of derailing even the most effective planning processes, will always exist. The NSS's primary contribution may thus lie in formal processes, and in changing mindsets and the organizational culture over time, with a view toward 'getting it right' more often, rather than an unrealistic hope of doing so all of the time.

STRENGTHENING THE MFA

The MFA has long been the stepchild of the Israeli national security DMP, and significantly strengthening its role is essential.⁷ The MFA itself has already begun to do so on its own in recent years, instituting important changes both at the structural level and in terms of its organizational procedures.

The ongoing practice of appointing foreign ministers primarily for reasons of coalition politics rather than professional qualifications and personal stature, such as recent Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, has had a devastating impact on the MFA's standing. No change of consequence in the MFA's organizational fortunes will be feasible until the foreign minister, like the defense minister, once again comes to be seen as an appointment based, first and foremost, on substance. Only then will premiers cease the current practice, whereby foreign ministers are typically excluded from their 'defense' meetings, which are invariably largely diplomatic in nature.

7. See, for example, the recommendations of the Winograd Commission, the special investigative body established to study the reasons for Israel's military and decision-making failures during the 2006 Lebanon war. Commission for Investigating the Events of the Campaign in Lebanon 2006 (Winograd Commission), "*Milhemet Lebanon ha-Shniya: Din ve-Heshbon Helki*" ["Second Lebanon War: Interim Report"], April 2007, <http://vaadatwino.co.il/pdf/%D7%93%D7%95%D7%97%D7%97%D7%9C%D7%A7%D7%99.pdf>.

The MFA has long been a largely passive participant in the DMP, primarily a mouthpiece for policies formulated elsewhere, rather than an operational agency with a mission-oriented organizational culture and clearly defined objectives. The MFA must become deeply involved in the formulation of policy itself, both of a purely diplomatic and a broader politico-military nature. To cite just one vital example, the MFA should be involved in virtually every decision to use military force, unlike the current situation in which the premier and defense minister bear sole responsibility for this in cases of limited action, or where decisions are presented to the cabinet or MCoD for approval in cases of more significant operations, all without MFA any involvement.

To help secure this new, heightened role, the foreign minister or MFA director-general⁸ must become a permanent participant in all of the premier's policy-oriented and operational meetings with the defense minister and CoS. Appointing MFA directors-general for fixed terms, much like the CoS or heads of the intelligence services, rather than every time a new foreign minister comes into office, on average every two and half years, would further strengthen their stature and that of the ministry, and provide for a far greater ability to conduct policy planning. Moreover, the MFA director-general should become a permanent participant in relevant meetings of the IDF General Staff and all other appropriate senior IDF and MoD decision-making forums, including operational ones. Similarly, a senior IDF officer should be a permanent participant in the MFA's top decision-making forums.

It is particularly important that the Policy Planning and Research Divisions be strengthened within the MFA, in terms of professional expertise and organizational clout, and that their work be better integrated into that of the regional and functional divisions. Finally, the MFA must be strengthened in terms of personnel size, administrative autonomy, and budgets.

STRENGTHENING THE MoD

A further area of possible reform is in the relationship between the IDF and MoD, with a view to subordinating the IDF to greater civilian oversight. As constituted ever since Israel's establishment, the IDF, not the MoD, is actually the dominant player. Both report separately to the defense minister, and the MoD is neither designed nor staffed to conduct ministerial oversight over policy and budgets. The defense establishment as a whole also enjoys unique budgetary autonomy from the Ministry of Finance.

One possibility is to further strengthen the MoD's strategic planning capabilities, including the broad spectrum of politico-military and diplomatic issues currently dealt with by the IDF Planning Branch. This issue has dogged the MoD-IDF relationship ever since the Planning Branch's establishment in the 1970s, and at times, it has even been made a joint IDF-MoD organ. The establishment of the MoD Politico-Military Division in the early 2000s was supposed to have resolved the issue, but as with other compromise arrangements, it never fully did. A final resolution of this ongoing conundrum is important, though not essential. For all of the desirability of greater civilian control in a democracy, the existing arrangement has generally worked effectively, and change in this area must be approached with caution.

8. Directors-general in Israel, akin to British permanent secretaries, are the senior bureaucrats in each ministry, directly subordinate to the minister.

Finally, on the process level, the fear of leaks has an important effect on decision-makers' expectations and the DMP as whole. In a reformed process, the premier would have to ensure secrecy by taking preventative measures, punishing offenders and, above all, observing the new norms himself. Leaks are endemic to all democracies and will remain so in Israel. The norms, however, were far more restrictive in the past and can become so again, largely through prime-ministerial determination.

ELECTORAL REFORM

A truly substantive change in Israel's DMP would require fundamental electoral reform, not just limited 'fixes' to the existing institutions and processes. A comprehensive treatment of the needed reforms is beyond the scope of this paper, but two primary issues must be addressed if greater governability and general decision-making effectiveness are to be achieved. First, the premier's formal authority must be strengthened so as to make the cabinet more accountable to him and to ensure that he can usually expect to serve a full four-year term. In the current situation, the defense and foreign ministers are typically the premier's leading rivals, and coalitions usually serve no longer than two to three years, with a highly deleterious impact on the national security DMP. An expectation of a full four-year term would greatly reduce the pressure on premiers and ministers to focus so overwhelmingly on immediate political considerations and short-term achievements and would enable a more policy-based and planned, as opposed to politics-based, process.

Second, the cabinet must be restructured in a manner designed to make it a far less politicized and far more effective decision-making body. Efforts should focus primarily on the MCoD, which, to be effective, must be greatly cut in size and restricted to the relevant ministers. Ideally, the MCoD would consist of the premier, defense and foreign ministers, vice or deputy premiers (thereby lending some substance to these otherwise honorific titles), and the ministers of domestic security and finance on an as-needed basis. The total number of permanent ministerial participants would not exceed five to seven. Senior officials would participate as necessary.

In conclusion, caution is warranted. There is no such thing as a correct, one-size-fits-all electoral system or national security DMP; arrangements adopted by various countries must reflect their unique circumstances and character. Moreover, all electoral systems and DMPs contain pathologies of their own, and we are virtually assured to create new pathologies by reforming this system. We can and must strive for improvement, but there are no guarantees of success, and there are no panaceas. Even the best process would be hard-pressed to effectively address the demands of Israel's complex external environment.

Yet, after 65 years of independence, the same basic political processes that so successfully gave rise to Israel in its formative years are still largely intact. Although the national security establishment's size and sophistication have changed beyond recognition, the decision-making processes at the prime-ministerial and cabinet levels remain largely unchanged and increasingly incapable of addressing the demands placed on them. Although reform is widely recognized as essential, the dysfunctions of the PR system, which account for much of the system's failings, are also the biggest impediments to change.