

MK Nachman Shai, why shouldn't a consultant help an IDF general get appointed chief of staff?

MK Nachman Shai of Kadima was the commander of Army Radio and was dubbed "the national tranquilizer" when he served as Israel Defense Forces spokesman during the 1991 Gulf War. Since then, he has served as director general of the Second Authority for Television and Radio, chairman of Channel 2 news and the Israel Broadcasting Authority, and director general of UJC Israel (now the Jewish Federations of North America).

Shai is a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and was the first person last week to call on Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein to open an investigation of a document on the letterhead of a PR firm that proposed a public relations campaign for Maj. Gen. Yoav Galant to help him secure the appointment for chief of staff of the army.

MK Nachman Shai, why shouldn't a general be assisted by a strategic consultant when he is competing for the position of chief of staff?

A move of that kind corrupts the army. I have been following military affairs for 40 years, as a reporter and later in a series of jobs. I have seen maybe 10 chiefs of staff selected and I have noticed that, as the years go by, there is more intervention by external elements, political or otherwise, from all kinds of groups, who want to contribute their opinions and put in a good word for one general or another.

In this case, we are referring to a completely planned campaign, just like in the political arena. This is something new. In our own special way, we are climbing one step higher, a dangerous step. Every officer in the IDF wants to be the chief of staff. Any brigadier general or colonel who observes this process examines the route a commander took to become chief of staff. When the lesson is that you have to have close ties with strategic consultants, there is no reason that senior officers shouldn't say, "If the route goes through the office of a strategic consultant, why should I

start so late? Why not right now?"

The army is stripping itself of its values and then it will be corrupted. This did not start today, but today we can see how this process turned rotten. It makes no difference if the Galant document is forged or real; it reflects some kind of culture that has penetrated the army. The prime minister, the chief of staff and, ultimately, the defense minister did the right thing when they decided to impose on the attorney general the task of examining the affair. That's the way to clear the air.

The chief of staff is appointed by the defense minister, who is a political figure, and there have been claims that previous chiefs of staff were chosen because they had the "right" political opinions. Does a major general also need to be skilled in politics? Why shouldn't a candidate for the post get some help from someone who knows how things work?

There has been a cloud of rumors surrounding almost every chief of staff, and people have whispered about their connections and opinions. The chief of staff is the most powerful appointee in the public arena, though [he isn't more powerful than] elected officials. The chief of staff has hundreds of thousands of people under his command. He can give orders that cause people to die. He has a budget of more than NIS 50 billion. His positions and opinions have weight even beyond his uniform and rank. But his selection process is ultimately in the hands of one person: the defense minister. It is not possible that the process of appointing such an important person should look like this. It has to become institutionalized and become transparent.

People who were appointed chief of staff in many cases later became defense ministers and prime ministers. From this campaign we can learn more about the failure of the process of appointing a chief of staff, a process that takes place away from the public eye.

The defense minister did not express any opinion about the affair in the first



Nachman Shai. "The army is stripping itself of its values and then it will be corrupted."

few days after the news broke. In your opinion, did he act properly?

[Ehud] Barak should have reacted on Friday evening. There are things that must be said immediately. Yesterday morning, remarks from those surrounding the defense minister were published, saying it was an anonymous letter and that that does not warrant a reaction. But it is really not an anonymous letter. Whether it is an authentic document or a forged one, it is a document that was prepared by professionals.

It was aimed at influencing the choice of one of the most influential people in the country. It cannot be treated with

indifference or scorn. It did not just suddenly spring up; it grew in a certain kind of soil. Therefore, it's not enough to get rid of the rotten fruit. The ground itself must be cleansed. In my opinion, the fact that he reacted to the affair only now paints him as someone who had to be dragged into responding, and that is not the right way for him to do things.

Did this phenomenon also exist when you were the IDF spokesman?

I saw things like that when I was spokesman. One of the major things that I fought for was creating a distance between the commanders and the spokesmen of the various commands and arms

of the IDF, so that they would not become their personal spokesmen. The commanders wanted to say then: "Hello, we also know how to appear in the headlines and do public relations." The defense minister at the time, Moshe Arens, and the chief of staff, Dan Shomron, asked me at the time to create a distance between the spokesmen and their commanders.

Another possibility reported yesterday was that the document was prepared for the defense minister's bureau and not for Galant. The defense minister wanted to know how to go about the selection process in a way that would ultimately lead to his appointing Galant. Is

that also unacceptable?

I expect that if the defense minister has decided that Galant is his choice for chief of staff, he would throw all his weight behind that and the matter would end there. The defense minister does not need any additional strategy. He does not need to make Gabi Ashkenazi look bad in order to appoint Galant. We are not talking here about mere advice; this is a positive campaign and a negative campaign. If I were defense minister and someone were to present me with a document of this kind, I would send it back to him by return mail and make it clear to him that this was not our intention.

Does the IDF spokesman have to be a media consultant for the chief of staff and the generals?

The IDF spokesman has to advise the chief of staff on matters relating to the public status and image of the IDF, and on the issue of public trust in the army. He is not supposed to give advice on how to conduct campaigns. He is the media consultant for the entire army. That's why I'm sure this caused him a great deal of discomfort. That is a shame. The IDF has succeeded in the last few years to restore the public standing that had been damaged during the [Second] Lebanon War.

According to all the figures presented to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, a very large proportion of the public places its trust in the IDF today. The IDF's trust in itself has also risen since the war. The affair of the document that was published now, if it pervades the army, could damage public trust in the organization. Immediate steps must therefore be taken to investigate the matter and not allow it to get musty.

What should be done until the investigation is completed? Can Barak appoint a chief of staff under the shadow of this affair?

The defense minister must stop for the moment the process of choosing the chief of staff and await the results of the investigation. As it is, Barak has already interviewed all the candidates, and one can assume he knows what he wants. It is not reasonable for Barak to formulate a decision about the identity of the chief of staff while this affair is still on the agenda. Heaven forbid that someone should be appointed and then found to be tainted.

Otherwise Occupied / Amira Hass

Thais and yoga in Ramallah

Barley 'pitot' claims it can alleviate depression, as does the 'cobra' position in yoga. But can they really help workers in the northern West Bank?

My creditors have been chasing after me and I have nowhere to hide. They've been doing so pleasantly – an e-mail here, a telephone call there, or sometimes an SMS. My debt? A few strands of information they gave me. And the only way I can defray it is by writing an item in the newspaper.

There's been a reason behind every delay in payment. For example, a gag order on a certain subject, or the young woman who said that when she complained to the Jerusalem police that a settler had hit her, she was arrested on the spot for assault. But this time it's my fault. Time has passed and I lost the opportunity to check whether the story could become a news item.

There are some creditors who are merely the figment of my imagination. A laconic report, something on a Palestinian site that sparks my curiosity, a casual remark from a shopkeeper or a neighbor, an anthropological stroll in the neighborhood grocery store. For example, the barley "pitot" with the sticker praising the virtues of the product, including the proclamation that one of their effects is "relief of depression."

I'd already prepared a list of people to interview and questions like: Is there a way to confirm the intuition that the vast majority of Palestinians are suffering from depression? And in the same breath: There is an active yoga group in Ramallah, whose members say the cobra position is excellent for fighting depression. Were the Palestinian Health Ministry to listen to me, I would propose that they train hundreds of yoga instructors.

This immediately reminds me of the Japanese acupuncturist who, after successfully treating dozens or perhaps hundreds of Palestinians whose pains conventional medicine was unable to ease, could not continue his treatments after the Israeli Interior Ministry refused to renew his entry visa.

Another imaginary creditor – mass e-mails from NATO. Some of these from last week spoke of the visitors who continue to venture to the Red Cross compound in East Jerusalem where three East Jeru-

salemmites found refuge one month ago – a former minister in Ismail Haniyeh's government and two Hamas-affiliated members of the Palestinian legislative council – who the Israeli Ministry of Interior and police ordered to expel. The visitors have included Christian clergymen, senior members of Fatah and PLO, and the consuls of Egypt and Jordan. A show of unity which indicates that, despite the fact that this struggle against expulsion does not interest the vast majority of Israelis, it remains in the Palestinian headlines.

What is Palestinian here?

These threads of information have arranged themselves inside my head in a "Palestinian affairs section" and an "Israeli affairs section." In the first sector, for example, I would place how the residents of the northern West Bank are referred to in Ramallah slang – "Thais." I heard there's been an official ban on the use of this nickname, considered offensive apparently because it tells the truth. The prosperity of Ramallah, which in Israel is attributed to the generosity of the occupier, is also dependent on the employment conditions of Palestinian workers from the distant districts.

There are some who mistakenly define my task as a reporter on Palestinian affairs. What exactly is Palestinian about the demolition of homes and tents, the confiscation of water pipes and the razing of fields, the arrest of children on false charges and their subsequent beating? What is Palestinian about expulsion orders, about roadblocks that haven't heard the news that there are "no longer checkpoints in the West Bank"? If there was enough time and space, all of these loose threads could fill the entire pages of every newspaper published in the last week alone. And all of this is the work of Israelis.

Let's take, for example, the area between Bitounia in the north, Jib in the east, Beit Iksa in the south and Beit Sira in the west. Some people might ask why I didn't say I was referring to the area between Ramot, Givat Ze'ev and Route 443. No, I'm not referring to the giant



Route 443. Some roadblocks haven't yet heard the news that there are "no longer checkpoints in the West Bank."

settlements that are as illegal as the outpost of Migron, but rather to the many Israelis – who are smart and sophisticated and have excellent planning abilities, who have put their heads together over the past 40 years to dispose, step after step, this entire area of its Palestinian owners and residents and turn it into an area almost clean of Palestinians.

Unexplained detours

About two weeks ago I encountered Hussam, a Palestinian laborer, when I went to check on the road that leads to the villages of Bidu and Qatana (which had been permanently blocked a long while ago). He'd left the settlement of Har Shmuel where he works, a mere eight kilometers from where his village is located. Before Route 443 was supposedly opened to Palestinian traffic, Hussam would travel along it with other Palestinians who work on the settlements. The road was officially "opened" on instructions from the High Court of Justice, only to be closed at its eastern side (before the turnoff to Givat Ze'ev). Palestinians are forbidden to continue from there.

Now the laborer must make a 40-km detour, and so along with waiting in the morning at the

checkpoint and having to walk several kilometers on foot to and from work, his route has been lengthened by two or three hours or so in each direction.

According to his work permit, Hussam is allowed to leave via the Jib checkpoint (eastern Givat Ze'ev). But the soldiers there, for some reason, demanded that he drive back – another detour of some 20 kilometers – and leave only via the Qalandiyah checkpoint in the east. Why? No special reason. Hussam has not heard of yoga, but he's certainly familiar with depression.

The Israel Defense Forces spokesman responded on this subject: "As a rule, Palestinian workers are required by law to undergo a security check when they go to work in Israeli communities. The crossing point designated for this purpose was the Qalandiyah checkpoint. However, with the intention of making it easier for residents of the villages close to Givat Ze'ev, workers are permitted to cross at the nearby Jib crossing point. It should be noted that we are referring to some 80 laborers who constitute only some 10 percent of the total number of workers in these communities (Givat Ze'ev, Givon and Har Shmuel).

Is this a Palestinian or an Israeli story?

Letters to the Editor

A common goal in Congo

In response to "Israeli doctors in Congo to aid burn victims get slammed for occupation," July 18, and "Israeli medical delegation in Congo takes heat while trying to soothe burns," July 19

These articles are erroneous in their suggestion that collaboration between the Medecins Sans Frontieres/Doctors Without Borders team and Israeli burn specialists from the Sheba Medical Center was difficult due to anti-Israel sentiment on the part of MSF staff. No such sentiment was expressed by any member of my team, at any time during or after the treatment.

The reality is that, while treating burn victims from the recent fuel tanker explosion in eastern Congo, the MSF and Israeli teams on the ground collaborated extremely well and appreciated each other's contribution in helping the patients. Both medical teams shared the common goal of providing the best possible treatment to those most in need.

MSF has been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1981 and we will continue to provide quality medical care to our thousands of patients in the country. Our work is based on humanitarian principles and is guided by medical ethics and impartiality. MSF is not anti-Israel – indeed we pride ourselves on being a neutral organization.

Grace Tang
Head of Mission
Democratic Republic of Congo,
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Medecins Sans Frontieres

Between freedom of expression and academic freedom

In response to "Profs against free speech," August 2

"Freedom of expression" and "academic freedom" are two different concepts. Every person is entitled to express his or her opinion, as long as they do not incite to break the law. While we may find someone's opinions acceptable or detestable, they are no more than the views of the person expressing them.

Academic freedom is inherently different. It is the freedom given to a university researcher to conduct research as well as to publish it, without any political intervention on the part of the government or university authori-

ties; it is also the freedom to voice opinions based on research. Academic freedom is the lifeblood of academia. Without this freedom there is no academia worthy of the name.

The freedom possessed by an academic to voice a political or moral opinion, which does not stem from a scientific study, is freedom of expression and not academic freedom – just as the freedom to express an opinion, on the part of any person who is not an academic, is freedom of expression.

Emmanuel Sharon
Mevasseret Zion

Not drying up, getting polluted

In response to "Water, hypocrisy and politics," August 1

Israel is not drying up at all, nor since the establishment of the state has there been a situation where the heads of the water economy had at their disposal such a large variety of resources in a range of quality levels – allowing for proper handling of a series of drought years.

The campaign slogan should not be "Israel is drying up," but "Israel is getting polluted." Growing sections of the coastal aquifer and within the Arava are dropping out of the production system due to salinity and contamination – no less challenging a problem than the quantitative shortage.

A plan to restore the southern coastal aquifer between the edge of the Gaza Strip and Ashdod was recently approved, and parts of it have already been implemented. The fight against contamination and the increased salinity of natural water resources requires, beyond monetary resources, interministerial cooperation given that the Water Authority does not control a wide variety of sources of human pollution. For example generated by criminal industries, absorption pits, farms, pirate garbage dumps, irrigated agricultural plots and seepage from urban areas and roads.

The successful efforts to restore the natural water resources, while simultaneously replacing fresh water with treated sewerage and developing desalination facilities to treat sea water, will allow for proper and calm management of the water economy. This can be accomplished without frightening the public with draconian fines and empty slogans.

Regarding the water conservation campaign, the general public has cooperated with the call to

save, except for the kibbutzim and moshavim where, for some reason, "agricultural" water continues to be used for non-agricultural purposes. Many citizens are also using gray water, whether through primitive means or expensive systems.

Israeli agriculture has done wonders by international standards through the use of treated sewerage water, and in reducing the amount of water used per unit of area and per ton of produce – a large part of it through the use of treated sewerage. However, it must be made clear that the savings potential of [lessening] domestic use in Israel is relatively small quantitatively, because water consumption here is efficient and very sparing in comparison to other countries – both on the systemic level and the level of individual use.

Therefore, pressure should not be exerted on the public beyond establishing reasonable rate brackets: If you use less than 60 percent of the household allocation, you will be charged a discounted rate; between 60 and 80 percent, you pay cost price; and above 80 percent, you pay a higher rate of three or four times the cost price.

David Elkan
Karmei Yosef

Young Brits see themselves here

In response to "A Zionist snapshot of UK Jews," August 6

Anshel Pfeffer complains that "the JPR [Jewish Policy Research] report does not include a breakdown according to age groups." It does. The survey states that 20% of respondents had already lived in Israel and 22% thought it likely that they would live in Israel in the future – a figure that rises to one third in terms of all 18-39 year olds (my emphasis). This is an astonishing statistic: One third of the younger sector of British Jewry thinks it likely they will live in Israel at some point. They don't seem to be as worried about the political situation as Anshel Pfeffer.

Andrew Balcombe
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