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המרכז הבינתחומי הרצליה - 84260					

Gilead: Probe decision to buy German subs

• By HERB KEINON

An objective body needs to be established to determine whether the decision to buy submarines from Germany was correct and was made after going through the proper channels, Maj.-Gen (res.) Amos Gilead told *The Jerusalem Post* on Tuesday.

"The submarine case is very worrying," said Gilead, former head of the Defense Ministry's diplomatic-security division and today head of IDC Herzliya's Institute for

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Policy and Strategy.

Blue and White leader Benny Gantz pledged on Monday to establish a committee of inquiry into the submarine purchases if elected.

Gilead's name burst into the headlines earlier this week when Channel 13 reported that he told police investigating suspected bribery in the submarines affair that Netanyahu gave Germany approval to sell Egypt advanced submarines, something Netanyahu's political rivals say was motivated by a financial interest he formerly had in a company that did business with the German conglomerate, Thyssenkrupp, building the submarines.

Netanyahu has denied giving a nod to Germany's selling the submarines to Egypt, a move which defense officials have said would harm Israel's qualitative military edge. Gilead refused to discuss in any way the sale of the submarines to Egypt.

He was willing to talk about what he feels is the need to investigate Israel's 2015 decision to purchase two additional submarines from Germany, a decision that has led to police recommendations to indict six

people – including close Netanyahu confidants and senior security officials – for bribery and other offenses.

"Submarines are an incredible strategic weapon that can be used for a wide range of missions," Gilead said. "The question is whether Israel needs submarines, and the answer is 'yes,' with five exclamation marks. Then the question is how many, because submarines are expensive." He said the expense is not only the purchase of the submarines, but their upkeep as well.

In the final analysis, Gilead said, the question is how many submarines are needed – and that depends on the resources at hand. When Israel inked the deal in 2015 for two additional German submarines, it had a fleet of five submarines, with a sixth already on order.

"If I give more to submarines," he said, "I am able to give less to the land forces." Gilead said that it is the land forces that will decide the next war and which should be equipped "with the very best weapons, both offensive and defensive."

"If you buy too many submarines, it may be at the expense of the land forces," he said.

Gilead, whose previous roles in the IDF included spokesman, was careful not to say whether he thought this was the case, but rather that it was something that needed to be investigated.

Gilead said there was a clear, streamlined process in the security apparatus to determine which weapons should be bought. This process starts with each of the three military branches – land, sea and air – assessing what their needs are, and bringing them to the chief of staff and the general staff, which judge the requests based on intelligence information and an assessment of the current strategic situation.

The chief of staff then makes his decision and brings it to the defense minister, who makes a recommendation – which may be different than that of the army – and then brings that to the prime minister.

After weighing the matter, Gilead said, "the prime minister must – must – bring it to the security cabinet, which is the forum authorized to make decisions on security and foreign policy."

He said that if steps in the process are "skipped over," and other actors are involved – including those close to the prime minister against whom the police have recommended indictments – then there is room for an investigation.

"I think all the ways provided by law should be exhausted in understanding the decision-making process: how it was handled, if it was influenced by foreign considerations, if it worked and if it was effective," he said. "This needs to be checked by an objective body. This could be either the state comptroller or a government commission of inquiry, as has been done in the past."

Gilead said it is "very worrisome" if the decision did not proceed through the proper channels.

"In the end it affects all of us," he said. "If in the end we will not have a strong enough land force, we will face serious damage, because I see what the Iranians and Hezbollah are planning."

Gilead said that "it can't be that we buy unnecessary submarines which didn't go through the correct process, and ignore recommendations of the security establishment."

Former defense minister Moshe Ya'alon, now one of Netanyahu's chief political rivals, has said in the past that he and other defense officials objected to the purchase.

"This is not only a procedural matter – about whether there was a discussion, or what kind of discussion," Gilead said. "It is whether you are making the right decisions."

In the end, he said, "this is a question of whether or not you have muscles in the right place, or not."