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Armée et nation en Israël : pouvoir civil, pouvoir militaire

The Israeli Changing Security Agenda: Army/Society Relations

Amir Oren
Yehuda Ben Meir
Stuart A. Cohen
Mark A. Heller

Sous la direction de May Chartouni-Dubarry

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Tél. : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 00 - Fax : 33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
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Sommaire

Avant-propos p. 7
May Chartouni-Dubarry

Armée et nation en Israël : pouvoir civil, pouvoir militaire p. 9
(synthèse)
Historique p. 11
L'interaction entre les sphères civile et militaire p. 15
La dimension « religieux-laïques » p. 18
L'impact des recompositions stratégiques extérieures p. 19
May Chartouni-Dubarry

De BG à Bibi : les forces israéliennes de défense 50 ans après p. 23
Le modèle Ben Gourion :
contrôle politique et unité de commandement p. 23
Le nouveau pluralisme p. 27
Rompre les liens p. 29
L'aliénation nouvelle p. 34
Amir Oren

Les relations « civil-militaire » en Israël p. 37
Introduction p. 37
Principes constitutionnels – le Haut-Commandement national p. 40
L'organisation de la défense p. 53
Le contrôle du pouvoir civil p. 56

Armée et nation en Israël : pouvoir civil, pouvoir militaire

Yehuda Ben Meir
Le livre ou l'épée ?
Dilemmes entre religion et service militaire en Israël p. 59
« S'instruire ou servir ? » p. 67
« Intégration ou isolement ? » p. 73
Les implications politiques p. 79
Stuart A. Cohen

Les liens armée-société en Israël :
l'impact des facteurs extérieurs p. 83
Introduction p. 83
La doctrine nationale de sécurité p. 84
Les transformations de l'environnement stratégique p. 87
Structures et doctrines p. 96
Les implications sur les relations entre l'armée et la société p. 97
Mark A. Heller

Biographies/Auteurs p. 103

Contents

Foreword p. 7
May Chartouni-Dubarry

The Israeli Changing Security Agenda: Army/Society Relations p. 9
(Synopsis)
Historical Background p. 11
Civil/Military Interaction p. 15
The Religious/Secular Divide p. 18
The Impact of External Factors p. 19
May Chartouni-Dubarry

From BG to Bibi: The Israeli Defense Forces at 50 p. 23
The Ben-Gurion Model: Political Control and Unity of Command p. 23
The New Pluralism p. 27
Breaking the Bond p. 29
The New Alienation p. 34
Amir Oren

Civil/Military Relations in Israel p. 37
Introduction p. 37
Constitutional Principles – The National Command Authority p. 40
Defense Organization p. 53
Civilian Control p. 56
Yehuda Ben Meir

The Scroll or the Sword?
Dilemmas Between Religion
and Military Service in Contemporary Israel p. 59
"Study or Service?" p. 67
"Insulation or Integration?" p. 73
Policy Implications p. 79
Stuart A. Cohen

Army/Society Relations in Israel:
The Impact of External Factors p. 83
Introduction p. 83
Israeli National Security Doctrine p. 84
Changing Strategic Environment p. 87
Structural/Doctrinal Responses p. 96
Implications for Army/Society Relations p. 97
Mark A. Heller

Biographies/Authors p. 103

Avant-propos

Le 17 mai 1999, les Israéliens se rendront aux urnes pour élire simultanément leur premier ministre et leurs 120 représentants à la Knesset. Prévues initialement pour le mois d'octobre 2000, ces élections anticipées sont censées modifier non seulement la cartographie politique israélienne mais l'ensemble de la donne régionale. Les spéculations se multiplient à la veille d'un scrutin jugé comme déterminant pour l'avenir de la paix au Moyen-Orient. Le lien établi entre l'arrêt brutal du processus de paix israélo-arabe et l'arrivée d'une nouvelle équipe au pouvoir dirigée par Benyamin Nétanyahou est un fait incontestable. Néanmoins, rien ne permet d'affirmer en l'état actuel des choses qu'un gouvernement d'union nationale – s'il devait se former à l'issue des élections et quelle qu'en soit la couleur – soit en mesure de fournir la clef d'un déblocage des négociations.

L'enseignement majeur de cette campagne reste, à l'instar de toutes celles qui l'ont précédée, la permanence de la primauté des enjeux de sécurité. En forçant Israël à se déterminer par rapport à son histoire, à son identité et à son environnement régional, le processus de paix, avec ses avancées et ses reculs, n'a pas fini d'agir comme un électrochoc sur l'ensemble de la société israélienne, comme en attestent la polarisation croissante de l'opinion publique, l'atomisation des élites ainsi que la fragmentation des grands partis traditionnels. Ces tensions internes et le caractère volatil de la scène politique israélienne ont contribué, sinon à accroître, tout du moins à garder intact le rôle primordial des militaires

dans la vie politique ; sur les 4 candidats en lice, 2 sont en effet des généraux retraités[1]. C'est tout le paradoxe – et certains jugeront le caractère unique – de la démocratie israélienne. La relation quasi symbiotique entre la société israélienne et son armée demeure inchangée, du moins en apparence.

Cet ouvrage vise donc à donner une meilleure compréhension des liens tout à fait spécifiques et complexes entre la nation israélienne et son armée dont l'évolution déterminera, davantage peut-être qu'un scrutin électoral, l'avenir du processus de paix. Il a bénéficié de la contribution de 4 experts israéliens dont les analyses reflètent les grandes lignes du débat actuel en Israël autour de cette question. Ces études ont été présentées et discutées à l'occasion d'un séminaire franco-israélien qui s'est tenu à l'Ifri en septembre 1998.

Pour finir, je tiens à exprimer ma reconnaissance à Anne-Laure Cloutier qui a veillé à la continuité « logistique » du projet et à Brigitte Pennaguer pour sa précieuse assistance éditoriale.

Avril 1999

May Chartouni-Dubarry
Chargée de recherche sur le Moyen-Orient, la Méditerranée, le monde arabe
Institut français des relations internationales.

1. Il s'agit de Ehoud Barak, Yitzhak Mordechaï, les deux autres étant Benyamin Nétanyahou et Zeev Benyamin Begin.

Armée et nation en Israël : pouvoir civil, pouvoir militaire

May Chartouni-Dubarry

Parmi les nombreuses questions que soulève le cinquantième anniversaire de l'État hébreu, il en est une, centrale, qui concerne la relation tout à fait spécifique entre la société israélienne et son armée. L'évolution de ce lien quasi ombilical constitue l'un des facteurs-clefs déterminant tout à la fois l'avenir de l'État d'Israël, de son identité propre, ainsi que de ses rapports avec son environnement régional. « Armée du peuple » et « nation en armes » : ces deux expressions résument à elles seules l'interpénétration et l'interaction étroites entre les deux sphères civile et militaire. L'armée israélienne a, dès sa création, prétendu à une vocation nationale, sociale et même morale, et assumé des fonctions allant bien au-delà de sa mission initiale : la défense des frontières. Inspiré et initié par Ben Gourion, ce rôle moteur de l'armée dans le processus de construction nationale comprenait des tâches aussi diverses que l'enseignement de l'hébreu et de la culture juive aux nouveaux immigrants ou la construction de colonies de peuplement à l'intention de soldats démobilisés. Dans le même temps, Tsahal (Forces de défense israéliennes, en hébreu) constituait un vecteur de mobilité et d'ascension sociales pour des conscrits d'origine modeste. Le service militaire constituait ainsi un rite initiatique sans lequel aucun israélien ne pouvait prétendre, au moins symboliquement, à la citoyenneté pleine et entière.

Armée et nation en Israël : pouvoir civil, pouvoir militaire

Objet de tout l'orgueil national depuis cette guerre-éclair de 1967, symbole vénéré et intouchable, Tsahal est-elle en voie de se banaliser, de se désacraliser ? Plusieurs indices viennent corroborer la thèse d'une mutation profonde du rôle de l'armée dans la société israélienne : une baisse sensible de la motivation qui touche les conscrits autant que les réservistes ; le malaise au sein de l'opinion publique qui n'hésite plus à critiquer la politisation ou le carriérisme de certains officiers ; un budget militaire en baisse constante depuis dix ans ; l'érosion de la fonction de creuset unificateur de Tsahal comme en attestent les exemptions accordées aux immigrants russes et éthiopiens...

Les transformations géostratégiques en cours dans la région et la modification du concept même de la guerre que cela induit contribueront à renforcer cette tendance au sein de Tsahal vers une professionnalisation et une autonomisation du corps d'armée de plus en plus grandes ; une perspective qui, pour une grande majorité des Israéliens, relevait, il n'y a pas si longtemps encore, de l'hérésie.

L'étude examine ces mutations en cours sous 4 angles différents.

· *Le premier* tente d'inscrire cette problématique dans une perspective historique, en retraçant les principales étapes qui ont marqué l'évolution de ces liens fondateurs et uniques entre la nation et l'armée en Israël.

· *Le deuxième thème* est centré sur la relation civils-militaires. La perméabilité ou la porosité de la frontière entre le civil et le militaire en Israël a été traditionnellement imputée à la prééminence des enjeux de sécurité sur la vie politique du pays. L'envers de la médaille de cet état d'« intimité » entre les deux sphères est que l'armée finit par refléter en son sein le processus de polarisation politique croissante de la société israélienne autour de l'enjeu du processus de paix.

· *Le troisième thème* analyse de façon pointue les rapports complexes et paradoxaux entre les milieux dits « religieux-nationalistes » et l'armée. Alors que le nombre d'exemptions du service militaire accordées à la communauté *haredi* (religieux ultra orthodoxes) ne fait qu'augmenter, on constate dans le même temps une désaffection relative des laïcs par rapport à l'armée. Deux militaires sur dix porteraient la kippa et cette tendance à la « délaïcisation » des forces armées est, semble-t-il, appelée à se renforcer dans les dix prochaines années.

· *Enfin, le dernier thème* évalue l'impact des recompositions stratégiques extérieures – régionales et internationales – sur cette relation et la manière dont cela affecte le regard que l'armée porte sur elle-même, et sur la redéfinition de son rôle et de sa mission au sein de la société et de l'État. La paix avec l'Égypte et la Jordanie, l'effondrement de l'Union soviétique et le processus de paix ont écarté la menace de type « existentiel » qui pesait jusque-là sur Israël, légitimant l'état d'alerte et de mobilisation permanent au sein de la population.

■ Historique

Le concept de « sécurité nationale » israélien a été forgé à la fin des années 40 et au début des années 50 à la fois par les circonstances géostratégiques particulières qui ont prévalu à la création de l'État hébreu et par la vision sociale des pères fondateurs, notamment celle de Ben Gourion. De cette combinaison est née la version israélienne de la « nation en armes » : une force militaire qui reflète et façonne la société.

Il n'existe pas en Israël de *Livres blancs* à l'instar de ceux établis périodiquement par les ministères de la Défense dans de nombreux pays. Une doctrine informelle s'est pourtant imposée à travers l'expérience de

la guerre de libération de 1948 et des premières années de l'établissement de l'État. Cette doctrine s'appuyait sur trois fondements :

- Israël était condamné à évoluer dans un environnement hostile voué à sa destruction ;
- Cette menace était d'autant plus aiguë qu'Israël souffrait d'un manque de profondeur stratégique et d'un état de forces désavantageux sur les plans démographique et matériel ;
- Enfin, il était quasi impossible pour l'État hébreu de remporter une victoire décisive dont l'issue aurait été d'imposer la paix à ses voisins. Dans ces conditions, seule la supériorité militaire écrasante d'Israël par la mobilisation optimale de ses ressources humaines et économiques pouvait forcer les Arabes à renoncer à l'option de la guerre.

Cette équation stratégique initiale a donc conduit à la création d'une armée, Tsahal, selon le modèle d'une force de milice basée sur le système de conscription quasi universel et de réserve (les hommes de 18 à 51 ans). Seul un noyau dur de professionnels assure de façon permanente l'encadrement et l'entraînement des troupes. Ce sont eux qui, avec les conscrits, assument les tâches de « sécurité courante » (opérations de routine, contre-terrorisme, déploiements quotidiens), ainsi que celles exigeant un degré de préparation optimal (renseignements, force aérienne, etc.). Néanmoins, ce sont les réservistes qui portent le plus gros du fardeau en cas de confrontation terrestre de très large envergure.

La structure de la Force israélienne de défense (FID) répondait également à la mission dont elle avait été investie dès sa création dans l'entreprise de construction nationale. Le système de conscription universel et de réserve était conçu comme un moyen d'inculquer des valeurs et des idéaux communs conformes à la vision que l'establishment sioniste se faisait du « nouvel homme israélien ».

Jusqu'à la guerre des Six Jours de 1967, les lourdes contraintes – en termes de temps, de mobilisation de ressources, mais aussi de pertes humaines – que faisait peser cet état de guerre permanent étaient généralement bien acceptées par la population. Les raisons en étaient bien évidemment un sens très fort de solidarité, une confiance quasi absolue dans l'armée et, par-dessus tout, la conviction qu'Israël courait un réel danger existentiel, qu'il n'y avait pas de paix possible, et que tout ce qui était exigé des Israéliens au nom de la sécurité était pleinement justifié, en un mot qu'Israël n'avait pas le choix.

Tout cela commença à changer à la fin des années 60. La guerre d'usure avec son flot de pertes humaines et les premiers efforts diplomatiques commencèrent à remettre en cause le postulat de base du « *No Choice* ». Mais, jusqu'en 1973, ces questionnements restaient le fait de quelques élites.

La guerre d'Octobre constitue un véritable tournant dans l'évolution du lien entre l'armée et la société. Elle a contribué à ébranler la confiance quasi absolue dans le génie militaire de Tsahal et dans l'infaillibilité de l'establishment politico-militaire. Mais, même à ce moment-là, l'opinion publique a plutôt rejeté la responsabilité des revers militaires initiaux, non point sur l'armée – en dépit des défaillances révélées par la Commission d'enquête – mais sur les responsables politiques qui avaient rompu avec la doctrine officielle, en n'ordonnant pas une large mobilisation des réservistes ou une attaque de type préemptif.

Toutefois, les changements les plus fondamentaux ne se produiront pas avant la fin des années 70 et sont liés à l'apparition de toute une série de facteurs stratégiques et politiques. Le premier est lié à la réduction de la menace de type conventionnel. La paix avec l'Égypte et les huit années de guerre Iran/Irak ont contribué à exclure du champ de la confrontation la première puissance arabe et à neutraliser la menace de la formation

d'un front oriental. Le deuxième facteur est lié au processus de « désacralisation » de Tsahal amorcé en 1973. La guerre du Liban de 1982-1985 – surtout les massacres de Sabra et de Chatila – a provoqué un véritable séisme au sein de la société israélienne. Cette expérience amère a profondément remis en cause le concept de guerre préventive. Menahem Begin a lui-même qualifié l'opération « Paix en Galilée » de « *War of choice* », l'objectif n'étant pas de protéger les populations du Nord d'Israël mais de refaçonner la carte politique et stratégique du Proche-Orient dans un sens favorable aux intérêts israéliens. Ce n'est pas un hasard si cette guerre – qui se poursuit aujourd'hui au Liban-sud sous la forme d'une guérilla (ou guerre de faible intensité) – est devenue l'un des enjeux internes les plus litigieux dans l'histoire d'Israël, provoquant des manifestations massives et portant un coup sérieux au moral comme à la discipline des troupes. Mais c'est incontestablement le déclenchement de l'Intifadah en 1987 qui a eu l'effet le plus néfaste sur la motivation des troupes. L'armée s'est ainsi retrouvée confinée à des tâches de maintien de l'ordre et engagée dans une guerre d'usure – pour laquelle elle n'était pas psychologiquement préparée – contre la population civile palestinienne. L'Intifadah a profondément ébranlé le mythe de la « pureté des armes » de Tsahal et porté un coup à son prestige ; à telle enseigne qu'une proportion de plus en plus importante de réservistes appelés chaque année à servir dans les territoires ne rejoignent plus leur unité. Enfin, les perspectives de paix ouvertes par Madrid puis par Oslo ont révolutionné le concept de sécurité nationale et ont induit une baisse de la motivation parmi les conscrits et surtout les réservistes. En changeant de nature, la menace a transformé le rôle de l'armée. Plus fondamentalement, l'enjeu de la paix a accru le processus de polarisation au sein de la société israélienne, en proie à des divisions internes entre religieux et laïques, sépharades et ashkénazes, partisans du « Grand Israël » et avocats du compromis territorial, entre colombes et faucons, sympathisants du Likoud et défenseurs du parti travailliste, sans oublier l'arrivée massive d'immigrants russes dans les années 90 qui

introduit un nouvel élément d'hétérogénéité. La dilution du statut quasi mythologique de l'armée n'est pas due qu'à des facteurs externes *stricto sensu*. Il découle autant d'un changement profond des valeurs au sein de la société israélienne lasse et fatiguée de la guerre, et qui n'est plus disposée à sacrifier sa qualité de vie. Ces deux processus parallèles d'érosion du consensus national et de dilution de l'idéal sioniste et collectiviste des premières décennies affectent en profondeur les liens entre l'armée et la nation.

■ L'interaction entre les sphères civile et militaire

C'est David Ben Gourion qui a posé les fondements de ce modèle de relations unique entre les deux sphères civile et militaire. Grâce à un immense prestige personnel, il a réussi à relever les défis posés par ses rivaux politiques et militaires, et à établir le contrôle ferme des instances civiles sur l'appareil de l'armée et, à un stade ultérieur, à procéder à la dépolitisation des FDI. Ce modèle a permis à l'armée israélienne de maintenir à un niveau optimal ses capacités opérationnelles. Néanmoins, la cohésion des élites sur laquelle il reposait a commencé à s'effriter à la fin des années 60 et surtout à partir de 1973. Comme analysé plus haut, cette date marque l'amorce du déclin du prestige de Tsahal, en raison du processus de fragmentation des élites, mais aussi des transformations internes à la société et à la politique israéliennes. Elle marque également l'émergence d'un nouveau type de relations entre les pouvoirs civil et militaire, aux contours encore incertains mais qui s'éloigne de plus en plus – et notamment depuis les élections de 1996 – du modèle initié par David Ben Gourion.

Ces relations continuent à être marquées par une forte interpénétration des deux champs et par une absence de différenciation nette entre les élites politiques et militaires, comme l'atteste la reconversion politique

aisée et parfois brillante de nombreux officiers. Bien que la fonction présidentielle soit largement honorifique, il est significatif de constater que le chef de l'État actuel ainsi que son prédécesseur étaient tous deux généraux. Pendant de nombreuses années et jusqu'à l'assassinat d'Itzhak Rabin, le Président, le Premier ministre et le chef de la Cour suprême de justice étaient également des généraux à la retraite. Le cadre constitutionnel délimitant les champs de compétence entre le pouvoir militaire et le pouvoir politique reste flexible et général, et relève beaucoup plus du droit coutumier que du droit purement constitutionnel. L'unique texte légiférant en la matière, et s'intitulant *Loi fondamentale sur l'Armée*, fait moins d'une page. Bien qu'il établisse sans ambiguïté le principe constitutionnel de la subordination de l'armée au pouvoir politique, il laisse persister un flou juridique quant à savoir de qui relève en dernière instance l'autorité sur les forces armées : du Premier ministre, du ministre de la Défense, du Comité ministériel chargé de la sécurité nationale ou encore du Cabinet. L'une des questions qui n'a pas été tranchée dans la pratique a trait au rôle du ministre de la Défense : représente-t-il l'armée au sein du Cabinet ou au contraire le gouvernement vis-à-vis des militaires ? Il est important de souligner qu'Israël est l'unique démocratie en cette fin de millénaire où le ministre de la Défense est le deuxième personnage de l'État en importance, talonnant de près le Premier ministre (à telle enseigne que pendant vingt-deux ans, ces deux fonctions ont été remplies par la même personne). En temps de guerre, cette ambiguïté sur le partage des responsabilités et de l'autorité au niveau du processus de décision peut devenir une source de tension majeure, comme lors de la guerre du Liban en 1982, quand Ariel Sharon prit plusieurs initiatives sans accord gouvernemental préalable – telles que la décision d'ordonner l'entrée des troupes israéliennes dans Beyrouth-ouest à la suite de l'assassinat du président libanais fraîchement élu, Béchir Gemayel.

La cooptation de généraux au passé prestigieux demeure un gage de succès et de légitimité pour les partis politiques. L'ancien chef d'état-major, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, et le candidat battu au même poste, Matan Vilnai, ont tous deux, semble-t-il, été approchés par des cadres du parti travailliste pour les inciter à rejoindre les rangs. De toute évidence, le nombre des ex-officiers supérieurs se recyclant dans la vie politique n'est pas prêt de décroître. Mais la distension des liens que l'on observe entre le citoyen israélien et son armée se vérifie également au niveau des relations entre le leadership politique et le haut commandement de l'armée qui n'ont jamais été aussi mauvaises que depuis l'arrivée au pouvoir de Benyamin Nétanyahou. En réalité, les premiers signes de tension entre le pouvoir politique et le pouvoir militaire remontent aux accords d'Oslo. L'implication d'un certain nombre d'officiers supérieurs dans les négociations sur la mise en œuvre d'Oslo I et II a eu comme résultat de mettre Tsahal au cœur de la controverse qui divise la société israélienne. L'état-major a tenté en vain de rester à l'écart des conflits internes et de préserver l'image apolitique et consensuelle de l'armée. Jusque-là, le leadership politique avait toujours respecté la neutralité de Tsahal comme un élément essentiel de son identité. Rompant avec cette approche, Benyamin Nétanyahou accusa, au moins implicitement ou par la voix de ses collaborateurs, le haut commandement militaire d'être inféodé à la gauche et son prédécesseur, Itzhak Rabin, d'avoir effectivement « politisé » l'armée. Il tenta alors d'exclure les généraux de toutes les négociations en cours, s'aliénant l'ensemble de l'establishment militaire et poussant la crise de confiance entre les deux pouvoirs politique et militaire à son paroxysme.

■ La dimension « religieux-laïques »

Le clivage « religieux-laïques » et les tensions qu'il génère au sein de la société israélienne a fini par gagner les rangs de l'armée. La « délaïcisation » des forces armées, les exemptions croissantes accordées aux *haredims* (juifs ultra orthodoxes) et la multiplication des soldats portant la kippa suscite un débat des plus aigus en Israël sur les dangers que cela fait peser sur l'unité de Tsahal. L'assassinat d'Itzhak Rabin par un réserviste issu des milieux religieux – attachés dans leur grande majorité au Grand Israël – a amplifié les craintes d'une idéologisation des forces armées pouvant conduire à des formes de désobéissance.

Contrairement à leurs homologues *haredi*, les conscrits nationalistes-religieux ne cherchent pas à se soustraire au service militaire. Contrairement aussi aux jeunes laïques de plus en plus réticents à servir dans les unités de combat, les diplômés des écoles rabbiniques ont vu leur représentation croître au sein de ces mêmes unités et font preuve d'une plus grande motivation et d'un fort esprit de cohésion.

Un autre enjeu litigieux concerne les communautés ultra orthodoxes perçues de plus en plus par le reste de la société comme un poids économique et social. Récemment, un projet de loi présenté à la Knesset par des députés travaillistes portant sur une régulation et une limitation des droits d'exemption accordés aux *haredims* a été rejeté grâce à l'alliance entre des députés du Likoud et du parti religieux, d'une part, et des députés arabes israéliens, d'autre part. Cet épisode – quelque peu surréaliste – est illustratif tout à la fois du processus de fragmentation des élites et du déficit d'intégration nationale que l'armée n'est plus en mesure de combler.

■ L'impact des recompositions stratégiques extérieures

L'environnement stratégique israélien tel qu'il émerge aujourd'hui est fondamentalement différent de celui qui a façonné la structure et la doctrine traditionnelles de Tsahal ainsi que le modèle des liens armée-nation. La réduction de la menace militaire de type conventionnel, l'effritement du « consensus sécuritaire » et l'apparition en 1991 d'un nouveau type de menaces, les missiles balistiques, imposent un réaménagement des priorités en matière de sécurité, ainsi qu'une restructuration en profondeur des forces armées. Aucun des responsables politiques ou militaires israéliens n'ignore la réalité de ces changements et la nécessité d'y répondre de façon appropriée. Mais il semble qu'il y ait davantage d'accord sur la nature du problème que sur les moyens d'y remédier.

L'un des traits les plus marquants de l'environnement stratégique actuel et futur est l'élargissement de l'éventail des menaces, à la fois en termes de portée et d'intensité. L'État hébreu continuera à être confronté à deux types de menaces qui se situent chacune aux deux extrémités du spectre : la prolifération des armements de destruction massive susceptibles de faire à nouveau peser sur Israël une menace de type existentielle ; la permanence du terrorisme et des conflits de faible intensité (guérilla, mouvement insurrectionnel…). L'évolution du processus de paix est sans aucun doute l'une des variables-clefs de l'environnement stratégique. Mais, même dans le cas le plus optimiste, il faudra se préparer à la guerre dans la paix. En effet, pour les responsables israéliens chargés de la défense, la paix représente à la fois une opportunité et un défi. Une opportunité car elle permettrait de réduire et de restructurer les capacités en matière de défense ; un défi en raison de l'incertitude qui pèse sur la stabilité politique de nombreux États de la région – l'une des idées qui prévaut dans les cercles de pouvoir israéliens est que l'absence de systèmes démocratiques dans la région rend toute paix extrêmement fragile.

En tout état de cause, les évolutions, prévisibles à moyen terme, de l'environnement stratégique israélien semblent aller dans le sens de l'émergence d'une armée plus professionnelle, impliquant un système de recrutement plus sélectif et une diminution substantielle des réservistes qui ont donné à Tsahal son identité « d'armée des citoyens ». L'une des conséquences sera de creuser le fossé existant déjà entre l'image et la réalité de Tsahal en tant que miroir de la société israélienne. Pour ne citer que cet exemple, le rôle de creuset unificateur imparti à l'armée ne s'est jamais exercé à l'endroit de la population arabe d'Israël ou de la communauté ultra orthodoxe de la population juive.

Ces tendances vers une armée plus réduite mais plus performante (« *a smaller but smarter army* ») rencontreront des résistances, pour diverses raisons. La première est l'attachement résiduel mais persistant de la population à l'image – de plus en plus éloignée de la réalité – d'une armée investie d'une mission sociale. Les sondages d'opinion indiquent une opposition forte à l'idée d'une armée de volontaires, même en cas de paix. Une autre raison est le coût qu'une telle transformation induirait. Une armée de professionnels sera une armée extrêmement onéreuse, ne serait-ce qu'en raison de la nécessité d'augmenter la part des salaires et pensions (qui constituent déjà près de 45 % du total des dépenses) pour être en mesure de rivaliser avec le secteur civil. De plus, le citoyen et contribuable israélien, de moins en moins disposé à faire des sacrifices au nom de la sécurité, s'opposera à n'en pas douter à un gonflement du budget de la Défense. Enfin, l'enlisement du processus de paix a contribué à réhabiliter l'« ancien » agenda de sécurité et à repousser à un avenir plus lointain les nécessaires transformations que devra subir l'armée israélienne à la lumière des recompositions stratégiques futures.
Pour toutes ces raisons, il est peu probable que l'État hébreu adopte le modèle d'une armée professionnelle, basée exclusivement sur le système de volontariat. Une force composite formée de soldats de carrière et de conscrits, recrutés de façon plus sélective que par le passé, semble pour le

moment être l'éventualité la plus plausible. Cette semi-professionnalisation ne sera peut-être pas pour déplaire à certains au sein de l'état-major quelque peu irrités par l'immixtion extérieure croissante dans les affaires de l'armée.

From BG to Bibi: The Israeli Defense Forces at 50*

Amir Oren**

For most of Israel's existence, its security forces, whether in uniform or in mufti, projected an aura of invincibility. Even when they suffered setbacks, they were considered the proudest symbol of the Israeli – or rather Jewish – nation. But in recent years, they seem to have fallen from grace, internationally as well as domestically. How did this come about? Is it an irreversible trend, or just part of a natural cycle of ebbs and flows?

■ The Ben-Gurion Model: Political Control and Unity of Command

Israel is probably the only democracy at the end of the millennium in whose government the Minister of Defense is the second most important member of the cabinet, close behind the Prime Minister, so close, in fact,

* This paper is the distillation of 30 years of journalistic coverage of military and political affairs in Israel. It is based on documentary research and numerous conversations with central figures in the defense establishment, government and judiciary. Some of the material first appeared in the author's columns in *Davar*, *Ha'aretz*, and other newspapers and magazines.

** Journalist (military correspondent at *Ha'aretz*).

that almost half of the time, in 22 of the state's first 50 years, the Defense Minister was the Prime Minister. Retired generals in Israel routinely go into politics and reach cabinet rank, including the coveted Defense portfolio. Though Israel's presidency is largely ceremonial, it is worth noting that both the current president and his predecessor were generals. For several years, until shortly before Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, the President, Prime Minister, and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court were all retired generals.

While Israel has changed in many ways since 1948, it remains a country hovering on the brink of war and constantly involved in cross-border hostilities. And David Ben-Gurion, who died 25 years ago, would still recognize many of its main features. The model of civil-military relations he instituted aimed at assuring the prime ministerial control of the military at two levels: vis-a-vis other politicians and over the armed forces. In striving to achieve this kind of control, Ben-Gurion had to reconcile the contradictory needs for representative civilian government in a democratic society and for unity of command in the military, especially in time of war. Ben-Gurion's challenge was to establish his dominance over the generals and his freedom from cabinet interference precisely at the moment when the state of Israel was being created, fighting for its life and forming its institutions.

He was helped by the fact that both the generals and the ministers were neophytes in the business of running countries, armies and wars; at most, they were veterans of public service in trade union or Jewish Agency affairs. Nevertheless, he confronted a hierarchy in which all mainstream Zionist political movements in pre-state Israel were represented in a "National Staff" headed by a political rival. In 1948, this rival was Israel Galili, leader of Ahdut Ha'avoda, which had split from Ben-Gurion's own Mapai Party. As Head of the National Staff and de-facto Deputy Minister of Defense, Galili was subordinate to Ben-Gurion. But Galili

was also the immediate superior of the ranking military officer, Yaakov Dori, who had the title Chief of the General Staff. Ben-Gurion sought to eliminate the middleman and exert direct supervision over Dori and the General Staff.

This had something to do with Ben-Gurion's wish to streamline the chain of command, a lesson he absorbed from his formative time in London during the Blitz of 1940, when Winston Churchill, as a new Prime Minister experienced in military and naval affairs, reorganized the separate service ministries into a single Ministry of Defense under his own direction. Ben-Gurion insisted on appointing a single Chief of the General Staff, who outranked all other officers. The CGS was to be the commanding general of all ground forces – no distinct Army as such was ever established – with the commanding officers of the Air Force and Navy subordinate to him and serving as members of the General Staff plenum. When these two services resisted their subordination to the General Staff, and hence to the Army, Ben-Gurion even appointed Army generals to command them for a while.

This accent on reorganization for defense was not a mere pretext for political machinations, although some ministers and generals perceived it precisely as a naked grab for power on Ben-Gurion's part. As a result, five General Staff brigadiers, including Chief of Operations Yigael Yadin, tendered their resignations, claiming that Galili's participation was essential. But given the cabinet's fear that he, himself, would resign, Ben-Gurion prevailed, and the officers relented.

The same dual motive explained Ben-Gurion's insistence on decommissioning the headquarters of the Palmah (the Haganah shock troops, which swelled to three combat brigades in 1948 and provided some of the best officers and fighters). Once the cabinet stopped deliberating and reached its political decision, the military could have

only one master. Competing sources of authority, be they political, ideological or personal, could fragment the forces into militias fighting each other and challenging the nation's central authority. This held true whether the perceived challenge came from Menahem Begin's Irgun Zvai Leumi, the Lehi underground, or even Haganah veterans, now out of touch with the new Israel Defense Forces, who simply tried to organize a club.

Of all these challenges, the Palmah's was the most emotional, precisely because the political parties towards which Palmah was oriented were semi-estranged members of the Labor family. All of Palmah's generals and most of its other officers left the service at war's end, or were pushed out. The most senior of those who chose to stay on and make the military their career was Yitzhak Rabin, who was made to wait both for his general's rank (arranged by Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan when Ben-Gurion was on leave) and his appointment as CGS.

Under Ben-Gurion, the IDF was made safe for Mapai. In the early years, one did not have to carry a party card in order to be promoted to the senior ranks, but it helped. And while ambitious officers might safely declare themselves "non-partisan", they could not afford to be openly anti-Mapai. But at the height of his power and prestige, following the swift military victory in 1956, Ben-Gurion relaxed this control and began to look for fighting officers to energize the IDF even if they were not Mapai stalwarts. Because only one party – indeed, one leader – could conceivably rule, it seemed safe to appoint officers like Ezer Weizman (a former member of Irgun Zvai Leumi) and Palmah hero Yohai Bin-Nun to command the Air Force and Navy, respectively. As a result, the IDF appeared to be de-politicized, and only rarely thereafter did the implicit subject of politics in military appointments become explicit.

Ben-Gurion's other aim, and to a large extent his great achievement, was to make the IDF an agent of Israelization for a heterogeneous society. The army was assigned urgent national and nation building tasks outside the purview of conventional soldiering. Conscription was the great equalizer of Israeli society, and the years that draftees spent in uniform became their rite of initiation. Given these accomplishments, it is ironic that Ben-Gurion's political decline can be traced to an issue involving the IDF.

■ The New Pluralism

This issue was the Lavon Affair, which pitted Pinhas Lavon, the only other politician to have held the defense portfolio, against Colonel Binyamin Gibly, the head of military intelligence. Following the exposure in 1954 of an Israeli sabotage network in Egypt, Lavon and Gibly gave contradictory versions of the decisions leading to its establishment and activation. Confidential inquiries produced reasons to doubt the veracity of both, and their careers were quickly cut short. Gibly was denied any chance of promotion, and Lavon was sent back to his old job as secretary-general of the Histadrut trade union; this still left him part of the Mapai leadership, but further away from the top in the presumed order of succession. When Lavon demanded rehabilitation in the wake of later disclosures, other politicians were inclined to grant his wish, but Ben-Gurion, as patron of the IDF, rejected any reason short of a judicial finding to accept a politician's word over that of an officer.

Whether noble or pathetic, Ben-Gurion's efforts to portray the IDF as a moral as well as professional example were less than convincing. Although military censorship was tight and the press was eager to censor itself, more and more Israelis were being exposed to examples of military corruption and incompetence in their regular or reserve service. And as

the reflected glory of the 1956 war began to fade, the career military was again subject to a more discriminating view: some officers were indeed considered "the best and the brightest", toiling selflessly for Israel's security, but many others were regarded as mediocre, finding in the service shelter from the hardships of making a living as civilians.

The time was thus ripe for a new look at the equation, "Ben-Gurion equals the IDF equals the best interests of Israel". By trying to advance younger politicians, including Moshe Dayan, Ben-Gurion angered the Eshkol-Meir generation. When the clash over the Lavon Affair came to a head, Ben-Gurion left Mapai and formed Rafi, taking with him Dayan and other recently retired officers. Eshkol and Meir responded by forming an alliance with Ahdut Ha'avoda. This gave them a defense-oriented reinforcement, including Galili and Yigal Allon, the former commander of the Palmah; Rabin, Allon's protege in the Palmah, was finally made CGS.

The Mapai-Rafi clash, coming on the heels of the Lavon Affair, signaled the beginning of a new and pluralistic Israel; this implied a fresh look at the IDF. With people such as Ben-Gurion, Dayan and Shimon Peres now in opposition to the new establishment, people's beliefs in absolutes were shaken. In short order, the Six Day War jolted Israel and the IDF in several directions. Between the 1967 and the 1973 wars, the IDF's reputation was again unchallenged. Its generals were celebrated by a grateful nation and offered, upon retirement, plum jobs in industry and government. Instead of merely controlling the military, the ruling party now manipulated its top officers once they entered politics. Labor's chief kingmaker, Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir, first prevailed on CGS Haim Bar-Lev to extend Sharon's service when Sharon threatened to join the competition, then quoted Weizman's boasts regarding his plan to succeed Begin (thereby managing to turn Begin against Weizman), and

finally secured Bar-Lev a ministerial appointment as an internal counterweight to Dayan.

■ Breaking the Bond

But this balancing act fell apart in October 1973, when the elites drifted apart from each other. Up until the 1973 war, the military had tacitly helped the government patch the gap between its electoral rhetoric and the demands of defense doctrine. This doctrine was predicated on an immediate call-up of reserves when Arab preparations for war were detected, no matter what the presumed intentions behind these preparations were. Had the IDF done its doctrinal duty in October 1973 (as it did in May of that year) and recommended a call-up, it would have belied Labor's election campaign line, which featured Meir, Dayan, Bar-Lev and others boasting of the quiet along the Suez Canal and giving the government credit for its wise defense and foreign policy. Israel's media, too, were dutifully pro-establishment and had given the political and military leadership the benefit of the doubt. When it turned out that they were all, to one extent or another, partners in failure, the political-military-media triangle was beset by mutual recriminations.

The war marked a major turning-point in Israeli history. Before then, the IDF had a reputation for invincibility and its high command for infallibility; after that, the perception was just as negative. Israeli society lost its trust in the good faith and competence of its leaders. Rather than being the better part of "us", the military – along with the political echelon above it – became "them". The bond between the elites was broken by the Meirs government's futile attempt to save its own neck by accepting the Agranat Commission of Inquiry report, which singled out CGS David Elazar and several other generals for removal from office. The Agranat report followed the logic of the British system – and of Dayan's lawyers – according to which a minister is held personally

accountable only if he or she ignores the advice of the professional echelon. Otherwise, the minister is accountable to parliament, or – come election time – to the people. In this particular instance, however, elections were held in 1974, before the report was out. The Meir government clung to a majority in the Knesset and then forced General Elazar out, while refusing to volunteer its own resignation. In other words, the General Staff could no longer count on its civilian superiors to share in its failures as it shared in its triumphs.

The one minister who warned against this very result, and suggested that the cabinet apply the same standard of accountability to ministers as it did to generals was Yitzhak Rabin. But Rabin was a new and junior addition to the cabinet, and while untarnished by a war in which he had played no part, he was suspected of harboring ill-will towards Dayan and coveting the defense portfolio himself. He was also too inexperienced in politics to appreciate that Dayan's departure, rather than serving as a buffer between the IDF and Meir, would eventually force Meir out, as well.

At first, Meir prevailed in cabinet, but she could not withstand mounting public protests, and she resigned. Two months after the publication of the Agranat report, Israel had a new national security team in place, with Rabin as Prime Minister, his arch-rival Shimon Peres as Defense Minister, and General Mordechai Gur as CGS. For the first time, a retired military officer occupied the country's top executive position. This change was generated by two of Rabin's predecessors as CGS, retired generals Yigael Yadin and Haim Laskov, who as the two military experts on the five-member Agranat commission cast the deciding votes against Elazar and for Dayan. But in less than three years, Yadin further changed the face of Israeli politics by forming his own party, Dash, whose Knesset list took enough votes away from Labor to swing the

balance in favor of the Likud and usher Menahem Begin in to the Prime Ministers' Office.

In the 10 years between 1967 and 1977, the Likud had been legitimized by the old embodiment of Ben-Gurion's Israel: the generals. Their contributions included Weizman's (followed by Sharon's) move from the General Staff to Begin's side, and then Yadin's one-two punch – Agranat and Dash. Moreover, when Begin upset Labor and formed his first government, he was at pains to include five retired generals: Yadin (along with his Dash colleague, Meir Amit), Weizman, Sharon and, most surprisingly, Dayan, who bolted Labor's back benches to become Foreign Minister.

Though hardly noticed at the time, 1977 brought about another change in the IDF's role. The previous year, in reaction to the Agranat report, a Basic Law bolstered the position of the CGS vis-a-vis the cabinet (his constitutional commander) and the defense minister (his designated superior). The law was intended to prevent Gur and future generals from running for cover and preempting future Agranat-type findings by asking for a call-up of reserves at the slightest sign of any Arab military activity. But even as the military vowed to prevent a repeat of the 1973 surprise, it became less relevant in the emerging era of diplomatic contacts with Arab states. The General Staff, and particularly Aman (military intelligence), which was charged with overall early warning, were attuned to war and ill-prepared for peace. This weakness was aggravated by Begin's secretiveness, which left Gur and his subordinates in the dark about the feelers being put out to Anwar Sadat.

Gur, unaware of the background, warned that Sadat's initiative could be a deception. But the only major political figure to side with him was Deputy Prime Minister Yadin, who was filling in at the Defense Ministry for the injured Weizman and, prisoner of his role in the Agranat

Commission, wanted Begin to approve a call-up of reserves). All this reflected badly, not only on Gur, but on the reputation of the IDF as a whole.

This was consistent with the continuing deterioration in the IDF's reputation after 1973. Apart from a brief, shining moment during the Entebbe rescue operation, the Israeli public grew increasingly accustomed to the bungling of missions by the IDF, and the rest of the security establishment. The 1978 Litani Operation in Lebanon exposed defects that had not been addressed in the post-1973 rehabilitation of the army. These defects were even more glaring when Begin and Sharon sent the IDF into Lebanon in 1982. To fail in an offensive war planned and initiated by Israel against the weakest of its enemies meant that something was indeed rotten, and this, rather than the exceptional accomplishments of elite units, became the true measure of the IDF for the mass of Israelis exposed to it as conscripts and reserve officers and soldiers.

Though it dealt only with the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the Kahan Commission of Inquiry gave impetus to this popular image. It, too, ended the career of a CGS, Rafael Eitan, and punished other generals, but unlike the Agranat Commission, it also held the Defense Minister accountable. An indirect result of this inquiry was that the most active member of the commission, Supreme Court Justice Aharon Barak, would play a major part in the court's gradual move away from an almost blindly pro-defense posture towards greater skepticism with respect to politics and self-interest in the guise of national security.

This move started with the Elon Moreh decision of 1979, in which the court found against the claims of the serving CGS (Eitan) because a predecessor now in opposition (Bar-Lev) and the retired general who was serving as defense minister (Weizman) contradicted his alleged

professional view. Influenced by Barak and another Justice who knew the IDF well, Meir Shamgar, the court would no longer kneel at the altar of defense.

It intervened when generals bent military justice and gave clemency to soldiers who murdered Arab prisoners of war. It forced the IDF to accept a lawyer, rather than an "old boy network" general, as the head of the military court of appeals. It gave new standing to civilians, especially bereaved families demanding to know how their loved ones had died and who were the officers responsible. And it released the media, in 1988, from most of the military censorship shackles under which they had operated.

These developments, along with exposure of scandals, corruption, and the brutality associated with the efforts to suppress the Palestinian Intifada after 1987, further eroded the status of the IDF. It was no longer assumed without question that one simply gritted one's teeth and went on 30-50 days of annual active reserve duty. Lebanon and the Intifada reduced the stigma of trying to avoid reserve duty, and many of those who did go did it more for the sake of their buddies in the unit than for some abstract national ideal supported by barely half the electorate, and not necessarily the same half that served and risked life and limb.

As more and more Israelis served less and less, and as public funds were increasingly diverted to newly emerging constituencies (such as the ultra-orthodox) whose privileges far outweighed their duties, the notion began to take hold that the Army, in essence, was no different than other uniformed agencies, such as the police or even the fire brigade: they were all professionals, of a sort, paid to take risks and competing with other groups for monetary rewards and benefits.

As the media multiplied and competition became fiercer and more commercialized, officers complained that journalists were promoting negative stories because it made for good copy. And with the focus of politics shifting from centralized parties to personal primary campaigns, name recognition, which senior rank in the IDF still provided, became the key to success; if the CGS is a politician-in-waiting, he constitutes a serious threat to the existing leadership, and it is therefore not surprising that there is little goodwill toward such a figure in either major party.

■ The New Alienation

Up until Netanyahu's election victory in 1996, the emerging natural order seemed to be one of mutual suspicion among politicians, senior officers and civilians (media, families). In one important respect, this changed when Netanyahu and several of his Likud colleagues started to view the military as part of the "old elite", indeed, the *ancien regime*, which had gone down to defeat together with Peres.

This charge was unfounded, at two levels. In the first place, the military, after 1977, had got used to the idea of periodic changes in government, and even to the possibility that the Defense Minister might be a political or personal rival of the Prime Minister. As a result, loyalty to any single person or party was increasingly avoided, if only because it was no longer career-enhancing. Secondly, while several top generals grudgingly took part in the Rabin government's efforts to negotiate and implement the Oslo framework, they were never overly enthusiastic about its content and prospects. And some of them thought that Rabin was wrong to give the Palestinian track priority over the Syrian-Lebanese one. But the generals had to take on the burden of preparing data and planning changes on the ground, simply because the IDF itself had for many years blocked all efforts by prime ministers to break the army's monopoly on national security staff work. And while many of them

trusted Rabin, their old commander, to act prudently and preserve a sufficient margin of safety in case a deal with Yasser Arafat turned out to be unsound, they did not have the same degree of confidence in Shimon Peres.

Indeed, one could argue that the coolness toward Peres by senior security officials was reflected in the decision of retired generals identified with Labor, such as former CGS Dan Shomron and former Planning Branch chief Avraham Tamir, to endorse Netanyahu. The new Prime Minister, more aloof from the defense establishment than any of his predecessors, misread the general's mood. They were not out to get him. Rather than leaning towards a military putsch, as some observers feared, they felt that Netanyahu was conducting an anti-military coup. CGS Lipkin-Shahak privately toyed with the idea of quitting, but when he was unable to persuade his deputy, Matan Vilna'i, to join him, he shelved his personal distaste of Netanyahu and even requested an extension of his term.

The General Staff, along with former high-ranking officers in other key security positions (including Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai), has generally been centrist in its national security outlook – somewhat to the right of Peres, somewhat to the left of Netanyahu. But because of Netanyahu's inexperience, these officers, active and retired, acted to restrain the government from escalating into a war with Syria or the Palestinian Authority, and the media tended to suspend their habitual criticism of the military and side with it against Netanyahu.

The IDF's own organizational psychologists talked about a crisis of confidence between the government and the military, partly because Netanyahu and the Finance Ministry defended budget cuts by depicting career officers as being chiefly interested in their own pay and pensions. For one army analyst, the contrast with Ben-Gurion's time could not be sharper. Ben-Gurion, he said, was affectionately known as "The Old

Man", because he was a father-figure, perhaps even a grandfather-figure, to officers in their 30's and 40's. In his last years, Rabin enjoyed the same stature. The military likes to think of itself as a family, or as an extended family comprised of nuclear families (branches, bases, and units). When the Prime Minister is younger than the CGS and publicly alienated from him and from the entire armed forces, the family is torn apart.

This is an important part of the explanation for what is happening to the IDF, but not the whole story. Israel has moved away from the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The individual has replaced the collective as the focus of attention. Institutions with solid histories and contributions – the kibbutz movement, the Histadrut, major political parties – have had to adapt or risk being swept away. The IDF is part of this process, and whatever challenges lie ahead for it, it will have to find a new place in a new Israel.

Civil/Military Relations in Israel

Yehuda Ben Meir*

■ Introduction

Simultaneously part of the Third World and part of the Western world, Israel is an ideal laboratory for the study of civil-military relations. The country shares with the Western nations a deeply rooted tradition of and solid commitment to democratic government. The constitutional principle of civilian supremacy over the armed forces is firmly and clearly grounded both in law and in custom. Yet Israel is the only Western democracy to be suspended in a perpetual state of war throughout its lifetime. Born in war, Israel has always faced a direct military threat to its existence: even today, after having fought six wars in fifty years of independence and after dramatic progress in the peace process, there are still Arab and Moslem countries which refuse to recognize its right to exist. Forged by necessity from the instinct for survival, the Israeli army has become both a symbol of national unity and a dominant force highly involved in almost all facets of Israeli life. Such a reality must certainly pose challenges to healthy civil-military relations, and the way in which Israel has met these challenges is a

* Research Fellow at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University.

source of fascination to anyone with an interest in modern civil-military relations.

Any serious study of civil-military relations in Israel must tackle a number of key questions. Has there been an erosion or an increase in civilian control over the armed services during the past fifty years? What are the precise relationships among the prime minister, the defense minister, the ministerial committee on national security, and the cabinet in terms of ultimate authority over the armed forces? What are the advantages and disadvantages for Israel of precise and vigorous constitutional definitions of the civil-military relationship as opposed to the present flexible and general ones? Can a society experiencing protracted war, in which security is such a salient factor, preserve an instrumentalist army, i.e., one that does not penetrate civil institutional spheres? How healthy is the current system and what changes are necessary?

A major factor determining the extent of civilian control in Israel has been the firm ideological commitment of the military to democratic government, complete with a deep and unshakable belief in the principle of civilian supremacy. Israel may be a young country, but its society reflects the age-old traditions and mentality of the Jewish people. Many scholars credit Ben-Gurion's leadership and vision for the fact that, unlike so many other new nations, the military did not become predominant and never showed praetorian tendencies[1]. In my opinion the roots go much deeper and can be traced back 3,500 years to the exodus from Egypt. Back then the Jews had already been defined by the Almighty as a "stiff-necked people" and ever since they have manifested a suspicion of, and at times a disregard for, all forms of authority. Jews have always shown democratic and pluralistic tendencies ("two Jews – three opinions"), at times bordering on anarchy. Some go so far as to

1. Amos Perlmutter, *Military and Politics in Israel*, London: Cass, 1969, p. 128.

contend that the Jews are ungovernable, a contention not without empirical support. Be that as it may, the commitment of the IDF's officer corps to a free, pluralistic and democratic society reflects the cultural heritage of the people and society of which they are part.

Given this, can the continuation of firm civilian control in Israeli civil-military relations be taken for granted? Is it certain that civilian control, at least in the formal sense, will continue to be a nonissue in Israeli society? At present the answer seems clearly to be yes, but if one looks toward the more distant future there is room for some concern - for two major reasons. First, the composition of the Israeli officer corps is changing. The initial cadre of IDF commanders were strongly embued and indoctrinated with Zionist, democratic and liberal values, i.e. with the revolutionary ideology of the Jewish national liberation movement. Some, such as Dayan and Rabin, come from families who held high positions in the civil hierarchy of the Zionist and Labor movements. This picture, however, is slowly but surely changing. Many young soldiers today use officership in the IDF as a key vehicle for socio-economic mobility. It is less a calling and more a career; the IDF itself is becoming more and more corporate.

Alone, this development, though worrisome, does not seem to pose a direct challenge to civilian control. The principle of military subordination to civilian authority is so much a part of the IDF culture that anyone reaching the rank of Chief of the General Staff (CGS), or of any general staff position, would presumably have acquired a reasonable commitment to civilian control. But when the second factor enters the picture, there is cause for genuine concern.

The past two decades have seen a growing polarization within Israeli society, with public opinion characterized by a basic lack of consensus, or what is technically known as a "state of desensus". The country is divided between religious and nonreligious, Sephardim and Ashkenazim

(Jews from Africa and Asia and Western Jews), supporters of Greater Israel and advocates of territorial compromise, right and left, doves and hawks, Likud supporters and Labor adherents. The massive influx of Russian immigrants in the 1990s poses a potential new division: newcomers versus old-timers. Many people in Israel are concerned that the country may be quickly approaching the state of a "house divided against itself". The specter of possible severe social, economic and political instability raises questions as to how the changing IDF would respond to such a situation.

■ Constitutional Principles – The National Command Authority

Unlike the United States and much more along the lines of Great Britain, the constitutional basis for Israeli civil-military relations is to be found more in convention and less in law. The primary piece of legislation which deals with civil-military relations – *The Basic Law: The Army* – is less than one page. Its main points are as follows:

1) The Defense Army of Israel [IDF] is the army of the state.
2) (a) The army is subject to the authority of the government.
   (b) The minister in charge of the army on behalf of the government is the minister of defense.
3) (a) The supreme command level in the army is the chief of the general staff [CGS].
   (b) The chief of the general staff is subject to the authority of the government and subordinate to the minister of defense.
   (c) The chief of the general staff shall be appointed by the government on the recommendation of the minister of defense.

4) The power to issue instructions and orders binding on the army should be prescribed by or by virtue of law[2].

This legislation went a long way toward correcting some of the more glaring deficiencies in the formal status of civil-military relations, although it still left much to be desired. It did, however, firmly establish the constitutional principle of civilian control over the military.

An interesting question that has arisen regarding the defense minister's role is whether that person represents the military in the cabinet or the government vis-à-vis the military. Peres, who served both as prime minister and defense minister, is of the opinion that each defense minister decides for himself the answer to this all-important question[3]. Prime Minister Begin, on the other hand, was adamant in support of the second position. In a heated exchange that took place during a cabinet meeting in May 1979 between Begin and Defense Minister Weizman, Weizman maintained that he and the chief of staff were responsible for defense, while Begin retorted that the cabinet was responsible for defense, that the defense minister's role was to represent the government to the army, not the army to the cabinet, and that Weizman did not understand the constitution[4]. Weizman subsequently resigned from the cabinet. Three years later, during what was probably the most turbulent and heated cabinet session dealing with the war in Lebanon, Prime Minister Begin reiterated his unequivocal position – this time admonishing Ariel Sharon, then defense minister. In an ominous tone, Begin reminded Sharon that he had already pointed out this essential constitutional principle to a former defense minister and that Sharon was

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2. *Laws of the State of Israel*, Vol. 30, Jerusalem: Government Printers, 1991/92, pp. 150-151.

3. Interview with Shimon Peres.

4. Aharon Yariv, "Military Organization and Policymaking in Israel" in Robert J. Art, Vincent Davis and Samuel P. Huntington (eds.), *Reorganizing America's Defense*, Washington: Pergamson-Brassey's, 1985, p. 110.

not responsible for the IDF or for defense and security any more than any other cabinet minister was[5].

Begin's convictions and legal expertise notwithstanding, one can argue with his reading of Israel's constitution. His contention that the minister of defense does not bear any responsibility for the IDF beyond that of all other cabinet ministers is questionable even from a strictly formal point of view. True, ultimate responsibility for the military is vested in the government and, by virtue of the principle of collective responsibility, it is shared equally by all the ministers; at the same time, however, the defense minister is charged, by law, with the implementation of all defense legislation, and it is he who is individually "*in charge of the army on behalf of the Government*"[6]. Regarding the question of whom the defense minister represents, however, Mr. Begin's conception of Israel's constitutional system appears to be correct.

The language of *The Basic Law: the Army*, in its entirety, makes it amply clear that the defense minister is part of the civilian and not the military echelon and that he signifies the personal incarnation of the government's will vis-a-vis the IDF. However, the informal point of view appears to be quite different. To use an incisive American concept, the IDF is the bureaucratic constituency of any defense minister, and many a defense minister finds it necessary to represent the IDF and advocate its positions in the councils of state. Peres claims that in the final analysis a good defense minister must be both the IDF's ambassador to the government and the government's ambassador to the IDF[7]. In conclusion, as Perlmutter astutely observes, "*the lessons of 1954, and to some extent of 1967, have shown that the absence of a*

5. Personal knowledge.

6. Section 2 (b) of *The Basic Law: The Army*, *Laws of the State of Israel*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

7. Interview with Shimon Peres.

powerful defense minister supported by his government and people who can command the confidence of the high command impedes the development of a harmonious relationship"[8].

By prefacing the CGS's subordination to the defense minister with the stipulation that he is individually "*subject to the authority of the Government*", the law grants the CGS a status enjoyed by few other public officials. A director general of any ministry is responsible to his minister and has no direct recourse to the cabinet. The same holds true for the heads of Israel's civilian intelligence services: they are directly and personally responsible to the prime minister but have no standing with the government as a whole. Even deputy ministers are only authorized to act on behalf of the minister who appointed them and in those areas designated by the minister. Only a cabinet minister, by virtue of the collective responsibility of the government and in view of the fact that the government consists of its ministers, has direct recourse to the cabinet. The law thus gives the CGS a status of quasi-minister.

Many chiefs of staff, as well as others, have subscribed to this interpretation of the law. The claim has even been made that having the status of quasi-minister, the CGS is, in effect, a quasi-political figure. Thus former CGS Gur claimed that "*authority in the military-tactical sphere is clearly that of the Chief of Staff; in the political sphere – it is equally clearly that of the Defense minister – the main problem in the relation between the Chief of Staff and the Defense minister is their cooperation in the strategic-political sphere*"[9]. Even a senior political figure such as Shimon Peres says that the CGS is "*three-quarters military and one-quarter political*" and that he should be permitted to present to the cabinet not only military but also political ideas[10]. Indeed,

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8. Amos Perlmutter, *Military and Politics in Israel*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

9. From an interview with Mordechai Gur in *Ma'ariv*, April 14, 1978.

10. Interview with Shimon Peres.

during the deliberations over the interim agreement with Egypt in 1975, Prime Minister Rabin and Defense Minister Peres enabled CGS Gur to present to the cabinet a radically different strategic approach regarding the nature and scope of the withdrawal. Interestingly enough, Gur told the cabinet that the plan was his own, and – with the exception of his deputy – did not enjoy the support of the general staff. Although the cabinet rejected his suggestion, Gur emphasizes that his ideas were not of a tactical-military-operational nature but represented a novel political-strategic approach to the peace process[11].

The Hebrew word for authority, *marut*, conveys a sense of absolute subjection. There is no question that, from the formal point of view, the IDF is absolutely and totally subject to civilian authority, and there seems to be little question regarding the supreme authority of the government. Both the IDF and the CGS are, by law, subject to the authority of the government, and it is the government who is authorized both to appoint and dismiss the CGS. Few, if any, would thus argue with the conclusion that the cabinet, collectively, is the commander in chief of the IDF, exercising authority parallel to that of the president of the United States and the prime minister of Great Britain[12]. With the exception of former CGS Chaim bar-Lev, almost everyone agrees that the authority of the government over the chief of staff is equal to that of the CGS over subordinate officers and is applicable, without exception, in the strategic, tactical, and operational spheres[13].

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11. Interview with Mordechai Gur.

12. See *Laws of the State of Israel*, Vol. 35, *op. cit.*, p. 372; see also Shimon Shetreet "Grey Area of War Powers: The Case of Israel", *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, serial No. 45 (Winter 1988), pp. 33, 35, No. 29.

13. Interviews with Chaim Bar-Lev, Rafael Eitam, Mordechai Gur, Moshe Levy, Yitzchak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ezer Weizman.

The question, however, is how this constitutional formula can be applied effectively to the practical necessities of everyday life. It is inconceivable that a body of twenty or so ministers should act as commander in chief of a modern armed force and run the day-to-day affairs of the IDF or the day-to-day operations of a war. There has to be a single individual to whom the CGS can turn, at any given moment, for guidance. Israeli legislators were aware of this conundrum, and thus the section that states "*the army is subject to the authority of the government*" also stipulates that "*the minister in charge of the army on behalf of the government is the minister of defense*"[14]. At first reading, this solution seems straightforward and rather elegant. Nonetheless, it leaves two issues open to interpretation: the relationship between the defense minister and the government, on the one hand, and that between the defense minister and the chief of staff on the other.

The situation is even more complex, however, for there is another individual who can be viewed as representing the government vis-a-vis the IDF, and that individual is the prime minister. The prime minister is not mentioned at all in *The Basic Law: The Army* and thus seemingly has no direct role with regard to the IDF nor any direct standing with the CGS. However, constitutional convention clearly subordinates the CGS to the prime minister as well as to the defense minister. In a cabinet meeting held during the Lebanon War, Defense Minister Sharon noted in passing that CGS Eitan had participated in a Phantom fighter plane reconnaissance mission over enemy territory, Prime Minister Begin interrupted Sharon's briefing and, turning toward Eitan, said: "*As prime minister, I am ordering you not to fly anymore, under any circumstances, over enemy territory*"[15]. No one present questioned

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[14]. Sections 2 (a) and 2 (b) of *The Basic Law: The Army*, *Laws of the State of Israel*, Vol. 30, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-151.

[15]. Personal knowledge.

Begin's right to issue such an order to the CGS on a purely operational issue; nor was there any doubt that Eitan would obey.

This constitutional convention is supported by the fact that by virtue of his heading the government, the prime minister – more than anyone else – represents the will of the cabinet, thus invoking the cabinet's collective authority. It is further supported by the 1981 amendment to *The Basic Law: The Government*, by which each minister, including, of course, the defense minister, "*is responsible to the prime minister for the functions with which the minister is charged*" and especially by legislation enacted in February 1991 that created a statutory Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) headed by the prime minister. With the introduction of the prime minister into the equation comes the necessity to consider the relationship between the prime minister and the defense minister, especially vis-a-vis the IDF and the CGS.

There exists no formal definition of the government's sphere of responsibility on the one hand and that of the prime minister and/or defense minister on the other. Nothing in the cabinet's rules of order, or in the instructions of the high command, or even in any government decision spells out clear and obligatory guidelines regarding which issues and decisions must be brought before the cabinet or the MCNS and which can be handled at the prime ministerial or defense minister's level. There are, of course, informal arrangements – some oral, others written – but from a formal constitutional and statutory viewpoint, there is a total vacuum.

In March 1992, as part of the legislation providing for the direct election of the prime minister by popular vote, the Knesset in effect rewrote *The Basic Law: The Government.* Section 51 of the new law reads as follows: "(a) *The state shall wage war only by virtue of a decision by the government*. (b) *Nothing in this section should be construed as*

preventing military operations necessary for the defense of the state and for public security. (c) *Notification of a decision by the government to go to war, in accordance with subsection* (a), *shall be given to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset as soon as possible, the prime minister shall also deliver a statement, as soon as possible, before the Knesset; notification of military operations, as stated in subsection* (b), *shall be given to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset, as soon as possible*"[16]. However, the law still leaves enough leeway under section 51 (b) for extensive military operations without a formal government decision to go to war.

After the government decides to undertake a military operation, the defense minister is responsible for its conduct, although he remains subject, to some degree, to government instructions and decisions. This area has been a major source of tension in Israeli civil-military relations. During the Lebanon War, for instance, extensive actions were taken without prior governmental authorization. Defense minister Sharon, with Prime Minister Begin's approval, ordered the IDF to enter West Beirut after the murder of President-Elect Bashir Gemayel, the action was brought to the cabinet for approval only eighteen hours later. Similarly, Sharon ordered the IDG to advance along the Beirut-Damascus road in the Bahamdoun area after the cease-fire of June 11, 1982 – this time not only without prior governmental authorization or knowledge but also without the approval or knowledge of Acting Prime minister Simcha Ehrlich (Begin was visiting the United States)[17].

While there may be disagreement as to the defense minister's authority to act on his own in the absence of a government decision to the contrary, there is general agreement that once the government decides on

16. *Laws of the State of Israel* (in Hebrew), *op. cit.*, p. 214.

17. Personal knowledge. See also Shimon Shetreet "Grey Area of War Powers: The Case of Israel", *op. cit.*, p. 11

an issue, its decision is binding on everyone, including the defense minister. It follows that, since the entire basis for the defense minister's authority over the IDF, according to *The Basic law: The Army*, is by virtue of his being in charge of the army "on behalf of the government", he clearly has no authority when acting against the government, and any order he makes in contradiction of a government decision or policy is null and void. This position has been confirmed by the Supreme Court. In the Eilon Moreh case, Justice Moshe Landau rules that, in the light of sections 2 and 3 of *The Basic Law: The Army*, "*as long as the government has not spoken on a particular subject, the chief of staff is obliged to fulfill the instructions of the defense minister*". But once a matter is brought before the government, a government's decision on that matter is binding on the chief of staff, and the defense minister as one member of the government, together with his fellow ministers, bears joint responsibility for its decisions, even for the majority decisions resolved against his own dissenting opinion[18].

One gray area remains: the relationship of the prime minister and the defense minister to the IDF and the CGS. Huntington claims that the presence of a single civilian authority is of crucial importance for effective, objective civilian control, arguing that the principle of "dual control" (between the president and the Congress) constitutes "*a major hindrance to the development of* [objective] *civilian control in the United States*"[19]. Division of authority within the civilian echelon and the absence of a single master enables the military to play the various sides against each other and is a sure prescription for trouble in civil-military relations. Despite the division of power between the executive and the Congress, however, within the executive branch itself there is a clear chain of command. At the top of the pyramid is the president, who as

18. HCJ 390/79, *Dwikat v. Government of Israel*, Piskey Din (in Hebrew), Vol. 34 (1), p. 10.

19. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1957, pp. 177, 412.

commander in chief exercises ultimate and supreme authority over the armed forces; under him is the secretary of defense, who functions as a kind of deputy commander in chief[20]. This arrangement was evident and proved itself during the Gulf War. In Great Britain the prime minister, acting in the name of the Crown – though subject to the decisions of the cabinet – is the supreme civilian authority vis-a-vis the armed forces. In France, during wartime, the president of the republic assumes the role of commander in chief[21].

Israel surely does not suffer from a division of power between the executive and legislative branches, but its executive branch is characterized by a fragmented and unclear chain of command – primarily because of the ambiguous division of authority between the prime minister and defense minister. During the first twenty years of Israel's existence, with the exception of one year (1954), one individual held both posts, so the problem only arose after the separation of the position of defense minister from that of prime minister in the wake of the Six Day War. The fusion of the two roles before 1967 prevented a normal and gradual development of a relationship between the two offices and caused a great deal of confusion as to what belonged to whom[22]. Peri comments extensively on the tug-of-war between the prime minister and defense minister for control over the IDF, seeing it as a focus of the rivalry between two sub-elites of the Israeli political establishment. He also tries to show that many a chief of staff has put this rivalry to good use, using it as a means of getting his own way[23]. Perhaps to avoid these consequences, when Rabin formed his

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20. This view is epoused by many students of civil-military relations in the United States.

21. See Sir Ewen Broadbent, *The Military and Government: From Macmillan to Heseltine*, Royal United Services Institute Defense Studies Series, London: Macmillan, 1988.

22. Interview with Chaim Yisraeli.

23. Yoram Pari, *Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 80-82 ; 86-90 ; 151-155 ; 165-172.

government in 1992, after Labor's victory in the general elections of that year, he retained the defense portfolio for himself, reverting to a pattern abandoned in 1967.

There are two aspects to this issue. First, can the CGS appeal the decision of the defense minister to the prime minister? If so, can he do so always or only in certain circumstances? If the latter, what are those circumstances? Written law provides no answers to these questions. There does exist, however, a fairly well-developed constitutional convention regarding this issue. Its essence is that the CGS is entitled to appeal any decision or to raise any issue with the prime minister, but he can do so only through the defense minister. The defense minister can theoretically refuse such a request, but in practice he will invariably approve it[24]. There is no reported instance of a defense minister refusing the CGS access to the prime minister. However, former CGS Gur tells of a letter he wrote to Prime Minister Begin, setting out his reservations as chief of staff concerning certain statements made by Begin at a general staff meeting. The letter was sent via Defense Minister Weizman, and Weizman held it up for three days. During a meeting at the prime minister's office, Gur turned to Begin and said, in Weizman's presence, "*I wrote you a letter. The defense minister has held up its delivery for three days now. This is impossible. He has no right to do so*". Weizman had no convincing answer, and Gur took out a copy of the letter and handed it to Begin. As a result of the incident, Begin arranged for the CGS to meet with him once a month for a tête-à-tête[25].

The second aspect relates to what happens if and when the CGS receives contradictory orders from the prime minister and the defense minister. This question is entirely hypothetical – in all of Israel's history, no CGS

24. Interviews with Chaim Yisraeli, Moshe Levy, Ezer Weizman and Yitzchak Rabin.

25. Interview with Mordechai Gur.

has received a directive from the Prime Minister contradictory to that received from the Defense Minister or vice versa – but it is not meaningless or academic, for in the context of Israeli politics, anything can happen. Once again, written law is silent, but here constitutional convention also provides no guidance, since the issue has never arisen. I posed this question to the interviewees in my study on civil-military relations, however, and it elicited a number of different responses.

Most of those interviewed made a clear distinction between contradictory orders that do not demand immediate action or necessitate an immediate decision and those in which delay is impossible and the CGS must decide one way or another. In the first case, almost everyone agreed that the CGS would demand that the cabinet or the MDC be convened in order to decide the issue and would refuse to take action in the absence of a government decision one way or another[26]. Another possibility would be for the CGS to inform the prime minister that he had received contradictory orders from the defense minister and that if the prime minister objects to those orders, he should dismiss the defense minister from the cabinet[27].

The problem becomes more complex when, for some reason, there is no time or it is impossible to convene either the cabinet or the MDC and thus the CGS has to act without recourse to the ultimate authority of the government (if, for example, an unidentified aircraft entered Israeli airspace, and one party ordered the CGS to intercept and shoot the plane down if necessary, and the other ordered him not to open fire under any circumstances). In such a case, there are, essentially, two approaches. The prevalent opinion is that the prime minister has the upper hand, and his orders should prevail. The logic behind this view is that the prime

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[26]. Interviews with Aharon Yariv, Moshe Levy and Moshe Arens.

[27]. Interview with Aharon Yariv.

minister, more than anyone else, speaks on behalf of the government, and the defense minister cannot act contrary to the government's wishes. According to this approach, a clash between the prime minister and defense minister is a clash between the defense minister and the government – the result of which cannot be in doubt[28]. Thus Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister and Defense Minister, says simply: "*The Prime Minister is the boss*". Weizman concurs, saying that in the final analysis, "*the Prime Minister is the commander in chief because it is he who represents the government*". He adds that "*if, as Defense Minister, he had ever been overruled unequivocally by the Prime Minister, it would never have entered his mind not to accept the Prime Minister's verdict*". In the same vein**,** former Defense Minister Arens emphasizes that the Defense Minister "*as a 'good soldier' must accept the ultimate authority of the Prime Minister*". Eitan says that as CGS, he would have put the case before the prime minister, telling him that he was receiving contradictory orders, and would have done whatever the prime minister told him to do[29].

The second approach does not argue with the supremacy of the prime minister but adds a certain nuance – namely, that in such a dramatic situation, the CGS would be guided, to a large degree, by his own inclinations and his own judgment. Thus Gur admits that he would apply his own judgment and "his own value system" and in the absence of a clear-cut government decision or at least pending such a decision, he would probably do what he considered right under the circumstances. Former CGS Moshe Levy says he would follow the orders of the prime minister, but only if he believed in them; if he felt that what the prime minister was suggesting would be a catastrophe and he had the backing of the defense minister, he would probably refuse to obey the prime

28. Interview with Chaim Yisraeli.

29. Interviews with Shimon Peres, Ezer Weizman, Moshe Arens and Rafael Eitan.

minister's orders and would insist that the issue be brought before the government. Perhaps the most interesting response was Rabin's. His reaction to the question was almost visceral. Initially, he refused even to entertain it, claiming that "*such a situation was totally inconceivable, could never happen* [and] *would represent a total breakdown of the civilian authority*". The consequence of such an occurrence would be "that there simply was not government". Finally, he acknowledged that, if such an event ever did occur, "*the chief of staff would have no choice but to act as he saw fit*"[30].

■ Defense Organization

In Israel, the IDF manifests a relatively high degree of unification although it falls short of the Canadian model[31]. *The Israel Defense Forces Ordinance* of May 1948, which established the IDF, stated in its first clause that "*there is hereby established a Defense Army of Israel [IDF], consisted of land forces, a navy and an air force*"[32]. The act thus spoke clearly of a single service while at the same time emphasizing that this single armed service consists of three different forces. This duality has left its mark on the IDF, which has been characterized throughout its history by two conflicting trends: a strong desire on the part of the air and naval arms for more independence, and a constant pressure by the general staff and the CGS for complete interdependence and for preservation of a unified command and staff structure. Contradiction abounds, even in details: for example, unlike Britain and the United States, but in line with the Canadian model, the IDF has a single set of rank designations and insignia; unlike the Canadian forces, however, it

30. Interview with Yitzchak Rabin.

31. See Aharon Yariv, "Military Organization and Policymaking in Israel", *op. cit.*, pp. 108-129.

32. Section 1 of *The Israel Defense Forces Ordinance*, *Laws of the State of Israel*, Vol. 1, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

maintains different uniforms. (When referring to differences between the air force and ground forces, Israelis speak of the blues versus the greens).

With the conclusion of the War of Independence in 1949, a serious struggle broke out within the senior military echelon regarding the structure and organization of the IDF. The commander of the air force, General Remez, lobbied strongly for an independent air force organized as a separate service with its own chief of staff, along the lines of the British RAF. The CGS, Yigael Yadin, favored the preservation of a single unified military force. Ben-Gurion decided in favor of Yadin's position; nevertheless, the air force and navy were given their own staffs, which included the traditional functions of operations, manpower, intelligence, and logistics. The air force never gave up its desire for more independence, from time to time skirmishing with the general staff. As years passed, it received high priority and grew steadily in strength, power, and prestige. This became more and more apparent, and after its spectacular victory in the Six Day War, its demands for recognition of its special status within the IDF grew. As CS Dan Shomron is reported to have said, the Israeli Air Force's relationship with the IDF resembled that of a "*foreign army but a friendly one*"[33].

General Benny Peled, commander of the air force from 1972 to 1977, for example, contended that the air force was subordinate to the CGS only, claiming that the various branches and departments of the general staff – such as the chief of operations - function with regard to the air force in a coordinating capacity with no command authority. According to this line of thought, the general staff is a staff structure for the ground forces, and the CGS functions both as the chief of staff of the ground forces and as head of all defense forces, similar to the British chief of the defense staff (CDS) and far more powerful than the American CJCS. True to

[33]. Personal knowledge.

this approach, General Peled also maintained that he enjoyed the right of direct access to the defense minister[34].

Needless to say, Peled's ideas – shared, at least in part, by other air force commanders – were rejected outright by successive chiefs of staff. Although the air force, because of its size, stature, and importance as well as its high standing in the eyes of the Israeli public, does enjoy certain trappings of autonomy not always shared by the navy, the accepted view is that while the general staff is – or, at least, was – a general staff headquarters for the ground forces, it also serves as a joint defense staff for the entire armed forces. Yariv described one of the functions of the general staff as constituting what the famous Soviet World War II Chief of Staff General Shaposnikoff called the "*Brain of the Army*" "*and* [dealing] *with short- and long-range overall concepts at the strategic and higher tactical levels*". This view is supported by the fact that the chiefs of the air force and the navy are integral members of the general staff and by the fact that the heads of the general staff departments are usually senior in rank to their colleagues in the air and naval staffs[35]. The creation in 1983 of a headquarters for the field corps (artillery, infantry, armor, engineer, signal and so on), which is taking over from the general staff more and more of the staff functions for the ground forces, gives this view even further credence.

In recent years, the air force has come closer to accepting the prevailing view and sees itself more and more as an integral part of the IDF. The main reason for this change of heart is the appointment during the 1980's of senior air force officers to key positions on the general staff previously reserved for officers of the ground forces (positions that include the Deputy CGS, the head of the planning branch [G5], heads of

34. Interview with Moshe Levy.

35. Aharon Yariv, "Military Organization and Policymaking in Israel", *op. cit.*, p. 112, 114.

other departments within the planning branch, the head of the manpower branch [G1], the head of the strategic planning department, the financial adviser to the CGS, the chief education officer, and others)[36]. Such a relatively high degree of integration at the various levels of the general staff structure reinforces its unified nature and accentuates its role as a joint defense staff.

Yariv sums up Israel's staff structure by saying that "*we do not, therefore, have an integrated staff structure. What we do have is integration in dynamics, that is, in the staff work at the highest military level, with the General Staff playing a somewhat senior role to the staffs in air force and navy headquarters*"[37]. Former CGS Gur notes that the existence of even semi-independent air and naval forces is an important contribution to civilian control because it prevents the military from speaking with one voice and allows the civilian authority to receive diverse opinions and evaluations on many key issues. As a result, there is a better chance that the minister of defense and perhaps even the prime minister will make the real decision[38].

■ Civilian Control

A key concept in any modern analyses of civil-military relations is that of civilian control. All agree that civilian control is an essential feature of any democratic state. There is far less agreement, however, as to what exactly civilian control is and what it entails. The definition of civilian control "in the old sense" puts the entire emphasis on the exercise of ultimate formal authority by elected representatives of the people. The

36. Interview with Moshe Levy.

37. Aharon Yariv, "Military Organization and Policymaking in Israel", *op. cit*., p. 1150.

38. Interview with Mordechai Gur.

modern definition of civilian control and one which is relevant to democracies, sees the essential problem as how to properly combine military advice and opinions with political input, civilian advice, and popular opinion. Civilian control refers to the appropriate balance between civilian and military involvement in all areas, and specifically in the area of national security.

Based on this definition, the picture regarding Israel is complex. There are large differences in the degree of civilian control manifested in the three dimensions of civil-military interaction in the area of national security, as well as subtle differences over time. The operational dimension shows a very high degree of civilian involvement, comparable to and perhaps exceeding that of other advanced western countries. The dimension of strategic planning, on the other hand, shows a totally different picture: civilian involvement in the actual formulation of national security policy is limited. The dimension of force development – i.e. the allocation of resources – lies somewhere in the middle, showing a definite increase in civilian involvement over time.

In the final analysis, however, when the civilian echelon, i.e. the top political leadership, is determined to implement a given policy and is willing to invest the necessary political resources in so doing, it is dominant and the military has no choice but to toe the line. The two most important national security policy initiatives in Israel's history – the opening to Egypt which led to Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and Oslo – were undertaken by the civilian leadership without involvement and even without the knowledge of the IDF.

The Scroll or the Sword? Dilemmas Between Religion and Military Service in Contemporary Israel

Stuart A. Cohen*

The title of this paper is derived from an ancient Jewish teaching, attributed to Elazar of Modi'in, who lived in the land of Israel during the third century c.e. As far as we know, Elazar was the first rabbi to take homiletic advantage of the alliteration of *safra* and *saifa*, Aramaic terms which translate as "a scroll and a sword". These two objects, he taught:

"*Came down from heaven tied together.* [God said to Israel]. *If you observe* the torah [i.e. the Divine word of the Bible] *which is written in the one, you will be saved from the other; if not, you will be smitten by it*"[1].

A plain reading of this text leaves no doubt that its author intended to project the Bible and the sword as antithetical opposites. Indeed, generations of traditional Jewish commentators have understood it to present a figurative

* Professor of Political Studies and Fellow of the BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar Ilan University.

1. Sifre, *A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, trans. & ed. Reuven Hammer: New Haven, Yale University Press, 1986, parag. 40:7, p. 122. The passage also appears in: *The Midrash: Leviticus*, trans. J. Slotki, London: Soncino Press, 1939, parag. 35: 6, p. 449; and *The Midrash: Deuteronomy*, trans. J. Rabbinowitz, London: Soncino Press, 1939, parag. 4:2, p. 90.

contrast between martial action, on the one hand, and the irenic pursuit of scholarship, on the other. Modern Zionist readings, by contrast, have tended to turn our text inside out. Conveniently citing only the first line, they portray the scroll and the sword as complementary rather than mutually exclusive entities, intertwined rather than in conflict. Thus, in modern Israel the twinning of *safra* and *saifa* has attained the status of a slogan, encapsulating the dual nature of the new Jew's responsibilities to serve his (and her) country as both a scholar and a soldier.

Such rhetoric has for long been particularly common within what is conventionally referred to as Israel's "national religious" Jewish community. Although the terminology begs several questions (how "national"? or, for that matter, how "religious"?), it nevertheless remains serviceable. By general consent, the "national religious" community encompasses those sections of the population, Ashkenazim and Sephardim, who invest the establishment of the State of Israel with religious significance as a precursor of Jewry's promised Redemption[2]. Even as thus defined, "national religious" Israelis (who comprise roughly 12-15% of the total population) are far from being an altogether homogeneous bloc. Nevertheless, they do constitute a distinct category of analysis. Their outlook and life-styles vary from those of the ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) communities (7-8% of the total Israeli population), whose attachment to traditional standards of religious observance tends to be more rigid and whose attitude towards modern political Zionism less enthusiastic. But national religious Jews also differ in several important respects from the predominantly "secular" majority. Indeed, the two communities maintain separate educational frameworks.

Considerable attention has been lavished on the "religious-secular cleavage" in Israeli public life and, more specifically, on the relations between national

2. Charles S. Liebman & Eliezer Don Yehiya, "Religious Orthodoxy's Attitude Towards Zionism", in *Religion and Politics in Israel*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp. 57-78.

religious Jewry and other segments of Israeli society[3]. Nevertheless, the available literature has virtually ignored the possibility that religious tensions in Israel might enter the military domain. In the past, that neglect was justified by the consensus on national security affairs which pervaded all sectors of Zionist Israeli society, religious and secular alike, and which seemed to ensure the immunization of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) from the ideological rifts which otherwise characterize Israeli public life. Moreover, there seemed to be nothing particularly distinctive about the military service patterns of national religious youth. True, a substantial proportion of national religious females of conscript age were known to claim exemption from service on religious grounds (in accordance with the provisions of the 1953 National Service Law), and thus to follow practices even more widespread in *haredi* circles[4]. But such was not so in the case of males. Unlike their *haredi* counterparts, very few national religious boys of conscript age sought to avoid the draft. Moreover, once enlisted, the vast majority displayed no distinctive military "profile". Instead, national religious troops (reservists as well as conscripts) seemed to constitute an integral component of the IDF's overall complement[5].

Such is no longer the case. Once considered irrelevant, discrepancies between "religious" and "secular" troops in the IDF have of late aroused increasing interest. This is especially at the conscript level, where the disparities in their service patterns have become particularly marked. Broadly speaking (obviously exceptions abound), recruits from secular backgrounds are

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3. Dan Horowitz & Moshe Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel*, (Albany), Suny Press, 1989. Recent articles on the subject in general are collated in "Israeli Judaism: The Sociology of Religion in Israel", (eds.) S. Deshen, C. Liebman, M. Shaked, *Studies of Israeli Society*, Vol. 7, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1995, to which is appended a comprehensive bibliography.

4. On which see: Yehezkel Cohen, *Female Enlistment and National Service: A Halakhic Enquiry* (Hebrew),Tel Aviv, *Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Dati*, revised edtn., 1993.

5. Note, for instance, the complete absence of any distinctive discussion of troops drawn from the national religious community in Reuven Gal, *A Portrait of the Israeli Soldier*, Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.

evincing what the former Chief of Staff (Lt.-Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak) termed "*a preference for the individual over the collective*", and display a progressively lower rate of "*motivation to military service*"[6]. Willingness to enlist in combat units has declined most steeply amongst secular kibbutz youth, who were in earlier decades renowned for their marked over-representation in IDF combat units. Graduates of national religious high-schools, however, evince contrary trends[7].

The results are easily observed. Once comparatively rare, the sight of a knitted skullcap (*kippah serugah*; the most obtrusive mark of male national-religious affiliation) on the head of an Israeli soldier on active front-line duty is now commonplace. This is particularly so in those formations to which enlistment is elective and selection especially rigorous. The rate of national religious recruits to elite units (*sayarot*), for instance, now far exceeds their proportion in the conscript population (perhaps by a ratio of 3:1). The sociological break-down of NCO's and junior officers tells a similar tale. Roughly 30% of all IDF fighting servicemen in these ranks now wear a *kippah serugah*; as many as 60% of those passing out in the first class of NCO infantry courses since 1995 graduated from the national religious high-school system; the relevant figure in the infantry officers' training school was 100%. Similarly, between 1995 and 1997 alone, the percentage of national religious graduates of the pilot training programme almost

6. *Ha-Aretz* (Hebrew daily, Tel Aviv), 29 March 1995, 6 Feb. 1996 and 9 Sept. 1996.

7. According to a survey published in 1996, the decline in intention to enlist for a full three years of service amongst secular high school students amounted to 14% over the period 1986-1995 (from 82 to 68%); in religious high schools, by comparison, the relevant figure was much lower (from 86 to 81%). Similar differentials emerge at other levels of enquiry. In 1995, 34% of the secular respondents announced an intention of volunteering for combat units (down from 48% in 1986) and 22% to do so as officers (down from 31% in 1986). Amongst religious respondents, the comparable figures were 49 and 35% respectively in 1995, and 55 and 36% in 1985. These results were kindly made available to the author by Dr. Ya'akov Katz of the Education Department at Bar-Ilan University. See also: Y. Ezrachi & R. Gal, *General Perceptions and Attitudes of* [Israeli] *High-School Students Regarding the Peace Process, Security and Social Issues* (Hebrew, 2 vol.), The Carmel Institute for Social Studies, Zikhron Ya'akov, 1995.

doubled (from 6 to 11%; whereas the proportion of kibbutz members dropped from 19 to 12%)[8].

The possible implications of such data arouse conflicting emotions. In broad terms, the affirmative attitude towards military service displayed by so many national religious troops is welcomed, since it provides the IDF with a pool of high-quality and highly-motivated manpower. At the same time, precisely the same attributes also generate concern, principally on political grounds. Many (perhaps most) national religious troops, it is argued, possess a deep ideological and religious commitment to the retention of Jewish control over what they refer to as "the greater land of Israel" – i.e. the West Bank, "liberated" by the IDF in 1967. Hence, it is sometimes feared, they might be particularly reluctant to carry out any orders which they might be given to dismantle Jewish settlements in those regions. Support for that argument is found in the fact that, in the wake of the Oslo agreements of 1993 and 1994, one group of national-religious rabbis did explicitly call upon religious troops to refuse to obey any such order, which (if ever issued) would – in this view – constitute a violation of Divine command[9]. Were that ruling to be followed, the IDF might itself be split on religious-secular lines.

Two other developments, it has further been argued, add weight to that fear. One is the rise to senior position in the IDF (colonel and above) of a growing number of career personnel identified with the national religious community[10]. Another is the sense of cohesion being fostered

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8. Compare *Bita'on Hail Ha-Avir* (Hebrew, *Israel Air Force journal*), No. 103, June 1995, p. 8 (6%) with No. 109, June 1996, p. 12 (10%) and *Ha-Aretz*, 3 July 1997 (11%).

9. Manifesto issued by "The Union of Rabbis on Behalf of the People of Israel and the Land of Israel", reprinted in *Ha-Tzofeh*, 15 May 1995.

10. In 1998, for the very first time, a member of the national-religious community was promoted to the rank of *aluf* (Major-General), with a seat on the General Staff. Moreover, of the present complement of almost 40 persons at the rank of *tat-aluf* (Brigadier-General), those wearing a *kippah serugah* have recently increased to eight.

among national religious youth in general by the particularly intense web of institutional networks to which many of them are affiliated. Quite apart from an influential and popular youth movement ("B'nei Akivah"), the range also extends to a country-wide system of gender-segregated and residential national religious high schools *(yeshivot tichoni'ot* for boys, *ulpanot* for girls); a dozen pre-conscription religious academies (*mechinot_kedam tzevai'ot*), whose prototype was established adjacent to the West Bank settlement of Eli in 1984 with the express purpose of providing young men with whatever spiritual and physical "fortification" their forthcoming enlistment in the IDF might require; and 30 *hesder* (lit: "arrangement") academies, whose pupils intersperse their periods of military service with study in seminaries of advanced learning (*yeshivot*). The frameworks, it is sometimes feared, might foster a system of "dual control", compelling commanders to share authority with the rabbis, many of whom subscribe to a particularly intense brand of nationalism. Will the rabbis concerned always resist the temptation to exercise the political influence thus placed at their disposal? And, if not, could national religious troops be trusted to remain loyal to the conventional military chain of command[11]?

This alarmist scenario cannot be dismissed out of hand. After all, a series of murderous incidents – of which undoubtedly the most prominent was the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995 by a national religious reservist – provide ample evidence of the depths of feelings which attachment to the Land of Israel can arouse. Since that trauma, however, the specter of religious-based mutiny (and even of conscientious objection on national-religious grounds) seems to have very much receded. Opinion amongst the settlers has become far more pragmatic, and rabbinical injunctions have tended to stress the

11. Comments by Brig.-General (ret.), Orri Orr, chairman of the *Kneset* Foreign Affairs and Security Committee in *Ha-Aretz*, 5 July 1995 and 11 December 1995. For press approval: Dan Kislev, "To Disband this Palmach", *ibid*., 11 July 1995 and Ze'ev Schiff, "A Dangerous Arrangement", *ibid*., 11 December 1995.

overriding necessity of avoiding any action which might impair the unity of Israel's armed forces[12]. As far as can be judged, the overwhelming majority of national religious servicemen and women appear to concur with that order of priorities, which (one must assume) are in any case reinforced by their socialization into the military framework and hierarchy during their periods of conscript duty.

So intense has been the degree of interest focussed on the specifically political dimensions of the potential confrontation between religion and military service in contemporary Israel, that other possible manifestations of tension between the scroll and the sword in the IDF have been virtually ignored. This distortion is regrettable. Not only does it greatly exaggerate the imminence of an ideologically-motivated military revolt (whilst also neglecting the restraints on that possibility). More importantly, it also ignores other possible manifestations of tension. The present paper seeks to redress that imbalance. First, it presents a framework for an analysis of the distinctiveness of national religious service patterns. Thereafter, it outlines some of the areas in which that distinctiveness might generate conflict.

Basic to the argument that follows is the contention that conflicts between "the scroll and the sword" in the IDF, even when ideological in content, conform to a basic structural paradigm. This is because they unfold in a military setting, and hence in an environment considerably more restrictive ("greedy", in Coser's terms[13]) than is likely to be encountered elsewhere in modern society.

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12. See, e.g., Haggai Huberman, "The Oslo 'B' Map as a Final Settlement", *Ha-Tzofeh*, weekend supplement, 21 February 1997 and Biranit Goren, "It's Now a Question of the Price", *Ha-Aretz*, 24 February 1997.

13. Lewis Coser, *Greedy Institutions: Patterns of Undivided Attention*, New York: Free Press, 1974.

Confronted with the pressures of military life, all troops (especially if they are raw conscripts) doubtless suffer some difficulties of adjustment. But the experience is likely to be particularly discomforting for those from an orthodox Jewish background, because they are still committed to the equally "greedy" framework imposed by the religious requirements of orthodox Judaism. Hence, servicemen in this category not only demand the creation of conditions which will permit them to retain standards of ritual practice. If in need of practical and/or spiritual guidance, they also insist on their continued right of appeal to their non-military rabbinical guides, whom they regard as the only legitimate interpreters of Divine law.

As thus portrayed, the potential for conflict between two competing "greedy" frameworks, one military and the other religious, has always been inherent in the IDF. What has changed in recent years, however, has been both the nature of the issues involved and the intensity of debate to which they have given rise. Whereas tussles between religious and military authorities in Israel at one time centered on relatively abstruse issues of a ritual nature, they now concentrate on problems of vital interest to secular and religious Jews alike, and involve far larger numbers of persons, both in and out of uniform.

Shifts of that nature cannot be attributed to any single cause. In part, they reflect the increasing ferocity of religious-secular exchanges across a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from the composition of municipal religious councils to the civic status of new immigrants whose claims to Jewish identity do not always meet the strict requirements of traditional Jewish law. Furthermore, the new tone of debate has also been affected by the increasing political leverage which the religious parties in general have attained as a result of the demise of the Labour Party's parliamentary hegemony and the emergence of a more evenly balanced two-party system. At root, however, the principal cause for the shift appears to be cultural. In Israel, religious and secular communities (together with the various sub-divisions within those two

broad conglomerates) do not only adhere to different values. Increasingly, they are also adopting divergent life-styles and attributing disparate meanings to concepts and symbols about which there once existed a broad measure of communal agreement. As a result, the opportunities for religious-secular communication have been considerably narrowed, as indeed have the channels which once made such communication possible.

It is within that context that the most fundamental of the dilemmas between "the scroll and the sword" make themselves manifest. The remainder of this paper will briefly discuss two examples. One addresses the essentially intellectual conflicting "greedy" demands which religious injunctions and military service impose on the time of individual troops. The other focuses on the organizational pressures which a growing body of increasingly articulate national religious personnel exerts on the military framework as a whole.

■ "Study or Service?"

At a superficial level, national religious attitudes towards military service in the IDF seem to be altogether straight-forward. Quite simply, enlistment constitutes a mitzvah ("religious obligation") as well as a national duty. Beneath the surface of that somewhat bland doctrinal declaration, however, there lurk several imponderables. For instance: What is the precise status of this particular *mitzvah*? Is its performance binding perennially, or only at times of perceived national crisis?

For over a generation now, religious Zionism's spiritual guides have struggled to provide answers to such questions. Considering the paucity of attention to military affairs of any sort in the canonical legal compendia upon which traditional Jewish legal discourse (the halakhah) conventionally rests, that exercise has met with considerable success. The period since 1967, especially, has witnessed the publication of an ever-growing stream of

detailed rabbinical compositions in the field generically known as "the laws of war" (dinei milkhamah). Encompassing an area of public life uncharted by Jewish traditional teachings for centuries, such works (many of them compiled by rabbis themselves in possession of military experience), are not concerned solely with theological polemic or with theoretical justifications for war-making. Overwhelmingly, they are designed specifically to enable orthodox servicemen to harmonize the demands of ritual practice with those of military service. Based by on array of stunningly erudite sources, they indeed manage to specify the manner in which that task might be accomplished in a vast spectrum of areas[14].

Notwithstanding the overall success of this enterprise, there nevertheless remains one significant area of halakhic interest in which the potential for tension between the scroll and the sword has not entirely been resolved. Specifically, religious Zionist thought has yet to harmonize the (new) call for young orthodox Jews to devote a substantial amount of their time to military service with the much more ancient teaching that the study of the *Torah* (Divine Law) must take precedence over all other activities. Devotion to the latter principle has always been basic to orthodox Jewish culture. Study for its own sake (*lishmah*), both of the Bible and of the multiple layers of commentaries and supra-commentaries generated by the extended

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14. For samples of this extensive literature see: *Mishpat Ha-Milkhamah* ("The Law of Warfare", 1971) by Shemaryahu Arieli; *Ha-Hayil ve-ha-Hosen* ("Soldiering and Immunity", 1989) by Joshua Hagar-Lau; *Shabbat U-Moed Be-Tzahal* ("Sabbath and the Festivals in the IDF", 1990); *Pe'ilut Mivtza'it Be-Tzahal Al Pi ha-Halakhah* ("Operational Activities in the IDF According to the Halakhah", 1991) by Isaac Jakobovitz; *Ha-Tzavah Be-Halakhah* ("The Army in the Halakhah", 1992) by Isaac Kaufman; Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch, *Melumdie Milkhamah: Response on Matters Concerning the Army and Security* (Hebrew: Ma'aleh Adumim: Ma'alit, 1993); and, most impressive of all, Shlomo Goren's *Meishiv Milkhamah* ("Responding to War", 1983-1996) – four fat volumes of instruction and polemic by the IDF's first Chief Rabbi. Much of the material contained in these works has been edited and reproduced for the use of individual servicemen in single-volume pocket books. Two of the most popular are: *Laws Concerning Army and War: A Guide to Students on the Eve of Conscription* (Hebrew: ed. Shlomo Min-Hahar *et al.*; Jerusalem: Haskel, 1971), and Zechariah Ben-Mosheh, *Laws Concerning the Army* (Hebrew, 2nd edtn. Sha'alvim, 1988).

and intensive scrutiny of that text as the word of God and the embodiment of eternal truth, has traditionally been endowed with intrinsic instrumental value. According to some ancient teachings, it even takes precedence over prayer as a true form of Divine worship. By pondering those sources and exploring their limitless nuances, generations of sages and their disciples have stimulated and made concrete an intimate relationship with their Maker. Thus perceived, *Torah*-study *(talmud torah*) is not simply an intellectual experience, designed to collate and increase knowledge. Essentially, it constitutes a sacrament: the means whereby the Jew achieves communion with his God.

In their most extreme form, the monopolistic claims of *torah*-study (especially vis-a-vis military service) have found most explicit expression in *haredi* circles. It is now calculated that a vast proportion (probably as much as 80%) of *haredi* young males of conscription age presently claim – and receive – extensive deferments from enlistment in the IDF on the grounds that "*the* [study of the] *Torah is their profession*"[15]. Indeed, this particular segment of Israeli society now posits as an article of faith the argument that the energies which its members invest in the scholarly vocation contribute as much (if not more) to Israel's ultimate

[15]. Published IDF statistics report that 28,550 male deferments were granted in 1996 – a growth of 16% since the previous year. This figure represents 7.4% of the entire potential male draft cohort, compared to 6.4% in 1995, when the total number of Israeli youngsters of service age was somewhat smaller. Even more marked is the reported growth in the proportion of religious females now exercising their legal right to claim exemption, on the grounds that military service might conflict with their Orthodox life-styles. Of all potential female conscripts, 32% claimed exemption in 1996; two-thirds of them on religious grounds.These figures are derived, respectively, from: report by Colonel Avi Zamir, Head of Draft Board, cited in *Ha-Aretz*, 15 December 1997; and IDF spokesman reported in *Yediot Aharonot*, Tel Aviv (Hebrew daily), 28 November 1996. On the origins of the various arrangements' permitting this form of non-service, see: Menachem Friedman, "This is the chronology of the *status quo*: religion and state in Israel", in Vera Pilovsky (ed.), *The Shift from Yishuv to State, 1947-1949: Continuity and Change* (Hebrew), Haifa, Haifa U.P; 1990, pp. 62-4.

survival than do the exertions of IDF troops[16]. What also needs to be recognized, however, is the degree to which the national religious community is itself susceptible to the force of such arguments. Much though religious Zionism takes issue with many of the basic tenets of *haredi* thought, and especially with the latter's view of the State of Israel as nothing more than another version of Jewry's exile[17], it too must ultimately acknowledge the axiomatic priority which traditional Jewish teachings attach to *Torah*-study as a full time avocation. In the last analysis, religious Zionism's attempts to rationalize a relaxation of that norm carry the whiff of an apologia, even when they are most eloquently presented and appeal to the imperatives of state security[18].

The ramifications of the dilemma thus posed on the service patterns of individual national religious conscripts are becoming increasingly apparent. At their most extreme, they have resulted in the tendency of a small (but increasing) number of national religious men of service age to imitate *haredi* practice, by requesting draft deferments for periods of as long as seven or eight years in order that they might pursue their theological studies without interruption[19]. More ambivalent – but also far more wide-spread – are those

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16. For the most authoritative account see: Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society – Sources, Trends and Processes* (Hebrew), The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1991, esp. chapters 4,5.

17. See: Aviezer Ravitzky, "Exile in the Holy Land: the Dilemma of Haredi Jewry", *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, No. 5, 1988, pp. 89-125.

18. Still one of the most cogent expositions is: Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstien, "The Ideology of Hesder", *Tradition*, No. 19, 1981, pp. 199-217.

19. This phenomenon has become particularly marked amongst students registered in the academies (*yeshivot*) directed by pupils of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1939), and especially the central Kook academy (*Merkaz Harav Kook*) in Jerusalem. See: Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "The Nationalist Yeshivot and Political Radicalism in Israel", in *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, (eds.) M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994, pp. 264-302. The instance is particularly interesting in view of the fact that Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, propounded teachings which – especially as interpreted by his son after 1967 – served as a basis for a particularly militant brand of Jewish Zionist fundamentalism. See: Gideon Aran, "Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism: The Bloc of the Faithful in Israel (Gush Emunim)", in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, (eds.) M.E. Martin & R. Scott Appleby, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 265-344.

frameworks which seek to enable young servicemen to discharge both their scholarly and soldierly obligations within institutional settings especially tailored to that purpose. Unlike his *haredi* counterpart, the national religious youth of conscript age does not simply face a stark choice between study or a three-year stint of compulsory military service. He can now choose between a selection of other options: a *hesder* yeshivah, where he will spend five years, of which just two will be spent in army service; a pre-conscription academy (*mekhinah*), which provides a year-long programme of religious studies prior to regular enlistment; the *gachelet* programme, which combines four years of service with religious studies; or the *Shiluv* system, in which two years of study envelope three years of regular military service.

Two facets of that roster are particularly worthy of attention. One is the multiplicity of such frameworks, which seek to cater to a variety of tastes and to satisfy a wide range of aspirations. The second is their numerical growth. The number of *hesder yeshivot*, for instance, has multiplied from just one in 1964 and 12 in 1980 to 30 in 1998; and of *mekhinot* from one in 1984 to 12 in 1998. In terms of registration, the figures are still more impressive. Altogether, the number of national religious conscripts enrolled in one or another of the frameworks listed above now amounts to some 6,000, thus encompassing almost 40% of each annual cohort of troops from this segment.

What accounts for such developments? Fashion perhaps provides one answer. But far more fundamental seems to be an inner-directed resolve to ensure that the military's "greedy" intrusions into the traditional Jewish pursuit of *torah* scholarship is contained within reasonable bounds[20]. This drive is further strengthened by the scope of the challenge which the recent exponential growth in the number of *haredi* academies and students presents to religious

[20]. See., e.g., Rav Yehudah Shaviv, "Conflicting *Mitzvah* Obligations (Halakhic Aspects of the *Hesder*)", *Crossroads*, 1, 1987, pp. 187-199. See also interview with Mosheh Hagar (principal of the Beit Yatir pre-conscription academy) in *Zera'im*, No. 1, September 1996.

Zionism's scholastic pride. In the words of one national-religious commentator:

"*We have a duty not to relegate Torah study to those who are not cognizant of God's deliverance* [i.e. *haredim*].... *In order to promote great Torah authorities* [of our own*], those absorbed in Torah must be freed from any other yoke.... If* [they] *are required to combine their study with military service, even for a very limited time, and thereafter be called to reserve duty... the possibility of producing the top quality Torah leadership that our nation needs, will be seriously impaired*"[21].

■ "Insulation or Integration?"

Always central to Israel's character as a "nation in arms" has been an insistence on the sociological heterogeneity of the units of which the IDF is composed. This facet of the military structure was stressed with particular force by David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), Israel's first prime minister and minister of defense (he held both positions between 1948 and 1953 and from 1955 until 1963), and the man chiefly responsible for creating the IDF and defining its character. From the very first, Ben-Gurion intended Israel's armed forces to become an instrument of new Jewish "nation building" and a symbolic focus of national sentiment. Above all, he envisioned the IDF as a bonding institution within which Israel's otherwise fractured society could be homogenized and welded into a single whole. This vision did not impair the formation of segregated units for the small Druze minority; neither did it override Ben-Gurion's support of the arrangement whereby volunteers to the

21. Rav Zalman Melamed, "Producing Torah Leadership", *Crossroads*, No. 4, 1991, pp. 65-72 (compare the editor's comment on page 67). See also: Rabbi Yeshayahu Steinberger, "Scholastic Excellence in Zionist' Yeshivot: Vision and Reality", *Ha-Tzofeh*, 3 January 1997.

NAHAL (Fighter Pioneer Youth) corps enlisted in homogeneous "nuclei" (*garinim*)[22]. But it did certainly invalidate the establishment of separate military units for specifically religious troops. On this point, Ben-Gurion was adamant:

"*I fear that the creation of religious units will result in the creation of anti-religious units.... It is preferable, and possible, to educate officers and commanders to understand and respect the religious soldier*".

Hence: "*Our army will be a united army, without 'trends'*"[23].

In time, the principle of religious-secular "integration" within the IDF also became a basic component of the overall religious Zionist ethic. The only particularistic demands which the national religious community made of the IDF were for the establishment of a military chaplaincy (*rabbanut tzeva'it*), empowered both to ensure the supply of the ritual articles which religious troops require on a daily basis, and to ensure that IDF practice adhere to orthodox halakhic standards, especially with regard to sabbath observance and the dietary laws[24]. In all other respects, however, national religious troops neither sought – nor were granted – any particular concessions. On the contrary, they seem overwhelmingly to have concurred in the projection of equal military service as the most conclusive proof of religious Zionism's commitment to full participation in the entire national enterprise.

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22. On these two exceptions to the rule see, respectively: David Coren, *Steadfast Alliance: The Druze Community in Palestine and the Haganah* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense Publications, 1991, and Yair Doar, *Ours is the Sickle and the Sword* (Hebrew), Efal: Yad Tabenkin, 1992.

23. Reply to the Mizrachi (religious) party, 23 September 1949; cited in Zahava Ostfeld, *An Army is Born: Main Stages in the Buildup of the Army Under the Leadership of David Ben-Gurion* (Hebrew, 2 vol.), Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense Publications, 1994, p. 441.

24. See: Benny Michaelson, "Ha-Rabbanut ha-Tzeva'it", in *The IDF and its Arms*, Vol. 16 (Hebrew), (eds.) I. Kfir and Y. Erez, Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1982, pp. 83-132.

Those conditions no longer apply. Although the IDF undoubtedly remains the most comprehensive of all Israeli institutions – and certainly the most obtrusive meeting-ground between citizens who otherwise live their lives in vastly different cultural milieus – its claims to constitute an integrative bridge between religious and secular troops no longer carry quite the same conviction. Instead, the two communities from which the two categories of troops are drawn seem increasingly to have been drifting apart and thus becoming more segregated. Raised in what are now becoming very disparate environments, and espousing distinctive sets of values, they find it increasingly difficult to communicate when thrown into close proximity by the experience of enlistment. One testimony to that circumstance, especially notable because of the audience to which it was addressed, is provided by a cautionary article which two fresh conscripts published in *Zera'im*, the bulletin of the national religious youth movement, B'nei Akivah. "The IDF", they warned younger members to be aware, "*is not at all a religious institution*". One reason is that conditions in the unit mess do not always meet orthodox dietary standards, especially in isolated front-line postings which are too small to billet a military chaplain. But far more significant are the challenges posed by other tests, most of which are all the more traumatic for being so unexpected.

"*Quite apart from experiencing the shock to which every conscript is submitted on entering the military framework, the religious soldier in addition is estranged and struck dumb by the comportment of his secular comrades. Even their everyday speech contains phrases and terms which his own mouth, used to prayer, is unable to utter and which his ears, attuned to words of wisdom, refuse to absorb*"[25].

[25]. Ya'akov Levi and Aaron Furstein, "It is Not Easy to be a Religious Soldier", *Zera'im*, No. 8, July 1995, pp. 8-9.

A detailed examination of the precise reasons for that situation lie beyond the scope of the present essay, and can therefore only be briefly outlined here. In part, the change can be attributed to forces at work within the secular community, of which undoubtedly the most important is the decline in attachment to (and knowledge of) the vast cargo of traditional Jewish symbols and practices which in a previous generation constituted integral facets of what has been termed Israel's "civil religion"[26]. Equally influential, however, have been processes at work within the insular world of national religious Jewry itself. The products of over two generations of a particularly rich, intensive and essentially segregated educational system, the most recent generations of national religious youth have become far more assertive than their forbears. They have also begun to take the initiative in fields which were once considered to be virtually secular monopolies. One example is provided by the prominence of the role played by the national religious community in the post-1967 settlement movement and particularly in *Gush Emunim* ["The Bloc of the Faithful"], established in 1974 with the express purpose of ensuring Jewish control over the territories acquired during the Six Days' War[27]. Another – of perhaps greater import in the long term – is the degree to which individual members of the national religious community have penetrated into the very highest reaches of the country's economic, judicial, administrative and communications elite without (again, in contrast to many of their forbears) masking their origins[28].

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26. Compare Charles S. Liebman & Eliezer Don-Yehiyah, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Religion and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, with Charles S. Liebman and Steven M. Cohen, *Two Worlds of Judaism: The Israeli and American Experiences*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. See also: Shulamit Levi, Hanah Levinson and Elihu Katz, *Beliefs, the Observance of Commandments and Social Relations Amongst Jews in Israel*, Jerusalem: The Guttman Institute for Applied Behavioural Research, December 1993.

27. On which there now exists a substantial body of literature. See: Danny Rubinstein, *On the Lord's Side: Gush Emunim* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1982; Gideon Aran, "Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism", above No. 19; and the personal recollections by one of the movement's founders: Gershon Shafat, *Gush Emunim: The Story Behind the Scenes* (Hebrew), Beit El: Publications Beit El, 1995.

28. For comments on this development: Yair Sheleg, "The New National Religious Character", *Yom Ha-Shishi* (Hebrew weekly), 19 August 1994.

As we have seen (above, n. 10), similar processes have begun to take place at the highest reaches of the IDF. Here, too, however, the *political* fears generated by that phenomenon seem to have been exaggerated, and to have masked far more important *cultural* developments taking place at lower strata of the military hierarchy. In fact, what really merits attention is not the emergence of a number of national-religious senior officers but the growing tendency amongst more segments of national religious servicemen to bunch together and thus to form almost homogeneous units. To put matters another way, the push towards "integrated" military service, although still acknowledged to be a fundamental article of religious Zionist faith, is increasingly giving way to an "insular" pull.

The root causes for that tendency are not difficult to gauge. Doubtless, most recruits would prefer to serve with persons of their own kind; and that urge is always likely to have been especially strong amongst national religious servicemen, principally because of their particular need for a communal atmosphere conducive to their observance of orthodox Jewish practice. But what until recently constituted little more than a vague aspiration has now virtually attained the status of a communal imperative. National religious troops are becoming increasingly sensitive to the cultural chasm which seems to separate them from the majority of secular troops. Many, and especially those who enroll in *hesder yeshivot* or in the *mekhinot*, are also expressing increasing determination to minimize whatever threats military service might pose to their ability to conform to the rigid demands of Jewish ritual practice. In consequence, they are expressing a growing preference to serve – as groups – in homogeneous formations, rather than as individuals in the IDF as a whole.

The tendency towards an "insular" form of national religious military service is most blatant amongst *hesder* personnel. This is hardly surprising, since the peculiarity of the *hesder* time-table, which permits a far more truncated spell

of conscript duty than is performed by most other recruits, virtually mandates that *hesder* personnel be drafted *en bloc* and serve together. Fearful that the existence of socially homogeneous units might result in the concentration of casualties within a particular segment of society (such as was indeed experienced by the national religious community when an armoured formation principally composed of *hesder* troops was mauled at the battle of Sultan Yakub in June 1982[29]), IDF commanders have since the Lebanon War insisted that individual battalions generally contain no more than one *hesder* company. Within that limit, however, the homogeneity of the units concerned remains marked – in infantry *brigades as well as in the armoured and engineering corps (to which the vast majority of hesder* personnel are assigned). In each case, the number of such companies, many of which are composed of students of a single academy, has grown in direct proportion to the expansion of the overall *hesder* complement.

Significantly, however, it is not only *hesder* personnel who tend towards an "insulated" form of military service. Similar – albeit far less institutionalized – patterns are also apparent amongst other national religious recruits. A large proportion of national religious female recruits, for instance, serve in the Education Corps – and more specifically in the "Branch for Torah Culture" which (not unexpectedly) is monopolized by graduates of the national religious educational system. Likewise, a large proportion of the graduates of *mekhinot* gravitate towards the IDF's elite *sayarot* (reconnaissance units), where they now constitute a recognizable, and distinct, category of analysis. A parallel tendency towards "bunching" can be observed in several of the other combat formations within which the numbers of national religious conscripts have become particularly marked. Indeed, it has to a large extent been (unwittingly) facilitated by the reforms which the IDF Manpower Branch in 1995 instituted in the overall draft system, with the express

29. On which see: Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, pp. 173-179.

purpose of giving potential conscripts a greater say in the determination of their ultimate locus of service[30]. By permitting – indeed, encouraging – recruits to express their own unit preferences (within certain limits), the new system has also made it easier for many of them to co-ordinate their selections, and thus increase the likelihood that they will serve in specific units *en bloc*.

Observation suggests that such developments certainly impose a number of organizational constraints on the military framework. (Of these, undoubtedly the most widely-felt, especially amongst junior commanders, is the need to display greater sensitivity to the demands of a sizable and invariably articulate body of religious troops for what in an earlier age were generally considered to be extraordinary, and hence unjustifiable, "concessions"). In the long run, however, the ramifications for Israeli society as a whole must be considered much more significant. After all, the IDF has for long prided itself on its character as a "people's army" which (in the words of one observer),

"*has helped to break all barriers between men who lived all their lives in vastly different cultural milieus. Boys from religious families could mix freely with antireligious boys from secularist left-wing kibbutzim, learning to give and take, to disagree while respecting the other's right to his own view, to refuse from excesses of behavior and find a deeper unity of purpose*"[31].

Should the tendencies towards segregation and "insulated" service noted here persist, the validity of all such depictions is bound to be impaired. Instead of being a great "nation builder", service in the IDF might become a "nation divider", thereby reinforcing the drift towards a religious-secular divide which in any case threatens Israel's communal unity.

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30. On the new system see: *Ba-Machaneh* (IDF weekly; Hebrew), 11 May 1994; and interview with Gen. Yoram Yair (outgoing head of Manpower Branch), *ib*., 6 September 1995.

31. Samuel Rolbant, *The Israeli Soldier: Profile of an Army*, New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1970, p. 154.

■ Policy Implications

The above analysis suggests that its possible policy implications can be analyzed along several axes.

The first, and most fundamental, is that which distinguishes between those threats which are realistic and those which are not. This paper has argued that many analyses of the potential ramifications of current dilemmas between the scroll and the sword are misdirected. The fear that such dilemmas might result in a widespread incidence of military disobedience seems particularly exaggerated. Underplayed, by contrast, are the wider personal and societal dimensions of tensions between religion and military service.

That being the case, the first policy implication is clear. Any steps which might conceivably be taken in order to "cleanse" the IDF of its supposed "ideological colonels" would clearly be misdirected. Worse still, by injecting an unwarranted consideration into the issue of military appointments and promotions, such steps would merely add yet another layer of complexity to what is already a sensitive area of national-security decision-making.

Instead – and this must be categorized as our second policy recommendation – efforts at reform should be directed elsewhere – and especially towards the pre-conscription educational system. After all, it is there that the gulf between religious and secular communities in Israel first becomes manifest. The IDF merely inherits the fruits of a situation whose roots lie in the existence of at least three separate educational "streams", which segregate religious, secular and ultra-orthodox children from the kindergarten through high school, and beyond.

An entirely different axis of policy implications relates to the steps which the military authorities themselves might be in a position to implement (or, at least, to initiate). In this case, however, the spectrum is determined by the overall shape which the IDF might assume in the foreseeable future. Will it continue to adhere to its image as "a people's army", nominally based on universal conscription (at least for Jews)? or will it move – as I have elsewhere argued it is already moving – towards a more "professional" force in which service, even if not entirely voluntary, would certainly be based on a far more selective form of conscription?
My own analysis leads me to contend that - perhaps ironically - continued adherence to a militia format altogether leaves leave the IDF with rather less freedom of maneuver in manpower issues than would a more professional format. This is also true where religious-secular divergences are concerned. Hence, my third policy recommendation would be for a system of more selective service.

The reasoning is as follows: As a "people's army", the IDF is committed to making specific provisions for religious servicemen and women – and yet, in the very nature of things, can never fully satisfy the legitimate and deeply-held needs which each and every individual in that category might possess. That particular feature of the present situation might be eased were enlistment to be more selective. As a primary national institution of the Jewish state, the IDF would – of course – still be expected to maintain the standards of religious observance which Jewish religious law (the *halakhah*) demands. Yet, it would not have to go beyond the consensual bounds of those provisions and, therefore, would not pose a problem of conscience for those servicemen who would wish it to do so.

Experience has taught me that any suggestion that the Israeli army might follow almost every other western force and abandon compulsory conscription immediately arouses cries of alarm and dissent from several quarters. This is not the place to confront each of those objections – which

encompass matters as diverse as the financial cost of any such change, its operational viability, and the difficulty of finding any other framework which might provide a "rite of passage" for Israeli youngsters to full citizenship. With regard to the particular matter in hand, however, these objections might be supplemented by the claim that – under a system of selective service – the representation of religious youth in military service might become even more disproportionate than it already is. Principally this is because of the enlistment data already referred to, which show a significantly higher degree of "motivation" for military service amongst religious than secular youth.

Here too, my own prognosis is considerably less alarmist. For one thing, and as already noted, I believe that the fear of religiously-inspired and politically-motivated collective dissent within the IDF is grossly exaggerated. Secondly, however, my assessment is that were the IDF to become truly "professional", the pressures on career servicemen and women to preserve a politically neutral stance would vastly increase. Hence, even were the overall sociological complexion of the IDF to shift (as could well be the case), the effect of that change on corporate behavior would not be marked.

Army/Society Relations in Israel: The Impact of External Factors

Mark A. Heller*

■ Introduction

Israel's national security concept was forged in the late 1940s and early 1950s in response to the political-military leadership's interpretation of the strategic environment (especially the geo-political circumstances) in which Israel found itself at the time. From this concept logically flowed the basic structure and doctrine of the Israel Defense Forces, and these combined with the social vision of the founding fathers, especially David Ben-Gurion, to produce a peculiarly Israeli version (or at least, idealized version) of the "nation in arms", that is, a military force that both reflects and shapes the character of society at large. The purpose of this paper is to examine the likely impact of recent and prospective changes in Israel's strategic environment on military structure and doctrine. The central conclusion of the analysis is that such changes will inevitably transform the character of the IDF, and that this transformation will, in turn, challenge the traditional model of army-society relations in Israel.

■ Israeli National Security Doctrine

* Senior Research Associate at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University.

Israel's national security concept has never been embodied in any formal document. There is no Israeli equivalent of the White Papers or periodic reports issued by defense ministries in many other countries. Nevertheless, something approximating a coherent doctrine evolved in the light of the experience of the 1948 War of Independence and the first years of Israeli statehood[1]. This doctrine was based on a number of basic assumptions:

1) that Israel would continue to live in a hostile environment. The inability to transform the 1949 General Armistice Agreements into peace treaties was understood to mean that Israel would remain in a formal state of war with neighbors bent on its destruction, and the expectation was that Israel would continue to live under the permanent threat of a renewed outbreak of fighting with one or more Arab armies;

2) that Israel would continue to face this threat in conditions of demographic and material inferiority and lack of territorial depth. This made it vulnerable both to surprise attack and protracted war;

3) that the combination of material inferiority and the international diplomatic constellation would make it impossible for Israel ever to achieve a decisive victory in war, in the sense of being able to impose peace on its adversaries, and that this objective would be achieved, if at all, only when entrenched Israeli military superiority compelled the Arabs to despair of the war option.

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1. The traditional security concept is treated extensively in Yisrael Tal, *National Security: The Few Against the Many*, Tel Aviv : Dvir, 1996, and Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israeli Military Doctrine*, JCSS Study n°12, Jerusalem & Boulder, Co: The Jerusalem Post & Westview Press, 1989, ch.. 2; for a telegraphic summary, see Eliot A. Cohen, Michael J. Eisenstadt and Andrew J. Bacevich, "Israel's Revolution in Security Affairs", *Survival*, 40, No. 1 (Spring 1998), pp. 48-50.

Several conclusions flowed from these assumptions. The first was that Israel would need to maintain a high state of military readiness in order to prepare for the inevitable "Next Round". The second was that only a very intense mobilization of the human and economic resources at its disposal would enable Israel to overcome its demographic and material inferiority. The third was that Israel could not realistically hope to promote defined, positive objectives and that its security policy was therefore defensive in the strategic sense, i.e., designed to deter an attack against it. Nevertheless, if war did break out, Israel's demographic and material vulnerabilities obliged it to force adversaries to agree to stop fighting as quickly as possible, and this necessitated the application of decisive force, i.e., a stress on the offensive at the operational and tactical levels.

These conclusions had clear implications for the structure and combat doctrine of the IDF. Most importantly, they led to the decision to build the IDF as a militia-type force, consciously patterned on the Swiss model. Israeli military power would be based on near-universal conscription of males and females, and following compulsory service, males would continue to be subject to annual reserve duty, the primary purpose of which was to ensure that they maintained their combat proficiency in the event of an emergency requiring their mobilization. A small permanent core of professional soldiers would bear primary responsibility for training and planning, and they, along with conscripts, would bear the burden of "current security" (i.e., routine, day-to-day deployments and counter-terrorism operations) as well as for those tasks demanding a permanent state of full operational readiness (intelligence, air power, etc.). But the brunt of any full-scale military effort, especially on the ground, would be borne, not by the standing forces (which Israel could not afford to maintain in sufficient quantity), but rather by reservists.

The reliance on reservists (and the lack of territorial depth) resulted in a military posture highly intolerant of ambiguity: any indication that an adversary was preparing for or even contemplating a resort to force produced a strong inclination to preempt. One reason was that a surprise attack by the adversary could so disrupt or delay the mobilization of reserves that his initial gains might be irreversible. The other was that a prolonged mobilization of reserves in the absence of military action was liable to do severe damage to the economy. For the same reason, any military action that did break out needed to be terminated fairly quickly and decisively (in the sense that the adversary would not soon be able to mount a new threat), not only because protracted conflict increased the risk of a broader Arab coalition, but primarily because it precluded demobilization of the reserves. Consequently, great emphasis was placed on developing offensive capabilities (maneuver and firepower) and, in the event that Israel did not preempt, carrying the battle into enemy territory at the earliest possible moment. And this depended, at least in part, on the import or indigenous development of qualitatively superior equipment, meaning a heavy financial burden.

The resulting military structure – "a nation in arms" – was primarily determined by the early strategic and material parameters of Israeli security policy, but it coincided with the political leadership's understanding of the task of "nation-building". During the first decade after independence, Israel absorbed hundreds of thousands of Jews with traditions and social structures quite different from those of the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine (the *Yishuv*) – indeed, the "Ingathering of the Exiles" was one of the central sustaining myths of Zionist ideology – and Ben-Gurion and his followers placed great store in the IDF as an institution of socialization. Universal conscription and reserve service were seen as a kind of crucible that would not only provide perhaps the one shared experience of Jews from diverse backgrounds (given residential patterns, this was less likely to happen in the schools), but

also inculcate common educational values and ideals conforming to the Zionist establishment's vision of "the new Israeli man".

■ Changing Strategic Environment

Military structure and doctrine placed very heavy demands on the time and resources of the Israeli population. For most of the period up to and including 1967, these demands were accepted virtually without question, as were the casualties that accompanied wars and between-war operations. The reasons for this included a high degree of solidarity, confidence in the political leadership, the unchallenged legitimacy and esteem of the military establishment, group- or unit-loyalty among reservists, and, for some, the social mobility and sense of acceptance accorded by participation in the security effort and the hegemonic social norms behind it. The most important factor, however, was the almost consensual belief that the existential threat to Israel was genuine, that there was no peace option, and that whatever was demanded of Israelis in the name of security was really necessary – that there was "No Choice".

All this began to change in the late 1960s, when the constant stream of casualties from the War of Attrition combined with international mediation efforts to challenge the notion that what was at issue was the impossibility of peace rather than the terms of peace, i.e., the validity of the "No Choice" assumption. At first, the change was barely perceptible, since the basic postulates of security policy were questioned only by cultural and literary elites on the fringes of society. Confidence in the infallibility of the political/military establishment was not really shaken until the 1973 Yom Kippur War. But even then, the Israeli public attributed the initial setbacks and the high casualties to insufficient vigilance, and attached most of the blame, not to the military echelon (notwithstanding the defects revealed by the Commission of Inquiry), but rather to the political leadership that departed from traditional doctrine

by refusing to authorize a large-scale call-up of reserves or a preemptive strike.

More profound challenges to the traditional concept did not arise until the late 1970s, and stemmed from three sources. One was the reduction in the conventional military threat. To a large degree, this was attributable to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, culminating in the peace treaty that, for all its shortcomings, effectively removed the strongest Arab country from the "circle of war" and moved what had been the most worrisome front since 1949 to the bottom of the list of geographical priorities. But it was also a consequence of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, which minimized the chances of a viable "Eastern Front" coalition, and then of the Second Gulf War, which decimated Iraq's conventional military power, especially its force projection capabilities.

The second was the decline of the security consensus due to developments that contradicted the premise of "No Choice". The most dramatic catalyst of this change was the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, which Prime Minister Menahem Begin termed a "*War of choice*". Although the action was initially presented as an extended counter-terrorism operation to protect Israel's northern frontier, it soon became apparent that the objectives of the campaign went far beyond either the deflection of an imminent or developing threat or the establishment of broader deterrence. Instead, it aimed at promoting a particular political vision, unlike the 1956 Sinai Campaign to which Begin compared it. It is not coincidental that the war in Lebanon quickly became the most contentious war in Israel's history, provoking massive civilian demonstrations as well as damage to military morale and discipline. After the early stage of maneuver, it degenerated into protracted counter-insurgency or counter-guerrilla operations that exacted a continuing toll of casualties whose justification or necessity came under growing criticism. As in the case of the Yom Kippur War,

most of the criticism was leveled at the political echelon, rather than the army. Nevertheless, the performance of the military command did come in for some scrutiny[2]. The army's prestige was also challenged by the operational demands of low-intensity warfare; these conformed neither with the heroic mold in which the IDF had traditionally been cast nor with the IDF's essential structure and training. Similar problems emerged after the outbreak of the *intifada* in 1987. Despite the quite different circumstances of a civil uprising, the IDF once again found itself confronted with operational demands for which it was not prepared, and the government once again found itself trying to develop and explain a policy that produced a steady stream of casualties whose justification was a matter of intense public controversy, and that demanded commitments that some in the military, especially in the reserves, were increasingly reluctant to make.

The third was the appearance in 1991 of a new kind of danger for which the traditional emphasis on the offensive was inappropriate: the Iraqi ballistic missile attacks on Israel during the Gulf War. For the first time, Israel was exposed to a military threat to which the most immediate and appropriate response was defensive, not offensive, and in which the bulk of the military, and virtually all reservists, took no active part.

During the 1980s and 1990s, these three developments increasingly occupied a place in Israel's evolving security agenda and seemed to prefigure a strategic environment quite different from that which dictated the traditional structure and doctrine of the IDF and the pattern of army-society relations in Israel. Neither the political echelon nor the defense establishment has ignored the fact that the threat environment is changing and that these changes require responses. For example, several

2. See, for example, Emmanuel Wald, *The Curse of the Broken Vessels: The Twilight of Israeli Military and Political Power (1967-1982)*, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv: Shocken, 1987 (Hebrew).

years ago, the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee established a subcommittee on defense doctrine. More recently, the Defense Ministry has convened a working group to reexamine the threats and appropriate responses. The Planning Branch of the IDF General Staff is constantly reassessing the environment in the context of elaborating multi-year work plans. And every incoming chief-of-staff in the past decade has promised to restructure the IDF in accordance with new demands. Nevertheless, there seems to be more agreement about the nature of the problem than about the proper solution[3].

The most salient feature of the current and prospective strategic environment is the broadening of the threat continuum, in terms of both intensity and geographical scope. At the top end of the spectrum, it is widely assumed that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East is inevitable, notwithstanding various arms control proposals and counterproliferation measures[4]. This development, combined with the continuing spread of long-range delivery systems (ballistic- and cruise-missiles), will expose Israel to far more intense damage from a wider variety of sources than ever before. Indeed, it has been argued that Israel, because of its small size and highly concentrated population and industrial base, is the most vulnerable country in the world to this type of threat[5]. With WMD warheads, missiles pose a

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3. For various expressions of essentially the same agenda, see, Tal, *National Security*, chapter 24; Yitzhak Mordechai, "In Search of Security: Defending Israel into the Next Century", *Harvard International Review* (Spring 1998), pp. 54-59; Eliot A. Cohen *et al.*, "Israel's Revolution in Security Affairs" *op. cit.*, pp. 50-59; and Ron Ben-Yishai, "Military Intelligence Estimate: The Chance of War Next Year is Greater Than in the Past", *Yediot Ahronot* (Sabbath Supplement), 10 July 1998, pp. 6-9. Former Deputy Chief-of-Staff Major-General Matan Vilna'i gave a similar assessment in a lecture at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 28 June 1998.

4. For a detailed study of proliferation trends, see Ian O. Lesser and Ashley J. Tellis, *Strategic Exposure: Proliferation Around the Mediterranean*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1996.

5. Lieutenant-General Lester L. Lyles, head of the United States Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, in an interview in *Israel Air Force Journal*, cited in *Ha-Aretz*, 25 August 1998.

potentially existential threat of the type to which Israel has not been exposed since at least before 1967. Even with conventional warheads, they can seriously disrupt the normal functioning of society and the economy, as happened in 1991, and they can, given sufficient accuracy, delay mobilization of reserves and interfere with Air Force operations in the critical first stages of armed conflict. By threatening the civilian rear area, they can also counter Israeli escalation dominance, which has played a role in the past in Israeli strategies of war termination[6]. In this context, missiles are a factor in assessments about the conventional threat, as well, though the advantage that Israel has enjoyed in this regard for the past few years is otherwise unlikely to be challenged in any radical way.

A second expectation is that Israel will continue to confront the challenges of insurgency/guerrilla warfare and terrorism. In particular, a settlement with the Palestinians comprehensive and definite enough to eliminate future conflicts is not an operating assumption, and planning incorporates the likelihood of intermittent but ongoing low-level violence along the evolving boundaries between Israel and the Palestinian Authority[7]. Low-intensity warfare is normally placed at the opposite end of the spectrum of violence, and the challenge is usually framed in terms of protracted, inconclusive conflict that conventional armed forces are not especially well-suited to meet and that extract a continuing toll of casualties among soldiers and civilians whose justification, in the face of political alternatives, is increasingly questioned[8]. But concern has also

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6. Mark A. Heller, "Coping with Missile Proliferation in the Middle East", *Orbis*, 35, No. 1 (Winter 1991), pp. 19-20.

7. For some detailed scenarios, see Ron Ben-Yishai, "Military Intelligence Estimate: The Chance of War Next Year is Greater Than in the Past", *op. cit*. Anecdotal declaratory evidence as well as the training and equipment of Palestinian para-military forces suggest that this is also the operating assumption of the Palestinian Authority.

8. President Ezer Weizman, perhaps the most prominent survivor of the generation that fought in the 1948 War of Independence, reportedly referred to the changing nature of the challenge by

been expressed in recent years about "super terrorism", i.e., the possibility that the further breakdown of central authority in Russia or other successor states of the former Soviet Union, or some other development, will enable non-state actors to get access to WMD technologies and materials. This is a hybrid problem that bridges the extremes of the spectrum, because it combines the magnitude of the WMD threat with the difficulties of deterring and/or preempting the actions of terrorist organizations or individuals.

A third anticipated development concerns the impact of advanced technologies on communications and precision guidance. There is little doubt that continued advances in censoring and data-acquisition, processing and sharing technologies will affect the nature of military command and combat itself, to the point where many believe they herald a veritable "Revolution in Military Affairs". There is much less certainty about how the RMA will impact Israel's capabilities relative to those of its potential adversaries. Some argue that it will work to Israel's advantage, given its more developed technological base, scientific and technical training, and experience in the development and integration of systems. Others suggest that user sophistication will become less critical because technological advances will simplify such vital military functions as communications, maintenance, and long-range/standoff capabilities, thereby working to the advantage of those countries with a less-developed technical base and more centralized command systems, and that Israel's "qualitative edge" has already begun to erode because of growing Arab (especially Egyptian and Saudi) access to western military industries[9]. In any case, there is an awareness that the ongoing technological revolution presents risks as well as opportunities; one of

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telling a group of current senior commanders, "*Our problem was how not to die; yours is how to live*". Cited by Deputy Chief of Staff, Major-General Uzi Dayan, in author's interview, 5 September 1998.

9. Eliot A. Cohen *et al*., "Israel's Revolution in Security Affairs", *op. cit.*, p. 50; and Amos Gilboa, "Developments in Major Armies of the Middle East", in Mark A. Heller (ed.), *The Middle East Military Balance, 1997*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

these risks is that societies and military establishments more dependent on advanced micro-electronics are also more vulnerable to cyberwarfare attacks.

The emergence or intensification of these new elements does not mean that the traditional concern with conventional threats has been eliminated. Until assessments of the future environment can be predicated on a peace agreement with Syria, the possibility of a renewed outbreak of conventional war must remain an operating assumption. By and large, Syria has found it difficult to finance the upgrading and modernization of its military forces. But it retains a large army and its stress on certain critical elements (surface-to-surface missiles, air defenses) as well as its advantage in standing forces make some Syrian attack scenarios credible enough to require a fairly high state of Israeli readiness.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is politics. The intensity with which any of these types of threats – WMD/missiles, low-intensity conflict, conventional, and new technologies – actually materializes will depend, to a large degree, on the political context in which they emerge, particularly, the nature of Israel's relations with the Arab world. Thus, the evolution of the peace process is a primary variable in Israel's emerging strategic environment. The completion of comprehensive peace would reduce the likelihood that most Arab actors would invest heavily in acquiring WMD/missile capabilities or that such capabilities would be brought into play in an Arab-Israeli context. They would also minimize the number of scenarios in which states outside the peace process (Arab or non-Arab) would have a political incentive to activate their capabilities. A political settlement with Syria would minimize the danger of a conventional war on Israel's northern front, and since it would probably entail a regulation of Israel's relations with Lebanon, the problem of low-intensity warfare on that front would also be mitigated.

And a stable, final status agreement with the Palestinians would significantly reduce the threat of terrorism from that quarter.

But none of these developments can be predicted with complete confidence. Indeed, they are not, strictly speaking, external factors in the strategic environment. To some degree, they are beyond Israel's control; to some degree, they are very much a function of what Israel itself does or does not do. But for whatever reasons, it is not inconceivable that further stalemate or regression in the peace process will exacerbate the political context and intensify the conventional and non-conventional military and low-intensity threats. Besides, even in the optimistic political scenarios, there are several complications that security planners will bear in mind. One is that of "rogues", i.e., states or non-state organizations and individuals who will reject the peace and try to subvert it or otherwise act against Israel. This is likely to be manifested most persistently in the form of terrorism, a non-existential threat that will nevertheless continue to preoccupy the defense establishment, but it could also express itself, with varying degrees of effectiveness, in the policies of "second tier" states like Iran, Iraq, or Libya. A second factor is the Israeli conviction that any peace that is achieved will have vindicated the traditional insistence on credible deterrent power; the corollary of that is the conviction, likely to persist for a longer time after any formal resolution of the conflict, that the maintenance of peace similarly requires the maintenance of credible deterrence, i.e., a satisfactory response capability to the full range of potential threats[10]. Finally, there is the problem of instability and regime change in the region, or breakdown of the peace process for some other unforeseeable reason.

[10]. This point is stressed in the lecture by Vilna'i and in the article by Defense Minister Mordechai.

This is essentially what has been termed the problem of "war after peace"[11]. It was not part of Israel's security agenda when the national security concept was originally forged, but it promises to be a permanent consideration, indeed, the fourth major parameter in the evolving strategic environment, as far into the future as one can realistically project. For Israeli defense planners, peace represents both an opportunity and a potential challenge. The opportunity is the possibility of downsizing or restructuring defense capabilities in response to mitigated threats following on the fundamental improvement of relations with other Middle Eastern states. The challenge lies in the uncertainty about the durability of this more benign political environment. Most of the regimes in the region face domestic threats of varying intensity, primarily due to chronic internal problems: demographic pressures and rapid urbanization, economic stagnation and stalemated reforms, and the challenges by radical Islamist or nationalist alternatives to the legitimacy of governing elites[12]. In extreme circumstances, these problems could produce regime changes for reasons that are only indirectly connected to Arab-Israeli issues but that would have serious ramifications for Israel's threat environment. That is what happened in Iran, and it could conceivably happen in Turkey, or, more ominously, in Jordan, Egypt, or – after a peace agreement involving territorial concessions – in Syria. In such circumstances, even the middle of the threat continuum, i.e., the conventional realm, would be of much greater concern. In the current circumstances, this is perhaps the least pressing dimension of the emerging strategic environment. But however remote the likelihood, the possibility of regime transformation (or major policy reversal by the existing regime) in a country like Egypt, which has made noteworthy

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11. Eliot A. Cohen *et al*., "Israel's Revolution in Security Affairs", *op. cit*., p. 53.

12. The problem of "societies under stress" is treated in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce R. Nardulli and Lory A. Arghavan, "Sources of Conflict in the Greater Middle East", in Zalmay Khalilzad and Ian O. Lesser (eds), *Sources of Conflict in the 21st Century: Regional Futures and U.S. Strategy*, Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1998, pp. 177-91.

progress in enlarging, upgrading and modernizing its armed forces since the peace agreement, will necessarily temper the advisability of degrading Israeli defense capabilities, even in the conventional realm. Of course, it is also possible that domestic political developments will have the opposite effect, that is, the replacement of regimes now hostile to Israel with others more neutral or benevolent. But the only place where that seems remotely likely in the short- to medium-term is in Iran; none of Israel's Arab neighbors seems to be a candidate for this kind of transformation.

■ Structural/Doctrinal Responses

Most of these contingencies or anticipated developments in the strategic environment imply continuation or intensification of already perceptible trends in force structure and planning. For example, the missile/WMD threat has already resulted in a larger defensive component in overall strategic posture, including the creation of a Home Front Command and the dedication of more resources to intelligence and early warning and to active (anti-missile) and passive (shelters, gas masks, etc.) defenses. This trend is likely to accelerate. The July 1998 flight-test of the Iranian Shihab-3 missile, with sufficient range to cover all of Israel, was widely assumed to be responsible for the Israeli government's decision to reverse course and authorize an increase in the defense budget; the weakening of the Iraqi inspection regime has confirmed the long-standing expectation that Iraq will eventually activate the "breakout" capacity it preserved even when the regime was operating more effectively. Whatever the precise mix of defensive elements adopted, it is likely that part of Israel's evolving response to this threat will be the further development of space-based capabilities[13]. At the same time, the

[13]. Tal, *National Security*, p. 224; interview with Major-General Yitzhak Ben-Israel, Director of Research and Development in the Israeli Ministry of Defense, *Defense News*, 17-23 August 1998, p. 22.

need to maintain a credible deterrent has also led to the acquisition of longer-range weapons (e.g., F-15I strike aircraft) and may also have even more far-reaching implications. Because of its limited size, for example, Israel cannot avail itself of all the mechanisms to which the superpowers resorted in order to guarantee an assured second-strike capability (e.g., dispersal, concealment, mobility). One partial remedy for this problem might be for Israel to place part of its deterrent force at sea.

As solutions such as space-based capabilities and sea-based deterrence are adopted, they will require, not only the procurement of advanced technologies and equipment in close cooperation with the United States, but also a large component of skilled personnel to develop, maintain and operate them. Like the diffusion of information systems and cybernetics, this points to the likelihood of ever greater reliance on more professional and technically-qualified standing forces, based on more selective recruitment and longer retention of high-quality manpower.

The same may well be true of the response at the other end of the threat spectrum, i.e., counter-terrorism and low-intensity conflict (LIC). Both the *intifada* and the experience in south Lebanon have shown the comparative advantage in security operations of dedicated, in-place counter-insurgency/LIC units (such as the Border Guard and elite infantry formations) over general purpose reserve and even conscript forces. Even the technological trends in conventional warfare will favor highly-trained, technically-advanced long-service units over large traditional combat formations. This is almost certainly what several chiefs-of-staff had in mind when they referred to the need for a "smaller, smarter army". In any event, most of the foreseeable developments in the strategic environment suggest the emergence of a more professional army, with a corresponding decrease in the role of part-time soldiers, i.e., the reservists who have given the IDF its "citizens' army" character since the early years of Israel's existence.

■ Implications for Army/Society Relations

As these structural and doctrinal changes are introduced, they will undoubtedly influence the familiar pattern of army-society relations. In general, the demand for increasingly sophisticated and esoteric professional skills will encourage more selective recruitment and longer-term retention of high-quality manpower, probably at the expense of universal conscription. As a result, the IDF will be less broadly reflective of Israeli society and will increasingly become a specialized and in many ways distinct sector of that society. In this respect, the IDF will increasingly resemble "normal" professional armed forces which, in other western countries, exhibit certain characteristics of a separate caste.

To some extent, this development will widen the existing gap between the image and the reality of the IDF as a mirror of society. For one thing, the IDF's role as an instrument of social integration and nation-building has never extended to the Arab population of Israel (notwithstanding the conscription of Druze and the voluntary enlistment of many Christians and Bedouin) or to the ultra-Orthodox sector of the Jewish population; with respect to the latter, exemption rates have continued to rise and are so much higher than those among the general Jewish population that the question of military service for the ultra-Orthodox has become something of a political "hot potato". At the same time, higher recruitment standards and a growing pool of eligible candidates for conscription have already led to a more liberal policy on deferrals and exemptions, especially for female soldiers[14]. Prospective

[14]. According to the outgoing Head of the Manpower Branch, Major-General Gideon Sheffer, only 45% of the annual cohort of 18-year olds theoretically eligible for military service are actually recruited; the number is expected to rise to 50% in the coming years. *Ha-Aretz*, 7 September 1998.

changes in the external strategic environment may well lead to even more selective recruitment policies. But even if the result is a quantitatively smaller army, it will also be an immensely expensive army, partly because of the training demands for those who do serve, partly because of the need to compete with the civilian sector for the high-quality manpower the IDF will want to retain for long-term or career service. The competition will necessarily involve material incentives. This, too, is already apparent in the rising manpower (salaries and pensions) component of the defense budget, which is already approaching 45% of total outlays[15].

Such trends may encounter resistance for various reasons. One is the residual attachment to an image of the army's social function that increasingly deviates from reality but nevertheless continues to exude a powerful attraction; public opinion polls show very strong opposition to the idea of a volunteer army, even on the assumption of peace[16]. Another reason is the sheer cost. Over the past decade, "national security" has been somewhat demystified, and demands for allocation of national resources to other social purposes have been raised with greater effect. One result is that defense expenditures as a proportion of (a quickly-growing) gross domestic product have declined from about 20% to less than 10% in the years 1987-1997[17]. Moreover, there is evidence of a decreasing disposition to sacrifice for security, reflected in the willingness to do longer military service but also in the willingness to pay higher taxes for defense; that dropped from 48% in 1986 to 29% in 1998[18]. Expansion or consolidation of the peace process would almost

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15. Arieh O'Sullivan, "Will the Defense Budget be Shot Down?", *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 September 1998.

16. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 1998*, Memorandum No. 49, Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, July 1998, pp. 36-37.

17. *Yediot Ahronot*, 19 August 1998, p. 3.

18. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 1998*, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

certainly undermine further the willingness of society to underwrite a heavier defense burden. A third is the difficulty of carrying out the transformation while the "old" security agenda remains relevant. During the mid-1990s, when it was felt that the peace process provided a "window of opportunity" that minimized the probability of war in the short-term, the multi-year plan known as "Mirkam-2000" was able to stress long-range force planning and research and development at the expense of day-to-day readiness (alert status, training, war stocks, etc.) But more recent evaluations have led to a revised five-year plan, "Idan 2003", which pays greater attention to short-term readiness[19]. This means that the transformation of the IDF in keeping with the future threat environment will take place over a longer period of time.

For these reasons, it is unlikely that Israel will be willing or able soon to embrace the emerging western model of a professional army based exclusively on volunteers, especially since many of those armies are partly dedicated to military operations other than war. Instead, the most likely outcome will be a composite force, made up of active-duty volunteer career soldiers and paid conscripts, recruited somewhat more selectively than in the past on the basis of higher standards than those that currently prevail. In any case, there will be far less reliance on reservists, especially for routine operational duties. Indeed, plans have already been announced to lower the reserve service age ceiling for combat forces to 41, to call up reserves once every two years rather than once a year, and to focus almost exclusively on refresher training.

In some ways, this predicted response is consistent with broader social trends. The Spartan, stoic values and collectivist ethos that dominated the pre-state *yishuv* and the first decades of post-independence Israel

19. Amos Gilboa, "Developments in Major Armies of the Middle East", *op. cit.*; Arieh O'Sullivan, "Will the Defense Budget be Shot Down?", *op. cit.*

have conceded much ground to privatized concerns amidst growing material prosperity. One of the by-products of this has been a dilution of the army's semi-mythological status. The IDF remains one of the few highly-respected national institutions, but even it is no longer immune to critical inquiry and demands for greater transparency by politicians and the media, or even to direct intrusion by the courts, in response to the social agendas of various interest groups, or by parents concerned with the welfare of their children. Indeed, the phenomenon of growing outside intervention in the army's affairs has produced some signs of barely-veiled resentment[20]. This may make the prospect of greater distance between a somewhat more professional army and general society not altogether unwelcome to the defense echelon.

[20]. There is a tone of studied reserve in Defense Minister Mordechai's observation that "*there has been a precipitous rise in societal involvement, sometimes even interference, in matters of security. Today, the courts, the legislature, parents, politicians, and above all, the media keep a vigilant eye on affairs hitherto considered to be off-limits to civilian scrutiny*" *In Search of Security*, p. 58.

Biographies/Authors

Amir Oren is a columnist and a member of the editorial board at *Ha'aretz* daily, Tel Aviv. He has written about national security affairs, focusing on the Israel Defense Forces and on Israel's relations with the United States. He covered the IDF in several of its campaigns, including the 1969-70 War of Attrition, the Yom Kippur War, the Lebanon War and the Intifadah. A frequent commentator on radio and television, he has also been a regular speaker to classes at the IDF National Defense College, Command and General Staff College, Air Force Flight School and numerous other military groups. Amir Oren, who studied political science and international relations at Tel Aviv and George Washington Universities, has researched the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship for the Washington Institute and worked as a Congressional Liaison on the staff of Israel's embassy in Washington. His articles appeared in various publications, including *The New Republic* and *The Economist*. He has served as Washington and New York correspondent for the Israeli daily *Davar*.

Yehuda Ben Meir completed rabbinical studies at Yeshiva University, and holds a M.A. in Experimental Psychology and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Columbia University. He headed the Bar-Ilan University Psychology Department until 1971. From 1971 to 1984 Dr. Ben Meir was a Member of Knesset for the National Religious Party, and from 1981 to 1984 was Deputy Foreign Minister. He published "National Security Decisionmaking: The Israeli Case", JCSS Study,

No. 8, and *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*, Columbia University Press, 1995.

Stuart A. Cohen was educated at Oxford University (England) where he received his doctorate in diplomatic history. Since 1972 he has taught at the Political Studies Department in Bar-Ilan University (Israel) where his current rank is full professor. He is also a senior research fellow of the Begin-Sadat BESA Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University (Israel). Stuart A. Cohen's field of academic specialization include: the diplomatic history of the Middle East; the Jewish political tradition; and civil-military relations in Israel. He has lectured and published widely in each of these fields.

Mark A. Heller has been Senior Research Associate at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, since 1979. He received his B.A. in Political Science and Economics at the University of Toronto and did his graduate studies at Harvard University, where he earned an M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies and a Ph.D. in Political Science. He has taught international relations at Tel Aviv University and at several American universities, including Brandeis and Cornell. He was coordinator of Research at the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security in 1991 and Visiting Professor of Government at Havard University in 1992. Dr. Heller has written extensively on Middle Eastern political and strategic issues. His publications include *A Palestinian State: The Implications for Israel*; *The Middle East Military Balance*, which he edited and co-authored from 1983 to 1985 and again in 1996 and 1997; *No Trumpets, No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (co-authored with Sari Nusseibeh); *The Dynamics of Soviet Policy in the Middle East: Between Old Thinking and New*; and a JCSS policy study "The Israel-PLO Agreement: What if it Fails? How Will we Know?". He has also published numerous monographs, book chapters, and articles in *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Orbis*, *Survival*, and other professional journals.

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