

Democracy and National Security in a Protracted Conflict

Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak

The Salience of the Security Factor

Yitzhak Rabin, one of Israel's leading political and military figures, once described Israel's security situation since its establishment as 'dormant war' erupting every few years into active conflict.¹ Indeed, Israel has fought more wars than any other country since the Second World War; and the periods in between have been marked by persistent limited conflicts including border clashes, terrorist strikes and reprisal raids. This situation has resulted in the issue of national security becoming central to Israeli society and having a major impact on values and institutions as well as on the everyday life of the people. Basic societal contours such as Israel's territorial and demographic boundaries have been shaped by two Arab-Israeli wars. The first overall military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states in 1948/49 concluded with the partition of Mandatory Palestine along lines determined mainly by the fighting. No less crucial was the demographic shift brought about by this war due to the exodus of the vast majority of the Arabs living within the boundaries of what became Israel, thus moving it closer to the ideal-type of the nation-state. The second war to have a crucial impact on Israel was the Six-Day War of June 1967 in which Israel conquered the rest

* Dan Horowitz is Professor of Political Science and Sociology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Moshe Lissak is Professor of Sociology, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The present essay is from the authors' forthcoming book, *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel*, due to be published soon by the State University of New York Press. We wish to thank the publishers for their kind permission to include it here.

¹ See Y. Rabin, in *Academy in Memory of Yizhak Sadeh*, September 21, 1967 (Hebrew).

Jerusalem
Quarterly
Summer
1989
#51

raises the question of when and under what conditions should Israel's deterrent power be viewed as having deteriorated to the extent that it is deemed necessary to launch an attack to preempt an anticipated enemy action. A partial answer to this question is provided by defining a number of vital interests which, if threatened, would constitute a *casus belli*. Such interests were defined in the early 1960s as the blocking of the Straits of Tiran, the massing of enemy forces along Israel's borders, the undermining of the *status quo* in Jordan, etc.¹⁶ The assumption of this doctrine is that, given its vulnerable borders close to its population centers, Israel can hardly afford to absorb a full-scale enemy attack before moving to the offensive. After the Six-Day War, the doctrine was replaced by the notion of 'defensible borders' to enable Israel to absorb an enemy attack without the need for a preemptive strike.¹⁷

This shift in concepts resulted in debates over strategy becoming enmeshed in the ideological controversy over the future of the territories, with proponents of various positions drawing maps of 'defensible borders' to suit their ideological predilections.¹⁸ Each area conquered by Israel in the Six-Day War – the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights and the West Bank – was viewed from a different perspective in this debate. In respect of the Sinai Peninsula, the approach eventually adopted in the peace agreement with Egypt was that demilitarized buffer zones would provide Israel with adequate early warning in case of enemy attack. For the West Bank, however, where ideological, political and strategic concerns were closely intermingled, such an arrangement was not considered appropriate or applicable and three different approaches emerged.

The first was embodied in the 'Allon Plan' that guided the governments led by the Labor Alignment until 1977, even though it was never adopted as official policy.¹⁹ The strategic concept was that Israel should seek border changes, mainly in the sparsely-

Borders, Jerusalem (The Hebrew University, The Leonard Davis for International Relations) 1975, p. 5-13; M. Handel, *Israel's Political-Military Doctrine*, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Center for International Affairs, Occasional Papers) 1973, pp. 1-36.

See I. Allon, 'An Interim Assessment Between Two Wars', *Molad* (New Series), Nos. 29-30 (October 1982-December 1983), pp. 502-503 (Hebrew); S. Peres, 'The Time Dimension', *Maarachot*, No. 146 (September 1962), pp. 3-5 (Hebrew).

See D. Horowitz, *Israel's Concept of Defensible Borders*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 15), pp. 13-41.

See I. Allon, 'Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (October 1976), pp. 38-53; A. Shalev, *The West Bank: Line of Defense*, Tel Aviv (Hakibbutz Hameuchad) 1982, pp. 104-153 (Hebrew); M. Dayan, *A New Map - New Relations*, Tel Aviv (Shikmona) 1969, pp. 30-31 (Hebrew); D. Horowitz, *Israel's Concept of Defensible Borders*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 15), pp. 15-30.

See Y. Cohen, *The Allon Plan*, Tel Aviv (Hakibbutz Hameuchad) 1972 (Hebrew).

populated Jordan Rift Valley, that would allow it to control the axes linking the West Bank to the East Bank. The presence of Israeli forces in these parts of the West Bank would ensure that heavy weapons such as tanks, artillery and, above all, surface-to-air missiles that can cover Israel's airfields would be kept out of the remainder of the territory. The second approach is based on Israeli control of the mountain ridge running north-south through the heavily-populated heart of the West Bank, with all the social and political consequences implied in continued Israeli rule there.²⁰ The third approach, favored by only a small minority, calls for a return to the 1967 borders along with demilitarization of the West Bank, thus accepting the need to revert to the preemptive strike as a means of countering attempts to violate the area's demilitarized status. The controversy over the three approaches reflected the incursion of political and ideological considerations into the sphere of national security: no longer was it possible to achieve a consensus based solely on expert military judgements accepted by the entire defense establishment. A striking indication of this quandary was provided by the opposing report of the Chief-of-Staff and one of his predecessors in a case before the Supreme Court on whether the Gush Emunim settlement of Elon Moreh near Nablus was essential on security grounds. Chief-of-Staff Rafael Eitan testified that the settlement, built on land appropriated from Arabs on security grounds, was essential for national defense, while former Chief-of Staff Haim Bar-Lev maintained that it had no security value. The Defense Minister at the time, Ezer Weizman, was also known to be opposed to the settlement.²¹

The third national security challenge faced by Israel has been adapting its civil-military relations to the conditions of the protracted conflict. There are two facets to this challenge: ensuring the optimal use of manpower and other resources for national security while maintaining a democratic regime and creating a system of control for the military appropriate to a prolonged state of emergency marked by occasional limited clashes in periods of 'dormancy' and periodic eruption of full-scale war fought under international political constraints. The two facets of national security are intertwined. Israel's unique patterns of civil-military relations have largely determined both the extent of national consensus on the allocation of resources to security needs, and the types of civilian control of the defense establishment. These characteristics – broad civilian participation in national security tasks, vague boundaries between military and political institutions, social networks including members of both military and

²⁰ See Y. Erez and A. Kfir, *Talks with Moshe Dayan*, Tel Aviv (Massada) 1981, p. 27.

²¹ See Z. Schiff, 'Whose Professional Opinion Prevails?', *Haaretz*, June 24, 1979.

of speech and cultural expression, civil rights, and the right of labor to organize and strike. To the extent that proposals to restrict these rights have arisen, it has been from radical groups on the fringe of the political map and not from the ranks of the military.

The trends of militarization of the civilian sector and the 'civilianization' of the military can be examined also from the perspective of the concept of the 'military mind'.⁴⁵ The characteristics of the 'military mind' fall into two categories. The first concerns the utility or desirability of violence as a means to attain goals in international relations. The second concerns authoritarian values and the symbolic importance attached to the hierarchical structure of the military. These categories are not necessarily found together to the same degree in all cases. Israel provides a case where, as we have noted, there is a consensus between the military and the civilian elites on the legitimacy of employing violence in international conflicts on the one hand, and on the need to restrict the authoritarian dimensions of military life and to prevent them from spilling over into the civilian sector, on the other. The shared dominant approach is thus 'civilian' where politics is concerned and 'military' where national security is at stake. There is, however, evidence indicating that the tendency to 'civilianize' the military has declined over the years, and there are indications that authoritarian influences are gaining strength, at least as far as the organization of the military itself is concerned.⁴⁶

The concept of the 'military mind' applies to sub-cultures within the military as well as the civilian sectors, and is more concerned with 'mentality' than with institutional arrangements. A more comprehensive approach for examining the institutional implications of the interpretation of the civilian and military spheres is based on the concept of 'role-expansion' of the military which is applicable also to the defense establishment as a whole.

In the wake of the 1973 war, there has been a major expansion of the economic role of the defense establishment. These trends are expressed in the portion of the GNP devoted to defense which has risen from 22-24 per cent to 28-29 per cent. Especially important in this context is the expansion of Israel's military-industrial complex, which includes the IDF, the civilian arms of the Defense Ministry and public and private firms in the civilian sector. All sectors of the economy are thus represented in the military-indus-

⁴⁵ See S.P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 23), p. 61; P. Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 23); W. Eckhardt and A.G. Newcomb, 'Militarism, Personality and Other Social Attitudes', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 13 (1969), pp. 210-219; W. Eckhardt, 'The Factor of Militarism', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 2 (1969), pp. 123-132.

⁴⁶ See M. Lissak, *Military Roles in Modernization: Civil-Military Relations in Thailand and Burma*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 23), Chap. 7.

trial complex, and there are no clear rules about the respective responsibility of each sector in the development and production of weapons and supplies. Thus, military aircraft and the Gabriel sea-to-sea missile are produced by Israel Aircraft Industries, government corporation. Several types of weapons and ammunition are produced by the Military Industries and auxiliary bodies of the Ministry of the Defense. Another ministry unit Rafael (the Weapons Development Authority), is responsible for the development and production of sophisticated weapons systems. The IDF Armored Corps, however, has overall responsibility for the production of Israel's first domestically-produced tank, the Merkava, although some of its systems are produced by public and private firms. Private and non-governmental public firms, such as those owned by the Histadrut are also involved in arms production. Thus, mortars are produced by Soltam, a subsidiary of the Histadrut holding company Hevrat Ha'ovdim, while some electronic equipment is manufactured by firms with joint public and private ownership.⁴⁷

The growing demand of the military has made the defense industries into Israel's largest industrial branch. This branch includes 43 per cent of all government corporation employees, 50 per cent of those in the Histadrut sector, and 10 per cent of the private sector - altogether 25 per cent of those employed in industry. Defense production plays an especially prominent role in large corporations. Seven of the 20 large corporations in Israel are dependent, to a large extent, on defense orders.⁴⁸ In addition, the army purchases vast quantities of non-military products such as food, clothing and construction materials in the civilian market, making it the largest single consumer in the entire economy.

The very existence of a military-industrial complex influences the composition of the elites. Civilian firms in both the private and the public sector that conduct extensive defense business employ a large number of retired senior officers who are responsible for maintaining their firm's connections with the defense establishment. Retired senior officers are also heavily involved in the export of Israeli-made weapons and security services, an area which comprises about 25 per cent of Israel's total exports.⁴⁹

Israel's military industries have passed through several stages of development. At the outset, their job was to supply rather elementary types of weapons and ammunition to the IDF. Nevertheless, even then, in the 1950s, the military industry was developing unique types of arms, most of them light weapons, some of which, - e.g., the Uzi submachine gun and later the Galil assault

⁴⁷ See A. Mintz, 'The Military-Industrial Complex', in M. Lissak (ed.), *Israeli Society and its defense Establishment*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 3), pp. 114-119.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 112.

lery unit to open fire on the ship, which caused it to burn and sink. This demonstration of fierce determination to prevent, at all costs, any expression of political autonomy within the IDF secured the integrity of the IDF as a unified army. The *Altalena* affair reflected the concern of Ben-Gurion and his government with politicization of the IDF by incorporating formerly independent bodies into its ranks. This was perceived as particularly threatening where the bodies concerned – the IZL and the LHI – had a long tradition of rejecting the authority of the Organized Yishuv.

The second crisis involving partisan influences in the IDF differed considerably from the *Altalena* affair, and focused on Ben-Gurion's decision to disband the Palmach, a prestigious military unit that was an integral part of the Haganah, the organization from which the IDF itself sprang. In that respect, the Palmach had been subject to the authority of the Organized Yishuv, and continued to accept without question the authority of the Israeli government and the IDF command. Nevertheless, the Palmach enjoyed organizational autonomy within the IDF that was manifested in a separate command and staff structure that handled training, supply and manpower.⁶⁰ Moreover, many Palmach members were close to the kibbutz movements, especially to the Kibbutz Hameuhad organization, which was led by a left-wing faction of the Labor Movement known as Ahdut Ha'avodah. These informal ties were especially evident in the Palmach command, which comprised mainly kibbutz members identified with Ahdut Ha'avodah. The latter had once been a faction in Ben-Gurion's party Mapai, but later broke away and merged with another left-wing group. Hashomer Hatzair to form a new party, Mapam. The Palmach, thus, appeared to be providing Mapam – Mapai's main rival in the Labor Movement – with a channel of influence on the younger generation.

Politically, then, the Palmach was a thorn in the side of Ben-Gurion and his party. In addition, the ideological arguments advanced by those who sought to retain the Palmach's partial autonomy clashed with Ben-Gurion's concepts of statehood (*mamlachtiut*) that adamantly upheld the need for a depoliticized army. While Ben-Gurion justified the disbanding of the Palmach separate command in terms of the need to depoliticize the army, his left-wing opponents sought to prevent or, at least, to delay this step by pointing to the unique character of the Palmach as a volunteer force inspired by Labor Zionist values.⁶¹ The decision to disband the Palmach was, at least on the ideological plane, a crucial step towards a unitary army cleansed of particularistic political affi-

⁶⁰ See M. Pail, *The Emergence of Zahal*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 10), Chap. 11.

⁶¹ See A. Shapira, *The Army Controversy, 1948: Ben-Gurion Struggle for Control*, Tel Aviv (Hakibbutz Hameuchad) 1985, pp. 50–57 (Hebrew); Y. Gelber, *The Disolution of the Palmach*, Tel Aviv (Schocken) 1986, pp. 225–226 (Hebrew).

liations. The controversy surrounding Ben-Gurion's action was conducted within the bounds of democratic rules of the game, and the Palmach accepted the inevitable once the decision of the cabinet had been ratified by the Provisional Council of State.

The elimination of military units with particularistic allegiances to political movements did not mean the end of politicization in the IDF. Ben-Gurion himself applied political criteria in the promotion of senior officers. For example, the advancement of officers with IZL or LHI backgrounds was severely restricted, as was the advancement of Palmach veterans (especially those identified with Mapam), albeit to a lesser extent. In any case, the disbanding of the Palmach and the surrounding controversy had led to a wave of resignations of officers identified with Mapam, including some of the most outstanding commanders of the War of Independence. Ben-Gurion himself contributed to this process when he removed several senior officers from their posts, including the former commander of the Palmach himself, Yigal Allon, who was replaced by Moshe Dayan as commander of the Southern Command.⁶²

Another expression of politics in the army was the participation of officers on active duty in party activities. An extreme manifestation of this was the appearance of several senior officers as candidates in the elections to the first Knesset in 1949.⁶³ Yigal Allon, Moshe Carmel and Shimon Avidan appeared on Mapam's list of candidates for the Knesset, and Moshe Dayan had a place in the Mapai list. This was seen to be justified because the elections were held before the major demobilization took place, and the senior officers who stood as candidates were regarded as only serving for the duration of the war and not as military professionals. The phenomenon did not, however, recur, and was indeed prohibited by the Basic Law: Knesset. Nevertheless, General Staff rules still permit officers to be inactive members of political parties.

Most parties, especially those of Labor Movement parties and the kibbutz movements, actively seek to cultivate ties with the members serving as career officers. The settlement movements have set up special offices to handle this task, and the parties periodically organize what are described as 'informational' meetings for their members in the officers corps.⁶⁴ These considerations were seen as unavoidable given the close involvement of the army in shaping foreign and defense policy. In this context, party ties could still play a role in promotions, but often more important was the social or ideological background shared by senior officers and decision-makers that predisposed them to similar views on matters of national security.

⁶² See Y. Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics*, op. cit. (above, footnote No. 56), pp. 61–64.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–67.