

The 'Religionizing' of the Israel Defence Force: Its Impact on Military Culture and Professionalism

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Many studies have examined civil-military relations from different research perspectives and a range of disciplines. The political science and sociological approaches have focused chiefly on the hierarchical relationship that crystallized over time between political echelons and military command. Some explored the degree of militarization in nations and societies, where the military played a pivotal role in civilian spheres that are not by nature its field of operations. Others have attempted to investigate a society's level of mobilizing around its security needs, and coined the concept of "garrison State" – a label often used in connection with the Israeli State and the way of life of its society and citizens. Another field of study draws on sociology to examine the implications of military service on social stratification, and the societal and ethnic divides within Israeli society.¹

In recent years, the steep increase in the number of Israel Defence Force (IDF) officers wearing the "knitted-skullcap" (a term that refers to the group variously defined, in Hebrew, as Modern Orthodox, National-Religious, Religious Zionists, or Settlers) has raised important issues for civil-military relations and for religion's place as a unifying or divisive factor within the military. The key questions from the perspective of civil-military relations focus (a) on the manner by which the military leadership obeys the directives of democratically elected decision-makers rather than of actors outside the political system²;

¹ Below is a partial list only of the numerous publications dealing with the complex relationship between the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and its parent society, and its implications for stratification and immigrant absorption in Israel: Z. Ostfeld, *An Army Born*, Ministry of Defense, 1994 ; U. Ben-Eliezer, *The Emergence of Israeli Militarism, 1936-1956*, Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1995 ; Z. Drory, *Utopia in Uniform*, Ben-Gurion Center, 2000 ; D. Horowitz. & M. Lissak., *From Settlement to State*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1977 ; M. Lissak "The Israel Defense Force as an Agent of Socialization and Education : A Research in Role Expansion in Democratic Society", in M.R. Van Gils (ed.), *The Perceived Role of the Military*, Rotterdam University Press, Rotterdam 1972 ; D. Horowitz & M. Lissak., *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1989 ; D. Cohen, *The Policy of Absorption during the Period of Mass Immigration, 1948-1953*, doctoral dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, 1985 ; Z. Zameret, *Days of the Melting Pot*, Sede Boqer Campus, Ben-Gurion Research Center, 1993 ; R. Gal & L. Tamir (eds.), *Between the Yarmulke and the Beret, Religion, Politics and the Military in Israel*, The Dan Shomron Center for Society, Security and Peace, Kinneret Academic College, Ben-Shemen, Modan Publishing, 2012 ; V. Azarya B. Kimmerling, "New Immigrants in the Israeli Armed Forces", *Armed Forces & Society*, vol.6, n°3, 1980 ; T. Bowden, *Army in the Service of the State*, Tel-Aviv University Publishing Projects, 1976. ; B. Halpern, "The Role of the Military in Israel", in J.J. Johnson (ed.), *The Role of the Military in: Underdeveloped Countries*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962 ; D. Horowitz, "Is Israel a Garrison State?", *Jerusalem Quarterly*, vol.4, Summer 1977 ; M. Lissak, "The Civilian Components of Israel's Security Doctrine : The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in the First Decade", in I. Troen & N. Lucas (eds.), *Israel – The First Decade of Independence*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995; E. Luttwak & D. Horowitz, , *The Israeli Army*, London, A. Lane, 1974 ; Y. Ben-Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995 ; S. Cohen, *The Sword and the Scroll?*, London, Harwood Academic Press, 1997.

² Stuart A. Cohen, "From Integration to Segregation : The Role of Religion in the IDF", *Armed Forces & Society*, vol.35, n°3, 1999, pp.387-405 ; same author, *Divine Service? Judaism and Israel's Armed Forces*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2013.

and (b) on the degree to which the armed forces maintain their professional autonomy when it comes to operational decisions.³

Israel seems an especially suitable case for examining these issues. Young people from the National-Religious community have filled the vacuum created by dwindling motivation to join the military among other population groups, and have replaced members of the kibbutz movement in volunteering for combat roles and command courses in the IDF. The contribution made by the young National-Religious people in filling the ranks of the IDF's combat array and command backbone is undeniable. And yet, harsh claims are being made about the serious damage caused to the military's organizational culture, and the political and sectarian impacts of decision-making in the IDF.⁴ The issue is now being explored in the country through the prism of the Army's unity and apolitical character – two principles that have always been integral to the IDF since it was established. Since statehood and the IDF's inception, the ties between religion, politics, and the military have been the object of disputes and political bargaining. When right-wing movements and the religious bloc entered the government in the 1970's, the religious-ideological-political divide widened in Israeli society. The evacuation of South and North Sinai, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, and the attempts to evacuate illegal outposts in the West Bank sparked off tension and violent conflicts between the IDF and the settlers. More recently, particularly since the disengagement, incidents have increased in which National-Religious soldiers confront the question of accepting authority and discipline – should they listen to their commanders, or their rabbis?

Cases of refusal to obey orders have damaged the IDF's discipline and command authority. Commanders in the field frequently opt for compromise to avoid conflict with their senior commanders and avert possible political and institutional consequences. Though they do not admit it, IDF commanders are aware of the threat posed by the religionization process to the IDF's functional capacity. The process intensified with the widening role of the Chief Military Rabbinate under the command of Brigadier-General Avichai Rontzki, the Chief Military Rabbi from 2006 to 2010, who was accused of invading the spheres of education, heritage, and leadership in IDF units. Rontzki remarked:

It's a battle for the character of Israeli society – no less. The question is whether it will become a Jewish national army – by which I mean a religious one (...) or an army of the State and of all its citizens.⁵

The IDF's religionizing is part of the changes that have occurred in Israeli society over the past 25 years, and have undermined basic assumptions regarding civil-military

³ Stuart A. Cohen, *The Scroll or the Sword? Dilemmas of Religion and Military Service in Israel*, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997.

⁴ A.R. Hoffman, "The knitted officers in loyalty test", *Yediot Aharonot*, 15 September 2010. The article drew on statistics presented at the conference "Religious and Secular Soldiers: The Challenge", held jointly by the Center for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University and the Dan Shomron Center for Society, Security and Peace at the Kinneret College. A survey conducted ahead of the conference showed that a third of the respondents thought that many, or very many, religious officers and commanders would refuse to obey orders to evacuate settlements and outposts in the West Bank.

⁵ A. Magnezi & K. Nachson. "General reserved: Elazar Shteren attacked the departure letter of the leaving IDF Manpower Chief Director", *Ynet*, 20 July 2011 (Hebrew).

relationships. This article explores the implications of the process by which the IDF's organizational culture has been religionized. First and foremost, it addresses the weakening of command and control authority within the military, following sectorial and political logics that breached the boundaries of the Army framework. Drawing on the larger historical and societal context of the recent period, the present article seeks to identify the risks and advantages – loss or enhancement of cohesion – of this “religionization” of the IDF : to illuminate the divisive and unifying impacts of this comprehensive and wide-ranging process. The aim is thus not to somehow predict where the IDF is going but to sketch out potential developments in this area.

Historical Review

Political arrangements and legislative orders in Israel are secular in nature, and the secular sector in the population is thus the dominant one. The Zionist movement sprang from a rebellion against religion – which over the centuries had preserved the Jewish people, but was also responsible for shaping its character as an exilic people. Leaders of the Socialist-Zionist movement believed that religion had grown obsolete, and rebelling against it was considered an important aspect in liberating the individual and society from its burden – a liberation that made it possible to build a new society. At the same time, at its beginnings the country's leaders were able to conserve and instil contents and symbols of the Jewish people in the world of concepts of the emerging society. For instance, their belief was that the Zionist flag was in fact the *tallit* (the prayer-shawl in which Jews enfold themselves), and that featured the Star of David.

Since the Zionist movement sought to approach and shelter under its wings every Jew in the world, it believed its duty was to let religious Jews identify with and feel part of that community, with the basic values shared by all Jews. There is no doubt that grouping secular and Jewish religious values under one roof made possible the unity that led to the Jewish people's rebirth in its ancestral land. In an article dealing with the question whether religion in Israel is a unifying or a dividing factor, Guttman writes: “*Not only is it Israel's official policy, it is one of Zionism's fundamental principles, that made possible the claim that consensus still exists among Israelis, and it serves as a robust infrastructure for national solidarity*”.⁶ In the historical process of consolidating the new Israeli society, religion had not only a multi-faceted role but also a unifying basis with an ancient religious structure. It was not by chance that Jewish communities worldwide always called themselves “the People of Israel”.

From the beginnings of the modern Zionist nationalist movement, its leaders saw Judaism as a central part of the Jewish national experience, and rejected assimilation into Western nations. They took issue with the Orthodox rabbis, who refused to accept the modern secular Jewish version of nationalism. Hence the Zionist Movement found itself simultaneously embracing the values of the Jewish tradition, symbols and ceremonies, and distancing itself from them. From a unifying factor, religion became a divisive factor

⁶ E. Guttman, “Religious in Israeli Politics – Unifying and Dividing Factor”, in M. Lissak & E. Guttman (eds.), *The Israeli Politics System*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1979, p.397 (Hebrew).

between socialist Zionism and extensive parts of the religious public. The attempt to create a partnership between secular and religious people generated more than a few flashpoints. Secular Zionism adopted symbols, holidays and traditional ceremonies, which it interpreted in ways that did not always accord with conservative religious culture. From the secular viewpoint, the Israeli State was based on Western principles of democracy and the people's sovereignty, while the religious outlook held that the Torah (the body of Jewish laws) is the Jewish people's "Constitution". The divide between the two approaches was so profound and fundamental as to be unbridgeable. It is noteworthy here that, since the earliest days of the Israeli State, its leaders intended to enact legislation that would separate the State from religion. Religious Israelis refused to cede, certainly when it came to personal matters such as marriage and divorce, and also in everything pertaining to keeping the Sabbath and so forth. Secular Israelis abandoned the principle of freedom of conscience in the field of personal laws, while religious Israelis forewent the enforcing of Jewish laws in all areas of life. What ensued was a kind of status quo, in which each side lived according to its own principles, without trying to enforce them on the other side.

The Military as a Reflection of Society

Even if the Israeli Army planned to maintain normative uniqueness, its organizational culture and command backbone underwent historical changes. The term "organizational culture" defines the pattern of shared approaches, beliefs, assumptions and expectations that shape the ways of thinking and actions of a given organization's members, who identify with its objectives and operations. The term "social culture" is broader, and it encompasses ideology and vision that are expressed in myths, national heritage, battle heritage, cultural heroes, ceremonies and symbols.

As an inseparable part of society, particularly in Israel where the IDF (including the reserves) is a people's Army, the military is vulnerable to the infiltration of civilian ideas, values and norms into its organizational culture. The latter is a key factor for implementing the organization's objectives, and for its capacity to control and motivate its commanders. Social divides and disparity with regard to fundamental values and behavioural norms within the organization create tension and competition vis-à-vis values and messages that political factors and rival social sectors in Israeli society introduce into the Army. Many research studies have discussed the porous boundaries between Israeli society and the IDF. Moshe Lissak, whose research bears on the army-society relationship and the distinctive character of the IDF, analyzed the nature of the boundaries and intersections that typified Israel and the Army in the early years.⁷ Several scholars defined Israel as unusual when comparing it to other developing nations. The terms "nation in uniform" (i.e., a civilian army) and "garrison democracy" characterized the IDF and its commanders. Huntington remarks that, at that period, the IDF was typified by strong professionalism, while civilian oversight was objective and at its highest point.⁸ Examining Huntington's explanations, we

⁷ M. Lissak, "Jewishness and Normalization in Army-Government Relations", in R. Cohen-Almagor (ed.), *Basic Issues in the Israeli Democracy*, Tel Aviv, Poalim Publishers, 1999, pp.227-245.

⁸ S.P. Huntington., *The Soldier and the State*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1957, p.73.

see that he attributed to Israel's civilian groups tremendous power and influence over events in the Army. Since civilian power was then in the hands of party organizations, Huntington considered it civilian oversight. And yet that picture – which was true in the 1950s and 1960s – underwent changes in the wake of certain social processes in Israel. Civilian forces, defined by their politics and sectors, increased their power and influence over military endeavours, as did the National-Religious group. Robin Luckham, in his classic typology of civil-military relations, has pictured boundaries between civilian and military organizations or systems as either contiguous, or permeable, or again fragmented.⁹ Drawing on this distinction, most researchers have classified the situation in Israel as a mixed or interim one, in which the boundaries were both fragmented and to a great degree permeable.

Lissak's research has underscored the reciprocal permeability of civil and military institutions and organizations. "*Phenomena of the army's involvement in political and security decisions on the one hand, and of ties between parties and military figures on the other, reflected aspects of the problem of porous boundaries between the political system and the military system*".¹⁰ In Israel, the extent to which they have influenced the organizational culture and command and control norms has yet to be studied, but civil and military elites clearly collaborate with each other, or as Yoram Peri put it, form "*a partnership of the elites*".¹¹ In other countries too, such partnerships lead to cases of close – official and unofficial – contacts, convergence, and powerful mutual influence. With regard to national consolidation, tight subjective ties between the Army, elite groups, and social and political sectors have inherently negative aspects.

Against this background, Israeli society's capacity to keep the Army apolitical is limited. Even if it is abundantly clear and understood that the military is subordinate to the civil power, certainly in legal terms, the involvement of political institutions, chiefly parties, in what happens in the military, is exaggerated. Israel is no longer an unsullied example of a "nation in uniform" where civil oversight is applied to a great extent, and the Army is remote and set apart, operating according to purely professional criteria. The classic Huntingtonian model in which the Army is subject to civil political control and maintains its social isolation to foster its professional code – one that is driven by military objectives, free from political interference – no longer exists in Israel.¹²

Bearing in mind this historical background and the changes that have taken place in military-society relations since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, we can investigate the degree of

⁹ A.R Luckham., "A Comparative Typology of Civil-Military Relations", *Government and Opposition*, vol.6, Winter 1977, pp.5-35. See also: M. Lissak, "Jewishness and Normalization in Army-Government Relations", *op.cit.*, pp. 229-231 ; Ben-Dor, "Politics and Army in Israel in the Seventies", in M. Lissak & E. Guttman (eds.), *The Israeli Political System*, Tel Aviv, Poalim Publishers, 1979, pp.411-432 (Hebrew).

¹⁰ Lissak, 1999, *op.cit.*, p.234.

¹¹ , Y. Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp.172-174.

¹² For more on the subject, see: Y. Levy, "The Embedded Military: Why did the IDF Perform Effectively in Executing the Disengagement Plan", *Politika*, vol.16, Summer 1997, pp.43-65 [Hebrew]. Translated into English in *Security Studies*, vol.16, n°3, 2007, pp.382-408.

intervention and influence that have occurred in the IDF in recent years, with a special emphasis on the influence of the country's religious-nationalist entities.

The IDF – Historical Changes

The historical narrative of the struggles for the nature of the IDF in the State's early days is vital for understanding the rational basis on which the Army was constructed. As an apolitical army, the IDF was established in the midst of struggles between parties from both left and right, and religious streams that wanted their worldviews and values to have a place within the nascent army.

David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister and Defence Minister, waged stubborn battles to build a uniform army, without special units having an affinity to external ideological or political authority. During the 1948 Independence War, rabbis and leaders of the religious camps demanded that a separate framework be created for religious soldiers.¹³ Ben-Gurion barred the formation of religious units, and saw no operational need for it. On the eve of the Jewish New Year 1959, he rejected the demand submitted by representatives of Hapoel Hamizrahi to open separate units.¹⁴ Still, he believed a solution should be found allowing religious soldiers to serve in the Army, and to comply with the religious commandments and way of life. He wrote in his diary :

We told them: (a) our army will be uniform without streams; (b) for the sake of uniformity, we will undertake to provide kosher food ; (c) we will impose a Jewish atmosphere on the Sabbath; (d) we will educate for reciprocal respect, so that a soldier who does not pray will not scorn a soldier who puts on *tefillin*.¹⁵

Despite this, dilemmas over the integration of religion and military service increased after the State and the IDF were founded. On the one hand, the rabbis, concerned about the influence of the secular ethos, wanted to set up separate units to allow soldiers to keep a religious way of life. On the other, they were worried that forming religious units might deepen the rift between secular and religious people and would exempt the government from imposing basic religious laws (providing kosher, keeping the Sabbath, etc.) throughout the entire IDF.

At the time of the Independence War, ten percent of the soldiers in IDF units were religious, and thousands of them were troubled as to the extent to which the military would accommodate their religious observances and practices. The defence establishment was tasked with finding a method that would allow religious soldiers to serve without affecting their beliefs and way of life.

¹³ S.A. Cohen, "The Sword or the Scroll ? Dilemmas of Religion and Military Service in Israel", *Foreign Affairs*, 1997, pp.37-45.

¹⁴ For an extensive discussion on Ben-Gurion's attitudes to the demands of the religious parties and rabbis, and his rejection of religious separateness, see: Z. Ostfeld, *Tzava Nolad*, vol.2, Ministry of Defense Press, 1992, pp.746-751 [Hebrew].

¹⁵ Ben-Gurion Archives, Diary, 31 January 1950.

The “*Yeshivot Hesder*” Track : The Solution for National-Religious Israelis

A solution to the dilemma of combining religion and army service came in the form of the “*plugot ha’hesder*” (literally: “arrangement companies”), formed by the National-Religious sector. The first *Hesder Yeshiva* (“arrangement Yeshiva”), Kerem B’Yavneh, opened in 1955, but was only officially accredited as such in 1965.¹⁶ After the Six-Day War (1967), Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook turned to yeshiva graduates for help at a time of moral and spiritual crisis among the Jewish people, and invited them to take on national-Jewish missions: to settle the ancestral lands and join the IDF. Rabbi Kook viewed settling in the Occupied Territories as a Messianic task, and the Gush Emunim (“Bloc of the Faithful”) movement was founded as a result. The rabbi and his graduates believed it possible to transform the IDF into an instrument for settlement, and thus accepted military service as validating religious commandments.

The numbers of the *Yeshivot Hesder* increased, and they became prestigious institutions with ever-growing student bodies. From one yeshiva in 1965, there were twelve in 1980, sixteen by 1991 and close to 50 in 2014. For the IDF, *Hesder* graduates were a source of top quality manpower, and in historical terms they contributed in the 1970s to rebuilding the Armoured Corps that had suffered losses in the Yom Kippur War. Armoured corps commanders learned the special needs of the yeshiva graduates and took them into account.

The same process accompanied the reestablishment of the Givati brigade as an elite active-duty formation in 1983 – men from the *Hesder Yeshivas* assumed the mission and augmented its ranks. In the brigade’s battalions, a special company composed of *Hesder* yeshiva graduates was created, which had to deal with its own intakes and the difficulties relating to the graduates’ special status within the brigade. Rabbis visiting the units to give Torah classes initially met with objections and were cold-shouldered – it was something of a volte-face in thinking that was not easy for Givati’s commanders to accept. But thanks to the rabbis’ patience and perseverance, the commanders grew accustomed to the situation and eventually recognized the classes’ added value for the soldiers’ determination and motivation.

Starting in the early 1990s, *Hesder Yeshiva* students were assigned in whole platoons to operational units throughout the field forces. Once a year, a platoon composed of *Hesder Yeshiva* graduates was added to every infantry, armour, artillery and engineer battalion. Though they certainly made a contribution, the former *Yeshiva* students initially posed problems to the IDF because their full service period was shorter, making it hard to fully integrate them as combat soldiers in field units. A decision was taken to merge two relatively short periods of service into one long one. In 2007, the IDF’s former head of the Personnel Directorate, Gen. Elazar Stern, while still serving as Chief Education Officer, sought to disperse the *Yeshiva* men among the brigade’s various companies, instead of forming them into single homogeneous platoons. Stern saw many reasons for ending

¹⁶ Stuart A.Cohen, “The *Hesder Yeshivot* in Israel : A Church-State Military Arrangement”, *Journal of Church and State*, vol.35, Winter 1993, pp.113-130.

segregated combat units, citing primarily the value of equality and the IDF as a melting-pot that reflects the diversity of Israeli society. Due to objections from rabbis, Stern’s request to extend Yeshiva graduates’ service from sixteen months to three years was turned down. Yet in March 2010 for the first time, soldiers from the Hesder Yeshivas were allocated to mainstream platoons alongside other conscripts.

The Religious Zionist stream’s strong interest in regular service in the IDF for its young men led to the founding of three pre-military academies. The first was launched in 1987, with the idea of providing a year of study to train young religious men before induction in order to withstand the secular culture prevailing in the IDF. “Pre-induction strengthening” was the term that Religious Zionist Israelis used. There are currently thirty-four pre-military academies, of which seventeen provide Torah studies. Over 2,000 graduates of State religious schools enlist in such institutions yearly. Due to their weight and prestige, Torah-based pre-military institutions have superseded Hesder Yeshivas among the Religious Zionist public in terms of attractiveness.

Today, fifty percent of all Religious Zionist youths, including those who graduated from Hesder Yeshivas, now commit to regular military service and volunteer for prestigious outfits ; 23% of them attend Officers’ Course. Moreover, the youth movements catering for the needs of the Religious Zionist sector strongly contribute to structuring the ideological foundation which motivates those youngsters to enlist and serve in the IDF. A research by Naomi Abstangfer that tracked four groups of inductees from 2001 to 2004 in thirteen religious and ten secular pre-military academies revealed that the number of National-Religious youths outstripped that of their secular peers. Yet, statistics on inductees to the IDF’s combat tracks suggest that the differences are not particularly large and, as shown in the table below, among those attending officers’ course the percentage of secular academies’ graduates actually exceeds that of their religious peers.¹⁷

	<i>Combat Units</i>	<i>Junior Command</i>	<i>Officers</i>
Religious pre-military academies	78.4%	41.6%	17.3%
Secular pre-military academies	70%	39.5%	24.5%

The change in the IDF’s command backbone began in the 1990s with a marked increase in the number of Officers’ Course graduates among Religious Zionist young men. Also, many commanders from the National-Religious sector now remained in the standing Army and from then on the religious world of the Hesder Yeshivas has informed the IDF’s command worldview.

This increase in the weight of young people from the National-Religious population in the military, and their influence on the discourse of values and the IDF’s organizational culture, should be examined against the backdrop of changes that had taken place in Israeli society in the mid-1980s.

¹⁷ T. Liebel & R. Gal, “Military-Society Relations : Politics and Army in Israel”, in R. Gal & L. Tamir (eds.), *Between the Yarmulke and the Beret*, 2012, *op.cit.*

“The National Religion of Security Is Being Replaced by a Religion of Redemption”

The developments that have occurred on Israel’s political map have generated outlooks that weaken the long-established “national religion of security”.¹⁸ The old perception is now confronted with new perspectives of “territorial (or religious) nationalism”. Objective definitions of security are rejected in favour of ideological-political considerations fostered by religious right-wing parties.

The roots of the central conflict in Israeli society lie in the outcomes of the Six-Day and Yom Kippur Wars. Frequently accompanied by violence, the exacerbation of ethnic, religious and political conflicts accelerated the polarization processes at work in every aspect of society. It raised doubt as to whether Israeli society could manage to function in future as a democratic society, and as a Jewish and Zionist one. The disintegration of the political culture that had been built since the pre-statehood days of Jewish settlement became apparent during the crisis that followed the Yom Kippur War, which affected security, politics, and society all at the same time. But the “New Sociologists” consider that the breaking point came in the wake of the Six-Day War,¹⁹ whose outcomes created the foundation blocks for Israel’s development as a militaristic occupying power – but also put in place the stumbling block which the country could not overcome.

Two basic questions faced the Israeli government following the Six-Day War : victory had evoked a sense of security within the Israeli general public, and encouraged hopes that, with increased immigration, increased foreign investments and rapid economic development, it could build an affluent society. Paradoxically, the new sense of peace enabled a debate on social issues : it looked as if Israel would advance from engaging with questions of security to debating social matters. The actions of the Black Panther movement in 1971 revealed to the wider public a grievous problem of social divides, allied with economic and ethnic divides.²⁰ The second question that entered the nation’s painful agenda after the Yom Kippur War concerned the future of the Occupied Territories and their residents. In the post-Six-Day War years, the government preferred, as did most ordinary Israelis, to close their eyes to the Palestinian problem that was fast becoming Israeli society’s problem. However, the Yom Kippur War confronted it with the most fundamental questions, and the government lost some of its authority and ability to control political and social forces in Israel.

Anyone analyzing events in Israeli society since 1973 discerns a disintegration of the prevailing political culture and the deepening of the crisis of authority. The sharpest and arguably the most representative expression of that view was the extremist politics of extra-parliamentary organizations, which caused the existing ideological, political, and religious fissures to grow between the two camps. The changes that unfolded after the war built an

¹⁸ B. Kimmerling, “State-Society Relations in Israel”, in A. Ram (ed.), *The Israeli Society: Critical Aspects*, Tel Aviv, Breirot, pp.28-345, 1993 [Hebrew].

¹⁹ See the article by Y. Levy & Y. Peled, “The Fracture That Never Happened: Israeli Sociology after the Six Days’ War”, *Teoria u'bikoret*, 1993, pp.115-128.

²⁰ Y. Katz, “Social Developments since the Six Days’ War”, *Monthly Review*, June 1975, pp.23-28 [Hebrew].

anarchistic mould over the years. Both sides worked within and outside the political establishment, in the ways they saw fit, to create permanent sectarian barriers that would help them achieve their political targets. Their activities reflected the subversion by religious and nationalist circles of the legitimacy of Israel's rule of law. In contrast with the political culture that had developed in the Zionist movement and the Jewish *Yishuv* (the period before statehood), a new tendency to principled political anarchy was taking shape. Parts of the religious leadership contended that no law must be accepted simply because it's the law – a position grounded on loyalty to a social and cultural order anchored in the Jewish religious canon and faith in rabbinical decrees and interpretations.

Some 40 years afterwards, it is clear that the political turnabout and the conjunction of right-wing movements with the religious bloc in government perpetuated and worsened the ideological-political and religious divides. These developments, in tandem with events in the West Bank, sent the State of Israel down a one-way street. The historian Jacob Talmon expressed his view on the subject compellingly, particularly in the final chapter of his book *The Age of Violence* which discussed the dangers awaiting Israeli society and its descent into an era of chaos in the name of religious commandments and absolutist rights by virtue of a Divine promise.²¹

Members of Gush Emunim and their supporters in the Religious Zionist sector sought to replace the historical Labour movement, and assumed the right to use a rebellious approach, just as the Yishuv under British rule had done. Moshe Lissak analyzed the distortion and the deterioration in this way: “*What developed from this was a territory that was subject to the IDF's control, but not under the sovereignty of the State of Israel, a reality of dual norms whose danger lay in undermining the rule of law*”.²²

The National-Religious right wing found its way into the heart of the military-security establishment, assisted by a “revived Religious Zionist ideology”, while the Left distanced itself – and was even perceived as alienated – from its Zionist foundations. Gush Emunim leaders managed to equate religious values and beliefs in the “Greater Land of Israel” concept with Zionism's fundamental values. They addressed all the basic components and fabric of the collective Jewish Zionist identity, that is, national values that the general public cannot deny. The political leaders, like the rabbis, sought to adhere to pan-Israeli foundations that are accepted as positive – even noble. Shared by the broader secular bloc, narratives of the IDF's battle heritage in the War of Independence, of operations by the paratroopers in the 1950s, the amazing heroism of the Six-Day War and the liberation of Jerusalem – all these were

²¹ For a wide and in-depth discussion of the Six-Day War from the historical perspective, see J.L. Talmon, *The Age of Violence*, Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1974, pp.294-396 [Hebrew].

²² M. Lissak. “The Ethos of Security and the Myth of the Militarized Society”, in Stuart. A. Cohen (guest ed.), A. Sagi & Y.Z. Stern (eds.), *Democratic Culture*, vols.4-5, Bar-Ilan University and the Israel Democracy Institute, 2001, p.193.

admiringly adopted into the bosom of the National-Religious movement and became part of ideological underpinnings whose centrepiece was the idea of Greater Israel. It was an approach that went over the heads of governmental institutions, towards the general public, to those “faithful to the Zionist beliefs” but who had not forgotten their religion and had not “lost their way”.²³ Narrow security considerations had no place in that discourse.

The religious aspect in the speeches and actions of Gush Emunim’s leaders was directed not only at the personal level, but also towards the secular establishment and military and government institutions. Political leaders and rabbis saw themselves as continuing the just and righteous Religious-National-Zionist tradition. In their educational and public advocacy, classic Israeli banners were raised – fulfilling national missions such as holding outposts in border regions, never abandoning settlements, making the desert bloom, productive work, and Scriptural heritage that was linked to the IDF’s battle heritage in the modern era.

The struggle against the withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and some years later against the disengagement from the Gaza Strip stirred the blood of young people and disciples of redemptive religion, setting them at a distance from the security establishment and the IDF. During the struggles in Yamit in 1982, and during the withdrawal from Gaza settlements in 2005, several rabbis denounced IDF commanders and pronounced the legitimacy of refusing orders. At the same time, and despite struggles with the government and the establishment, the heads of the political right-wing managed to direct their flock away from simply grazing, towards significant service in the IDF’s combat units and in its command ranks. The movement’s heads and rabbis were intent on gaining access to foci of influence and decision-making, and were now planning to change the behaviour patterns of the younger generation.

Alongside the severe criticism by the political and religious leadership of the National-Religious bloc, it is also worth noting the immense contributions that those leaders made when it came to guiding young people towards fulfilling the fundamental values of the Zionist movement: settlement, enlisting for combat service in the IDF, volunteering for command courses, and serving in the standing Army. Whereas the motivation to serve in general, and in combat units in particular, was falling among many secular inductees, among their religious peers willingness to enlist and perform combat service was growing.²⁴

The Religious-Zionist leadership augmented its educational institutions in a deliberate effort to enhance the religious public’s impact on the military as a central institution of Israeli society. With the result that today, over 1,600 young religious people graduate from the 34 pre-military academies now in existence; the majority continue on to regular military service, and volunteer for combat units and command tracks.

²³ G. Aran, *Eretz Israel: Between Religion and Politics*, Jerusalem, Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1985.

²⁴ Survey by the Carmel Institute for Military Research, Zikhron Ya’akov, interview with Reuven Gal, Head of the Institute, in A. Golan, “Who Served in the IDF in 2000?”, *Haaretz Supplement*, 28 September 1998.

The numerous changes that have affected Israeli society, and the failure to come to arrangements with the Palestinian Authority, seem to have enhanced the nationalist security perception and made possible the rise of the religious Right. The National-Religious bloc has successfully entered the heart of the IDF establishment : its young men serve in elite units, and many IDF commanders wear skullcaps.

How the Changes Have Affected the IDF

One can consequently state that the IDF's organizational culture has undergone substantive change. Early on, the Army became aware of the dangers born of the crisis that was assailing the nation. Its senior command tasked the Personnel Division and the Department of Behavioural Sciences with studying and defining the changes that were taking place in the wider society, and requested recommendations on how the IDF could best cope with them. Noticeable in the working papers of the Behavioural Sciences Department is the position that the IDF is no longer at the heart of the national the consensus, that there is a growing influx of narrow political interests and public disputes into the Army, and that such developments are harming its organizational culture and professional standards.

The crumbling consensus in the wider society generally, and particularly around the Army, created doubts about the political neutrality of the IDF. The lack of consensus placed the military at the focus of political disputes, rendering it vulnerable to attacks from right and left because of its actions, or failure to act. According to Hellman, a senior researcher in the IDF's Behavioural Sciences Department, the Army's politicization process is in fact powerfully eroding the military's *esprit de corps*.²⁵ On the one hand, the IDF must confront the increasing weight of liberal-democratic values in secular Israeli society ; indeed, ever since the First Lebanon War, the military is in open conflict with the universal humanism of the radical left. On the other hand, trying to curb the power of the National-Religious right-wing, it is also in a continuing dispute with the settlers, members of parties that support them, and Gush Emunim activists, who never accepted government decisions regarding disengagement from settlements and withdrawal from the territories of Gaza and the West Bank.

The serious erosion in consensus on the security core created a particular problem in mobilizing reserve units and in the way they functioned in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories. It was not by chance that the IDF avoided allocating reserve units to serve in Lebanon during the many years it had a presence there, and preferred instead to have ongoing security tasks performed by conscripts. The primary danger lying in wait for the IDF is the damage to trust, and the relationship between the Army and the civil sector. Once self-evident, the acceptance of universal service, both in conscript service and the reserves, can no longer be

²⁵ Y. Vergan, *Pre-Military Program : Update Document*, Jerusalem, The Knesset, Center for Research and Information, 2008.

taken for granted because the broad agreement of old over national goals and security perceptions has gone.

Today, close to 60% of young men and 50% of young women of conscription age are inducted into the IDF.²⁶ Some researchers emphasize that those who actually serve in the Army are no longer representative of youths in the general population in socio-economic, ethnic, and religious terms, which only deepens the social divides and decreases the level of identification of society as a whole with the Army.

Uri Ben-Eliezer highlights two phenomena associated with the declining status of the Army as well as with the discontent and criticism expressed during the Lebanon War and the Intifada. One was the acknowledgement by heads of the defence establishment that not only has society undergone changes that make it hard to conscript youths and obtain unchallenged support from them for military operations in the Occupied Territories²⁷; the other resided in the increasing numbers of fundamentalist Army officers who identify with the settlers and their supporters. Moreover, the phrase “the People’s Army” that was so common in Israeli society for decades did not stand the test of time. Since 1973, in a relatively rapid process, Israeli society has disengaged from its Army. As Stuart Cohen and Or-Israel Bagno write in their research study into the social significance of military service in Israel:

It seems that the days have passed when excellence in military service automatically brought with it glory, and the army generally enjoyed immutable prestige. Now the glory has departed and the mythic status that enfolded military men (then and now) is receding too.²⁸

An army that is no longer at the heart of the national consensus frequently starts in media storms. The Israeli media is aggressive, critical, and tenacious, and the public constantly pays keen attention to security issues. The IDF has gradually lost its protective definition as the Army that defends the people, and has become integral to the public and political debate. Ever since it became vulnerable to the media, a regular theme on the agenda has been the

²⁶ Amir Rappaport, “In a Decade, the Number of Torah Learners Doubled and as a Result, So Did the Number of Military Exemptions”, *Yediot Aharonot*, 9 July 2001 (Hebrew). If one also takes into account the minorities who are exempt by law, it transpires that only 50.4% of all young men aged 18 actually joined the Army. The report dated 8 July 2001 by the head of the Personnel Directorate, Gen. Yehuda Segev, shows that in 2005, of all men liable for service, exemptions would be given to 6.2% on medical grounds and 11.2% on religious grounds, while 2.2% were exempted due to low aptitude scores, and 2.1% because they had a criminal record. Another 3.9% were located abroad, and 0.1% were actually dead. The head of the Personnel Directorate said that by 2010, the ratio of conscripts among male and female Jews would fall to no more than 65%. IDF: *Research Targets in the Military-Society project, 1996*, Personnel Directorate, Behavioural Sciences Department, p.8.

²⁷ U. Ben-Eliezer, “From a Nation-in-Arms to a Postmodern Army: Military Politics in ‘New Times’ Israel”, in S.A. Cohen (guest ed.), A. Sagi & Y. Stern (eds.), *Democratic Culture*, vol.4-5, Bar-Ilan University and the Israel Democracy Institute, 2001, pp.55-97.

²⁸ S.A. Cohen & O.-I. Bagno, , “The Social Consequences of Military Service in Israel”, in Cohen, Sagi & Stern (eds.), *Democratic Culture*, 2001, *op.cit.*, pp.131-150.

controversy over the place, role, and impact of religion in the Army – or what has become known as the “religionization process” of the IDF. Statistics for motivation levels among young soldiers from the Religious-Zionist sector indicate an increasing dominance on their part in every category examined. The percentage of young men from National-Religious schools who enlist in the Army is the highest, and the same holds true regarding those who participate in officers’ course and sign on for the standing Army.²⁹

The IDF’s Personnel Directorate has learnt and internalized the potential of youths who have been schooled in the pre-military academies and the Hesder Yeshivas. In fact, young men from the yeshivas have served as a reserve of combat soldiers after the Yom Kippur War, and also filled quotas when the Givati brigade was being revived. The crisis in motivation for service and volunteering for officers’ course among secular young people has actually been solved by relying on graduates of pre-military academies. The IDF welcomed young people charged with ideology and an educational basis that matched its needs.

At Officers’ Course passing-out ceremonies, the proportion of Religious-Zionist high school graduates hardly goes unnoticed. In 2004, 40% of the junior officers in the IDF (up to the position of company commander) were religious – this is twice the number of their relative proportion within the general population. Although – for understandable reasons – no detailed study has been conducted, it is clear that the numbers of knitted-skullcap wearers in the senior ranks of the IDF (Lt.-colonels and Colonels) is higher. Over the past few years, a process of has taken place in which the Army’s elite has been replaced, and the place of kibbutz and moshav youth taken over, by the elite youth of the Religious-Zionist segment of the population. Yoram Peri remarks in that connection: “*In an era of a multicultural society, new groups that were once marginal have entered the elites – the Orthodox Religious, the National Religious, and the Mizrahi and women*”.³⁰

The IDF’s Organizational Culture – Undergoing Change

An organization’s culture is expressed in its organizational behaviour: how its secondary units operate, the behavioural norms of commanders and soldiers in routine times and emergencies, the forms of command and their reflection of the organization’s ethos, objectives, and modes of implementation. Events in the IDF’s ranks in recent years can be analyzed from several standpoints.

Ahead of the 2005 disengagement from Gaza, prominent rabbis – led by the head of the Merkaz Ha’rav yeshiva, Rabbi Avraham Shapira – issued directives to religious soldiers to refuse orders and not to take part in the evacuation of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

²⁹ Y. Levy, *The Other Army of Israel – Materialist Militarism in Israel*, Tel Aviv, Yediot Aharonot Books, 2003, pp.33-38.

³⁰ Y. Peri, “A New Military Elite”, in E. Ben Rafael & Y. Sternberg (eds.), *New Elites in Israel*, Jerusalem, Bialik Institute, p.125, 2007 [Hebrew].

Responding to those directives, Zalman Melamed, head of the Beit El yeshiva, declared : “*It’s better to refuse and stand trial for it, and those who find it hard to talk should not take part whatsoever in this terrible prohibition*”.³¹

When examining how, in the evacuation of settlers, the IDF included some infantry units where many religious soldiers served, an even harder question arises. Those units were apparently kept away from the innermost circle physically engaged in the operation, and were instead deployed in the outer, protective circles. Thus, the graduates of Hesder Yeshivas or of the religious pre-military academies, and soldiers from the Nahal Brigade of Orthodox soldiers did not actively participate in the evacuations.

Over the years, there has been greater involvement of rabbis from the *Yeshivot* in the IDF’s decision-making processes, and their attempts to influence the Army’s senior and junior commanders have intensified. Yeshiva heads were invited by some IDF leaders to have a say in the definition of service conditions, and took pains to insure that their flock’s special rights would be constantly preserved in field units.

Rabbinical intervention and the ensuing damage to the IDF’s organizational culture and command arrangements peaked with the founding of a battalion comprising male and female soldiers within the IDF’s Officer Training School. Twenty-one religious cadets refused to move to the mixed-sex Hadas Battalion, though they were informed that in compliance with the “appropriate inclusion” regulations they would serve in a separate company. The rabbis exercised pressure on the commander of Ground Forces, Major-General Yiftach Ron-Tal, and in response he halted the transfer. Another discussion was held in Ron-Tal’s office, with the participation of several rabbis from the pre-military academies and the commander of IDF Training Base 1. Ultimately, the head of Ground Forces Command accepted the decision of Colonel Gal Hirsch and the cadets were integrated into the Hadas battalion over their objections.³² A similar clash against a gender backdrop happened during manoeuvres by a reserve armoured battalion in Tze’elim. Some religious soldiers refused to travel in vehicles driven by female soldiers. According to an officer in the battalion, “*there was an atmosphere of refusing to obey orders, even though we didn’t actually reach that point*”. Irritating phenomena – as in cases where religious soldiers and officers walked out of official ceremonies because entertainment troops comprising women went on stage – have become routine in the IDF. Some commanders “understood” the religious soldiers, while others reacted sternly. In either event the result was the same: it caused damage to unity of the ranks, goodwill, and discipline in the military.

In 2009, the question arose again – who should Hesder Yeshiva graduates obey? The head of the Har Bracha Hesder Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, called on his graduates to

³¹ Tamir Libel, *Database ‘Religion, Politics and Military’*, Dan Shomron Center for Society, Security and Peace, Kinneret Academic College, p.34.

³² U. Yehoshua, “The IDF Will Not Surrender to the Rabbis”, *Yediot Aharonot*, 3 September 2004, p.11.

refuse to execute orders that run counter to the commandments of Jewish religious law. His belligerent declarations and his refusal to attend a meeting with Defence Minister Ehud Barak led to a decision to cut off contacts with the yeshiva, and to cease the annual 800,000 shekel subsidy that it received from the State. A former Chief of Staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, commented on the issue and said: “*Although the rabbis have got off their high horse, they’ve left it stabled nearby so they can climb up again whenever they want*”.³³

Organizational Reform of the Chief Military Rabbinate

From the outset, the Chief Military Rabbinate was charged with handling religious affairs in the IDF. The changes that Chief Rabbi Israel Weiss put in place in 2006 should be seen as the first stage of changes in the IDF’s organizational culture. New goals were set out: (1) to provide an authority on Jewish religious law for IDF soldiers and commanders; (2) to impact on the building of power and morality in IDF units and commands via direct involvement in all spheres of endeavour; (3) to shape a common setting for IDF service with a Jewish faith character, and to cater for the religious needs of all soldiers and commanders; (4) to constitute a unifying factor between the populations that the IDF is comprised of.³⁴

In 2007, Avichai Rontzki was appointed as Chief Rabbi of the IDF. Rontzki was a former paratrooper and an outstanding soldier, who had newly become religious and then decided that he would change the goals of the Chief Military Rabbinate and broaden its field of endeavours. His addition to the objectives of the Rabbinate consisted in enhancing Jewish consciousness among the IDF’s commanders and soldiers. It was an organizational and conceptual revolution that in fact infringed upon the sphere of authority of the IDF’s Chief Education Officer. The changes that followed began with educational and cultural activities in the IDF, where greater emphasis was placed on courses, seminars, and lectures that dealt with studies of Judaism. Since the Education Corps does not always receive the necessary budgets, the military rabbinate decided to assist in all programs where religious studies were the focus. And when the Chief Education Officer found it hard to enlist secular lecturers and field-trip guides, the problem was solved with the help of religious lecturers who volunteered to come and give the soldiers “a good dose of religion”.

The combination between belief and the perception of military service as a religious mission was expressed in Rabbi Rontzki’s activism within the framework of the chief military Rabbinate. IDF units in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Eilat, Mitzpeh Ramon and Yeruham organized advanced Jewish study days. “Yeshiva days” were held in other units and a mobile Jewish study-hall was set up which travelled to combat outposts in order to bring Jewish

³³ Y. Elitzur, *The Internal Threat: The Israeli Society in Orthodox Hands* [Hebrew], Jerusalem, Carmel, 2010, p.80. See also: H. Levinson, I. Pappé & Y. Liss, “Ehud Barak, Defense Minister, Gave an Order to Take Out Har Bracha Yeshiva from the Agreement with the IDF” [Hebrew], *Haaretz*, 13 December 2009.

³⁴ Annual Report under the Freedom of Information Law, 2007, p.72 [Hebrew].

awareness to combat soldiers. Rabbis from the reserve forces took part in this activity, as well as volunteer rabbis. Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon encouraged the activity and ordered the launch of a training programme named "IDF Educational Leadership in Jerusalem". Its substantive areas were focused on Jewish-Israeli identity, with the overarching objective of strengthening officers' self-image as commanders in the Army of Israel as a Jewish and democratic State. During 2008, the programme received academic assistance from the Shalom Hartman Institute.

The trend set by Chief of Staff Ya'alon and the Chief Military Rabbinate's success in offering programmes delivered by the Education Corps helped intensify the training of IDF soldiers in a period of attenuating identity and continuing debate over the country's future. The contribution of this increased religious awareness to the revitalization of the Jewish-national identity was important for the IDF and its commanders, and in my assessment the organization underwent in-depth cultural change because of the active involvement of the Chief Rabbinate.

The important trend that chief military rabbis Weiss and Rontzki instigated is the turnabout in the educational perspective and goals of the Military Rabbinate. Rather than the religious soldiers, its main current target population is that of the secular soldiers who are far removed from Torah observance and commandments. The Chief Rabbinate's perception of its role as contributing to the education, morale, and battle spirit of all IDF soldiers, produced a strange phenomenon in the Second Lebanon War and later in the Cast Lead operation, when rabbis conducted prayers before setting out to battle : many units held religious ceremonies of a kind never seen in previous decades.

When Brig.-Gen. Eli Shermeister, Chief Education Officer, spearheaded a battle against the intrusion of the Chief Military Rabbinate and the religious content it brought into the education and battle-heritage array – which is his sphere of responsibility –, a meeting of the Education Committee and the Foreign Affairs & Defence Committee was held on 1 February 2010 in the Knesset, following the disclosure that religious soldiers had refused to obey orders. Brig.-Gen. Shermeister maintained that "*[t]he damage caused to Israeli society as a result of refusing orders is enormous*". He added : "*Whatever a soldier's opinions, they must never impact on performing the task. We demand adherence to the task, and the damage entailed in failure to comply with the task is vast*".³⁵

In 2013, when a new Chief Education Officer, Brig.-Gen. Avner Paz, took office, a slight change occurred. Army commanders tried to steer the struggle between the Chief Rabbinate and the Chief Education Officer towards an understanding on the sensitive themes of the education and guidance available to IDF soldiers. Paz, a former kibbutznik, who fought in the General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (*Sayeret Matkal*), declared: "*On no account should we enforce religious content. A commander who thinks that he who pays the piper calls the*

³⁵ See: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/048/198.html> [Hebrew].

tune – is wrong". While he was also cautious not to level the same accusations as his predecessor as regards the strengthening of the Jewish Awareness Department in the Military Rabbinate and its impact on the daily life of average soldiers, he announced that the IDF would stick to the People's Army model. He dispelled any misunderstanding as to his meaning as follows:

Study-days and lectures on religious themes should not be forced on soldiers who are not interested in them. It is the commanders' responsibility and when I hear there have been exceptions, that is, soldiers have been compelled to listen to something with proselytizing content, we will not take it lying down – and the Chief Rabbinate has been cautioned not to take that direction. Only State education can dictate the values and Zionism to be taught, there cannot be two different doctrines.³⁶

The task awaiting the incoming Chief Education Officer was not an easy one, since the IDF's organizational culture had changed over several years, just as it had changed in Israeli society in general in the previous two decades. Some IDF commanders prefer to recruit their unit's lecturers from the religious sector, and educators and rabbis from religious yeshivas – not only because of the financial savings involved. The latter are only paid travel expenses and frequently waive payment. Those commanders in brigades and battalions, whose numbers are constantly growing, will prefer to rely on those who have studied Judaism since childhood rather than to favour the national educational foundation a pluralistic State army requires.

Conclusion

It is clear that since, due to concerns over the loss of its status and legitimation, the IDF abandoned its self-perception as socially detached and insulated, its organizational culture has changed substantively. For several years, the military has been characterized by greater openness towards wider society, whose values it accepts and instils. As Y. Levy remarks:

That openness is the path towards constituting the army's legitimacy. Enhanced openness at a level that breaks down some of the military's societal insulation leads to a model of diversity management – that is, a model typical of organizations operating in a multicultural setting.³⁷

The management of diversity is aimed at handling populations with specific needs and sectorial claims, by creating institutional arrangements, orders, and directives for handling those populations' demands. The most substantive change that the IDF has undergone is the introduction and positioning of religion within its organizational culture. As a result, and as

³⁶ See : www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340.1-4526418,00.html, 3 June 2014, Chief Education Officer: "A commander will prefer activity with Rabbi – because it's for free" [Hebrew].

³⁷ Y. Levi, "The Embedded Military : Why Did the I.D.F. Perform Effectively in Executing the Disengagement Plan", *Politika*, vol.16 (Summer), 1997, pp.43-65 [Hebrew].

Yagil Levy has also shown,³⁸ the Army's autonomous professionalism has been damaged and new extraneous considerations are infiltrating the military sphere.

Empowering religion in the IDF may unify the ranks, but it is equally divisive and invites friction and trouble. Only time will tell what direction events will take now that the boundaries between the IDF and the National-Religious sector are down. It will be interesting to continue examining whether the IDF manages to isolate itself from political, societal, and religious influences and pressures. One can of course find positive aspects in the IDF's choice of the pluralist approach – one in which each sector can find its place, and maintains its special principles and way of life. The liberal pluralist approach that the IDF applies by integrating members of different religions and ethnic groups, translating into a more favourable attitude to the religious sector, is nothing short of a breakthrough in its way of thinking and, moreover in the policy that drives personnel issues in the IDF.

It is rather paradoxical that the military establishment, perceived as a conservative organization that is not open to change, has chosen not only to listen to and learn about the dramatic developments of recent decades in Israeli society, but also to try and steer a course by which it can hopefully handle those fundamental changes. The basic assumption was that the military is not a passive actor, and that it simultaneously influences and is influenced by society. Though IDF leaders have not abandoned the “People's Army” concept, they are now seeking new ways for coping with the changes that impact on it. The IDF believes it correct to integrate more populations and to increase the number of conscripts with strong values and willingness to volunteer for and serve in its combat units and command ranks. Another major component is the desire to bring religious Israelis into the IDF's melting-pot, since it is impossible to remain indifferent to the conscription statistics that reflect a lower motivation to serve and a changing set of values among secular Israelis. These uncomfortable statistics require not only different thinking patterns, but also a conscious decision to help the National-Religious bloc to build the pre-military academies and Hesder Yeshivas that provide a pool of reservists for the military's ranks.

While the new model of command and management in the military provides socio-political and recruitment advantages, it also carries the inherent functional risk of harming military professionalism and command ability. This is because it places rabbis and National-Religious leaders in a position where they become partners, critically influence cultural contents and activities, and even define the IDF's spirit.

Leaders of the National-Religious sector, with all the differences and variegated streams it contains, have indeed managed to insert themselves into the Army as major players. Their influence has now superseded that of the layer of commanders who were once identified with the secular-Ashkenazi population and members of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim*. Senior Army

³⁸ Y. Levy, “The Concretization of the Israeli Military”, *Armed Forces & Society*, n°1, 2013, pp.1-26.

commanders tried to control and contain the “dual hierarchy” process that was taking shape in some military units, where dual subordination to military commanders *and* rabbis is required. But they easily become embroiled in controversy, as when actions and statements by Army leaders like Effi Eitam, Elazar Stern, Yaakov Amidror, and Chief Rabbi Rontzki sparked off rancorous public arguments.³⁹ The more religious soldiers ascend the ladder of rank, the stronger their voices will become, and the more strongly their aspirations to leave a religious mark on the IDF as a whole will make themselves felt.

The empowerment of rabbis and leaders of the National-Religious bloc has introduced changes into the spirit of military ceremonies and the IDF’s cultural tradition. Religious soldiers have received permission to swear allegiance using the word “I declare” instead of “I swear”; they have boycotted women officers in uniform in professional training sites, and demanded that they be trained only under the command of male officers. When women appeared in cultural performances of the Education Corps, rebellion erupted, and religious male soldiers walked out of IDF auditoriums and conferences. The commander of a religious unit refused to accept the posting of an outstanding female communications officer to his unit, and she was sent back to the Communications Corps. Anyone who studies the decisions taken by the IDF regarding the “appropriate inclusion” of female soldiers in field units immediately grasps the extent to which its organizational culture has changed hands, and religious factors have taken over events in it.

The Chief Military Rabbinate’s over-involvement in educational and cultural endeavours and in the daily life of IDF units has damaged the delicate balance of freedom of religion and fundamental rights, to which every soldier is entitled as a citizen of the Israeli State. Proportionality is lacking when the Chief Military Rabbinate’s actively seeks to inculcate religious values and tradition to all IDF soldiers, including the secular or non-Jewish ones. The desire to boost soldiers’ loyalty and devotion to the State of Israel does not require an overdose of religion. The rabbinical establishment’s powerful impact has damaged the IDF’s authority by setting new behavioural norms and standards of service in the military. Such damage materializes in the refusal by religious soldiers to carry out orders from their commanders when evacuating illegal outposts, and in their statements in the media criticizing the Army’s actions in the West Bank. The violence sometimes used by National-Religious youth, without fear of response from the Army or from a law enforcement agency, injures both Palestinians and IDF units and commanders.

A retired Supreme Court judge, Justice Mishael Cheshin, told the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee: “*It is not enough to punish the messenger, the whole level at*

³⁹ One recent example was the words that the commander of the Givati Brigade wrote his troops before their incursion into Gaza in July 2014 (*Ha’aretz*, 13 July). He invoked notions of a Godly-sanctioned war against the enemies of the people of Israel. The sheer amount of talkbacks and reactions to this statement are an apt indicator of the degree to which the place of religion in the IDF is still very much contested.

which the matter is handled must be discussed. My assessment is that today the source of refusing orders is the existence of a State within a State. We are eating the harvest of seeds sown years ago". Cheshin added: *"The State within a State is controlled by people who are outside the system. Rabbis are the counsellors and they are listened to"*.⁴⁰

It now looks as if the IDF has lost its military professionalism and command autonomy, which demand a distance and separation from political and societal forces. The senior leaders of the IDF are not strong enough to insulate the military and move away from politics as well as from the extra-institutional forces that have set up camp within it and created a "joint management" system where professional command once autonomously ruled.

The present article has tried to probe three issues : religion's past and present place within the IDF ; the direction in which the societal and political changes will take Israeli society ; as well as the growing strength of the religious streams in the ranks of the IDF. The answer to the questions raised seems to lie in how matters are presented. The profile of the IDF and its organizational culture will mirror the face of Israeli society – certainly against the backdrop of increasingly porous boundaries in recent years. Just as there is no undeniable answer to the friction of recent decades between State and religion, it seems impossible at this stage to halt the process of history: in other words, there will continue to be involvement by religious-social forces with political and religious interests.

⁴⁰ Justice Mishael Cheshin, at the Foreign Affairs & Defense Committee jointly with the Knesset's Education Committee, 1 February 2010. See: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/048/198.html> [Hebrew].