

Religious Authorities in the Military and Civilian Control: The Case of the Israeli Defense Forces

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Abstract

This article takes a step toward filling the gap in the scholarly literature by examining the impact of religious intervention in the military on civil-military relations. Using the case of Israel, I argue that although the subordination of the Israeli military to elected civilians has remained intact, and the supreme command has been mostly secular, external religious authorities operate within the formal chain of command and in tandem with the formal authorities, managing the military affairs. This religious influence is apparent in three major domains: (1) the theological influence on military deployment, (2) the exclusion of women from equal participation in military service, and (3) the role expansion of the Military Rabbinate as a quasi-state agency and its reflection in the socialization of secular soldiers and the development of alternative military ethics. Consequently, extra-institutional control of the military is at work.

Keywords

civilian control, extra-institutional control, military ethics, military service, religionization, theology

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Over the years, relations between religious communities and the military have changed in many industrialized democracies. Students of those relations acknowledge the involvement of religious authorities in military affairs.

For example, military chaplains stepped into the vacuum created by the failure to provide spiritual care and answered the soldiers' and commanders' questions in the wake of new ethical dilemmas arising from the changing nature of warfare. That change witnessed growing military engagement with noncombatants in urban warfare, counterinsurgencies, and combat against terrorism.¹ Until supplanted by modern laws, the ethics of the just war were traditionally rooted in theological writing. In Britain, chaplains with close contacts with military commanders are often called on to advise about moral issues and play a key role in setting the moral limits of response to insurgencies that involve the treatment of noncombatants.² Whereas in the British and Canadian armies religious ethics may have helped restrain aggressiveness,³ a different picture emerged in the U.S. military. There, military chaplains view themselves as emissaries, even missionaries, from their churches⁴ and pose major challenges to the authority of the military command.⁵ Furthermore, the portrayal of the war in Iraq as a religious war, with "Jesus Killed Mohammed" as one of its symbols, legitimated aggressive actions that claimed the lives of enemy civilians, even in defiance of the political will.⁶

In these cases, there was intervention by a source of authority external to the chain of command, inasmuch as military chaplains remained accountable to the churches that sent them, even though the churches are considered nonstate actors within a state operation.⁷ Similarly, in my analysis of the case of Israel, where rabbis have become increasingly involved in military affairs since the 1990s, capitalizing on the growing presence of religious soldiers in the ranks, I argued that the growing influence of religious authorities in the military restricted the command's intraorganizational autonomy.⁸

These are all indications of how religious authorities engage in policymaking within the military. However, scholars have not asked a simple question: How can this involvement be reconciled with the principles of civilian control in a democratic regime?

This article takes a step toward ameliorating this scholarly deficit by analyzing how religious authorities that engage in policymaking within the military affect civilian control, either potentially or actually. To this end, I use Israel as a case study. I argue that although the subordination of the Israeli military to elected civilians has remained intact and the supreme command has been mostly secular, external religious authorities operate within the formal chain of command and manage military affairs in tandem with the formal authorities. This religious influence is apparent in three major domains: (1) the theological influence on military deployment, (2) the exclusion of women from equal participation in military service, and (3) the role expansion of the Military Rabbinate as a quasi-state agency and its reflection in the socialization of secular soldiers and the development of alternative military ethics. Consequently, extra-institutional control of the military is at work.

Theoretically, intervention by religious authorities in the military may stand in sharp contrast to the basic principles of civilian control of the military in democratic

societies. Civilian control is aimed at effectively limiting the politicians' autonomy to deploy the military and the military's autonomy itself in the areas of activity that have political implications, particularly military deployment and military doctrine. Such limits correspond with the political objectives and resources that allow elected officials to shape and enforce autonomously policies regarded as expressing the will of society as a whole.⁹ A clear and unified hierarchy of command, from the political authority to the rank and file, is a prerequisite that might be intolerant of any intervention, particularly by an external authority involving nonstate actors such as churches.¹⁰

Such an intervention falls within the limits of what Huntington termed *subjective control*, which is opposed to *objective control*, the paradigmatic Western type of civilian control. Objective control requires the military to abstain from politics and places control of military affairs in the hands of a single, recognized, legitimate authority that officers obey as a professional responsibility. In subjective control, the military is civilianized. However, instead of being subjected to state institutions that represent the public will, the military itself mirrors the many and conflicting interests of civilian groups through which the power of particular civilian groups is maximized. Since the eighteenth century, civilian control in Western societies has moved from the subjective to the objective model.¹¹ Effective attempts by religious authorities to maximize their power within the military can therefore be viewed as a feature of subjective control, because they represent the particularistic interests of their institutions.

The next section describes the general background to the case of Israel and is followed by two sections indicating what areas have been subjected to religious influence and what the effects have been. In the concluding section, I integrate the empirical findings with the theoretical framework to specify how religious intervention may affect civilian control.

General Background

Israel is among very few democracies in which military conscription survives. Conscription applies to both males and secular females with the exception of Israeli Palestinians, ultra-Orthodox Jews (who are partly exempted), and religious women.

Orthodox Jewish young people, particularly national-religious youth who link religion with a vision of the national mission, make up about 10–12 percent of the Israeli Jewish population. Until the 1970s, fears about the secularizing impact of close contact with secular conscripts in mixed combat units led many religious Jewish men to take auxiliary positions in the military and avoid military careers.¹² However, since then, religious youth have gradually increased their presence in the military.

Beyond the perception of military service as a religious commandment (*mitzvah*), the sharp tension between the centrality of the military in Israeli society and the marginality of the religious groups within the military, which extended to social and cultural marginality, motivated the desire of young persons to serve in combat roles.¹³

Religious groups increasingly felt that the time had come to challenge the secular middle class, which was identified with the founding of the state and the dominant Labor movement, and was associated with the fiasco of the October 1973 War (in which Israel was surprised by an Egyptian-Syrian attack). The establishment in 1974 of the *Gush Emunim* movement (“Bloc of the Faithful”), the ideological foundation underpinning the settlement project in the West Bank, marked a shift, from a strategy based on a partnership with the Labor movement, to an attempt to subject the national project to religious principles, thus challenging the dominant secular paradigm.¹⁴

To promote this agenda and also address the concerns of religious young people about possible secularization resulting from military service, religious leaders initiated special programs. Most significant were “arrangement academies” (*hesder yeshivas*), which combined Torah study in a yeshiva with a short period of military service in homogeneously religious frameworks in combat units. This program has expanded significantly since the late 1970s.¹⁵

Later, in the late 1980s, pre-military Torah academies (*mechinot*) were established, allowing many of the religious conscripts to defer their enlistment to study for 12–18 months at the academies for “spiritual fortification.” Thus, the academies prepared the young religious draftees to deal with the secular culture in the military and eased fears of secularization.¹⁶ Both the hesder and the academies are headed by rabbis.

On its side, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) needed to fill the manpower gaps caused by the declining motivation of the secular middle class, the social backbone of the conscript military, to serve in combat roles. Motivation was decreased by the decline in external threats, the ascendancy of a market society that devalued military sacrifice, and the decoupling of soldiering from citizenship, as groups attained rights and status despite little or no military contribution.¹⁷ Together with the efforts to address new operational needs, the IDF therefore encouraged programs fostering the integration of religious males into its ranks. For example, hesder yeshiva students were a source of top quality manpower to rebuild the Armored Corps that had suffered losses in the 1973 War, and to reestablish the infantry Givati Brigade following the first Lebanon War (1982).¹⁸ In 1988, the project of pre-military academies was founded on the initiative of Major General Amram Mitzna (the commander of the *Central Command* during the first Intifada, the Palestinians’ uprising against Israel’s rule), who called on the religious sector to increase its presence in the ranks.¹⁹

In 2010, the graduates of the religious pre-military academies and hesder yeshivas constituted about 10 percent of the army’s combat force,²⁰ while the overall proportion of religious soldiers in regular combat units was about 25–30 percent, concentrated in the ground forces.²¹ Religious soldiers made up a large percentage of the infantry brigades, and the number of religious graduates of the infantry officers’ course rose steeply, from only 2.5 percent in 1990 to 26 percent in 2008.²² Still, the vast majority of the senior command remained secular.

It is worth emphasizing that the religious soldiers are not contained within special units. Graduates of pre-military academies serve with secular conscripts in mixed combat units. Until 2005, hesder yeshiva students served in homogenous platoons within heterogeneous companies of religious and nonreligious soldiers. The IDF has

gradually and partially dispersed the hesder yeshiva students in smaller groups throughout larger battalions.²³ Both the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies have an influence on their students. However, because hesder students combine periods of service with yeshiva studies and still serve in homogenous squads, the hesder rabbis have more influence than the rabbis of pre-military academies.

Numbers have a cultural impact. The critical mass of religious soldiers translated into an increase in the bargaining power of the rabbis' (heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies) vis-à-vis the military. At the minimum, they expected to create cultural arrangements that would let religious youth serve in the military without compromising their religious beliefs. Imposing Jewish dietary laws and observing the Jewish Shabbat on base were preconditions. However, over time, the rabbis escalated their demands to reshape the military culture. Pressures were not only "top down": the rabbis served their students' needs and demands and answered their questions "bottom up," because the students, particularly from the hesder yeshivas, turned frequently to civilian rabbis for guidance in resolving conflicts between religious and professional issues, such as working on the Sabbath or serving with women.²⁴ For its part, the IDF compromised its freedom of action and accepted many of the rabbis' demands, leading to expanded religious influence in the IDF,²⁵ as the next section describes.

The "Religionization" of the IDF

Expanded religious influence affected military policies and culture in several domains.

Theological Influence on Deployment

As a critical mass of religious soldiers emerged in the combat units, the IDF came to recognize the right of the rabbis—the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies—to negotiate the terms of their students' military service.²⁶ Gradually, this bargain extended from cultural arrangements designed to help religious soldiers observe religious laws to political bargaining over the deployment of religious soldiers in religiously sensitive areas.

A major force motivating the religious youths' entry into combat units was the self-assigned obligation to preserve the settlement project in what they perceived to be the religiously significant West Bank, part of the Holy Land of Israel.²⁷ Religious soldiers and rabbis ascribed religious meaning to the military deployment in the West Bank. After the Oslo Accords, through which Israel was committed to establish a Palestinian political entity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the rabbis went one step further, issuing religious decisions (*piskei halacha*), banning religious soldiers' participation in the dismantling of West Bank settlements as the peace process prescribed, and even denying that any elected government had the legal right to compromise Israel's control of the territory.²⁸ In so doing, the rabbis subjected military discipline to theological considerations. Furthermore, the rabbis transferred the issue of compliance from the arena of ideological debates to the domain of binding decisions with serious

theological consequences. Religious decisions are marketed as indubitable truth, viewed by many as an expression of the divine will.²⁹

Religious rulings became a concrete issue when the Israeli government decided to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip in 2005, which involved the removal of about 8,000 settlers and the dismantling of another four settlements in the northern West Bank. The perceived destruction of the settlement enterprise threatened to reduce religious Zionism from a pioneering elite to just another sector in society, and also threatened to undermine the self-identity of a considerable number of religious conscripts as bearers of a national mission.³⁰ Hence, the plan led several prominent rabbis to call for disobedience.

It was an issue of authority. As Rabbi Avraham Shapira, the leading rabbi of the religious Zionist sector argued, Jewish law forbids giving away any part of the Land of Israel to non-Jews, and therefore soldiers are prohibited from taking part in the dismantling of settlements and must disobey orders to do so.³¹ Eight heads of about forty hesder yeshivas called for disobedience. Only four called for compliance with military orders, but many others gave vague directions, suggesting “gray” refusal. Although the heads of the pre-military academies publicly called on the soldiers to obey orders, some of them objected to the deployment of the religious conscripts to evacuate the settlements and even recommended “gray” refusal and “foot-dragging.”³² Only a minority among the rabbis claimed that the issue of compliance was not a theological one.³³ Furthermore, even rabbis who argued against religious decisions that endorsed disobedience did so on theological grounds. The prominent rabbi Shlomo Aviner, for example, argued that undermining the unity of the nation by sowing discord in the military thwarts the theological principle of the duty to save a life (*pikuach nefesh*).³⁴

IDF policies were therefore guided by a concern that many religious soldiers might disobey orders to remove the settlers.³⁵ Doing so could thwart the evacuation, given the expectation that the settlers would physically resist their eviction.³⁶ To minimize the scope of potential disobedience, the IDF (at both the senior and field levels) simply negotiated the terms of deployment with the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies.³⁷ Consequently, forces were deployed on the basis of political loyalty, thus distancing units largely staffed with religious soldiers from the inner circle of those deployed to evict settlers.³⁸ In addition, the IDF command instructed the mission commanders to show “sensitivity and understanding” toward religious soldiers unable to carry out the evacuation orders and to find alternative assignments for them.³⁹

Unprecedentedly, the command even successfully mobilized the IDF Chief Rabbi to legitimize theologically the command’s orders and mitigate potential dissidence.⁴⁰ In other words, a religious authority was called on to help enforce military discipline. By doing so, the command practically acknowledged that compliance with orders to evict the settlers fell within the theological domain.

In the end, the mission was accomplished successfully; only about sixty soldiers refused in a manner that required military legal action against them.⁴¹ The command’s efforts to ease the religious soldiers’ dilemma succeeded but at the cost of compromising the canonic principles of military discipline. Disobedience would surely have been higher had the IDF decided to coerce the religious soldiers to participate in the mission

without compromises, but the IDF's mode of deployment prevented any real testing of this hypothesis. Furthermore, the IDF's accommodation of the religious leadership's grievances was reflected in the fact that the IDF refrained from imposing sanctions on the hesder yeshivas whose heads had encouraged disobedience.⁴² In the end, therefore, the IDF acknowledged the legitimacy of the rabbis' role to instruct their students to obey or disobey orders; by doing so it acknowledged the status of the rabbis in policymaking.

Following the disengagement from Gaza, the West Bank became the main arena in which critical decisions must be made to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The price of that resolution will probably be the withdrawal from most of the territory and the dismantling of many of the Jewish settlements there. Moreover, Israel had also pledged to the United States that it would dismantle many illegal outposts that had been built in the West Bank without the approval of the Israeli government.

Against this background, the rabbis developed an agenda of increasing the critical mass of religious soldiers to limit the military's ability to deploy troops to dismantle the settlements. Among others, Rabbi Eli Sadan, the founder of the religious pre-military academies, called on religious youth to join the ranks of the military, secret services, and police to develop the infrastructure for the "ideal state."⁴³ Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim, the head of the pre-military academy Elisha in the West Bank, testified that, since the withdrawal from Gaza, he more particularly sought students with the potential to become military leaders to help Israel fulfill what he saw as its true nature.⁴⁴ Indeed, the number of students enrolling in the pre-military academies grew in the years 2005–12 (the period of the religious community's reaction to the Gaza disengagement) by 30 percent,⁴⁵ while the number of religious graduates of the infantry officers' course rose by about 20 percent.⁴⁶ This growth could not have been realized without the IDF's support; the command heard the new post-disengagement voices, but nevertheless encouraged the deployment of organized religious combatants in the sensitive West Bank.

The situation in the West Bank is more complicated than in Gaza for three reasons. First, more than 300,000 Jewish settlers live in West Bank. Second, religious values are much more pervasive in the territories than in Gaza. Third, local bonds are stronger than in Gaza because a significant percentage of the religious soldiers come from communities in the West Bank. Some IDF officers are even residents of illegal settlements.⁴⁷

In view of this situation, the IDF further developed the deployment doctrine used during the Gaza disengagement, according to which military units are distanced from the inner circle. This inner circle consists mainly of police units who engage with the evacuees, whereas military units staff the outer circles. In the outer circles, the soldiers establish a perimeter to fend off Palestinians who may try to harm the soldiers and the settlers, as well as other settlers who may try to assist the evacuees.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, some leading rabbis ruled against any engagement in evicting settlers, even indirectly.⁴⁹

Protests and disobedience arose from within the units deployed in the West Bank. For example, in August 2007, a company was ordered to provide perimeter security for the removal of Jewish families from the market in Hebron. Twelve out of forty

soldiers, mostly hesder yeshiva students, refused to comply with the order after consulting with their rabbis, while negotiations held between the rabbis and the IDF helped to reduce the number of refuseniks.⁵⁰

In 2009, for the first time in the country's history, soldiers in uniform, half of them hesder students, raised protest signs, in this case against the dismantling of illegal settlements. In these cases the IDF punished the soldiers. In late 2009, in an unprecedented move, the Ministry of Defense retracted *Har Bracha* Yeshiva's status as a hesder yeshiva after its head openly and publicly encouraged soldiers to disobey orders to dismantle Jewish settlements.⁵¹ Other threats to refuse to carry out orders to demolish settlements have been heard clearly since then.

The IDF thus reformulated its position, stating that it preferred that the army not be on the front lines of dismantling outposts and that police units should do the job,⁵² although the police are incapable of doing so alone. Whether the military and its political supervisors admit it or not, it is safe to assume that a central consideration in refraining from dismantling illegal settlements (with some exceptions imposed by the High Court of Justice and in most cases without using military force), despite the Israeli pledge to the United States, is the simple understanding that doing so would open the military to massive refusals from religious soldiers. Such concerns were based on the incidents detailed above and on the fact that some heads of hesder yeshivas supported and even encouraged disobedience.⁵³ As the graduates of the religious pre-military academies and hesder yeshivas constituted about 10 percent of the army's combat force, such concerns were realistic.

Furthermore, in the Gaza disengagement, when religious soldiers felt that they were part of a strong and cohesive collective of soldiers, they preferred to act like the majority, and resistance to the mission was reduced. The growing presence of religious soldiers in the mixed field units however, might produce the opposite result and, as a former organizational consultant in the IDF admitted, obstruct future missions that involve the removal of settlers.⁵⁴

More significantly, the government's future ability to dismantle legal settlements if agreements with the Palestinians require it to do so is limited as well. This situation may thwart the political will to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The decisive issue, then, is not whether religious soldiers will obey orders to dismantle settlements: it is whether the government will instruct the IDF to dismantle settlements or to delay the eviction of settlers as long as possible, at the cost of missing opportunities to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Exclusion of Women

The IDF is unusual in that it drafts women. Because of legal pressures and human resources shortfalls, since the mid-1990s the IDF has gradually and partially opened combat positions for women. For example, in 2001 women filled only 1 percent of combat roles: this number rose to 3 percent in 2010.⁵⁵ Such positions are staffed mostly by secular women. Religious women have traditionally been exempted from military service by law at the demand of the religious parties, but many of them volunteer for auxiliary service.

Nevertheless, women's integration into the combat units collided with the concomitant increasing presence of religious men in the combat ranks, for whom service with women created problems of modesty. Consequently, the rabbis—the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies—demanded that the religious men and the secular women be kept separate in field units. The rabbis even threatened not to send their students to combat units where men and women interacted.⁵⁶ They invoked the religious commandment to maintain a “holy camp”—because God walks in the midst of the camp to protect Israel against its enemies—with modest behavior at its core.

In response to these pressures, the military command formulated and implemented the “appropriate integration” guidelines in 2002, which developed rules for the shared life of women and religious soldiers. Such rules include separate residential arrangements, the requirement for women to wear modest clothes, permission for religious soldiers to serve in all-male units to avoid interaction with women, and permission to avoid activity that requires physical interaction with women and hence violates the prohibition against the mingling in a private area of men and women not married to each other.⁵⁷

The army favored the needs of religious soldiers when the latter enjoyed a significant quantitative advantage, a policy that unintentionally excluded women from many significant roles. Female-free zones created within the bases raised barriers to the equal integration of women, particularly in field units. Furthermore, given the quantitative advantage of religious male soldiers, their option to avoid interaction with female soldiers in mixed-gender activities made women a kind of disturbance to the effective management of human resources. For commanders, the placement of women could create trouble with religious men that was harmful to the mission, and since such trouble also involved influential rabbis, excluding women avoided political problems.

Barriers thus were extended not only to combat roles, which in practice became barred to women in units with a significant percentage of religious soldiers, but also to training and other auxiliary roles.⁵⁸ Gradually, as the chief of staff's advisor on women's issues stated, “appropriate integration has, over time, become the main—if not the only—perspective through which joint service by men and women is implemented in practice.”⁵⁹ In short, religious authorities played a key role in shaping human resources policies at several levels:

1. The issue of gender integration in the military was subjected to religious considerations, although as the religious major general Yishai Be'er, also a law professor, argued, “most of these problems [of gender integration] are not a matter for rabbis.”⁶⁰
2. The military committee that formulated the “appropriate integration” guidelines negotiated the terms of these guidelines with rabbis.⁶¹ In other words, the rabbis took part in steering a formal human resource policy while leveraging their bargaining power with the military. We should recall that in the early 2000s, the IDF was engaged in a new round of hostilities with the Palestinian Authority and could not risk disrupting the inflow of highly motivated

religious males into the combat units. As Major General Yiftach Ron-Tal, who chaired this committee, simply explained, the IDF was on the verge of a crisis that could have caused the loss of the finest combatants.⁶²

3. When the rabbis complained that the new guidelines were only partially implemented, the military established a special administration in 2004 headed by religious reserve officers, then heads of pre-military academies, to oversee the policy. In other words, the policy stakeholders were provided with the power to supervise the policy. In practice, this administration functioned as a kind of “modesty guard” inspecting the camps and presenting women soldiers as a sort of “modesty problem.”⁶³
4. Since field commanders were inclined to avoid clashes with religious soldiers that might jeopardize missions, the rabbis became powerful advisers to their students-soldiers in dilemmas pertaining to interacting with women. Soldiers turned to their rabbis with questions, for example, about riding in the same vehicle with female soldiers or restrictions on physical contact with women.⁶⁴ Consequently, the religious soldiers leveraged their local bargaining power, based on their quantitative advantage and the backing of powerful rabbis, to negotiate successfully with their commanders.⁶⁵

The religiously motivated exclusion of women did not spark significant resistance from either liberal and feminist organizations or the female soldiers themselves. Some public protest appeared only in 2011 when, in a farewell letter, the IDF's Personnel Directorate Head, Major General Avi Zamir, warned against the erosion of the joint service of religious and secular soldiers. He presented it as a threat to the system of conscription and cited evidence about the exclusion of women to support his argument.⁶⁶ Public interest in this warning encouraged the IDF command to improve its monitoring of the implementation of “appropriate integration.”⁶⁷ In other words, this was an intramilitary action that triggered public opinion.

A few weeks later, public opinion was also aroused by the refusal of some religious soldiers, backed by heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies, to listen to female soldiers singing as part of a military band, despite having been explicitly ordered by their commander to remain at the event. As a compromise, the IDF's chief of staff decided that religious soldiers would be allowed to opt out of entertainment ceremonies that involved women's singing, but not formal events such as memorial services.⁶⁸ Again, the trigger was not the religious soldiers' conduct but the protest of the rabbis responding to the IDF's decision to punish the soldiers, who in this case were cadets in the IDF officers candidate school, by expelling them from the school.⁶⁹

Role Expansion of the Military Rabbinate and Modification of Military Ethics

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the military command has encouraged the expansion of the traditional role of military chaplains from the provision of religious services to the religious socialization of secular soldiers.⁷⁰ Concerned about soldiers' motivation,

the military command unprecedentedly formalized the rabbinate's new task—to instill “a Jewish consciousness” in the soldiers and commanders to reinforce their fighting spirit.⁷¹

To that end, the rabbis also increased their presence in the field units, functioning as “priests anointed for war,” whose role was to speak to the troops to ensure that they were prepared physically and spiritually to fight.⁷² The rabbinate further enhanced its influence by recruiting a new generation of young rabbis who were former combat soldiers. With combat experience, the field rabbi could be an organic part of the unit, talk to the soldiers in “military language,” and be accepted as a source of military-religious authority.⁷³ This role expansion usurped the Education Corps' monopoly over educational activities in the IDF.

Socialization by rabbis extended to the modification of military ethics. Since the first Lebanon War (1982), the IDF has been increasingly engaged in urban warfare. As in other democracies, ethical dilemmas about the balance of risk between the lives of soldiers and those of enemy civilians, in situations where risk can be transferred from one side to another, have come to the fore and encouraged new theological writing. Prominent rabbis, among them heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies, opposed the role of international law in guiding the right to wage war (*jus ad bellum*) and the rules of waging war (*jus in bellum*). They argued that Israel's wars were ordained or determined by God (“a commanded war”), and religious commandments rather than the nations' consent guide the rules of war.⁷⁴ Many rabbis criticized the IDF's “purity of arms” doctrine as an alien ideology and demanded that the ban on the killing of enemy civilians be relaxed.⁷⁵ Sparing the lives of soldiers became paramount; putting soldiers at risk in order to protect enemy civilians became illegitimate.⁷⁶

This theological discourse diffused into the Military Rabbinate and played a practical role in Operation Cast Lead against Hamas-ruled Gaza in December 2008–January 2009. Military rabbis joined the troops and worked to “spiritually elevate” the soldiers, mostly secular, by dispensing theological propaganda. They painted the battle as a campaign against (the modern incarnation of) Amalek, the first tribe to attack Israel after the exodus from Egypt. For this sin, God commanded that Amalek and his name be absolutely wiped out, without sparing men, women, children, or infants. In this spirit, rabbis tried to dictate the appropriate code of conduct in the field: “When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral.”⁷⁷ The chief rabbi testified that he had read Biblical verses describing the national revenge of Samson against the Philistines in Gaza, portraying the Palestinians as the continuation of the old Philistines, Israel's enemy in the twelfth century BCE. He argued that this reading gave the soldiers strength.⁷⁸ The chief of general staff criticized the chief rabbinate's proclamations, indicating that such a deviation from the military's policies must not reoccur.⁷⁹

In a similar spirit, a head of a hesder yeshiva reported that he had guided his students, before they deployed to Gaza, that “in all situations in which your lives or the lives of your comrades were regarded as sufficiently endangered and the choice was to endanger the lives of innocents—there should not be a moment's hesitation . . . It is clear who is to be preferred.”⁸⁰

Key to the rabbinate's involvement in ethical issues was the development of sensitivity to casualties in Israeli society, particularly following the first Lebanon War; this sensitivity to military casualties echoes similar developments in other industrialized democracies. Ethical dilemmas and sensitivity to casualties emerged together and were mutually reinforcing, creating pressure from both religious and secular actors to reduce the risks to the soldiers. Prominent rabbis and the Military Rabbinate thus provided the IDF with a theological seal of approval for the ethical code of conduct informally adopted by the IDF in the fight against terror.⁸¹ In this code, protecting soldiers' lives was given higher priority than the obligation to avoid injuring enemy civilians who were not involved in terror when these civilians were not under the effective control of the state.⁸² In this way, the new ethics helped deal with casualty sensitivity by theologically legitimizing the shifting of risk from Israel's soldiers to enemy civilians. As one soldier testified, when the IDF chief rabbi, a brigadier general and former commander of a parachute battalion, preached before of a company of young soldiers engaging in war for the first time and presented the enemy as Amalek, whose life was worthless, his attitude affected the soldiers.⁸³

An aggressive fire policy was encouraged that disproportionately claimed the lives of eighty-four civilians to one Israeli soldier.⁸⁴ It follows that religious socialization helped legitimize and even aggravate an aggressive fire policy in urban warfare, in which field unit commanders enjoy a great deal of freedom to interpret general policies according to their preexisting values.

The "religionization" of military ethics, however, not only partly legitimized policies but also challenged them. Studies have shown that religiosity is correlated with soldiers' inclination toward the greater use of firepower and increased risk of harming civilians. This attitude signifies a deviation from the principle of proportionality derived from the informally adopted ethical code mentioned above; it rejects the notion of a balance between an expected military advantage and collateral damage.⁸⁵

In Operation Protective Edge, launched in summer 2014 against the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, a brigade commander, Colonel Ofer Winter, a graduate of the pre-military academy headed by Rabbi Sadan in the West Bank settlement of Eli, dispatched a "battle order," telling his troops they were going to war "to wipe out an enemy" who "curses, blasphemes and scorns the God of Israel."⁸⁶ He thus presented the battle against the Palestinians not as a state defense against an enemy or an the extension of a war rooted in the Bible against Amalek, as rabbis had previously done, but as a religious war aimed at protecting the reputation of God. It was the first time that a senior commander publicly provided religious legitimacy for the use of force. Commanders used to invoke the Bible, but mainly as a historical reference rather than a source of divine guidance. In practice, the colonel appropriated the function of the "priest anointed for war" that had been the Military Rabbinate's monopoly.

Confirming that the colonel echoed the socialization to which he had been exposed at the pre-military academy, Rabbi Eli Sadan, the academy's head, went further. Preaching to his students during Operation Protective Edge, he described the mission as an attempt to topple the "Gates of Gaza," like the feat of Samson, the Biblical hero. Such a mission would pave the way toward Sadan's ideal, the re-founding of a Davidic

kingdom in Hebron (such as had existed about 1000 BCE). Like other rabbis, he equated the Palestinians to the old Philistines: after founding the kingdom, “you would not find any more Philistines,” he declared.⁸⁷ For both Colonel Winter and Rabbi Sadan, the campaign in Gaza was part of a religious war that must not be ended before a decisive victory; and victory, Sadan implied, might extend to ethnic cleansing.

That rhetoric may encourage action is reflected in Israel’s “trigger-happy” targeting of mosques suspected of harboring Hamas troops during Protective Edge. Take again Colonel Winter as an example: during battleground tours with journalists into a Palestinian village about a few hundred meters into the depths of the Gaza Strip, he presented a mosque destroyed by an air attack on Winter’s directive to neutralize fire that came from it, after he rejected the possibility of an attack that might have inflicted less damage. “Did you see it [the mosque]?” asked Winter, pointing to it. “This was once a mosque.” He said this giddily, without any hint of guilt, sorrow, or apology as he strode through the ruins of the village, whose 13,000 residents were expelled on the IDF’s orders. He continued, with pride: “When I said to you [this village] once looked different, I was referring to this [the ruins].”⁸⁸

Such theological rhetoric raises questions about the kind of legitimacy that some military men invoke. As Mark Chaves notes, religious authority is legitimated by calling on some supernatural referent such as God.⁸⁹ In this case, the colonel and his rabbi called on God’s authority, thereby implicitly challenging the state’s authority to control the military: if the war is commanded by God to protect his reputation, then it has unique rules with regard to its goals and the criteria by which its results are evaluated. A commanded war prescribes a decisive victory, overrides international norms, and thus challenges the rational political and military codes guiding the management of war.

Calling on God may also be associated with the denial of the authority of state institutions to decide territorial concessions over sections included in the “Promised Land.” When it comes to the dismantling of settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, such denial practically bred subversive behavior by religious soldiers guided by their rabbis, as I have already described.

On the surface, the Military Rabbinate has retained its self-proclaimed monopoly over religious socialization and is a part of the formal chain of command. At the same time, it is a quasi-state actor that does not necessarily derive its authority from the military hierarchy and is relatively autonomous, for several reasons:

1. The rabbis base their decisions on flexible interpretations of theological texts rather than according to the laws or directives of state institutions. Their mode of interpretation is not transparent and therefore cannot be publicly and legally monitored.
2. Military rabbis are strongly influenced by their mentors—civilian rabbis heading the institutions from which the military rabbis sprang. Clearly, the mentors’ theology may contradict military principles. For example, Brigadier General Yisrael Weiss, the IDF chief rabbi in the Gaza disengagement, during the debate regarding the issue of disobedience, declared that he would resign if Rabbi

Avraham Shapira, his mentor and the leading figure calling for disobedience, told him to.⁹⁰ Surely such a resignation would have reinforced the theological delegitimation of the withdrawal. Similarly, Brigadier General Rafi Peretz, the IDF chief rabbi at the time of this writing, has been personally affiliated with Orthodox rabbis, including Rabbi Shlomo Aviner,⁹¹ the leader of the pre-military academy Ateret Yerushalayim, who called for violating the Geneva Convention when a choice had to be made between saving soldiers' lives or killing innocent noncombatants.⁹² The problem of dual loyalty is the result.⁹³

3. Aside from inspiration and affiliation, military chaplains derive their legitimacy largely from civilian rabbis. Since the 1990s, the Military Rabbinate has been challenged by the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies, who have developed theological writings about the laws of war and have guided their students-soldiers through the tensions between military life and religious imperatives. Their students turn to the Military Rabbinate for advice on technical issues, such as dietary laws, but consult their civilian mentors on more complicated issues such as gender relations and the laws of war.⁹⁴

The traditional status of the Military Rabbinate as the supreme religious authority in the military has therefore been severely challenged. During the disengagement from Gaza, for example, civilian rabbis challenged the Military Rabbinate's authority by issuing decisions that banned religious soldiers from participating in the uprooting of settlers.⁹⁵ The Military Rabbinate thus sought to reinforce its own legitimacy vis-à-vis the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies; however, it could achieve legitimation only by aligning with these institutions' expectations to expand religious influence in the culture of the military and affect its deployment decisions. Rabbi Sadan, the leader of the religious pre-military academies, spoke about the decision made in a meeting of the heads of the pre-military academies and hesder yeshivas held in 2012: "The military has only one authority and it is the commander, but the commander, like the parliament, is responsible that his orders be compatible with Jewish religious law (*Da'at Torah*) . . . according to [the interpretation of] the Military Rabbinate."⁹⁶

In other words, the Military Rabbinate was authorized by civilian rabbis to monitor the legality of the army's commands and function as the supreme religious authority in the military; it was even authorized to override the command's decision. However, as Sadan emphasized, the other side of this deal is the chief military rabbi's commitment to coordinate his decisions with the heads of the hesder yeshivas and pre-military academies, that is, with external, civilian rabbis. For its part, as the Gaza disengagement demonstrated, the IDF command reinforced the Military Rabbinate in order to curtail the civilian rabbis' influence over their students-soldiers and to instill military motivation.

4. The quest for bargaining power vis-à-vis the supreme command and the need to obtain legitimacy from civilian rabbis encouraged the Military Rabbinate to act as an independent agent of military socialization. Dispensing theological propaganda derived from alternative military ethics in the Gaza campaigns is a

case in point. Another display of independence is in the field of education, where the Military Rabbinate not only became involved in educational activities previously exclusive to the Education Corps, but also promoted ideological values without the explicit approval of the supreme command.⁹⁷ For example, the rabbinate sponsored tours for soldiers in East Jerusalem in collaboration with a right-wing association (*Elad*) involved in the acquisition of property and settlement there; in this way, soldiers were not taught to honor religious tolerance. The rabbinate also disseminates material defining the borders of Israel according to theological themes.⁹⁸ Furthermore, in an attempt to imbue the Palestinian-Israeli conflict with religious symbols, the Military Rabbinate in 2012 released an educational document that featured a photo of Jerusalem's Temple Mount without the Dome of the Rock.⁹⁹ Also in 2012, the Military Rabbinate published a pamphlet stating: "The idea that views non-Jews as having equal rights in the state goes against the Torah, and no representative of the state is authorized to act against the will of the Torah."¹⁰⁰ This was a clearly theocratic text that challenged the state's authority and was accordingly banned from distribution.

In sum, the Military Rabbinate functions as a powerful, relatively independent, quasi-state agency. It is guided by theological sources, and even derives its legitimacy from civilian religious institutions whose agenda to influence military deployment is clear. By expanding its roles, the Military Rabbinate has become a significant agent of a socialization that affects the conduct of secular and religious soldiers and their commanders and presents an alternative military ethic, derived from theological writings, and challenging the formal authorities. Once again, external religious authorities operate in tandem with the military authorities, in this case to socialize the troops and shape military ethics.

The Impact on Civilian Control

The previous section documented how religious institutions have penetrated the IDF, a traditionally secular institution in Israel. This religious intervention has several effects pertinent to civilian control:

1. The IDF, having acknowledged the legitimate role of rabbis to instruct their students to obey or disobey orders, came to regard the rabbis as a legitimate party to negotiate their students' deployment in religiously disputed regions, in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Accordingly, it adapted its doctrine of deployment to satisfy the rabbis' demands in a way that risked its ability to carry out missions as instructed by the political authorities. Expanded religious influence challenged the legitimacy of elected state institutions to make decisions and impeded their implementation by influencing religious soldiers to disobey orders or at least to negotiate their compliance. Obstructing the IDF's ability to dismantle settlements may thwart any political will to resolve the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In a nutshell, the IDF is the only military among other militaries in democratic countries that has subordinated essential aspects of its conduct to religious authorities.

2. During the Gaza disengagement, the IDF accepted the extension of issues of purely military discipline into the theological domain by mobilizing the military chief rabbi to legitimize theologically the deployment of troops to dismantle settlements.¹⁰¹ For the first time, military discipline in operations (not just religious observance) was subjected to theological considerations and authority. Rather than arguing that such decisions were outside the theological domain, the chief rabbi engaged himself with this issue. Given the potential for more cases of disobedience in future removals of settlers in the more religiously sensitive West Bank, the supreme command increased its dependency on the legitimization services provided by the Military Rabbinate, which is a quasi-state agency.
3. Religious authorities played a key role in shaping human resources policies: they came to be accepted by the IDF as a legitimate party with whom to negotiate the formulation and supervision of gender policies on the micro and macro levels. Consequently, equal integration of women was hindered, contrary to the requirement of the Security Service Law (amended in 2000) that was intended to ensure equal opportunity for women in the IDF.
4. The Military Rabbinate expanded its role in the socialization of soldiers and its influence in the theological shaping of military ethics, even though it functions as a quasi-state agency that derives its legitimization from civilian rabbis. It thus presents an alternative military ethic derived from theological writings and challenging the formal authorities.

In these domains, the rabbis functioned not just as religious leaders, affecting policymaking simply by bargaining with the military command or its civilian controllers (as other interest groups do), but provided an alternative source of authority to that of the state, and in many cases challenged the state. Nor did they function as religious commissars serving the regime: the rabbis derived their authority by calling on God who, they maintained, prohibited territorial concessions, prescribed the holiness of the camp with chaste women, and dictated the rules of war. To constrain policies according to their worldview, the rabbis leveraged their influence on their students-soldiers. The cases in which religious soldiers pushed back against orders by threatening to refuse to uproot settlers or to serve with women reinforced the rabbis' bargaining power vis-à-vis the military.

As further validation of this conclusion, it should be noted that the influence of these religious authorities spread beyond the units in which religious soldiers were highly concentrated and affected the entire military. Let us recall that religious soldiers are not contained within special units:¹⁰² in the domains mapped here, the rabbis affected the deployment doctrine of all units, the general status of women, the military ethics of all units, and the socialization of secular soldiers. To the extent that religious soldiers served in mixed units, the rabbis' overall influence increased. Tentatively

speaking, if religious soldiers were contained in special units, women could serve with fewer limitations in the other, “secular” units.

As the principles of civilian control prescribe, the appropriate way to influence the military is by political negotiation leading to formal decisions such as legislation and executive directives. Formal processes take place when elected civilians shape the military culture and deployment, even adapted to religious requirements, such as in policies of religious diversity (e.g., respecting dietary rules and religious apparel). Extreme religious requirements cannot be reconciled with democratic imperatives, however, and so the power of religious authorities expands informally.

Indeed, the secular majority in Israel is less likely to accept legislation or formal directives that (1) subordinate military deployment to consultation with rabbis, (2) limit women’s positions in the military for religious reasons, and (3) formalize the Military Rabbinate’s role of educating secular soldiers and changing military ethics. Informal practices may be more tolerable. Thus religious influence has expanded through informal routes in which religious authorities operate in tandem with the civilly sanctioned military system.

It is important to note that the processes described here did not spark significant resistance from either liberal and feminist organizations or the soldiers themselves. Public opinion resisted expanded religious power only when an extreme degree of religious coercion became evident. Only then did the high command impose policies backed by public opinion and provide the tools with which to contain the religious influence. Examples cited in this article include women’s exclusion, women’s singing, the circulation of theological propaganda in Operation Cast Lead, the stripping of the status of hesder yeshiva from a school whose head encouraged disobedience, and the punishing of refuseniks. However, elected officials have not played a pivotal role in monitoring the military. For example, in 2005, the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women discussed the first signs of women’s exclusion in the IDF,¹⁰³ but it did not hold a follow-up meeting until 2011, when public protest mounted.¹⁰⁴

What accounts for this lack of public interest? Since the 1990s, Israel has turned to selective recruitment within the confines of conscription. Conscription encourages voice over exit: voice in the form of protest and other modes of collective action are favored when those involved have limited alternatives.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, in a vocational or semivocational army in which free choice plays a greater role, exit in the form of opting out of the recruitment system is the more favorable option.¹⁰⁶ To this we must add the declining numbers of the secular middle class in combat units since the 1980s.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the secular middle class has lost much of its interest in the military, giving the IDF command greater freedom of action and reinforcing its already powerful autonomy vis-à-vis elected civilians.¹⁰⁸ Concerning religious influence, informality has prevailed and created gray areas hidden from the public eye. Because unorganized soldiers lacked support from external, civilian allies and served in a hierarchical organization, secular soldiers, including women, did not resist this religious engagement. Some of them, particularly Mizrahi soldiers (whose parents emigrated from Arab countries), were imbued with Jewish traditional values and hence open to and tolerant of religious practices.¹⁰⁹ Public apathy and apathy among the ranks were mutually reinforcing.

As I have said, the IDF compromised its freedom of action and tolerated the religious influence for several reasons. First, the senior command has operated since the late 1980s on the assumption that it is dependent on the religious sector to fill its combat units with high-quality personnel. Therefore, it encouraged religious diversity. However, the more the religious sector has translated its power into demands that seek to reshape the military's culture and policies to make them more religious, the more the military has compromised its freedom of action in order to guarantee an uninterrupted flow of manpower from the religious communities.¹¹⁰

Second, religious values diffused from the social sphere into the military. The failure of the effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the outbreak of new hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (2000–2005), viewed as a struggle between Jews and non-Jews, reinforced Jewish identification on the Israeli side and strengthened a religious, or at least a nonsecular, identity.¹¹¹ This process, paired with the definition of the state as Jewish and democratic by the Basic Laws that were passed in 1992, privileged the status of religion in the military and the empowerment of the Military Rabbinate.¹¹² Against this background, it is small wonder that even secular soldiers tolerated religious practices such as public prayer.

Third, religion was used to motivate sacrifices when IDF commanders acknowledged the need to deal with the secular middle class's declining motivation to sacrifice in the military, which was aggravated during the 1990s. In 2002 the military took the unprecedented step of drafting a document, *Identity and Purpose*, that defined its collective identity as the military of the Jewish democratic state. The military is tasked with the mission of strengthening Jewish identity and enhancing the connection of the commanders and the soldiers to their land, values, heritage, and people. By bolstering the association between soldiering and Jewishness, the IDF created the infrastructure to privilege the status of religion, whose believers already have a firm grounding in values, and to privilege the status of chaplains as those that have the appropriate toolkit for educating soldiers. The influence of rabbis, both military and those heading the hesder yeshivas and the pre-military academies, increased significantly.¹¹³

Furthermore, as the IDF command came to tolerate religious influence informally, toleration of the daily practices described here was even more significant at the field level. After all, it is this echelon that allowed the rabbis to preach to the troops and encouraged their educational activity, excluded women,¹¹⁴ and negotiated the soldiers' compliance with the rabbis.

Was the IDF unaware of the implications of this expanded influence? As the analysis shows, the IDF has been guided by short-term interests. It traded autonomy for an inflow of perceived high-quality manpower and used religion to motivate sacrifice; the military was simply dragged into the situation described here. Furthermore, it favored its main combat task (to fill the ranks with highly motivated religious combatants) over its second-priority task, policing the settlers. Signs that the IDF was aware of the cost of this religious influence appeared in 2015 when IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot revealed his intention to curtail the powers of the Military Rabbinate, viewing its empowerment as "taking things too far."¹¹⁵ It is premature, however, to assess the extent to which this intention has been translated into reality.

In sum, civilian control was partly undermined. True, the subordination of the military to elected civilians has remained intact and the supreme command has been mostly secular. Furthermore, the elected governments could resist extreme right-wing pressures to display more aggressiveness in the West Bank and Gaza, because this power generally arises from the relations between politicians and generals and the power structure of the political system, rather than from the social makeup of the military. Although there is no indication of any serious undermining of civilian control, external religious authorities operate informally within the formal chain of command and in tandem with the formal authorities that manage the military affairs. They affect policies according to their worldview by leveraging their influence on religious soldiers. Partnerships in shaping military deployment, human resources policies, military ethics and the mode of military socialization are all deviations from the democratic norms of civilian control. Furthermore, such intervention lays the foundation for the future thwarting of the popular will (at least potentially) to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by evicting thousands of Jews in the West Bank. What is crucial is not just blocking militant initiatives, but the elected civilians' power to initiate concessions and to check the troops' aggressiveness once the army has been deployed to fight.

One may be tempted to correlate the empowerment of religious soldiers with the empowerment of the national religious party ("The Jewish Home") since 2013, when its leaders became senior cabinet members. However, the religious sector's power in the military increased even during the decline in the parliamentary power of the national religious sector during the 1990s and 2000s.

This party's agenda, moreover, seems quite congruent with that of the religious sector in the military and its rabbinical leadership. Parts of the civilian regime support this sector's activities for their own purposes, so we could argue that civilian control is not affected. However, the religious politicians have often acted in defiance of civilian control. For example, they campaigned on behalf of religious officers who were investigated over war crimes.¹¹⁶ Likewise, in Operation Protective Edge, the party's leader, cabinet minister Naftali Bennett, collected secret operational intelligence passed along by the former IDF chief rabbi, who joined the troops. Bennett used this information to bash the prime minister and defense minister for what he viewed as the indecisive conduct of the operation.¹¹⁷ In the end, religious leaders and soldiers endeavor to lock in the right-wing nationalist agenda by setting obstacles to the future dismantling of settlements, at the cost of thwarting the potential political will.

Conclusions

I have used the case of Israel to map the complexity of the engagement of religious authorities in the management of the military and to study its implications for civil-military relations.

On the surface, Israel is unique in that it has a conscript military in which both religious and nonreligious individuals serve, and is therefore permeable to religious influences from the surrounding society. It is also a country engaged in a protracted war in which religious values are involved. No less important, Israel lacks a separation

between church and state and thus faces an enduring tension between democracy and the Torah-based religion, which by definition is nondemocratic.¹¹⁸ Israel is therefore particularly exposed to the intervention of religious authorities into the military to the detriment of democratic procedures.

Nevertheless, even in countries where the separation of church and state is more established than in Israel, volunteer forces are exposed to religious values in the military, because the latter must guarantee religious diversity if they are to attract religious enlistees.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, modern theocracy manifests itself in attempts to formulate relatively closed, dogmatic civil religions, evident as in the United States and Britain following 9/11;¹²⁰ indeed, the portrayal of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as religious wars makes the case of Israel less unique.

Because religious authorities represent the particularistic interests of their institutions, we could view their attempts to increase their power within the military as just another aspect of subjective control, in Huntington's terms. In the case of religious authorities, however, deviation from the normative principles of civilian control is significantly higher: unlike other sectoral groups that may claim to represent the general will, religious authorities' source of legitimacy is God, a supernatural referent.¹²¹ Given that theocratic reasoning may diminish deliberation in the public sphere,¹²² the same theocratic features may also sway the judgment of soldiers and officers when religious authorities operate in the military and are allowed to use theocratic language to influence their followers. They may then claim a source of authority alternative to that of the state and of the formal chain of command. It follows that the direct impact of religious authorities undermines civilian control.

In a combination of purely subjective control and expanded religious influence in the military, religious authorities override the formal authorities in charge of the military. However, this combination rarely occurs. Dual hierarchies are more familiar in which the regime controls the military by creating mechanisms of control operated by religious authorities, paralleling the normal military chain of command. Religious authorities can then engage in the religious and political socialization of the troops without affecting decision making. This model typified the Parliament's army of England in the mid-seventeenth century, as an indirect mechanism of control by the Parliament vis-à-vis the King.¹²³ In a different manner, the postrevolutionary Iranian military was supervised by the Ideological-Political Directorate, whose role was not only to engage in religious socialization but also to influence promotion and other military-related matters in parallel to the formal chain of command.¹²⁴ This pattern is similar to what Robin Luckham termed *apparat control*, operated by political commissars to ensure the loyalty of the ranks to the regime.¹²⁵

Neither *apparat control* nor subjective control is typical in industrialized democracies, in which a unified chain of command is a hallmark principles of civilian control. More typical are forms of extra-institutional control that operate in tandem with formal, institutional control. Extra-institutional control refers to actions generally taken by nonbureaucratic actors, such as interest groups (including religious institutions), that act in the public sphere in an attempt to bargain with the military or restrain it, and are ultimately effective at narrowing the military's professional autonomous space.¹²⁶

Interest groups monitoring the military may be a kind of “fire alarm” that alerts the elected civilians or the supreme command whenever lower level commanders allegedly misbehave.¹²⁷ Indeed, in order to assure that politicians and generals express the public will, civilian control aims at effectively limiting their autonomy to deploy the military; extra-institutional control may thus represent the public will by engaging the public in monitoring the military. However, when the particular interests of such groups reign supreme, when they occupy powerful positions and have direct influence on their sons serving in the military, extra-institutional control may result in the partial “subjectivization” of control.¹²⁸

The case of Israel illustrates this extreme form of extra-institutional control, represented by the religious influence on informal practices enacted at the field level. Civilian chaplains affiliated with extramilitary institutions bargain with the military in an attempt to narrow the scope of its professional autonomy and the autonomy of its political supervisors. These extra-institutional actors, the rabbis, leverage their influence on their students-soldiers to affect policies and, in turn, reinforce the bargaining power of religious soldiers vis-à-vis the field command. Consequently, rather than informal bargaining, we have seen here a type of co-management of some military affairs. Religious authorities do not simply bargain but operate in parallel with the formal chain of command and have partial influence on specific military matters. Furthermore, rather than alerting the command to deviations from what they saw as normative behavior—the typical fire alarm—the rabbis often intervened operationally. By using a discourse that called on God, this type of intervention also signified, in part, the religious subversion of civilian control.

The engagement of religious nonstate actors with a theocratic agenda impairs normative civilian control and could even thwart the public will. Furthermore, even if the public will is reflected in the directives that elected officials attempt to enforce on the military, the implementation of these directives may be obstructed if there is no clear and unified hierarchy of command. In general, moreover, the military’s influence on policy and its ability to shirk its duty can increase when civilian powers disagree among themselves.¹²⁹ Military influence is more pronounced when the intramilitary hierarchy of command is fractured and parts of the military can ally with parts of the civilian regime. An illustration of this case is the alliance between the religious party and the religious sector in the IDF. The undermining of control is even more significant because the operation of religious authorities is informal and hence not monitored publicly. More formal modes of operation can be the norm only when religious authorities serve the regime, as apparat control suggests, or when the military and its civilian supervisors officially choose to expand religious influence in the ranks. Neither option, however, can (yet) be the norm in industrialized democracies.

This conceptualization of religious influence on civilian control in Israel offers a framework for dealing with comparable phenomena in other countries. Much as in Israel, in Britain and United States religious authorities operate in parallel with the formal chain of command and have partial influence in specific military matters. They challenge the elected civilians and their subordinate formal command rather than serve as their emissaries. Levels of influence and challenges are significantly higher in Israel

than in other militaries in industrialized democracies, but in all cases the intention of these religious authorities is to influence the entire military, not just specific sectors. Expanding this comparative outlook may be a promising avenue for future study.

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