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Beyond the Conventional Civil–Military "Gap": Cleavages and Convergences in Israel

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Abstract

This article modifies the framework for the analysis of civil–military "gaps" proposed in *Armed Forces & Society* (Vol. 38, 2012) by Rahbek-Clemmensen, Archer, Barr, Belkin, Guerro, Hall, and Swain, who depicted a continuum of four binary fissures ("gap dimensions") dividing two hypothetically homogeneous communities: civilians *versus* military personnel. Extrapolating from Israel's experience, this article instead visualizes a more dynamic and fissured landscape, inhabited by several hetero-geneous clusters of population groups, each comprising impromptu coalitions drawn from both the armed forces and civilian society. That environment, we argue, although certainly influenced by the traditional penetrability of Israel's civil–military boundaries, more directly reflects current technological and cultural processes, which are transforming encounters between civilians and military personnel in other countries too. We therefore suggest replacing the predominantly dichot-omous taxonomies that generally characterize studies of civil–military relations in contemporary democratic societies with the fractured format observed in the Israeli case.

Keywords

civil military relations, methodology, military culture, Israel

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Recent research has considerably advanced understanding of the so-called gap between societies and armed forces in many liberal democracies. Progress owes much to a conceptual innovation proposed in 2012 by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. Rather than simply citing instances of civil–military estrangement, they advised that students should be "more explicit about their conceptualization" and specify the areas of public life, in which civilian and military sectors are drifting apart (Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012, p. 670). Principally on the basis of prior literature relating to the United States, they identified four such "gap dimensions," each of which poses an individual query.

(1) *Cultural*: Do civilians and soldiers adhere to similar values and follow similar lifestyles? (2) *Demographic*: Does the composition of the military accurately mirror the overall complexion of the civilian population in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, etc? (3) *Policy preferences*: When contemplating possible courses of national action, do military and civilian elites seek similar objectives? and (4) *Institutional*: Are relationships between military and civilian bodies generally harmonious or conflictual?

This article suggests modifying that taxonomy. Referencing Israel, a country in which societal–military relationships have for some time been undergoing multiple shifts (S. Cohen, 2008), we propose the following adjustments:

- Renaming the "institutional" dimension of enquiry "institutional–occupational," an enlargement designed to incorporate the changes wrought in the professional pursuits of the increasing numbers of soldiers and civilians who now rely on similar skills and tools when performing their respective tasks.
- Rearranging the order in which the individual dimensions are analyzed in a sequence that reflects the chronological order of their appearance. The impression conveyed by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. is that all four dimensions appear simultaneously. By contrast, we suggest sensitizing the framework to historical processes, principally by adopting a sequential approach that reflects how each successive dimension of the civil–military relationship overlays its predecessor as time goes by. (That said, a cautionary note is in order. Only rarely does the evidence indicate that the advent of one "gap" directly instigates the arrival of another. In Israel, certainly, the order and timing of the sequence usually depend on exogenous circumstances. Further research is required in order to ascertain whether such is also the case elsewhere.)
- Most significantly of all, we recommend abandoning the rigidly dichotomous framework adopted by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., who depict a continuum of binary fissures dividing two distinct and hypothetically homogeneous communities: civilians on one side and men and women in uniform on the other (Table 1). By contrast, extrapolating from Israel's experience, we argue that within each of the "gap dimensions," a dual dynamic operates. In some

Table 1. Civil–Military "Gap Dimensions" (Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., 2012).

Categories of analysis

Cultural	Demographics	Policy preference	Institutional
	[no chronological sequence presented]		

Basic design

Binary differences between civilians and military personnel in all four categories.

Table 2. Civil–Military "Encounters" (Cohen & Cohen, 2020).

Categories of analysis
In order of chronological appearance (from left to right)

Policy preference			
	Demographics		
		Institutional–occupational	
			Cultural

Basic design

Differences between contending civil–military coalitions within each encounter category

areas of public concern, diverse segments of society are indeed distancing themselves from individual aspects of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conduct. But simultaneously, and often with respect to the same issues, other civilian groups are forming impromptu coalitions with sections of the military complement. What emerges, consequently, is a fractured environment inhabited by multiple clusters of both civilians and military personnel, whose interactions—because they involve harmony as well as conflict—warrant depiction as civil–military "encounters" rather than "gaps" (Table 2). This composite format, we submit, offers an alternative to the dichotomous design implicit in the pioneering single-country studies of democratic civil–military relations, which focused on north America and western Europe (e.g., Bacevich, 2011; E. Cohen, 2000; Feaver & Kohn, 2000; Holsti, 1999; Strachan, 2003; Vennesson, 2003; cf. Dempsey, 2016).

Our argument proceeds in three stages. First, we address the conditions responsible for the progressively compound character of civil–military relationships in Israel. Examining all of the Rahbek-Clemmensen categories in order of their chronological appearance, we thereafter illustrate the heterogeneity of the groups relevant to each. Finally, we discuss possible implications of the Israeli instance for comparable studies of other democracies.

The Compound Character of Civil–Military Relationships in Israel

Ever since its establishment in 1948, Israel has been called a "nation in arms," a designation said to reflect the intimacy of relationships between personnel in the IDF and the citizenry they protect. Although that terminology was never entirely accurate, since it ignored the significant minorities, Jewish and non-Jewish, who do not enlist (for details, see below), empathy with the armed forces was and remains a foundational element of mainstream Israeli citizenship. Moreover, and as several studies long ago demonstrated, a persistent sense of military threat, together with the retention of conscription for most youngsters of both sexes, has ensured that civil–military boundaries in Israel remain exceptionally porous (Etzioni-Halevy, 1996; Lissak, 1983, 1993; Schiff, 2009, pp. 109–125). One symptom of that situation is the "militarization" of Israeli political life, demonstrated by the high proportion of senior military personnel who after retirement have been elected to Israel's parliament (the *Knesset*), as were 13 of the 21 chiefs of staff (CoSs) who served between 1948 and 2019. Likewise relevant, conversely, is the simultaneous "civilianization" of the armed forces. In recent decades, especially, the IDF has exhibited marked corporate sensitivity to pressures exerted by the multiple nongovernmental citizen groups who energetically expose its alleged wrongdoings, often in the Supreme Court (S. Cohen, 2007).

Senior officers are clearly disconcerted by the overtly critical tone increasingly typical of such interventions, which contrasts sharply with the untarnished public praise once lavished on the Force. Even while ritually reasserting the IDF's iconic claim to be "a people's army," several recent CoSs have voiced suspicions that civil–military relations in Israel have turned a corner. The latest to do so was Lieutenant-General Gadi Eisenkot (2019; IDF CoS, 2015–2019) who in his valedictory address explicitly queried the resilience of the ties binding Israelis to their armed forces.

Central to the argument of this article is the observation that not even when expressed most bluntly do such sentiments prove that Israel is witnessing the emergence of a straightforward civil–military "gap," defined by binary cleavages between persons who do and perform military service. Instead, what the evidence indicates is that relations between the armed forces and society are becoming increasingly complex, a process nicely illustrated by the duality that now characterizes polls of public confidence in military behavior. Critical research has long signaled the possible deceptiveness of reports that domestic trust in the IDF "remains generally high and stable" (Hermann, 2018, p. 102; Tiargan-Orr & Eran-Jona, 2016, p. 328). A study published in 2015, for instance, showed that once attention shifted from the IDF's battlefield performance to the deficiencies that occasionally mar its record of economic and personnel management, societal regard dropped sharply (Eran-Jona, 2015). A current example tells the same tale. In the winter of 2019, when investigative journalists discovered that the IDF Manpower Branch had been selectively inflating recruitment figures, Lieutenant-General Aviv Kochavi (2019;

appointed CoS earlier that year) felt compelled to defuse the outcry by publicizing an immediate apology. In doing so, he implicitly acknowledged the applicability to Israel of a finding not long ago ascertained with reference to the U.S. military (Brooks, 2016). Civilian esteem and censure are not mutually exclusive. Often they exist in tandem.

The intrinsically compound nature of Israeli civil–military relationships is further underscored by their spectrum. Preparedness and operations are not the only military topics of public concern. Apprehensions are more frequently occasioned by quotidian service subjects, ranging from gender integration to religious instruction. Superficially, those issues might appear only tangentially related to the primary function of armed forces. But because the confrontations which they fuel reflect rival cultural attachments and ideological preferences, they foster competing interpretations of the IDF's very identity and societal purpose.

Israel's experience indicates that such clashes are most likely to occur when nations comprising communities from diverse ethnic backgrounds and shades of religious conviction sense a need to reformulate the behavioral norms expected of their members, soldiers, and civilians alike. In Israel, pressures of that kind have accumulated over an extended period, primarily in response to three stimulants.

One is an ongoing cultural transformation that, beginning in the mid-1970s, has eroded the hegemony of Israel's traditional elites and facilitated the emergence of a more pluralistic milieu (Kimmerling, 2001; Smooha, 1978). Besides undermining societal commitment to collectivist ideologies once considered bedrocks of Israeli national identity, this process has also incrementally sapped citizen support for institutions (e.g., the *kibbutz*) that to earlier generations epitomized Zionist values (Weissbrod, 2013). Some observers fear that it might now be fracturing attitudes toward the IDF too (Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019, p. xv).

A second cause for the liquefaction of Israel's civil–military harmony is the change in the IDF's operational agenda, which ever since the Lebanon campaign of 1982 has been dominated by repeated rounds of attritional "new war" battles against assorted Palestinian foes. These engagements have progressively challenged clear-cut moral judgements about good (Israeli) and bad (Arab) contestants, of the sort commonly voiced during the conventional wars of 1967 and 1973. Recent operations, especially those affecting Palestinian noncombatants in the Occupied Territories and Gaza, have instead regularly invited divisive domestic debates over the morality and legality of IDF conduct as well as its efficacy (Ben-Eliezer, 2012; Eastwood, 2017).

The opportunity now available for the virtually unlimited expression of rival opinions constitutes the third, and often most influential, stimulant to change. Thanks to the communications revolution and proliferating social media networks, demands for accountability travel faster, wider, and less expensively than ever before. Civilian groups intent on mobilizing protest against alleged failings by Israeli government agencies, the IDF included, no longer need to create large and costly organizational infrastructures for that purpose (Wiesslitz, 2019, pp. 65–90).

Neither do veterans. As is demonstrated by "Breaking the Silence," an organization founded in 2004 by IDF reservists determined to expose the realities of duties in the Occupied Territories, social networking can create relatively large audiences for messages contesting the majoritarian domestic view of the IDF as "the most moral army in the world" (Grassiani, 2009).

Cleavages and Conjunctions

The processes outlined above have not only accentuated the compound character of civil–military encounters in Israel. More consequentially, they also augment the penetrability of the country's nominal boundaries of civil–military affiliation. Certainly, that development cannot erase all civil–military divergences. But it does facilitate a contrary process of convergence, manifest when individual civilians and soldiers sense that, in a specific area of civil–military relevance, their affiliations coincide.

In the following paragraphs, we illustrate the bifurcate rhythm of cleavage and conjunction in each of the four dimensions of civil–military relationships (here, as already noted, termed "encounters") identified by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al.

Policy Preference Encounters

Differences over policy preferences supplied the earliest evidence of civil–military cleavage in Israel, surfacing within weeks of the State's creation. In June 1948, in the midst of the War of Independence, four members of the general staff resigned their posts, in protest at the manner in which David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, was directing the campaign and handling senior military appointments (Peri, 1983, pp. 54–55). Momentarily, a similar scenario loomed during the tense week prior to the outbreak of the Six Days' War in 1967, when several senior officers berated Prime Minister Eshkol for withholding authorization to attack the Egyptian forces massing on the southern border (Gluska, 2007, pp. 196–201). Those episodes, however, proved exceptional. True, over the years, numerous other policy dilemmas have likewise deeply divided the civil–military leadership that comprises Israel's "defense establishment" (Freilich, 2012). But, to date, never again have policy divergences divided soldiers from politicians. On the contrary, studies indicate that alignments invariably follow what Peri (2006) termed a "symbiotic pattern." In order to bolster their advocacy of a particular policy choice, individual Cabinet ministers—on both sides of the hawk–dove divide—unabashedly court like-minded senior military personnel, before and after their retirement. Simultaneously, individual serving officers with operational agendas lobby potentially sympathetic members of government.

Notwithstanding their borderline constitutional propriety, such practices have not resulted in the creation of a unified military faction in Israeli politics. As a group, members of the IDF officer corps have never committed themselves to a specific

brand of national ideology. Individually, rather, they have displayed a kaleidoscopic assortment of political orientations, with many joining, and sometimes heading, any one of the large variety of parties and factions, on both the left and right of the political spectrum, which periodically enliven Israel's parliamentary landscape (Ben-Meir, 1995).[1] Largely as a result, Israeli debates over policy preferences, whether conducted *in camera* or in public fora, invariably reflect variances that are as much intra-military as intra-civil.

Demographic Encounters

A focus on demographics, the second "gap dimension" identified by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al., shifts attention from differences between civil and military elites to discrepancies between the composition of the military and that of the civilian population overall. In Israel, this topic began to generate public concern during the 1990s when it first became apparent that, despite the country's continued nominal adherence to universal conscription, its military participation ratios had begun to decline (S. Cohen, 1995).

More recently, that trend has accelerated, principally in response to the IDF's attempts to cut personnel costs by adopting unabashedly selective recruitment policies. Whereas in 2004, 22.8% of Jewish men eligible for conscript service received exemptions from duty for one reason or another, as did 39.8% of Jewish women in the same age cohort; by 2016, the proportions had climbed to 28.4% and 41.9%, respectively (IDF Manpower Report, 2016).[2] After induction, a further 17% of men and 40% of women were discharged after just 3 months of service, mostly on grounds of redundancy. Among reservists, differentials between those citizens who are summoned to fulfill their military obligations and those excused from doing so are even starker. In 2014, of 2.1 million potential male reservists (i.e., Israeli residents aged 20–41 who had completed conscript terms), 75% were entirely discharged from duty; only 6% had performed annual stints of 20 days of service during the previous 3 years. Reports that in 2017 the latter number declined to just 5% (Levy, 2011) strengthened the impression that, in demographic terms, the civil–military "gap" in Israel was becoming almost as wide as in countries that had moved (or reverted) to an all-volunteer force.

Closer inspection of the figures mandates a refinement of so sweeping a generalization. Primarily, this is because shortfalls in the performance of military service are not spread evenly throughout Israeli society. Although very pronounced in some sectors, in others they are fast disappearing.

"Demographic civil–military gaps" are most manifest among Muslim Arabs (approximately 17% of all Israeli citizens) and ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) Jews (approximately 12%). On the supposition that they would never fight coreligionists, Muslim Arab men have always received collective exemptions. *Haredi* males are granted individual "deferments" (a euphemism for discharge) in deference to their insistence on the priority, national and personal, of full-time study of Judaism's

sacred texts. Women in both communities are exempted *en bloc*, on the grounds that military service would conflict with their traditional lifestyles.

Whereas the application of conscription to Muslim Arabs disappeared from Israel's public agenda after a brief appearance in the mid-1950s (Krebs, 2006, pp. 44–114), the nonservice of *haredi* males has in recent decades become a highly contentious topic, generating accusations that it undermines the principle of equitable service upon which universal conscription rests. Statistics fuel the controversy. Even according to IDF reports (which, as noted above, are now considered too generous) under 2,500 *haredim* enlisted in 2018. Over twice that number, comprising about 13% of the IDF's total male potential, is annually excused the draft. The cumulative effect is striking. An overwhelming preponderance of *haredim* now above the age of 18 has never performed a single day of military service. Since the pace of future *haredi* enlistment will undoubtedly continue to lag behind the *haredi* birth rate (presently 4.5% per annum, 3 times the national Jewish average) that majority is predicted to grow even further (Malach, 2016).

While the demographic contribution of *haredim* to the IDF is thus fast contracting, other segments of the Jewish population are shouldering greatly increased shares of Israel's military burden. Women's service provides a conspicuous example. Ever since 1995, when in a landmark decision, Israel's Supreme Court compelled the IDF to rescind its refusal to accept female candidates to the fighter pilot training course solely because of their gender, women have become an increasingly visible component of the IDF's overall combat complement. During the first two decades of the 21st century, the proportion of female recruits assigned to clerical duties, once a virtually automatic posting, declined to just 10%. Instead, thanks to the rise in the percentage of military occupations pronounced gender-neutral (from 55% in the late 1980s to 92% since 2012), they are increasingly being offered combat postings, an opportunity that many seize. In the ground forces alone, the number of women combat personnel climbed from just 435 in 2005 to over 2,600 in 2017 (Shafran Gittleman, 2018).

Equally dramatic are recent changes in the military service patterns of two other population segments, which partly overlap. One consists of children of immigrants from oriental lands (*mizrachiyim*), a community long disadvantaged both economically and educationally. The other is the "national-religious" population, an especially heterogeneous sector containing Jews of both Oriental and European origin, who adhere to a "modern orthodox" religious lifestyle.

Neither *mizrachiyim* (who comprise roughly 50% of the Jewish population) nor the national-religious (14–17%) subscribe to the *haredi* stance of resistance to military service. Nevertheless, until recently, even males in both groups played subsidiary roles in Israel's armed forces. During the first decades of its history, the IDF's most prestigious combat formations were principally staffed by sons of the secular and predominantly *ashkenazi* (European) bourgeoisie, who also dominated Israel's political, economic, and cultural life. But that is no longer the case. Male scions of the old elites are now demonstrating greater reluctance to perform frontline duty,

which many shirk by resorting to quasi-legal ploys. By contrast, the ranks of the most populous IDF combat units are being increasingly filled by groups once considered "peripheral" military assets—*mizrachiyim,* new immigrants from Ethiopia and, especially, young people (including women) from national-religious homes. A similar momentum also affects the profile of the IDF's junior officer corps, which the same groups are likewise beginning to populate.

From the perspective of this study, why those transformations have occurred (a question first comprehensively addressed in Levy, 2007) is less relevant than their consequences. In segments of society whose numerical contribution to Israel's defensive capabilities is visibly expanding, the civil–military "gap" is not widening at all; rather, it is fast contracting. Thanks to the increase in the numbers of service personnel from *mizrachi*, national-religious and new immigrant backgrounds, a growing proportion of families in those sectors now possess a personal stake in troop welfare. Inevitably, more also have had cause to participate in Israel's military bereavement discourse (Levy, 2012). One consequence is that these population groups have thus become increasingly distinct from their *haredi* counterparts who, as noted, now rarely have any contact with the IDF whatsoever. Another (to which we shall have cause to return) is that the IDF has altogether become a less homogenous institution than was once the case, a development that necessarily affects its ability to maintain its own cultural unity.

Institutional–Occupational Encounters

Initially, the influx of *mizrachiyim* and national-religious youngsters into IDF combat units generated forecasts that Israel's military complement would soon be totally transformed. Cassandras warned of a "revolving door" effect: The rise in the quantity of formerly peripheral groups enlisting in fighting formations would be matched—and perhaps even outpaced—by the numbers of secular bourgeois *ashkenazim* evading military service of any kind. Hence, the ranks would be dominated by recruits from underprivileged and/or national-religious homes.

That prediction has not materialized. Partly this is because for various reasons—family traditions, sense of patriotic duty, and desire for self-fulfillment—many recruits from the traditional elites still continue, albeit in smaller numbers, to seek postings to infantry and armor formations and prestigious air and naval units. But a more important cause for the maintenance of the IDF's overall sociological balance is the recent proliferation of alternative military assignments, especially in intelligence and other combat-support formations, the growth of which reflects the Force's adoption since the mid-1990s of an increasingly technologically intensive design (Marcus, 2018, pp. 127–184). The abundance of such openings means that young Israeli men and women no longer confront a stark choice between the inconveniences and dangers of frontline duty and the lingering stigma still associated with draft dodging. Instead, they can now apply for newly available combat-support postings, which blend stimulating (and comparatively risk-free) military service

with professional training that can subsequently be marketed in the civilian work-place. Significantly, appreciation of the new opportunities for what one study terms "quasi-evasion" (Adres et al., 2012) is not limited to the sons and daughters of the *ashkenazi* secular bourgeoisie. Mindful of future career prospects, national-religious and *mizrachi* parents likewise encourage their offspring to apply for acceptance to hi-tech units (Levi, 2018).

In several other advanced Western militaries, efforts to train and retain specialists in the rapidly expanding range of new military occupations have long been said to undermine many traditional features of civil–military relationships (Boene, 1990; Dandeker, 1994; Downes, 1985; Moskos et al., 2000; Nuciari, 1994; Snider & Watkins, 2000). The more armed forces come to rely on communications techni-cians, computer programmers and analysts, physicists, economists, mathematicians, media consultants, and logistic specialists—all personnel tasked with duties that in many essentials are indistinguishable from those undertaken by their professional counterparts in civilian employment—the less unique men and women in uniform appear to be. Combat troops, whose principal otherness from their fellow citizens lies in that they are trained to kill lawfully designated enemies and can be punished for not doing so, necessarily remain distinct from mainstream civilian society. But "fighters," in the traditional sense, no longer define the culture of the entire military complement. Neither do they exemplify today's military professional. On the con-trary, for many categories of personnel, the benchmark for assessments of profes-sional performance is now set not by the military institution whose uniform they wear but by civilian professional associations to which they aspire to belong. In the terms used in Moskos's (1986) seminal study, their reference groups are not located within the military organization but consist of persons engaged in comparable tasks in the civilian marketplace.

Of the several structural features predisposing the IDF to such trends, perhaps the most powerful is that, in Israel, the institutional "gap" identified by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. has always been indistinct. Unlike many other militaries, the IDF has never possessed its own university, law school, or teaching hospital—all institutions capable of accentuating civil–military disparities with respect to fields of interest and specialization. IDF lawyers, doctors, engineers, and statisticians have always been graduates of civilian academies, to which "lateral transfers" are alto-gether an entrenched practice. As early as the 1950s, Ben-Gurion encouraged the establishment of the "academic reserve," an arrangement whereby the IDF financed the university studies of exceptionally talented high school pupils in return for their commitment to extended terms of professional military service (Baram & Ben-Israel, 2019). Another early program granted senior ranks paid leave in order to study toward a degree at one of Israel's institutions of higher education (Enoch & Yogev, 1989). Over time, both frameworks have encouraged considerable cross-fertilization between military and civilian students who share common professional interests and, after graduation, continue to read the same professional literature and attend the same professional conferences. Thus, these contacts not only strengthen

the ties of association characteristic of Israel's extensive web of "security networks" (Sheffer & Barak, 2013). More importantly, they also foster the formation of civil–military "epistemic communities"—clusters of professionals who, notwithstanding their dissimilar institutional affiliations, share interconnected notions of professional validity and norms (Am. Cohen & Ben-Ari, 2014; Haas, 1992).

The processes that are thus intensifying institutional–occupational conjunctions between some segments of the Israeli military complement and their civilian counterparts are simultaneously emphasizing the differences between both groups and the IDF soldiers engaged in tasks that no other citizen can legally perform. This encounter frame too, therefore, displays a dual dynamic characterized by elements of both cleavage and convergence. On the one hand, civil–military disparities are sustained by the High Command's policy of feeding the most battle-worthy products of combat basic training programs into the numerous "special forces" that now spearhead all infantry brigades, each of which promotes an esprit de corps emphasizing the uniqueness of its personnel (Shamir & Ben-Ari, 2018).

At the same time, however, contrary processes are at work. Determined to maintain Israel's technological edge over all potential foes, the IDF has considerably magnified personnel allocations to units specializing in electronic and cyber warfare. To that end, it has also upgraded and enlarged the older "academic reserve" programs, which now encourage larger numbers of especially gifted recruits to defer their conscription and, at the military's expense, study toward a first and, in some cases, second university degree in subjects such as mathematics, computer sciences, aeronautics, and robotics (IDF Prospectus to Recruits, 2019). Stressing patriotic duty, the IDF does of course encourage the hi-tech specialists that it thus produces to remain in salaried military service for protracted terms. But because the material enticements offered by the civilian sector are usually much more attractive, the ultimate effect of the IDF's educational and training initiatives is to close much of the institutional–occupational dimension of the civil–military "gap." Even before completing their initial contractual military obligations, members of IDF cyber units are frequently headhunted by Israel's numerous start-up companies, which specialize in the exploitation of dual-use technologies and seek persons with the expertise, skills, and experience of unit cohesion that intensive military service amply supplies (Swed & Butler, 2015). Absent from this economic sector, therefore, are most of the difficulties that veterans in other countries and fields are reported to experience when undertaking the transition from military to civilian employment (Cooper et al., 2018). Rather, military–civilian partnerships are the norm.

Cultural Encounters

The IDF has long fostered its image as an instrument of domestic social engineering. Indeed, as early as 1949, Ben-Gurion explicitly instructed officer cadets to consider themselves leaders of a bonding institution, whose mission was to weld Israel's inherently divided society into a homogenized whole (Ben-Gurion, 1971, p. 81).

It is doubtful whether that vision was ever attainable. Altogether, militaries do not generally perform well as "nation-builders," and common military service has often exacerbated differences that optimists hoped it might moderate (Enloe, 1980; Krebs, 2004). Moreover, any chance that Israel might prove an exception to that rule was by the 1990s being undermined by pressures that virtually shattered the prospect of a unified Israeli society. During the past three decades, Israeli Jews have been immersed in a series of progressively divisive domestic identity struggles. Increasingly, alignments are being determined and reinforced not just by the residual strength of dissimilar ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds but also by contesting assessments of the relative virtues and vices of a "universal-liberal" as opposed to "ethno-national" ethos (Oren, 2019; Ram, 2000; Shafir & Peled, 2002; Weissbrod, 2013). So disruptive have those fractures become that, in the words of the country's President (Rivlin, 2015), Israel now constitutes a nation of increasingly segregated "tribes," each adhering to a cultural and epistemological "kit" of its own.

Several of those fissiparous trends have begun to show signs of affecting the IDF. Their relevance, therefore, lies in that they further undermine perceptions of relations between Israeli society and its armed forces based on the hypothetical homogeneity of either of those two entities. Rather, in the cultural sphere, as in others, assumptions of a binary cleavage between civilians and soldiers are undercut by evidence of compound cross-currents. When confronted with military-related issues that generate value-laden dissension, separate groups of IDF servicemen and women articulate varying positions, usually indicative of their individual cultural origins. Furthermore, here too they are likely to forge ad hoc associations with persons in the Israeli civilian sector who share their specific inclinations and outlooks.

Two recent instances provide examples.

The first is the public controversy sparked on March 24, 2016, with the online publication of a video showing an Israeli soldier (Sergeant Elor Azaria) shooting to death a Palestinian, who had earlier that day stabbed another Israeli soldier in the West Bank city of Hebron. What grabbed attention (the film was quickly picked up by the national and international media) was not just the killing, but the fact that it was carried out after Azaria's Palestinian victim had already been taken prisoner by IDF troops.[3]

Following standard procedures, the Israeli Military Advocate General ordered a criminal investigation into the incident by the military police. On the basis of the evidence collected, a military court dismissed as an "invention" Azaria's claim to have acted under the impression that the prisoner was booby trapped and therefore still posed a threat. Accordingly, on January 4, 2017, Azaria was convicted of manslaughter and conduct unbecoming a non-commissioned officer (the military prosecutor had earlier withdrawn the more serious charge of murder). Six weeks later, he was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and a year's probation. Azaria's appeal against his conviction was rejected at the end of July 2017, as was the prosecution's appeal against the leniency of his sentence. Nevertheless, in September 2017, the CoS reduced the prison sentence to just 14 months, which—in

consideration of his good behavior while in custody—was later shortened to just 9 months. In May 2018, Azaria walked free.

Every stage of this protracted legal process was subjected to intense public scrutiny and generated vociferous debate. Controversy was exacerbated by divisions of opinion among leading Israeli politicians. While some, notably Minister of Defense Ya'alon, immediately followed the lead of the CoS and condemned Azaria's action as a violation of the IDF's code of moral conduct, others, notably the Minister of Education, declared their support for an IDF soldier "under attack." Prime Minister Netanyahu vacillated. After initially siding with the Minister of Defense, he subsequently changed course, publicly contacting Azaria's family to express sympathy for the plight of their son and appointing Avigdor Lieberman, one of Azaria's most vocal supporters, to the post of Minister of Defense soon vacated by Ya'alon. Ministerial office did nothing to moderate Lieberman's views. Once appointed, he immediately insisted that Azaria be granted a presidential pardon— a demand that the President emphatically rejected.

According to opinion surveys, a stable majority among the Jewish Israeli public shared Lieberman's viewpoint. Each of Azaria's appearances in court occasioned demonstrations in his favor at the scene of the trial. Polls showed that even persons who in principle condemned the killing of captives felt that the IDF had a duty to protect its soldiers from the criminal justice system, especially since the accused was a conscript. On social networks, support for Azaria frequently translated into animosity against his prosecutors, who became targets of death threats and required security details. Muted, by comparison, were "new media" condemnations of the vitriol disseminated by Azaria's supporters (Yarchi, 2019).

At no stage did the parties to this debate divide into military personnel on the one hand and civilians on the other. On the contrary, the IDF was itself just as split as society at large. Some divisions mirrored rank; while a majority of senior officers clearly favored putting Azaria on trial, many among the rank-and-file did not. But at a more fundamental level, the intra-military schism reflected and was clearly influenced by deep fissures within Israeli society as a whole with respect to the core values of Israeli democracy and the appropriate treatment due to all Palestinians, not just "neutralized" terrorists. In this context, importance attaches to the extent to which IDF personnel, especially lower ranks in combat units, were exposed to civilian populist and far-right media networks, whose messages sometimes helped disseminate. Azaria himself was an example. Months before the shooting, he had joined a Facebook group named "*La Familia*," which although ostensibly a club comprising fans of a Jerusalem soccer team in fact fronted a right-wing organization with an occasionally criminal agenda. That turned out to be a critical move. *La Familia*'s virtual support group provided Azaria with a platform for the expression of his anti-Palestinian views before the shooting and, once he was brought to trial, mustered public support in his defense.

Our second example of the fractured nature of the cultural dimension of civil–military discourse in contemporary Israel references the controversy surrounding the

establishment of mixed gender units in the IDF. Feelings on this issue were undoubtedly inflamed by two of the demographic changes in the IDF's composition to which reference has already been made: the simultaneous influx into combat units of both women and national-religious males. Hence, this issue provides a rare demonstration of how processes in one civil–military encounter can directly influence developments in another. But the main justification for the citation of the gender issue here is the heterogeneity of the parties in Israel to this particular manifestation of a cultural civil–military encounter. Here too, the opposing sides, rather than conforming to a conventional "gap" dichotomy, comprise coalitions of both soldiers and civilians, with the added distinction that in this case (unlike the Azaria episode) the divisions also extend to the IDF High Command.

Controversy erupted at the turn of the 21st century, when Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz (CoS 1998–2002), having already opened most combat roles to women, announced the formation of mixed-gender combat units. When rationalizing his decision, Mofaz (2000, pp. 37–40) cited pragmatic considerations as well as the principle of gender equality and emphasized the gains bound to accrue to the IDF from the integration of women, especially into infantry and armor formations. But that position was soon challenged by spokesmen for Jewish religious orthodoxy and particularly by rabbinical heads of the pre-conscription academies attended by many national-religious recruits. They warned that Mofaz's reforms, which were implemented by his successors, would inevitably compromise the restrictions that traditional Judaism imposes on even the most minimal physical contact between unmarried men and women. Should those sensitivities be disregarded, the rabbis repeatedly warned, they would have to counsel their students to avoid enlisting in mixed-gender units. Given the continued dependence of IDF infantry and armor brigades on a steady intake of national-religious troops, this was a serious threat. It implied that whatever numerical gains Mofaz hoped to obtain from the greater integration of women would be more than offset by the refusal of national-religious young men to serve alongside them, let alone under their command (Levy, 2010).

Not unexpectedly, such pronouncements generated a counterreaction. Women soldiers, and organizations established as gender watchdogs, protested that rabbinic proclamations were endangering women's rights. As proof, they publicized in both the traditional and new media evidence that religious soldiers had walked out of military ceremonies in which women vocalists had performed, turned their back on a woman paratroop instructor, and had demanded that separate hours be allocated to men and women in a swimming pool during a unit's vacation (As. Cohen & Susser, 2014).

Anxious to restore a sense of institutional cohesion and control, the IDF High Command in December 2017 publicized a "Joint Service Ordinance," which both regulated conduct in mixed-gender units and established the right of religious soldiers to serve in single-sex formations. But it then jeopardized whatever benefits might have thereby been attained by initiating a series of consultations between

senior IDF personnel—including the CoS—and rabbis and representatives of women's organizations. Although designed to craft a conciliatory atmosphere, the initiative backfired. By inviting rival civilian organizations to attend IDF fora that discussed intra-military issues, the IDF relinquished its status as an institution quarantined from societal dissension and thus compromised its own autonomy. As much was shown when, as a result of pressure exercised by a coalition of religious lobbyists composed of civilians and soldiers, the High Command removed from a revised version of the Joint Service Ordinance a clause that had originally specified mixed-gender units to be the preferred default, exceptions to which would only be granted in special circumstances (Shafran Gittleman, 2018). Henceforth, was the impression, each side to the dispute could muster support among soldiers and civilians.

Implications

This article has argued that relations between the IDF and Israeli society, although frequently marked by confrontation, very rarely conform to the binary pattern of a "gap" between persons in and out of uniform. Examination of civil–military encounters in the four dimensions identified by Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. indicates, rather, that the parties involved usually constitute several rival coalitions, each of which is comprised of clusters of civilians as well as soldiers.

It is tempting to attribute that finding to the exceptionalism of the IDF's societal environment and hence to categorize the Israeli instance as unique. Of the several circumstances that might lend credence to that presumption of singularity, undoubtedly the most salient is the country's adherence to conscription. True, and as noted above, an increasing proportion of Israelis now receive exemptions from service. Nevertheless, Muslim Arabs and *haredi* Jews apart, the recruitment system still manages to encompass a fairly representative cross section of civilian society. To this must be added the impact of geography. Israel's exceptionally small size further augments the ability of enlisted personnel to traverse conventional civil–military boundaries. Such is the proximity of troop deployments to the homes of almost all Israeli soldiers that even recruits on basic training, when restrictions on freedom of movement are most stringent, normally spend every alternate weekend with their friends and families. Reservists become especially frequent "transmigrants" between the civilian and military worlds (Lomsky-Feder et al., 2008).

Those idiosyncrasies certainly exacerbate the compound nature of Israel's civil–military encounters. But, we submit, their influence is supplemented, often decisively so, by the current intersection of three other developments. One is the surge in the military's reliance on the expertise of service personnel who, because they acquired their skills in civilian training facilities, possess ties of professional (and sometimes ethical) affiliation that traverse the conventional civil–military divide. A second is the pressure exerted on overall societal consensus by the emergence of new topics of divisive discourse that focus, not on any specific governmental action but—more fundamentally—on the basic values in accordance with which society

ought to be organized and operate and, by extension, its armed forces to conduct themselves. The third is the proliferation of revolutionary channels of interpersonal communication ("the new media"), which diffuse such debates into and within the military institution, thereby further invalidating whatever illusions senior officers might harbor with respect to the insulation of the armed forces from societal turbulence.

Because all of the trends thus itemized are universal in character, there is no reason to presume that their influence might be limited to Israel. On the contrary, *mutatis mutandis*, they could be affecting both the tenor and structure of civil–military relations in other democratic societies, including those with all-volunteer armed forces. After all, salaried military personnel are also likely to be sensitive to the currents of technological change and cultural controversies that are transforming the overall character of their host societies. In their cases too, it has been found that social media networks enable civil divisions to be mirrored in the ranks (Forster, 2011).

How military hierarchies might best meet the challenges to force management thus presented is an issue beyond the scope of this article. More pertinent are its methodological implications for future academic studies of civil–military encounters. We suggest that those enquiries not just categorize multiple "gap dimensions" (as Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. proposed) but also realign them. Specifically, we recommend revising the conventional framework of civil–military analyses, which presume that orientations respecting issues of societal contention are determined by a binary dichotomy distinguishing civilians from soldiers. In its place, we advocate the adoption of an alternative focus, which identifies policy preferences and demographic, occupational, and cultural affiliations as supra-institutional determinants of alignments and thereby explains why, as in the Israeli case, the encounters that they generate divide soldiers as well as civilians and hence give rise to rival groupings that comprise coalitions of both sectors.

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Notes

1. That tradition of heterogeneity continues. Although three members of the quartet that led the "Blue-White" party in the two general elections held in 2019 were former chiefs of staff (CoSs; Gantz [2011–2015], Ashkenazi [2007–2011], and Ya'alon [2002–2005]), they did not carry all senior Israel Defense Forces veterans with them. Yair Golan (Deputy CoS, 2014–2017) ran for office in the left-wing "Democratic Camp" led by Ehud Barak (CoS, 1991–1994), and Yoav Galant (who was appointed CoS in 2010, although later disqualified for having contravened property regulations) joined Binyamin Netanyahu's "Likud" party.

2. A quarter of the men exempted suffered from physical or psychological handicaps, and a further 20% had a criminal record. The remainder consisted of ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) Jews (see below). Almost 80% of Jewish females exempted declared that military service would conflict with their Orthodox religious mores.

3. The film, shot by an activist of BeTzelem, an Israeli human rights organization focusing on IDF actions in the Territories, is available at https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4782563,00.html

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