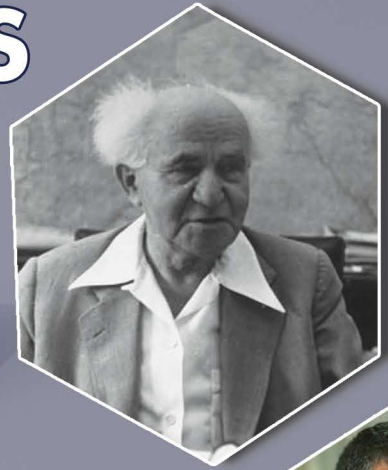


# THE PROCESS OF ISRAELI DECISION MAKING

MECHANISMS,  
FORCES,  
AND INFLUENCES



Karim El-Gendy



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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**Mechanisms, Forces, and Influences**

**By  
Karim El-Gendy**



**Al-Zaytouna Centre  
For Studies & Consultations  
Beirut - Lebanon**

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صناعة القرار في إسرائيل

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# Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	3
<b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....	5
<b>Introduction</b> .....	(7–14)
<b>Chapter One: The “Constitutional” Mechanism</b> .....	(15–29)
<b>First:</b> The Knesset .....	18
<b>Second:</b> The Cabinet .....	21
<b>Third:</b> The Relationship Between the Cabinet and the Knesset .....	26
<b>Fourth:</b> The Foreign Ministry Staff .....	28
<b>Chapter Two: Forces and Processes Within the Political System</b> .....	(31–69)
<b>First:</b> Coalition Politics .....	33
<b>Second:</b> Parties, Ideologies and Programmes .....	42
<b>Third:</b> The Role of the Prime Minister and Top Leadership and the Personification of Power .....	60
<b>Chapter Three: The Influence of the Military and Security</b> <b>Establishment on Decision Making</b> .....	(71–112)
<b>First:</b> The Security Concern and the Military Doctrine .....	73
<b>Second:</b> The Status of the Military and Security Establishment Within the Society .....	84
<b>Third:</b> The Chain of Command and the Structure of the Military and Security Establishments .....	86
<b>Fourth:</b> The Size of the Military and its Impact on Economy and the Society .....	91
<b>Fifth:</b> The Development of the Military-Industrial Complex .....	96
<b>Sixth:</b> The Military-Industrial Complex’s Relation to the Political Establishment and Decision Making .....	100



## **Chapter Four: The Role of Consultants and Think Tanks and its**

**Influence on Decision Making** .....(113–130)

**First:** Official Consultants .....115

**Second:** Independent Consultants and Advisors .....116

## **Chapter Five: The Influence of Interest Groups on Decision Making ...**(131–178)

**First:** The Influence of the Haredim (The Non-Zionist Ultra Orthodox) .....135

**Second:** The Influence of the Religious National Movement  
and Gush Emunim .....151

**Third:** The Histadrut Labor Union .....176

## **Chapter Six: The Relationship with the United States and its**

**Impact on Decision Making** .....(179–196)

**First:** Background .....181

**Second:** Impact on Decision Making .....189

## **Chapter Seven: Relationship with Jewish Communities Outside**

**of Israel and its Impact on Decision Making**.....(197–214)

**First:** The Jewish Community's Structure and the Israel Lobby .....199

**Second:** Jewish Communities and Israel: The Formal Mechanism .....203

**Third:** Jewish Communities and Israel: A One Way or Two Way  
Relationship? .....207

## **Chapter Eight: Decision Making in the Cabinet: A Case Study** .....(215–220)

## **Conclusion and the Decision Making Characteristics** .....(221–232)

**First:** Pragmatism vs. Ideology .....223

**Second:** Strengths and Weaknesses .....226

## **Bibliography** .....(233–246)

## **Index** .....(247–255)



## List of Abbreviations

ACPR	Ariel Center for Policy Research
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AEI	American Enterprise Institute
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AJC	American Jewish Committee
BESA	The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies
CBS	Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJF	Council of Jewish Federations
CPMJO	Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations
CUFI	Christians United for Israel
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IASPS	Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies
ICT	International Institute for Counter-Terrorism
IDC	Interdisciplinary Center - Herzliya
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IDI	The Israel Democracy Institute
IIESR	Israeli Institute for Economic and Social Research
INSS	The Institute for National Security Studies
IPCRI	Israel/ Palestine Center for Research and Information
ISA	Israel Security Agency ( <i>Shabak</i> )
JAFI	Jewish Agency for Israel



JCPA	Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs
JCSS	Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies
JIS	Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies
MCoD	Ministerial Committee on Defense
MEMRI	Middle East Media Research Institute
MID	Military Intelligence Directorate
MK	Member of Knesset
MP	Member of Parliament
NCRAC	National Community Relations Advisory Council
NIE	National Intelligence Estimate
NRP	National Religious Party
NSC	Israeli National Security Council
NSS	National Security Staff
NU	National Union
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UIA	United Israel Appeal
UJA	United Jewish Appeal
UJC	United Jewish Communities
WINEP	Washington Institute for Near East Policy
WJC	World Jewish Congress
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WTO	World Trade Organization
WZC	World Zionist Congress
WZO	World Zionist Organization

# *Introduction*





# Introduction

*Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy* - Henry Kissinger.<sup>1</sup>

According to its own declaration of independence, Israel is a Jewish and democratic state, and according to the Israeli Law, it is a parliamentary democracy where its decisions are theoretically made based on regulations that maintain the separation of powers of the various institutions involved in decision making. But in reality, however, the decision making mechanism in Israel is a complicated, highly personified, highly politicized, fluid, and informal process, with no clear overall authority. It is influenced by the motives of the different power centers within the political establishment and by factors and processes relating to the nature of the establishment itself. It is also influenced by the powerful institutions and individuals outside of the formal decision making political establishment, but who directly or indirectly influence it. Israeli decision making is also influenced by Israel's complicated external environment. The balance between these different domestic and external actors is what eventually determines the policy chosen, and it varies depending on the nature, context, and scope of the issue at hand as well as on the timing of the decision.

Following the 1967 and 1973 war's a number of academic studies and books have been written on the decision making process in Israel at the times of crisis. These books examined the details of how decisions have been made in some or all of the crises that faced Israeli decision makers in 1948, 1967, and 1973. The prime concern in these studies was the examination of the rationality of the decision making process in making choices in each crisis that take gains and consequences into consideration seems. These studies also focused on how the dynamics of political positions influenced the decision making process in an attempt to learn from past mistakes and to improve the decision making mechanism especially at the times of crises and under stress.

Another body of literature that emerged on Israeli policy around the same time has been aimed at explaining the nature of all or parts of the Israel's complex political and social system, often focusing on breaking down the different Israeli

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Heller, *The Birth of Israel, 1945–1949: Ben-Gurion and His Critics* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2000), preface xi.

institutions or societal groups. However, while this body of literature was mostly concerned with explaining the complexity of the ever changing societal and political mosaic of the Israeli society, it occasionally discussed the implications of domestic influences on foreign policy but rarely engaged the decision making process.

In the last few years, interest in Israeli decision making was again renewed especially following the 2006 war against Lebanon. This interest stemmed from the argument that failures within the Israeli decision making process lead to the war failures. The new academic interest was mostly focused on the failures of the decision making process, identifying imbalances and suggesting remedial measures. Like the initial body of work, this one also focuses on decision making during crises.

It could be argued here that this continuous interest by scholars and researchers in Israeli decision making process, albeit often expressed following major events or crises, is a result of a more chronic concern over the effectiveness of the often-faulty process. This chronic concern has been expressed by many Israelis over the years. Criticism of the decision making process has been sounded by scholars such as Yehuda Ben Meir, who states that Israel's decision making "has, in effect, no organized and systematic decision making process at all."

In addition, many Israelis involved in decision making, including both military and civilian personnel, have expressed similar concerns. For example, Abba Eban, who for many years was Israel's Foreign Minister and in the chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, characterised Israel's approach to decision making as "Amateurish, based on improvisation, and lacking institutionalisation."

Similarly, Shlomo Gazit, A former director of Military Intelligence (Aman), a former coordinator of activities in the occupied territories, also described most of the decisions which result from the Israeli decision making process as "irresponsible, haphazard, not thought out and not based on any examination and evaluation of alternatives." He also adds that "it was only by chance" that good or correct decisions were arrived at. He also states categorically that he cannot think of any single decision that was the result of coherent thinking and evaluation arrived at after thorough study and analysis of all options, possibilities, advantages, disadvantages, and the recommended course of action.

Aharon Yariv, also a former director of Military Intelligence and a former cabinet minister, has also described the Israeli decision making process as lacking some high level echelon that “can look at the issues and at the recommendations with an overall comprehensive view.” He wrote of Israel’s process of development of an overall strategy as the “most conspicuous weakness in the Israeli government system.”

Meir Amit, a former director of the Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks (Mossad) and the Military Intelligence has also stated that “In Israel there is no systematic decision making process in any area;... from economic and social issues to national security there is no orderly process, everything is pulled from a hat... we are in a country that runs itself, instead of being run.”

Likewise, Mordechai Gazit, who served as a director general both of the Prime Minister’s Office and of the Foreign Ministry, has stated that “there is no institutionalisation of the decision making process and it differs from case to case and from individual to individual.” He also stressed that there has never been a clear and formal division of responsibility and authority among the various functionaries in the Prime Minister’s Office, and it was not clear who does what. Eliyahu Ben Elissar, who served as director general of the Prime Minister’s Office during Menachem Begin’s first government, also states flatly that in Israel “there is no such thing as policy planning—not long range, nor short range, nor medium range.”<sup>2</sup>

In light of the above statements and the existing literature on the subject, this study represents an attempt to understand the current Israeli decision making process and to bridge the literature gap by relating domestic factors with decision making and foreign policy. It attempts to explain how elements and forces within the labyrinth of the Israeli society exert influence on the decision making mechanism and on how foreign policy and national security decisions are made. It will focus on political framework backgrounds, domestic and external factors, as well as the main players through which policy is made.

This study would also attempt to avoid focusing its attention solely on decision making in crisis situations as in the case of most earlier studies on the decision

<sup>2</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *National Security Decision Making: The Israeli Case* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), pp. 67–69.

making process in Israel. By doing so, it is hoped that a clearer picture of the decision making process can be drawn, and a better identification of elements unique to the Israeli case together with strengths and weaknesses can be made.

But while this study attempts to take holistic approach to the decision making process, major events feature prominently in it simply because crises are often associated with complex decision making mechanisms and high level officials which are the focus of this study.<sup>3</sup>

This study aims to discuss the Israeli decision making process from three different view points. The decision makers and the formal relationship between them, the structural forces and influences inherent in the decision making mechanism, and the external factors that influence the decision making process.

After this introduction, the second chapter of this study examines the first issue. It addresses the theoretical mechanism and framework of the political establishment focusing on the two main players in Israeli decision making, the Cabinet and the Knesset, and the interactions between them as stipulated by Israeli law and in practice. After explaining their structures and the powers given to each of the two by Israeli Basic Laws, it argues that the relationship between the Knesset and the Cabinet is a dynamic relationship whose center of gravity has been recently moving towards the Cabinet.

In the third chapter, this study will discuss the internal forces and processes which alter the formal relationships and balances between the major players and influences the way they operate. These forces include the impact of the use of proportional representation in Israeli general elections, the mechanisms, constraints, and development of coalition politics and how they influence decision making. They also include the different ideologies and programs of political parties. Finally they include the expanding role of the Prime Minister and the impact of the personification of power of Israeli leadership. This study argues that these three structural relationships within the decision making elite have led to a weakened Knesset, and to the failure of the cabinet as a decision making forum. These two factors have led to a culture of improvisation, and to the emergence of alternative forums led by the Prime Minister.

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<sup>3</sup> Ira Sharansky, *Policy Making in Israel: Routines for Simple Problems and Coping with the Complex* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

In chapter four, this study expands on a number of external forces, or forces external to the decision making process that are powerful enough to influence it. It discusses the influence of five forces; the military, the advisors, two religious groups, the relationship with the United States of America (US), and the relationship with the Jewish Diaspora.

The discussion of the Military influence starts with the security concern and the origins of the military doctrine. After describing the size and structure of the military it then attempts to explain how it managed to become such a major player in Israeli politics. This section argues that in light of the weak civilian leadership and a weak decision making, the military has used many of the tools it has in its disposal to fill the leadership vacuum. Considerable attention was given in this section to the civil military relations in Israel and how the military industrial complex has played a part in that.

The second section of this chapter discusses the role of consultants, advisors, and think tanks as an external player in the decision making process. The role of different Israeli think tanks is discussed including military consultants, civilian consultants and advisors, and independent think tanks. This section also provides a short description of all Israeli think tanks. It argues that advisors play a major role to decision makers not just in making policy but also for domestic political purposes.

The third section of this chapter focuses on the influence of political and interest groups. It focuses primarily on the influence of the two main religious groups in Israel, the *Haredim* (often referred to in English as the Ultra-orthodox) and the *Datim Le'umim* (known in English as the religious Zionist). The purpose of this section is not just to demystify the religious population in Israel or to explain the nature of the religious mosaic in Israel—although these were intended—but to discuss the different roles played by each group and how they shape Israeli policy politically and ideologically.

This chapter would then deal with the nature of Israel's relationship with the United States and how it influences Israeli decision making process. This section would first discuss the formal relationship between the two countries, surveying the scholarly discourse over the nature of the relationship. It argues that the client state model fails to explain Israeli behaviour towards the United States, and presents an

alternative interpretation of Israeli decision making based on the different attitudes of Israeli leaders towards their main benefactors and ally, the United States.

Finally this chapter would discuss the relationship between Israel and the Jewish communities outside of Israel, explaining the differences between the Jewish Community and the Israel Lobby in the United States, and explaining the nature and development of the Israel-Diaspora relations as well as the formal mechanisms of the relationship between the two. This section concludes with an analysis of the influence of this relationship on Israeli decision making and how Israeli decision makers' perception of the Diaspora influences their decisions towards them.

The fifth chapter represents an attempt to integrate these three viewpoints into a real decision making scenario by presenting a case study of a decision making process. The case study chosen is the decision making process to launch a deep bombing campaign into Egypt at the end of the War of Attrition in 1970. The issues discussed in this case study would also be compared to other decision making case studies.

Finally, and by way of conclusion, this study will summarize the main characteristics of the decision making mechanism in the sixth chapter. This chapter attempts to summarize the decision making characteristics in terms of their nature on the pragmatic-ideological scale, and in terms of its main strengths and weaknesses. The strengths and weaknesses identified are summed up in a list format.

# Chapter One

## *The “Constitutional” Mechanism*





## The “Constitutional” Mechanism

Theoretically, the Israeli political system is based on the principle of separation of powers, generally following the British pattern, with checks and balances, in which the executive branch (the government) is subject to the confidence of the legislative branch (the Knesset). The independence of the judiciary (with both its secular and religious branches) and its status as the protector of the democratic values and civil liberties, and the insurer of the fairness of laws is also expressed and guaranteed by the Basic Laws.<sup>1</sup>

The Israeli Basic Laws, which are a key component of Israel’s uncoded constitution<sup>2</sup>, identify the roles and powers of the ruling establishment’s various institutions, such as the Presidency, the Knesset, the Government (the Cabinet), the State Comptroller (the Supreme Audit Institution), The Local Authorities, and the Judiciary.

Michael Brecher has defined foreign policy decision making as “the selection, among perceived alternatives, of one option leading to a course of action in the international system. A decision is made by an individual or individuals or a group authorized by the political system to act within a prescribed sphere of external behaviour.”<sup>3</sup> He also categorized the different decisions into strategic decisions, tactical decision, and implementing decisions.<sup>4</sup> According to this definition,

<sup>1</sup> Israel does not have a written constitution; the almost constitutional Basic Laws are used instead. New basic laws can still be added and the existing ones can be updated—albeit it with an extraordinary majority. The Basic Laws have no clear provision that other legislations should not contradict them.

<sup>2</sup> According to Israel’s proclamation of independence a constituent assembly should have prepared a constitution by 1/10/1948. The delay and the eventual decision 13/6/1950 that the constitution is to be legislated chapter by chapter, resulted primarily from the inability of the different groups that were to make the Israeli society to agree on the purpose of the state, the state’s identity, and its long term vision. Another factor was the opposition of David Ben-Gurion himself. See Orit Rozin, “Forming a Collective Identity: The Debate over the Proposed Constitution, 1948–1950,” *The Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 26, no. 2, September 2007, pp. 27–251.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 374.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 374.

Israeli Basic Laws: The Knesset (1958) and The Government (2001) put the decision making powers to make all three types of decisions within the executive branch of government which is strongly linked to the legislative branch.

In this context state bodies and Institutions such as the Supreme Court, the President, the Attorney general, and the State Comptroller do not play a major policy making role and thus are beyond the scope of this study. The main institutions in the decision making mechanism are thus the Knesset and the Cabinet with the executive branch being the stronger of the two and with most of the powers being in the hands of the Prime Minister. The nature of these institutions, their composition, functions and powers can be summarized as follows:

## ***First: The Knesset***

### **1. The Knesset's Composition**

According to the Israeli Basic Laws, the Knesset is the parliament of the state. It consists of one chamber that includes 120 elected members elected every four years in general elections.

Democratic electoral systems around the world vary according to their emphasis on either the stability of governance or a fair representation of the electorate. The Israeli system is one which favours the fair representation of its diverse society, over the stability of the government. The Israeli electoral system is an extreme case of proportional representation as it considers the entire country a single electoral constituency and uses a low electoral threshold that allows smaller parties with very small shares of the nationwide vote to have representation in the Knesset. Perhaps the only comparable electoral system in western democracies to the Israeli one is that of Netherlands which also uses a single constituency and a low electoral threshold.<sup>5</sup>

In the Israeli model of proportional representation Members of the Knesset (MKs) are not elected individually but within the framework of political parties that compete for the electorate's votes. Each political party chooses its own Knesset

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Latner and Anthony McGann, "Geographical representation under proportional representation: The cases of Israel and the Netherlands," *Electoral Studies* journal, vol. 24, 2005, pp. 709–734.

candidates from within the party, and arranges them in the order that it sees fit to create a single electoral list.<sup>6</sup>

Following the national elections, the 120 Knesset seats are assigned in proportion to each party's %age of the total national vote provided that the parties gets votes more than the electoral threshold which has always been between 1–2%.<sup>7</sup>

The Knesset is composed of a main plenum and a number of committees. The plenum, the supreme authority of the house, has two annual sittings that combined make at least eight months. The two sittings together form a session. Resolutions of the plenum are taken by a majority of participating MKs, except for cases in which a special majority is required. The plenum elects the Speaker of the Knesset, who conducts the affairs of the Knesset, as well as one or more Deputy Speakers. Together, the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers constitute the Knesset Presidium, which approves the tabling of private Members' bills and the urgency of Motions for the Agenda.<sup>8</sup>

The Knesset has 12 permanent committees: The House (Knesset) Committee, The Finance Committee; The Economics Committee, The Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee (the most prestigious and sensitive of all), The Interior and Environment Committee, The Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee, The Education and Culture Committee, The Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee, The Labor and Social Affairs Committee, The Public Audit Committee, The science and technology Committee, and The Advancing the Status of Women Committee.

<sup>6</sup> Any party wishing to participate in the elections must register in the Parties Register, 100 or more citizens of the State of Israel may register as a party. See Israel Government Portal website, <http://www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNaEng/EngSubjects/EngSElections/EngSESytem/EngSEEstablishing>

<sup>7</sup> According to the Basic Law: The Knesset: “The Knesset shall be elected by general, national, direct, equal, secret and proportional elections, in accordance with the Knesset Elections Law.” These legal terms are implemented as follows: General: On Election Day, voters cast one ballot for a political party to represent them in the Knesset. Every Israeli citizen aged 18 has the right to vote. Israelis of all ethnic groups and religious beliefs, including Arab Israelis, participate in the process and for many years, voting percentages have reached close to 80%. National: The entire country constitutes a single electoral constituency. Direct: The Knesset is elected directly by the voters, not through a body of electors. Equal: All votes cast are equal in weight. Secret: Elections are by secret ballot. Proportional: The 120 Knesset seats are assigned in proportion to each party's percentage of the total national vote with the minimum required for a party to win a Knesset seat set at 2% of the total votes cast. See Jewish Virtual Library, “The Elections,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/>

<sup>8</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “The Role of the Knesset Speaker,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/speakerroll.html> (Accessed: 8/7/2008).

The factional composition of these committees resembles and reflects that of the Knesset itself. In addition, the Knesset can establish special committees and committees on particular matters. It may also elect subcommittees and delegate powers to them and can establish joint committees for issues concerning more than one committee. Committee chairpersons are chosen by their members, on the recommendation of the House Committee.

## **2. The Knesset's Powers and Functions**

The main function of the Knesset is to legislate and revise Laws as necessary. Additional duties include establishing a government, making policy decisions, reviewing Government activities, and electing the President of the State and the State Comptroller.

Bills proposed by the government to the Knesset have to first be reviewed by the Justice Ministry and the Finance ministry to check their legality and financial implications. They are also circulated to the rest of the Government Ministries for their comments. After the draft is approved by the government, it can be proposed to the Speaker of the Knesset by the relevant Minister who should also present an explanation of the law to the Knesset.

The Government is the sponsor of most legislation, but any Member of the Knesset (MK) can present a bill, known as a “private member’s bill”, and Knesset Committees can present bills dealing with the Basic Laws, Laws dealing with the Knesset, elections to the Knesset, MKs, or the State Comptroller.

The speaker of the Knesset, who is elected in the first session following the general elections, has the right to reject some of the MKs proposals for topics to be discussed. This can vary from one speaker to the other; while Reuven Rivlin the speaker from the Likud (2003–2006) Allowed smaller parties a greater say, Dalia Itzik the speaker from Kadima (2006–2009) is known to have exercised her powers, as she blocked more debate topics proposed by small parties than her predecessor.

In the Knesset, all bills go through three stages before becoming law, beginning with a first reading, which is a general debate in the plenum. At this stage the bill may be accepted and referred to the appropriate committee, removed from the Knesset table, or returned to the Government. If the bill is accepted, it goes to the appropriate committee for the resolution of details and possibly amendments. The committee then

returns the amended bill to the plenum for a second reading, where the deliberations and voting take place on each section separately. The bill is then presented in its final form, as adopted in the second reading for the third and final reading,

If a bill passes, it is signed by the presiding Speaker of the Knesset and is later published in the Official Gazette, with the signatures of the President, Prime Minister, Knesset Speaker and the minister responsible for the Law’s implementation. Finally, the state seal is placed on it by the Justice Minister, and the bill becomes Law.

Knesset debates take the form of general debates, motions for the agenda, parliamentary questions, and motions of no confidence. A general debate is held on bills or general matters of a political or other nature. While debates on bills conclude with a vote, debates on general matters may end without voting. A motion for the agenda is a preliminary debate concerning the inclusion of an issue raised by an MK on the Knesset agenda. A parliamentary question is asked by an MK of a minister on ministry affairs to draw the attention of the Government and the public to an issue that, in the presenter’s opinion, needs corrective action. Motions of no confidence are proposals by party factions to remove the political legitimacy from a government. If successful, they force a government to resign and to call for early elections.

Committees discuss Government regulations or any matter referred to them by the plenum. To further their deliberations they invite Government ministers, senior officials, and experts in the matters being discussed. Committees may require explanation and information from relevant ministers in any matter within their competence, and the ministers, or persons appointed by them, must provide the explanation or information requested.

## ***Second: The Cabinet***

### **1. The Cabinet’s Composition**

The Cabinet is formed after the general elections. The President<sup>9</sup> asks a member of the Knesset (usually the head of the largest party faction in the Knesset) to

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<sup>9</sup> The President’s role is largely ceremonial except for his exclusive power to pardon or commute the sentences of civilians and soldiers.

attempt to form a government where he will become the Prime Minister. Since no party has ever received enough Knesset seats to form a Government by itself, all Governments to date have been based on coalitions of several parties. To form a governing coalition, the newly-elected Prime Minister has to present a list of ministers, together with an outline of proposed Government guidelines to the Knesset for Approval. The list and outline have to be presented to the Knesset within 45 days of publication of the election results.

Like the Knesset, the Government usually serves for four years, but its term may be shortened by the resignation or death/incapacity of the Prime Minister, or a vote of no-confidence by the Knesset. In the case of a no confidence the Prime Minister and ministers of an outgoing Government continue their duties until a new Government begins its term.

Most ministers are assigned a portfolio and head a ministry; ministers who function without portfolio may be called upon to assume responsibility for special projects. The Prime Minister, who heads the Cabinet, may serve also as a minister with a portfolio. At least half of the Cabinet must be Knesset members, but all of them must be eligible for Knesset membership. The Prime Minister, or another minister with Prime Ministerial approval, may appoint deputy ministers who must also be Knesset members.

The whole Cabinet usually meets at least once a week, normally on Sunday mornings and typically for five hours<sup>10</sup>, but additional meetings may be called as needed. There are currently no limitations on the size of the cabinet or the number of ministers serving.

The Cabinet conducts much of its work through four standing committees dealing with economic affairs, legislation, foreign affairs and security, and home affairs and services. The purpose of the committee is to free the cabinet from the details of the largely technical matters. The committees meet once a week to deal with major issues that relate to the jurisdiction of more than one ministry. The cabinet may also set up special ad hoc committees of inquiry to scrutinize issues

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<sup>10</sup> Charles D. Freilich, "National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 60, no. 4, Autumn 2006.

affecting coalition unity or other urgent questions.<sup>11</sup> Some 50 committees have been established but only a few function continuously.

The only committee required by law is the Ministerial Committee on Defense (MCoD) which was established in 1991. It includes the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the ministers of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, and the minister of finance. Since the MCoD membership is seen as prestigious as it deals with the more sensitive security and political issues, other ministers seek to join it. But while other ministers can join the committee, its members should not exceed half of the cabinet.<sup>12</sup>

Attached to the cabinet are two administrative units, the Secretariat of the Cabinet, and the Prime Minister’s Office. The first unit, the Secretariat of the Cabinet, is formally there to serve the entire cabinet. Its formal role is to provide secretarial services to the cabinet and its committees, which includes archiving the cabinet deliberations (which remain confidential for 40 years, except for the defense committee which remains confidential for 50 years). The Cabinet Secretary, who heads the Secretariat, assists the Prime minister in preparing the agenda of the cabinet, provides ministers with relevant background information 48 prior to meetings, and provides the cabinet with drafts of decisions on proposed appointments to make the cabinet meetings more efficient.<sup>13</sup>

The other administrative unit is the Office of the Prime Minister, which assists the Prime Minister in his official activities and day to day work. The prime Minister is assisted by a Director General, a Chief of Bureau, a Foreign Affairs Advisor, a diplomatic advisor, an economical Advisor, a legal advisor, and the Military Secretary who serves as a liaison with the military command and the defense ministry. The Office consists of three departments: follow up, research, information and public affairs. One of its main roles is to scrutinize the flow of information and issues and to decide on which matters to call to the attention of the Prime Minister.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Helen Chapin Metz (ed.), “The Cabinet,” in *Israel: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988), <http://countrystudies.us/israel/80.htm> (Accessed: 23/3/2007).

<sup>12</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *Executive Governance in Israel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49–53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53–59.



## 2. The Cabinet's Powers and Functions

The Government, or the Cabinet of ministers, is the executive authority of the State. Its policymaking powers are very wide, each Government determines its own working and decision making procedures, and is authorized to take action on any issue which is not delegated by Law to another authority. The lack of a written constitution has strengthened the government and the Knesset as it removed the constitutional restrictions that may hinder their ability to pass laws and thus made the legislation process smoother. For example, the Knesset passed a legislation which stipulated that if a law has no budget to implement it for five years it ceases becoming a law. In the lack of a constitution, this paves the way for the government and the Knesset to remove laws using the annual budget if they have the necessary majority.

The Government is charged with administering internal and foreign affairs, including the security issues. As head of the Government, the Prime Minister's lies at the pinnacle of the decision making mechanism. In addition to chairing the Government meetings, the Prime Minister is its representative who coordinates its activities. The relationship between the Prime Minister and the other Ministers is only defined not defined which means that his authority within it depends on his character and personal political clout.

All deliberations of the cabinet meetings are generally secretive and little is known about their proceedings. The 1968 Basic Law on the executive branch includes the prohibition on the publication of cabinet proceedings on foreign or defense issues, or any other matters that the cabinet declared to be secret. In addition, a mechanism created in 1966 allows the cabinet to declare itself as the "Ministerial Committee on Security Affairs" for certain debates, making any disclosure of the proceedings into a case of "severe espionage".<sup>15</sup>

The issues brought up in the weekly meetings are usually those that statutorily require a cabinet decision, such as proposed legislation and appointments of public officials to highest ranks of the bureaucracy. National security issues take

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<sup>15</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel: The Second Republic* (Washington D.C: CQ Press, 2005), p. 269; and Alan Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question," *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)* journal, vol. 3, no. 1, March 1999.

substantial meeting time but do not come for vote in the cabinet. Instead they are summarized and reviewed by the Prime Minister. Similarly sensitive foreign affairs and defense issues are not brought up for discussion but are reported on as reports afterwards. The reason behind this behaviour is the fear of leaks to the media in large forums such as the cabinet. The Cabinet is thus held collectively responsible for issues which are not debated within the cabinet.<sup>16</sup>

Traditionally, the Prime Minister attempts to control the outcome of decisions by counting on the support of ministers from his party. Recently, with the weakening of party discipline, prime ministers have to also rely on other tactics to control decision outcomes. These tactics include using selected forums of ministerial committees, inner circles, personal persuasion, political payoffs, and ultimately the threat of resignation.<sup>17</sup>

The prime Minister also has great control over the Cabinet Secretariat. He even assigns the Cabinet Secretary political tasks. However, the scope of activities and influence of the Cabinet Secretary depends primarily on the trust established with the Prime Minister.<sup>18</sup>

In 1994 the cabinet rules of procedure established seven statutory committees, some of which have already been established. The committees are Defense, regulation of classified information, developing towns, privatization, work permits on Jewish holidays, archaeological excavation, and religious councils.

The prime Minister, who is the most influential over the appointment of ministers to committees, may participate himself in any committee meeting and even chair it. Public officials such as the Governor of the Bank of Israel and the Attorney General also attend cabinet committee meetings on regular basis. Also top officials of the budget division of the finance ministry attend the ministerial committee meetings when financial implications are involved.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op.cit.*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 49–53.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

### ***Third: The Relationship Between the Cabinet and the Knesset***

Under Israeli Law the Cabinet Ministers including the Prime Minister are collectively accountable to the Knesset for their actions. As the legislative branch of the state, the Knesset is meant to play a significant role in supervising the work of the government. However, like many other parliamentary democracies, in spite of this formal control of the legislature over the executive, in practice, the focus of political power is in the executive which reduces the legislature to a staging ground. In the Israeli system, the relationship between the Knesset and the Cabinet is better described as a “balance of terror,” where both the government and the cabinet has the powers to dismiss the other.<sup>20</sup>

Theoretically, the Knesset is meant to have supremacy over government. Any Knesset faction (a minimum of two members of Knesset) may submit a motion of no confidence in the Government. If a motion of no confidence is submitted, the Knesset must vote on it at its first meeting during the week following the submission. If the no-confidence motion receives a majority of 61 votes, general elections are called within 60 days. The defeated Government continues functioning as a caretaker until a new Government is established. No-confidence votes are also often used by the opposition merely to raise a matter for which no other procedure is available.

The Knesset may also dismiss the prime minister by failing to adopt the annual budget within three months of its submission. The Knesset may also dissolve itself at any time during its term, and a new government will have to be formed once a new Knesset is elected. In the period between a successful no-confidence vote and until a new Knesset is formally constituted following new elections, full authority remains with the outgoing Knesset as a caretaker legislative.

However, on the other hand, the Government is also free to act over wide fields without recourse to the Knesset, as long as it does not infringe any laws or tamper with the constitutional system. The government has a free hand in making treaties and other international agreements, where it can negotiate, sign, and ratify a treaty or convention without bringing it at all before the Knesset. This may not be the case only if the fulfilment of these agreements requires changes in domestic laws, which in this case would have to be brought before the Knesset.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

In addition, the Government has powers over the Knesset through its control of its coalition parties’ members and their parliamentary factions who constitute the Knesset’s majority. The government thus have the upper hand in any vote. The Prime Minister also has the ability to dissolve the parliament at any time during its term ( with the agreement of the president) and to call for early elections. The government could even pass laws that would change the relationship between the government and the Knesset, provided that it has sufficient majority. An example on this took place in the 1999 elections when many of Knesset legislations, which were introduced earlier to control the size of the government and the movement between political parties, were changed to cater for the needs of the coalition under the premiership of Prime Minister Ehud Barak.<sup>21</sup>

The government also controls the Knesset through its ability to initiate government bills, pass laws, and its traditional ability to control the Knesset’s internal proceedings. The Knesset’s provisions allowed the government a “Right of Way” in controlling most of the Knesset’s time, in putting its views forward before the members, and in expediting its business in the Knesset. This took place on the expense of members’ initiatives. In addition, not only were Government bills favoured by the Knesset rules over members’ bills, but the preliminary debate of a member’s bill was not usually taken without a nod of approval from the government. In fact, a statement by the government took precedence over another business, even a no-confidence motion, and often resulted in removing a member’s motion from the agenda if it happened to be on the same subject.<sup>22</sup> However, since 1992, the trend of government domination of bills was reversed to the favour of private Bills.<sup>23</sup>

Unlike the US parliamentary system, the Israeli members of Knesset are not as well staffed and thus their ability to discuss details of policies and budgets are

<sup>21</sup> Barhoom Garaysi, “The Parliamentary Composition Prevents a Common Dorm for Changes to the Israeli Government System,” *Almash-had Al-Israeli* (The Israeli Scene), The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (Madar) website, vol. 4, no. 146, 14/11/2006, [https://www.madarceneter.org/mash\\_had\\_pdf/almashhad-21-14-11-2006.pdf](https://www.madarceneter.org/mash_had_pdf/almashhad-21-14-11-2006.pdf) (in Arabic)

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Sager, *The Parliamentary System of Israel* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985), pp. 195–205.

<sup>23</sup> Anat Maor, “The Legislation in Israel,” Association for Israel Studies’ 22nd Annual Conference, Calgary, Canada, May 2006, <http://www.aisisraelstudies.org/2006papers/Maor%20Anat.pdf> (Accessed: 1/6/2008).

limited.<sup>24</sup> As a result, Knesset members are often at a disadvantage to the Government as they do not have as much vital information concerning government policy and administration as the government does, which limits their ability to scrutinize its activities. Knesset members do not receive explanations or background reviews with government bills when they are submitted to the Knesset. Even in cases where information is requested by the Knesset, which are normally not denied, the lack of staff results in the members' inability to digest the large amounts of information supplied.<sup>25</sup> This has led some to argue that, apart from its control of the budget, the Knesset has no direct clout as a policy making body, especially in diplomacy and defence policy.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Fourth: The Foreign Ministry Staff***

As defined by Israeli law, the role of Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to “formulate, implement and present Israel’s foreign policy, and to promote its economic, cultural, and scientific relations”.<sup>27</sup> The foreign Ministry elite staff were traditionally a major part of the decision making process. For decades the foreign Ministry was where policies were formulated by the Ministries hierarchical bureaucracy. At least until the mid 1970s the inner circle of the foreign ministry technical elite, were considered a major decision making circle.<sup>28</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ departments include a media and information department, Public Affairs Department (also known as *Hasbara*, or explanation), an intelligence department, a department of International Cooperation, a department for Jewish communities, an economic affairs department, and a legal advisor. The ministry’s bureaucracy is headed, like all other ministries, by a director general who reports directly to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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<sup>24</sup> Richard C. White, “Congressional limitations and oversight of Executive Decision-Making Power: The Influence of the Members and the Staff.” in Robert L Pfaltzgraff, Jr. and Uri Raanan (eds.), *National Security Policy: The Decision-Making Process* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), pp. 241–249.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Sager, *op. cit.*, pp. 195–205.

<sup>26</sup> Priya Singh, *Foreign Policy Making in Israel: Domestic Influences* (Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2005), p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> Israel Government Portal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, (Accessed: 20/7/2008).

<sup>28</sup> Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 505.

The role of the Foreign Ministry has been receding recently with the strengthening of the role of the cabinet, the Prime Minister, and the military. For reasons that would be explained later in this study the policy making role of the Foreign Ministry has gradually weakened and its participation in decision making has greatly reduced. This has left the Foreign Ministry’s role limited to a promotional role.

In an attempt to improve its policy making powers The Foreign Ministry’s intelligence department established a new political research division which also functions as a policy consultant.<sup>29</sup> The research division reports to the director general of the Foreign Ministry and thus is part of the Ministries bureaucracy. However, the policy making capabilities of this department are limited compared to other research bodies that will be discussed later in this study.

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<sup>29</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*



# Chapter Two

## *Forces and Processes Within the Political System*





# Forces and Processes Within the Political System

## *First: Coalition Politics*

### **1. Proportional Representation, Coalition Politics, and the Cabinet**

Perhaps the single most important structural determinant of Israel's decision-making mechanism is its proportional representation electoral system and the consequent need to govern through coalition-cabinets. This electoral system was historically adopted as a means of incorporating as many groups as possible under the Zionist organizations' umbrella, and later on under the state's umbrella. However, as result of its use, the diversity of the society was not only reflected in the Knesset, but amplified.

Compared to other countries, the number of parties contesting the Israeli general elections is relatively high considering the population size. This resulted in a fragmented legislature where smaller parties are being represented in the Knesset and no party ever getting a majority of more than 60 seats to form a Government on its own<sup>1</sup>. This system also allows fringe parties which hold views outside of the mainstream political and public consensus to have representation in the Knesset. Examples of these are the Haredi religious parties<sup>2</sup>, parties that represent the national religious or limited agenda parties such as Gil, which represented pensioners in the 2006 elections.<sup>3</sup>

The leader of the Knesset party faction with most seats is usually asked by the President to form the Government. He negotiates with other Knesset factions of his choice to reach a formal agreement for a coalition, which includes outlining the Government Guidelines and the Government Programme. But even though he chooses the parties to negotiate with, the electoral system gives smaller parties a

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<sup>1</sup> Parties contesting elections have ranged from 14–30, while parties which manage to get elected to the Knesset have ranged between 10–15 parties. In the 2006 general elections, 30 parties contested the elections, only 12 managed to win seats in the 17th Knesset.

<sup>2</sup> Represented in the 2006 general elections with the Sephardi Haredi party: Shas, and the Ashkenazi Haredi two party list: *Yahadut HaTorah HaMeukhedet* (United Torah Judaism).

<sup>3</sup> In the 2006 general elections, the new party Gil—*Gimla'ey Yisrael LaKnesset* (Pensioners of Israel to the Knesset) won a surprising seven seats in the 17th Knesset.

disproportionately strong influence in coalition negotiations. This influence is due to the fact that they get more leverage as tie breakers, making demands from larger parties in return for joining a coalition.

Coalition negotiations is a nearly all-consuming exercise with plenty of political maneuvering and political compromises in which all parties are now well versed. But coalition formation is not only about pragmatic political expediency, it is also shaped by the ideological positions and the compatibility in the positions of the participating parties towards different issues.

The coalition agreement between parties in a coalition is binding to all parties, and parties have a collective responsibility to the coalition in the Knesset. At a minimum, ministers in the cabinet should support any decision taken by the government, once it has been taken, both in the Knesset and publicly. All MKs in the coalition must vote with the government on issues of national defense, foreign policy, the budget, and motions of censure.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the coalition agreement the coalition is controlled by what is known as the Government Coalition Administration. This body, formed by representatives of the parties in the coalition, is responsible for ensuring that MKs from coalition parties vote in the Knesset in favour of government bills under what is known as Coalition Commitment. The coalition commitment is easily checked as most of the Knesset votes are open (originally using show of hands, now an electronic system is in place) which makes MKs' votes subject to scrutiny<sup>5</sup>. Knesset Members of the coalition also have little room for manoeuvre in opposing their faction's general position since they may be dependant on their ministers for continuation of parliamentary careers or obligated to them for a past preferment in nominating them for election in the Knesset.<sup>6</sup> Such a commitment to vote in favour of the government is particularly evident in all issues that affect the stability of the coalition and a Cabinet member may be dismissed for failing to support the government on any matter that is included in the original coalition agreement. This excludes instances when the minister's dissenting vote in the Knesset is for reasons

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<sup>4</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, "The Cabinet."

<sup>5</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "The Knesset," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/knesset.html> (Accessed: 18/2/2007).

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Sager, *op. cit.*, pp. 195–205.

of “conscience” which was specifically approved in advance by the Minister’s party.<sup>7</sup> It also includes instances when, at the discretion of the Prime Minister, MKs can vote according to their own independent views in issues which do not affect the coalition.<sup>8</sup>

In a way the coalition agreement is similar to the role played by the Chief Whip in the British model, on which the Israeli system is based, where Members of parliament (MPs) from the ruling party are forced to vote in their party’s favour in various votes under the threat of expulsion from the party.

This mechanism automatically provides any government with an automatic parliamentary majority and accordingly reduces of the powers of the legislative branch to check the executive branch, thus denying the Knesset a significant oversight role and transferring some of its powers to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, which effectively negating the principle of separation of powers. Some even argue that with the rare exception of issues of supreme importance and fundamental partisan discord, such as votes on the Camp David Accords or the Gaza Disengagement Plan, the Knesset’s actual impact on national security policy decision making is negligible.<sup>9</sup>

But the fragmented nature of the Knesset, and the governments, and the change in voter behaviour led to a political and government instability.<sup>10</sup> On the political stability indicator developed by the World Bank, Israel had the lowest political stability of the 36 countries surveyed<sup>11</sup> and some argue that Israel has not had a stable government since 1982. Until the moment of writing this study, Israel has had a total of 32 Governments<sup>12</sup> making the average the life of a Government less than two years. In addition, only 5 of the last 17 general elections were held

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “The Cabinet.”

<sup>8</sup> Madar Data Bank, “Government Coalition Administration,” 1/1/2006, <http://databank.madarceneter.org/databank/TopicView.asp?CatID=1&SubID=2&TopicID=28> (Accessed: 25/10/2006) (in Arabic).

<sup>9</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> It is estimated that one third to one half of voters have been known to select a different party from the one they selected in the previous elections. See Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*.

<sup>11</sup> Asher Arian et al., *The 2007 Israeli Democracy Index: Auditing Israeli Democracy-Cohesion in a Divided Society* (The Israel Democracy Institute–The Guttman Center, June 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Including the Provisional Government of Israel (between 14/5/1948–8/3/1949), and the Government formed following the 2006 elections.

in their original date<sup>13</sup> and the period between 1995 and 2005 Israel had seven governments. Moreover, in recent years no government has been to maintain complete cabinet stability for a full year and in the last 10 years the average rate for the replacement of a minister has been once every 16 months.<sup>14</sup>

This instability in coalitions meant that maintaining the coalition often became an end in itself, and a full-time preoccupation. Thus turning the Cabinet into a forum for ironing out the differences that divide coalition parties and for reaching livable compromises, rather than the executive body it is meant to be. This reduced the government's ability to make difficult decisions and, as a result, a strategy of delay, paralysis, and incremental, partial solutions dominated the Cabinet, resulting in policies that are short-term, populist, and sectarian.<sup>15</sup> Even in issues of grand strategy; there is a tendency to wait for issues to degenerate into "no choice" situations that force action and require sudden improvisation.<sup>16</sup>

It should be noted that the fragmentation of the Israeli political scene is not a new phenomenon. The Knesset's fragmentation has been existent since the first Knesset with between 14 and 33 parties contesting elections<sup>17</sup> and between 10 and 15 actually getting elected. However, this fragmentation has not presented problems in the early years of the state and its impacts have only been felt after the nature of the political scene has changed.

The Israeli political scene was originally dominated by a single party (Mapai and later the Alignment) which coincided with the stage of "nation building" between 1948 and the late 1970s. In 1977 and after the Likud's victory, the political scene shifted from single dominant party politics to competitive dual party politics. This dual scene, in turn, changed during the "electoral reform" period between 1992 and 2001 during which the Prime Minister was elected directly. During

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<sup>13</sup> In Israel's 60-year history, there have been countless coalition crises. But in only two cases—in 1977 and 1999—did a Government fall and the opposition take power as a result of a coalition dispute. Such battles usually result from smaller parties' attempts to intimidate a prime minister by blackmailing him to achieve certain goals or else they will "sink the boat."

<sup>14</sup> Barhoom Garaysi, "The Parliamentary Composition Prevents a Common Dorm for Changes to the Israeli Government System." (in Arabic)

<sup>15</sup> Gidi Grinstein, "A President Doesn't Guarantee Capacity to Govern," The Reut Institute, 10/10/2006. <http://www.reut-institute.org/Publication.aspx?PublicationId=967> (Accessed: 17/10/2006).

<sup>16</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> The record was set in 1999 when 33 different lists ran for Knesset.

this period the political scene became more sectarian and its fragmentation was more felt. The emergence of the new Centrist party, Kadima in 2005 also presents a potential for future change towards a three-party political scene.

During the years of labor dominance, small coalition partners were mostly compensated with secondary ministerial portfolios. However, after Labor lost its dominance in the late 1970s, the Knesset's fragmentation became more problematic as small parties increased their ministerial and budget payoff demands, and became more aware of their leverage power, which made the coalition forming process more demanding and complex and increased the number of ministries. The number of government portfolios obtained by small parties increased most in the period between 1977 and 1992 when the Knesset was characterized with having no core dominant party.

In an attempt to reduce the Knesset's fragmentation the electoral threshold was raised from 1% to 1.5% after the 13th Knesset in 1996 and subsequently raised again to 2% by the 16th Knesset (2003–2006). The aim was to reduce the number of parties in Knesset and hence improve the stability of the Knesset and the Government. However, according to The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) the number of parties which contested the elections has not reduced as a result of this change, and the voters continued to vote for small parties even if their votes have the potential to be “wasted” if the parties they vote for do not get enough votes to allow them to get into the Knesset.<sup>18</sup> The pattern of voting along social cleavages has continued in spite of the increase in voting on the basis of a particular issue.<sup>19</sup>

Knesset fragmentation is compounded by increasing divergence in the ideological positions of parties in coalitions. Until the Labor Party's fall from office in 1977, following 29 years of uninterrupted rule, Israel's coalitions were all centered on a loose alliance between Labor and the National Religious Party (*Mafdal*) which took pragmatic stance at the time regarding most policy issues. Since then, the degree of ideological congruence within governing coalitions has decreased markedly: Begin's first Likud-led coalition included the dovish

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<sup>18</sup> Editorial, “On Raising the Electoral Threshold: Causes and Goals,” *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 17/4/2007. (in Arabic)

<sup>19</sup> Michal Shamir and Asher Arian, “Collective Identity and Electoral Competition in Israel,” *The American Political Science Review* (APSR), vol. 93, no. 2, June 1999, pp. 265–277.

Democratic Party for Change, while the 1980s were witness to six years of Labor-Likud “National Unity Governments.” The first Shamir coalition included Likud and the right-wing fringe party Moledet, the Netanyahu coalition included Likud, Mafdal, Shas (a *Sephardi* religious party), and Israel Bealayah (a Russian immigrant party). The Rabin coalition included Labor and both the dovish left wing Meretz party and Shas. Barak’s coalition included Labor, Meretz and, initially, Shas, Mafdal, and Israel Bealayah. Finally, the three Sharon coalitions have ranged from narrow Likud-Labor Cabinets, to a Likud, Shinui (a centrist party), and the Mafdal-National Union (HaKud HaLeumi) coalition, known as NRP-NU.

This increasingly fragmented party system has weakened the institutional power of the Knesset and accelerated the concentration of prime Ministerial power, but at the same time it has considerably impaired the capabilities of the government to govern effectively and accountably.<sup>20</sup>

Another result of coalitions is the size of the government. In recent years, and in spite of recent attempts to curb the increasing number of ministers within the Cabinet, the size of the Cabinet has increased as the coalition requires a large number of ministerial positions to satisfy the requirements of each party’s “political stars”. A ratio of one Cabinet portfolio for every three or four Knesset seats is usually used to determine the Cabinet formation.<sup>21</sup> New ministries were often created for political figures, or they are appointed as Ministers without Portfolio. Cabinet sizes reached unmanageable numbers between the upper and lower twenties.<sup>22</sup>

In coalitions, ministers are appointed primarily on the basis of their party’s and their own personal political clout, rather than their professional expertise, managerial abilities, or personal inclination. This includes the Foreign Minister, the finance Minister, and the Justice Minister. Until the recent appointment of Amir Peretz, the position of Minister of Defense was an exception to this rule.<sup>23</sup>

The nature of the coalition government, with its allocation of ministries to different parties, thus allows the creation of what Charles Freilich describe as a federation of semi-autonomous ministries, with the Prime Minister authority over

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<sup>20</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, pp. 91–94.

<sup>21</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “The Cabinet.”

<sup>22</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

them particularly limited. Ministries effectively “belong” to the Minister or party they are headed by, and culture of “live and let live” prevails in the Cabinet with each minister free to run his or her ministry with a high degree of autonomy from both the Prime Minister and other ministers.<sup>24</sup>

Also, as a result of the size of the cabinets and the prestige of the Mini-cabinets, or the Ministerial Committees on Defense, Political parties within a coalition always insist on being represented in Mini-cabinets, which has caused them to overgrow as well with an obvious impact on their secretive nature, thus negating their *raison d’être*.

The degree of control of the Prime Minister over the cabinet is often related to his own political clout.<sup>25</sup> The Prime Minister’s ability to lead is primarily a function of his intra- and inter-party political skills and his ability to use the prestige of office to generate support for his preferred policies.<sup>26</sup>

## **2. Coalition Politics and Decision Making**

Coalition politics together with declining party discipline have meant that, on more than one occasion, prime ministers have had to rely on other coalition parties, or even opposition parties, to pass “historic” legislation for which they were unable to garner their own party’s support. For example, Begin needed the support of the then-opposition Labor Party to attain Knesset approval for the Camp David Accords, while Sharon needed Labor and opposition parties to obtain approval for the Gaza Disengagement Plan.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the politicization of the Cabinet has weakened the position of the Prime Minister in his government.

The partisan nature of the Knesset has also meant that members of the Knesset are preoccupied with their political activities—which, unlike parliamentary achievements, are the primary basis of their future Knesset membership and possible promotion to ministerial positions—and thus have little time to perform their role in checking the power of the executive.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press (USIP), 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*



Similarly, the partisan nature of the Cabinet, the quick turnover of coalitions, and the fact that future political careers usually have far less to do with how effectively they run their ministries than with how well they satisfy their party's constituency, mean that ministers focus on the immediate electoral ramifications of their actions, rather than on effective governance. As political figures in their own right, ministers must continually strengthen their positions and ensure their political futures. With an extraordinarily frenetic 24/7 news cycle, volatile party politics, and short terms between elections, many ministers' time must be devoted to intra-party politics no less than to the affairs of their ministry and of state. The Defense Minister, and to a lesser extent the Foreign Minister are exceptions to this rule.

Although little is known on the dynamics of and interactions within the cabinet, it is known that the Cabinet has become a forum for political grandstanding, rather than policy discussion. Nearly all ministerial statements are made with an eye on media coverage, and indeed are designed to be leaked immediately.<sup>28</sup> The issue of leakage is particularly interesting especially that all cabinet and ministerial subcommittees deliberations are supposed to be secret

In such a politicized cabinet, decision and policy issues are always discussed with an eye on their partisan and domestic political ramifications. This creates an environment where policy cannot be discussed objectively and where certain options are foreclosed or channeled into given directions. For example, the decision to kill the multi-billion dollar development program for the Lavi fighter was made purely on a partisan basis, without regard for the financial, technological, and operational considerations presented.<sup>29</sup>

Since the political price of issues increases the more controversial they are, formulating policy on the major issues of Israel's existence (for example the future of the West Bank) on which political parties, and Israelis at large, are divided, has become very difficult and at times can be considered political suicide.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, the Cabinet lacks an effective Cabinet-level policy staff. With little preparatory staff work and documentation, even basic data is often unknown to ministers and Cabinet meetings are devoted largely to a presentation of the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

situation, rather than to policy deliberation. Policy proposals are usually presented by the policy advocate—typically the relevant minister, ministry official, or the Prime Minister—who invariably presents just one favored option, which the Cabinet can either accept or reject.

Even when policy options are generated within the bureaucracy, differences are often ironed out prior to the meeting of the Cabinet, which remains unaware of them, or indeed, of their very consideration. On the other hand the bureaucracy (the ministries, as well as the defense and security agencies) are often not fully informed of the Cabinet's agenda and need for certain information, thus they prepare generic policies and not ones geared towards a certain agenda. In addition, the absence of policy staff meant that the Cabinet has no independent capability of assessing the data and options presented. Ministers thus have to rely on their general knowledge and the information they are able to gather from the press and from casual conversations, often with interested parties. As a result, intuition, and preconceptions replace serious consideration.<sup>31</sup>

If one also considers that ministers in the Cabinet, who are career politicians, are not experts in their spheres of responsibilities or in management, which raises doubts regarding the competence of their judgments, one can come out with an image of a dysfunctional Cabinet in terms of policy formulation and decision making. Furthermore, there is often only a loose connection between the Cabinet decisions and the allocation of the resources needed to implement those decisions, which are often made for purely symbolic reasons. It is an open secret in Israel that a substantial majority of Cabinet decisions is never implemented, and that they were adopted from the outset with no intention of implementing them. A rough estimate commonly used in the Israeli bureaucracy is that 70% of Cabinet decisions are not implemented.<sup>32</sup>

One example on how the cabinet is no longer where policy is made, is during the Gaza Disengagement. The Foreign Ministry was almost completely in the dark regarding the intricacies and negotiating requirements of the Disengagement Plan—formulated by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his advisors—and unable to play a significant role in its formulation, or even to effectively present it abroad.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Even the Ministry of Defense and the Israeli Army (Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)) were both brought into the process of disengagement at a comparatively advanced date.<sup>33</sup>

Another example on the inability of the Cabinet to deal with complex national security issues is the annual deliberations on the defense budget. Each year, the Ministry of Defense and the Israeli Army mount a public relations campaign, which at times borders on scare tactics, to generate public support for their budget request. This is then followed by Cabinet meetings, in which the Minister of Defense and Israeli Army present great amounts of data and assessments, with the aid of the latest technological imagery, to scare and dazzle the ministers. The ministers, who simply lack the ability to assess the budget demands presented, and given public opinion, tend to have little desire to question it. The battle between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance is often settled in a compromise with the latter making an arbitrary cut in the defense budget request.<sup>34</sup> This compromise is often a political compromise rather than an assessment of the details of the budget requirements.

## ***Second: Parties, Ideologies and Programmes***

### **1. Background on Social Structures and Ideologies**

The consequences of coalition politics are compounded by the ideological nature of the parties in a coalition. Ideology plays a great part in Israeli politics because of the exceptional degree of ideological fervor that exists in political life. Although most political parties in Israel subscribe to Zionist ideology (with the exception of the Anti-Zionist religious parties and the Arab parties), they vary greatly in their interpretation of Zionism as a natural reflection of the variation in Israeli society. There are three main sub-ideologies which fall under Zionism; with Labor Zionism (which has social democrat colors), Revisionist Zionism (which shares some traits with conservatives in other countries) and Religious Zionism

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

(which is distinct from non-Zionist religious parties). The first two ideologies are the most dominant and are currently represented politically by the Labor Party and the Likud Party.

In addition, the society is also divided ideologically on religious basis. The main cleavage is between the religious and the secular, with great disagreement between the two sides over the type of state Israel should become. While the different religious groups (Zionist and non-Zionist alike) would like to see Israel as a truly Jewish country governed by Jewish law (the *Halachah*) and collectively identify themselves as Jews rather than Israelis, the secular and nationalist Israeli Jews see no role for religion in public life or politics and tend to identify themselves as Israelis rather than Jews.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to these general ideological categorizations, the Israeli Jews are also divided ethnically according to the original countries from which the immigrant Jews came. Although approximately 68% of Israeli Jews are *Sabra* (A term used to refer to Israeli-born and mostly to second or third generation Israelis, and means cactus in Hebrew),<sup>36</sup> the society is deeply divided according to ethnic origins with a small rate of intermarriage between different ethnicities. The dominant ethnicities are Ashkenazim and Mizrachim (also referred to as Sephardim). Currently, they are roughly equal in size by vary according to different estimates. This variation is partly because the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) no longer classifies Jews according to their ethnic origin in the national census but according to their place of birth. In addition, the different estimates vary depending on how other Jewish minorities are classified.

On the Mizrachi side, while the two terms Mizrachim and Sephardim appear to be used interchangeably with a current tendency to use Mizrachim rather than Sephardim, the two terms are not identical. The term Mizrachim is an ethnicity term, which means eastern in Hebrew, in reference to where a number of Jews came from. Sephardim on the other hand is a religious term that refers to the type

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<sup>35</sup> Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, "What a Jewish State Means to Israeli Jews," in Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig and Bernard Susser (eds.), *Comparative Jewish Politics: Public Life in Israel and the Diaspora* (Bar-Ilan University Press), pp. 105–109.

<sup>36</sup> 2004 figures, see Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), Jews and others, by origin, continent of birth and period of immigration, [http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton56/st02\\_24.pdf](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/shnaton56/st02_24.pdf) (in Hebrew)

of religious practices they follow.<sup>37</sup> In that context it must be noted that there are efforts made by the Sephardi Haredi Party Shas to blur this distinction in order to allow itself to represent the ethno-religious group of the Sephardim and the Mizrachim.

On the Ashkenazi side, the Ashkenazi influence is attributed to their role in establishing the Zionist project since its beginnings prior to the establishment of the state. In 1948, most Jews in Palestine were Ashkenazim (77.7%) but further Mizrahi immigration to Israel has reduced the demographic gap with the Ashkenazi Jews, and at present, the Israeli Jewish population is roughly half Ashkenazim and half Mizrachim. However, the established Ashkenazi domination of the political and military establishments remained largely unchanged. The historical discrimination against Jews of oriental origin, and the cultural stigma against those who speak the “language of the enemy”, together with the fact that the Mizrachim have traditionally received second rate education and thus were mostly in blue collar employment, all of these factors have reduced the chances of the Mizrachim in building a body of political experience. The Mizrachim do not yet have party to represent them ethnically, since the Shas party represents the Sephardim religiously and has a religious manifesto. The ministerial experiences of David Levy and the recent accusations of incompetence against former Defense

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<sup>37</sup> *Ashkenazim*: The term was used to describe Jews who derive from northern Europe and who generally follow the customs originating in medieval German Judaism. It now refers to Jews of northern and eastern European background (including Russia) with their distinctive liturgical practices or religious and social customs. The word Ashkenaz means Germany in medieval Hebrew. *Mizrachim*: The term describes Jews who descended from the Jewish communities of the Middle East. Included in the Mizrahi category are Jews from the Arab world, as well as other communities including the Gruzim, Persian Jews, Bukharan Jews, Mountain Jews, Iraqi Jews (including the Baghdadi Jews of India), Kurdish Jews, and Yemenite Jews among various others. The term Mizrachim comes from “*Mizrach*” which means orient/east in Hebrew. Most Mizrachim practice Sephardic Judaism as they were influenced by the Sephardim who emigrated from Spain to the Ottoman Empire. Most Mizrachim speak Arabic and Judeo-Arabic. *Sephardim*: Are those who practice Sephardic Judaism according to the tradition of the Jews who left Spain or Portugal after the 1492 expulsion and joined the existing Mizrahi Communities in the Arab World. The beliefs of Sephardic Judaism are basically in accord with those of Orthodox Judaism, though Sephardic interpretations of *Halachah* (Jewish Law) are somewhat different than Ashkenazi ones. As a cultural designation, the term refers to the practices associated with Jews of this region and its related diaspora in the Balkans and Middle East (especially in Islamic countries). The term comes from the Hebrew term for Spain, *Sephard*. Traditionally Sephardim speak Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish.

Minister Amir Peretz are good examples of the lack of political experience amongst Mizrachi Jews. In the 17th Knesset the number of Mizrachi MKs was 32 representing only 27% of the Knesset seats.

By way of comparison, the Jewish immigrants from Russia who arrived in Israel in the 1990s, known in Israel as *HaRusim* (the Russians), had a much easier ride. Their absorption was much better into the society, they received bilingual training, they received a higher level of education, and their differences were more tolerated than that of the Mizrachim. This was partly helped by their European origins and by their claim that they came to save Zionism and the European nature of the state of Israel.

## 2. Political Ideologies

Because of the different cleavages in the Israeli society, political parties' became a complicated representation of these cleavages. Political Parties in Israel may primarily represent a political leaning such as the Likud (which represents the Center Right or the revisionist Zionism ideology) and Labor (which represents the Center Left or Labor Zionism ideology). Parties could represent a religious (or non-religious) affiliation such as the Haredi party Shas, or the secular party Shinui. They may also represent the interests of new immigrants such as Yisrael Ba'aliyah and Yisrael Beytenu which represent the interests of Israel's Russian immigrants, or represent the interests of certain groups such as The National Religious Party (*Mafdal*) which represents the religious settlers.

In short, Israeli political parties do not follow a universal linear or bipolar scale, such as the one Doves and Hawks scale often used outside of Israel to describe its parties. Instead, political parties fall into a varying number of categories on a multidimensional scale depending on the criteria and issues used to define those categories. These issues, which are understandably interrelated often relate to Israel's security, can be summarized as follows:

The first issue relates to how to deal with the Palestinian population in the whole of Historic Palestine. The position of Traditional Labor Zionism, which has been represented by the Labor Party, has been mostly for separation from the Palestinians, which would eventually lead to their transfer through economical pressure and denial of work. While this economic approach has been in line with Theodor Herzl's original vision, it was not sufficient. As a result, David Ben-Gurion, as the Labor movement's leader at the time, had to resort to military transfers of a

large number of the Palestinian population during the 1948 war in what new Israeli historians refer to as Plan Dalet or Plan D.

On the other hand, Revisionist Zionism, which has long been represented by the Likud, had a far more ambivalent attitude towards the native Palestinian population. In line with the vision of its founder Vladimir Jabotinsky and the Greater Israel Ideology, the Likud would allow Palestinians to remain in the land but would use great power to force them into submission in an “Iron Wall” arrangement. This approach was influenced by the Labor’s ideology of transfer particularly within its religious circles.

The debate between the two ideologies re-emerged following the 1967 war when the perceived demographic threat from Palestinian populations increased following the annexation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In this debate, the two ideologies expressed themselves in the two political positions that dominated the Israeli discourse on the future of Palestinians within the occupied territories. While Labor advocated self-determination for the Palestinians and the establishment of a separate Palestinian state it was not able to carry out mass expulsions in the current global climate. The Likud’s position, on the other hand, denied any collective political rights for the Palestinians in the occupied territories — although some of the extreme hawks were willing to allow the Palestinian Arabs individual political rights following annexation of the land, and others advocated a population transfer— but was also unable to implement an “Iron Wall” solution for fear of being accusing of building an Apartheid state. The increasing difficulty in carrying out either strategies — transfer, or the Iron Wall— led to a compromise that took the form of a “creeping occupation” of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which Israel hoped would go largely unnoticed by the west.

More recently, a new ideology of “unilateral Separation” or disengagement has emerged from amongst the Labor Zionist. This ideology, which appears to be in line with the original Herzl ideology of separation and Transfer, was also adopted by some members of the Likud and was much strengthened by the conversion of Ariel Sharon. Sharon’s split from Likud to establish the Kadima Party, which included members from both the Labor Party and the Likud, signaled the emergence of Unilateral Separation as an alternative consensus ideology.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Cook, “Israel’s Dead End,” *Al-Ahram Weekly* newspaper, Cairo, 26/6/2008, no. 903, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/903/op1.htm> (Accessed: 29/6/2008)

The second dimension is the future of the occupied territories. The extreme hawkish position favors annexation of all territories, while the extreme dovish one advocates a total Israeli withdrawal. There are two broad in-between positions which relate to the first dimension. The first, which is closer to the dovish extreme and is associated with the Labor party, uses the formula of 'territorial compromise' and envisages a partial withdrawal whose magnitude varies according to an individual's degree of dovishness. The second position, which is closer to the hawkish extreme, is generally termed the functional approach. According to this view, Israel should refrain from annexing the territories in dispute but should retain military control of them while allowing the Arabs living there to run their own affairs. The extent of autonomy to be allowed to the Arabs living in the territories varies according to the individual's degree of hawkishness.

A third dimension relates to the establishment of settlements in the territories. Views on this matter are naturally related to the future of the occupied territories. The school of territorial compromise regards the location of the new settlements as critical. It favors settlements only in those security zones destined to stay within Israel's borders following any political settlement. On the other hand, supporters of the functional approach and extreme hawkish annexationists do not make a distinction on principle about where settlements are to be established. However, the functionalists are more selective about the location and timing of new settlements for purely pragmatic security reasons.

The final, and arguably most important dimension, is the level of threat perception. This is the most difficult measure to assess in the quest to place the Israeli political leadership along the continuum. The extreme hawks display a high level of threat perception, accusing the Arabs of aiming to destroy Israel. In contrast, the extreme doves were convinced that the Arabs have become reconciled to the existence of the state of Israel. Those in the middle of the spectrum differentiate among various levels of hostility on the part of the various Arab actors.<sup>39</sup>

With the alliance between the Likud with the religious parties, a new general classification has emerged in which the major political parties were grouped into two main political camps. The first camp is called Israel A, which describes the

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<sup>39</sup> Efraim Inbar and Giora Goldberg, "Is Israel's Political Elite Becoming More Hawkish?," *International Journal*, no. 45, Summer 1990.



Left wing parties and includes a large proportion of secular, upper class, educated Ashkenazim, who normally vote for Labor or Meretz. The second camp is Israel B, which describes the Right wing parties together with the religious parties. It includes the religious, the Sephardim, the less educated, and the lower-status workers, who normally vote for Likud and the religious parties.<sup>40</sup>

The accuracy of such simplistic division can be contested in many ways. But perhaps its main weakness is that it reverts to the overly simplified bipolar model. The argument behind this classification is that the religious parties and the Right have formed a form of alliance that is quite distinct from that of the Left. For example, the Israeli right and the religious parties agree on the notion that “Jewish Blood” is what differentiates Jews from non-Jews. They both think very little of the blood of non-Jews (for the religious, the blood of non-Jews has no intrinsic value while for the Likud, it has a limited value). In addition, both the secular right wing Likud and the religious parties revere the Jewish past, which includes respect to the religious nature of this past, and they both insist that Jews have a historic right to an expanded Israel beyond its current borders. The religious heads of the religious parties also often appeal to the traditionally religious member of the Likud (and Labor for that matter).<sup>41</sup>

Both the right and the religious refer to Jewish history and tend to perceive any threat in light of the historical persecution of the weak Jewish communities throughout the history. But the irony is that those who make such images are the same people who speak with utmost confidence about Israel’s power and ability to impose its will on the Middle East. This blend of fear and exaggerated self confidence is common within the Israel B camp.

Another reason for the affinity between the secular right and the religious Jews is that the latter is capable of providing “convincing arguments” for Jewish rule over the land and for the denial of basic rights to Palestinians, since the secular Jews are too removed from Jewish religion and Jewish past to be able to talk about it competently. Only the religious can provide them with rationales based on the long history of the relationship between God and his chosen people.<sup>42</sup> It is worth noting

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<sup>40</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, pp. 261, 269.

<sup>41</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, 2nd edition (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–14.

that the Israel B camp (the right and the religious parties) has won 60 or more seats in every election since 1997, except in 1992.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the left, which longs for normalcy and wants Jews to be a nation like all other nations, is very different from the Israel B block which is united in its resentment of the idea of normalcy and its belief that Jews are exceptionally different from all other peoples and nations.

An example on the effects of the alliance between the Likud (right wing party) and the Haredim (non-Zionist religious parties) was in the 1996 general elections, when this alliance was credited for the Netanyahu victory. Haredi rabbis and voters stood solidly behind Netanyahu, in spite of attempts by Shimon Peres to court Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph. For example 89% the town of Bnei Brak (a largely Haredi town east of Tel Aviv) voted for Netanyahu.<sup>44</sup> Naturally, after the elections, Netanyahu formed a coalition with all three Haredi parties.

To demonstrate the differences between parties, this study provides a list and a brief description of the political parties represented in the Knesset and the initial coalitions formed following the election of the 16th Knesset and the 17th Knesset.<sup>45</sup> Following that is a summary of the political platforms and manifestos of the main political parties on the main issues that were crucial to the 2006 general election:<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 254.

<sup>44</sup> Asher Arian, "The Israeli Election for Prime Minister and the Knesset, 1996," *Electoral Studies*, vol. 15, no. 4, November 1996, pp. 570–575.

<sup>45</sup> The 16th Knesset was elected in Jan. 2003 and the 17 Knesset was elected in March 2006. See Zionism and Israel-Encyclopaedic Dictionary website, "Israeli Political System and Parties Zionism and Definition," <http://www.zionism-israel.com/dic/politicalsystem.htm> (Accessed: 25/10/2006)

<sup>46</sup> Israel Votes 2006, "Political Parties & Platforms," <http://www.israelvotes.com/2006/platforms.php> (Accessed: 8/8/2007).

**Table 1: Political Platforms of Israeli Main Political Parties**

Hebrew Name	English Name (If different)	Political orientation
<b>Meretz-Yahad</b>		Leftist, Zionist, secular
<b>HaAvoda</b>	Labor	Left of Center, Zionist, secular
<b>Shinui</b>		Centrist, Zionist, Capitalist, vehemently opposes the influence of the religious parties, and the government support to religious establishments
<b>Gil</b>	Pensioners Party	Unannounced, Pensioners rights
<b>Noy</b>		Center Right
<b>Kadima</b>		Center Right, Zionist, Populist
<b>Likud</b>		Right wing, Zionist, secular, capitalist
<b>HaIkhud HaLeumi</b>	National Union (NU)	Extreme Right, Zionist
<b>Yisrael Beytenu</b>	Israel Our Homeland	Extreme Right, Zionist
<b>Mafdal-Mafleget Datim Le'umim</b>	National Religious Party (NRP)	Extreme Right, Religious Zionist, Modern Orthodox
<b>Agudat Yisrael</b>		Ashkenazi, Orthodox, non-Zionist, (Hawkish)
<b>Degel HaTorah</b>		Ashkenazi, Orthodox, non-Zionist, (Dovish)
<b>Shas-Shomri Torah Sephardim</b>		Sephardi, Orthodox, non-Zionist
<b>Balad</b>	National Democratic Assembly	Arab party, Anti-Zionist, progressive, seeks to transform Israel from a state of Jews to a democratic state with equality for all its citizens
<b>Ra'am-Ta'al</b>	United Arab List	Largest Arab Party in the Knesset, anti-Zionist includes Islamists
<b>Hadash</b>	Communist Party of Israel	Israel's communist Party, includes Arabs and Jews, anti-Zionist

### and their Members in the 16th and the 17th Knesset

Prominent personalities	16th Knesset 2003	17th Knesset 2006
Yossi Beilin, Haim Oron, Ran Cohen, Zehava Galon	6	5
Amir Peretz, Benjamin Ben Eliezer, Ami Ayalon	21	19
Tommy Lapid, Avraham Poraz, Eliezer Zandberg	15	0
Rafael Eitan	0	7
David Tal	1	0
Ehud Olmert, Tzipi Livni	–	29
Benjamin Netanyahu, Shaul Mofaz, Silvan Shalom	40	12
Benny Eilon	7	9
Avigdor Lieberman	Joined NU	11
Zevulun Orlev, Nissan Slomiansky, Shaul Yahalom	6	Joined NU in NU-NRP
Yakov Litzman, Meir Porush	3	6
Moshe Gafni Avraham Ravitz	2	Joined Agudat Yisrael in UTJ
Nissim Dahan; Yair Peretz, Shlomo Ben Izri	11	12
Azmi Bishara, Wasil Taha, Jamal Zahalka	3	3
Ibrahim Sarsur, Talab El-Sana, Ahmad Tibi	2	4
Muhamed Barakeh, Hana Sweid, Dov Khenin	3	3

**Table 2: Detailed Platforms of the Major Israeli**

	<b>Palestinian Statehood</b>	<b>Peace Process</b>	<b>Jerusalem</b>
<b>Kadima</b>	Committed to Road Map and eventual creation of a Palestinian state	Committed to Road Map, but will continue on a unilateral path if negotiations fail or are not possible	Jerusalem will serve as the eternal capital of Israel
<b>Labor</b>	Committed to a negotiated two-state solution that includes a Palestinian state	Supports renewed negotiations toward a two state solution, while continuing to fight “terror”	Jerusalem, with all of its Jewish neighbourhoods, will be Israel’s eternal capital; willing to cede parts of the city to Palestinians under an agreement
<b>Likud</b>	Concedes that Palestinian state may be inevitable, but ideologically opposed to its creation	Willing to negotiate with PA leadership which is “not compromised by terror”	An undivided Jerusalem will be Israel’s eternal capital
<b>Meretz-Yahad</b>	Advocates the creation of a Palestinian state as a key to the conflict’s resolution.	A negotiated settlement accepted by all sides based on party leader Yossi Beilin’s “Geneva Accords”	A divided Jerusalem will serve as the capital of both Israel and a future Palestinian state
<b>NU-NRB</b>	Opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state based on ideological and security rationales	Sees the Palestinian Authority as non-viable and Jordan as the Palestinian state. Believes the Arab residents of West Bank can be citizens of Jordan-Palestine but not have to move there	Jerusalem shall remain Israel’s undivided and eternal capital
<b>Shas</b>	Philosophically opposed, but willing to consider under certain circumstances	Has supported land for peace negotiations in the past, but has retreated from this policy in response to “terror”	Jerusalem should remain the undivided capital of Israel
<b>Shinui</b>	Supports establishment of Palestinian state	Favours negotiations and territorial compromise for peace yet maintains a strong security stance	Jerusalem should serve as the capital of Israel and the future state of Palestine
<b>Yisrael Beytenu</b>	Supports the creation of a border drawn to minimize the number of Palestinians within Israel, so Israel can be Jewish and democratic	Prefers unilateral Israel moves to ensure security	Jerusalem should remain capital of Israel

### Political Parties for the 2006 General Elections

Settlements	Economy and Employment	Religion and State
Remove settlements in certain areas and maintain settlement blocks based on Israeli security needs	Improved budgetary transparency, reapportioned distribution of budgetary funding. Increased employment incentives, improved career oriented education, employment of minors	Introduce legislation that would legalize civil marriage/ burial
Immediate cessation of funding for settlements and withdrawal from most of the territories (with the exception of the settlement blocks)	Raising minimum wage and increased social benefits, legislate against abusive manpower agencies, improved education.	Maintain religious status quo while separating religion from the political realm
Israel should maximize the land it keeps in any final settlement and maintain control of all settlement blocks and the Jordan Valley	Reduction of unemployment and taxes. Increased incentives, improved transportation benefits, improved child care for working women	Maintain Religious status quo
Full withdrawal from all of the territories captured in the 1967 Six-Day War	Continued and improved professional training. Restrictions on employment of foreign workers to increase opportunities for Israelis	Supports State recognition of non-Orthodox conversions and patrilineal descent as legal source of Jewishness
Supports the continued construction of communities throughout the "Land of Israel" and rejects unilateral or negotiated withdrawals from existing communities	Reduce economic disparity, strengthen periphery and development towns; continue policies to strengthen economic growth. Increased minimum wage, tax incentives for working mothers	The state must maintain and strengthen its connection to Jewish tradition, while maintaining respect for the secular
Supports maintaining settlement blocks, but willing to concede territory if it saves lives	Increased government support for the poor and underclass. Increase government support for training programs	Israel should be ruled by Jewish values and laws
Major settlement blocks should be maintained in final agreement with Palestinians	Continue on current path toward a true market economy. Improved government support for employment	Supports the complete separation of religion and state
Maximize the number of settlements to be included in final borders of Israel including a land swap through re-drawn borders	Continue toward full market economy and privatization of government held industries. Increased support for working poor and women.	Supports maintaining the status quo with some allowance for addressing critical needs



From the political platform summary above one can see the differences in the positions of the main parties over the issues of the peace process, the Palestinian statehood, the future of Jerusalem, the settlements, and the relationship between religion and state. These differences can often be traced back to their respective ideologies.

One example of this ideological difference is the difference between the Labor Party and the Likud over the nature of the conflict. For decades there has been, and still is, an ongoing debate in the policy sphere between two schools of thought. The first school, which is adopted by the Likud, is called the “war between states” school and it argues that the source of the Arab-Israeli dispute was the refusal of the Arab states to recognize Israel’s existence and that peace will only happen if the Arabs change this policy, and that the Palestinian problem would be solved in the framework of a peace treaty with Jordan.

The second school, which is adopted by the Labor, is called the “was between nations” school and it argues that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is at the heart of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, and that to achieve a normal relationship with the Arab states the Palestinian problem has to be solved first. When the latter view dominated following the first *Intifadah*, especially as it was adopted by the military, this helped tip the balance to take a policy decision to start a peace process with the goals of resolving “the Palestinian dispute”.<sup>47</sup>

The strong ideological nature of political parties explains the difficulty that faces the Prime Minister in creating a coalition of diverse parties. In order to have a stable and successful coalition the ideological positions of coalition parties should be coordinated, as an unstable coalition can tie the Prime Minister’s hands or eventually lead to the failing of the Government.

Ideologies play an important role in policy deliberations. Policy is often discussed in ideological and partisan terms which exceed their sizes. For example, arguments are often made on issues of national security that portray them in terms of national survival, even when in most cases this isn’t really at stake. This is not to mention the ideologically charged issues, such as the peace process or the future of settlements, where formulating a policy in a coalition that has different ideological positions can be impossible.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

But on the other side, there are certain issues that are agreed upon across the political spectrum and are perhaps more influential than the dividing issues. These issues are always present during any decision making because of the underlying consensus on them within both the political and public spheres.

The most prominent issue upon which there is consensus amongst all Israel Jews is the character of state of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. All Israeli Zionist parties, including the Left and the “peace camp”, agree on the principle of the unity of the people of Israel and both the Right and the Left work to retain the purity of the population as a predominantly Jewish one through methods such as encouraging immigration. This principle greatly influences all demographic-related decisions including the absolute rejection by all Zionist parties of the right of Palestinian refugees to return their homes.

The issue of settlements could also be seen in light of this consensus. While the Labor party currently opposes the expansionist building of settlements, this should be understood in terms of its concern for the demographics and the character of Israel as a “Jewish state.” Labor currently opposes the expansion of settlements only because it believes that settlements jeopardises the demographic balance by adding the Palestinian population within the “territories” to the equation. Labor has, as a result, tactically sacrificed the notion of the wholeness of the land (*Shlemot Ha’aretz*),<sup>49</sup> which is stressed on by the Likud, in order to protect another notion; the unity of the people of Israel (*Ahadut Ha’Am*).<sup>50</sup>

Another principle on which there is consensus is the existential threat that Israel faces and the need to ensure the strength of Israeli deterrence, which includes putting a stop to any form of resistance. This principle, which is present in almost every Israeli decision, strongly influences the negotiation over the nature of any proposed neighbouring Palestinian state. All parties which support the

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<sup>49</sup> The concept of *Shlemot Ha’aretz*, or wholeness of the land has changed in meaning due to ideological changes in revisionist Zionist between the 1950s and the 1970s, While it initially meant both sides of the Jordan river, during the 1970s it has now come to mean the whole land of Israel, or the whole land between the river and the sea. See Nadav G. Shelef, “From “Both Banks of the Jordan” to the “Whole Land of Israel:” Ideological Change in Revisionist Zionism,” *Israel Studies* journal, vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 125–148.

<sup>50</sup> George Kurzom, “What Does the Application of the Right of Return Mean for Israel?,” *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 5/10/2007. (in Arabic)



establishment of a “Palestinian entity” agree that it should be a demilitarized state so as not to pose any threat to the security of Israel.

The status of Jerusalem also ranks high on the list of issues on which there is near consensus as is perhaps evident from the party manifestos summary above. Despite the positions of the Labor and the Meretz-Yahad parties regarding a divided Jerusalem, a law passed by the Knesset in 2000 makes it impossible to change the status of any part of Jerusalem without another Knesset law. Another law is being debated in December 2007 to make any change to the status of Jerusalem subject to a special (two thirds) majority in the Knesset.<sup>51</sup>

Even on the issues of the peace process and the final settlement with the Palestinians, although there are disagreements over them between the two main parties, Labor and Likud, a form of consensus is created between the decision makers in either party by the Beilin-Eitan Agreement which was signed in 1997—in the wake of the Rabin Assassination—between Yossi Beilin representing Labor at the time, and Michael Eitan who was then representing Likud as its parliamentary faction leader.

The agreement which aimed to clarify the areas of agreement and disagreement between the 2 parties regarding future negotiations with the Palestinians on a permanent settlement, created a framework for the Israeli negotiators in any final settlement negotiations with the Palestinians.<sup>52</sup>

The agreement set three principles around which an Israeli national consensus is to be built; The first principle notes that it has become necessary for Israel—if it seeks to secure the advantages offered by its presence in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip—to “permit” the creation of a Palestinian “entity” of undetermined status. Whether this entity is called a state, as Labor’s Beilin was prepared to concede, or an “enlarged autonomy,” as the Likud’s Eitan preferred, the fact of extensive Israeli limits on Palestinian sovereign power remains constant.

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<sup>51</sup> Ezra Halevi, “Knesset Advances Jerusalem Protection Law,” *Arutz Sheva* (Israeli National News), 16/12/2007, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/124255> (Accessed: 22/12/2007).

<sup>52</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “The Beilin-Eitan Agreement: National Agreement Regarding the Negotiations on the Permanent Settlement with the Palestinians,” [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/beilin\\_eitan.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/beilin_eitan.html) (Accessed: 8/8/2007).

The second principle is a demand for continuing Israeli strategic control over whatever territory is transferred to the Palestinian entity. This demand goes far beyond the recent negotiations over Israel's right of "hot pursuit" of Palestinian, and highlights the extent to which Israel views the rapprochement with the Palestinians as a way of preserving, rather than re-evaluating, its security interests in territories occupied in June 1967.

The third guiding principle concerns the future of settlements anywhere in the "Western Land of Israel" (The entire historical Palestine), and it follows from the second principle. The authors declare that the continuing existence of all settlements must be part of an agreement with the Palestinians. Such an agreement must preserve settler rights not only to keep Israeli citizenship, but also to maintain their individual and communal ties to Israel. The preservation of these ties—personal, legal, and territorial—therefore becomes one of the basic security interests that Israel insists must be preserved.<sup>53</sup>

The agreement also outlines detailed principles which are to be the basis of negotiations on the issues of borders, security, the status of the "Palestinian entity" and limits to its sovereignty, Jerusalem, the refugees, water, and the economy.

As evident from the categorization above, the definitions of Right and Left in Israel have become more about political positions and less about socio-economical issues. Commentators often argue that in Israel there is no Left any more, and that all that remains in the Left is a political position *vis-à-vis* the Right, with no associated social or economic Left leaning policies. But even with that limited definition, the political center in Israel is gradually shifting towards the Right—as a reflection of changed in the Israeli society. Such changes have meant that positions that in the past were considered extreme Right are now seen to be Leftist and moderate. A recent Poll by the GeoCartographia Research Institute shows that 55% of Israelis believe that the Left does not exist anymore, and that the Labor party can no longer be considered a Leftist party.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP), "The Beilin-Eitan Agreement on Permanent Status and its True Antecedents," [http://www.fmep.org/reports/vol07/no2/02-the\\_beilin\\_eitan\\_agreement\\_on\\_permanent\\_status\\_and\\_its\\_true\\_antecedents.html](http://www.fmep.org/reports/vol07/no2/02-the_beilin_eitan_agreement_on_permanent_status_and_its_true_antecedents.html) (Accessed: 9/6/2007).

<sup>54</sup> Editorial, "55% of Israelis Believe That the Left no Longer Exists," Arabs48 website, 3/4/2008, <http://www.arabs48.com/display.x?cid=6&sid=6&id=53165> (in Arabic)

### 3. Internal Party Politics

It should also be noted that political parties themselves should not be seen as blocs, especially in the case of larger parties such as Labor and Likud. All Israeli political parties function like western Political parties—with the exception of the Shas, Agudat Yisrael, Degel HaTorah, and the extreme Right parties.

These parties are generally composed of a Party Convention, which ranges between one thousand and three thousand members depending on the size of the party and is the highest party authority, a smaller Central Committee that meets more regularly, and a few smaller committees, such as the executive committee, which runs the day-to-day party activities. These party structures imply a great deal of transparency, but in reality the decision making within parties is to a great extent controlled by a small group of political leaders within the party who control the decisions on policies as well as on the choice of candidates to prominent party and public posts.

Even between these small groups of leaders, differences emerge and power bases are created within the same party. These rival camps—some of which are remnants of smaller parties—compete for the leadership of the party and work to push their interpretation of the party's founding principles to the front. For example the Labor party currently includes the Amir Peretz camp (which includes the bloc from the now dissolved Am Ehad party as well as the Histadrut worker union bloc), the Benjamin Ben Eliezer camp, and the Arab camps.

### 4. Political Programs

Ideologies aside, political parties' programmes are influenced by the degree of pragmatism of its decision makers, and can be changed for internal political or tactical reasons, or in response to a change in the Israeli public opinion. Both party ideologies as well as its social, political, and economical programmes are taken into consideration when creating a Government coalition.

In terms of decision making there are many examples of pragmatism in public policy. Ehud Barak's unilateral withdrew from Lebanon and his willingness to forego almost all previous Israeli positions at Camp David in 2000, Sharon's unilateral withdrew from Gaza, and Olmert's announcement of his intention of unilaterally withdrawing from the West Bank are but a few of these examples.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

Another example on pragmatism is the change in the position of different parties towards the wider conflict with surrounding countries. The Labor party, for example, has for a long time preferred to follow the periphery doctrine of creating links and alliances with the non-Arab “outer ring” countries with which Israel had no direct conflict such as Turkey, Ethiopia, the Shah’s Iran, and a few sub-Saharan governments, as well as with ethnic and religious minorities, like the Maronites in Lebanon and the Kurds in Iraq. This periphery doctrine, which was developed by Ben-Gurion and Eliahu Sassoon, was deemed to serve Israel’s security against the hostile inner ring Arab countries and was implemented by both the Labor and the Likud.

However, it was never considered a good substitute for a strategy aimed at achieving peace with Israel’s Arab neighbors. So when the geo-strategic balance of the region changed—with the establishment of peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the initiation of a peace process, and the changes that took place in periphery countries (Ethiopia and Iran)—a reversal of policy was needed. It was Rabin and Peres in the early 1990s who adopted such reversal and who considered post revolutionary Iran as one of Israel primary enemies.<sup>56</sup>

But when Likud came to power led by Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996, he tried to reverse this trend. Not only has he tried to undo the Oslo peace process but he also attempted to restore the periphery doctrine, and even initiated an extensive discreet program of reaching out to the Islamic Republic against the advice of the National Intelligence Assessment.<sup>57</sup> Although such rapprochement did not bear any fruit because of Iranian lack of interest and the Labor policy was reinstituted. This incident demonstrates how differences in ideological convictions regarding the conflict have clear policy consequence.

In terms of internal party politics, the decision by Labor veteran Shimon Perez to join Ariel Sharon’s newly formed Kadima Party and Benjamin Netanyahu’s behaviour in supporting and then opposing Ariel Sharon’s decision to disengage from the Gaza Strip, are two recent examples of such pragmatism.

<sup>56</sup> Leon T. Hadar, “Orienting Jerusalem toward Ankara or Cairo? Israel’s New Geostrategic Debate,” *Mediterranean Quarterly* journal, vol. 12, no. 3, 2001, pp. 8–30.

<sup>57</sup> Trita Parsi, “Iran: the Inflatable Bogey,” Rootless Cosmopolitan website, 9/10/2007, <http://tonykaron.com/2007/10/09/iran-the-inflatable-bogey/> (Accessed: 16/12/2007).

Like many political systems around the world, politics in Israel is a vocation comparable to Soviet “apparatchik” model of politicians. As a result career politicians who have spent most of their lives in political bureaucracies dominate it. As these career politicians are less likely to change than those who enter politics with fresh ideas, political conservatism and resistance to change has developed as a result in the political system.<sup>58</sup> This also opened the door for political expediency. It is not uncommon in Israeli Politics to see political parties making or supporting certain decisions to join government, to stay in government, or to avoid new general elections which may not be advantageous to that party.<sup>59</sup> To avoid losing voters as a result of such a pragmatic approach, ideological reasons are used as front to such decisions. It is worth noting that most political resignations can be explained in political terms, and that it is rare that an individual minister would resign on an issue of principle.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Third: The Role of the Prime Minister and Top Leadership and the Personification of Power***

#### **1. The Role of the Prime Minister**

The Prime Minister, also known as the Premier,<sup>61</sup> is the most powerful political figure in Israel. According to Israeli law, he, or she, is the head of the executive branch and thus wields executive power. In addition, he has the supreme political position in the country and represents the apex of the decision making pyramid in Israel.

The Prime Minister’s position in the cabinet is identified by Israeli law, as *Primus inter Pares*, or First among equals. He is responsible for the actions of his government. He has the authority to appoint and dismiss ministers, to set jurisdictional responsibilities of ministries, and to reorganize their functions and structures. Moreover he has the authority to appoint the heads of unelected

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<sup>58</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 101.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>61</sup> Premier and Prime Minister are both English naming conventions, whereas the accurate translation of the Hebrew title “*Rosh HaMemshala*” is head of the government.

power-sharing institutions such as the governor of the Bank of Israel, the Attorney General, and the Director of the Mossad. The Prime Minister, theoretically at least, has complete authority in making final policy decisions, and is the ultimate decision maker. He sets the cabinet agendas and controls the pace of events. The Prime Minister also has immunity from removal in the case of being accused in a court of law. He only has to resign after a final verdict against him in a legal case.<sup>62</sup> The Prime Minister and one or two senior ministers such as the Defence and Foreign Ministers are often referred to as the top leadership.

Between the years 1948 and 2008, twelve persons (eleven men and one woman) have served as prime minister. Seven were born in Eastern Europe. And five (Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak, Sharon, and Olmert) were born in Mandate Palestine except for Netanyahu who was born in 1949.<sup>63</sup> Most of them became prime ministers at a relatively advanced age following a long political career in party related political work. Most of them were also the heads of their political parties.<sup>64</sup>

With the concern for security as high as it is in Israel, a leader's military background is one of the most important characteristics to whether he is fit for leadership. Almost all Israel's governments, to date, possessed military or security experience even if the top leadership was not occupied by former generals.<sup>65</sup> For example, six of the last eight prime ministers in power since 1974 had distinguished military or security establishment record.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Defense ministers—except for Amir Peretz—were either former generals, such as Moshe Dayan, Ariel Sharon, Shaul Mofaz, Yitzhak Mordechai, and Ezer Weizman, or individuals with extensive

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<sup>62</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 265.

<sup>63</sup> Netanyahu was born in 1949 in Tel Aviv.

<sup>64</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

<sup>65</sup> Since 1992 three prime ministers (Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon), and two Labor party leaders (Binyamin Ben Eliezer and Amram Mitzna), and one Mafdal party leader (Effi Etam), were all former Military Generals. See Kameel Mansour and Fawz Abdelhadi (eds.), *Israel: Daleel 'Am 2004* (Israel: A General Guide 2004) (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 2004), p. 136.

<sup>66</sup> Prime ministers since 1974 and their highest military/ Security positions: Yitzhak Rabin and Ehud Barak were former Chiefs of Defense Staff, Ariel Sharon was a Major General and a former Head of the Southern Command of the Israeli army, Shimon Peres was a formal Director General of the Ministry of Defense, Yitzhak Shamir worked for the Mossad for 10 years, Benjamin Netanyahu served in the elite unit *Sayeret Matkal* (The reconnaissance unit of the General Staff).

military/ security background, such as Shimon Peres, Moshe Arens, Benjamin Ben Eliezer, and Yitzhak Shamir. Even those leaders who lacked such experience such as Menachem Begin compensated for that by surrounding themselves with experienced people such as Dayan and Weizman.<sup>67</sup>

Another characteristic of Israeli leaders that emerged recently is attention to obtaining foreign credentials. According to Israeli Historian Tom Segev, all elites in Israel today are people who have “an American chapter in their biography”. He asserts that the elite in economy, academia, science, business, the army, politics, and the media, are people who studied in the United States.<sup>68</sup>

## **2. Limitations to the Power of the Prime Minister**

The prime minister is not only entitled by law to be the ultimate decision maker, but he is also expected to lead and to be decisive. However, the Prime Ministers powers are limited by number of factors, many of which are also empowering factors. The prime minister is constrained by the coalition he creates, and by the coalition agreement between his party and other parties in the coalition. While he leads the cabinet, he is dependant on the support and the collaboration of ministers and on the confidence of the Knesset. The Prime Minister is only as strong as he can force his colleagues to let him be.

The Prime Minister is also constrained by the limited resources at the disposal of his office, including a limited budget and limited organizational means, which limits his ability to singularly affect public policy in spite of its great powers.. His role is also limited by the collective responsibility of the cabinet, as well as by the limitations of the powers conferred by law.<sup>69</sup>

In addition, the Prime Minister has the final say only on issues that reach him. In Israel, issues of foreign and security policy are the only issues that are regularly brought for decision to the top leadership, while matters of internal and economic policy are handled by the proximate decision makers such as ministers and senior

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<sup>67</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 333.

<sup>68</sup> Conversation with Tom Segev, “Israeli National Identity,” Institute of International Studies, University of California Berkeley, Conversations with History series, 8/4/2004, <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people4/Segev/segev-con0.html> (Accessed: 12/5/2007).

<sup>69</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 36, 49.

administrative office holders. The top leadership may act as a final court of appeal in internal and economic issues if proximate decision makers cannot reach an agreement among themselves.<sup>70</sup>

### 3. Personification of Top Leadership

In recent years, the power of the top leadership in Israel has significantly increased, with the political weight gradually shifting from the political platforms of parties to the personality of their leaders competing for the position of the Prime Minister. Israeli elections are becoming increasingly about the experience, skill, toughness, and nerve to make decisions of war and peace and to conduct Israel's relations with its allies.<sup>71</sup> Prime Ministers who have put great emphasis on collegial, collective, and lengthy decision making processes have been criticized for being indecisive, wavering, and vague.<sup>72</sup>

This is partly because large sections of Israeli Jews believe that what they need is a strong leader. Research has found that as a result of the weak nature of Israeli democracy and the anti-democratic attitudes held by many within the Israeli population, in times of trauma, Israelis tend to look for a strong leader who they hope will solve their problems. This position is confirmed by opinion polls consistently show that around two thirds of Israelis think that strong leaders are better than debates and laws,<sup>73</sup> this figure is high compared to western democracies where less than third of populations believe that a strong leader is better than debates and laws. The victory of Rabin in 1992 and the rise of Benjamin Netanyahu to power in 1996 are good examples on how the role of personality and perceived strength can sometimes be equal that of ideology and political experience.<sup>74</sup> In the 1992 election campaign, Rabin championed the significance of prime ministerial leadership in governance. His electoral list was named "The Labor Party Headed by Rabin."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>71</sup> Priya Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>72</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Alan Dowty, *op. cit.*

<sup>74</sup> Hassan Barari, *Israeli Politics and the Middle East Peace Process: 1988–2002* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), pp. 77–99.

<sup>75</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, p. 57.



These expectations by the public, the media, and other politicians of the Prime Minister to lead has played a major role in transforming the Prime Minister from a *Primus inter Pares*, or a first amongst equal, to a *Primus*, or a super minister.

This increase in the significance of leaders was accompanied with a general change in the types of leaders. Throughout its short history Israel's leaders have changed from a generation of "historical" leaders with great experience and popularity, to leaders who are a result of their political parties' bureaucratic system but have less popularity and less control over their own party. This has in turn changed to leaders who have a relatively brief professional political career before taken office, but often a long illustrious military careers and a charismatic popularity within the electorate and their parties' bases. This group is exemplified by the premiership of Barak and Netanyahu.<sup>76</sup>

The issue of personification of power has been compounded with the "electoral reform" law in 1992. The law, which called for the direct elections of the Prime Minister on a separate ballot, has been implemented in 1996 following the difficulties in forming the Government in 1984, 1988, and 1990. The law, which was meant to strengthen the executive, was essentially an attempt to change the Israeli system a unique combination, a parliamentary system with presidential attributes. It eroded many of the powers of the Knesset over governance and policy making and concentrated even more powers in the hand of the executive.

However, the law which strengthened the executive power and the prime minister, has not helped create stable coalitions, instead as the power of the Prime Minister has increased, his influence on controlling the majority in the Knesset has declined, especially *vis-à-vis* the small parties. The two-ballot vote gave smaller parties more leverage in pressuring the Prime Minister candidates in return for their support for his candidacy. It allowed the small parties to pressure bigger parties to accommodate their policy preferences not only during coalition formation bargaining but also during the prime ministerial elections. It also removed the incentive to vote for large parties within certain sectors (namely voting for a large party prime minister), which resulted in certain sectors voting for their representing parties in the Knesset vote and for the large parties' candidates in the Prime Minister vote. The results were a further fragmented Knesset which led to the two-ballot vote being abolished following the 2001 elections.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kameel Mansour and Fawz Abdelhadi, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–37.

<sup>77</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–39.

Nevertheless, this U-turn has not helped in reversing the general trend of personification, which extended even to local elections, which were reformed to elect a city's mayor directly by the public instead of the proportional representation previously adopted.<sup>78</sup>

The position of the Prime Minister has also been strengthened by the gradual growth of the Office of the Prime Minister over the years, which has only served in concentrating more powers in the hand of the Prime Minister.<sup>79</sup>

Three major policy decisions demonstrate the centrality of the decision making process around the Prime Minister. These decisions were: Begin's agreement to start talks with Egypt in 1977, Peres decision to withdraw from Lebanon in 1984 and his economic stabilization plan to stop inflation, and Rabin's decision on the Oslo Accord with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1992. In spite of their differences, in all three cases the Prime Minister was central to the decisions, which he almost took alone, keeping almost all of his cabinet in the dark except for one minister in whom he confided. Begin confided in Dayan, Peres confided in Yitzhak Modai, and Rabin confided in Peres. In all three cases, the top civil servants were generally not included in the consultations, but the Prime Ministers made extensive use of his advisors, Begin with Aharon Barak, Peres with a number of economists, and Rabin with Singer.<sup>80</sup>

Another sign on the personification of politics is the increasing role of public opinion in politics. Prime Ministers are continuously aware of their public opinion standing and always strive to have high public ratings. When leaders are unable to rise to the public's expectations, the public quickly loses confidence in them. Especially that Israelis do not have a very high opinion of their political leaders in general, compared to their confidence in the military staff for example.<sup>81</sup> This was apparent in the case of Ehud Barak who was characterized by his preference to ignore his advisors and to take his decisions alone. Such behaviour has led to loss of trust between him and his party — which

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<sup>78</sup> Giora Goldberg, "The Growing Militarization of the Israeli Political System," *Israeli Affairs*, vol. 12, no. 3, July 2006, pp. 277–394.

<sup>79</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–59.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106–125.

<sup>81</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

saw his behaviour as arrogant—and subsequently the public. It is believed that this perception together with his indecisiveness has contributed to his fall in March 2001.

Similarly, in the case of Ehud Olmert, political failures were coupled with a lack of charisma, and a rise in investigations into corruption cases within his government. As a result Olmert's public standing diminished fairly quickly. In February 2007 a *Haaretz* poll showed that 78% of Israelis are unhappy with leadership, with 32% of them citing corruption and 10% citing selfishness as the reason.

Some Israeli academics perceive personification as a threat to the Israeli political system which was envisaged to be based on political settlements and inclusion rather than decisiveness. They see the political system as a 4-level pyramid model with the general public at its base, supporting the political parties, which in turn support the Knesset coalitions, and at the top of the pyramid lies the executive body headed by the Prime Minister. They thus argue that since the democratic values and traditions are not rooted in the Israeli political system, strengthening the executive power at the top of the pyramid (as in a presidential system) can lead to alienation of the opposition which would adversely affect the already fragile and polarised society.<sup>82</sup>

#### **4. Cabinet Politicization, Improvisation, and Decision Making**

In addition to personification, the Israeli top leadership has other problems. The increasing size and politicization of the Cabinet and the Mini-Cabinet (the Ministerial Committee on Defense), together with the Prime Minister's inability to seek advice from—or confide to—ministers in the coalition such as the Defense Minister and the Foreign Minister (because they often are from another party in the coalition or another power base in the party),<sup>83</sup> have created a political culture

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<sup>82</sup> Editorial, "No to a Presidential System in Israel: Sections from a Recent Document Published by The Israel Democracy Institute," *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 12/12/2006. (in Arabic)

<sup>83</sup> These points were suggested by the former head of the National Security Council, Giora Eiland at a recent workshop on the Winograd Report by The Institute for National Security Studies at the University of Tel Aviv on 24/5/2007. In his remarks he referred to the case of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert *vis-à-vis* Defense minister Amir Peretz and foreign minister Tzipi Livni. See Editorial, "The Proceedings of a One Day Workshop on the Winograd Report: Reactions and Aspects: The Failure of the Second Lebanon War are Much More Than its Accomplishments," *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 10/7/2007. (in Arabic)

of maintaining “constructive ambiguity” within the cabinet and avoiding clearly defined policy objectives for fear of their negative domestic repercussions. This has, in turn, created a culture amongst leadership that avoids supporting staff work. Some scholars such as Charles Freilich even argue that there is a fundamental and conscious decision on the part of nearly all prime ministers to refrain from systematic staff work, especially work that is not informed of the Prime Minister’s agenda.<sup>84</sup>

Leaders have thus tended to downplay the importance of consultation and preparatory staff work, relying primarily on their personal judgment and relegating senior officials and advisers to the level of aides.<sup>85</sup> Yossi Beilin’s described this culture in a newspaper interview, upon assuming the position of a cabinet secretary in the Peres government of 1984–1986. He described how he was “astounded by the lack of any preparation for cabinet meetings. The preparations are more lacking than anyone from the outside could imagine. The ministers are no presented with sufficient information enabling their vote to take into account all the ramifications of these decisions.”<sup>86</sup>

Such culture of avoiding staff work is compounded with the fact that the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet both lack the organizational capabilities and the staff necessary to conduct systematic staff work such as policy assessment and formulation, inter-ministerial coordination, and implementation follow-up.

In addition, since most Israeli leaders have long political experiences, they have a long-standing familiarity with the primary national security issues and often have strongly held positions on how to deal with the different issues that Israel faces. Leaders are also strongly influenced by their beliefs and perceptions of the world. Michael Brecher argues that decision makers in foreign policy operate within their psychological dispositions, which include societal factors such as ideology and tradition that are derived from a cumulative historical legacy, as well as their personality factors.<sup>87</sup> In addition, Israeli leaders are also inevitably influenced by the culture of strong “can do” leaders—which is celebrated in Israel—and by the

<sup>84</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>87</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 229.

lack of checks and balances during policy formulation. This has resulted in an increased reliance on personal judgment which created a culture of improvisation and crisis management as an alternative to systematic forethought, planning, and prevention.

In too many areas, trial-and-error decision making and “fire-fighting” are the norm and are implemented to a degree unusual in other countries. Policies are tried and abandoned as events develop, without forethought, systematic analysis, or a basic strategic framework. Improvisation remains a primary characteristic of Israeli decision making to this day, and although it is perceived to have achieved success that surpassed expectations, its failures can be catastrophic to Israel. In spite of its many disadvantages, one advantage of improvisation is that it allows the decision maker to take action without a clear articulation of objectives and prior choice between policy options. However, even this advantage can be perceived as a disadvantage, since the lack of policy options leaves the Prime Minister with less room for maneuver.

In recent years, however, Israel’s ability to improvise has decreased, as issues have become far more complex, requiring lengthy, systematic planning, and implementation, and as the cost of error has grown and often became unacceptable.<sup>88</sup> However, policymaking remains, to a certain degree, influenced with personal preferences of the Prime Minister and the top leadership. For example, the then-Defense Minister Sharon decided on the 1982 invasion of Lebanon despite broad opposition from the Cabinet and national security bureaucracy, as did Barak in deciding on Israel’s unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon 18 years later. It is also understood that Prime ministers Begin, Rabin, Barak, Sharon, and Olmert all adopted radically new positions on the peace process solely, or almost solely, on their own understandings and intuitions.<sup>89</sup>

These three factors, the personalization of leadership, the politicization of the cabinet and the dominance of improvisation, have led to what has been described as the failure of the Cabinet as a decision making forum. Prime ministers were forced to formulate policy on their own in smaller *ad hoc* groups or forums, with only a few trusted confidantes. For example Golda Meir had a “Kitchen Cabinet;”

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<sup>88</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Rabin and Peres tended to work things out between themselves; and during the National Unity Government, Shamir convened a “Premiers’ Forum” (composed of Rabin, Peres, and himself); Sharon had a “ranch forum;” and Olmert consulted seven ministers which were known as the “Group of Seven”.<sup>90</sup>

As a result, the Israeli decision making process became not only personalized and idiosyncratic, but also fluid, informal, and less institutionalized. Prime Ministers for example tended to have a direct relationship with their Ambassadors to the United States, and although ambassador should answer to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, such direct relationship with the prime minister allowed them to become associates in the decision making process on foreign and security policy. This has been the case in the relationship between Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin with Prime Minister Golda Meir, between Ambassador Moshe Arens and Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and between Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>91</sup>

Many major decisions were taken without consulting the cabinet. For example, Sharon decided on the Gaza Disengagement Plan without consulting the national security bureaucracy on the options open to him, turning to it only for its input on the best ways to implement the course he already had decided on. Similarly, Begin went to Camp David in 1978 without the benefit of any preparatory staff work and quashed the one major study conducted by the Israeli Army prior to the summit. Extensive staff work was conducted at the bureaucratic level prior to the 1982 War in Lebanon, but was kept from the Cabinet by Begin and Sharon. Barak made important decisions on the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese fronts based on his own assessments and preferences.

However, it should be note that during times of crises most decisions taken (69% of the decisions during the 1967 war, and 55% during the 1973 war) are made in large institutional meetings, either the cabinet, the Ministerial Committee on Defense or the General Staff. Decisions were delegated to the Ministerial Committee on Defense when they are not as crucial as in the case of the later days of the 1967 wars when it was evident to the Israelis that the war was won.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Priya Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>92</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, p. 354.



# Chapter Three

## *The Influence of the Military and Security Establishment on Decision Making*





# **The Influence of the Military and Security Establishment on Decision Making**

## ***First: The Security Concern and the Military Doctrine***

It is fair to say that if there is one influencing factor that dominates all strategic decisions, and is the main concern for Israeli decision makers and the general public alike, this would be the concern for national security.

The traditional explanation of the security concern in Israel is that it stems from a combination of several factors; the first of which is the fundamental Zionist notion that Israel is a safe refuge where Jews can be safe from the threats that endanger their lives in the diaspora. The second factor is Israel's unique geostrategic position and its small margin of error, which are a result of its small population relative to its neighbours, its small geographic size, and its lack of strategic depth. The security concern is also explained as a result of Israel's settler nature vis-à-vis the Palestinian original population, and its history of isolation within its regional environment against which it has fought six wars to date. As a result, Israelis have a nearly total preoccupation with what they perceive as "a present threat" from their environment which they perceive as hostile, uncertain, volatile and incomparable to that of any other country, and thus warrants a special security arrangement.<sup>1</sup> The common wisdom is that these factors have converged to produce a society that continues to see itself as vulnerable in front what it believes are "existential threats."

However, according to this explanation one would have expected that the security concern would have reduced or diminished as a result of the changes in Israel's geostrategic position. Namely, Israel's increasing military might, its success in achieving military superiority over its neighbours, the existence of peace treaties with some of them, and Israel's success in obtaining the military backing of the United States. Since this has clearly not been the case as security issues continuing to play a major role in Israeli public life, some have suggested a psychological interpretation arguing that the concern for security was a result of an insecurity in minds of Israeli Jews, citing statements such as the one made by

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<sup>1</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

Israel's ex-Prime Minister Levi Eshkol in the 1960s when he described Israel as "*Shimshon der Nebechdiker*" which is Yiddish for "poor Samson", the strong man beset by crippling insecurity who feared a pogrom round every corner.<sup>2</sup>

This study will attempt to go beyond this simple interpretation to explain this contradiction by shedding light on the origin and development of operational and psychological fundamentals of Israel's national security doctrine.

## 1. Operational Principles of Military Doctrine

Ever since the early 1950s, the traditional Israeli national security doctrine has been based on a number of operational military fundamentals, which are expressed as follows:

- a. There is a massive disproportion between Israeli resources and the Arab national resources (mainly in terms of territory, manpower and gross national product) which prevents Israel from ending the conflict by military means, while allowing the Arabs to potentially do so. Consequently, the only goal of the Israeli Army<sup>3</sup> is to defend the country against an aggressive Arab world.
- b. The most fundamental and dangerous threat to Israel's existence is an all-out co-ordinated Arab surprise attack. Hence, Israel should always maintain the ability to defend itself under the conditions of such a worst-case scenario, known as *mikreh ha-kol* (the all-out case).
- c. To counter the quantitative disadvantage against the large surrounding Arab countries, Israeli national security doctrine is to rest on three pillars: Deterrence (through the threat of massive retaliation to any incursion), Strategic Warning (on any development which might endanger its national existence); and Decisiveness (the military ability to win a decisive victory if deterrence fails).

A number of operational implications emerged from this doctrine; first, the build-up of the capability needed to provide a high-quality strategic warning and a quick response to external threats, which explains why the Military Intelligence branch, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) and the Navy remain as regular forces while the ground forces are based on reserve manpower. Secondly, the build-up of a military capability is needed to maintain operational initiative in the battlefield, which

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Black, "Not David but Samson," *The Guardian* newspaper, London, book review, 11/2/2006, <http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1706250,00.html> (Accessed: 15/2/2008).

<sup>3</sup> Known in Hebrew as *Tzva Haganah Le'yisrael*, and often referred to in with its acronym *T'sahal*.

would be able to win a decisive victory within a short period.<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, Israel has adopted the principle of taking the war into its enemy's territories and a preference for short wars, due to its need to reduce human and economic costs to a minimum and to reduce the window for international military and diplomatic intervention. This has led Israel to adopt offensive maneuver warfare as a military strategy, which also gave Israel an edge since it advantages better-trained and equipped militaries such as the Israeli Army over militaries that rely on sheer numbers.<sup>5</sup> Fourthly, Israel has complemented its inherent weaknesses by having a strong alliance with a superpower, in accordance with David Ben-Gurion's principle that Israel should always have at least one great power patron. For the same goal, Israel has also sought to maintain regional connections.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Israel needed to establish its deterrence by building qualitatively and quantitatively disproportionate military capabilities. In the Israeli case, this meant building a nation in arms, where every capable man and woman carries out his military duties, in addition to maintaining a permanent well-armed professional military force. Israel, according to Yigael Alon (Deputy Prime Minister between 1967 and 1974), has thus adopted the concept of the "Garrison State" as established by American political scientist Harold Lasswell, but while choosing the garrison state concept clearly appears to be a direct result of its own security doctrine, it has also served Israel in achieving its strategic objective in becoming the strongest regional power.

Perhaps the most obvious result of this choice is the compulsory national military service. All Jewish and Druze men, and Jewish women, over the age of 18 are drafted for service, although exemptions may be made on religious, physical, or psychological grounds. Men in the Haredi community may also choose to be exempt while enrolled in Yeshiva religious schools and all Haredi and religiously observant Females, married females, and females with children are exempt. It is estimated that around 50% of females are exempt from serving in the Israeli Army.

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<sup>4</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, "Towards a Paradigm Shift in Israel's National Security Conception," in Efraim Karsh (ed.), *Israel: The First Hundred Years, Vol. II: From War to Peace?* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> David Rodman, "Israel's National Security Doctrine: An Appraisal of the Past and a Vision of the Future," *Israel Affairs*, vol. 9, no. 4, June 2003, pp. 115–140.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

Male officers serve for 48 months while male soldiers serve for 36 months. Israeli Females serve in the Israeli Army for only 21 months which are mostly spent in non combat roles.

In addition to the national military service, most Israelis also do annual reserve service (known in Hebrew as *Milo'eem*). Released soldiers may continue serving as reservists until the age of 54, contributing up to a month's worth of service each year, in both training and active service. The reserves constitute the backbone of the army's manpower needs alongside the military service. In fact, it is not rare to find two generations in the same family serving simultaneously in the army—the son in compulsory service and the father in reserves. The Reserve service has strengthened the link between reservists, who often serve in the same unit every year, and has also created a bond between the different segments of the society acting as a melting pot. The fact that reservists continue to be subject to military jurisdiction even when not on active duty,<sup>7</sup> not only serves to explain the Israeli saying that “Israelis are soldiers on eleven month's leave,” but also serves to strengthen the notion of the garrison state in Israel.

In addition, military service seems to be the only way to gain certain benefits; some jobs are open only to veterans and certain welfare benefits are available only to veterans and their families. Military service also used to provide a degree of prestige, where some use their rank or position to enhance their professional and personal status.<sup>8</sup>

## **2. Psychological Principles of Military Doctrine**

In addition to the operational fundamentals, the security of Israel was traditionally based on three main psychological principles:

### **a. The Primacy of Security**

It is the dominant belief in Israel that almost every national problem is a security problem, or at least involves security aspects. As a result, every major crisis in Israel's early history was seen as a threat to national and personal survival.<sup>9</sup> Such

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<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, “The Role of the Military in Israel,” Jewish Agency for Israel website, Jewish Zionist Education, [http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/.../Society/9\)The+Role+of+the+Military+in+Israel.htm](http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/.../Society/9)The+Role+of+the+Military+in+Israel.htm) (Accessed: 2/6/2008).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Alan Dowty, *op. cit.*

subordination of all private and collective aspects of life to security demands was typical of the Second *Aliyah* generation with its prime proponent being David Ben-Gurion. For Ben-Gurion, immigration, absorption, and the build-up of settlements were also security issues. His following definition of security is symptomatic of this dominant belief:

Security means the settlement and peopling of the empty areas in north and south; the dispersal of population and the establishment of industries throughout the country; the development of agriculture in all suitable areas; and the building of an expanding (self-sufficient) economy... Security means the conquest of the sea and air, and the transformation of Israel into an important maritime power... Security means economic independence... Security means the fostering of research and scientific skill on the highest level in all branches of [science and] technology... Security means vocational training of a high standard for our youth... And finally, security means a voluntary effort by the youth and the people in general for difficult and dangerous tasks in settlement, security and the integration of the immigrants...<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Ben-Gurion's Disciple, Moshe Dayan has once said that "Small nations do not have a foreign policy. They have a defense policy."<sup>11</sup>

### **b. Resorting to Force as a Solution to all Security Problems**

While, some sections of the Zionist movement were always aware that military solutions had their own limitations, other ideological streams tended to view the use of force as almost the only means to solve all security problems.

### **c. Self-Reliance**

The principle of self reliance—where states “tend” to rely on their own military power rather than on external guarantees such as peace agreements, defense pacts, or arms control regime to ensure their survival—is extremely dominant in the Israeli national security paradigm. This has often been attributed to the traumatic history of Jews in the Diaspora including the Nazi Holocaust, which, according

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<sup>10</sup> David Ben-Gurion, “Israel’s Security and Her International Position before and after the Sinai Campaign,” in *Israel Government Year-Book 5720 (1959-1960)* (Jerusalem: 1960), pp. 22–24, quoted in Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 267.

<sup>11</sup> Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 20.

to this understanding, created a siege mentality and a fundamental mistrust of Gentiles. In addition, Israel's wars against its neighbors have further magnified this sense of insecurity. Henry Kissinger once alluded to this principle when he noted, "Israel's margin of survival is so narrow that its leaders distrust the great gesture or the stunning diplomatic departure."<sup>12</sup> In terms of military doctrine, this self-reliance manifests itself in three distinct components: Self-reliance in manpower, self-reliance in training and doctrine, and self-reliance in arms.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Changes to Military Doctrine**

The traditional notion of national security started to change following the peace initiative by former Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the initiation of the peace process with the Palestinians and the Jordanians. Israel's immediate strategic environment since then came to be perceived as considerably more complex and nuanced especially with the complex changes in Israel's external environment. To give an example on how complex these changes are, one could point to the changes that took place during the period between 1995 and 2005. Events during that period included the initiation of peace processes with the Palestinians and Syrians, the second *Intifadah* and the unprecedented Palestinian attacks inside Israel, the evolution of the Iranian and Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction threats, the first Iraq war, the withdrawal from Lebanon and the development of a rocket threat from Hezbollah, the Gaza Disengagement Plan, and a variety of domestic developments including the Rabin assassination in 1995, the rapid Cabinet turnover, the growing size and strength of the settler movement, and the rapid economic development.

In addition, there has been a change of Israel's geostrategic environment in the period since the 1973 war. The change of the balance of threats from conventional war to unconventional threats, such as low intensity warfare and weapons of mass destruction, played a major role in changing the focus of military planners from achieving defensible borders through its control of territory, to achieving defensible borders through peace treaties that contained strong security guarantees.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, by the 1990s, Israel's national security environment became more complex when its interests, and security environment, started to extend beyond

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<sup>12</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, *op. cit.*, pp. 104–108.

<sup>13</sup> David Rodman, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

its borders and its “natural” interests in the Middle East, to encompass the entire world. This was also a result of a number of changes in Israel’s geostrategic position in the world, such as:

- The strategic of weapon of mass destruction (WMD) threats posed by the so-called second- and third-tier confrontation states (Iran, Iraq, and Libya) which were perceived in Israel as the primary danger to its security.
- The increasing complexity in Israel’s ties with its partners, such as the United States as well as China and India.
- Israel’s complex relationship with the European Union.
- The collapse of the Soviet Union and Russian Jewish immigration

Israel’s economic development in hi-tech and military industries which created interest in international economics for a such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).<sup>15</sup>

These changes to Israel’s environment led to changes in its military doctrine that attempted to respond to the complex nature of its increasingly volatile environment and to maintain its regional power. They also led to a change in the society’s security ethos that shape the fundamentals of the military doctrine. One change that took place in the security ethos is the recognition of the limits of power, which was only internalized by a section of the political class.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, the security concern and the fundamental perception of Arab hostility have persisted. As a result, a large segment of the political spectrum, especially in the right wing and religious segments, continues to see a very limited range of military or diplomatic options in dealing with Israel’s neighbors.<sup>17</sup>

#### **4. Changes to the Military Service**

In spite of the compulsory nature of the army and its benefits, maintaining the “nation in arms” nation has not been without its challenges. This was primarily because of two changes, a demographic change, and a socio-economic change.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Yoram Peri, “Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis,” in Daniel Maman, Eyal Ben-Ari and Zeev Rosenhek (eds.), *Military, State, and Society in Israel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2001), p. 109.

<sup>17</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*



The first change is that with the increase in the population of Jewish Israelis to cross the 5 million mark, especially between the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, mostly as a result of the addition of some 800 thousand new immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the Israeli Army was faced with more recruits than it needed.<sup>18</sup> Between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, the population of men aged 18–21 rose by more than 25% and the potential of military reservists (aged 22 to 51) rose by almost 59%. The potential conscripts continued to grow by almost 20% until the year 2000. This led the Israeli Army began to examine various possibilities for changing its recruitment policy. But although many alternatives of “selective reduction” were proposed, most of them compromised the basic principle of a nation in arms, entailing retreat from the model of a citizen’s army and turning the Israeli Army into a professional military.

In dealing with this issue the Israeli Army chose to deal with it using a number of solutions, rather than making a decision in principle. In the mid-1990s, it increased to tens of thousands the number of servicemen women it “lent out” to other civilian bodies, such as the civil service, *Magen David Adom* (the equivalent of the Red Cross), and the Society for the Protection of Nature.

In addition, the Israeli Army decided to adopt elements of selective recruitment and differential service to deal with the surplus manpower. The Israeli Army decided to make the principle of compulsory service more flexible by reducing the number of recruits, extending the differential range of service, and increasing the number who receive early release. For example, the Israeli Army responded to the requests of religious parties to increase the number of Yeshiva (religious academy) students who were exempted from military service, and their number rose from a few thousand after 1971 to over 20 thousand in the 1990s (from 2% to more than 7% of potential conscripts every year). Similarly, new immigrants received far-reaching exemption, from complete exemption for immigrants who arrived after the age of 29 to significant reduction or total cancellation of the six months period of service for those eligible for the draft, as well as exemption from reserve service. The basic entrance requirement for recruits was also raised, and the Israeli Army more easily dispensed with the Service of those who had low psychological profiles (known as “section 21”) or had difficulty in adjusting to military life.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> David Rodman, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Yoram Peri, “Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis,” pp. 122–128.

The second change was the change in motivation to serve in the military amongst conscripts and amongst reserves. First, there has been a drop in the potential conscripts' motivation to serve in Combat units, and particularly in unglamorous field units. According to a report by the head of the Manpower Branch, in 1996, 44% thought that for Israeli youth "service in combat units is a duty" compared to 64% who gave this answer in 1989.<sup>20</sup> This decrease in the readiness of individuals to volunteer for frontline units was coupled with a change in the sources of motivation to serve in elite units, which has moved away from patriotism towards an individual's desire for self-fulfillment.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, although military service is still converted into civilian status and a military career for people coming from relatively low social groups constitutes a ladder for social mobility. The societal character changes have led to the parallel existence of different types of ethos, which led to a decline in the significance of military service especially amongst Ashkenazi Jews.<sup>22</sup> While the soldier remained for The role model for young Israelis since its establishment, a new role model has now appeared in the form of the high tech entrepreneur, the lawyer or the media celebrity. In addition, whereas in the past exemption from the military was a cause of social stigma, it is no longer so today. One indication of this is the fact that the Civil Service Commission decided to stop the practice of examining the Israeli Army records of candidates for the civil service.<sup>23</sup>

However, it is still worth noting that the recognition of the need to serve in the Israeli Army is still quite high amongst young people who are eligible for the draft. In a study conducted in 1994 by the Israeli Army's behavioral sciences department, 50% of the subjects replied that they "would volunteer for the full three years of service if the Israeli Army was voluntary, 44% replied that they would volunteer for a shorter period, and only 6% said they would not volunteer at all". This rate has been fairly stable since the mid-1980s.<sup>24</sup>

On the reserves side, this motivational crisis is more severe. Although the growth in the number of recruits each year should lead to a yearly increase in

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<sup>20</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 126, reported in *Yediot Achronot* newspaper, 23/10/1996.

<sup>21</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> Yoram Peri, "Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis," p. 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109–125.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 125–126.

the number of reservists available, there is an even larger flow of dropouts from reserve service before the age of exemption (45 in combat units, 51 in non-combat units). This is often attributed to reasons such as health, psychological problems, and sometimes just plain dodging. A study conducted by the Israeli Army revealed that 50% of the reservists up to the rank of captain replied that if they had the opportunity they would not report for reserve service,<sup>25</sup> this is a large change in attitude considering that a similar study conducted by the Israeli Army in 1974 found that only 20% replied in this way.<sup>26</sup> The significance of this trend cannot be emphasized with the importance of the reserves to the military, and especially to the army, which relies mostly on reserve manpower.

The Israeli Army preferred to solve this problem by informal arrangements. The commanders of the reserve units summoned many more soldiers than are actually required and ended up with the required number. Grade-A units, for example, call up a reserve of 150%, and Grade-B unit commanders summon up to 500%. In addition, the Chief of Staff decided in May 1995 to make considerable concessions in the reserve service. The period of active reserve duty for combat soldiers was shortened and the age limit for reserve service in combat units was lowered, and the number of “reserve days” was also cut by approximately 50% compared with the mid-1980s.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of these two changes, the Israeli Army, which started off in the early 1950s as a citizen’s army, has in the 1990s become a military that forgoes the draft of some quarter of all the men who are eligible for military service—5% of them Israelis living abroad, 7% yeshiva students, about 3% exempt for medical reasons, and the remainder unsuitable in various ways.<sup>28</sup> This trend has also continued since the 1990s as forecasted by the Israeli Army. An internal study carried out by the Israeli Army revealed that only 52% of Israeli teenagers served in the military in 2008 compared to 59% in 2002.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126–127, reported in *Haaretz*, 12/9/1996.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126–127, reported in *Yediot Achronot*, 17/10/1997.

<sup>27</sup> Yoram Peri, “Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis,” pp. 125–128.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 124–125.

<sup>29</sup> These figures include Arab in Israel and Haredim, who are normally exempt from mandatory service. See Moran Zelikovich, “IDF: 50% of Israeli teens do not enlist,” *Yediot Achronot*, 1/7/2008, <http://www.ynetnews.com/Ext/Comp/ArticleLayout/CdaArticlePrintPreview/1,2506,L-3562596,00.html> (Accessed: 3/7/2008).

These changes in the Israeli Army, which have been seen by some as signs of change from the nation in arms to a professional army, have been interpreted by some as a process of normalization (whereby a society that was involved in a prolonged war or a mobilized society becomes a civil society). However this was not the only interpretation. While others saw them as a process of democratization, they have also been perceived as a mix between a process of demilitarization and the formation of a “postwar society” (where the military Occupies a smaller place in society, the social investment in it is reduced, the weight of the military and its influence declines in relation to the civilian society, and above all, the military ethos is weakened), together with a process of decolonization.<sup>30</sup>

## 5. The Security Concern and Decision Making

In terms of decision making, the security concern has led to the development of a reactive decision making mechanism which relies more on the operational agencies of the military and security establishment, rather than on the work of those involved in policy formulation, leading to *ad hoc* solutions to immediate problems, and short term policy options that don’t always fit together to constitute a long-term policy. Although this can be partly attributed to the fact that many of the problems that Israel faces provide it with a limited range of options and require clear and immediate short-term decisions in a highly charged and uncertain atmosphere, nevertheless, Israeli decision making has become more tactical than strategic as a result of this reactive approach.

This said, there are many exceptions to this interpretation of Israeli decision making as merely a reaction to changes external security environment. These exceptions include Rabin’s acceptance of the Oslo process, his willingness to withdraw from the Golan, Barak’s withdrawal from Lebanon and dramatic proposals at Camp David in 2000, Sharon’s Gaza Disengagement Plan, and Olmert’s West Bank “consolidation.”<sup>31</sup> However, it should be noted that the military doctrine of preemptive wars is not considered an exception to this approach, because of its reactive nature, even though its military doctrine is based on striking first.

Nevertheless, Rabin’s acceptance of the Oslo process can be explained by the changes that took place in military service. Some scholars such as Yoram Peri

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<sup>30</sup> Yoram Peri, “Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis,” p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*



have argued that the recognition by Rabin of the change in the reservists' attitude to military service was what brought him to adopt a historic decision and choose political compromise rather than following rigid policies, which would increase the probability of future war, on which there might not be national consensus.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the recognition of the limits of power has also been seen as the cause that led the government to choose a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of the domestic political implications of the security concern, it is not surprising that concerned Israelis have often chosen to elect leaders who have a security background. It is also not surprising that the two main "buzzwords" used in Israeli elections since the mid 1990s were Peace and Security (In Hebrew, *Shalom v'betachon*). The two words, which appeared in different combinations in different political parties' slogans, were employed by these parties as an attempt to portray themselves as the ones that would bring peace but without compromising on security.<sup>34</sup>

## ***Second: The Status of the Military and Security Establishment Within the Society***

The Israeli Army are today cherished as the chief symbol of statehood. A proof that Jews can defend themselves without begging favors. The Military has also become the centerpiece of Israel's civil religion, the ceremonies, and rituals by which the state legitimizes its institutions, cements the loyalty of its citizens, and commemorates its history.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the mentality of the garrison state (or the nation in arms, as some Israelis prefer to call it) is an integral part of the Israeli social fabric, as shown by a recent study by the IDB Group presented at the 2007 Herzliya conference. The study shows that 92% of the Jewish public in Israel are willing to fight and that readiness to fight ranks first amongst activities which are most important to patriotism. The same study ranked the military forces third as a source of pride,

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>34</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 260.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Cohen, "Israel's Starry-Eyed Foreign Policy," *Middle East Quarterly* journal, vol. 1, no. 2, June 1994.

below scientific and technological achievements and achievements in art and sport, in this it comes before Israel's ethical heritage and the Jewish character.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, wars have a tendency to strengthen the position of the top brass *vis-à-vis* the civilian authorities. In Israel, its successful wars have resulted in the public perception of the Military as the protector of the state, and in the great public trust that the military establishment enjoys. Wars have also resulted in the emergence of a group of military figures with a track record whom the public holds high and respects their military, security and even political views. Israel's wars also helped, together with other factors, in creating a military-political partnership where the military generals have extraordinary clout in the policymaking process.

The *Intifadah*, on the other hand, has led to the emergence of targeted assassinations as a new way of combating the resistance in the Gaza Strip and the West bank. The success of this method, which has relied heavily on intelligence, led to the emergence of the security services (especially the Israel Security Agency—ISA commonly known as *Shabak* or *Shin Bet*) within the Israeli society as a protector of the state against what it calls “Palestinian terrorism”.

This perception of the military, however, seems to be directly proportional with the military's ability to protect and provide the promised security. The same study presented at the 2007 Herzliya conference, shows that pride in the defense forces has suffered the greatest erosion, falling from 88% who said they were very proud of them in 2006 to 64% in 2007. This was because during the past year and a half the Military has disappointed various population groups, due to its performance in Lebanon in 2006 as well as the way it was used in evacuating Jewish settlers during the disengagement from Gaza, a mission that went beyond its traditional missions as a defensive force against the enemies and was seen by some as undemocratic.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Other activities surveyed included living in Israel, voting in elections, flying the Israeli flag, establishing a new village, respecting the Jewish tradition, contributing to social organizations, demonstrating against policy, and buying Israeli products. See IDB Group, “Patriotism and National Strength in Israel after the Lebanon War,” working paper presented at the 7th Herzliya Conference, The Institute for Policy and Strategy, [http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Eng/\\_Uploads/1856patriotismeng\(4\).pdf](http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Eng/_Uploads/1856patriotismeng(4).pdf) (Accessed: 9/6/2007).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

### ***Third: The Chain of Command and the Structure of the Military and Security Establishments***

#### **1. The Military Forces**

According to the Israeli Basic Law: The Military 1976, the Military is subject to the authority of the Government. The Minister in charge of the Military on behalf of the Government is the Minister of Defense. The supreme command level in the Military, the Chief of the General Staff—who is the Military’s Commander in Chief—is appointed by and subject to the authority of the civilian Government and is subordinate to the Minister of Defense (not the Ministry of Defense itself). This very common hierarchy is meant to ensure that the civilian authority controls the powers of the Military, by keeping it as a professional body, and curbing its desire for war.

However in the years after the establishment of Israel, the Military establishment enjoyed a degree of independence given to it by Ben-Gurion. This was evident in the attendance of the Chief of General Staff in Cabinet and security Cabinet meetings as an equal and not as a subordinate. Even after the Agranat inquiry following the 1973 war, when the roles, the powers, and the duties of the Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Chief of General Staff were clarified and the rules and standards of monitoring were established between the military and the political spheres,<sup>38</sup> the military still continued to enjoy an overlarge status on the expense of the civilian authority.

The highest authority in the military establishment is the Israeli General Staff headed by the Chief of General Staff. It is responsible for planning, organizing, training and supervising the military operation of the Army, the Navy and the Israeli Air Force (which are collectively known as the Israeli Army and which will be referred to often as the military).

Together with the Chief of General Staff (CGS), the General Staff also comprises the CGS deputy, the commanders of the Ground Forces, the Navy, and the Air Force, the Heads of the regional commands (namely the Northern Command, the Central Command, the Southern Command and the Home Front Command),

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<sup>38</sup> Editorial, “The State’s Army or the Army’s State: On the Supervision of the Military level by the Political Level,” *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 15/5/2007. (in Arabic)

and the heads of the Operations Directorate, the Intelligence Directorate (this influential directorate is also known as the Military Intelligence or *Agaf Hamodi'in (Aman)*), the Planning and Policy Directorate (which is also very influential in decision making within the Israeli Army), the Human Resources Directorate, the Computer Service Directorate, and the Technological and Logistics Directorate. Those directorates are all branches of the General Staff.

Other military members of the General staff also include: the commander of the Military Academies, the coordinator of Government activities in the occupied territories, the Israeli Army Spokesperson, the Military Advocate General, the President of the Military Court of Appeals, the Financial Advisor to the Chief of Staff, and the Military Secretary of the Prime Minister. The general staff also includes the following civilian staff: the Director-general of the Ministry of Defense, the Defense Establishment Comptroller, and the head of the Administration for the Development of Weapons and the Technological Industry. (For a complete diagram of the military structure see attached figure)

The core of the Israeli Army is composed of the forces in active duty, which currently includes 177,500 personnel, of which 140,000 are reservist. If we include the rest of the reserve forces that amounts to 429,000, the total number amounts to 606,500 personnel. An advantage that the Israeli Army has is that most of the officers come from the elite and educated sectors. Females constitute around half of the Israeli Army staff in active duty and most of them carry out desk jobs.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. The Security Forces

In addition to the military forces, the security forces are composed of the Intelligence services, the Israeli police, the Border Police, the Prison Service, and the Knesset Guard.

The intelligence services include two of the three Israeli intelligence organisations which were established by David Ben-Gurion in 1951, namely the Israel Security Agency<sup>40</sup> or *Sherut ha-Bitachon ha-Klali* (better known with its Hebrew acronyms *Shabak* or *Shin Bet*), and the Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks *ha-Mossad le-Modiin ule-Tafkidim Meyuhadim* (better known as

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<sup>39</sup> Kameel Mansour and Fawz Abdelhadi, *op. cit.*, p. 502.

<sup>40</sup> The *Shabak* is also known in English as the Israel Security Agency.



the *Mossad*). It can also include in some instances the intelligence division within the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Shabak is the Israeli counter-intelligence and internal security service. Its work is mainly within Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. It is believed to have three operational departments and five support departments. The three operational departments are:

- The Arab Affairs Department. It is responsible for “antiterrorist” operations, political subversion, and maintenance of an index on “Arab terrorists”. Shabak detachments worked with Aman undercover detachments (known as *Mist’aravim*) to counter the *Intifadah* uprising. This department has also been active in countering the military wing of Hamas.
- The Non-Arab Affairs Department. This department concerned itself with all other countries, including penetrating foreign intelligence services and diplomatic missions in Israel and interrogating immigrants from the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.
- The Protective Security Department. It is responsible for protecting Israeli government buildings and embassies, defense industries, scientific installations, industrial plants, and the *El Al* national airline.<sup>41</sup>

The Mossad (Hebrew for institute) is Israel’s intelligence agency. It has responsibility for human intelligence collection, “counterterrorism,” and covert action (including paramilitary activities, and the facilitation of *Aliyah* where it is banned). Its focus is on Arab nations and organizations throughout the world. Mossad agents are active in the former communist countries, in the West, and at the UN.

The Mossad has a total of eight departments, though some details of the internal organization of the agency remain obscure. Some of these departments are:

- The Collections Department. It is the largest, with responsibility for espionage operations, and with offices abroad under both diplomatic and unofficial cover. The department consists of a number of desks which are responsible for specific geographical regions, directing case officers based at “stations” around the world, and the agents they control.

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<sup>41</sup> Federation of American Scientists (FAS), “Intelligence Resource Program, Israel Security Service *Sherut ha-Bitachon ha-Klali (Shabak)*,” [http://www.fas.org/irp/world/israel/shin\\_bet/](http://www.fas.org/irp/world/israel/shin_bet/) (Accessed: 28/10/2006).

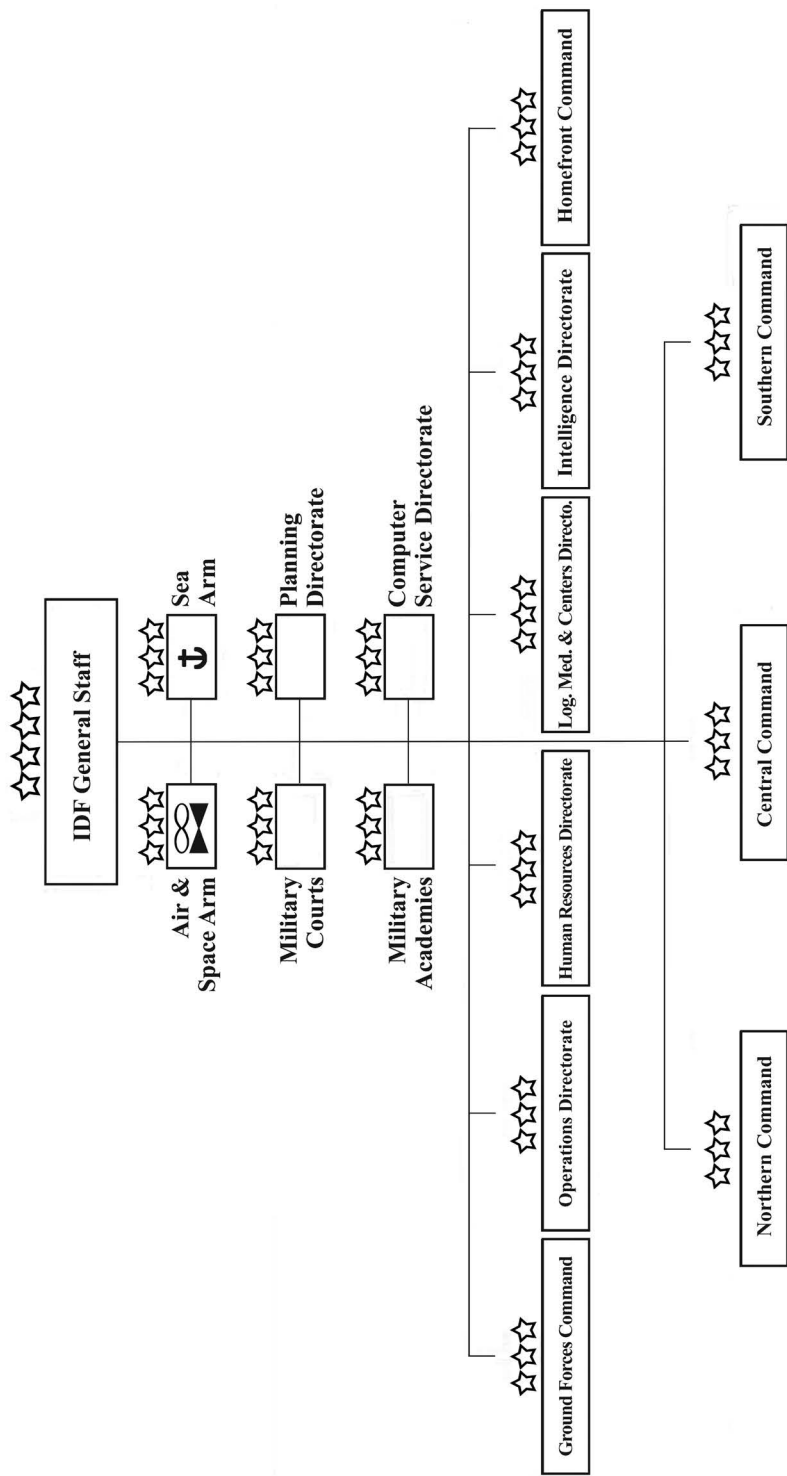
- The Political Action and Liaison Department conducts political activities and liaison with friendly foreign intelligence services and with nations with which Israel does not have normal diplomatic relations. In larger stations, such as Paris, the Mossad customarily had under embassy cover two regional controllers: one to serve the Collections Department and the other the Political Action and Liaison Department.
- The Special Operations Division, also known as *Metsada*. It conducts highly sensitive assassination, sabotage, paramilitary, and psychological warfare projects.
- The Physiological Warfare Department (*Lohamah Psichologit or LAP*). It is responsible for psychological warfare, propaganda and deception operations.
- The Research Department. It is responsible for intelligence production, including daily situation reports, weekly summaries and detailed monthly reports. The Department is organized into 15 geographically specialized sections or “desks”, including the US, Canada and Western Europe, Latin America, Former Soviet Union, China, Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Iran. A “nuclear” desk is focused on special weapons related issues.
- The Technology Department. It is responsible for development of advanced technologies for support of Mossad operations.<sup>42</sup>

It has also been publicly reported that in addition to the abovementioned organizations, an unnamed covert intelligence organization exists whose role is to coordinate between all the other Israeli intelligence organizations. In addition, one may also consider the military industries, the strategic study institutes, the retired officers, and the politicians affiliated with the military all as part of the Military-Industrial complex.

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<sup>42</sup> FAS, “Intelligence Resource Program, Mossad: The Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks *ha-Mossad le-Modiin ule-Tafkidim Meyuhadim*,” <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/israel/mossad/> (Accessed: 28/10/2006).

Israeli Military Structure Chart



### ***Fourth: The Size of the Military and its Impact on Economy and the Society***

The military is not only one of the most powerful institutions in the Israeli society, it is also the wealthiest. This is partly because of Israel's relatively high military spending. In spite of Israel's relatively small size, Israel has a very large defense budget. For example, in 2004, Israel's defense budget was the 12th largest in the world.<sup>43</sup> But before one goes into the details of the size of military and its expenditure, it is prudent to clarify the definition of the different measures of military expenditure. In Israel there are three measures of military spending:

- 1. The Defense Budget:** This refers to the cash outlays of the Ministry of Defense out of the Central Government budget. It does not include defense expenditures of other ministries and government agencies or non-governmental bodies. At the same time, it includes expenditures that do not directly finance the production of defense, at least in its narrow sense.
- 2. Defense Consumption:** This is a national accounting concept, calculated by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). It refers to defense expenditures on an accrual basis, by allocating expenditures among different ministries according to their purpose, rather than their administrative, or ministerial, affiliation. In addition to the Defense Budget, this definition includes security components within the various ministries.
- 3. The Total Cost of Defense:** This is a broader concept calculated by the CBS on the basis of the recommendation of a government committee charged with estimating the full cost of defense to the Israeli economy. Its major additions to the Defense Consumption are the full economic cost of the mandatory regular and reserve military personnel and the cost of civilian shelters construction. The Total Cost of Defense is generally around 25% higher than Defense Consumption. The total cost of defense is not calculated in other countries, and as a result, it cannot be compared internationally.

Of all three definitions, only the Defense Consumption has been calculated and published consistently for many years.<sup>44</sup> The details of the Defense Budget are all determined by the defense establishment and the government has no real

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<sup>43</sup> Zalman F. Shiffer, "The Debate Over the Defense Budget in Israel," *Israel studies*, vol. 12, no. 1.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

influence on its allocations.<sup>45</sup> In Knesset, the budget details are not debated and are only shown to five MKs who are appointed by the Defense and Foreign Affairs committee.<sup>46</sup> The whole Knesset then approves the total as part of the Defense Budget.<sup>47</sup> There are also reports that the intelligence budget for all the intelligence agencies is kept secret and is not included in the main budget.

In 2007 the defense budget stood at approximately 34.7 billion shekels (\$8.2 billion<sup>48</sup>), which constituted about 11.7% of a total budget of 295.4 billion shekels (\$70 billion)<sup>49</sup> while the defense consumption rose to 48 billion shekels (\$11.3 billion) which was 16% of the total budget.<sup>50</sup> Such a %age is very high by comparison to western countries' defense consumption. In fact this figure is equivalent to the defense consumption of Australia, Canada, or Turkey<sup>51</sup>, all of whom have larger populations and better infrastructure and resources. A number of scholars and commentators argue that the Total Cost of Defense, which includes the costs of the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan heights, has at normal times (when there is no war) reached one third of the total budget.<sup>52</sup>

In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) the Defense Consumption is currently equivalent to approximately 8% of the GDP, which is very high compared to western countries which spend an average of 3% of its GDP on defense. This figure includes the \$2.4 billion Israel receives from the United States per year in

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<sup>45</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>46</sup> Barhoom Garaysi, "Israel's Next Year's Budget is \$76 Billion," *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 16/10/2007. (in Arabic)

<sup>47</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 335.

<sup>48</sup> US Dollar.

<sup>49</sup> Yakov Katz, "IDF: Prospect for Conflict up in 2007," *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 11/1/2007, [http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&c\\_id=1167467702702](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&c_id=1167467702702) (Accessed: 23/7/2007).

<sup>50</sup> The Defense Consumption has reduced from 20% in 1987. See Yoram Peri, "Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis," p. 114.

<sup>51</sup> Editorial, "The Debate Widens on the Security Budget in Israel," *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 26/6/2007. (in Arabic)

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*; also see Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*; and Netanel Lorch, "The Israel Defense Forces," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 31/5/1997, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts%20About%20Israel/State/The%20Israel%20Defense%20Forces> (Accessed: 28/7/2007).

security assistance, which constitute around 2% of Israel's GDP. The Total Cost of Defense is estimated to be around 10% of GDP.<sup>53</sup>

To put these military spending figures in perspective, it is estimated that the United Kingdom, which has a high military expenditure, spent only 5.4% of its \$1,174 Billion budget on defense in 2007.<sup>54</sup> It also spent the equivalent of 2.5% of its GDP on defense in 2005.<sup>55</sup>

Israeli defense expenditures increased dramatically between the mid 1960s and the mid-1970s as a cumulative result of different factors. These factors were the 1967 Six Day War, the Israeli Army deployment in the Occupied Territories, the War of Attrition between 1968 and 1970, the development of an arms race with Egypt and Syria, large investments in fortifications on the Suez Canal front, the 1973 War and a massive post-war military buildup. By 1975, the Defense Consumption has become five times higher than 10 years earlier and its share of the GDP had increased from 10 to 32%.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to its share of the budget, the military is also the biggest customer for everything and anything in Israel and as a result, it plays a dominant role in the Israeli economy. The military industries are the largest industry sector in Israel and represent around 40% of the Israeli Industries. Israel is also currently the eighth largest arms supplier.<sup>57</sup> With approximately 75% of the total production of Israel's military industries exported,<sup>58</sup> the military industries' exports are its third source of hard currency after diamonds and tourism. There are approximately 150 defense firms in Israel, with combined revenues from arms sales reaching

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<sup>53</sup> "Background Note: Israel," U.S. Department of State website, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3581.htm> (Accessed: 23/7/2007).

<sup>54</sup> *Her Majesty's Treasury, UK budget report 2007*, Her majesty's Stationary Office, London, 2007.

<sup>55</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World FactBook*, Country Comparison: Military Expenditures, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2034rank.html> (Accessed: 28/7/2007).

<sup>56</sup> Zalman F. Shiffer, *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 27.

<sup>58</sup> Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), *Arming The Occupation: Israel and the Arms Trade* (London: CAAT, 2002), <http://www.caat.org.uk/publications/countries/israel-1002.pdf> (Accessed: 8/8/2007).

\$4.5 Billion in 2006.<sup>59</sup> These firms can be organized into three categories; large government-owned industries such as Israel Military Industries (one of Israel's largest employers), Israel Aerospace Industries, and the Rafael Arms Development Authority, all of which produce a wide range of conventional arms and advanced defense electronics.<sup>60</sup> Together the three produce 69% of Israel's military revenue.<sup>61</sup> The second category includes the medium size privately-owned industries such as Elbit system—ELOP (one of Israel's largest defense electronics and optics integrated systems manufacturers), Tadiran (which makes tactical radios and communication systems), Elisra Electronic systems, and ECI Telecom. Finally, the third categories include small privately owned industries producing a narrow line of defense products.<sup>62</sup> Some scholars note that the Arms sales revenues do not form part of the budget or the Ministry of Finance's calculations; instead they are added to the military budget through a special arrangement with the Prime Minister.

Civilian high-tech industries are staffed by a mixture of military or ex-military who work closely with western military industries. The Military and the universities are intimately linked too, with joint research projects and an array of scholarships.<sup>63</sup>

The role of the Israeli Army is not limited to military operations. The army was responsible for Arab areas within Israel, which were under military rule until 1966, and is responsible for policing the West Bank (and the Gaza Strip before the 2005 disengagement) after 1967. The Defense Minister is currently the person in charge of the occupied territories.<sup>64</sup> The Israeli Army is also involved in many other activities including building settlements through the *Nahal* units (Hebrew acronym for *Noar Halutzi Lohem* or Fighting Pioneering Youth<sup>65</sup>) where the

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<sup>59</sup> Alon Ben-David, "Israel's Arms Sales Soar to Hit Record in 2006," *Jane's Defense Weekly* magazine, 10/1/2007, <http://www.plasansasa.com/pdf/JDW-Jan-5.pdf> (Accessed: 24/7/2007).

<sup>60</sup> Hanan Sher, "Facets of the Israeli Economy-The Defense Industry," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFArchive/2000\\_2009/2002/6/Facets%20of%20the%20Israeli%20Economy-%20The%20Defense%20Industr](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFArchive/2000_2009/2002/6/Facets%20of%20the%20Israeli%20Economy-%20The%20Defense%20Industr) (Accessed: 21/12/2006).

<sup>61</sup> CAAT, *op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> Priya Singh, *op. cit.*

<sup>63</sup> Yitzhak Laor, "You are Terrorists, We are Virtuous," *London Review of Books* magazine, vol. 28, no. 16, 17/8/2006, [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n16/print/laor01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n16/print/laor01_.html) (Accessed: 1/9/2006).

<sup>64</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>65</sup> Nahal also is the name of one of the infantry regiments, alongside the Golani Brigade, Givati Brigade, Paratroopers Brigade, and others.

military/civil service units established military settlements that combined farming with regional defense in outlying and border areas. After an initial period, these outposts were turned over to civilian groups and generally became kibbutzim or moshavim. Many of the Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley and south of the Negev desert were established by the Nahal.<sup>66</sup>

The Israeli Army has also taken an active interest in the education of new immigrants, especially in the teaching of the Hebrew language. Army instructors were sent to centers of immigrant absorption, field schools, and other educational institutions. Special army programs for teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds combine classroom instruction with work on an army base. In addition, the military provides education to its soldiers beyond the professional training required for the effective execution of military objectives. There are special Hebrew language courses for new immigrants in the army, and disadvantaged Israelis can acquire basic skills such as reading comprehension and elementary mathematics during their military service. They also participate in week-long educational seminars which focus on Jewish history and the history, geography, nature and society of the State of Israel. The army has educational units located at *Yad Vashem* (the main Holocaust museum in Israel) and the Diaspora Museum.<sup>67</sup> The military also organizes immigration to Israel, monitors the media, directs research and development, and keeps strong links with most of the state's bodies. This led some commentators to argue that all the other activities are there to serve the military. Practically no area of Israeli public life is immune from the impact of the military. Its impact ranges from economic decisions such as industrial infrastructure, natural resource development, and urban planning, to cultural matters such as religious law and development of the Hebrew language, to the impacts on education system such as curriculum, and reserve service coordination.<sup>68</sup>

By association, the importance the military has strengthened the Ministry of Defense making it one of the main power centers in Israel. This may explain why prime ministers prefer to keep the role of the Defense Minister to themselves in addition to their prime ministerial role. Ben-Gurion, for example, has retained the position of the Defense Minister for the 15 years during which he was Prime Minister.

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<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, op. cit.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 324, 327.



Generally prime ministers only surrender the post of Defense Minister—either to a rival faction leader in their party or to a leader of another party in their coalition—when they do not have sufficient political power within their coalition.

### ***Fifth: The Development of the Military-Industrial Complex***

The military and security establishments' influence on decision making is better understood in the light of the existence of the influential Military-Industrial complex. The complex includes the military, the security establishments, the military industries, and the military's political representatives. It also includes organizations like the Atomic Energy Commission (which is headed by the Prime Minister), the veterans' organizations, Civil Defense organizations, and US-based organizations such as American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which helps bringing US military aids to Israel.

Just as the military has developed—as a result of the settlement nature of the state of Israel—and formed the backbone for the Zionist project, The Military-Industrial complex, formed the backbone for its industrial development, and through this complex the political leaders of Israel have controlled the economic growth bringing it towards capitalization and more in line with the more established US Military-Industrial complex.

To explain how the Military-Industrial complex' has developed we first have to explain the movement of high-ranking military officers after retirement. As the average age for military officers' retirement is in their forties,<sup>69</sup> it is rare to see a high ranking officer going back to normal civilian life. It is common, however, for retired officers, who are mostly secular Ashkenazi, to occupy key positions in the Military-Industrial complex, which can be roles in the security organisations, in the Ministry of Defense, in the military industries, or in running banks and other public and private establishments. Retired officers represent around three quarters of the executives in the various economic activities in Israel. This has created a situation where certain positions became exclusive to those within the Military-Industrial

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<sup>69</sup> Evelyn Gordon, "Where is All the Money Going?," *The Jerusalem Post*, 8/9/2006, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154526020810&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull> (Accessed: 23/7/2007).

complex, leading to possible conflicts of interest between the officers' jobs at the military and their potential future jobs in the military industries organizations.<sup>70</sup>

All of the parliamentary elections in Israel have featured a sizeable number of retired officers trickling into Knesset, with affiliations across the political spectrum but mainly on the left. Since 1960, an average of 10% of Israel Knesset members have been high ranking retired officers. In the 2006 general elections, for example, 15 Israeli generals along with 6 secret service agents have been elected into the Knesset. In addition, about 20% of Cabinet ministers are high ranking reserve officers. Of the three most important offices, the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, and the Foreign Minister, at least one (usually two) has been occupied by a former career officer as in the governments of Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon.<sup>71</sup>

Military service is an important prerequisite for many positions of power and importance in Israeli life. Chiefs of General Staff have done very well politically. The list includes Yigael Yadin, Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Chaim Bar-Lev, Mota Gur, Ehud Barak, and Shaul Mofaz. Rabin and Barak also became prime ministers.<sup>72</sup> In addition, almost all Israel's governments, to date, possessed defense, military or political experience even if key posts were not necessarily manned by former generals. In 2003, only one quarter of those elected to the Knesset have not served in the Israeli Army, and most of them were Arabs and Haredim who are exempted.<sup>73</sup> It worth noting that since the inception of Israel the secret slogan of Israeli politicians was "we shall conquer first the security apparatus, and then the Knesset and government."<sup>74</sup>

The role of the Military-Industrial complex has grown further since the 1967 war when many people moved between military, political, and industrial organizations. The most noticeable movement was the movement of military Generals into

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<sup>70</sup> The heads of the Mossad, the Borders Police, the Civil Guard, the civil administration in the occupied territory, the airports and ports administrations, and similar positions are all retired officers. The same pattern appears in the heads of Government corporations which are deemed fundamental to security, such as the electricity, water, oil refineries, the *El Al* airline, together with the military industries and advanced technological industries.

See Kameel Mansour and Fawz Abdelhadi, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–58.

<sup>71</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>72</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 333.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>74</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, p. 93.

politics, which increased during the demobilization periods following the 1948, 1967, and 1973 wars. The majority of former CGSs have led a political career after retiring from the military, many of whom became Defense Ministers. In the 1950s the first generation of Officers included Moshe Dayan, Yigal Allon, Yigael Yadin, Israel Galilee, and Chaim Herzog. Until 1967 the majority of reservist and retired officers joined the Labor party. Following the 1967 war, the number of officers joining the political elite increases sharply but with some joining the center right, such as Ezer Weizman and Ariel Sharon, and others joining the Center left.<sup>75</sup> As a matter of fact many political parties aim to draw the prominent military leaders to their parties in a bid to improve their credentials and their chances for getting more votes in the general elections. Examples on this are Ben-Gurion adding Moshe Dayan to the Mapai Party, Golda Meir bringing Chaim Bar-Lev and Yitzhak Rabin to the Labor Party, and Menachem Begin bringing Ezer Weizman to the Likud.

This pattern of movement of high-ranking officers has resulted in the leadership in all three spheres becoming more homogenous, and in the establishment of social elite whose members think and act similarly, are closely connected, and have similar views on how to serve the interests of the state. Members of this Military-Industrial complex agree on the concept of Israel's national security and on that its interests are best served by the actions of the Military establishment. As a result of such views, members of the Military-Industrial complex always work towards increasing Military expenditure, procurement, and recruitment, increasing arms production, raising the intelligence activities, fighting "terrorism", and granting the military establishment independence in setting its own policies.

The existence of such group has not only increased the influence of the military and security establishments on policy and decision making, and transformed it from that of a professional instrumental to a major political player, but it has blurred the boundaries between the military and civilian spheres.

In political terms, the term "retired officers" refers to those reached one of the three highest ranks in their military service: Brigadier General, Major General, and lieutenant General. In political life 23 officers fit this description, 5 of which are from the first rank, and 9 are from each of the last 2 ranks.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Priya Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>76</sup> Giora Goldberg, *op. cit.*

Based on the works of Giora Goldberg, in a study on the militarization of the Israeli political system, recently published in the Journal of Israeli Affairs, this study presents a chronological table summarizing the flow of movement of military personnel into politics including ministers, prime ministers, defense ministers, party leaders and City heads. It also includes an index of militarization of politics proposed by the abovementioned study.

**Table 3: The Growing Militarization of Israeli Political System and Its Index**

	<b>Ministers (% of gov.)</b>	<b>prime ministers (3 of 11 total)</b>	<b>Defense Ministers (8 of 13 total)</b>	<b>Party leaders</b>	<b>City heads %</b>	<b>Index %</b>
<b>50s</b>	Total: 2 (2.4%)	0	0	0	0	<b>0.5</b>
<b>60s</b>	Total: 4 (10.8%)	0	1 Moshe Dayan	0	0	<b>7.2</b>
<b>70s</b>	Total: 8 (15.9%)	1 Yitzhak Rabin	2 Moshe Dayan Ezer Weizman	3 Average party control: 18% Yitzhak Rabin Yigael Yadin Ariel Sharon	20 Shlomo Lahat (Tel Aviv)	<b>30.8</b>
<b>80s</b>	Total: 7 (15.3%)	0	2 Ariel Sharon Yitzhak Rabin	4 Average party control: 1.5% Moshe Dayan Ezer Weizman Rafael Eitan Rehavam Ze'evi	33 Shlomo Lahat (Tel Aviv)	<b>26</b>
<b>90s-00s</b>	Total: 13 (15.4%)	3 Yitzhak Rabin Ehud Barak Ariel Sharon	5 Yitzhak Rabin Yitzhak Mordechai Ehud Barak Benjamin Ben Eliezer Shaul Mofaz	10 Average party control: 40% Yitzhak Rabin Shimon Peres Ehud Barak Benjamin Ben Eliezer Amram Mitzna Ariel Sharon Efraim Eitam Rafael Eitan Rehavam Ze'evi Avigdor Kahalani	44 Ron Huldai (Tel Aviv) Amram Mitzna (Haifa)	<b>45.7</b>

### ***Sixth: The Military-Industrial Complex's Relation to the Political Establishment and Decision Making***

According to the Israeli Basic Laws and other Knesset Laws, the military is meant to be monitored and supervised by the civilian establishment through several bodies; the first being the government as a whole. The government can appoint or remove the CGS and the heads of the security forces and it is also entitled to discuss any security issue. The second body is the ministerial committee for security affairs which is part of the government, and whose role is to establish the main security policies and guidelines, and to supervise their implementation. The third and fourth bodies are the Ministry of Defense and the office of the Prime Minister, which operates as a ministry in its own right, while the fifth body is the National Security Council.<sup>77</sup> The Military is also supervised through the Knesset committee for Defense and Foreign Affairs, and the new Knesset committee for the military budget.

However, in spite of this formal civilian supervision framework, the defense establishment, and especially the Israeli Army, remain the most influential player in the national decision making mechanism forming a partnership with the civilian political leader. The political-military partnership has always existed between the political and military spheres, even before 1948 when the role of the military was played by the Haganah forces. When Ben-Gurion abolished all the military organizations in 1948 and established a unified military under the authority of the government and the Knesset, this partnership continued to exist in order to meet Israel's two main challenges, the establishment of a political leadership of a unifying authority, and the construction of a comprehensive national security doctrine to meet the new nation's security concerns.<sup>78</sup> As such the political-military

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<sup>77</sup> Aviezer Yaari, *Civil Control of the IDF*, Memoranda No. 72, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS), October 2004, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo72.pdf>  
Arabic Translation obtained from:  
<http://almash-had.madarcenter.org/almash-had/printtemp.asp?articalid=2436>

<sup>78</sup> See Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*; and Moshe Lissak, "The Civilian Components of Israel's Security Doctrine: The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in the First Decade," in S. Ilan Troen and Noah Lucas (eds.), *Israel: The First Decade of Independence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 575–591.

doctrine in Israel is closer to the Soviet model than it is to the American one where the military level is completely subservient to the political level.<sup>79</sup>

However, in addition to this partnership, Israel, as a nation in arms, lacks integral boundaries between the military and society, which inevitably led to the militarization of certain societal spheres and the politicization of the military in other spheres. The militarization led to a military ideology with the political establishment which was compounded by the lack of a strong counter-balancing political ideology, while the politicization of the military led to a reduced autonomy represented in judicial intervention in operations and investigations, and interventions from soldiers' parents.<sup>80</sup>

This permeability between the military and civilian spheres, this has been explained as a result of the fact that Israeli officers are not removed from the rest of the society. Officers don't live in separate military camps but with their families, which prevented the creation of a "barracks sub-culture". Officers are fully integrated within civil society, shopping, recreating, sending children to school and spouses to work, and sharing the feelings and tribulations of the broader population.<sup>81</sup> They also interact at work with reserve "civilians" carrying out short reserve duties.<sup>82</sup> Recently this partnership has evolved as a result of three main factors; the protracted war, the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the political crisis that resulted, and the two low-intensity conflicts (the two *Intifadahs*) between 1987 and 1992, and from 2000 onwards. It is worth noting that some Israeli scholars such as Asher Arian do not describe the relationship between the military and the political spheres as a partnership, but see the influence of the military as the best example of an institutional interest group.<sup>83</sup>

To give an idea of how the military influences the decision making, one might like to read the descriptions given by Yoram Peri, an expert on Israeli military-civilian relationship, of this process. He draws an image of the

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<sup>79</sup> Uri Raanan, "Contrasting Views of the Role of Strategic (Politico-Military) Doctrine: Soviet and Western Approaches," in Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr. and Uri Raanan (eds.), *National Security Policy: The Decision-Making Process* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984).

<sup>80</sup> Yoram Peri, "Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis," pp. 114–115.

<sup>81</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>83</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, pp. 324, 327.

Israeli Army headquarters at Hakiryah in Tel Aviv with dozens and officers and civilians in the Planning and Policy Directorate working on material to serve the decision makers, while the high ranking officers participate in political forums where decisions are actually made, working with the Prime Minister's small team of confidants and the security Cabinet. He also describes the interactions between members of these teams during those meetings as informal where personality plays a large role in the debates and discussion. This relationship doesn't always suit the civilian leadership as weakens its positions. For example, the military is not just represented in civilian meetings, it is over-represented. The CGS is always accompanied by a group of senior officers which shifts the balance of the meeting towards the military positions.<sup>84</sup>

This influence has long been recognized within all decision making circles in Israel. Even the military leadership recognizes that the military plays an enlarged role in decision making. For example, Shlomo Gazit, A former director of Military Intelligence, a former coordinator of activities in the occupied territories, and a member of the prestigious The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), claims that the core and focus of Israel's problem in decision making lies in "the relationship between the defense establishment and the government". The problem according him is that the defense establishment has the tools for policy planning, policy evaluation, coherent thinking, and systematic presentation of proposals, yet there is no alternative mechanism or factor which can present alternative options based, to the same degree, on systematic analysis and evaluation. Thus, whenever a national security issue arises, one immediately asks: "what does the general staff suggest-what does the Military Intelligence have to say?"<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, in a recent lecture at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (which is now renamed to The Institute for National Security Studies) on the subject of military civilian relations in wartime, the former Israeli Army chief of General staff Lt General Moshe Ya'alon admitted that the military played too dominant a role in political decision making, but he, nevertheless, expressed his vision for the civil-military relationship as a reciprocal one where the military is an active partner in the political level. The moderate model he envisages for a successful political and military interface is one where the political echelon represents the initiating

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<sup>84</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>85</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

directive, which is translated by the military into operational alternatives, and in turn is presented back to political decision makers for their approval.<sup>86</sup> Former CGS Ehud Barak made similar statements in 1994 when he warned the Israeli Army not to “make manipulative use of the sensitive and central security issue in Israel existence” and not to “dictate to the government the nature of the political arrangement”. However, the current civilian-military relationship doesn’t seem to be moving towards this moderate model yet.

In light of the above, this study attempts to identify the ways in which the military influences the decision making, and the causes behind its ability to exercise such influence over the civilian leadership. The list below is a summary of these influences and causes:

1. The military and security establishments have a complete control of intelligence that the political echelon receives. This allows the General Staff’s Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) and the other intelligence agencies to exclusively assess the security situation, which ultimately determines the way in which Israel’s entire political class perceives the world. The Military Intelligence is responsible for the annual National Intelligence Assessment and is the only intelligence service capable of generating comprehensive politico-military assessments.<sup>87</sup>

In many areas, the Israeli Army is either the sole or primary entity capable of supplying information, analysis, and policy advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet, often in areas extending far beyond the commonly accepted spheres of military competence. No other institution can compete with the Intelligence, Planning, and Operations Branches’ ability to generate rapid and sophisticated staff work around the clock. Moreover, the Chief of Staff and other senior officers frequently appear before the Cabinet and act as senior advisers on defense and foreign policy matters.

The officer who heads the MID is not only responsible for intelligence within the military, he is also the advisor on intelligence issues to the Prime Minister, the defense Minister and the Cabinet as a whole. In addition three of the last Directors of Military Intelligence (Barak, Israel Shahak, and Ya’alon) became Chiefs of General Staff.

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<sup>86</sup> Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS), “Israel’s Civil-Military Relations in Wartime,” JCSS bulletin, no. 31, September 2005, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/bulletin/bulletin31.pdf> (Accessed: 2/9/2006).

<sup>87</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*



2. The military's domination of strategic planning using its Planning and Policy Directorate. The Israeli Army Planning and Policy Directorate is a primary player at the Cabinet level, dealing not only in military planning for the General Staff, but in strategic political-military planning, geared largely to the needs of the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and the Cabinet.<sup>88</sup> As a result, it inevitably transforms the military doctrine into policies that directly influence the decision making. The General Staff also provides detailed policies which exceed the military tactics into political policies. Israel may well be the only country where the military has complete authority over the strategic and tactical issues.

This happens in spite of the fact that, the military provides the civilian leadership with only one option which the government can either approve or reject and do nothing. In addition, the option presented is based on the military's planning process which is sometimes described as being based on an extreme worst-case rationalization.<sup>89</sup>

According to Major general Aharon Yariv, such a monopoly of the military over planning is the "most conspicuous weakness in the Israeli government system". Major General Yisrael Tal also describes the weakening of the government's status vis-à-vis the military: "When the government wants to assess situations or, alternatively, to set policy, it relies on the same source—the Israeli Army General Staff—which it is itself supposed to oversee, whose recommendations it is supposed to critically analyze, and which it is supposed to guide".<sup>90</sup>

3. The lack of institutional subordination of the military to the civilian government and the nature of the relationship between the Israeli Army and the Ministry of Defense.<sup>91</sup> Instead of the Israeli Army being subordinate to the Ministry, the relationship between the two is in fact a complementary one. According to Ben-Gurion's decision to separate the Ministry of Defense from the Military, The Israeli Army has authority for all matters of military organization and force structure, training, doctrine, intelligence, logistics and procurement plans, personnel, strategic planning, and operations. The Ministry of Defense, on the

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Meir Stieglitz, "Israel on the Brink," *Information Clearing House*, 10/1/2007, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article16131.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>91</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 329.

other hand, is responsible for the defense budget, arms procurement, and exports. In reality, the ministry's role is limited, for the most part, to the implementation of policies favored by the Israeli Army.<sup>92</sup>

The structural weaknesses in the machinery of civilian control over the military establishment stems from a lack of constitutional and legal clarity as to formal aspects of the system. For example, the Israeli Army is only subordinate to the Defense Minister and not the Ministry itself. Thus, the ministry does not have the right or the capabilities to oversee the Israeli Army.

4. The lack of a strong alternative civilian mechanism for the government to assess military intelligence and policy. This was coupled with the reduced independence of the Knesset's prestigious Defense and Foreign affairs committee. The preoccupation of the committee's members of with domestic and partisan political activities has also contributed to its inability to take on the politically unpopular task of challenging the national security establishment, which has led Knesset officials such as Samuel Sager to complain that the committee has become a tool to legitimise government policy choices on controversial issues. In addition, members of the committee often complain that they do not receive detailed information during briefings by government officials. The government's justification to that is that the committee's members often leak details of the briefings to the media.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the committee lacks any staff of its own, making it almost entirely dependent on the national security establishment for information and thereby further limiting its oversight capabilities.<sup>94</sup>

In an attempt to resolve this lack of civilian assessment, Israel's government established its own version of National Security Council (NSC) in 1999 with the role of "coordinating, integrative, deliberative, and supervisory body on all matters of national policy". The Council operates as an arm of the Prime Minister's Office and reports directly to him. The head of the NSC is a National Security advisor to the Prime Minister and one of the NSC's roles is to make independent recommendations on national security policy to the Cabinet.<sup>95</sup> This Council,

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<sup>92</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>93</sup> Priya Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

<sup>94</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, "Israel Establishes National Security Council," <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Politics/nsc.html> (Accessed: 24/10/2006).

however, has been sidelined since its inception, and its advices are often not taken into account. It is sufficient to say that six people have served as the NSC heads since its establishment by the government and most of them complained about the absence of powers and the lack of partnership in the decision making process.<sup>96</sup> As a result, most NSC heads, who served an average of one year, have ended their terms feeling they were unable to fulfil their duties under the existing circumstances.<sup>97</sup>

A number of studies on the role of NSC have also been critical of its lack of contribution to decision making. A study by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (Now The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)) entitled: *Whom Does the Council Advise?*, describes the current security decision making mechanism as one that takes place on 4 levels. The first level is the Prime Minister, followed by the ministerial security committee (with the Defense Minister having a prominent role within it). The third level is the Prime Minister's office and especially the Director General of the Prime Minister's Office, and the Prime Minister's political, socio-economic, and military secretary (the last being the link to the military and security establishment as a member of the General Staff), while the fourth and final level is the National Security Council which only takes the role of an assistant in the decision making.<sup>98</sup> Another study has noted the small number of staff in the council as a factor in the demotion of the council to a largely inconsequential position.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, a report by the State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss on the National Security Council suggests that the role of the NSC, which is meant to have a global, comprehensive and systematic vision, has been taken by the Military secretary of the Prime Minister, who in reality is the General staff's representative in the Prime Minister's office.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Shahar Ilan, "Knesset approves expanding powers of national security chief," *Haaretz*, 29/7/2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/knesset-approves-expanding-powers-of-national-security-chief-1.250729>

<sup>97</sup> Ronny Sofer, "Top NSC Officials Step Down," *Yedioth Achronot*, 9/10/2007, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3447868,00.html> (Accessed: 10/6/2008).

<sup>98</sup> Aviezer Yaari, "Whom Does the Council Advise? A New Model for the National Security Council," *Memoranda of Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies*, no. 85, JCSS, September 2006, <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo85.pdf>  
 Arabic Excerpt obtained from Arabs48, <http://www.arabs48.com/display.x?cid=19&sid=165&id=40841>

<sup>99</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>100</sup> Aluf Benn, "State Comptroller Recommends Upgrading National Security Council", *Haaretz*, 28/9/2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/768140.html> (Accessed: 23/12/2006).

In 2008, and following the Winograd report on the 2006 war on Lebanon, the National Security Council (NSC) was renamed to the National Security Staff (NSS), and role of its chief was expanded to include handling all matters of foreign affairs and defense seen by the prime minister. The NSS chief will also receive information updates from every state body and will be invited to every cabinet meeting that deals with matters of foreign affairs and defense, and to every committee meeting involving the heads of the secret services.

5. The unified large structure of the military, which makes it more powerful as it represents a united front in front of often-divided cabinets. The military and security establishments have also grown in recent decades in terms of size, organizational complexity, and process sophistication. New organizational structures have also been added, and existing ones greatly expanded. Staff work within agencies has improved markedly, along with intensive usage of information technology capabilities and increasing levels of professionalism. For example, the Israeli Army Planning Branch became a primary player in the Israeli Army and at the Cabinet level; the intelligence community as a whole grew greatly in size and capabilities and the Mossad, the Shin Bet, and the Foreign Ministry intelligence department, each established new research divisions; and the Ministry of Defense's politico-military policy planning branch were established.

The military and the military-related industries also employ a disproportionate share of the national labor force. Thus making the defense establishment as a whole, a major economic force.<sup>101</sup>

6. The political crisis and the loss of political consensus following the 1967 war. Since then the divide between the right and the left made it impossible for either side to achieve a majority vote and the military moved in to fill the vacuum. For example the inability of all Israeli governments to create a clear military policy towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly evading the territorial question, has left the whole issue to the Israeli Army to resolve. The Israeli Army devised maps for the agreements it desires, thus dictating policies to the civilian leadership. It was not the government policy that guided the military, but the military's interests that controlled the design of any political plan.

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

Some commentators also argue that the lack of a strong civil authority creates a vacuum for military leaders—with or without political ambition—to step into, and the lack of a clear strategic political policy creates a vacuum for *ad hoc* policies to fill. In a recent workshop at the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies to assess the 2006 Lebanon war, the past chairman of the NSC Giora Eiland pointed to the lack of study and planning in the decision making mechanism. He also noted that the last four governments with which he has worked have been preoccupied with ongoing security issues with nobody to deal with the strategic issues or to present alternative political and military views to the government.<sup>102</sup>

7. The military's influence was also strengthened by its involvement in diplomacy. Over the years, many of the diplomatic contacts with Arab and other states have been conducted by the Israeli Army, thus providing it with a leading role in foreign policy. Beginning with the Armistice Agreements of 1949, the Israeli Army played a major role in all of the peace talks, including the Camp David Accords of 1978, as well as the talks with the Palestinians, Syrians, and Jordanians since the 1990s. Military cooperation has also been an important means of fostering relations with foreign countries.<sup>103</sup>

8. The military's control over the West Bank (and previously the Gaza Strip), and its responsibility for the civil administration in these areas. This has provided it with primary influence over an entire range of issues related to the territories, many of a purely civilian and particularly sensitive character.<sup>104</sup>

9. The two *Intifadahs*. The protracted low-intensity conflicts, especially since 2000, have forced the Israeli Army to revise its strategic doctrines—which were established to deal with regular military forces—to deal with the new challenges. The military acquired responsibilities of civilian nature including policing and pacification activities for which it was neither built nor trained. The “counterrevolutionary” warfare against the *Intifadahs* is by definition a political warfare which forced the Israeli Army to develop a military doctrine that includes political elements.

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<sup>102</sup> Editorial, “Round One Against Iran,” *Almash-had Al-Israeli*, 14/11/2006. (in Arabic)

<sup>103</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

This only served to draw the Military and Security establishments' leaders further into the domestic political arena as their roles shifted from the domain of operational tactics to that of strategic and defense policy.<sup>105</sup> In addition, the protracted low intensity conflict also required a decision making process which is continuously reliant on knowledge and systematic staff work, that can only be provided by the Israeli Army. The political civilian control has thus been weakened vis-à-vis the military, which gained a significant advantage in generating the required knowledge for managing the violent confrontation.<sup>106</sup> According to Major General (ret.) Shlomo Gazit, The first *Intifadah* completed the process of turning the CGS into a dominant force in the occupied territories and from this point on the head of the Central Command has become actively in charge of the settlements in the territories.

10. The existence of the Ministry of Defense's political-military directorate which serves as an official link between the military and the political levels.

11. Israeli Army Doctrines and its Operational Control, which can create constraints for political leaders. This includes Israel's first-strike preemptive doctrine and the broad discretion given to officers. Even at relatively low levels, military commanders are given room for maneuver, which may create situations that were no preferred by the civilian leadership.<sup>107</sup>

12. The fact that virtually all ministers have served in the Israeli Army, as conscripts and reservists, and many are former senior officers strengthens the military view, and the influence of the military-industrial complex, even within the civilian establishment.

13. The military's control over the media allows it to shape decision making through its influence over public discourse and public opinion. It also makes benefit of the public respect it enjoys in comparison to the public low confidence in the politicians.<sup>108</sup> The military almost has a complete monopoly over the supply of information to media outlet and thus has the capacity to manipulate journalists and

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<sup>105</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>106</sup> Kobi Michael, "Military Knowledge and Weak Civilian Control in the Reality of Low Intensity Conflict: The Israeli Case," *Israel Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 28–52.

<sup>107</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>108</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

the media. The army controls press censorship through the office of the Military Censor. According to the agreement between the Israeli Army and the media representatives, all media outlets agree to abide by the orders of the censor in order to be able to operate in Israel. Reporters are expected to censor themselves and not report any of the forbidden material.

The Military Censor, a unit in the Directorate of Military Intelligence, is to inform the media of which issues require its approval. The list of such issues is subject to ongoing change, but always includes issues related to national security and military.<sup>109</sup> The military censor has wide powers to publish an order that no material can be published; and it even has the powers to close a newspaper or shut down a station.<sup>110</sup> The Defence Regulations dealing with censorship have been backed up by other laws designed to reinforce secrecy such as the Israel Penal Revision Law (1957), which included broad definitions of matters to be classified, and even penalized the unauthorized disclosure of official information that was not classified.

In addition, Most of the Military correspondents serve in the reserves in the press liaison unit in the office of the Israeli Army spokesperson, as well as members of the editorial boards of their respective newspapers. They are also organized in a separate unit within the Israeli Press Association.<sup>111</sup>

However, it should be noted that recently a more active press and increased exposure to foreign mass media have led to a loosening of censorship restriction.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Israeli journalists have adopted the tactic of passing sensitive material on to foreign outlets and then reprinting it after it is published abroad—which is a perfectly legal practice.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Yehiel Limor, *The Printed Media: Israel's Newspapers*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts%20About%20Israel/Culture/The%20Printed%20Media-%20Israel-s%20Newspapers> (Accessed: 7/10/2007); and Editorial, "Censorship by Israel: How It's Carried Out," *New York Times*, 29/6/1982, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE3DD123BF93AA15755C0A964948260> (Accessed: 7/10/2007).

<sup>110</sup> Brian Montopoli, "News Out of Israel Filtered Through Military Censor, Public Eye," *CBS News*, 20/7/2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/blogs/2006/07/20/publiceye/entry1822256.shtml> (Accessed: 31/10/2006).

<sup>111</sup> Moshe Lissak, *op. cit.*, pp. 585–586.

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, *op. cit.*

<sup>113</sup> Giora Goldberg, *op. cit.*

In addition to censorship, the military operates its own radio station, staffed by well known Israeli broadcasters as well as soldiers in regular service. Israel's *Galei Zahal* (IDF Waves) has a large civilian audience. The Israeli Army also publishes a popular weekly as well as a more in-depth monthly magazine, and the Israeli Army Spokesman's office provides information on army and security related issues.<sup>114</sup>

Based on these factors and causes, scholars such as Yoram Peri have argued that the military has become a de-facto decision maker.<sup>115</sup> This military influence is understandable, and even expected, during wartime. For example it is documented that during the 1967 and 1973 wars, members of the military elite met alone with the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister more frequently than did any other group, and that in 1973 these meetings were almost as often as Prime minister's meetings with all other Israeli groups combined.<sup>116</sup> A more recent example was on the eve of the Lebanon war in the summer of 2006 when the military option was discussed in the Cabinet for less than three hours, and the decision to go to war against Lebanon was not countered by any well-reasoned diplomatic alternative.

However, there have been incidents when the military's participated in the decision making in "peace time." Examples on this participation include the incident in 1975 when members of the Gush Emunim founded the first illegal outpost<sup>117</sup> in the West Bank. Prime Minister Rabin, who initially saw this as a challenge to the government, demanded that the Chief of General Staff Mordechai Gur disperse the settlers. But Gur objected on the grounds that doing so either would require the use of force which is likely lead to bloodshed, or would result in soldiers refusing to follow their orders.

Rabin yielded to his view and the settlers' position was strengthened. The incident was considered a watershed moment, establishing an important precedent for future Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. It exposed the government's

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<sup>114</sup> Jonathan Kaplan, op. cit.

<sup>115</sup> Yoram Peri, "Israel's Broken Process: Decision-Making on National Security Must Be Fixed," *The Washington Post* newspaper, 25/8/2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/08/24/AR2006082401330.html> (Accessed: 1/9/2006).

<sup>116</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, p. 353.

<sup>117</sup> Illegal outposts are small new settlements illegal according to Israel Law.

According to international law, all settlements and outposts are Illegal. The Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) 1977 article 85(4a) defines the occupying forces importing their own population into the occupied territories as a "grave breach" of international law.



weakness and made clear to the settlers that through the use of force they would be able to impose their own will on the government. If the military has played a neutral instrumental role, such a precedent may not have been established.<sup>118</sup>

It is worth noting that the military's recommendations are not always the most "militaristic". There are occasions when the military played a "moderating" role calling for peace negotiations and withdrawals while it was the politicians who opposed it. It was the Israeli Army in the late 1980s that decided that it would be in Israel's advantage to engage in a peace process. The late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin included the military, not only as an implementer of the peace process but as a major policy making and negotiating partner. Likewise the military played a restraining and moderating role during the premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu, largely because its pragmatic world outlook was indirect contrast to Netanyahu's government's ideological stance. During 1997 the Israeli Army top brass have more than once rejected suggestions for aggressive action against the Palestinians that were initiated by the political level, and especially by the Prime Minister. This confrontation reached its climax during the 1999 elections when tens of retired generals joined opposition parties and formed new ones with one aim; to topple down Netanyahu's government, which they did, bring to power a the former Chief of General Staff Ehud Barak.<sup>119</sup>

However, as result of the failure of the Camp David summit in 2000 and in response to the second *Intifadah*, the Israeli Army has abolished its peace drive, formulated an unyielding hard line policy, and changed its security doctrine towards the Palestinian uprising.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

<sup>119</sup> Yoram Peri, "Civil Military Relations in Israel in Crisis," pp. 121–122.

<sup>120</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*.

# Chapter Four

*The Role of Consultants and Think  
Tanks and its Influence on  
Decision Making*



# The Role of Consultants and Think Tanks and its Influence on Decision Making

## *First: Official Consultants*

The previous chapter discussed the over-enlarged role that the military plays as a consultant to decision makers and especially to leaders with non-military backgrounds. For these purposes the military uses its research and assessment centers, which are part of its intelligence apparatus, as consultants. The civilian government also has at its disposal a limited research capability attached to some of its ministries. The most important official research centers are:

**1. The Mossad's Research Department:** which is responsible for intelligence production, including daily situation reports, weekly summaries and detailed monthly reports. It is organized into 15 specialized sections that each deal with a geographical area.<sup>1</sup>

**2. The Military Intelligence Department's (MID's) Research Department:** which is very influential within the Military Intelligence, and carries out its own national security assessments. It may be sufficient to say that the Director of Military Intelligence and the head of its research unit present their latest intelligence assessment to the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, and other policy makers on their weekly meeting. The most important publication of the MID's research department, the annual National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), is also presented to the Cabinet as well as the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. In addition, the MID's research department issues a compilation of reports, daily assessments, weekly summaries, and white papers.

Reports and estimates presented by the MID and its research department, such as the NIE, often exceed their scope of identifying and estimating threats against the state and warning against surprise attacks. Instead they provide policy recommendations to policy makers.<sup>2</sup> These assessments are widely respected in

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<sup>1</sup> Federation of American Scientists, Intelligence resource program, The Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks *ha-Mossad le-Modiin ule-Tafkidim Meyuhadim*.

<sup>2</sup> Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, pp. 50–51.

Israel even though they occasionally contradict with the Mossad's assessments.<sup>3</sup> The clout of the MID's research department means that the NIE has the upper hand in those disagreements.

The degree of influence of the MID's research department is perhaps best exemplified by the public debate between the Head of the MID Amos Malka and the Head of the MID's research department Amos Gilad—who is effectively No. 2 at the MID—over Gilad's manipulation of intelligence assessment during the 2000 Camp David negotiations. Malka has accused Gilad of influencing the MID's assessment of Yasir Arafat's intentions by portraying him as being against peace. As a result of this alleged manipulation, the MID's pre-negotiations assessment thus stated that Arafat was willing to negotiate but that his list of demands was stringent and almost completely inflexible. Gilad was also accused of propagating the idea that there is no Palestinian peace partner, which has remained for a very long time after the Camp David Negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

**3. Foreign Ministry's Research Division:** which is the only other influential governmental consultant not affiliated with military. Although this research division was established in an attempt to counterbalance the role played by the two research departments described above, its capabilities are still limited compared to theirs.

## *Second: Independent Consultants and Advisors*

Official consultants aside, this study will look at the role of other independent and semi-independent consultants that participate in shaping decisions through

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<sup>3</sup> A recent disagreement between the two intelligence bodies went public when following the 2006 Lebanon war, they presented to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert contradicting assessments regarding the intentions of the Syrian regime and whether their signals about peace are genuine. The MID research department was of the opinion that Syrian signals are genuine, while the Mossad believed that the Syrian overtures should not be taken seriously. See Aluf Benn, Amos Harel and Gideon Alon, "MI and Mossad disagree over Assad's intentions," *Haaretz*, 26/12/2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/805497.html> (Accessed: 30/3/2008).

<sup>4</sup> Uri Avnery, "Israel's Intelligence Scandal: Irreversible Mental Damage," *Counter Punch* newsletter, Petrolia, 21/6/2004, <http://www.counterpunch.org/avnery06212004.html> (Accessed: 30/3/2008); and Dan Margalit, "Unnecessary Excitement on the Left," UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, <http://www.jewishtoronto.net/page.html?ArticleID=66748> (Accessed: 30/4/2008).

their specialist professional research and advice to the government. The study starts from the premise that neither the Prime Minister nor the Cabinet have significant policy-making machinery at their disposal at the cabinet level and are thus in need for advisors. The Prime Minister's advisors, which include a Chief of Bureau, a Foreign Affairs Advisor, a diplomatic advisor, an economical Advisor, a legal advisor, and the Military Secretary, serve more as aides, responsible primarily for the Prime Minister's day-to-day needs and certainly lacking the capacity to conduct systematic policy formulation and coordination.<sup>5</sup> Prime Minister chose to rely on their advisors and aids prior to the establishment of the National Security Council Office, and even after the establishment of the National Security Council, the prime ministers who were in office since its establishment (Barak, Sharon, and Olmert), have chosen to continue relying on their traditional advisers and processes.

Consultants outside of the policy making mechanism include individual consultants such as advisors and aides, as well as institutional consultants such study centers affiliated with universities and independent think tanks. Consultants support policy by providing policy options and identifying their advantages, disadvantages, and possible consequences. Their work can vary from academic research to policy support to the decision makers.

### **Advisors and Aides**

Advisors to the Prime Minister are appointed to consult on policy issues that the Prime Minister took special interest in. They are appointed either on the basis of their expertise and professional experience, or for other political consideration. Advisors who are appointed on the basis of their specialized expertise tend to serve longer and often remained in office under different prime ministers and different coalitions. These included advisors on security issues, "anti-terrorism," and the Arab population inside Israel. Advisors on most other policy areas are often close political affiliates of the Prime Minister, and often serve shorter terms. For example upon becoming Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu appointed 20 advisors compared to 8 advisors in the previous governments. Many of these advisors played political roles serving as quasi-ministers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> Asher Arian, David Nachmias and Ruth Amir, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59.

Likewise, Prime Minister Sharon relied on his advisor Dov Weisglass who became the primary player and the *de facto* National Security Adviser, leaving the Foreign Affairs Adviser, Military Secretary, and National Security Adviser to compete for influence in secondary areas. During the disengagement process and the building of the separation barrier, Sharon depended mostly on Weisglass as well as the geography Professor Arnon Soffer, also known as the “intellectual father of the disengagement plan.” Professor Soffer is known for being a demographic prophet who considers that the “Palestinian womb is a biological weapon.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, Olmert’s senior advisers, Yoram Turbovich and Shalom Turjeman (his diplomatic aide), were assigned tasks as important as conducting peace negotiations with Syria.

In addition, all three of Netanyahu, Barak, and Sharon relied on their private lawyers, who were long-term acquaintances, for sensitive tasks, in some cases appointing them to senior staff positions

Individual advisors and consultants are also employed for domestic political purposes. Israeli leaders’ awareness of the increase in the role of personality on politics led them to use public relations advisors to help them make the decisions that would serve their political positions domestically. Ariel Sharon, for example, hired Reuven Adler, who has the reputation of being a public relations expert as well as being a member of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), before the 2001 elections. Adler is often credited for helping Sharon win the elections by portraying him not as a hardliner but as the only candidate capable of achieving peace. After he was elected Prime Minister, Sharon continued using Adler’s advice. It was reported that Sharon did nothing without consulting Adler, who essentially became Sharon right hand man.<sup>8</sup> After Sharon’s demise and Olmert’s ascension to power, Adler took on two new clients: Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak, while Ehud Olmert, who did not get along well with Adler, hired the former Barak strategist Tal Zilberstein as his chief adviser.

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<sup>7</sup> Arnon Soffer: is a professor of geography/demography at Haifa University. In addition to advising Prime Minister Sharon, He also is an advisor to the army’s top brass and is the head of research for the IDF’s National Defense College. See Paul de Rooij, “The Voices of Sharon’s Little Helpers,” *Counter Punch*, 9/12/2004, <http://www.counterpunch.org/rooij12092004.html> (Accessed: 5/3/2008).

<sup>8</sup> Matt Rees, “The Man Who Turned Sharon into a Softie,” *Time* magazine, 15/5/2005, <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,1061523,00.html> (Accessed: 31/5/2008).

The prime Minister could also make benefit of the advice of or any person who is not in public office, for example, during the 2006 Lebanon war, the Prime Minister Ehud Olmert consulted with 4 advisors and took their advice regarding launching a ground operation in the last days of the war. Two of these advisors were retired high ranking officers, the third was a military strategic advisor and the fourth was a pollster. None of these four held public office at the time this consultation took place.<sup>9</sup>

### **Consultants and Think Tanks**

In addition to individual consultants and advisors, Israel has a number of independent think tanks. According to a study recently published by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS), there are more than 20 study centers in Israel that are recognized as true think tanks and which are players in the political scene. (This excludes consultations with international study centers and organizations in ally countries, and mainly in the United States).<sup>10</sup> Although some of the think tanks were established as early as 1945, Israel has generally witnessed an increase in their numbers in the last few years since the start of the peace process, as universities and private American donors played a major role in funding the establishment of new think tanks.

Since the main role of think tanks is to support the decision makers, the clout and success of any given think tank depends primarily on its ability to influence the policies of the government or other decision makers who hold official positions. The most prestigious of all think tanks are the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (now known as The Institute for National Security Studies) and the Herzliya Annual Policy Conference. But while, individual think tanks vary in the subjects of their research, their main focus continues to be strategic issues such as national security, political settlement issues, issues related to the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and socio-economic issues.

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<sup>9</sup> Aluf Benn, "Final Lebanon Push Decided After PM Met Informal Team," *Haaretz*, 25/5/2007.

<sup>10</sup> Perla Izemkank-Kane, "On Knowledge & Policy: The Role of Think-Tanks in Israel and Other Countries," The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS), 2004, translation from Hebrew provided by the *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, vol. 64, Autumn 2005.



Below is a list of the think tanks most relevant to policy formulation and decision making:<sup>11</sup>

**1. The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)–Tel Aviv University:<sup>12</sup>**

Perhaps the most prestigious think tank in Israel is The Institute for National Security Studies which now includes The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS). The center, which was established in 1977 at the initiative of Tel Aviv University, sees its mission as carrying out research at the highest academic level on issues related to Israel's national security, and on Middle East regional and international security affairs. The center also aims to contribute to the public debate and governmental deliberation on issues that are—or should be—at the top of Israel's national security agenda. Its main study topics are issues related to Israel's national security, Israel's defense, world Jewry, Middle East regional and international security affairs, and socioeconomic issues.

The center addresses the strategic community in Israel and abroad with its research; Israeli policymakers, decision making echelons, strategic planners, opinion-makers and the general public.

The center is funded by a trust fund established by members of the Jewish communities of the United States. JCSS sought to ensure for itself the financial independence necessary for its research and other activities. The center is governed by an international and an Israeli Board of Trustees.

The Center has 24 high profile researchers, many of whom are retired officers with leading careers in Policy and Planning, and Intelligence Directorates. The center publishes the results of its research as books journal articles, special reports, annuals, and memoranda. It also publishes the annual Middle East Military Balance provides broad assessments of major strategic developments in the Middle East as

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<sup>11</sup> Information about think tanks and study centers is obtained from self descriptions on think tanks' websites as well as from descriptions by independent guides. See:

- Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS).
- The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI).
- World Conference on Religion and Peace.
- National Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA).
- Jewish Finder.

<sup>12</sup> The institute's website: <http://www.inss.org.il/>

well as data on military, economic, and demographic conditions in all states of the region. Its publications are in English and Hebrew and are well received in Israel and abroad.

## **2. The Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center (IDC):<sup>13</sup>**

The Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center is a private non-for-profit academic institution, which considers itself to be an elite establishment. It receives no subsidies from the national budget which they argue is why they have complete academic and administrative freedom.

The center's goal is to prepare Israel's future leadership, through providing the highest level of support to leaders in business, politics, technology, and space sciences. The three thousand-student strong center has seven colleges including the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy, and Strategy which prepares graduates to take leading positions in the public and private sectors. The center also includes the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy

The Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center also includes The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) which organizes the annual Herzliya Conference on the Balance of Israel's National Strength and Security. The institute, which was part of the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, was established in 2000 with the goal of supporting the shaping of national policy on the issues crucial to the state such as national security, foreign policy, the military, strategy, intelligence, governance, the Jewish people, the economy, science and technology, infrastructures, resources and the environment, as well as social and educational issues. It is led by a mix of professors and retired officers.

The Herzliya Conference has become a major event in Israel politics and has quickly become a summit for Israeli leadership and the *who-is-who* in every field. The Institute for Policy and Strategy also prides itself that Israeli governments have often adopted the conferences reports as official policies.

<sup>13</sup> The center's website: <https://www.idc.ac.il/eng/default.asp>

### **3. Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS)<sup>14</sup>**

The IASPS was established in 1984 with the goal of reducing the socialist regime in Israel with the support of the American aid. The institute aimed to link the economical issues such as market reform to the geopolitical ones such as missile defense systems, and to promote neoconservative liberal economy values in Israel.

The Jerusalem based institute, which also has a Washington bureau, worked to train a generation of Israeli economic experts and political analysts. It also assisted members of Knesset in economic research, and assisted in developing economic reform policies. Researchers in the institute spend a month in the Washington bureau as part of their activities, during which they work as research assistants to congressmen.

The institute is best known for the report it produced to the then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, entitled: “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm”. The report which was seen as a US-Israel neoconservative manifesto proposed a new approach to solving Israel’s security problems in the Middle East with an emphasis on “Western values”, but was criticized for advocating an aggressive new policy and advancing right-wing Zionism. The study group which produced the report was headed by Richard Perle and included well know neoconservative figures such as Douglas Feith, and David Wurmser. This report was an exceptional case in the interference of neoconservative elements in the Israeli policies. The institute has been in decline since late 2002.

### **4. The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies–The Hebrew University of Jerusalem<sup>15</sup>**

The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies aims to research fundamental processes taking place in the multicultural Israeli society, to analyze the long-term implications of these processes and to propose alternative strategies of action. It is a not-for-profit organization and since 2007 it has been based at The Institute of Urban and Regional Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The institute focuses on three main issues; the relationship between Jews and Arabs in Israel, the relationship between religion, society and state, and the relationship between Society, Space and Governance.

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<sup>14</sup> The institute’s website: <http://www.iasps.org/index.php>

<sup>15</sup> The institute’s website: [http://www.fips.org.il/Site/p\\_home/home\\_en.asp](http://www.fips.org.il/Site/p_home/home_en.asp)

## 5. The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS)<sup>16</sup>

The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies is an independent not-for-profit academic institute working on policy research in the fields of economic, social, and environmental policy, with a focus on Jerusalem. The institute, which was established in 1978, focuses on applied research and on providing various publications to the decisions makers. It also provides forums for discussion to assist decision makers, and carries out study assessments of policy alternatives.

The Jerusalem Institute is known for its right wing stance. It has four main research strings; Studies on Jerusalem, conflict management with Palestinians, environment related policies, social and economic policies.

The institute prides itself for having been successful in affecting government policies in the following policy issues: changes in the route of the security fence around Jerusalem, the disengagement from Gaza and its impacts on Israel, the Shift from conflict resolution to conflict management in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict between 2000–2004, the environmental quality and the uniqueness of Jerusalem, The Dead Sea, and the planning of the historic basin of Jerusalem.

## 6. The Reut Institute<sup>17</sup>

The Reut institute is a newly established think tank based in Tel Aviv. It describes itself as an innovative non-partisan not-for-profit policy group designed to provide real-time long-term strategic decision-support to the Government of Israel. It supplies its services exclusively to the Government of Israel, and since it is supported by private donors it does so free of charge.

It focuses on decision support services to the government more than research. The institute claims to specialize in areas that the decision makers are not aware of. Its current focus areas are national security and socio-economics growth, with the goal of bringing Israel to be amongst the top 15 countries economically. It also plans to expand its work into areas concerning the Jewish world and decision making processes. The institute is currently being perceived by the establishment and international media as one of the best decision support think tanks in Israel.

<sup>16</sup> The institute's website: <http://www.jiis.org.il/>

<sup>17</sup> The institute's website: <http://www.reut-institute.org/>

## **7. Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace–The Hebrew University of Jerusalem<sup>18</sup>**

The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace is dedicated to fostering peace and advancing cooperation in the Middle East and around the world through research and informative events.

Founded in 1965, the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace enjoyed the personal support of former United States President Harry S. Truman. Although part of the Hebrew University and located on the Mount Scopus campus, the Institute has its own Board of Trustees and an Academic Committee that determines its overall policies and research programs.

The Institute supports major studies on the history, politics, and social development of the non-Western world, with particular emphasis on the Middle East. It has five regional research units; Africa, Asia, Balkan, Latin America, and the Middle East. It also includes the Minerva Center for Human Rights and the Modernization and Comparative Civilizations Unit. As an institute for the advancement of peace, the Truman Institute initiates joint projects to parallel major international political activities on conflict resolution and on the struggle to uphold the principles of human rights, as defined by the UN Charter in both the international and local spheres. Each year the Truman Institute hosts a number of Visiting Fellows. The Truman Institute was the first in Israel to host Palestinian scholars for long-term visits.

## **8. The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations–The Hebrew University of Jerusalem<sup>19</sup>**

The Leonard Davis Institute of the Hebrew University is an academic research institute devoted to the study of international affairs. The institute aims to deepen the understanding of international relations by various means including the promotion of research, the publication of research papers, and organizing workshops, conferences and seminars.

The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, which was established in 1972 at the Mount Scopus campus of The Hebrew University Jerusalem, is by

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<sup>18</sup> The institute's website: <http://truman.huji.ac.il/>

<sup>19</sup> The institute's website: <http://davis.huji.ac.il/>

its nature and statutes an interdisciplinary body, though formally anchored in the Faculty of Social Sciences. It plans its programs in accordance with three broad aims:

- a. To promote research in the theory of international relations, adopting a broad perspective that draws on a variety of disciplines.
- b. To present the universal themes of international politics to the Israeli public, thereby enhancing the national discourse on these matters.
- c. To put the Institute's expertise and consulting capability at the service of national institutions conducting the security and foreign affairs of Israel.

The Leonard Davis Institute serves as a center where researchers from the International Relations, Political Science, and related departments at the Hebrew University, as well as at other Israeli universities and academic centers, can develop and coordinate research programs. The Institute's programs aim at deepening the understanding of Israel's foreign relations and diplomacy, Middle Eastern affairs, as well as international politics. This embraces, particularly, the critical choices that Israel faces as part of the international community in domains such as international political economy, human rights, global security, and conflict resolution. The Institute's publications appear in English and Hebrew.

### **9. The National Security Studies Center–The University of Haifa<sup>20</sup>**

The center, which was established at the University of Haifa in 2000, describes itself as a promoter of multidisciplinary studies in the field of national security and serves as a platform for research, publication and public debate for scholars of diverse academic orientation who find a common interest in the modern perception of national security. The institute has four main goals: research of the highest academic standard, interdisciplinary connection of the various aspects of national security, assistance in policy formulation, and advance of public debate.

### **10. The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute<sup>21</sup>**

The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute is a center for the interdisciplinary study and discussion of issues related to philosophy, civil society, culture and identity, and education. The Institute gives expression to the wide range of opinions in Israel,

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<sup>20</sup> The center's website: <http://nssc.haifa.ac.il/>

<sup>21</sup> The institute's website: [http://www.vanleer.org.il/default\\_e.asp](http://www.vanleer.org.il/default_e.asp)

and aims to enhance ethnic and cultural understanding, improve social tensions, empower civil society players, and promote democratic values.

### **11. Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel<sup>22</sup>**

The Taub Center is a non-partisan, not-for-profit institution with two main goals; supporting social policies, and enriching the public debate on social issues in Israel.

### **12. The Ariel Center for Policy Research (ACPR)<sup>23</sup>**

The Ariel Center for Policy Research was established in 1997 as an independent not-for-profit organization. Its aim is to carry out local and international debates on all security policies, especially the ones which resulted from the post-Oslo “peace process”. The center is working towards establishing a “strategic plan for the state of Israel” which is to be presented to the decision makers and the public. The center’s website features a message from the ex-Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir which implies that the centre has a right wing stance from the peace process and aims to influence the post-Oslo process through providing alternative policies.

### **13. The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI)<sup>24</sup>**

The Israel Democracy Institute describes itself as an independent, non-partisan think tank. It was founded in 1991 for the purpose of assisting in planning policies, as well as reforms to government, public administration, and democratic institutions and values which are still in their formative stages.

Its research mainly addresses legal and constitutional issues that serve its stated goals: encouraging structural, political, and economic reforms, becoming a source of information and comparative studies for the Knesset and the government, becoming an advisory body to the decision maker and the public, and finally encouraging public debate of issues on the national agenda. It also encourages studies that focus on resolving conflicts in the Middle East, and has programs that study alternatives to achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians proposing ideas such as the Middle East Common Market.

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<sup>22</sup> The center’s website: <http://www.taubcenter.org.il/>

<sup>23</sup> The center’s website: <http://www.acpr.org.il/>

<sup>24</sup> The institute’s website: <http://www.idi.org.il/english/>

The prestigious Guttman center, which specializes in public opinion surveys on social issues, is part of the IDI and is known for having the largest record on public opinion since the establishment of the state.

#### **14. Israel/ Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI)<sup>25</sup>**

The IPCRI, founded in Jerusalem in 1988, claims to be the only joint Palestinian-Israeli public policy think-tank in the world. It is devoted to developing practical solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The center is independent and is headed by a joint Palestinian/ Israeli management.

The IPCRI deals with the main issues in the Israeli-Arab conflict, issues which two sides are unable to resolve such as:

The nature of the final status agreement that the two sides must reach, the borders between the two entities, the question of Jerusalem, the Israeli settlements in the West Bank, guaranteeing security of Israeli and Palestinian citizens against violence by opponents of the peace process on both sides, stimulating the economic development of the Palestinian territories in a way beneficial to both sides, resolving the issue of water, and educating the two traumatized nations toward peaceful coexistence.

#### **15. Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research–Tel Aviv University<sup>26</sup>**

Tami Steinmetz Center's was established, according its website, with the purpose of promoting systematic research and thinking on issues connected with peacemaking processes and conflict resolution.

The center, which was established in 1992, is part of Tel Aviv University. Its main goals are to conduct periodic surveys that gauge trends in Israeli public opinion as the political process progresses, and to keep a database on Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in particular and Israeli-Arab cooperation in general.

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<sup>25</sup> The center's website: <http://www.ipcri.org/>

<sup>26</sup> The center's website: <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace/>



## **16. Chaim Herzog Institute for Media Politics and Society–Tel Aviv University<sup>27</sup>**

The Chaim Herzog Institute for Media Politics and Society was established in October 2002, as part of the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tel Aviv University. The Institute, named after the sixth president of the State of Israel, Chaim Herzog, was established with the aim of conducting academic research into the reciprocal links, connections and influences between the news media, society and politics. Its goals are to serve as a meeting ground for academics, researchers, journalists, producers, social critics and policy makers who share an awareness of the increasing social significance of the contemporary news media to society and culture, and who seek to understand it and enhance its quality.

## **17. The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies<sup>28</sup>**

The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies is an interdisciplinary research center devoted to the study of the modern history and current affairs of the Middle East and Africa. The center is part of the School of History and the Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities at Tel Aviv University (from which it obtains its funding in addition to trusts and donations). The center claims to be the oldest and largest institution of its kind in Israel, and that it has brought scholarly objectivity to the analysis of political subjects through research, publications, conferences, documentary collections, and public service. It also claims to be unbiased and that it does not take positions or recommend policies. Its declared goal is to inform the academic community, policy makers, journalists, and the general public about the complexities of the Middle East, and so advance peace through understanding.

## **18. The Peres Center for Peace<sup>29</sup>**

The Peres Center was established by the ex-Prime Minister and current president Shimon Peres in 1996. The declared goal for the center is to implement Peres's vision of the "New middle east" where all countries in the region work towards establishing peace through socio-economic cooperation and

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<sup>27</sup> The institute's website: <http://www.tau.ac.il/institutes/herzog/>

<sup>28</sup> The center's website: <http://www.dayan.org/>

<sup>29</sup> The center's website: <http://www.peres-center.org/>

“people-to-people interaction”. The center presents itself as a non-partisan non-governmental organization, which they claim allows it to work in parallel to the political processes in the region.

The center’s main activities are to design and facilitate tangible peace building projects that address its interests, utilizing cross-border, regional and international partnerships to bring these initiatives to fruition.

### **19. The Yitzhak Rabin Center<sup>30</sup>**

The Rabin center was established to commemorate the late Prime Minister and Chief of General Staff Yitzhak Rabin, and to draw lessons from his assassination, its circumstances and implications.

The Center combines socio-educational activity, documentation, and commemoration, and operates in all sectors of Israeli society, in order to perpetuate the memory of Yitzhak Rabin and his assassination, and to infuse the values of democracy in the Israeli society.

### **20. The Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel-The Hebrew University of Jerusalem<sup>31</sup>**

The institute is an independent not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to encourage economic research, with particular emphasis on the economy of Israel. The Institute was founded in January 1964 as the successor of the Falk Project for Economic Research in Israel. The general administration of the Institute is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees, originally nominated by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in consultation with the Maurice and Laura Falk Foundation of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

### **21. The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA)<sup>32</sup>**

The Center provides policy-oriented research on matters of strategy, security, and peace in the Middle East, and in particular the national security and foreign policy of Israel.

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<sup>30</sup> The center’s website: <http://center.rabincenter.org.il/english/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> The institute’s website: <http://pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msfalkin/home-1.htm>

<sup>32</sup> The center’s website: <https://besacenter.org/>

In addition to the abovementioned think tanks there are other study centers in Israel which do not qualify as think tanks but which are worth mentioning such as:

**1. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA)<sup>33</sup>**

The center focuses on policy research and education serving Israel and the Jewish people. Its current focus is the need to present Israel's case in the wake of the Second *Intifadah* since 2000, and the return of anti-Semitism in the post-Holocaust period.

**2. The Adva Center<sup>34</sup>**

The center conducts policy analysis, advocacy work, and public outreach to inform policy makers and the general public in Israel and abroad about equity and social justice issues in Israeli society.

**3. The Israeli Institute for Economic and Social Research (IIESR)<sup>35</sup>**

The institute specializes in economic and social research on issues relating to Israel's public agenda.

**4. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute<sup>36</sup>**

The institute claims to be the premier center for applied social research serving Israel and the Jewish world. It seeks to improve the effectiveness of social services by developing and disseminating knowledge of social needs as well as the effectiveness of programs intended to meet those needs.

**5. The Jewish-Arab Center–The University of Haifa<sup>37</sup>**

The center's goals are to encourage and support equitable coexistence between Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel.

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<sup>33</sup> The center's website: <http://www.jcpa.org/>

<sup>34</sup> The center's website: <http://www.adva.org/default.asp?lang=en>

<sup>35</sup> The institute's website: <http://www.iiesr.org.il/default.asp?langid=1>

<sup>36</sup> The institute's website: <http://brookdale-en.pionet.com/default.asp>

<sup>37</sup> The center's website: <http://jac.haifa.ac.il/>

# **Chapter Five**

## ***The Influence of Interest Groups on Decision Making***



## The Influence of Interest Groups on Decision Making

Israel is awash with political groups that aim to advance their agendas and interests forward. But as a result of Israel multi-faceted cleavages, these interest groups are difficult to categorize on a linear spectrum. They can be Right wing religious organizations such as the Yesha Council representing the interests of the religious Israeli settlers, or left wing such as the Histadrut workers union. They can also be religious groups, such as the Haredim, or part of the agriculture lobby such as the Kibbutz and the Moshav movements. Interest groups also include peace groups, such as *Gush Shalom* (Peace Bloc) and *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now), which aim to sway the Israeli public opinion and the decision makers to the direction of achieving a “just peace” based on the “land for peace” principles.

But because of the centralized bureaucratic nature of the political system, there are only a few points of access to lobby the decision makers. As a result these interest groups have limited options to influence policy from outside. Ideally they would have to influence the group of Knesset parties that represent the government coalition, or the key individuals within those parties who can bring issues to the agenda. Alternatively they can influence the civil servants high in the government ministry which deals with the issue. There is no benefit in influencing individual members of the Knesset as they have no power of their own.<sup>1</sup>

In response, interest groups that seek to get most returns for the least efforts, choose to become either institutional, a formal organization such as a military, or to be associated with a political party.<sup>2</sup> In some cases the leaders of the interest groups are also members of party institutions such as the leaders of the Kibbutz or Moshav movements whose interests seek to define the actions and policies of the Labor party.<sup>3</sup> Some interest groups, especially the religious ones, exercise large scale social, economical, and settlement activities, through educational networks, medical and social care, economic projects, and settlement organizations which

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<sup>1</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318, 320.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

they control or influence. Occasionally these groups also use their affiliated party's political influence to secure funding for their activities. The most extreme example of such is the Sephardi Haredi group represented by the Shas Party.

Independent interest groups, that is groups that are neither institutional or party affiliated, that attempt to influence policy are generally short lived, easily contained by the government, and generally unsuccessful. The large number of demonstrations and petitions in Israel is no indication of their effectiveness in bringing a change in policy. In most cases they are only effective when there are the appropriate political and diplomatic conditions, and most importantly the political will by the leadership.

For example, the legislation to annex the Golan Heights, which was advocated for through public campaigning and a petition signed by hundreds of thousands of Israeli, was only legislated when the right conditions and the political will existed for the legislation.<sup>4</sup>

Interest groups also have other challenges; most of the issues they advocate are either already studied debated, researched, or discussed by the government or by public or semi public agencies. This limits the interest groups which are unable to present new issues, and creates a favourable condition for the government to maintain its policies.<sup>5</sup>

This part of the study aims to discuss some of these interest groups, highlighting their ideological backgrounds, explaining their internal structures, and attempting to determine how they shape Israeli decision making. Much attention is given to the religious groups which are divided into two groups; the Haredim and the Datim Le'umim. On the other hand, the Agricultural interest groups of the Kibbutzim and Moshavim together with the peace camp are largely ignored in this study because of their much-reduced influence on decision making.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317.

<sup>6</sup> After the 1949 and the 1951 elections there were 36 Members of the Knesset from the Kibbutz and Moshav movements, while in 2003 there were only nine members from the Kibbutzim and Moshavim. See *Ibid.*, pp. 341–342.

The influence of the peace camp was also reduced greatly since the fall of 2000. See Efraim Davidi, "Protest Amid Confusion: Israel's Peace Camp in the Uprising's First Month," *Middle East Report* magazine, Washington, The Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), no. 217, Winter 2000, pp. 36–39.

## ***First: The Influence of the Haredim (The Non-Zionist Ultra Orthodox)***

### **1. Background on the Israeli Religious Spectrum**

Religion is a central issue in Israeli political life, partly because of the broad consensus amongst Jews that Israel should be a Jewish state—regardless of their disagreement on the definition of what a Jewish state is. In public life conflict only arises regarding the degree to which legislation and civil life in Israel should reflect the norms and decisions of established religious authorities.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in order to better understand the significance of the Haredim one should understand the nature of the religious spectrum of the Israeli Society, which ranges from the religious Jews who want to see Israel as a truly Jewish country in the religious sense, to the secular Jews (the Hilonim) who see no role for religion in public life. This spectrum, which is often referred to in a bipolar way, is more nuanced than the way it is often portrayed as a split between the religious and the secular Jews.

There are two main religious groups in Israel, namely the Haredim, and the religious nationalist, the Datim Le'umim. Together they constitute one end of the religiosity spectrum with a population of around 17–25% of Israeli Jews, depending on the survey used (split as 5–8% Haredim and 12–17% Datim Le'umim).<sup>8</sup> The Haredim, whose name literally means those who tremble from the fear of God, are generally non-Zionist religious Jews who fully abide by the religious laws of Orthodox Judaism (The Halachah) and who dedicate most of their lives to the study of the Talmud. The Haredim are perceived as the most adherent in their observance to commandments of Judaism, even more so than the Datim Le'umim. The Datim Le'umim, whose name means the Religious Nationalist, are also observant Jews, yet they are also ideologically a religious Zionists group. They are also known simply as the Datim (Hebrew for religious).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 349.

<sup>8</sup> Shlomit Levy et al., *A Portrait of Israeli Jewry: Beliefs, Observances, and Values among Israeli Jews 2000*, Highlights from an In-Depth Study Conducted by the Guttman Center of The Israel Democracy Institute for the AVI CHAI Foundation, 2000; and Daniel J. Elazar, "How religious are Israeli Jews?," Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), <http://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/howrelisr.htm> (Accessed: 29/12/2007).

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Fundamentalism," <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article252665/fundamentalism> (Accessed: 17/12/2007).



Perhaps not surprisingly, the religious groups, especially the *Haredim*, strongly disagree with secular life and are not afraid to express this in their own press. This has reached a degree that they described the life of the secular Jews as garbage and even called on the seculars to take their corrupt lifestyle and leave the country.<sup>10</sup>

Next on the scale of religiosity come the *Masortim*,<sup>11</sup> or Traditional Jews. They describe themselves as Jews but they do not abide by the more difficult commandments of Orthodox Judaism. They are prepared to modify Jewish practices required by the *Halachah* in those cases where they believe it to be personally necessary or attractive to do so. A recent poll shows that among traditional Jews, 67% go to synagogue regularly, 87% light Shabbat candles every Friday, and 94% keep kosher.<sup>12</sup>

Since they vary in their degree of practicing Judaism, Traditional Jews fill a wide spectrum in this classification. As a result, establishing the size of this group becomes a difficult task. A survey by the Guttman institute in 2000, estimated them to be around 35% of Israelis.<sup>13</sup> This group, which until recently constituted a majority amongst Israeli Jews, has long acted as a force of moderation between the extremes of Israeli society.

On the other side of the spectrum lie the fourth and last group of Israeli Jews, the non religious or the secular Jews (referred to in Hebrew as the *Hilonim*). Although their beliefs are secular, their practices, on the other hand, may be quite similar to those of many traditionalists. The only difference is that they maintain those practices for family and national reasons rather than religious ones. In fact, of the 48% of Israeli Jews who describe themselves as non-religious in the Guttman survey above, only 22% describe themselves as totally non observant.<sup>14</sup> According to recent poll quoted above, 38% of secular Jews living in Israel keep kosher food often or at all times (50% of Israeli Jews don't keep kosher at all times), and 36% of Israeli families that define themselves as secular light Shabbat candles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–34.

<sup>11</sup> This term should not be confused with the Masorti Movement, the name of the Conservative Movement in Judaism.

<sup>12</sup> Editorial, "Poll: 40% of secular Jews keep kosher," *Yediot Achronot*, 26/5/2008, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3547740,00.html> (Accessed: 28/5/2008).

<sup>13</sup> Shlomit Levy et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Editorial, "Poll: 40% of secular Jews keep kosher."

Secular Jews are equally difficult to estimate because of the difficulty in differentiating Secular Jews from Traditional Jews. They thus are often wrongly put together in a large 75–83% category to differentiate them from the religious groups of the Haredim and the Datim Le'umim.

Almost all the elites in Israeli society cultural, intellectual, political and economic are found within the secular group which is overwhelmingly Ashkenazi.<sup>16</sup> Some of the seculars are hostile to the two first religious groups, describing them as a danger to the society, and occasionally accuse them of living in a different time than the one “Modern Israel” is living in.

Between June 1999 and January 2000, the Guttman Center of The Israel Democracy Institute carried out a comprehensive study of Jewish religious behavior in Israel and of how Israeli Jews define their own identity. The study found that the lifestyles, values, and identity of most Israeli Jews reflect a profusion of efforts to maintain a bond to Jewish tradition, on the one hand, and maximum freedom of choice, on the other. The result of this mix is a fairly broad Israeli-Jewish consensus that reflects a commitment to Jewish identity, Jewish culture, and Jewish continuity, but does not accept *Halachah*—rabbinical law—as a system of binding imperatives. It also found a polarizing trend represented by an increase in proportion of the Haredi and non religious groups.

## 2. Background on the Haredim

Of all the political powers within the Israeli society, the Haredi Jews<sup>17</sup> are perhaps the least understood outside of Israel. This is perhaps because of their declared non-Zionist (and often anti-Zionist) nature, and the lack of literature in languages other than Hebrew that explains their ideologies. Their distinct traditional appearance and customs may have also resulted in more literature that deals with their folkloristic aspects rather than the details of their ideologies and how they influence the Israeli policies.<sup>18</sup>

This lack of sufficient studies of the Haredim outside of Israel is unfortunate given they the increase in the influence of religion on the society. The Haredim have been part of almost every government coalition since their surprise electoral

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel J. Elazar, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Haredi*: Hebrew for a person who trembles (from the fear of God). Plural, *Haredim*.

<sup>18</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*

success in 1988 and their subsequent coalition with Yitzhak Shamir's Likud. Their success throughout the 1990s, has at various times, put them in a position to be able to dictate to the rest of the Israeli society. The Haredim are also the fastest growing Jewish community in Israel with a birth rate approximately three times as fast as the rest of the Jewish population. This growing community, which currently stands at about 800 thousand people, has provided the Haredi leaders with a growing power base.<sup>19</sup>

In this study the Characteristics of the Haredim will be explained in context by putting them in contrast to the rest of Israelis, and especially to the Datim Le'umim who are also discussed under a separate heading.

All Haredim are followers of Orthodox Judaism, which means that they are not followers of either Reform Judaism or Conservative Judaism, the two forms of Judaism that emerged, and are dominant, amongst American Jewry. The Datim Le'umim, who also follow Orthodox Judaism are followers of a movement within Orthodox Judaism, called modern orthodoxy, also known as the Mizrahi movement, which attempts to reconcile religious observance with the modern world.<sup>20</sup>

The differences between the Non-Zionist Haredim and most Zionist Israeli Jews (religious and secular) over Zionism are complex. The Haredim agree with the Zionists over the notion that anti-semitism is an eternal quality common to all non-Jews. However, they disagree with the Zionist on many other issues.

The first issue of disagreement is the Zionists' goal of concentrating Jews and establishing a state in Palestine, since this goal contradicts with the Haredi interpretation of the Talmud and its commentaries. In the Haredi view, Zionism calls upon humans to do what only God and the messiah could do, since in traditional Judaism, the return to the land of Israel was inseparable from the messianic redemption of the people of Israel. Thus, returning to the land and creating a state before the return of the *Masheeh* (Hebrew for Messiah) would amount to defying God's will and would only postpone the real redemption and the real ingathering

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<sup>19</sup> Steven Erlanger, "A Modern Marketplace for Israel's Ultra-Orthodox," *The New York Times*, 2/11/2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/02/world/middleeast/02orthodox.html> (Accessed: 14/11/2007).

<sup>20</sup> Short for *Merkaz Ruhani* or Religious Center, and is not to be confused with the name used to describe Jews of Oriental origins.

of Jews from the exile.<sup>21</sup> The Haredim do not attribute any holiness to Israel and do not consider it to be the beginning of redemption.<sup>22</sup> In fact, to Haredim who live in Israel, Israel is only another Diaspora. For example, the Haredi parties, unlike the rest of the Israeli Parties, do not end or begin their conventions with the singing of the national anthem “*Hatikva*.” instead they recite Jewish prayers. Israeli Haredim also retain strong links with other Haredi Jews in other countries especially the United States.

Many of the Datim Le’umim, on the other hand, believe that the redemption is not a messianic act only carried by God, but is an immediate imperative for every living Jew. They believe that the messianic age has started already, and that the redemption has started with the establishment of the state of Israel and that it will soon be complete with the imminent coming of the Masheeh. The dispute between the two main religious ideologies is theologically centered upon the issue of whether Jews are living in normal times as the Haredim believe, or in the period of the beginning of redemption, as the Datim Le’umim believe.<sup>23</sup>

Another difference is that the Haredim insist on separating themselves from the Gentile (non-Jewish) society, as well as from Jews who do not follow the religious law as strictly as they do. The aim of Haredi practices has, and still is, to preserve the Jewish way of life, as it existed prior to modern times.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, the Datim Le’umim, in spite of their strict observance of Jewish religious law, have devised ways to participate in modern society and have made compromises with modernity, both in the Diaspora and in Israel, since the 1920s split between the two groups.

One aspect of the lack of Haredi participation in the society is that most male Haredim who join a Yeshiva (a religious school) get a deferment from the 3-year

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<sup>21</sup> In a famous Talmudic Passage in Tractate *Ketubot*, p. 111, God is said to have imposed three oaths on the Jews. Two of which contradict tenets of Zionism. The first oath is that Jews should not rebel against non-Jews. Secondly, as a group, Jews should not massively emigrate to Palestine before the coming of the Messiah. The third oath is that Jews should not pray too strongly for the coming of the Messiah, so as not to bring him before his appointed time.

<sup>22</sup> Stewart Reiser, *The Politics of Leverage: The National Religious Party of Israel and Its Influence on Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1984), p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17.

military service, and after the expiry of this deferment, they either get a complete exemption or simply join the reserves after a brief training period. In any case, they are disqualified from serving in any dangerous or even unpleasant capacities. All Haredi women, unlike other Jewish Israeli women who serve two years, are completely excluded from military conscription.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the Datim Le'umim serve in the military in one of two arrangements that combines Talmudic studies with military service.

As a result many secular Jews complain that the Haredim do not share the burdens imposed upon society equally with other Israeli Jews. In response the Haredim argue that all victories as well as defeats of the Israeli army are due to God's intervention and that without doubt God takes into consideration the numbers, the progress in study, and the commitment of those Jews who engage in Talmudic study. The Haredim cite numerous passages in the Talmud and in subsequent Talmudic literature that are emphatic on this point. Traditional Israeli Jews support the Haredim and the cited sacred Jewish writings on this point.<sup>26</sup>

The Haredim, like many of the traditionally religious Jews, prohibit their women from playing even insignificant roles in politics or public activities in which they may appear as leading males, not to mention that many of them are kept illiterate by the command of the rabbis.<sup>27</sup> The Datim Le'umim, on the other hand, would not hesitate to admit women in their political parties and even to positions of authority.<sup>28</sup>

A rivalry between these two religious ideologies exists over who has the most influence and power. Both ideologies have gained and lost ground in recent history following domestic societal and geopolitical changes. It is well known in Israel that hatred between the secular Jews can never match the hatred between the religious groups themselves.<sup>29</sup> This animosity often surfaces when Rabbis on both sides attack the ideologies of the other group.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8, 38.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

### 3. Power Structures of the Haredim

The Haredim themselves are also divided internally. Their divisions are such that some scholars such as Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky argue that if it was not for the division of the Haredim and especially their rabbis, the influence of the Haredim and the “Haredi-fication” of the Israeli society might have been much stronger.<sup>30</sup>

The Haredim are divided into two main categories according to the religious practices of both the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim. This ethnic division is relatively recent in the Haredi community. Until not too long ago, the Mizrachi Haredim were part of the Ashkenazi Haredim education system, but discrimination by the Ashkenazim against Sephardim and differences in religious practices between the two branches of Judaism caused the Sephardim to split politically. This process created a rift between the two groups that continues to get worse. Currently Shas is the only political party that represents the Sephardi Haredim (as well as claiming to be the only available representative of wider Mizrachi Jews).

On the Ashkenazi side, the Ashkenazi Haredim are split further into two categories; the Hasidim, or the Hasidic Jews (themselves divided into different dynasties/ sects), and the non-Hasidic Haredim, also known as the Lithuanian Haredim (because of their Lithuanian theological origins). The differences between these two sub-categories are theological but the parties representing them, Agudat Yisrael and Degel HaTorah, respectively, often join each other in a united electoral list called United Torah Judaism (Yahadut HaTorah HaMeukhedet) in order to reach the 2% electoral threshold.

The two parties representing Ashkenazi Haredim are often differentiated politically on the basis of their attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Agudat Yisrael is often referred to as right wing Hawkish party, while Degel HaTorah is referred to as a Dovish party. On the Sepahrdi side, Shas party’s head, Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph, who has advocated peace negotiations while at the same time being an advocate of strengthening the settlements, is seen by some as being somewhere between the Agudat Yisrael and the Zionist Mafdal, thus questioning the predominant assumption that they are a non-Zionist party.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Aaron Willis, “Redefining Religious Zionism: Shas’ Ethno-Politics,” *Israel Studies Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 1, Fall 1992.

Such a distinction and classification is inaccurate as it lacks an understanding of the basic ideologies of the Judeo-centric Haredim. According to Israel Shahak, the Haredi thought is based on the notion that Jews and non Jews are poles apart, and all Haredi Jews share one point of departure which is that non Jews want to kill and destroy the Jew. How they react to this is where the Haredim differ. The Degel HaTorah party led by Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach believes that since communication with non-Jews is impossible, the best way is not to provoke non-Jews by not reminding them of their (the Jews') existence. On the other hand, the spiritual leader for one of the Dynasties/sects of the Agudat Yisrael party, Rebbe Menachem Shneerson (The Lubavitcher Rebbe),<sup>32</sup> believes that Jews must be strong so that non-Jews would not destroy them. The leader of the Sephardi Shas, Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph, appears to have a stronger position than the two of them. Yoseph publicly declares that Jews, when sufficiently powerful, have a religious obligation to expel all non-Jews from the country and destroy all Christian churches. He argued in a Haredi newspaper article in 1989 that since Israel is too weak to demolish all the Christian churches in the Holy Land (even though they are places of idolatry, in his view), it is also too weak to retain all the conquered territories. He thus advocates that Israel makes territorial concessions to avert war in which Jewish life could be lost. According to this explanation it is clear that the differences between a "Haredi Dove" and a "Haredi Hawk" are not that great, and that they are more tactical than ideological.<sup>33</sup>

Rabbi Yoseph's comments in 1989 ( which were supported by Rabbi Shach at the time) which supported withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967 was perceived by the western media as a sign of peace when in fact, if they are understood in context of their ideologies, their views would constitute one part of the Hawkish heart of Israeli politics. Rabbi Yoseph, who is known for his fierce and sharp rhetoric and his curses and ill-wishes to political leaders that he hates, would almost certainly have favored a permanent occupation of all the territories if he were convinced that this would not provoke Arabs to harm Jews, and that no Jewish life would be lost in the process.

In terms of their power structures, all three Haredi parties have no internal democratic process, as is the case with other Israel parties. The heads of their political parties are subordinate to the religious heads of their Haredi groups.

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<sup>32</sup> Rebbe is the Yiddish language version of the Hebrew Word Rabbi.

<sup>33</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

The Agudat Yisrael faction takes its directions from the Hasidic rebbes of Ger, Vizhnitz, Boston, and Sadigura who exert much influence in the daily lives of their followers, the Hasidim. The Belz rebbe, a prominent political and religious figure in his own right, is also closely involved in Agudat policy-making, though inter-party politics resulted in Belz failing to get any of their representatives into a high position on the combined Yahadut HaTorah list in the 2006 Knesset elections.

Degel HaTorah is headed by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv and Rabbi Aharon Shteinman. Policy decisions are also weighed and decided by a *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah*, or a Council of Torah Sages. This council is made up of experienced communal rabbis who are mostly senior and elderly heads of Yeshivot,<sup>34</sup> and all of them are very learned in Talmud, devoted to *Halachah* (Jewish law), and guided by their knowledge and application of the classical “Code of Jewish Law”, the Shulkhan Arukh.

Shas’ principal spiritual leader is the renowned authority of Halachah Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph, and like Degel HaTorah, Shas also has its own Council of Torah Sages, but in practice, Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph has complete control of all the Shas MKs. The Israeli government’s refusal to extend Rabbi Yoseph’s term as Sephardi Chief Rabbi had been one of the main reasons for the Shas party’s establishment. The extended power of Shas into the wider Mizrachi, or oriental, community and the lack of other secular representation of the Mizrachim can be related to the fact that the majority of Mizrachi Jews remained traditionalists and retain belief in the “magical powers of Rabbis and holy men”. Although Mizrachi Jews are prepared to criticize a politician, they would rarely criticize a Rabbi in public. Almost all Mizrachi politicians, including the black panthers of the 1970s, commonly bow to kiss the hands of their Rabbis in public.<sup>35</sup>

One note to be made on the Hassidic Haredim is that they are strongly influenced by the teachings of the Cabbala which emphasises on the cosmic differences between Jews and non-Jews, more so than the *Halachah* (Jewish law). One of the principles of Cabbala is that Souls of Non-Jews are evil and that they are an earthly embodiment of Satan. In addition, the Cabbala also teaches that a Satanic soul (non-Jewish soul) cannot be transformed into a divine soul (Jewish soul) by mere persuasion.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Yeshiva* is a religious school. Plural, *Yeshivot*.

<sup>35</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.



The late “Lubavitcher Rebbe,” Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who headed the Chabad movement and wielded great influence among many religious Jews in Israel as well as in the United States, was reported to have said in a recording published in 1965<sup>37</sup> that there is a difference in the Halachah’s attitude about the bodies of non-Jews and the bodies of Jews, and that an even greater difference exists in regards to the soul. Two contrary types of souls exist; the non-Jewish soul, which comes from the satanic sphere, and the Jewish soul, which stems from holiness. He also stated that “the general difference between Jews and non-Jews is that a Jew was not created as a means for some other purpose; he himself is the purpose, since the substance of all divine emanations was created only to serve the Jews.” Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh, one of the Lubavitcher sect’s leading authorities was also quoted saying that “There is something infinitely more holy and unique about Jewish life than non-Jewish life”.<sup>38</sup>

#### **4. Influence of the Haredim**

The Haredi influence in the state started with the establishment of the state when Ben-Gurion reached an agreement, on the eve of his declaration of establishment of the state, to maintain the *status quo* that existed with regard to religious jurisdiction. This meant that matters of personal status would continue to be directed by the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. Since then, Jewish marriage, divorce and other issues continued to be performed according to strict Jewish law. In 1953, an act of Knesset placed all Jews in Israel under the jurisdiction of the rabbinic court for issues of personal status. Christian and Muslim religious councils or courts also continued to determine issues of personal status based on their own religious law.

The new state, under pressure from the Haredim, also established a number of principles for the public observance of Jewish law. On the Jewish Sabbath stores, offices, and public transportation are shut down. All food served by government institutions, including the military, abides by the Jewish dietary laws. A Ministry of Religion was established with departments for Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Druze affairs. The ministry oversaw and subsidized places of worship. The department for Jewish affairs—obviously the largest—was charged with building

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

synagogue, religious courts, and yeshivas (Religious schools), It also provides religious services for new immigrants, and supervises the dietary laws.<sup>39</sup>

To observers the Haredi attitude towards the state may seem contradictory. While the Haredim do not serve in the military, and publicly denounce Zionism, they still participate in the governments of Israel. The reason behind this is that after the *de facto* creation of the Israel, each Haredi group charted its own way in how to deal with the state.

While some Haredi groups chose an anti-Zionist stance and to publicly oppose the state, such as the Satmar Chasidic sect, Edah Hacharedis, and the smaller group Naturei Karta, others chose a more pragmatic approach in dealing with Israel such as the Lithuanian Haredim and most Chasidic sects such as Ger, Belz, Vizhnitz, and Chabad-Lubavich. Ger, Belz and Vizhnitz together established the Agudat Yisrael, which initially had an anti-zionist position but has changed to a pragmatic non-Zionist position, accepting Israel as a refuge for the survivors of European Jewry. Similarly, Chabad-Lubavich started with an anti-Zionist position but has settled for a non-Zionist position, supporting the state in protecting the Jewish community living in it.

Haredis who join the government only do so to ensure the retention of the Jewish nature of their communities and protect their rights in the state, rather than because of a true subscription to the Zionist ideology. This is perhaps the reason some of the Ashkenazi Haredi Rabbis forbid their followers from becoming ministers in any government and only allows the Haredi politicians to become deputy ministers, even though they carry out all the functions of a Minister.

Although the majority of Jewish Israelis see the Haredim and their leaders as fringe, in recent years, the political influence of the Haredim has seen an increase, as they played a role as a main coalition partner with the party that forms the government. Because they have no political interest in the government, they are very flexible in coalition negotiations, which make them a good political partner. Shas and Yahadut HaTorah only insist on implementing their social and welfare agendas through public funding and budget before they join any government coalition. The common wisdom is that the increase in the influence

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<sup>39</sup> Anti Defamation League (ADL) website, “The Conversion Crisis: The Current Debate on Religion, State and Conversion in Israel,” <http://www.adl.org/Israel/Conversion/creation.asp>

of Haredim is because the main political parties of Labor and Likud need the Haredim—who combined constitute the third bloc after Labor and Likud—in government coalitions, thus they provide them with the privileges they request, including funding their education system, and provide assistance with in passing legislations to support other demands they make. However, some scholars argue that this *realpolitik* explanation based on pragmatic political convenience is not as sufficient as it does not take into account the special affinity of all religious parties and secular right wing parties.

The increasing influence of the Haredim since the 1990s has also been largely attributed to their great attention to the religious education of their children. In Israel's two-track education system, the Haredi children only learn Talmudic studies, and do not get any secular education. It is estimated that currently one out of every four children in Israel does not receive any secular education.<sup>40</sup> The Haredim acquired direct influence over several school networks, and indirectly influenced others, and thus managed to spread their influence on an increasing segment of younger generation Israelis in other non-Haredi schools.<sup>41</sup> Their attempts to restore traditional Jewish religious education, which was generously subsidized by the state, especially in poorer towns resulted in a new generation of believers who adhere to their worldview communities of Israel.

The Haredim also established many social networks within their communities providing inducements such as hot meals to people in poorer localities. Shas for example spends most of its money in building its network of institutions and in training members who would enable the party to maximize its control of the public. Adults between 40–50 were encouraged to leave their professions or give up their businesses in order to enroll in their institutions and study sacred subjects with guaranteed remuneration. The remuneration, which was effectively salaries for studying, was low, but numerous individuals considered the life of study preferable to their persisting to do low rate work or to maintain their decaying businesses. But the recruits did more than study Talmud. They were required to do political work for Shas. These recruits soon constituted Shas' political cadre,

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<sup>40</sup> Isi Leibler, "Retreat From Reason," *The Jerusalem Post*, 25/9/2007, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1189411476484&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull> (Accessed: 28/12/2007).

<sup>41</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

which has been and remains instrumental in turning Haredi neighborhoods into electoral constituencies under almost any conceivable circumstances.<sup>42</sup>

The Haredim benefit greatly from the state's financial support and work hard to keep it going, the Ashkenazi Haredi political parties in particular have concentrated primarily on obtaining funding for their communities. For example, between 1988 and 1990 Peres and Shamir supported the demand of the Haredi parties for funding, which was known as the "special money" grants. These grants were made through a voluntary association formed to remain under the real control of a Haredi Knesset member or his friends. The ministry of finance made grants from the state budget to such associations, most often based on flimsy purpose statements and with no control exerted over expenditures. These special money grants were finally withdrawn, but only when the resultant corruption that took place in their use reached an unprecedented scale.

Since the Haredi political ideology is to have the state of Israel organize its public life in accordance with the *Halachah* (the Jewish religious law), these Haredi parties concentrate on enforcing strict conformity to their interpretation of Jewish religious law in public life. This manifests itself in issues such as observance of Shabbat, conversion to Judaism, defining who is a Jew, control of marriage and divorce, kosher dietary laws, cultivating the land, and the desecration of the dead by archaeologists. Issues of economic and political nature usually follow on the Haredi list of priorities.<sup>43</sup> Even these issues are always seen in a purely religious manner that is rooted in Judaism such as protection of Jewish lives.

The Haredim have managed to secure a series of laws and administrative rulings that have gone in the direction desired by them. For example, the Knesset has passed legislations such as:<sup>44</sup>

- a. The 1953 law establishing sole jurisdiction to the orthodox rabbinical courts regarding marriage and divorce among Jews.
- b. The 1951 law making the Jewish Sabbath an official day of rest for Jews.
- c. The 1962 law prohibiting the raising of pigs in Israel except in areas where there is a Christian population.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 348.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

They also put a great emphasis on preserving the religious symbols of the state, and are supported on this matter by many Israeli Jews. At times, the Haredim appear to bring up religious issues when the coalition which they are in appears to be in danger. In other cases the issues are raised as a result of competition amongst different religious parties and factions.<sup>45</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting example on the importance of the religious symbols to the Haredim and their ability to use their political power is the incident of the Education Minister Shulamit Aloni from the Meretz party being photographed eating non-Kosher meat in an Arab restaurant in Nazareth in 1992. This incident, which may seem insignificant was deemed a violation of the religious symbol of the ritual purity of food and resulted in protests by all religious political parties against what they termed a “profanation of Judaism”. The traditionally religious members of the Knesset from the Labor party followed the religious parties, which forced the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to support those accusations against Aloni. However, this was not the end of the incident. Shas also threatened to leave the Rabin coalition forcing Rabin to summon the leaders of Meretz on four separate occasions to convey to them the complaints about Aloni made by Rabbi Ovadia Yoseph. Rabin also forced Aloni to apologize publicly in an open letter to Rabbi Yoseph.

Political reasons are always blamed for the big parties’ submission to the religious parties’ demands. For example, in spite of their secular background, Peres and Netanyahu regarded Rabbi Yoseph as an important political figure and often courted him openly. In the case of the Aloni incident, the Labor Party and its non-traditionalist sympathizers argued that concessions to the demands of the Haredim were necessary to ensure Shas’ backing for the peace process.<sup>46</sup>

The fact that issue of religious symbols is minor may explain why the large parties concede them to the Haredim in return for their backing on bigger issues. Yet, it remains a testament to their ability to mobilize their power base effectively.

The Haredim choice of coalition is not always based on who provides them with the financial support they need, but is also based on ideologies and religious beliefs. In the mid-1970s the Lubavitcher Rebbe decided that the Labor Party was

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>46</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–37.

too moderate and thereafter shifted his movement's political support sometimes to Likud and sometimes to a religious party. Ariel Sharon was the Rebbe's favorite Israeli senior politician. From the June 1967 war until his death the Lubavitcher Rebbe always supported Israeli wars and opposed any retreat. In 1974, he strongly opposed the Israeli withdrawal from the Suez area, conquered in the October 1973 war, and promised Israel divine favors if it persisted in occupying that land. After his death thousands of his Israeli followers, who continued to hold the views expressed in the above quoted passage, played an important role in Netanyahu's election victory by demonstrating at many crossroad junctions before the election day, and chanting the slogan: "Netanyahu is good for the Jews". Although they subsequently criticized Netanyahu strongly for meeting with Arafat, signing the Hebron agreement, and agreeing to a second withdrawal, the Rebbe's followers continued their overall preference for the Netanyahu government.<sup>47</sup>

The Haredim also have an economical influence. According to the economist Momi Dahan, from the School of Public Policy at Hebrew University, some 60% of Haredi men do not work regular jobs, preferring religious study instead. In addition, most Haredi families are the largest amongst Israeli Jews with six or seven children. As a result more than 50% of Haredim live below the poverty line and get state allowances (mostly child benefits and unemployment benefits), compared with a mere 15% of the rest of the population.<sup>48</sup> These state allowances and the support that the Haredim get from the government are major issues in the Israeli economy, which is gradually changing from a social economy into a liberal capitalist economy, but is unable to considerably cut state allowances to the Haredim for political reasons.

For example, after Netanyahu's success in the general elections, which was greatly supported by the Haredim as explained above, his attempts to carry out economic reforms towards an American style market economy were hampered by his commitment to continue funding the Haredi community institutions. His attempts to balance the needs of his voters with his economic reforms—together with a budget crisis in 1999—eventually led to the failure of his 1999 budget, which together with the disagreement over the Wye River Accord, forced Netanyahu to call early elections.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Erlanger, "A Modern Marketplace for Israel's Ultra-Orthodox."

More recently, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert agreed to provide the Haredi school sector with funding equivalent to that of the state school system, with no obligation on them to incorporate secular schools' core curriculum subjects into religious education as demanded by secular Jews.<sup>49</sup> It is needless to say that this funding to ensure the Haredim's backing has serious economic consequences on the budget.

The Haredim's increasing electoral leverage also allows them to advance their agendas. They use the coalition agreements to make demands that serve their interests and strengthen their political positions not just economically but also politically. The Agudat Yisrael party has once demanded that the Netanyahu government should make no territory concessions to the Palestinians. More recently, Shas has threatened to withdraw from Olmert's coalition if the latter discusses Jerusalem in any peace negotiations. In the Knesset, the Haredi MKs have made requests to pass laws to curb Christian missionaries, and lobbied against the Supreme Court, which does not rule according to the Halachah.

The Haredim also influence public policy by their exclusion from military conscription. While this has remained a minor concern at the establishment of the state, the growth of the Haredim compared to the rest of the population is gradually making it a bigger, which is evident in the increase of public, and media discourse on the topic. The Haredim currently account for more than 10% of draft-age Israeli Jews, but by 2019, the government forecasts they will constitute almost 25%.<sup>50</sup> This would mean that the military could lose a quarter of its potential conscripts.

Finally, the Haredim influence Israeli decision making indirectly through religious ideas. The Israeli foreign policy, although usually conceived and conducted by secular Jews, has to date displayed an essence derived in part from the Jewish religious past. For example following the 1967 war Israeli governmental leaders with almost full support of Israeli Jews believed that the Arabs were incapable of harming Israel and therefore refused to make any concessions. This was exactly the position of the Ashkenazi Haredim.<sup>51</sup> Only after suffering grievous losses in Jewish lives in the October 1973 war, and fearing another war, did the government of the state of Israel—again with almost the full support of Israeli Jews—agree to

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<sup>49</sup> Isi Leibler, *op. cit.*

<sup>50</sup> Tim Franks, "Israel's Other Demographic Challenge," British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 3/9/2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6970195.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6970195.stm) (Accessed: 24/12/2007).

<sup>51</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, "Fundamentalism".

return the Sinai to Egypt. The same process took place in Lebanon when guerilla warfare, conducted by the Lebanese in 1984 and 1985, resulted in consistent Israeli casualties. It appears that the Zionist movement, which underwent a partial secularization, has kept many of the basic Jewish religious principles, and that Rabbi Yoseph, David Ben-Gurion, Ariel Sharon, and all major Israeli politicians appear to share a common ground in policy making.<sup>52</sup>

## ***Second: The Influence of the Religious National Movement and Gush Emunim***

### **1. Background on the Datim Le'umim, the National Religious Party (Mafdal), Gush Emunim, and the Yesha Council**

Perhaps one of the most important interest groups in Israel politics is the Datim Le'umim religious group,<sup>53</sup> and its most prominent political manifestations, the Mafdal and Gush Emunim.<sup>54</sup>

The Datim Le'umim movement is as old as secular Zionism. The emergence of the Zionist movement aroused considerable enthusiasm among many Orthodox Jews who participated in the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 when Zionism was declared a political movement. By the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, when the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was established, the secular orientation of the Zionist movement became clear to Orthodox Jews, who reacted in two very different ways. While a small group of Orthodox Jews left the WZO, the majority remained and formed a separate political faction within the WZO called Merkaz Ruhani, or spiritual center, which is usually referred to as the Mizrachi Movement.<sup>55</sup> In 1911, a group of the Mizrachi movement broke off and joined the Orthodox Jews who have left earlier to form the Agudat Yisrael party, which had a strong anti-Zionist ideology.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Datim Le'umim*: Hebrew for Religious National. Plural, *Datim Le'umim*.

<sup>54</sup> *Gush Emunim*: Hebrew for Bloc of the Faithful.

<sup>55</sup> Mizrachi is short for *Merkaz Ruhani* or Religious center and is not to be confused with the term for Oriental Jews.

<sup>56</sup> Stewart Reiser, *op. cit.*, pp. 8–9.



However, the Mizrahi Movement at the time was motivated by a purely pragmatic approach that was concerned more about saving the Jewish body rather than saving the Jewish soul by redemption. This is best illustrated by Mizrahi Support of British proposal of Uganda for the location of the Jewish colony in 1903. In the 1920s, the Mizrahi Movement joined the general Zionist grouping in the WZO known as the Ezrahim.

However, this ideological position changed due to the work of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, known as Rabbi Kook the elder, who was the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Palestine. According to Shlomo Aviner, he was the first orthodox figure to make a systematic attempt to integrate the centrality of the Land of Israel in religious tradition into a reinterpretation of the political activity of Zionism.<sup>57</sup>

As a result of his work to blend orthodoxy and modern Jewish nationalism in the 1920s, he is considered to be the founder of the religious Zionist ideology, which known as *Datim Le'umim* (religious national). The ideology he created constituted a change of course for the Mizrahi movement from pragmatic Zionism to messianic Zionism where Zionism became part of the gradual messianic redemption of the Jewish people. The *Datim Le'umim* ideology was further developed afterwards by Rabbi Kook's son and successor Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, known as Rabbi Kook the younger.<sup>58</sup>

Rabbi Kook the elder's success in nationalizing religion in the period between 1920 and 1948 has shifted the position of the Mizrahi movement from pragmatic Zionism into messianic Zionism. The Mizrahi movement positions thus changed from a pragmatic position that accepted the Ugandan option to one that advocated full Jewish sovereignty in the "land of Israel."

After the establishment of the state, the *Datim Le'umim*<sup>59</sup> continued playing a role in the Zionist movement. They have contributed greatly to the Israeli state, military, and society. The fact that the religious-Zionist parties participated in every Israeli government between 1948 and 1992 is enough testament to their partnership

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–13.

<sup>58</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>59</sup> The *Datim Le'umim* are also often collectively referred to as the *Kippot Srugot* (knitted skullcaps) in contrast with *Kippot Shkhorot* (Black skullcaps) which are worn by the *Haredi* community.

in the state. In addition, by becoming full partners in the Zionist project, they have also marginalized the non-Zionist Haredim.<sup>60</sup>

The two pre-state Mizrachi movements formed two parties, The Mizrachi, and *HaPo'el HaMizrachi*. These parties—which united after 1955 to create the current representative party, the National Religious Party (NRP) or the *Mafdal*<sup>61</sup>—became the constant coalition partner of the dominant Mapai party—the ancestor of today's Labor Party—during the period between 1948 and 1977. During this period, which is often termed the historic league, the Mizrachi—and the Mafdal after it—have adopted pragmatic foreign policies, conceding the national security, foreign affairs, and economic policies to Mapai in exchange for Mapai's concessions on religious issues.<sup>62</sup>

But this change back to pragmatism, which calculates the human and consequences of each decision, was short lived. Following the perceived “miracle” of the six-day war of 1967 and the occupation of the remainder of historic Palestine, The messianic Zionist ideology notion was further strengthened within the Mafdal. What many Jews saw as an unexpected victory awakened the dormant messianic dimension of the Datim Le'umim who saw the victory as another sign that the redemption is indeed underway.<sup>63</sup>

A strong messianic Zionist faction thus emerged from within the Mafdal, influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Kook the elder, and the rabbis who graduated from Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook's yeshiva in Jerusalem, Merkaz Harav, or the Center of the Rabbi, established a Jewish sect with a well-defined political plan. They were the younger generation of Mafdal leaders and constituted its new religious elite who became later known as the Youth Circle (or the *Tze'irim*). Mafdal thus experienced a third change in the form of a dramatic return towards territorial hawkishness.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Isi Leibler, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> *Mafdal*, is a Hebrew acronym for *Miflaga Datit Leumit*.

<sup>62</sup> Stewart Reiser, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–49.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48; and Helen Chapin Metz (ed.), “Gush Emunim,” in *Israel: A Country Study*, <http://countrystudies.us/israel/102.htm> (Accessed: 30/12/2007).

The acquisition of land has also strengthened the Revisionist Zionist position whose goal of controlling the whole “land of Israel” in its biblical borders was its most important goal. This position, which was championed by the Herut Party, which merged into Likud in 1973, implied that the return any of this land to the Arabs would be to defy God’s plan for the redemption of the Jewish people. The religious aspect to Revisionist Zionism together with a generational change in both Mafdal and Mapai paved the way for a coalition between Mafdal and Herut’s successor, the Likud, when it assumed power in 1977.<sup>65</sup>

Concerned about their constituency, and about asserting their identity as *Datim Le’umim*, the Tze’irim decide to formulate a new strategy characterized by a new nationalistic foreign policy. They took the lead on the issue of settlements, first lending their resources to the Movement for the Whole Land of Israel, a mostly revisionist Zionist movement, which had the goal of assimilating all the land acquired in the 1967 war,<sup>66</sup> and later on focusing their support on the new movement of Gush Emunim (or the bloc of the faithful).

In early 1974, Tze’irim founded Gush Emunim as a faction within the Mafdal, triggered by the territorial concessions made by the Israel government in Sinai in 1974 and conviction that God’s masterplan was already underway. Months later, Gush Emunim’s formal political ties with the Mafdal were cut as a result of splits within the party regarding supporting unauthorized settlements. However, ideological and material support systems between the Mafdal Yeshivot educational system and Gush Emunim remained solid.<sup>67</sup>

The members and supporters of the Gush Emunim, who represent around 6–7% of Israeli Jews,<sup>68</sup> are the most messianic segment of the *Datim Le’umim*. They conform strictly in their daily lives to what they believe are the laws of God, and they advocate the creation of a society based on those laws, but their political activities have been directed toward settling and retaining the land won in 1967.<sup>69</sup> Since its establishment, the Gush Emunim movement has played a role in the construction of most settlements in the West Bank, through its settler arm

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–49.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–38.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, “Fundamentalism.”

Amana. After the death of Rabbi Kook the younger, the spiritual leadership of Gush Emunim became centered in a semi-secret rabbinical council, known as the Gush Emunim Rabbinical Council, selected from among the most outstanding disciples of Rabbi Kook the younger.

The emergence of Gush Emunim influenced, and was influenced by, changes in Israeli government policy towards the settlements. From the end of the 1967 war until 1974, Moshe Dayan, as Defense Minister, determined Israeli settlement policy. He did not allow the establishment of Jewish settlement in the bulk of the territories occupied in 1967. The only exception he made was to allow a tiny group of Jewish settlers to live near Hebron. Dayan wanted to envelop the densely inhabited parts of the West Bank and Gaza by creating a settlement zone in the almost uninhabited Jordan Valley and northern Sinai (the Yamit area). Dayan also promised not to confiscate village lands in order to preserve the Israeli alliance with the feudal notables who were in firm control of the villages (although not of the larger towns), and he mostly kept his promise.

By 1974, and through 1975, the newly established Gush Emunim demonstrated its strength by organizing enormous demonstrations opposing the Dayan promise. In this atmosphere Peres, who became Defense Minister after Dayan in 1974 in the first Rabin government (1974–1977), initiated a new policy which he called “functional compromise” and for which he acquired Gush Emunim support. According to this policy, all the land inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that was not being used by the inhabitants could be confiscated for the exclusive use of the Jews.

At first, Prime Minister Rabin opposed this policy, but Peres supported Gush Emunim and planned a strategy to combat Rabin’s opposition. Gush Emunim organized a mass rallies and after lengthy negotiations, a compromise settlement that favored Gush Emunim was reached. Their members were allowed to settle in what is now the settlement of Kedumim. In 1976, with the help of Peres, Gush Emunim founded the settlement of Ofra as a temporary work camp and the settlement Shilo as a temporary archaeological camp. Gush Emunim also pursued similar policies and initiated settlement beginnings in the Gaza Strip. Rabin’s acceptance of Gush Emunim’s settlements was seen as a sign of acknowledgement of Gush Emunim as a significant interest group.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Stewart Reiser, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Following the 1977 Likud victory and the election of Menachem Begin as Prime Minister, a “holy alliance” of the religious Gush Emunim and successive secular Israeli governments occurred. The Likud permitted the launching of a number of Jewish settlements beyond the borders of the Green Line, and gave Gush Emunim the active support of government departments, the army, and the WZO, which recognized it as an official settlement movement and allocated it considerable funds for settlement activities.<sup>71</sup> Since then this alliance has remained in place and the settlement movement has continued to grow.<sup>72</sup> It is currently estimated that a majority of the Israeli society, as represented by Knesset members, supports retaining all settlements in one form or another.<sup>73</sup> In early 1999, less than 20 members of the Knesset out of 120 opposed retaining the settlements. These 20 included the Arab Knesset members.

After having achieved settlement policy successes, the Gush Emunim rabbis cleverly conducted a number of political intrigues and were able to achieve domination of the Mafdal in spite of the severing of formal political ties. From the mid-1980s the Mafdal has followed the ideological lead of Gush Emunim.<sup>74</sup> Yesha has also created affiliations between Gush Emunim settlements and the Labor party, the Mafdal, and Herut party’s Betar youth movement.<sup>75</sup>

Representing the religious settler movement in the West Bank is the council for the settlements known as the Yesha council. The Yesha council represents the elected heads of the settlement councils in addition to settler leaders, and is often considered to be a successor body for Gush Emunim. The Yesha council deals primarily with practical matters, such as the utilization of land and water, relations with Israeli military authorities and, if necessary, mobilizing political pressure on the government.

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<sup>71</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “Gush Emunim.”

<sup>72</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>75</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “Gush Emunim.”

In 2006, the Mafdal joined the right wing pro-settlements National Union party (HaIkhud HaLeumi)<sup>76</sup> under one electoral list called NRP-NU or Mafdal-HaIkhud HaLeumi in order to reach the 2% electoral threshold. Together they obtained nine Knesset Seats.

## 2. The Datim Le'umim Messianic Ideology

Contrary to the Haredim, the Datim Le'umim ideology is a religious Zionist ideology that asserts that redemption of the Jewish people has already started and that the establishment of the state of Israel is the first stage in this redemption. But unlike the secular Zionists, who wanted to make the Jews a nation like all other nations, Gush Emunim reject this notion of normality especially when sought by copying non-Jews applying non-Jewish standards that are in their eyes satanic. The Gush Emunim argument is that Jews are not and cannot be a normal people. Their eternal uniqueness is the result of the covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai.<sup>77</sup>

The Gush Emunim's messianic ideology assumes the imminent coming of the *Masheeh* (The Messiah), and asserts that the Jews, aided by God, will thereafter triumph over the non-Jews and rule over them forever. Followers of this ideology believe that all current political developments will either help bring this about sooner or will postpone it. Jewish sins, and most particularly the lack of faith, can postpone the coming of the Messiah. But this delay will not be of long duration, because even the worst sins of the Jews cannot alter the course of redemption, Sins can nevertheless increase the sufferings of Jews prior to the redemption. The Datim Le'umim believe that the two world wars, the Holocaust, and other calamitous events of modern history are examples of such suffering.<sup>78</sup>

The ideological consequence to such beliefs is that all the Jewish rulings that are allowed during the messianic age are applicable today according to the followers of this ideology, for example the Halachah permits Jews to rob non-Jews in those locales wherein Jews are stronger than non-Jews, but it strictly reserved the consequences, for the messianic age. Gush Emunim dispenses with such traditional precautions by claiming that Jews, at least those in Israel and

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<sup>76</sup> The National Union (NU) is also known as the *HaIkhud HaLeumi*.

<sup>77</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzkvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the Occupied Territories, are already living in the beginning of the messianic age. This is stated by one of Gush Emunim's leaders, Rabbi Aviner, who was quoted saying: "While God requires other normal nations to abide by abstract codes of justice and righteousness; such laws do not apply to Jews".<sup>79</sup>

According to the Halachah, the murder of a Jew, particularly when committed by a non-Jew, is the worst possible crime. But the Gush Emunim Rabbis believe that a Jew who kill Arabs should not be punished. They also help such Jews who are punished by Israel's secular courts. One of their leaders, Rabbi Israel Ariel, stated that "A Jew who killed a non-Jew is exempt from human judgment and has not violated the [religious] prohibition of murder". Similarly in 2004, Rabbi Dov Lior, the head of the Council of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria, ruled that the Israel Defense Forces was allowed to kill innocent people.<sup>80</sup> This religious ruling should be remembered whenever the demand is voiced in Israel that all non-Jewish residents of the "Jewish state" should be dealt with according to Halachah regulations.<sup>81</sup>

The Datim Le'umim, Like the Hasidim, are also greatly, influenced by the teachings of the Jewish mysticism of Cabbala, albeit with a difference interpretation. The disciples of Rabbi Kook continue to make policy decisions based upon their belief in certain innovative elements of ideology that are derived from their distinct interpretation of the Cabbala.

One aspect of the belief in Cabbala is that the Datim Le'umim in general, and Gush Emunim in particular, believe in the sacredness and uniqueness of the Jewish life and Jewish Blood, and that they are much higher than those of a non Jew.<sup>82</sup> Rabbi Yehuda Amital, an outstanding Gush Emunim Leader who was appointed as a Minister without portfolio between 1995–1996 by Prime Minister Peres (who also described him as a moderate) wrote a published article which argued that the 1973 war was not directed against Egyptians, Syrians and/or all Arabs but against all non-Jews. In his article entitled "The Significance of the Yom Kippur War" he said:

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>80</sup> Gideon Levy, "Heads to the Right," *Haaretz*, 9/3/2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/962041.html> (Accessed: 9/3/2008).

<sup>81</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 70.

The war broke out against the background of the revival of the kingdom of Israel, which in its metaphysical status is evidence of the decline of the spirit of defilement in the Western world... The Gentiles are fighting for their mere survival as Gentiles, as the ritually unclean. Iniquity is fighting its battle for survival. It knows that in the wars of God there will not be a place for Satan, for the spirit of defilement, or for the remains of Western culture, the proponents of which are, as it were, secular Jews.

Gush Emunim's interpretation of the Cabbala also influences their ideologies regarding the land. They believe that not just humans can be redeemed but all conceivable material objects, ranging from tanks to money, can be redeemed if touched or possessed by Jews, especially messianic Jews. They apply this doctrine to the conflict arguing that what appears to be confiscation of Arab-owned land for subsequent settlement by Jews is in reality not an act of stealing but one of sanctification. According to Rabbi Shmaryahu Arieli, one of the followers of the two rabbis Kook, the 1967 war was a "metaphysical transformation" where the land is redeemed by being transferred from the satanic to the divine sphere.<sup>83</sup> This ruling implies that any withdrawal from the land would mean restoring Satan's sovereignty over it. This was confirmed by Rabbis Aviner and Shlomo Goren who ruled that Judaism forbids granting even a small amount of autonomy to the Palestinians.<sup>84</sup>

An example on such ideological influence is their influence on Israel's expansionist policies. In line with the Biblical promise in Deuteronomy 11:24 *"Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; our border shall be from the wilderness, from the river Euphrates, to the western sea"*, the followers of the two Rabbis Kook viewed Lebanon as being "delivered" from the power of Satan with its inhabitants being killed in the process.<sup>85</sup> For Gush Emunim the Sinai and present-day Lebanon are parts of this Jewish land and must be "liberated" by Israel. Rabbi Ariel published an atlas that designated all lands that were Jewish and needed to be "liberated". This included all areas west and south of the Euphrates River extending through present-day Kuwait.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.



Another aspect of their interpretation of the Cabbala is that while the Bible anticipated only a single Messiah, The Cabbala anticipated two Messiahs who will differ in character. The first Messiah, a militant figure called “son of Joseph,” will prepare the material preconditions for redemption. The second Messiah will be a spiritual “son of David” who will redeem the world by spectacular miracles. But although the cabbalistic conception is that the two Messiahs will be individuals, Rabbi Kook the elder altered this idea by advocating that the first Messiah will be a collective group of people. Rabbi Kook identified his own group of followers as the collective “son of Joseph”. Thus Gush Emunim leaders, following the teaching of Rabbi Kook the elder, continue to perceive their rabbis and perhaps all followers as well, as the collective incarnation of at least one and perhaps the two Messiahs.

Gush Emunim members believe that this idea should not be revealed to the uninitiated public until the right time. They believe that their sect cannot err because of its infallible divine guidance. As a result and by virtue of exclusive access to the total and only truth, Gush Emunim supporters believe that they are more important than the remainder of the Jewish people. They also believed that they are entitled to use violence to keep the rest of the Jewish people, which has been corrupted by the satanic western culture, from straying out of the ordained path.

Another impact of the belief in cabbala is the believe that the power of Satan and of his earthly manifestation, the non-Jews, can at times only be broken by irrational action. Gush Emunim thus founded settlements on the exact days of United States’ Secretary of States James Baker’s recurrent arrivals in Israel. This was not merely to demonstrate their power but also as part of a mystical design to break the power of Satan and “its American incarnation”.

The Gush Emunim’s attitude towards Palestinians, whom they always refer to as “Arabs living in Israel”, is also ideologically driven. Rabbis Kook, Aviner and Ariel viewed the Arabs living in Israel as thieves. They based their view upon the premise that all land in Israel was and remained Jewish and that all property found thereon thus belonged to Jews.<sup>87</sup> The Gush Emunim rabbis, politicians, and ideological popularizers have routinely compared Palestinians to the ancient Canaanites, whose extermination or expulsion by the ancient Israelites was, according to the Bible, predestined by a divine design.

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

In an article in *Kivunim*, the unofficial publication of the world Zionist organization, in 1984, Mordechai Nisan, a lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, wrote on the subject, relying upon the works of Moshe Ben-Maimonides the famous Rabbi and Jewish Philosopher of the Middle Ages. In his article Nisan says that a non-Jew permitted to reside in the land of Israel “must accept paying a tax and suffering the humiliation of servitude”. Nisan demanded that a non-Jew “be held down and not [be allowed to] raise his head against Jews.” He also demanded that a non-Jew must not be appointed to any office or position of power over Jews and that if non-Jews refuse “to live a life of inferiority, then this signals their rebellion and the unavoidable necessity of Jewish warfare against their very presence in the land of Israel.”<sup>88</sup>

This ideological background explains why Gush Emunim, from its inception, wanted to expel as many Palestinians as possible. The Intifadahs have only allowed Gush Emunim spokespeople to disguise their real demand for total expulsion by arguing that expulsion is warranted by “security needs”.<sup>89</sup>

According to the teachings of Rabbi Kook, the Datim Le’umim believe that the only way to sanctify the Israeli society is by getting actively involved in the society and in exerting political influence. As a result they have taken many measures to ensure such involvement in the wider society. For example, they dress like secular Jews and only distinguish themselves outwardly by wearing skullcaps. They also introduced portions of secular teaching into their schools curricula. In addition, not only have they permitted their people to enroll in Israeli secular universities, but they also established the religiously oriented Bar-Ilan University.<sup>90</sup>

They also tried to promote their public image in Israel by presenting themselves to the public as successors of the Zionist pioneers of the 1920s and 1930s, who are still cherished in the Jewish national memory and lauded in Israeli education. One of the ways in which they do that is that they continue to emulate the dress and mannerisms of the early pioneer by dressing in the Israel secular clothing fashion of the 1950s. The almost exclusively Ashkenazi background of both the early pioneers and the Gush Emunim settlers and Rabbis also helped this emulation.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

The doctrine of sanctity, attributed by the two Rabbis (Kook the elder and the younger) to almost every Zionist enterprise, contributed even more to the widespread public sympathy for and support of Gush Emunim. For example, the state's Chief Rabbi is always chosen from the leadership of the religious Zionism movement,<sup>91</sup> The Mafdal has also dominated the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the chief Rabbinate, the rabbinical courts, and religious council. This ongoing historical cooperation was helped by the fact that religious Zionism was in many ways compatible with Secular Zionism as it drew upon some its basic themes, notably the idea that the goal of Zionism is to create a "new Jew" who will never submit to oppression. Rabbi Kook the younger, together with other Gush Emunim leaders, went further by defining "the State of Israel as the kingdom of Israel, and the kingdom of Israel as the kingdom of heaven on earth".<sup>92</sup>

Gush Emunim have also won broad public sympathy in Israeli Jewish society because of their attitude towards army service, which contrasts sharply with the societal antagonism directed against the Haredim for their exemption from military service.<sup>93</sup> According to the teachings of Rabbi Kook, each Jew has a religious duty to fight and to train to fight. The Datim Le'umim members have faithfully followed this teaching. Many Gush Emunim members have been and still are officers of the Israeli army's select units and their proportion in such units has continually increased. The Gush Emunim religious school students are known for their excellent combat qualities, their high motivation to fight, their relatively high casualty rate during the 1982 Lebanon war, and their willingness to beat up Palestinians during the *Intifadah*.

### 3. The Significance and Structure of the Yesha Council

Gush Emunim activists live in a homogeneous West Bank society that they control. This society is mostly protected against "contamination" by detested secular ideologies, especially those that stem from Western culture and have been to some extent influenced the secular part of Israeli Jewish society. To the Gush Emunim group, the religious settlements have more than one meaning; first, they

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<sup>91</sup> The Mafdal's control of these institutions has recently weakened, as the Haredim demanded their share in them.

<sup>92</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

are citadels of the messianic ideology. As homogeneous settlements are also models and potential nuclei of the new religious society that they want to build. They also believe that the settlements have the potential to influence the Israeli society as a whole, since they believe that by encountering the holy parts of the land, the hearts of the Jewish masses would be united with the heart of the land.<sup>94</sup>

On the local and regional level, Israeli settlements in the West Bank are organized in the same way as communities inside Israel: individual settlements elect representatives to run their local affairs and to represent them in the 24 local and regional settlement councils. Most of these elected officials are focused on the daily lives of their communities and constituents while others are well-known personalities, long-identified as leaders of the settlements enterprise and the “Greater Israel” ideology. Theoretically, on the national level, and as result of the Israeli proportional representation electoral system, the settlements as geographic entities are not represented in the Knesset, except as far as in parties that represent their ideologies.

But in reality, on the national level the settlements differ from other communities in Israel is in the existence of an additional body between these two levels, comprised of the elected heads of the 24 settlement councils in the West Bank, plus 5–10 additional visible or influential leaders of the settlement movement. These individuals sit together in the Council of Settlements of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, better known as the Yesha Council.<sup>95</sup> The Yesha Council thus draws its power from being able to lobby the government as a bloc and not as individual settlements.

The Yesha Council operates as a de facto government of the settlers, dealing with both internal affairs of the settlements and external affairs (i.e., relations both with the government of Israel and the international community). The council extracts a “tax” from the regional councils with which it funds activities for the benefit of the settlements. As a quasi-government, the Yesha Council assumes the functions of various ministries within the settlements including (but not limited to) Planning

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>95</sup> *Yesha* is an acronym for Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and the word *Yesha* also means “salvation” in Hebrew. Although all Israeli settlements in Gaza were dismantled in summer 2005, the Council has retained the acronym.

and Construction, Defense and security programs for settlements and on the roads, Foreign Affairs including fundraising and public relations, and National Security.

By virtue of the way the Yesha Council is organized and run, the religious nationalist bloc maintains control of the Council, and members of that bloc remain the most visible leaders of the settlers today. These leaders are drawn mainly from four different groups:

- a. Regional Council heads:** As elected community leaders, Regional Council heads have in many ways the strongest claim to leadership. Among the most influential of these are the heads of Benjamin, Shomron, Gush Etzion, and Mount Hebron and the former head of the Gaza Shore Regional Council.
- b. Settlers in the Knesset:** Settlers who are elected to the Knesset are, by definition, prominent figures in the settlement leadership. They include Uri Ariel (from Kfar Adumim, representing the National Union), Nissan Slomiansky (from Elkana, representing the Mafdal) Arye Eldad (from Kfar Adumim, representing the National Union), Avigdor Lieberman (from Nokdim, representing the Yisrael Beytenu party), and Benny Elon (from Beit El, representing the National Union).
- c. Popular Leaders and Activists:** These are people who for decades have been associated with the leadership of the settlement movement. They include Israel Harel (founder and former chairman of the Yesha Council), Haggai Segal, and Uri Elitzur.
- d. Rabbis:** Important settler rabbis today include—but are by no means limited to—former MK Rabbi Haim Druckman one of the spiritual leaders of the Bnei Akiva youth movement,<sup>96</sup> Rabbi Eliezer Waldman the Gush Emunim spiritual leader, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, Rabbi Dov Lior, and Rabbi Zalman Melamed.

Again in theory, the heads of all of the West Bank settlement councils come together in the Yesha Council to decide on policy and make decisions. But in reality, the Council is controlled by a handful of its strongest members, including the Regional Council heads of Shomron, Benjamin, Gush Etzion and Mt. Hebron. In addition, one of the “extra” members of the Council, Zeev Hever, who is the general director of Amana (the settlement arm of the Gush Emunim), plays a critical role in the council. This core group of leaders, who are all committed

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<sup>96</sup> The *Datim Le'umim* are also sometimes referred to as the *Bnei Akiva* groups.

to the traditional religious-nationalist ideology of Greater Israel, is the engine driving most of the political positions and tactics adopted by the Yesha Council.

In addition, important decisions taken by the Yesha Council are coordinated with the settlers' political allies in the Knesset who are all members of the Mafdal as well as the blessing of the committee of Rabbis of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza.<sup>97</sup>

#### **4. The Influence of the Yesha Council and Gush Emunim**

Since the outset of the settlement enterprise, one of the great ironies has been that while the settlers have often pursued policies that were at odds with the policies of the government of Israel (or were even illegal according to Israeli law), much of the financing for their activities has come, directly and indirectly, from the government itself. This remains true today, with the Yesha Council drawing a substantial portion of the funding for its various activities from the budgets of regional settlement councils. These are funds provided by the government of Israel to meet the municipal needs of the settlements, which are then transferred to the Yesha Council by the regional councils. The use of government funds against the government was most ironic when the Yesha Council organized and financed a campaign opposing the government's 2005 disengagement plan by the then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's.<sup>98</sup>

But this irony could be explained by explaining the role of the settlements in controlling the occupied territories. These settlements and their ideological and historical importance served as an excuse for the military presence and road movement control measures in these areas. The real goal of the military presence and control measures was not to provide security for the settlements, but it had a more strategic goal. The overall Israel strategy of control of the occupied territories after Oslo, which was labelled "control from the outside", relied on settlements as the foci of Israel's military power in the territories. The system of controlled roads and bypass roads which sliced the occupied territories into small enclaves relied on

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<sup>97</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Who Leads the Settlers?" Peace Now website, July 2006, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=62&docid=1840&pos=22>; and Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Challenges to the Settler Leadership," Peace Now, July 2006, <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=62&docid=1864&pos=21>; and Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 65, 75.

<sup>98</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Who Leads the Settlers?"; Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, "Challenges to the Settler Leadership."

the settlements as pivots of the road grid. This form of control allows the military to dominate the territories with minor expenditure of forces.<sup>99</sup>

But in order to do that settlements were needed in remote and isolated places that most Israelis would consider “unnatural” to live in (compared to the “greater Jerusalem” settlements, for example, which are considered “natural” to live in). Israeli governments thus relied on the ideologically dedicated Gush Emunim for creating settlements deep into the West Bank and in Gaza. The isolated settlement of Netzarim in the middle of the Gaza Strip (now evacuated) was a good example on this strategy. Nahum Barnea, a well known Israeli commentator, used it to explain the role of settlements saying that “if Netzarim has not existed, it would have been invented.”<sup>100</sup> The strategic importance of the settlers to the Israeli government and the military was apparent in 1995 when the labor government refused to remove the Hebron settlers following the Baruch Goldstein Massacre. Interestingly, this refusal was mostly based on the opposition of heads of all the Israeli security services.<sup>101</sup>

This strategic importance of settlements may explain why the Yesha Council is informally supported by many segments of the establishment, from the Prime Minister to the utility companies, such as the water, electricity and sewage companies. But far from being passive tools in this arrangement, the settlers also had a major role in influencing the decision makers in matters that relate to their interests. For example, it has been argued that the refusal of Prime Ministers Rabin, Peres and Netanyahu to advocate the evacuation of a single Jewish settlement was primarily due to the influence of Gush Emunim.<sup>102</sup>

Yesha Council’s strength as a lobby has thus stemmed from both its strategic importance of the settlers, as well as its access to authority and its ability to interact directly with decision-makers to make sure that its views are taken into consideration during any discussions that impact the settlers’ interests.

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<sup>99</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, “Peace Policy as Domestic and Foreign Policy: The Israeli Case,” in Sasson Sofer (ed.), *Peace Making in a Divided Society: Israel After Rabin* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), p. 29.

<sup>100</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Who Leads the Settlers?”; Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Challenges to the Settler Leadership.”

<sup>101</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–83.

<sup>102</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Who Leads the Settlers?”; Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Challenges to the Settler Leadership.”

In a recent study conducted by researcher Anat Roth of The Israel Democracy Institute, entitled “The Secret of its Strength: The Yesha Council and its Campaign against the Security Fence and the Disengagement Plan,” Roth enumerated some of the main factors that have helped the Yesha Council solidify its political strength. These include several observations about the Yesha Council:

- As holders of official offices recognized by the government (i.e. heads of the local or regional councils) and responsible for relations with the government, Yesha Council members have direct access to the levers of power and decision making at virtually every level in the Israeli government.
- Yesha Council members control large sums of money (mainly diverted from funds provided by the government to local and regional settlement councils).
- The Yesha Council has an ability to mobilize and organize mass numbers of activists that is unparalleled in any other sector or by any other group in Israel.
- The settlers in general enjoy the sympathy of a large part of the Jewish Israeli public, reflecting the settlers’ success at defining themselves as representing “genuine Zionism,” in the sense of settling the land and confronting the Palestinians.
- The government has (until the summer 2005 disengagement from Gaza) consistently failed to seriously rein in the settlers, as it lacked the unity, strength, and political will necessary to take any sort of meaningful action against them, even in the face of the most provocative actions; for example, during the early days of the Madrid process, when the settlers greeted each visit of then-US Secretary of State Baker to Israel with the establishment of a new settlement, much to the chagrin of the government of Israel.<sup>103</sup>
- The Yesha Council enjoyed, for many of the reasons above, a clear asymmetry of strength relative to its opponents. While enjoying the veneer of respectability that comes from official positions and access to official power and privilege, settlers and their supporters have portrayed those who oppose them as naïve, foolish, suicidal, anti-Zionist, and pro-Palestinian. They have also made it clear that a high cost will be extracted from any political leader who attempts to hurt them (which is perhaps why the first Israeli leader to successfully confront the settlers, Ariel Sharon, came not from the Left, but from the pro-settler Right).

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.



- The Gush Emunim is endowed with a territorial base of its own, and is replete with dedicated followers who can expertly handle weapons and execute military operations.<sup>104</sup>

The ways in which the general Datim Le'umim movement influence the decision making mechanism in Israel were summarized in an article by Ran Edelist in the Israeli newspaper Yerushalaim. In his article, which was published in 1996 under the title "First We Shall Conquer the Supreme Court and Then the General Staff," Edelist argues that the Datim Le'umim's institutions have prepared four approaches for the battle to control the "land of Israel", these four approaches are Settlements, Financial Support, Education, and promotion of their men into the military with the goal of dominating a future General Staff.

### **a. Political Influence**

Gush Emunim's influence upon political leaders of varying political persuasions has always been significant.<sup>105</sup> Its influence varies from its current strong alliance with the Likud to its very little influence on members of the leftist secular Meretz Party, whom they perceive as spiritually rotten,<sup>106</sup> and accuse of polluting Zionism by blending communism into it.<sup>107</sup>

Gush Emunim also enjoys great support amongst the general Israeli population as well as the support of Orthodox Jews in the Diaspora. It is estimated that about one-half of Israel's Jewish population supports Gush Emunim.<sup>108</sup> For example, in 1996, the Datim Le'umim youth group Bnei Akiva was the largest youth group in Israel according to a survey by the Ministry of Education. Bnei Akiva registered 28% of youth group members, compared to 23% to Labor related youth groups.<sup>109</sup> Gush Emunim rabbis and lay leaders are also perceived by many Israeli Jews as being endowed with dedication, a sense of mission, moral superiority, strict honesty in financial affairs, and a sense of their own certitude. Some compare this characterization that of the Hamas leaders in the Palestinian society.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>109</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 153.

<sup>110</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

Many Oriental Jews, although unwilling to join, have continued to support Gush Emunim. The Likud constituency has to date consistently supported Gush Emunim, and the Labor Party supported Gush Emunim until the end of the 1970s. It may be sufficient to say that with the exception of a few years in the 1990s, the Mafdal, the largest Datim Le'umim party, has always been a coalition partner.<sup>111</sup> The Labor Party—and the Mapai party before it—has enjoyed a “historical partnership” with the Mafdal for years,<sup>112</sup> and has only changed its position regarding the Mafdal recently. The rift between the Labor party and the Mafdal took place as the latter moved towards the right, which coincided with the Likud electoral win in 1977. This was manifested in the Mafdal's opposition to the peace treaty with Egypt and its demands that Lebanon be annexed “as a part of the Jewish ancestral heritage.” The rift also increased after the breakout of the first *Intifadah* when the costs of continuing the occupation became unwarranted in the eyes of the Labor party.<sup>113</sup>

Another way in which the Yesha Council influences the decision making is its extremely close ties with officials across the political and military echelons and. For example Gush Emunim retains close unofficial links the Mafdal as well as the small right wing Tehiya party and factions in the Herut wing of Likud party.<sup>114</sup> They also maintain close ties with the Israeli military, and “cooperate” with the military on matters that range from construction and settlement expansion to the daily activities of the Israeli Army, forcing the Israeli Army to divert vital resources and endanger soldiers in order to protect the settlers who may undertake deliberately provocative and illegal activities.<sup>115</sup>

For example the committee of Rabbis of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza began developing their own intelligence network, which quickly became extensive, using information gathered from religious or otherwise sympathetic officers of the military's high command. It is claimed that one of their informants General Moshe Bar Kochba, a member of the General Staff, who informed the rabbis

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<sup>111</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 152.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>113</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>114</sup> Helen Chapin Metz, “Gush Emunim.”

<sup>115</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Who Leads the Settlers?”; Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Challenges to the Settler Leadership.”

regularly and in advance about the plans for army operations in the occupied territories. In response, the military decided to regularize those relations and to inform the rabbis officially about its operations hoping that by doing so they might convince them to cooperate with the military.<sup>116</sup>

These strong relations led to the impression that, insofar as day-to-day activities within the West Bank are concerned, both the government and Israeli Army have largely co-opted to serve the interests of the settlers. In addition, in 2005, the Sasson Report on settlements formally confirmed that for years, elements of the Israeli government have not only turned a blind eye to settler transgressions but also actively colluded in them.<sup>117</sup>

### **b. Military Influence**

The Datim Le'umim also recognized the importance of the military in Israeli politics, and when Gush Emunim appeared, its lay leaders and especially its rabbis began educating and inspiring young Datim Le'umim to adopt the military profession as a religious duty, to join the combat and elite units of the army and to become officers. According to an army colonel they constitute up to 40% of the combat officers, around 15% of the combat support officers, and 10% of the staff officers.<sup>118</sup> Young Datim Le'umim are dedicated, disciplined, and efficient soldiers, ready to sacrifice their lives for their country if necessary. This penetration of the military has enhanced the image and importance of the Datim Le'umim in Israeli society and provided some of its followers with good careers.<sup>119</sup> In addition, it is well known in Israel that those who serve in the combat and/or elite units or as pilots enjoy tremendous social prestige when they leave the service and often are able to exert political influence.<sup>120</sup>

There are two unique schemes devised for young Datim Le'umim to serve in and penetrate the combat and elite units. The first scheme, which is known as Hesder

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<sup>116</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, p. 85.

<sup>117</sup> Peace Now, "Summary of the Sasson's Report," <http://www.peacenow.org.il/site/en/peace.asp?pi=61&fld=343&docid=1454> (Accessed: 17/12/2007).

<sup>118</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Israeli Army, a National Melting Pot, Faces New Challenges in Training Officers," *The New York Times*, 31/12/2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/31/world/middleeast/31israel.html?pagewanted=print> (Accessed: 2/1/2008).

<sup>119</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

Yeshivot, or arrangement religious schools, was formulated as an arrangement, not governed by law, between two independent parties: the Israeli Ministry of Defense and the rabbinical heads of the Datim Le'umim's Hesder Yeshivot religious schools. According to this five-year arrangement, the Hesder Yeshivot students receive a special kind of draft service. They are not inducted into the army in the normal way, and unlike normal conscripts, they do not serve continuously for three years in units assigned by the army according to its needs. Instead, they are inducted into the army as groups and serve in their own homogeneous groups, accompanied by their rabbis who are responsible for and watch over the students' "religious purity." In total, they serve for three six-month periods instead of the normal three years. After each period of army service, the Hesder Yeshivot students leave the army for a six-month period of Talmudic study in a yeshiva.

The major reason for the continuation of this arrangement, however, is the excellent military quality and record of the Hesder Yeshivot students, whose performance and dedication are far above the military average.<sup>121</sup> Soldiers in Hesder Yeshivot units, known as Nachal Haredi, distinguished themselves during the suppression of the *Intifadah*; they were noted for their cruelty to Palestinians, and were from many perspectives much more severe than the Israeli army average. The homogeneous composition of Hesder Yeshivot groups of soldiers is another reason for the continuation of the special arrangement. When the army commanding officers have wanted to inflict especially cruel punishment upon Palestinians or others, they have most often relied upon and used religious soldiers. In other groups, consisting of soldiers with different political views, some members might object to illegal cruelty and even inform media people of its use. In Hesder Yeshivot units the religious soldiers, who are generally crueler than most secular Jews, will not object to the orders.

The other scheme is known as *Mekhinot Toraniyot Kedam Tzevaiyot*, or pre-military torah academies. This scheme is now the main scheme of organized penetration by Datim Le'umim into the Israeli army. Through this scheme the young men, usually eighteen years of age, who enter religious pre-military academies are given draft deferments for one or one and one-half years of study and "spiritual fortification". Afterwards, they serve for three years in ordinary combat or elite unit (i.e. not in homogeneous groups). The teachers in these academies are for the most

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<sup>121</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, p. 91.

part not rabbis but rather retired officers who possess some Talmudic knowledge. Only a small amount of the teaching is devoted to military subjects and training in hiking and endurance. Most of the teaching and study time is devoted to those parts of the Talmud and other religious literature that inspire dedication to the land of Israel and to other values favored by Gush Emunim. These pre-military academies, which are based in the Occupied Territories, have been subsidized by the army to some extent, but the major part of the support money has come from private donors. Most graduates of these pre-military academies serve their full three-year terms. Some serve for a much longer time and become career officers.<sup>122</sup>

Together these two schemes currently turn out around 1,200 recruits a year. The number of Datim Le'umim recruits into the Israeli Army has seen a 40% increase in over the past five years and was accompanied by a reduction in the number of secular Ashkenazi conscripts, who traditionally constituted the backbone of the military, especially in combat units.<sup>123</sup>

### **c. Ideological Influence**

In addition to their strong influence on the Israeli government on all matters related to settlements and their success in obtaining funding to finance their enterprises, Gush Emunim also attempts to influence the foreign policy of the state through its ideologies and world outlook. Gush Emunim's influence on Israeli policies is often apparent where official government's policies on certain matters clearly reflect the Gush Emunim's ideological position.

For example, Israeli governments under both Labor and Likud leadership has refused to free Palestinian prisoners "with Jewish blood on their hands" but have not hesitated to free prisoners with non-Jewish blood on their hands, such as those who killed other Palestinians. The religious difference between Jewish blood and non-Jewish blood is known to most Israelis but is rarely mentioned in discussions about Israel's policies.

Gush Emunim's ideology, which stipulates that Arab hostility towards the Jews is inherent and theological in nature, has also influenced certain segments

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>123</sup> Yagil Levy, Edna Lomsky-Feder and Noa Harel, "From "Obligatory Militarism" to "Contractual Militarism": Competing Models of Citizenship," *Israel Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 127–148; and Steven Erlanger, "Israeli Army, a National Melting Pot, Faces New Challenges in Training Officers."

of the Israeli political scene who in turn influence official policy. It is needless to say that the conclusion such ideology is that the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be resolved politically. This influence was demonstrated in a quote of the prominent Gush Emunim leader and former Knesset member, Eliezer Waldman, who reportedly stated in a public conference that “Arab hostility springs, like all anti-Semitism, from the world’s [resistance] to be saved [by the Jews]”.<sup>124</sup>

Gush Emunim’s position towards the peace process, in which Israel would have to withdraw from territories it occupies, is expectedly hostile. However, the rationale behind this hostility is very different from other settlers who also resist such peace process. While secular Golan Heights settlers claimed that the Labor/ Meretz peace policies in the 1990s were mistaken because peace with Syria could be reached on Israeli terms, Gush Emunim claimed that “the Washington negotiations with the PLO amount to nothing else than a dialogue of human beings with a herd of ravenous wolves, aiming solely at turning the entire land of Israel into the entire land of the Arabs”.<sup>125</sup> This hostile attitude towards the Oslo process is perhaps best explained by a quote of an article by Rabbi Ariel in which he states: “Historic Zionism has reached its end in bankruptcy... The real Zionism, the holy one with profound roots, exists only where the really religious Jews are living; in the mountains of Judea and the valleys of Samaria”. Rabbi Dreyfus was also quoted attacking the Jews who engaged in the peace process saying: “The Jews who lead us into that sin no longer deserve any divine protection. We must fight those who separated themselves from the true Israel. They have declared a war against us, the bearers of the word of God.” The last statement was representative of the thinking of most religious settlers before Rabin’s assassination.

In addition, Gush Emunim also continues to encourage Israeli authorities to deal cruelly with Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>126</sup> Gush Emunim have, for example, issued Halachic rulings that a non-Jewish child can be punished like an adult for disturbing the peace if a Jew judges that he is not short on wisdom. In addition, a non-Jewish child intended to commit murder, for example, by throwing a stone at a passing car should be considered a “persecutor of the Jews” and should be killed. Citing Rabbi Moshe Ben-Maimonides as his

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<sup>124</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

authority, Rabbi Aviner ruled that killing the non-Jewish child in this instance is necessary to save Jewish life. Rabbi Aviner also said that is mandatory to inflict the death penalty upon Arabs who throw stones and for other reasons if it is believed that the world will thereby be improved. The punishments, mentioned here, should be invoked if the authorities believe that such punishment will deter other wicked people.<sup>127</sup> This background may help explain some incidents during the Palestinian *Intifadahs* in which Israeli Army soldier's operations were seen by the outside world as disproportionate to stone-throwing Palestinian children.

Another example of ideological influence was during the time of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when the military rabbinate in Israel, clearly influenced by the ideas of the two Rabbis Abraham Kook and Tzvi Kook urged all Israeli soldiers to follow in the footsteps of Joshua and to re-establish his divinely ordained conquest of the land of Israel. This exhortation of conquest included extermination of non-Jewish inhabitants. The military rabbinate also published a map of Lebanon in which the names of Lebanese towns had been changed to the names of cities found in the Book of Joshua. Beirut, for example, was changed to *Be'erot*. The map designated Lebanon as land belonging to the ancient northern tribes of Israel, Asher and Naphtali.

Gush Emunim also continued to advocate other extreme hawkish policies and by fiercely opposing Sharon's 1982 alliance with the Lebanese Falangists, who were Christians and therefore considered to be idolaters. Gush Emunim's position in 1982 was that Jews in their battles and conquests should only rely upon God's help even in spite of the fact that the use of the Falangists as a proxy army preserves Jewish blood. Any alliances with non-Jews could incur God's wrath and lead to His withholding of help. Nevertheless, such ideas regarding alliances were not adopted, as they were, even for extreme Labor Party hawks, unacceptable.<sup>128</sup>

## 5. Challenges for Gush Emunim

The Yesha council is facing many challenges both internally and externally. The partnership between the Datim Le'umim and the state was threatened with the Oslo process and the discussions of the future of the settlements, following the Rabin assassination, and during the process of Disengagement from Gaza.

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The disengagement from Gaza was particularly traumatic to some members of the Datim Le'umim as it was against many of the things that the movement believes in regarding how Zionism is part of the gradual messianic redemption of the Jewish people. Some even feel betrayed by the state. A Peace Now survey of residents of 120 settlements following the disengagement found that among religious settlers, 52% felt less Israeli after the disengagement, compared to 23% of secular settlers.<sup>129</sup> Many of the Gush Emunim changed their traditional prayer for the state of Israel on Sabbath and religious holidays to a prayer that the state would be "guided". The very foundations of religious Zionism—and especially its historic alliance with secular Zionism and wholehearted acceptance of the State of Israel—have been shaken, and the the National religious movement's relationship with the Israeli establishment has hit a downturn.

On the other side, there were fears during the Gaza Disengagement process that the Datim Le'umim in the army might refuse to carry out government orders for Israeli withdrawals from parts of the occupied territories and for the removal of Jewish settlements. Some commentators even mentioned civil war. Obviously, none of this happened but these comments reflect a concern regarding the state of the alliance between religious Zionism and secular Zionism. These concerns were backed up by studies that show that for the religious youth, an instruction by a rabbi has an equal and sometimes superior value than that from a commander. These concerns have surfaced before, following the Rabin assassination.<sup>130</sup>

On the other hand, other studies carried out after the disengagement attribute the lack of dissent by the Datim Le'umim in the army to their concern with minimizing the impact of military norms on their own introspective world—such as preserving their distinctive identities in a military environment, reconciling military service with studying sacred texts, avoiding unnecessarily desecration of the Sabbath, and harmonizing military life with the observance of traditional laws of modesty. The author argues that such concerns are greater than being universally committed to exerting an influence on the entire Israeli Army.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Nadav Shragai, "For Religious Zionists, the First Independence Day after disengagement poses an ideological dilemma," *Haaretz*, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/711298.html> (Accessed: 30/12/2006).

<sup>130</sup> Israel Shahak and Norton Metzvinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>131</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, "Tensions between Military Service and Jewish Orthodoxy in Israel: Implications Imagined and Real," *Israel Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 103–126.



The Yesha council also has challenges in terms of its representation of the settlers, with the rise of the Haredim settlers, and the “quality of life settlers” on the expense of the Nationalist-Religious ones. The Council is also facing challenges to its leadership from within the settler movements and its relevance has been called into question following its failures in stopping the disengagement process and the building of the West Bank Barrier. These challenges, and the changing demographics of the settlers in the west bank, are reflected in recent voting patterns. While the settlers traditionally voted for the Mafdal, the national Union party, and sometimes for other religious parties, the 2006 results show that The NU-NRP joint list only attracted about 30% of the vote in the West Bank, which includes religious and non-religious settlements. This was a sign of an increasing diversity in the settler community in the West Bank, and a weakness in the Gush Emunim and Mafdal’s power base in the West Bank.<sup>132</sup>

Ironically, the collapse of the Oslo process has also adversely affected the religious settlers in their attempt to penetrate the Israeli military. Since then, the Israeli society became less mobilized against what it believed to be an outside threat, and thus provided the religious settlers with less room to penetrate major institutions such as the military and to influence long-term policy.

### ***Third: The Histadrut Labor Union***

Another major interest group in Israel influencing the formulation of public is the influential and politically powerful Histadrut Labor union.<sup>133</sup> The Histadrut is the largest voluntary organization in Israel. It was founded in 1920 as a trade union, although it did was much more than that in the period prior to establishment of the state in 1948. The Histadrut (Hebrew for federation, and short for *Hahistadrut Haklalt shel Haovadim b’eretẓ Yisrael*, The general federation of laborers in the land of Israel) wields an enormous influence in the government’s wage policy and labor legislation. It is also influential in political, social, and cultural realms.

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<sup>132</sup> Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Who Leads the Settlers?”; and Dror Etkes and Lara Friedman, “Challenges to the Settler Leadership.”

<sup>133</sup> Officially named: *Hahistadrut Haklalit shel Haovdim B’eretẓ Yisrael*, The General Federation of Laborers in the Land of Israel.

Although the ideology of the organization represented the interests of the workers, in reality the Histadrut represented the interests of the Labor party. Since its establishment, different labor parties have controlled the Histadrut, at least until 1994, and have greatly benefited from it. Members of the Histadrut constituted a considerable proportion of the Labor party membership, that controlling the Histadrut was a major political goal for politicians who to aim to control the Labor party. When in government, Labor had the ability to coordinate government and Histadrut work. For example it could easily handle wage negotiations with workers. The relationship between the Labor party and the Histadrut is such, that it is reported that one of the main reasons for Labor to join the National Unity Government in 1988 was the opportunity for Peres, as Finance Minister and chairman of the Knesset's Finance Committee, to bail out the Histadrut, as well as the kibbutzim, and the Moshavim, which were billions of dollars in debt.<sup>134</sup>

Since the establishment of the state, the Histadrut has become the second strongest force in economic and social policy after the government as it claimed more than 1.8 million members, but after its reorganization in 1994, its membership was reduced to 700 thousand members. Nevertheless, this large number ensured that remains a force to be considered in relevant decisions.<sup>135</sup>

Unlike all labor unions around the world, which are often associated with socialist parties (either directly or indirectly), the Histadrut is made up of workers who elect their governing officers from competing parties. These were traditionally workers parties or parties that accept social values, but since 1965, the full spectrum of parties that competes in the Knesset elections also competes in the Histadrut elections, making those elections an important stage for in the Knesset elections.

Labor's reliance on the Histadrut increased after the party's decline in the 1988 elections, as it tried to use the Histadrut to regain political power. Paradoxically as the Histadrut became more important to the Labor party's future, the role of its leaders diminished. Finally, after the 1994 reforms the Labor lost control of the Histadrut and thus lost some of its powers. Some labor losses in elections were

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<sup>134</sup> The Histadrut is distinct from the two agricultural lobbies, the kibbutzim and moshavim, whose aims are to gain financial benefits and subsidies from the Government. Both lobbies are currently in decline. See Helen Chapin Metz, "Interest Groups," in *Israel: A Country Study*, <http://countrystudies.us/israel/104.htm> (Accessed: 23/12/2007).

<sup>135</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 336.

blamed on the lack of organizational support which was previously provided by the Histadrut. Although the role of the Histadrut is in decline, it still plays a role as a force of opposition when the Likud is in power. The Histadrut and its leadership were strengthened as a result of the 1977, 1996, and 2003 Likud victories.

# Chapter Six

*The Relationship with the United States  
and its Impact on Decision Making*



# The Relationship with the United States and its Impact on Decision Making

## *First: Background*

The United States has given Israel—how can I tell it to this body? The United States has given Israel, apart from political and military support, munificent and magnificent assistance in the economic sphere. With America's help, Israel has grown to be a powerful, modern state... I know I speak for every Israeli and every Jew throughout the world when I say to you today, 'Thank you, people of America'.

Benjamin Netanyahu in a speech to a Joint Session of Congress<sup>1</sup>

From a comparative perspective, the United States and Israel may well have the most extraordinary tie in international politics.

Daniel Pipes and Mitchell Bard in the *Middle East Quarterly*<sup>2</sup>

The United States is Israel's current sponsor and its main ally. However, this relationship is far from static, and a good understanding of its nature can shed light on how this can affect the decision making mechanism within the Israeli establishment, and on whether the relationship affects the sovereignty of the decisions made by it.

Well before its establishment as a state; Israel was envisaged—or at least portrayed itself—as an outpost for western civilization (Europe at the time) in the middle of the Muslim world. This idea was clearly outlined by Theodore Herzl in his book *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State) which became the cornerstone of Zionism ideology. In his 1896 book Herzl wrote describing his vision of a future Jewish state: "There [in Palestine] we shall be a sector of the wall of Europe against Asia, we shall serve as the outpost of civilization against barbarism."

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<sup>1</sup> Speech made on 10/7/1996. See Benjamin Netanyahu's website, [www.netanyahu.org/joinsesofusc.html](http://www.netanyahu.org/joinsesofusc.html) (Accessed: 7/7/2008).

<sup>2</sup> Mitchell G. Bard and Daniel Pipes, "How Special is the U.S.-Israel Relationship?," *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 4, no. 2, June 1997.

After the establishment of the state in 1948, Israel continued to portray itself as a vanguard of Western civilization, as an outpost that protects the west's interests in the region. In an article by Gershom Shoken, editor and publisher of Haaretz, in 1951 he outlined what some see as Israel's mission statement. He wrote:

Strengthening Israel helps the Western powers maintain equilibrium and stability in the Middle East. Israel is to become the watchdog. There is no fear that Israel will undertake any aggressive policy towards the Arab states when this would explicitly contradict the wishes of the US and Britain. But if for any reasons the Western powers should sometimes wish to close their eyes, Israel could be relied upon to punish one or several neighbouring states whose discourtesy to the west went beyond the boundaries of the permissible.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, Israel's security needs also necessitated maintaining a strategic relationship with an outside military power. Israeli leaders since Ben-Gurion have been aware that Israel could never be completely self-sufficient. As a small state with limited resource, Israel simply could not afford to allow itself to become isolated during wartime. Ben-Gurion's principle that Israel should always have at least one great power patron, has remained a cardinal principle of Israel's national security doctrine.<sup>4</sup> This alliance with a superpower took the form of an alliance with the Soviet Union during the late 1940s, with France in the 1950s, and with the United States since 1967.<sup>5</sup>

The United States' policy towards Israel following its establishment in 1948 was a policy of support for the creation of a Jewish homeland. This support, which was driven by sympathy and guilt for not doing enough to save Jews during the Holocaust, took the form of financial aid to Israel—which exceeded the aid given to any other country—as well as political support to Israel in the United Nations.

This support, however, had its limits, as the United States clearly identified the differences between its national interests and those of Israel, a position which allowed the US to balance competing interests in the region, and to play a reasonably balanced mediating role in Middle East conflicts. This could partially

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<sup>3</sup> A. Bober, *The Other Israel* (New York: Anchor books, 1972), pp. 16–17, cited from Gershom Shoken, *Haaretz*, 30/9/1951.

<sup>4</sup> David Rodman, *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Leon T. Hadar, *op. cit.*

explain the United States' Role in the Suez war, when it forced the UK, France and Israel to retreat when they attacked Egypt in 1956.

This attitude towards Israel changed during President Lyndon Johnson's administration between 1964 and 1967, and especially after Israel's overwhelming military victory in the 1967 war. The US—which adopted a policy of using proxies to secure its interests in the developing world after the Vietnam War—started seeing Israel as a small, yet mighty, asset in the region. From this point on, the US and Israel developed their strategic cooperation and intensified their military, intelligence, and economic cooperation, which inevitably brought their policies closer. A published US State department document demonstrates the United States' recognition of Israel's capacity to represent its interests following the 1967 war. It reads:

Israel has probably done more for the US in the Middle East in relation to money and effort invested than any of our so-called allies and friends elsewhere around the world since the Second World War. Here the Israelis won the war, single-handedly, have taken us off the hook, and have served our interests as well as theirs.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the role Israel played as a “Western pillar” in the face of a Soviet incursion into the Middle East and in the face of the threat that the US saw in the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, there are other factors that helped in establishing this strategic relationship such as the loss of Iran as a strategic US ally in the region following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, The rise of fundamentalist and evangelical churches that call for unconditional support for Israel, followed by the rise of the right-wing Likud to power in 1977 with its Revisionist Zionism ideology, and policies of annexing Arab land and accelerating settlement construction. The last two factors together helped start an ideological connection on the grassroots level which has continued to grow.

Although Israeli American relationships have started warming up by the late 1950s, it was only in 1967 that it saw a dramatic improvement. In the 10 years following the 1967 war US aid to Israel has shifted from loans to essentially direct grants, with the bulk of it consisting of military assistance.<sup>7</sup> This was aided with the signing of over 100 agreements and memoranda between the US and Israel

<sup>6</sup> John Rose, *The Myths of Zionism* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 157.

<sup>7</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 26.



especially during the second Reagan administration. These agreements include many agricultural, economic, educational, health, scientific, technical, security, and defense agreements.<sup>8</sup> Israel was also the first country to conclude a Free Trade Agreement with the US which was implemented in 1985. In 1989 Israel was granted a “major non-NATO<sup>9</sup> ally” status which gave it access to expanded weapons systems and opportunities to bid on US defense contracts.

Israel is also linked to the US defense establishments through a diverse array of formal agreements and informal links. For example, a memorandum of understanding signed between the US and Israel in 1981 led to the establishment of a Joint Security Assistance Planning Group, and a Joint Political Military Group, which meet regularly to review Israel’s aid requests and to coordinate military plans, joint exercises, and logistical arrangements. Likewise, the two intelligence organizations are joined up by two dozen intelligence sharing arrangements like the Joint Anti Terrorism Working Group which was established in 1996.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, in 2007 Israel signed a homeland-security cooperation agreement with the United States to promote “anti-terrorism cooperation” through technology and science. Any perceived changes in the US-Israeli relationship between different US administrations and Israeli governments should be seen in the context of this established formal relationship.

In addition, Israel continues to receive an annual aid of \$3 billion per year in economic and military grants, which is around one sixth of America’s direct foreign assistance budget and around 2% of Israel’s GDP. The terms on which Israel gets this aid has led politicians such as Representative Lee Hamilton to argue that the aid to Israel substantially exceeded the popularly quoted figures to more than \$4.3 billion. In addition Israel receives US loan guarantees which permit Israel to borrow money from commercial banks at lower interest rate thereby saving millions in interest payments.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “Formal US-Israel Agreements,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/MOUs.html> (Accessed: 22/12/2007).

<sup>9</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

<sup>10</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, pp. 31–34.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25–30.

Israel also received supplemental aid packages such as the \$1.2 billion provided to support the implementation of the Wye Agreement, and the additional \$1 billion in foreign military financing aid to help prepare for the war with Iraq in 2003. In addition, the United States has also provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapon such as the Lavi aircraft, the Merkava tank and the Hetz (Arrow) missile system. Such projects are often portrayed as joint research and development efforts but the US never needs these weapons and never intends to use them. Furthermore, Israel also receives US surplus military equipment beyond the limits imposed by United States Law.<sup>12</sup>

Israel also receives financial support from wealthy Jewish organizations and individuals through a strong fund-raising mechanism. It also receives political support from the active Israel Lobby, which was established in 1967, and from major media conglomerates. In addition it receives financial support from the bosses of trade unions and the heads of pension funds, in the form of their unions' pension funds invested in Israel Bonds.<sup>13</sup>

Some analysts such as Stephen Zunes argue that the large amounts of US aid to the Israeli government have not been as beneficial to Israel as many would suspect, since most of the economic assistance has gone primarily to finance non-productive sectors such as settlements and the military, as well as to finance loan repayments to American banks. Each fiscal year since 1974, approximately \$1 billion of Israel's \$1.2 billion in Economic Support Funds has been used to cover the interest and principal due on previous US loans that were made primarily to finance arms purchases from the United States. While this argument has some merit, it can still be argued that had Israel not obtained this aid, its ability in paying those loans would have been reduced.

These analysts also argue that the military aid is in fact simply a credit line to American arms manufacturers and actually ends up costing Israel two to three times that amount in training, staffing and maintenance, procurement of spare parts, and other related expenditures. The overall impact is thus an increase in Israeli economic and military dependency on the United States and a drain in Israel's fragile economy, taking money away from Israel's once-generous social

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27–32.

<sup>13</sup> James Petras, *The Power of Israel in the United States* (Atlanta, GA: Clarity press, 2006), p. 39.

welfare system.<sup>14</sup> This is a result of a US law that requires that US military aid is spent this way. However, it must be noted here that Israel is the only country that is allowed to spend 25% of its military aid in developing its own military industry, which benefits from the economy of scale allowed by the direction of such funds.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Israel's military and economic dependency has increased after the 1973 war as the United States was accorded a greater strategic importance in Israel, and especially in the 1980s when Israel took a decision to rely on the US in the production of its aircrafts and Navy vessels to allow it to develop arms industry which produced an enormous array of arms. This economic dependency went hand in hand with Israel's diplomatic dependency as it became more diplomatically isolated following the oil embargo.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the financial and military support Israel receives from the US government, it also benefits from the United States' consistent diplomatic and political support. Between 1972 and 2006, Washington Vetoed 42 UN Security Council Resolutions, which is greater than the combined total of all the vetoes casted by all the other Security Council members for the same period. In addition, in 2002, US ambassador to the UN John Negroponte reportedly told a closed meeting of the Security Council that the United States would henceforth veto any resolution condemning Israel that did not simultaneously condemn "terrorism" in general and specifically mention Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades by name.<sup>17</sup> The United States also routinely backs Israel in the UN general assembly whenever it passes a resolution, which is non-binding and largely symbolic, condemning Israel's behaviour or calling for action on behalf of the Palestinians.

As many scholars have become interested in the US-Israeli relationship, they have disagreed in explaining it. Some have seen it as a dependency model of client-patron, where Israel has become a true client state serving the

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Zunes, "The Strategic Function of US Aid to Israel," *Middle East Policy* journal, Washington, DC, Middle East Policy Council (MEPC), vol. 4, no. 4, October 1996.

<sup>15</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 40.

United States strategic interest in the region,<sup>18</sup> while others believe that both countries are benefiting in this reciprocal relationship, and that mutual cooperation in state-of-the-art arms development, as well as “counter-terror” and counter-proliferation efforts, has raised the relationship from simple dependency to higher levels.<sup>19</sup> This view is also supported by the occasional decisions by Israeli leaders that do not consider the United States strategic interests in the region. Thus, a debate emerged between scholars and commentators on the effect this relationship has on policy making and decision making in both countries.

The first school of thought’s argument suggest that US controls Israel which acts as its proxy, holders of this opinion believe that Israel is a US strategic asset, and that US support is simply payment for services rendered by what can be described as “a US base, with regional expertise”. The argument also sees the support of the American Jewish population as a factor in this relationship.

Promoters of this argument, who include Professor Naom Chomsky, Professor Norman Finkelstein, and others on the left, cite incidents where they believe US policy influenced Israeli policy. The most recent incidents being the US objection to any retaliation against the Iraqi Scud missiles in the 1990 gulf war or any overt intervention in the 2003 gulf war, the US insistence on the continuance of the Lebanon war in 2006, and the US veto to Israeli Arms sales to countries such as Venezuela and China<sup>20</sup> which the US perceive as strategic threats.

They back their argument with statements like the one made by President Reagan’s in 1981. He was reported to have made the following comments justifying the United States’ support for Israel: “With a combat experienced military, Israel is a force in the Middle East that actually is a benefit to us. If there were not Israel with that force, we’d have to supply that with our own, so this isn’t just altruism on our part.”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Stephen J. Green, *Taking Sides: America’s Secret Relations with a Militant Israel: 1948-67* (New York: William Morrow, 1984).

See Arabic Edition: Stephen Green, *Al-Inhiyaz: ‘Alaqa America al-Sirriyah bi Israel* (The Bias: The Secret American Relations With Israel) (Beirut: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1984), pp. 216–227.

<sup>19</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

<sup>20</sup> Mounzer Sleiman, “Will US Keep Letting Israel Sell Arms?,” Al Jazeera English website, 7/7/2005, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/23A0A815-7FD2-4482-A20A-09DDF72D8A5E.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> Naseer H. Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The US Role in Israel and Palestine* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003), p. 39.

The second school of thought's argument, on the other hand is based on the idea that the US support of Israel does not serve US foreign interests. This argument suggests that the original model of Israel as a proxy has been replaced with one where Israel leads the United States through its lobby's control of the congress, the administrations, the mass media corporations, and Democratic Party donors.

Promoters of this argument, who include Professor John Mearsheimer, Professor Stephen Walt, and Professor James Petras, believe the Israel Lobby works to define and shape the US national interests in Israel's favour. Instead of the client state model they see an entanglement between two independent players with the lobby's function to essentially sustain and manipulate the entanglement.

They note incidents where Israel policy was different from that of the US such as their position regarding withdrawal from the occupied territories following the 1967 war. Although the US has pushed for a peace settlement where land could be used as leverage, Israel seemed more interested in holding onto the land. It is needless to say that Israel's view has prevailed in this issue. They also cite Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 which dragged the US into a disastrous intervention, and the defiance of Ariel Sharon to President George Bush's demands for withdrawal from his 2002 invasion of the West Bank.

They also back their argument with comments such as those made by the previous Prime Minister Ariel Sharon during a Cabinet meeting in 2001. In response to calls by Shimon Peres for Sharon to heed to the American requests for ceasefire Sharon was reported by *Radio Kol Yisrael* to have said: "Every time we do something you tell me Americans will do this and will do that. I want to tell you something very clear: do not worry about American pressure on Israel, we, the Jewish people control America, and the Americans know it."<sup>22</sup>

More recent examples cited by promoters of the second argument are in relation to what they believe is the Israel Lobby's contribution in Pushing the US into war and in making a confrontation against Iran on behalf of Israel on top of the United States' list of priorities.

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<sup>22</sup> IAP News, Sharon to Peres: "Don't worry about American pressure; we control America," Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (WRMEA), Israel Press, 3/10/2001, [http://www.wrmea.com/html/newsitem\\_s.htm](http://www.wrmea.com/html/newsitem_s.htm) (Accessed: 30/3/2007).

## ***Second: Impact on Decision Making***

In terms of Israeli decision making, it is fair to say that Israeli decisions are always made with the American position in mind. As Israel's main ally, American positions regarding particular policies are always identified before a decision is made and policies are often discussed between Americans and Israelis on many levels before they are put to action. Close cooperation especially on strategic and security issues is well in place and ranges from policy discussions in think tanks to tactical cooperation between military personnel. Indeed, information and policy exchanges with the US are so extensive that, on many issues, US policy-making policies capabilities are often seen as an extension of Israel's capabilities.<sup>23</sup> To assist this cooperation, the Israel Lobby works very hard to smooth any disagreements, by portraying Israeli interests as American interest and by providing a common policy platform.

However, this simple model does not explain the intricacies and contradictions of American and Israeli decisions. While one would expect that Israeli policies would be in line with American ones, policies adopted by the Israeli decision makers have not always towed the American line in spite of the ongoing cooperation. For example, Israel has continued to refuse to halt settlement building in spite of the United States' clear policy against settlements. Israel has bombed the Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981 without prior US approval, it has also annexed the Jerusalem and Golan in 1982 and 1981, invaded Lebanon in 1982, and rejected Reagan's plan for peace in 1981.

There have been a number of interpretations of this Israeli behaviour. The first interpretation is a historical one that argues that in many ways, Israel's attitude toward the United States is rooted in the communal traditions of the *shtetl* (the small, East European Jewish township). This view argues that Israeli decision makers interpret relations with the great powers on the analogy of relations between the vulnerable Jewish communities of Poland and Russia, and the local ruler or prince (in Yiddish, *poritz*). This relationship was historically fraught with ambiguity. On the one hand, the Jews, as an alien minority, demonized by the Gospels and Christian doctrine as Christ-killers, were utterly beholden to the prince. Their well-being rested on his good will. On the other hand, should he choose to

<sup>23</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

withdraw his protection, complete disaster loomed. As a result, the poritz was both benefactor and potential tormentor at the same time. The persistence of this model in dealing with powerful outsiders helps to explain the ambivalence of Israeli attitudes and policies towards the United States. At one time Israel is compliant accomplice, for instance, in the Iran-Contra affair, while at other times, Israel was a suspicious rival, as in the case of Jonathan Pollard, an American Jew working as a Navy analyst who was imprisoned in 1987, on charges of spying for Israel.

According to this interpretation, acclamation of the United States by Israel as “our greatest ally” is accompanied by expressions of resentment, such as Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s December 1981 outburst to US ambassador Samuel Lewis: “We are not a banana republic!” Even such a low-key figure as Gad Ya’acobi, formerly economics minister and now ambassador to the United Nations, bitterly complained about American economic advice at the very moment Israel was receiving \$3 billion in aid: “The High Commissioner sent us a note from Washington and gave us a negative term report!” Sometimes one hears from Israel the prideful independent Jew-as-Zionist, but just as often one hears the shtetl rabbi supplicating before the poritz.<sup>24</sup>

A less simplistic alternative interpretation to these policy contradictions is a political one which argues that Israeli decisions strongly depend on the positions of Israeli decision makers toward the United States. Moving from right to left on the Israeli political spectrum, there are four identifiable positions on the relations with the United States executive and particularly regarding the peace process: Ultra-nationalism, Conservatism, Realism, and Progressivism.

These approaches are distinguishable by their underlying attitudes toward two main issues: the value of maintaining control over the Occupied Territories captured in 1967, and the relative value of the United States as a factor in Israeli security. Given consistent United States executive support for the “land for peace” principle as the basis for an Arab-Israeli peace deal, the stronger Israel’s attachment to the 1967 territories, the less likely there can be a coordinated Israeli-American policy toward the peace process. In addition, and as a result of the security implications of any territorial concessions, the more the United States is seen as a central factor in Israeli security, the greater the likelihood that Israeli leaders will actively seek the

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<sup>24</sup> Stuart A. Cohen, *op. cit.*

United States' involvement in the peace process as a means of tying it into Israel's security network. This centrality to Israeli security increases the chances Israel will make concessions in peace negotiations, as they would be necessary to retain American support.<sup>25</sup>

### 1. Ultra-Nationalism

Ultra-nationalism is represented by parties on the right of the Likud Party such as the National Religious Party (*Mafdal*), the far-right parties of Techiya, Tzomet, Moledet, and the National Union (*Ha Ikhud Ha Leumi*). It also includes right wing segments within the Likud party itself. The most important ultra-nationalist policymakers were former prime ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, and Ariel Sharon, as well as former Chief of General Staff and former minister Rafael Eitan.<sup>26</sup>

The main ideology of these parties—namely the integrity of the land of Israel (*Shlemot Haaretz*)—is in direct clash with the “land for peace” formula, which the Americans have long adopted, but this clash is less prominent when it comes to making concessions outside of the borders of Eretz Yisrael. As advocates for self-reliance ultra-nationalists also fear the implications of the increasing dependence on the United States, which they see as weakening Israeli deterrence. They believe that Israel could consolidate its grip over the West Bank and Gaza without damaging its relationship with the United States because it had the support of powerful pro-Israel forces in Washington and was the dominant power in the territories. Ultra-nationalism also tends to oppose American involvement in the peace process and expects the Americans not to interfere in Israel's attempts to gradually incorporate the West Bank and Gaza into Israel.

One Example on Ultra-nationalism policies was after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 when Reagan proposed a peace plan that called for territorial concessions by Israel. Begin's response to the Reagan Peace Plan was to inform the Knesset: “We have no reason to get on our knees.” Further, on September 5, the cabinet approved the immediate establishment of three new settlements in the territories, in defiance of the Reagan Plan's call for a settlement freeze. Other

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, “Israeli-American relations and the Peace Process,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)* journal, vol. 4, no. 2, June 2000.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



examples include Begin's applying Israeli law to annex the Golan Heights without consulting the United States, and Yitzhak Shamir's confrontation with George HW Bush in 1992, when he refused to freeze settlements construction in return for loan guarantees Israel has requested.

But inspite of Begin's reluctant participation in the Madrid conference can be explained by his statement just after he left office: "I would have carried on autonomy talks for ten years. Meanwhile we would have reached half a million Jews in Judea and Samaria,"<sup>27</sup> Ariel Sharon's disengagement from Gaza in 2005 could be seen as a signal of his deviation from this ideology, which was confirmed by his split from the Likud to form the new Kadima party.

## 2. Conservatism

Conservatism is represented by the pragmatic wing of the Likud known for its pragmatism. Leading conservative figures include former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, former foreign and defense minister Moshe Arens, former ambassador to the United States Zalman Shoval, and former finance minister Dan Meridor.<sup>28</sup>

Like Ultra-nationalism, Conservatism ideology also assumes that Israel should keep the territories occupied in 1967 together with the settlements. However, since the beginning of the first *Intifadah*, it has adopted a predominantly realpolitik approach to foreign policy. Netanyahu was the first to publicly abandon the Likud's long-time support for autonomy by embracing the concept of territorial compromise. He also talked about accepting a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with limited sovereignty. This position allowed conservatives to cooperate with the United States in a manner that the ultra-nationalists could not.

Although conservatives recognize the pivotal role that could be played by the United States, they voice doubts about its commitment. They see the role of the United States in the peace process as that of a facilitator, and seek to minimize the role of the American administration in it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; and Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>28</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

Following the Jerusalem clashes in 1996, Netanyahu changed his position on limiting the United States role in negotiation, and saw its involvement in negotiations as crucial to preventing the collapse of the peace process, which he feared would result in Israel's isolation and alienation from the United States. Working with allies in the Congress to limit American pressure, negotiations eventually led to the Wye agreement. However, Keeping one eye on the next election, and fearing that his concessions may limit his chances of reelection, he not only froze the implementation of the agreement but also broke pledges to the United States by dramatically increasing government support for settlement activity.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Realism

Realism is represented by a segment of the Labor party. The most important realist was the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a former ambassador to the United States and army chief of staff. Other important realists include former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, former chief of staff and former minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, former deputy chief of general staff and deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai, and former civil governor of the territories and former Deputy Defense Minister Efraim Sneh.<sup>31</sup>

Realism, also known as *realpolitik* or pragmatism, has been rooted in the political culture of state building with its strong security emphasis. It was promoted by David Ben-Gurion and the Labor party in the early years of the state and is strongly associated with the military's *modus operandi*. Realists were mostly an elite group of army officers that was appointed to high positions in the Labor party after leaving the military. This small group enjoyed great strength within the Labor party, which felt it could not get elected on its dovish platform without the presence of high-ranking army officers to give the party credibility.

Realists such as Rabin recognized ever since the 1950s the need to reorient Israeli foreign policy from Europe to the United States, and continued to see the United States as a cornerstone of Israeli strategy toward the peace process. In addition, their position on the occupied territories depends on its importance in enhancing Israel's security and providing strategic depth with no nationalistic concern for the territories like that of the conservatives. Rabin viewed some settlements as

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

having security value and others as “political” and, hence, of negligible value. Furthermore, to realists, there is no better security guarantee than to tie the security of Israel to the United States. In fact, Rabin believed that Israel’s security was “inextricably linked to the United States.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, realists’ flexible position on surrendering land for peace to enhance Israel’s security, and their belief in the importance of the United States to Israel security made them the most compatible group in Israeli politics with the American position.<sup>33</sup> Rabin, and other realists, believed that the role of the United States in the peace process was indispensable, and hence coordination with the United States was central to the realists’ foreign policy. He also believed that a deal with the Arabs should be accompanied by some material benefits from the United States. Realists also continued to push for a closer strategic cooperation with the United States and for an acceptance of the American position on every issue that does not affect the security of Israel directly. According to Realists, the United States utility has many aspects such as: financial aid, weapons supply, diplomatic aid in the United Nations, facilitating contact with Jews in countries with no diplomatic relations with Israel, and deterring the former Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, realists still preferred to distance the United States from the detailed bargaining, at least until the latter stages, due to the American tendency to “split the difference” between the parties. For example, upon his election, Barak sought to lower the profile of the United States in the negotiations as well as the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in judging whether the Palestinians were fulfilling their security commitments under the 1998 Wye Agreement.<sup>35</sup>

In terms of military cooperation, Rabin always argued against a defense pact with the United States for fear that it would restrain Israel’s tactical room for maneuver and, by putting American lives at risk for Israel, possibly undermine American support for Israel in the long-run.

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<sup>32</sup> David Horowitz (ed.), *Yitzhak Rabin, Soldier of Peace* (London: Peter Halban, 1996), p. 47, quoted in Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, *op. cit.*

<sup>34</sup> Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, pp. 105–106.

<sup>35</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, *op. cit.*

#### 4. Progressivism

Progressivism is represented by the Meretz Party as well the leftist circles within the Labor party. Leading progressives include Former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, Oslo architect Yossi Beilin, Israel's Oslo chief negotiator in 1993 and current Center party MK Uri Savir, former foreign minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, and current Minister Haim Ramon. Although the progressives have gained growing influence within the Labor party since the end of the 1980s, Labor's electoral reliance on realists such as Ehud Barak has weakened their influence over foreign policy.<sup>36</sup>

Progressives believe that security could not be achieved without peace, and that it could not be attained through military power alone. They believed peace could be achieved by allowing Palestinians self-determination, and through the creation of a regional framework for economic cooperation. For the Progressives the whole Land of Israel is neither a core value nor a great security value. In fact, Jewish settlements were generally considered a security burden because they inhibited the possibility of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians. Progressives also argued that Israel must make territorial concessions for idealistic reasons, because continued rule over another people and ensuing human rights abuses threaten the Jewish and democratic character of the state.<sup>37</sup>

Progressives viewed the American role primarily as a supplier of funds necessarily for this regional economic cooperation to take place, by rewarding those who are willing to proceed with peace. In addition, they downplayed the importance of the American role in Israel's national security, and thus saw the role of the United States in the peace process as less significant.

For example, Yossi Beilin, started the second track Oslo negotiations with the Palestinians despite the fact that Washington was sponsoring the Washington talks. In fact, the Oslo negotiations were initiated and reached by both sides without the knowledge of the Clinton Administration. Progressives often, however, seek American involvement in order to overcome some procedural problems and to help sell any agreement to the Israeli public.

In terms of military cooperation, and unlike the position of the realists, Progressives were in favour of a defense pact with the United States. Peres saw

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

the United States as “the glue” that would hold together a multilateral security pact that would serve not as a defense against a common enemy but rather as an intra-regional security system.

In light of this classification, it becomes obvious why national unity governments display a degree of immobility in terms of foreign policy and the peace process. It becomes difficult for members of a national unity government to reach a unified position regarding the peace process. For example, during the unity government between 1984 and 1990, Israel simultaneously pursued two different foreign policies.

It should be noted that in recent years, disagreements between the US and Israel became less common, this is partly because the US has, for a long period, supported a policy of encouraging Israeli elite to come and study in Israel. This has helped create an “Americanized” Israeli leadership in which can work more effectively with American administrations. This can also be explained by the improvement in the relationship between the United States and Israel has also seen an upturn during the George W. Bush’s two administrations, which was coupled with a growth of the grassroots movement within the Christian Right led by Christian Zionists who support Israel to help bring along a fulfilment of their theological prophecies. But on the other hand, direct intervention of the US in the Middle East since the first gulf war made the regional role of Israel rather unclear and has led to some differences between American and Israeli interests in countries like Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. In addition, the Bush administration did not seem to adopt the Neoconservatives ideological policies regarding the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—as outlined in the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies’ *Clean Break* document—and have chosen—in rhetoric at least—to support the route of a peace process.

# **Chapter Seven**

***Relationship with Jewish Communities  
Outside of Israel and its Impact on  
Decision Making***



## **Relationship with Jewish Communities Outside of Israel and its Impact on Decision Making**

### ***First: The Jewish Community's Structure and the Israel Lobby***

The Jewish community in the United States is by far the most influential Jewish community outside of Israel, with reportedly more Jews in the United States than in Israel.<sup>1</sup> In political terms the US Jewish community is most famous for being a host to the very powerful Israel Lobby. The Israel Lobby has been recently defined in a study by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt as “a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively works to shape the United States’ foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction.”<sup>2</sup> This study recognizes the importance of this definition in differentiating between the American Jewish community and the Israel Lobby which constitutes from Jewish and non-Jewish individuals and organizations. However, as it aims to explain the political role played by the Israel Lobby in light of the wider Jewish community context whose grassroots organizations often provide the lobby with essential support, such a distinction would be made but not emphasized.

The Jewish community in the United States includes tens of Jewish organizations which play different roles. Jewish organizations in any North American city that has a Jewish community often organize themselves under a federation with the purpose of encouraging community development, fundraising, and community relations. A Federation includes Jewish social agencies, volunteer programs, educational bodies, and related organization. These federations are then united under the United Jewish Communities (UJC), which thus became the largest Jewish organization. UJC is a fundraising umbrella organization, which

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005 the number of Jews in the United States was 5,914,682 compared to the number of Jews in Israel which was 5,021,506. See Jewish Virtual Library, “The Jewish Population of the World,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/jewpop.html> (Accessed: 7/5/2006).

<sup>2</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, “The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy,” Harvard Kennedy School, Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP06-011, March 2006, <http://web.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=3670>



represents 155 local Jewish federations across North America. The UJC also represents 360 independent non-federated Jewish communities.

The UJC was formed after the merger of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF) which was an umbrella organization of federations and organizations,<sup>3</sup> with the main fundraising organizations; United Jewish Appeal (UJA), which was the main fundraiser responsible for collecting donations from Jews via their local federations, and with the United Israel Appeal (UIA)<sup>4</sup> which was responsible for the distribution and of the funds that are used in Israel.<sup>5</sup> After the merger the United Jewish Communities (UJC) became the largest Jewish organization in the United States.

The Jewish community also includes single issue organizations such as the successful lobby organization the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) that functions as a political action Committee and thus gets directly involved in the political process, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) which fights anti-semitism, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs which coordinates public policy, the right wing American Jewish Committee (AJC), the left wing American Jewish Congress, Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization, and the umbrella organization known as the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMJO) which coordinates 51 national Jewish organizations.<sup>6</sup>

Some of these organizations have a clear lobbying mission, others are less so. While the UJC has a wider reach and a much bigger budget much of the media attention is given to the lobbying organization AIPAC and the ADL, because of their clear political nature. It should be noted that while not all Jewish organizations are part of the lobby politically, but most of them do support Israel at least financially through the federation system.

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<sup>3</sup> United Jewish Communities (UJC), "An Introduction into the Jewish Federation System," <http://www.ujc.org/onlinelearning/flash/interface.html> (Accessed: 22/12/2007).

<sup>4</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *Jewish Power: Inside the American Jewish Establishment* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> UJC, "United Israel Appeal," <http://www.ujc.org/page.html?ArticleID=40599> (Accessed: 22/12/2007).

<sup>6</sup> Janice J. Terry, *US Foreign Policy in the Middle East, The role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 70.

In addition to the Jewish organizations, a substantial part of the Israel Lobby is formed by prominent Evangelical Christian Zionist individuals and organizations, who believe that Israel's rebirth is a part of the Biblical prophecy of end times. The most prominent of these organizations is Christians United for Israel (CUFI) which was established in 2006 and acts as an umbrella organization. The Mearsheimer and Walt study also includes some high ranking non-Jewish neoconservative as part of the lobby.

Studies on the Israel Lobby often include policy think tanks as part of the lobby since they publicize and push for an Israeli-US Alliance, such as the very influential Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), the Middle East Media Research institute (MEMRI), The Hudson Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that the Israel Lobby is often referred to as the strongest lobby in Washington. For example, AIPAC often brags to being the strongest and the most important organization affecting America's relationship with Israel, citing many prominent US politicians and lobby leaders.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars such as Raymond Cohen, argue that while more effective lobbies conduct their business away from the public gaze, AIPAC claims are essentially an attempt to maximize its influence by exaggerating their powers and perhaps by tapping into the age-old myths of Jewish power.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the polarization of the Jewish community in the United States (a polarization that matches that of Israeli Jews),<sup>10</sup> the key Jewish organizations in the Jewish community are run by right wing hardliners who have a record of supporting almost every decision taken by the Israeli governments and are known for supporting the expansionist policies of the Likud Party, including its hostility to the Oslo Peace Process. This right wing leaning, which stands at odds with the mostly liberal Jewish community, was a natural consequence of the process that brought those hardliners to head those organizations in the first place.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Cohen, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

Following its electoral victory in 1977, the Begin's Likud revolution started looking for like-minded traditionalist within the American Jewish community to help maintain close cooperation with the American administration in spite of the incompatibility between the United States' and the Likud's policies on the occupied territories. Likud then helped these right wing pro-Israel activists rise to positions of leadership, and later on assigned them the *Hasbarah* project (Hebrew for explanation), where they would explain to the American public and Congress why Israel was unable to withdraw from the Occupied Territories, and lobby the American public and Congress against territorial compromise.

The return of the Labor party to power with Rabin in 1992, with its declared policy of territorial compromise that was compatible with the United States' position, was naturally accompanied with the abolition of the *Hasbarah* department which was no longer needed. Shimon Peres, who as foreign minister abolished the department, was quoted as saying: "if you have a good policy you don't need *Hasbarah*, and if you have a bad policy, *Hasbarah* will not help."<sup>11</sup> But Labor did not change the right wing leadership of the US Jewish organizations to a more moderate one since the moderates feared they would be accused of being pro-Arab if they took a pro peace positions, and were worried that the Likud may return back to power and punish them.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, American Jews are extremely reluctant to publicly criticize Israel or to air divisions within their ranks before the larger American society, and Jewish communities in general tend to suppress dissent within them. Thus, those who are alienated by the conservative nature of the Jewish leadership do not seem to care enough to protest against it.

Together these factors helped in strengthening the hard-line positions of the leaders of the American Jewish organizations which constitute the lobby,<sup>13</sup> which does not reflect those of the Jewish community. The hard line stance of the leadership of Jewish organizations has prevailed on issues such as the occupation, the settlements, the two state solutions, and establishing a Palestinian state.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> UJC, "United Israel Appeal."

<sup>13</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

<sup>14</sup> In the 1990s; 78% of Jewish Americans thought Israel should freeze Jewish settlements, and 79% supported a demilitarized state. See Janice J.Terry, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

Outside of the United States, the only substantial Jewish community is the European one. Although the European Jewish community is not as powerful as its American counterpart, it shares many of its characteristics. There are recent attempts to create a pan-European Jewish organization following the EU accession of 10 new member states in 2004.

It is worth noting that following the 2006 Lebanon war there has been an increase in the number of voices and new movements within the Jewish communities in the United States<sup>15</sup>, the United Kingdom<sup>16</sup>, Canada<sup>17</sup>, and Australia<sup>18</sup> which called for a debate on Israel and the degree representation of the traditionally right wing community leaders, who are always supportive of every Israeli action. Their positions range from being pro-Israel pro-peace to being against the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This may be a sign of the loosening of the stronghold the community's leaders on Jewish voice in communities outside of the United States.

This study will not attempt to analyze the works of the lobby and its influence on the United States policy making. Instead, it will focus on the relationship between the Lobby (and the wider Jewish community in the Diaspora) and Israel, and how this relationship influences the Israeli decision making mechanism.

## ***Second: Jewish Communities and Israel: The Formal Mechanism***

The most obvious manner in which Jewish communities in the US publicly support Israel is through their financial support. The current estimation is that Israel receives around \$2 billion annually in private donations from American citizens,

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<sup>15</sup> Max Deveson, "US Jewish Lobby Gains New Voice," BBC, April 2008, p. 16, <http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7349371.stm> (Accessed: 17/4/2008).

<sup>16</sup> Brian Klug, "Who Speaks for Jews in Britain?," *The Guardian*, 5/2/2007, [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/brian\\_klug/2007/02/hold\\_jewish\\_voices.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/brian_klug/2007/02/hold_jewish_voices.html) (Accessed: 8/4/2007).

<sup>17</sup> Jews for a Just Peace, "Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians Condemns Creation of pro-Israel Caucus," <http://www.jewsforajustpeace.com/pages/news/parl.html> (Accessed: 8/3/2007).

<sup>18</sup> Ben Cubby, "Jewish Coalition Calls for Open Debate on Palestine," *The Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper, 6/3/2007, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/03/05/1172943356185.html/> (Accessed: 24/3/2007).

roughly half of which in direct payments and half via the purchase of State of Israel bonds through the Development Corporation for Israel.<sup>19</sup> These private donations to Israel are tax deductible as a result of a special clause in the US-Israel income tax treaty.<sup>20</sup>

This financial support takes place through a formal relationship between Israel and the Diaspora Jews, which is established by two Jewish organizations that liaise between Israel and the Diaspora. These organizations are the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and its operational arm the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI). A 1952 Israeli law, which determined the status of the two organizations, and a 1954 Accord between the Israeli government and the Jewish organizations in the United States, authorized the Zionist movement and JAFI to function as the formal representatives of the Diaspora in Israel, and of Israel in the Diaspora. In reality, they function as the providers of assistance to Israel in the spheres of development, settlement, immigration and its absorption, and coordination with Jewish organizations abroad.<sup>21</sup>

A third organization, the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, can be added to these two groups. The global Jewish think tank, established by the Jewish Agency, is responsible for studying issues of primary concern to the Jewish community world wide with the state of Israel at the core of this community.

The World Zionist Organization (WZO) is the main vehicle through which Israel disseminates its message to Jews around the world, and through its elected councils and assemblies it is also the vehicle through which the Diaspora Jews are formally entitled to voice their views to Israel. It is appointed by the World Zionist Congress (WZC) every four years. It is composed of roughly equal representatives of Israel, The US Jewry, and the World Jewry.

The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), on the other hand, is more concerned with “nation-building” tasks inside Israel such as land reclamation, building settlements, and settling Jewish immigrants. It is the largest private social service provider in

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<sup>19</sup> Clyde R. Mark, *Israel: US Foreign Assistance* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, “Is the Jewish Diaspora Unique? Reflections on the Diaspora’s Current Situation,” *Israel Studies*, vol. 10, no. 1, Spring 2005.

Israel. It is also considered to be the largest Jewish institution in the world with a budget that stood at half a billion dollars in the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

Because of disputes with assertive Diaspora Jewish leaders who were active in the Zionist movement, Ben-Gurion and his colleagues preferred to cooperate with JAFI rather than with the Zionist Movement. As a result, funds raised by the Diaspora Jews are transferred to Israel through the Jewish Agency, with the Zionist Movement getting its share through the Agency.<sup>23</sup> Recently, the role played by JAFI's settlement department has been assigned to a new settlement division at the WZO in order to retain the US tax-exempt nature of donations to JAFI by keeping it out from any involvement in the occupied territories. However, on the ground this has had very little impact with the same individuals and processes remaining unchanged.<sup>24</sup>

JAFI's budget comes from federated fund raising campaigns around the world, but primarily from North America through the work of the UJA, which is currently part of the United Jewish Communities (UJC), which represents 800 thousand Jewish households that contribute to the federated campaigns. It is through these funds that the Federation System makes itself a partner in the management of a broad range of these institutions.

To demonstrate the scale of funds raised as well as the commitment of the federation leaders, one incident should be mentioned. In 1991 the leaders of the Jewish federations met to discuss changes to the new immigrants welfare program they which they run through donations. The proposed plan was to change it from providing different services to immigrants, to providing cash (grants and loans) with which the new Russian immigrants to Israel could purchase individual services on the open market. To do so each local federation would be responsible for its "fair share" of a \$900 million package, and would as a result have to put up their community assets as collateral against the loans which the immigrants would be drawing on Israeli banks. In spite of the risk associated with such move to community assets and family businesses, the plan went ahead and the funds were provided to the new Russian Jewish immigrants.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *op. cit.*

The flow of financial donations from US Jewry to Israel can be summarized in the following steps:

1. Money is collected during annual local federation fundraising campaigns. Previously it was collected from general members of the community, but now mostly via major donations from wealthier members of the community. It is estimated that 0.5% of all donors give around 50% of the donations.<sup>26</sup>
2. Each local federation then determines how much of its money should be kept in the United States for national Jewish projects and how much should be sent “overseas”. The “overseas” portion of the donations, most of which goes to Israel, is then passed on by the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), which is part of UJC, to the United Israel Appeal (UIA), also known as *Keren Hayesod*, and is also part of UJC.
3. UIA then distributes the funds raised, together with US grant funds it secures, to the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which is a World Jewish Congress (WJC) Affiliate.
4. The Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee use the money in Israel projects. The Jewish Agency for Israel uses funds in projects of land reclamation, building settlements, and settling Jewish immigrants, while the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee uses its funds in providing social services assistance to the most vulnerable communities such as the children-at-risk, struggling immigrant populations, the elderly and the disabled.<sup>27</sup> According to Israeli Journalist and Historian, Tom Segev, the UJC donations constitute a sizeable segment of Israel’s Gross National Product (GNP)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), “Who Are We?,” [http://www.jdc.org/who\\_mission.html](http://www.jdc.org/who_mission.html) (Accessed: 22/10/2007).

<sup>28</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

### ***Third: Jewish Communities and Israel: A One Way or Two Way Relationship?***

#### **1. Alternative Interpretations**

There have been many attempts to interpret the role played by the Jewish communities in the Diaspora *vis-à-vis* the state of Israel.

One interpretation is that Diaspora Jews have a strong identification with the state of Israel and see it as their duty to protect it. Commentators such as Jonathan Jeremy Goldberg argue that the establishment of the state gave Judaism a renewed strength and meaning, and that instead of weakening the Diaspora—as many have expected due to emigration to Israel—instead it strengthened it. Thus, celebrating Israel became a central theme in many aspects of Jewish life in the Diaspora, and many Diaspora Jews see supporting Israel as an essential and integral part of what defines them as Jews.<sup>29</sup>

Another interpretation of the Jewish community in the United States is a historical one. Its advocates compare the role of the Jewish community to that of the Shtetl's traditional intermediary, or *shtadlan*. The *shtadlan* who might be a well-connected, assimilated Jew or a well-disposed gentile, has been of great value to the larger Jewish community in the Shtetl as he often interceded on behalf of the Jews to the local ruler or prince. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for a lobby is *shdulah*, from the same root as *shtadlan*.<sup>30</sup>

A third interpretation is one that compares the role of Israel to the Jewish community in the Diaspora to that of an insurance policy. This interpretation is based on the notion that Israel is the only truly safe place for Jews. Diaspora Jews thus find it prudent to invest in Israel so that if anti-semitism returns in the host countries, they can always seek safety in Israel. Jewish contributions to Israel are thus seen as payments into an insurance policy.

A fourth interpretation is that American Jews feel a need for partnership with Israelis only when the latter are suffering, and that the only reason American Jews continue to support Israel during “peace times” is the concern that if they don't do

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>30</sup> Raymond Cohen, *op. cit.*



it themselves, it would be very difficult to request financial aid to Israel from the United States administration.

But neither of these interpretations seems to provide a sufficient understanding of the complex nature of the relation between Israel and the Diaspora. A deeper historical examination of the Israel-Diaspora relations not only reveals a relationship that has been less than consistent, but also that a degree of rivalry and friction between Israel and the Diaspora Jews (especially the large and powerful American Jewish community) over the leadership of the Jewish people, has often shaped this relationship.

## 2. Historical Survey of Relationship

According to Israeli Historians, the establishment of Israel in 1948 made the Diaspora redundant to those who subscribed to classical Zionist doctrine. The first period—from 1948 to the late 1960s—was characterized by an ideological negation of Diaspora life (*Shlilat Hagolah*).<sup>31</sup> The Zionist ideology, based on the idea that Israel is the homeland for all the world's Jews, considered all Jews who did not make *Aliyah* (immigration, or literally ascendance) to Israel less than those who have done so.<sup>32</sup> Israelis saw the birth of the state of Israel as one of the central facts of modern Jewish history. To Jews in Israel a Jewish life became to live in a Jewish country, thus to them, a Jewish life in the Diaspora is incomprehensible. Israelis also believed that the life in “exile” is doomed with the threat of anti-semitism from one side and the danger of assimilation into the communities they live in from the others.<sup>33</sup>

An example on the notion of Israel's primacy over the Jewish communities worldwide is Ben-Gurion's remarks in his address to the Zionist Actions Committee in 1942, in his statement the then-chairman of the Jewish Agency observed:

New Zealand and Australia are the young offspring of England. While the English government cannot obligate them to take its advice, the English in New Zealand and Australia, and presumably the English in Canada, look

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Conversation with Tom Segev, “Israeli National Identity.”

<sup>33</sup> A recent poll carried out by the Jewish Agency demonstrates that the vast majority of Israeli Jews (76%) feel safer living as Jews in Israel than in Diaspora. See Shlomo Shamir, “Poll: 76% of Israelis feel safer living as Jews in Israel than in Diaspora,” *Haaretz*, 1/7/2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=997638> (Accessed: 3/7/2008)

toward England and do as England does. However lame the comparison; I can also see this applying to Eretz Yisrael. The heart of American Zionism can be seen in Eretz Yisrael.<sup>34</sup>

This ideological position was supported by the results of the 1956 and 1967 Wars, but has gradually dissipated since the mid 1970s, especially because of the results of the 1973 War. Until the 1973 War, most Israeli senior politicians, the “professional Zionists,” and the majority of the Israelis not only negated Jewish life in the Diaspora, but also argued that Israel was the nation’s epicenter. They emphasized that the establishment of a nation state for Jews has normalized the situation for all Jews.

But in spite of this strong ideological position, political and material needs led Israeli leaders to compromise on their Zionist attitudes towards the Diaspora, and the linkages that existed between the Yishuv and the Diaspora were retained.<sup>35</sup> Although Israelis were no longer able to understand Diaspora Jews in the wider context of a Jewish life, they recognized and appreciated their political and financial support.

On the Diaspora side, the Jewish community in the United States did not give much attention to Israel in terms of political support when it was first established and the financial support was limited initially. The initial reactions of the majority of the organized Jewish Diaspora to the Israeli victory in the 1948 War and to the establishment of the state were qualified and hesitant, with differences emerging in the Diaspora between Zionist and non Zionist Jews who did not want to see Israel interfering in their affairs. Support increased after the 1956 War and particularly after Israeli military success in the 1967 War. Some scholars such as Norman Finkelstein argue that it was only when Israel’s position was strengthened in 1967, that the Diaspora started getting interested in Israel, and that it was only then that their financial support increased.

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<sup>34</sup> The transcript of this meeting is in the Central Zionist Archive in Jerusalem.

See Zohar Segev, “An Ongoing Tug-of-War,” *Haaretz*, book review, 7/12/2006, <http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Home/About/Press+Room/Jewish+Agency+In+The+News/2006/5/dec7haar.htm> (Accessed: 10/5/2007).

<sup>35</sup> Ernest Stock, “Philanthropy and Politics: Modes of Interaction between Israel and the Diaspora,” in S. Ilan Troen and Noah Lucas (eds.), *Israel: The First Decade of Independence* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 699–711.

Finkelstein advocates this view in his book “The Holocaust Industry” where he describes the changes that took place within the Jewish community following the 1967. He argues that as a direct result of Israel becoming the United States’ strategic asset in the Middle East, it has become safe to be pro-Israel in the United States, and thus American Jewry, Jewish intellectuals and so forth, become fanatical towards the State of Israel, when until 1967 there were only two public Jewish intellectuals who are publicly identified as supporting Israel, Hannah Arendt and Noam Chomsky.<sup>36</sup>

A compromise was thus reached between Israel and the Diaspora. This compromise was strengthened with the increasing autonomy of Diaspora communities,<sup>37</sup> and the beginning of Israeli acceptance to the Jewish community life in the US, as an alternative to life in the “Jewish state” in terms of Jewish integration in the modern world.<sup>38</sup> A recent survey by the World Union for Progressive Judaism (a Reform Judaism organisation) showed that 60% of Israelis have an “ongoing connection” with Diaspora Jews.

Diaspora Jews confidence thus grew and they occasionally demand to have a bigger role in the decision making within the Israeli establishment. There have even also been requests to allow some of the Diaspora Jews the right to vote in the Israeli general elections under the premise of being Israeli expatriates. On that, the survey carried out by the World Union for Progressive Judaism showed that 73% of Israelis believe Israel should take the views of Diaspora Jews into account.

### **3. Challenges to Israeli-Diaspora Relations**

This compromise reached between Israel and the Diaspora also had its fair share of challenges. A number of changes have taken place on the Diaspora side that reflected a negative change in Diaspora Jews attitude towards Israel. These changes included a decline in the campaign revenues and in the %age of the revenues that are sent to Israel. This %age has dropped from 75% of revenues to 66% just after the 1973 war, to 40% in 1995, and to 25% today.<sup>39</sup> In addition, there has been a

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<sup>36</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso books, 2001), under Chapter 1: Capitalizing the Holocaust.

<sup>37</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> This was perhaps coupled with the resurgence in Jewish identity within Israel on the expense of the national identity.

<sup>39</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

sharp decline in the number of Jewish tourists to Israel, and a gradual increase in the number of Diaspora Jews who became skeptical about Israel's centrality.<sup>40</sup>

These negative changes in the relationship between the Israel and the American Diaspora have been attributed by a number of Jewish scholar to the clashes between American Jewish leaders with one another and with Israeli government officials over a number of issues, including the definition of a Jew for immigration to Israel, recognition of non-Orthodox conversion and marriage rites, the Jonathan Pollard spy case, Jewish settlements in the territories conquered by Israel in 1967, and Israeli responses to the Palestinian *Intifadah*.<sup>41</sup> In addition to these clashes, transformations in the Israeli political scene, such as the rise of the right wing and the peace process, together with the turning of each of Israel and the Diaspora to deal with its problems and challenges facing, have both played a role in the negative changes. One of the most obvious consequences of these changes was a reduction in mutual expectations between the two.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, the Liaison between Israeli officials and American Jewish leaders, which is meant to maximize their influence on the United States government, has witnessed changed in dynamics between the leaders on either side. During the first 25 years of the establishment of the state, the European born Israelis communicated easily with the American Jews who also immigrated to the United States from Europe. But during the subsequent years Israeli leaders (who became more Israeli rather than European) and American Jewish community leader (who became more American) have lost this common language and Israelis faced the challenge of leading an American Jewish community which they fundamentally did not understand.

Furthermore, Israel and the Diaspora occasionally have disputes which appear to reflect a power struggle. The most prominent manifestation of rivalry and power struggle between Israel and the US Jewry was in 1988 when the Israeli Government led by the Likud Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir wanted to create a coalition with a group of Haredi parties, who requested that the Law of Return would be amended

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Theodore Sasson, Charles Kadushin and Leonard Saxe, "American Jewish Attachment to Israel: An Assessment of the "Distancing" Hypothesis," Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University, February 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

as a condition for joining the coalition. The amendment they requested, which was labelled the “who is a Jew” bill, proposed that those who are converted to Judaism have to be converted by an Orthodox rabbinate in order to be allowed immigration into Israel as Jews. This bill, whose consequences were a little more than symbolic, was directed at the Reform Judaism, and the Conservative Judaism movements in the United States whose conversion processes are deemed to be lax by the Orthodox.

As a result the bill was met a very strong rejection from the US Jewry, of whom a majority is conservative and Reform Jews, that it almost resembled a declaration of war. Leaders of nearly every non-Orthodox Jewish body in America began mobilizing. A majority of the members of the Presidents Conference demanded that the bill is to be abolished. They also called for a reform to the Israeli electoral system to eliminate the bargaining power of the Haredi parties. The Council of Jewish Federations’ (CFJ) general assembly on that year voted for a full scale campaign to stop Yitzhak Shamir from going ahead with this deal, delegations were sent to Israel to meet with every Israeli law maker, Letters and petitions were prepared and advertisement was published in Israeli press.

Over four weeks plane load after plane load of American Jews flew to Israel including the top leaders of the CFJ, the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), The National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC),<sup>43</sup> AIPAC, the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the American Jewish Congress, *B’nai B’rith*, Hadassah, and the Reform and Conservative movements. Some local federations even voted to hold the “overseas” portion of their financial contributions until the amendment was abolished. The protests in the US and Israel appeared to have got the results they wanted. Shamir tore up the coalition agreement and entered into a national unity agreement with Shimon Peres.

While some insiders such as Dan Meridor believed Shamir staged this to get a better position in a national unity coalition with Peres which he wanted from the outset to face outside pressure, and although there has not been any equally significant incidents since then. This watershed moment was a demonstration of the clout of the Jewish community and their ability to influence Israeli policy.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> The National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC) is now known as the Jewish Council for Public Affairs.

<sup>44</sup> J. J. Goldberg, *op. cit.*

#### 4. Israeli Positions Regarding the Diaspora and its Influence on Decision Making

As for the Israeli side, one can notice one main contradiction in the relation between Israel and the Diaspora. While Israel expects the Diaspora to provide it with *Aliyah* (emigration), money, and political and diplomatic support, it has invested its own resources in ensuring the continuity of Jewish communities abroad, in assisting communities in crises, and in rescuing Jews in distress around the world.<sup>45</sup> This is evident in the call for massive Jewish immigration to Israel, made, for example, by prime minister Ariel Sharon, which stands in contrast to modest support for Jewish education in the Diaspora—a policy that has been implemented by the same Sharon government.<sup>46</sup> This contradiction could be explained by shedding light the different positions Israelis have towards Diaspora Jews and their lobbying structures.

There are two main positions in Israel regarding the worldwide Jewry; the position of Labor and the position of the Likud. While the Likud believes in worldwide Jewish solidarity, Labor believes that Israel is strong enough and doesn't really need the Diaspora's help to establish state to state relationship with the United States. It also believed that Israel shouldn't really lead the American Jews, and that American Jews would follow Israel's lead more or less automatically since their support for Israel is purely out of admiration (a conviction that eventually turned out not to be entirely true).

In addition, these two approaches coincide with the two most significant Israeli approaches toward the role of Congress and the pro-Israel Lobby in the peace process.

Labor's support for "land for peace" has generally made it easier for it to work with the US executive on the peace process, and thus saw little need for lobbying and Hasbarah as discussed earlier. Labor government regarded the pro-Israel Lobby as superfluous and downgraded its relationship with AIPAC. Rabin, who was very critical of its aggressive lobbying, and thought it would lead to unnecessary confrontation with the American Administration supported limiting

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<sup>45</sup> A recent survey by the World Union for Progressive Judaism showed that 47% of Israelis believe Israel must help Jews in distress no matter what.

<sup>46</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

AIPAC's role in Labor's peace strategy, and some key progressives even went so far as to label AIPAC an "extreme right-wing" group with a negative impact both on the peace process and Israeli security. Former deputy foreign minister Yossi Beilin explained this relationship when he was quoted as saying: "Labor's coming to power pulls the rug from under AIPAC. We want US involvement in the peace process; their agenda was to keep the Americans out. We want peace based on compromise, and their agenda was to explain why compromise was impossible."<sup>47</sup>

Likud, on the hand, have recognized since the early 1980s that their hawkish positions, which are often in clash with American policy, need support by its allies in the Congress and the pro-Israel Lobby. During the 1980s, the Likud attained American support not only for Israel but also for the Likud's positions among conservative politicians, Christian fundamentalist groups, key figures in the media and important groups within the American Jewish community. In addition, the Likud strategy particularly benefited from the increased power of the AIPAC.

For example, Israeli Likud activists worked with American Jewish groups and key congressional Republicans to reduce US pressure on Israel when it deployed its troops in the West Bank in 1998. They also worked together to stop the flow of American aid to the Palestinian Authority.<sup>48</sup>

Generally speaking, the establishment of new direct channels of communication between Israel and American administrations since Rabin's first government has led many Israeli prime ministers of the right and the left (such as Begin, Rabin, Netanyahu, Barak, and Sharon) to feel less need for Jewish mediation.

Since the 1980s, Israel concluded that it would be able to pursue its own economic and political interests without the massive support and mediation of the Diaspora leaders and professionals.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Rynhold, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *op. cit.*

# Chapter Eight

## *Decision Making in the Cabinet A Case Study*





## Decision Making in the Cabinet: A Case Study

To demonstrate the dynamics of foreign decision making in times of crisis, this study will discuss the decision making process before and during the three-month long Israeli deep penetration bombing of Egypt in 1970, which marked the end of the War of Attrition. Comparisons will also be drawn with the 2006 Lebanon war to demonstrate common trends.

The decision making process started with the option of military strikes deep into Egypt surfacing within the Israeli Army's General Staff. The emergence of this option followed the delivery of new Phantom F-4 aircrafts from the United States to the Israeli Air Force (IAF), which allowed the latter the necessary capability to carry out the deep bombings. The option was then recommended to the cabinet, which represented a wide coalition that included the Labor party—led by Prime Minister Golda Meir—the Mafdal, the right wing part Gahal, and the left wing Mapam party. The deliberations within the cabinet revolved around four issues: Could the raids be carried out at an acceptable price? What purpose would they serve? What would be the American position? and how would the Soviet Union react?

The first question was the easiest, as the military experts unequivocally advised the cabinet on the capabilities of the IAF to carry the operation with few risks and costs.

The second question however was more difficult to answer. The stated objectives were to reduce the Egyptian military pressure by bombing its bases in the rear; to end the Attrition War and compel Egypt to a ceasefire agreement; and to deter the Egyptians from launching a full-scale war. In addition, there were other less-articulated political and psychological objectives such as breaking Egyptian morale and creating a credibility gap between Nasser and the Egyptian people, which could bring about the downfall of his regime. These objectives were not prioritized or ranked in any order.

The cabinet's assessment of the United States' position was highly influenced by an assessment by the then-Israeli ambassador in Washington Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin's assessment was reportedly based on a hint from an American official during a cocktail party in Washington, which may have implied the United States' tacit support of the bombing. Rabin, who wanted to cement Israel's relationship

with United States and to project an image of Israel as a as strong in order to obtain more weapons, believed that this was green light from the Americans.<sup>1</sup> His hawkish position towards bombing Egypt was so strong that, in spite of requests by some ministers for further verification of the American position, he helped tip the balance of the cabinet in favor of the hawks.

The last issue discussed by the cabinet was that of reaction of the Soviet Union. Dayan's memoirs reveal the existence of two schools of thought within the cabinet on that issue. While the majority of the cabinet saw that the Soviet Union faced political and technological constraints that prevent it from intervening directly on the Egyptian side, a minority that included Dayan believed that such optimistic view was not based on a realistic appraisal but rather on wishful thinking. This minority also believed that Egypt was so central to Russia's global policy that it was unlikely that they would allow the Nasser regime to collapse. Eventually, no consensus was achieved between the two views and the majority view was accepted as a basis of the policy.

The decision to bomb was taken and during the first weeks of the military air raids, there were signs of considerable success in achieving military objectives, such as causing substantial damage to the Egyptian military and the reduction of Egyptian attacks. However, the military pressure failed to achieve any of its political or psychological objectives such as undermining the Egyptian morale, toppling the Nasser regime, or forcing Nasser to return to the ceasefire. Instead, Egyptians rallied around Nasser who chose to continue the War of Attrition with the assistance of the Soviet Union. The intervention of the Russians providing, air defenses, and personnel eventually neutralized the Israeli Air Force, strengthened Egypt's air defenses, and deprived the Israeli Air Force from its ability to launch preemptive strikes on Egypt which paved the Egyptian's way to the October War in 1973. A cease-fire initiative, sponsored by the United States, which turned out to be against the military strikes, eventually paved the way for a ceasefire.<sup>2</sup>

The briefly discussed decision making process demonstrated many of the issues discussed earlier in this study:

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan Barari, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Avi Shlaim and Raymond Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice and Consequence: Israel Deep penetration bombing in Egypt, 1970," in Ian S. Lustick (ed.), *Arab Israeli Relations: A Collection of Contending Perspectives and Recent Research* (Hamden, Conn: Garland Publishing, 1994), pp. 281–314.

1. The lack of a coherent policy and clear prioritized objectives of the decision. This remains to be an issue within both the political and military echelon. The lack of strategic thinking and planning and clear campaign objectives were two of the causes named in the Winograd Commission report for the failures during the 2006 Lebanon war.<sup>3</sup>

2. The lack of serious research or exploration of available options other than the airstrikes. The process by which bombing became an option was not determined by a complex set of calculations, but simply by military's recommendations. These recommendations were based on the military's ability to perform the operation, and the operation advantage from raising the level of violence. Once the military option was submitted to the cabinet, it became the sole focus of attention and was to be either accepted or rejected. The implications of the lack of alternatives was the lack any political flexibility once the military operations started. The operations continued to increase the military pressure until the Nasser would agree to terminate the War of Attrition and resume the ceasefire.

This failure to explore options was partly because of the lack of professional staff work and the lack of adequate information received by the ministers, which left them relying on their general knowledge, casual conversations, and even hearsay. The prime example on the lack of information was the importance accorded to the alleged hint given by the American official to Rabin.

Both the lack of flexibility and the lack of staff work were also noted in the Winograd Commission report as causes for the failures in the 2006 Lebanon war. In addition, the manner in which the military option was proposed and agreed on in 2006 by the military bears resemblance to that in which it became the sole option in 1970, albeit the decision making time in 2006 was much shorter.<sup>4</sup>

But according to some scholars such as Michael Brecher, this lack of alternatives was not the case in 1967, where they argue that careful evaluation of alternatives and an estimation of the costs and benefits of their consequences took place even during the stressful pre-crisis period and before the decision to pre-empt was taken. According to Brecher, the decision to carry out a pre-emptive strike was taken because it had the highest expected returns. They argue that such an

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<sup>3</sup> "English Summary of the Winograd Commission Report," *The New York Times*, 30/1/2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/world/middleeast/31winograd-web.html> (Accessed: 5/6/2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

examination of costs and benefits was not just limited to military aspects but also to international, economic and human aspects, and that no premature decisions were taken on issues such as the old city, taking the Golan height, or the extent of advance into Sinai. In addition they also argue that a process of estimation and revision took place in 1967 and that a capacity to learn was demonstrated by civilian and military leaders.<sup>5</sup> Brecher also argue that even during the crises of the 1973 war the stress did no lead to deterioration in the calculation of alternatives.

However, other scholars such as Yehuda Ben Meir, argue that in that incident the “waiting period” was mostly a result of hesitation and lack of self confidence rather than a process of weighing political and military options.<sup>6</sup>

3. The lack of adequate evaluation of the bombing consequences, in terms of their benefits and their costs. While the anticipated benefits were in the minds of the decision makers, there was little attention given to the potential costs. Israeli decision makers overlooked that Nasser had the option of getting Russian support. They also failed to see that by forcing the Soviet Union to choose between intervening effectively or admitting their inability to protect Egypt, they invited the physical intervention of the Soviet Union in the conflict. This was against one of the cardinal tenets of Israel’s military, laid down by Ben-Gurion, that the Israeli Army must never , under any circumstances risk a direct confrontation with the army of a great power.

4. The failure to consider issues across different dimensions, such as considering tradeoffs between the military and diplomatic consequences of the military option.

5. The lack of a long term planning perspective, and the reactionary nature of the cabinet’s planning process. Prime Minister Meir defended this tendency for short term policy, justifying it as a necessity considering the threats that Israel faces.

6. The tendency to overestimate the probability of preferred outcomes or, in other words, the dominance of affect over calculation. Examples on this tendency are the cabinet’s views on the possibility of toppling the Nasser regime, its assumptions about the American position, and its assumption of the Russian reaction.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, p. 359; and Janice Gross Stein and Raymond Tanter, *Rational Decision-Making: Israel’s Security Choices, 1967* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1980), pp. 309–322.

<sup>6</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Shlaim and Tanter, *op. cit.*, pp. 281–314.

## *Conclusion and the Decision Making Characteristics*



## Conclusion and the Decision Making Characteristics

By way of conclusion, this chapter will attempt to list the main characteristics of the Israeli decision making process. These characteristics would be grouped under two headings; the first is pragmatism versus ideology, and the second is strengths and weaknesses.

### *First: Pragmatism vs. Ideology*

One of main characteristics of Israeli decision making is its mix between ideology and Realpolitik (also known as realism or political pragmatism).<sup>8</sup> Some scholars such as Raymond Cohen have noted this duality and the fine balance Israeli decision makers often keep between the different political factors, external forces, and environmental constraints on one side, and political ideologies on the other.

Examples on policy pragmatism include the Israeli decision makers' exploitation of its environment for opportunities of cooperation, however partial or informal. Israelis explored avenue such as arms, intelligence, aid, oil, military assistance, and war to achieve a number of their objectives. As a result of this policy, candidates for mutually beneficial working relationships included anyone who possessed some conceivable common interest with the "Jewish state." This included the Hashemite house of Jordan; the "outer tier" of non-Arab states (Turkey, Iran, and Ethiopia) according to the concept of "my enemy's enemy is my friend". It also included France as it was embroiled in a war in Algeria, a Federal Republic of Germany eager for legitimacy following the Second World War, the emerging states of Africa and Asia, Kurds, Maronites, and other disaffected or minority Muslim groups.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, Israel tried a number of political positioning. It explored a nonaligned status only to discard it in favor of a "free world" position as it sought to gain the US alliance which was embroiled in Korea and the cold war. Later, this position

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<sup>8</sup> The Realpolitik approach is often referred to in the United States as Realism.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond Cohen, *op. cit.*



was strengthened with Israeli rhetoric, which became staunchly anticommunist, thus skillfully mobilizing friends in Washington by presenting Israel as a bulwark against communism and a valuable strategic asset in the cold war. More recently, this rhetoric was replaced with a new rhetorical basis for strategic cooperation with the United States, which presented it as a cooperation against fundamentalist Islam.<sup>1</sup>

The Israeli tradition of pragmatism in foreign policy was established by Chaim Weizmann before the establishment of the state and was then adopted by Ben-Gurion and Moshe Sharett who together with politicians such as Reuven Shiloah, Abba Eban, Walter Eytan, Gideon Rafael, and others, proved capable of playing the game of flexible, non-ideological international politics In the face of international pressures.

But while these means and positionings indicate a realist decision making process, Israel and the Zionist movement before it have adopted a number of unrealistic political decisions that contradicted with this realpolitik approach. These decisions included:<sup>2</sup>

- The choice of Ottoman Palestine as the future site of the Jewish national home, even though this meant transplanting an essentially European population into the heart of the Muslim world.
- The declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948, despite the near certainty that it would touch off a war in which Jews would be a minority on the battlefield.
- The declaration of the Law of Return, which allowed Jews from everywhere to immigrate to Israel, despite the lack of state resources to deal with massive and diverse immigration.
- The declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of the state, despite its strategic vulnerability and its ambiguous legal status.
- The willingness, through years of strong international criticism and ostracism, to insist that territories acquired in the 1967 war only be returned in exchange for full peace.
- The Israeli governments' assumption of responsibility for the welfare of Jews worldwide, irrespective of their formal citizenships, which makes the national interest of the state not limited to the sustenance and survival of its own immediate

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

citizens, but bound up with the interests of Jews everywhere, whether or not they intend one day to live in Israel. This particular decision is not just a marked deviation from classic realism; but is counterproductive in Realpolitik terms.

These unrealistic decisions can only be explained as a result of the political ideology of Zionism. This ideology is, in turn, influenced with the Jewish narrative, which centers around the divinely ordained mission of a chosen people (the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who acquired a favored, unmediated relationship with the creator of the universe). As a result of this covenant, these people have dedicated themselves to the service of God, which obliges them to preserve their separate identity from the “non-chosen” people. Thus according to Jewish tradition, history is an unending struggle between the chosen and everybody else in a narrative of good and evil. At the culmination of history the chosen people, dispersed and chastened because of divine displeasure, are destined to gather in its scattered fragments from among the nations of the world and to return redeemed to its original divinely promised homeland.

The Zionist narrative, which in spite of its secular outlook is much influenced by the above narrative, is thus based on the following ideologies:<sup>3</sup>

- Israel belongs to the entire Jewish people.
- The State of Israel is not just a legal and administrative entity catering to the interests of its resident citizens but a vehicle in the historical service of the entire Jewish people most of whom are in fact citizens of other states.
- The “ingathering of the exiles” via making Aliyah to the Holy Land.

In addition, Israeli leaders have inherited an entire vocabulary and set of metaphors from Biblical sources to describe its relations with “the nations.” Even the Hebrew word for nations, *goyim*, carries connotations of fear and suspicion. Statements such as “The goyim were always against us,” “Esau hates Jacob,” “a people that dwells alone,” and, more generally, “the entire world’s against us” are all seen as timeless truths defining the Israeli predicament. This world view stands in stark opposition to the realpolitik assumption that yesterday’s enemy is tomorrow’s potential friend.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

It is thus fair to say that Israel's foreign relations, and the Zionist movement before it, have mostly conformed political ideologies with respect to goals, rather than to any doctrine of realism. However, in terms of the ways and means of Israel's diplomacy, they are mostly dominated by realism.<sup>5</sup>

## ***Second: Strengths and Weaknesses***

In addition to the duality between Pragmatism and Ideology in Israeli decision making, the different factors, influences and processes described in earlier chapters, as well as other general characteristics, can be categorized into a set of strengths and weaknesses.<sup>6</sup> These strengths and weaknesses are summarized below with special emphasis given to the decision making process in times of crises.

It should be noted that some Israeli Scholars such as Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov argue that external and domestic forces have different influences on decision making depending on the timing and context of the decision being considered. While external rather than domestic factors were responsible for initiating conflict reduction or resolution, the role of the domestic factors increased during negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

### **1. The Mechanism's Weaknesses**

#### **a. The Domination of a Short-Term Perspective**

Perceived or actual threats facing Israel led to a nearly total preoccupation with security, which led to short-term policies and solutions to immediate problems as well as responsive and unplanned actions. This lack of long-range planning, together with the lack of a clear definition of the goals and aims of national security policy, led to a tendency towards:

- Reactive decision making that responds to the immediate events in its external environment without consideration of consequences.
- A decision making process that is mostly concerned with the "here and now" and with limited attention to the future.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> This classification is based on Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*, as well as Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–71, 92–94.

<sup>7</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

- Dominance of a culture of improvisation and crisis management.
- Postponement of non-essential decisions, and dealing with pressing issues. As a result, when non-essential issues become urgent they are decided upon without time for an in-depth study.

### **b. The Politicization of the Decision Making Mechanism**

The nature of the proportional representation system and the influence of coalition politics, together with strong ideological commitments led to an extremely politicized and emotionally charged decision making mechanism. This politicization, which often came at the expense of strategic interests, has led to:

- Dominance of domestic political considerations in policy planning.
- Ministerial emphasis on personal standings in parties and political careers more than governance.
- Maintaining the coalition becoming a goal rather than a mean.
- A preference to avoid clearly defined policy objectives and to maintain “constructive ambiguity.”
- A strategy tactic-alization, in which each issue is considered separately in a cumulative way.
- Avoidance of supporting staff work and the general suspicion of experts.

### **c. The Deterioration of Governmental Capabilities**

The size of the Cabinet, coalition politics, the disintegration of the Cabinet to independent ministries, and the fact that Cabinet ministers are professional politicians, all led to the Cabinet’s inability to function as a policy-making forum. This failure in the cabinet, together with the weakening of the authority of the Prime Minister’s office, and the pressure, which the system is under, due to lack of sufficient experienced staff, all led to:

- The Prime Minister’s tendency to establish his own small policy formulation forum.
- The lack of systematically formulated policy. On most issues, there are quite simply no Israeli policies, and ministries and agencies often expressing conflicting policies relying on their own estimates of what they believe the policy to be.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

- The Prime ministers' preference to keep their freedom of maneuver over the benefits of systematic policy formulation.<sup>9</sup>

#### **d. The Lack of an Institutional Decision Making Mechanism**

The internal processes and the structural characteristics of the system such as the lack of systematic staff work at the highest levels, and the fear of leaks, created a condition where power is dependent on the leader and the issue discussed, and where the decision making mechanism is comparatively fluid, informal, and un-institutional. This led to:

- Highly idiosyncratic and personalized decision making.
- A reliance on expertise and confidence, and lack of sufficient checks and balances.
- The dominance of oral and personal communications between different levels.
- A disconnection between highly developed information gathering mechanisms and Policy Planning formulating/ decision making mechanisms.
- Insufficient coordination between government agencies, especially because of fear of leaks and domestic political issues.
- The prime ministers refraining from necessary consultation and coordination, and his tendency to overlap assignments and lines of authority.

#### **e. The Dominance of the Military-Industrial Complex**

- Strong influence over decision making because of its monopoly over intelligence and policy planning.
- A structural weaknesses in the machinery of civilian control over the military establishment.
- The lack of a strong alternative mechanism for the assessment of military intelligence and policy by the civilian authority, in spite of the presence of the National Security Council.

#### **f. The Static Nature of the Political Elite**

As an establishment dominated by those to whom politics is a vocation, the Israeli establishment tends to be static and conservative, compared to a system dominated by politicians who are not in politics for gain. In the latter case, the chances are higher in generating new political ideas and directions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Asher Arian, *Politics in Israel*, p. 101.

### **g. Reliance on Past Experiences in Times of Crises**

Israeli Decision makers are psychologically prone to reliance on past experiences as a guide to coping with current threats to their basic values. Their reliance on the past is exacerbated by a feeling of achievement and success manifested in what they see as their ability to overcome so many obstacles and threats throughout the years.

This reliance creates a great conceptual rigidity to understanding the threats. In addition, although decision makers keep an open mind to information inputs that may change the existing conception, their decisions are still based on basic assumptions which were accepted in the past but never reassessed in light of the new information.<sup>11</sup>

### **h. The Limited Approach to Problems**

Each problem is dealt with individually, with an eye on specific and immediate goals, with no overall view. Israel has no equivalent of the British “white paper” or the American “Posture Statements”. In fact, the only place where policy papers are prepared is the Israeli Army planning branch.

## **2. The Mechanism’s Strengths**

While many of the weaknesses above have led many scholars and commentators to argue that Israel, at its summit, has no organized and systematic decision making process,<sup>12</sup> there are many strengths of the system, which should be noted for contributing to its often-successful decisions.

### **a. Common Values**

The existence of a shared commitment to a few fundamental principles, which have forced a certain degree of discipline on the system, may keep bureaucratic battles from reaching the extremes often found in other countries. These principles are:

- Concern for security and the “existential threats” that face Israel.
- Consensus over the Zionist ideology.
- The preservation of Israel as a democratic and “Jewish state,” which naturally includes for example automatically determines the policy towards the right of return to the Palestinian refugees.

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, pp. 344–345; and Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–71.

<sup>12</sup> Yehuda Ben Meir, *op. cit.*, pp. 67–71.

### **b. Small Tightly Knit Establishment**

In Israel's small establishment, most officials come to know each other personally. This facilitated the development of a "common language" and a common understanding of many issues Israel faces. It also creates a level of personal and professional intimacy and makes it easier to identify those who are responsible and capable of dealing with a particular issue.

### **c. Ease of Communication**

The small establishment also enables ease and speed of communications through informal, personal ties, which are independent of the hierarchy.

### **d. Rapidity and Flexibility**

The un-institutionalized, informal, and improvisational nature of the Israeli decision making, gives it the ability to change gears, regroup, rethink, and rapidly adapt to changing circumstances in its environment.

### **e. Dynamic and Pragmatic Decision Making on National Security Issues**

Although government policy is often highly charged ideologically or politically, especially on issues as the future of the West Bank or the defense budget, the military and security establishment itself takes a distinctly pragmatic approach viewing issues from an analytical problem-solving perspective. This is also a primary characteristic of much of the political leadership. Numerous Israeli leaders have demonstrated an ability to radically change their existing policies, even those based on long and deeply held ideological convictions or strategic outlooks when either necessity or opportunity warranted.<sup>13</sup>

### **f. The Strong Political-Military Relations**

The Israeli Civil-military borders are highly porous, with most officers retiring at relatively young ages. This porosity continues to facilitate the flow of new ideas from the military, and helps in reducing the danger of long-established mindsets.

### **g. Transparency**

Israel is analyzed by both its domestic and the international media possibly more than any other nation. As a result, press coverage serves as a primary means

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<sup>13</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

of gauging reaction to policy. Israel is also scrutinized by its own judicial system. Some argue that on the long run such exposure strengthens and immunizes the decision makers.

#### **h. Responding to a Complex Environment Under Stress**

Scholars such as Michael Brecher argue that Israeli decision makers demonstrated an accurate awareness of their complex environments with no exaggeration or minimization during the 1967 war, and that in spite of the increased stress that they experienced in the first few days of the 1973 war, it did not impair this awareness too drastically, even though it has affected individual performance.<sup>14</sup>

#### **i. Consultation**

The continuous contact with the international community at all levels exposes the mechanism to an ongoing exchange of ideas, feedback, and constraints. Exchanges with friendly governments, or individual leaders and officials, especially in the United States, can often serve as an important input into the Israeli decision making mechanism and feedback serve as a “reality check.” For policies formulated and decision being considered.

#### **j. Democracy**

Many Israelis argue that one of the most important strengths of Israeli decision making mechanism is that Israel enjoys the benefits of a healthy and vibrant democracy (at least amongst Israeli Jews), in which media, political, social, and public criticisms put pressure on politicians to act in the best interest of the Jewish public.

#### **k. Operational Professional Excellence**

In spite of the failures at the leadership level, Israel has a number of spheres of excellence such as the defense establishment, which has an orderly, systematic decision making mechanism and where a focused effort is made to utilize the information available to generate appropriate policy options. There are spheres of excellence within the defense establishment (especially the air force), the intelligence community, and various other units. This, however, is operational excellence, not Cabinet level policy-making.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis*, pp. 345–347.



## **1. Motivation and Quality People**

Israelis believe that even if the decision making mechanism itself is faulty, this is at least partly overcome by the quality of the people involved in it, who are often committed to a common goal, motivated with a sense of extreme, even existential threat, and believe in the righteousness of their cause. Long years of familiarity and expertise on the issues of national security have helped overcome the lack of sufficient staff support and the faulty mechanism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Charles D. Freilich, *op. cit.*

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## ***Index***





# Index

## A

Abdel Nasser, Gamal, 183, 217–220  
 Adler, Reuven, 118  
 Adva Center, 130  
 Africa, 89, 124, 128, 223  
 Agudat Yisrael Party, 50–51, 58, 141–142, 143, 145, 150–151  
 Algeria, 89, 223  
 Allon, Yogal, 98  
 Alon, Yigael, 75  
 Aloni, Shulamit, 148  
 Am Ehad Party, 58  
 Amana, 155, 164  
 American Enterprise Institute (AEI), 201  
 American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), 96, 200–201, 212–214  
 American Jewish Committee (AJC), 200, 212  
 American Jewish Congress, 200, 212  
 American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 206  
 Amit, Meir, 11  
 Amital, Yehuda, 158  
 Anti-Defamation League (ADL), 200  
 Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, 186  
 Arafat, Yasir, 116, 149  
 Arendt, Hannah, 210  
 Arens, Moshe, 62, 69, 192  
 Arian, Asher, 101  
 Ariel Center for Policy Research (ACPR), 126  
 Ariel, Israel, 159–160, 173  
 Ariel, Uri, 164  
 Arieli, Shmaryahu, 159  
 Asia, 124, 181, 223  
 Australia, 92, 203, 208  
 Aviner, Shlomo, 152, 158–160, 164, 174  
 Avraham, Poraz, 51  
 Ayalon, Ami, 51

## B

Baker, James, 160, 167  
 Balad/ National Democratic Assembly Party, 50  
 Balkan, 124  
 Bar Kochba, Moshe, 169  
 Bar-Ilan University, 161  
 Bar-Lev, Chaim, 97–98  
 Bar-Siman-Tov, Yaacov, 226  
 Barak, Aharon, 65  
 Barak, Ehud, 27, 38, 58, 61, 64–65, 68–69, 83, 97, 99, 103, 112, 117–118, 193–195, 214  
 Barakeh, Muhamed, 51  
 Bard, Mitchell, 181  
 Basel, 151  
 Begin, Menachem, 11, 37, 39, 62, 65, 68–69, 98, 156, 190–192, 202, 214  
 Beilin, Yossi, 51–52, 56, 67, 195, 214  
 Beit El, 164  
 Ben-Ami, Shlomo, 195  
 Ben Eliezer, Benjamin, 51, 58, 62, 99  
 Ben Elissar, Eliyahu, 11  
 Ben-Gurion, David, 45, 59, 75, 77, 86–87, 95, 98, 100, 104, 144, 151, 182, 193, 205, 208, 220, 224  
 Ben Izri, Shlomo, 51  
 Ben-Maimonides, Moshe, 161, 173  
 Ben Meir, Yehuda, 10, 220  
 Benjamin (Settlement), 164  
 Bishara, Azmi, 51  
 Bnei Brak (Town), 49  
 Brecher, Michael, 17, 67, 219–220, 231  
 Bush, George, 188  
 Bush, George HW, 192  
 Bush, George W, 196



## C

Camp David, 35, 39, 58, 69, 83, 108, 112, 116  
 Canada, 89, 92, 203, 208  
 Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 43, 91  
 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 194  
 Chaim Herzog Institute for Media Politics and Society, 128  
 China, 79, 89, 187  
 Chomsky, Naom, 187, 210  
 Christians United for Israel (CUFI), 201  
 Clinton, (Bill), 195  
 Cohen, Ran, 51  
 Cohen, Raymond, 201, 223  
 Cold War, 223–224  
 Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMJO), 200  
 Council of Jewish Federations (CJF), 200, 212

## D

Dahan, Momi, 149  
 Dahan, Nissim, 51  
 Dayan, Moshe, 61–62, 65, 77, 97–99, 128, 155, 218  
 Dead Sea, 123  
 Degel HaTorah Party, 50, 58, 141–143  
 Democratic Party (US), 188  
 Democratic Party for Change (Israel), 38  
 Druckman, Haim, 164

## E

Eban, Abba, 10, 224  
 Egypt, 14, 59, 65, 93, 151, 169, 183, 217–218, 220  
 Eiland, Giora, 108  
 Eilon, Benny, 51  
 Eitam, Efraim, 99  
 Eitan, Michael, 56  
 Eitan, Rafael, 51, 99, 191  
 Eldad, Arye, 164  
 Eliashiv, Yosef Shalom, 143  
 Elitzur, Uri, 164

Elkana (Settlement), 164  
 Elon, Benny, 164  
 England, 208–209  
 Eshkol, Levi, 74  
 Ethiopia, 59, 223  
 Europe, 61, 88–89, 181, 193, 211  
 European Union, 79  
 Eytan, Walter, 224

## F

Feith, Douglas, 122  
 Finkelstein, Norman, 187, 209–210  
 Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 122  
 France, 182–183, 223  
 Freilich, Charles, 38, 67

## G

Gafni, Moshe, 51  
 Gahal Party, 217  
 Galilee, Israel, 98  
 Galon, Zehava, 51  
 Gaza Disengagement Plan/ Process, 35, 39, 41, 69, 78, 83, 85, 123, 167, 174–175, 192  
 Gaza Strip, 46, 56, 58–59, 85, 92, 94, 101, 108, 155, 163, 165–166, 169, 173, 191–192, 203  
 Gazit, Mordechai, 11  
 Gazit, Shlomo, 10, 102, 109  
 Geneva Accords, 52  
 GeoCartographia Research Institute, 57  
 Germany, 223  
 Gil/ Pensioners Party, 33, 50  
 Gilad, Amos, 116  
 Ginsburgh, Yitzchak, 144  
 Golan, 83, 92, 134, 173, 189, 192, 220  
 Goldberg, Giora, 99  
 Goldberg, Jonathan Jeremy, 207  
 Goren, Shlomo, 159  
 Gulf War (1990, 2003), 187, 196  
 Gur, Mordechai/ Mota, 97, 111  
 Gush Etzion (Settlement), 164



## H

Hadash/ Communist Party of Israel, 50  
 Haifa, 99  
 HaIkhud HaLeumi/ National Union Party (NU), 38, 50, 52, 157, 164, 176, 191  
 Hamas, 88, 168, 186  
 Hamilton, Lee, 184  
 Harel, Israel, 164  
 Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 124  
 Hebrew University, 122, 124–125, 129, 149, 161  
 Hebron, 149, 155, 164, 166  
 Herut Party, 154, 156, 169  
 Herzl, Theodore, 45, 46, 181  
 Herzliya, 84–85, 119, 121  
 Herzog, Chaim, 98, 128  
 Hever, Zeev, 164  
 Hezbollah, 78  
 Holocaust, 77, 95, 130, 157, 182, 210  
 Hudson Institute, 201  
 Huldai, Ron, 99

## I

India, 79  
 Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies (IASPS), 122, 196  
 Institute for Intelligence and Special Tasks (*Mossad*), 11, 61, 87–89, 107, 115–116  
 Interdisciplinary Center (IDC)-Herzliya, 121  
 International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT), 121  
*Intifadah*, 54, 78, 85, 88, 101, 108–109, 112, 130, 161–162, 169, 171, 174, 192, 211  
 Iran, 59, 79, 89, 183, 188, 190, 196, 223  
 Iraq, 59, 79, 89, 196  
 Iraq War, 78, 185  
 Islamic Jihad Movement, 186  
 Islamic Revolution 1979, 183  
 Israel Bealiyah Party, 38  
 Israel/ Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), 127

Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), 85, 87–88, 107  
 Israeli Army, 42, 69, 74–76, 80–84, 86–87, 93–95, 97, 100, 102–105, 107–112, 140, 158, 162, 169–172, 174–175, 217, 220, 229  
   - Israeli Air Force (IAF), 74, 86, 217–218  
   - Navy, 74, 86, 186, 190  
 Israeli Institute for Economic and Social Research (IIESR), 130  
 Itzik, Dalia, 20

## J

Jabotinsky, Vladimir, 46  
 Jerusalem, 52, 54, 56–57, 122–124, 127, 129, 150, 153, 161, 166, 189, 193, 224  
 Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), 130  
 Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS), 119, 123  
 Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), 118, 204–206, 208  
 Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 204  
 Johnson, Lyndon, 183  
 Joint Anti Terrorism Working Group (US-Israel), 184  
 Joint Political Military Group (US-Israel), 184  
 Joint Security Assistance Planning Group (US-Israel), 184  
 Jordan, 52, 54, 59, 89, 155, 223  
   - Jordan Valley, 53, 95, 155  
 Judea, 158, 163, 165, 169, 173, 192

## K

Kadima Party, 20, 37, 46, 50, 52, 59, 192  
 Kfar Adumim (Settlement), 164  
 Khenin, Dov, 51  
 Kissinger, Henry, 9, 78  
 Knesset, 10, 12, 17–22, 24, 26–28, 33–39, 45, 49– 51, 56, 62, 64, 66, 87, 92, 97, 100, 105, 115, 122, 126, 133, 143–144, 147–148, 150, 156–157, 163–165, 173, 177, 191

Kook, Abraham Isaac, 152–153, 158–162, 174  
 Kook, Tzvi Yehuda, 152–153, 155, 159–160,  
 162, 174  
 Korea, 223

## L

Labor Party/ HaAvoda, 37–39, 43, 45–48, 50,  
 52, 54–59, 63, 98, 133, 146, 148, 153, 156,  
 168–169, 172–174, 177, 193, 195, 202,  
 213–214, 217  
 Lahat, Shlomo, 99  
 Lapid, Tommy, 51  
 Lasswell, Harold, 75  
 Latin America, 89, 124  
 Lebanon, 10, 58–59, 65, 68–69, 78, 83, 85,  
 107–108, 111, 119, 151, 159, 162, 169,  
 174, 187–189, 191, 196, 203, 217, 219  
 Levy, David, 44  
 Lewis, Samuel, 190  
 Libya, 79, 89  
 Lieberman, Avigdor, 51, 164  
 Likud Party, 20, 36–38, 43, 45–50, 52,  
 54–56, 58–59, 98, 138, 146, 149, 154, 156,  
 168–169, 172, 178, 183, 191–192, 201–202,  
 211, 213–214  
 Lindenstrauss, Micha, 106  
 Lior, Dov, 158, 164  
 Lipkin-Shahak, Amnon, 193  
 Litzman, Yakov, 51  
 Livni, Tzipi, 51, 118

## M

Madrid, 167, 192  
 Mafdal/ National Religious Party (NRP),  
 37–38, 45, 50–52, 141, 151, 153–154,  
 156–157, 162, 164–165, 169, 176, 191,  
 217  
 Mapai Party (Later Alignment), 36, 98,  
 153–154, 169  
 Mapam Party, 217  
 Mearsheimer, John, 188, 199, 201  
 Meir, Golda, 68–69, 98, 217, 220

Melamed, Zalman, 164  
 Meretz Party, 38, 48, 50, 52, 56, 148, 168,  
 173, 195  
 Meridor, Dan, 192, 212  
 Metzvinsky, Norton, 141  
 Middle East, 48, 79, 120, 122, 124, 126,  
 128–129, 181–183, 187, 196, 210  
 Middle East Media Research institute  
 (MEMRI), 201  
 Military Court of Appeals, 87  
 Military Intelligence (Aman), 10–11, 74,  
 87–88, 102–103, 110, 115  
 Minerva Center for Human Rights, 124  
 Mitzna, Amram, 99  
 Modai, Yitzhak, 65  
 Mofaz, Shaul, 51, 61, 97, 99  
 Moledet Party, 38, 191  
 Mordechai, Yitzhak, 61, 99  
 Morocco, 89  
 MT. Hebron (Settlement), 164  
 Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, 130

## N

National Community Relations Advisory  
 Council (NCRAC) (Later named Jewish  
 Council for Public Affairs), 200, 212  
 National Security Council (NSC) (Later  
 named National Security Staff (NSS)),  
 100, 105–108, 117, 228  
 Nazareth, 148  
 Negev, 95  
 Negroponte, John, 186  
 Netanyahu, Benjamin, 38, 49, 51, 59, 61,  
 63–64, 112, 117–118, 122, 148–150, 166,  
 181, 192–193, 214  
 Netherlands, 18  
 New Zealand, 208  
 Nisan, Mordechai, 161  
 Nokdim, 164  
 North America, 200, 205  
 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),  
 184  
 Noy Party, 50



## O

Olmert, Ehud, 51, 58, 61, 66, 68–69, 83, 117–119, 150, 192  
 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 79  
 Orlev, Zevulun, 51  
 Oron, Haim, 51  
 Oslo, 59, 65, 83, 126, 165, 173–174, 176, 195, 201

## P

Palestinian Authority (PA), 52, 214  
 Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), 65, 173  
 Paris, 89  
 Peres, Shimon, 49, 59, 62, 65, 67, 69, 99, 128, 147–148, 155, 158, 166, 177, 188, 195, 202, 212  
 Peretz, Amir, 38, 45, 51, 58, 61  
 Peretz, Yair, 51  
 Peri, Yoram, 83, 101, 111  
 Perle, Richard, 122  
 Petras, James, 188  
 Pipes, Daniel, 181  
 Poland, 189  
 Pollard, Jonathan, 190, 211  
 Porush, Meir, 51

## R

Rabin, Yitzhak, 38, 56, 59, 61, 63, 65, 68–69, 78, 83–84, 97–99, 111–112, 129, 148, 155, 166, 173–175, 193–194, 202, 213–214, 217, 219  
 Rabinovich, Itamar, 69  
 Rafael, Gideon, 224  
 Ramon, Haim, 195  
 Ravitz, Avraham, 51  
 Reagan, (Ronald), 184, 187, 189, 191  
 Reut Institute, 123  
 Rivlin, Reuven, 20

Road Map, 52  
 Russia, 45, 189, 218

## S

Sadat, Anwar, 78  
 Sager, Samuel, 105  
 Samaria, 158, 163, 165, 169, 173, 192  
 El-Sana, Talab, 51  
 Sarsur, Ibrahim, 51  
 Sasson Report, 170  
 Sassoon, Eliahu, 59  
 Saudi Arabia, 89  
 Savir, Uri, 195  
 Schneerson, Menachem Mendel, 144  
 Segal, Haggai, 164  
 Segev, Tom, 62, 206  
 Shahak, Israel, 103, 141–142  
 Shalom, Silvan, 51  
 Shamir, Yitzhak, 38, 62, 69, 126, 138, 147, 191–192, 211–212  
 Sharett, Moshe, 224  
 Sharon, Ariel, 38–39, 41, 46, 58–59, 61, 68–69, 83, 97–99, 117–118, 149, 151, 165, 167, 174, 188, 191–192, 213–214  
 Shas Party, 38, 44–45, 50, 52, 58, 134, 141–143, 145–146, 148, 150  
 Shiloah, Reuven, 224  
 Shinui Party, 38, 45, 50, 52  
 Shneerson, Menachem, 142  
 Shocken, Gershon, 182  
 Shomron (Settlement), 164  
 Shoval, Zalman, 192  
 Shteinman, Aharon, 143  
 Sinai, 151, 154–155, 157, 159, 220  
 Slomiansky, Nissan, 51, 164  
 Sneh, Efraim, 193  
 Soffer, Arnon, 118  
 Soviet Union, 79–80, 88–89, 182, 194, 217–218, 220  
 Suez, 93, 149  
 Suez War (1956), 183, 209  
 Sweid, Hana, 51  
 Syria, 89, 93, 118, 173, 196



## T

Taha, Wasil, 51  
 Tal, David, 51  
 Tal, Yisrael, 104  
 Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, 127  
 Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, 126  
 Tehiya Party, 169  
 Tel Aviv, 49, 99, 102, 123  
 Tel Aviv University, 120, 127–128  
 The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA), 129  
 The Guttman Center, 127, 136–137  
 The Institute for National Security Studies (Formerly named Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS)), 102, 106, 108, 119–120  
 The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), 121  
 The Institute of Urban and Regional Studies, 122  
 The Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), 37, 126–127, 137, 167  
 The Jewish-Arab Center, 130  
 The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, 124–125  
 The Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel, 129  
 The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 128  
 The National Security Studies Center (University of Haifa), 125  
 The Peres Center for Peace, 128  
 The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 125  
 Tibi, Ahmad, 51  
 Truman, Harry S., 124  
 Tunisia, 89  
 Turbovich, Yoram, 118  
 Turjeman, Shalom, 118  
 Turkey, 59, 92, 223

## U

United Arab Emirates, 89  
 United Arab List/ Ra'am-Ta'al Party, 50  
 United Israel Appeal (UIA), 200, 206  
 United Jewish Appeal (UJA), 200, 205–206, 212  
 United Jewish Communities (UJC), 199–200, 205–206  
 United Kingdom (UK)/ Britain, 93, 182–183, 203  
 United Nations (UN), 88, 124, 182, 186, 190, 194  
     - Security Council, 186  
 United States of America (US), 13–14, 27, 62, 69, 73, 79, 89, 92, 96, 119–120, 122, 124, 139, 144, 160, 167, 181–196, 199–214, 217–218, 223–224, 231  
     - Congress, 181, 188, 193, 202, 213–214  
 University of Haifa, 130

## V

Vietnam War, 183  
 Vilnai, Matan, 193

## W

Waldman, Eliezer, 164, 173  
 Walt, Stephen, 188, 199, 201  
 War of 1948, 46, 98, 209  
 War of 1967, 9, 46, 53, 69, 93, 97–98, 107, 111, 149–150, 153–155, 159, 183, 188, 209, 224, 231  
 War of 1973, 9, 69, 78, 86, 93, 98, 111, 149, 150, 158, 186, 209–210, 218, 220, 231  
 War of 1982, 69  
 War of 2006, 10, 107–108, 111, 119, 187, 203, 217, 219  
 War of Attrition 1968–1970, 14, 93, 217–219  
 Washington, 122, 173, 186, 190–191, 195, 201, 217, 224  
 Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), 201

Weisglass, Dov, 118  
 Weizman, Ezer, 61–62, 98–99  
 Weizmann, Chaim, 224  
 West Bank, 40, 46, 52, 56, 58, 83, 85, 92, 94,  
     101, 108, 111, 127, 154–156, 162–164,  
     166, 170, 173, 176, 188, 191–192, 203,  
     214, 230  
 Winograd Report/ Commission , 107, 219  
 World Bank, 35  
 World Jewish Congress (WJC), 206  
 World Trade Organization (WTO), 79  
 World War II, 183, 223  
 World Zionist Congress (WZC), 204  
 World Zionist Organization (WZO), 151–152,  
     156, 161, 204–205  
 Wurmser, David, 122  
 Wye River Accord/ Agreement, 149, 185,  
     193–194

## Y

Ya'acobi, Gad, 190  
 Ya'alon, Moshe, 102–103  
 Yadin, Yigael, 97–99  
 Yahalom, Shaul, 51  
 Yariv, Aharon, 11, 104  
 Yisrael Ba'aliyah Party, 45  
 Yisrael Beytenu/ Israel Our Homeland Party,  
     45, 50, 52, 164  
 Yitzhak Rabin Center, 129  
 Yoseph, Ovadia, 49, 141–143, 148, 151

## Z

Zahalka, Jamal, 51  
 Zandberg, Eliezer, 51  
 Ze'evi, Rehavam, 99  
 Zilberstein, Tal, 118  
 Zunes, Stephen, 185



# List of Publications for al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

## *First: Arabic Publications*

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18. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *al-Yawmiyyat al-Filastiniyyah li Sanat 2014* (The Palestine Daily Chronicle: Year 2014), 2015.
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### **Am I Not a Human? Series**

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23. Hasan Ibhaïs, Mariam Itani and Sami al-Salahat, *Mu'anat al-Mar'ah al-Filastiniyyah Tahta al-Ihtilal al-Israeli* (The Suffering of the Palestinian Women Under the Israeli Occupation), Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (2), 2008.

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68. Khaled Waleed Mahmoud, *Afaq al-Amn al-Israeli: Al-Waqi' wa al-Mustaqbal* (Prospects of the Israeli Security: Reality and the Future), 2007.
69. Hasan Ibhaïs and Wael Sa'ad, *al-Tatawurat al-Amniyyah fi al-Sultah al-Filastiniyyah 2006–2007* (Security Developments in the Palestinian Authority 2006–2007), The Security File of the Palestinian Authority (1), 2008.
70. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *Sira' al-Iradat: Al-Suluk al-Amni li Fatah wa Hamas wa al-Atraf al-Ma'niyyah 2006–2007* (Conflict of Wills Between Fatah and Hamas and Other Relevant Parties 2006–2007), The Security File of the Palestinian Authority (2), 2008.
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86. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *Dirasat fi al-Turath al-Thaqafi li Madinat al-Quds* (Studies on the Cultural Heritage of Jerusalem), 2010.
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98. Na'el Isma'il Ramadan, *Ahkam al-Asra fi Sujun al-Ihtilal al-Israeli: Dirasah Fiqhiyyah Muqaranah* (Islamic Rules Regarding Prisoners in the Israeli Jails: A Comparative Jurisprudence Study), 2012.
99. Hosni Mohamad Borini, *Marj al-Zuhur: Mahattah fi Tarikh al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi Filastin* (Marj al-Zuhur: A Key Event in the History of Islamic Movement in Palestine), 2012.
100. Ghassan Mohammad Duvar, *al-Mustawtinun al-Sahayinah fi al-Daffah al-Gharbiyyah: Al-I'tida' 'ala al-Ard wa al-Insan* (The Zionist Settlers in the West Bank: Aggression on Land & Man), 2012.
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102. Wael ElMabhouh, *al-Mu'aradah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakatal-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (Hamas) 1994–2006: Dirasah Tahliliyyah* (Opposition in the Political Thought of Hamas Movement 1994–2006: Analytical Study), 2012.

103. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *Azmat al-Mashru‘ al-Watani al-Filastini wa al-Afaq al-Muhtamalah* (The Crisis of the Palestinian National Project and Its Prospects), 2013.
104. Bilal Mohammad, editor, *Ila al-Muwajahah... Dhikrayat Dr. ‘Adnan Maswady ‘an al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin fi al-Daffah al-Gharbiyyah wa Ta’sis Hamas* (Towards Confrontation: Memoirs of Dr. Adnan Maswady Regarding the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank & the Founding of Hamas), 2013.
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108. ‘Abdullah ‘Ayyash, *Jaysh al-Tahrir al-Filastini wa Quwwat al-Tahrir al-Sha’biyyah wa Dawruhuma fi Muqawamat al-Ihtilal al-Isra’ili 1964–1973* (Palestinian Liberation Army & Popular Liberation Forces & Their Role in the Resistance to the Israeli Occupation 1964–1973), 2014.
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110. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (Hamas): Dirasat fi al-Fikr wa al-Tajrubah* (Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas): Studies of Thought and Experience), 2014, 2nd ed. 2015.
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Liberation Organization and the Palestinian National Council: Overview-Documents-Resolutions), 2007, 2nd ed. 2014.

112. Maher Ribhi Nimr 'Ubeid, *al-Bina' al-Tanzimi wa al-Fasa'ili li al-Asra al-Filastiniyyin fi Sijn al-Naqab* (The Organizational Structure of the Palestinian Prisoners in the Naqab (Negev) Prison), 2014.
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116. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *al-Sultah al-Wataniyyah al-Filastiniyyah: Dirasat fi al-Tajrubah wa al-Ada' 1994–2013* (The Palestinian National Authority: Studies of the Experience and Performance 1994–2013), 2015.
117. 'Ata Mohammad Zahra, *al-Barnamij al-Nawawi al-Irani* (Iranian Nuclear Program), 2015.
118. Basem al-Qasem, *Sawarikh al-Muqawamah fi Ghazzah: Silah al-Radi' al-Filastini* (Resistance Rockets in Gaza: A Palestinian Deterrent Weapon), 2015.
119. Raid Nairat and Sulaiman Bsharat, *al-Nizam al-Siyasi al-Filastini: Ishkaliyyat al-Islah wa Aliyyat al-Taf'il* (The Palestinian Political System: Reform Complexities and Activation Mechanisms), 2016.
120. Rami Mahmoud Khreis, *al-Khitab al-Sahafi al-Filastini Tijah al-Muqawamah al-Filastiniyyah: Dirasah Tahliliyyah wa Maydaniyyah Muqarinah* (Palestinian Media Discourse Towards the Palestinian Resistance: An Analytical and Comparative Field Study), 2016.

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  127. Rabi' Mohammad al-Dannan, *Misr bayna 'Ahdayn: Mursi wa al-Sisi: Dirasah Muqaranah, (5) al-Ada' al-I'lami* (Egypt Between Two Eras: Morsi and al-Sisi: A Comparative Study, (5) Media Performance), 2016.
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130. ‘Adnan Abu ‘Amer, *Manzumat al-Amn al-Israeli wa al-Thawrat al-‘Arabiyyah* (Israeli Security System and the Arab Uprisings), 2016.
131. Ashraf Othman Bader, *Israel wa Hamas: Jadaliyyat al-Tadafu’ wa al-Tawasul wa al-Tafawud 1987–2014* (Israel and Hamas: The Dialectic of Mutual Restraining, Communication, and Negotiations 1987–2014), 2016.
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134. Ahmed Khaled Alzatari, *al-‘Ilaqat al-Turkiyyah al-Israeliyyah 2002–2016* (Turkish-Israeli Relations 2002–2016), 2017.
135. Khaled Ibrahim Abu ‘Arafah, *Al-Muqawamah al-Filastiniyyah li al-Ihtilal al-Israeli fi bait al-Maqdis 1987–2015* (The Palestinian Resistance Against the Israeli Occupation of Jerusalem 1987–2015), 2017.
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137. Qutaiba Waleed Ghanim, *Al-Usuliyyah al-Diniyyah fi al-Jaish al-Israeli: al-Asbab wa al-Tada‘iyat ‘Ala “al-Dimuqratiyyah fi Israel” 1995–2014* (Religious Fundamentalism in the Israeli Army: Factors and Impacts on the Democracy in Israel 1995–2014), 2018.
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## ***Second: English Publications***

### **The Palestinian Strategic Report Series**

142. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh and Basheer M. Nafi, editors, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005*, 2007.
143. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006*, 2010.
144. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007*, 2010.
145. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008*, 2010.
146. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2009/10*, 2011.
147. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11*, 2012.
148. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*, 2013.
149. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013*, 2015.
150. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, 2016.
151. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, editor, *The Palestine Strategic Report 2016–2017*, 2018.





### **Am I Not a Human? Series**

152. Abbas Ismail, *The Israeli Racism: Palestinians in Israel: A Case Study*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (1), translated by Aladdin Assaiqeli, 2009.
153. Hasan Ibhais, Mariam Itani and Sami al-Salahat, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Woman Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (2), translated by Iman Itani, 2010.
154. Ahmed el-Helah and Mariam Itani, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Child Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (3), translated by Iman Itani, 2010.
155. Firas Abu Hilal, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Prisoners & Detainees Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (4), translated by Baraah Darazi, 2011.
156. Mariam Itani and Mo'in Manna', *The Suffering of the Palestinian Refugee*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (6), translated by Salma al-Houry, 2010.
157. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *The Suffering of Jerusalem and the Holy Sites Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (7), translated by Salma al-Houry (published in collaboration with al-Quds International Institution (QII)), 2012.
158. Hasan Ibhais and Khaled 'Ayed, *The Separation Wall in the West Bank*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (8), translated by Baraah Darazi, 2013.
159. Hayat Dada, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Student Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (9), translated by Salma al-Houry, 2017.
160. Mariam Itani, Amin Abu Wardeh and Waddah Eid, *The Suffering of the Palestinian Worker Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (10), translated by Salma al-Houry, 2014.
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162. Fatima Itani and Nitham 'Ataya, *The Suffering of Palestinian Environment and Farmer Under the Israeli Occupation*, Book Series: Am I Not a Human? (12), translated by Salma al-Houry, 2016.



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164. Muhammad Arif Zakaullah, *Religion and Politics in America: The Rise of Christian Evangelists and Their Impact*, 2007.
165. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh and Ziad al-Hasan, *The Political Views of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon as Reflected in May 2006*, 2009.
166. Ishtiaq Hossain and Mohsen Mohammad Saleh, *American Foreign Policy & the Muslim World*, 2009.
167. Ibrahim Ghushheh, *The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghushheh (Ex-Spokesman of Hamas)*, 2013.
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## This Book

This study is an attempt to understand the Israeli decision-making process, and to bridge the literature gap by relating domestic factors with decision-making and foreign policy.

It attempts to explain how elements and forces within the labyrinth of the Israeli society exert influence on the decision-making mechanism and on how foreign policy and national security decisions are made. This study expands on a number of external forces, or forces external to the decision-making process that are powerful enough to influence it. It discusses the influence of five forces; the military, the advisors, two religious groups, the relationship with the United States, and the relationship with the Jewish Diaspora.

This study attempts to take holistic approach to the decision-making process and avoid focusing its attention solely on decision-making in crisis situations.

## The Process of Israeli Decision Making: Mechanisms, Forces, and Influences



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