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The Process of National Security Decision-Making in Israel and the Influence of the Military Establishment

Dr. Mahmoud Muhareb

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Abstract

This study researches the decision-making process in national security matters in Israel; and examines the influence and role of the military establishment in this process. To achieve this purpose, the study begins with an overview of the political decision-making process in Israel, especially in what relates to national security, from the formal and legal perspective. It then discusses the role of the military establishment in formulating national security decisions and the nature of the establishment's relations with the civilian sector.

Introduction

There is no consensus on the definition of the concept of "National Security"; the definitions available are numerous and varied, with some reducing the notion of national security to its basic military aspects while others expand it to include all components of power in nations and states, including the economy, education, technological advancement, national unity, societal cohesion, and foreign relations.

The International Encyclopedia for the Social Sciences defines National Security as "the nation's ability to defend its domestic values against foreign threats".¹ Another definition formulated during the Second World War, later becoming conventional, offers a negativist definition of national security, stating that: "a nation feels secure when it is not forced to concede legitimate interests in order to avoid war, and when it is able to defend these interests through war, when necessary."²

¹ "National Security", in: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol.11, Macmillan,1968

² Walter Lippmann, *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic*, (Boston: Little, 1943), p. 5

In the Israeli context, a variety of definitions abound, some limiting the concept and others expanding it. For instance, in his book, *National Security: The Few Against The Many*, General Israel Tal defined it as follows: “it is the guarantor for the nation’s existence and the defense of its interests.”³ On the other hand, in his book, *War and Strategy*, General and Professor Yehoshavat Harkabi elaborates on national security, claiming that it includes the defense of the nation’s existence, independence, and regional integration; he also includes the defense of its citizens’ lives, the nature of its political system, its domestic security, its day-to-day security on the borders, its ideology, its demographic balance, and its stature in the world.⁴

National security occupies a prominent place in the Israeli mentality, trumping all other priorities. The military dimension of national security, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict, dominates their conception of national security. Israel exhibits specific characteristics setting it apart from other nations in its attitude towards national security, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Israel has waged more wars than any other state in the world, since its founding in 1948 and, until today, has changed, expanded, and altered its geographic boundaries with a rhythm that is unmatched in the modern age.
2. Since its founding, Israel has not viewed itself as a normal state like any other, in stature or in role, and has founded its national security on the premise that they must hold military superiority over all Arab countries, and remain the strongest regional state above all others, singly or grouped.

³ Yisrael Tal, *National Security: The Few Against the Many*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1996), p.15

⁴ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *War and Strategy*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1990), pp.529-536

3. Israel assumed – and continues to assume – the presence of a threat to its existence, even though this threat was never real at any stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict, despite its superiority in conventional weaponry and its monopoly of nuclear arms, with a nuclear arsenal placing it among the first nuclear powers after the United States and Russia.
4. Israel's spending on security has steadily increased after each war, to the point where the Israeli citizen's share of military spending is among the highest in the world.

In addition to financial expenditures, members of the Israeli society devote a sizeable amount of their time to security in a manner that is almost unparalleled by any other state in the world. Every Jewish Israeli performs a mandatory service in the army that, once he reaches 18 years, lasts for two and a half years according to the law; after completing the mandatory service, they must serve in the army for a month each year until reaching the age of 45. This means that the average Israeli serves in the army for over five years in their life, without counting conscriptions during periods of wars and crises. Additionally, as a soldier, or a reserve officer, the Israeli citizen submits to military courts in matters related to his service, whether during his effective service duty or the rest of the year. Reserve personnel require a special permit from their military unit if they wish to travel outside Israel, and they must be continually ready to rejoin the army on short notice. Once recalled to reserve duty during emergencies or war, they must immediately report to their military unit regardless of disruption to their civilian life.

5. Israel national security, especially regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, occupies the most prominent position in the media, and is the main variable affecting the morale of Israeli society and influencing the society's assessment of the performance of the Israeli government. It constitutes the most influential criteria in formulating the public's view of this or that party. Under such conditions, it is not surprising for the Israeli Army to occupy the prime position in Israeli society, surpassing any other institution in Israel, and sporting a high value in the eyes of its society that is not exceeded, or even approached, by any other society's stance towards its army.

Neither the Israeli government nor the Knesset publishes papers on the process of national security decision-making. The only two official reports discussing the formulation of Israeli national security decisions came following Israel's failure at war, and after an internal struggle flared among the elite regarding who should carry the burden of failure. These reports were the work of the "Agranat Commission," formed to investigate the "shortcomings" of the October

War in 1973, and the “Winograd Commission,” formed following Israel’s failure in the Second War of Lebanon in 2006.

Despite the importance of the decision-making process in Israel, especially in what relates to national security, research on the topic in the first two decades following the establishment of Israel remained quasi-absent. The rare publications that dealt with the topic in that period, like the study of Yehezkel Dror and Benjamin Akzin, were effectuated from the perspective of government policy planning, its performance, and the necessity to improve it; the authors realized early-on that an institutionalized, organized methodology was absent from the decision-making process.⁵

In his 1984 book, Zvi Lanir considers the theme of decision-making in national security to be one of the most understudied topics in Israeli research during the first three decades of the state.⁶ Yehuda Ben Meir refers this negligence to the fact that national security in Israel is attached, more than in any other country, to military considerations and decisions which are – by nature – shrouded in secrecy that is deeply rooted in the values and culture of Israeli society, and protected with legal sanctions in case this secrecy was breached.⁷

The Israeli Political System and the process of Making National Security Decisions

The Israeli political system was influenced by the British Parliamentary model; however, it was not founded upon old traditions or established immune customs, as is the case in Great Britain,

⁵ Benjamin Akzin and Yehezkel Dror, *National Planning in Israel*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Hamedrasha Lemenhal, 1966)

⁶ Zvi Lanir, *Israeli Security Planning in the 1980's* (New York: Praeger, 1984), p. v.

⁷ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National-Security Decision-Making*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1987), p.12

nor did it rely on a written constitution, as in the United States. Still today, there is no constitution in Israel. Israel has substituted for the constitution by enacting a series of basic laws that regulate the functions of the various powers and institutions of the Israeli state; these laws were successively promulgated by the Israeli Knesset.

The Israeli political system is also characterized by a multitude of political parties and the inability of a single party to gain a majority in the Knesset since the founding of Israel and until today. This has to do with the nature of the Zionist settler and immigrant society that was founded in Palestine, and also to Israel's adoption of proportional representation and a low electoral threshold. This opened up the possibility for an array of small and mid-sized parties to obtain representation in the Knesset, which has led to all governments formed in Israel, since its founding, to be composed of multi-party coalitions.

In 1968, the Knesset legislated the Basic Law of the government, which states that the Israeli government, composed of the prime minister, as well as other ministers,⁸ is the executive authority of the state, and carries out its tasks after the Knesset approves the proposed action. The legal stature of the prime minister in the first three decades to Israel's founding was that of a first among equals, with the only legal distinction from other ministers was that the prime minister's resignation would lead to the dissolution of the whole cabinet, imposing the formation of a new government or holding new elections. Until 1981, threatening ministers who disagreed with their policies with resignation and reconstituting a new cabinet without them, or going to early elections, was the weapon employed by prime ministers.

⁸ "Book of Laws 540" (Sefer Ha-Hukim 540), 1968, p. 226

In 1981, an important change occurred in the attributes and stature of the prime minister, with the Knesset amending the basic law of the government. The amendment gave the prime minister the powers to dismiss cabinet ministers, affirming that “the minister is responsible towards the prime minister in the tasks delegated to the minister.”⁹ These measures greatly enhanced the potency of the prime minister. This amendment greatly strengthened the position of the prime minister.

The Basic Law of the government does not contain clear indications regarding the process of national security decision-making; rather, a single article of this law indirectly touches on this point by stating that “it is among the government’s attributes to work, with the aid of permanent or temporary ministerial commissions, on different issues.”¹⁰ In order to understand the decision-making process from an official and juridical angle, one needs to understand the institutions that – to varying degrees – contribute to this process, aiding the government and the prime minister in performing their role in national security decision-making.

The Ministers Committee on Security Affairs

This Committee, first founded in 1953, was originally called “the Ministers Committee for Foreign Affairs and Security,” remaining marginal and secondary in the decision-making process for many years. At the time, then prime minister and defense minister, Ben-Gurion insisted that security issues were not to be placed on its agenda. To further its marginalization, Ben-Gurion abstained from attending its meetings, except for a few months in 1955. Additionally, the role, and importance of this committee changed in 1961, when Ben-Gurion submitted to pressures

⁹ “Book of Laws 1026” (Sefer Ha-Hukim 1026), 1981, p. 280

¹⁰ *Ibid*

from the Achdut Havoda party and founded “the Ministers Committee for Security Affairs”, as well as when Levi Eshkol became prime minister and the minister of defense in June 1963.¹¹

The Ministers Committee for Security Affairs did not occupy a steady position in the decision-making process. Its composition and the rhythms of its sessions and the subjects it treats and its role in national security decision-making changed from period to period and from one prime minister to another. For example, Prime Minister Menachem Begin did not form a ministers committee for security affairs after his victory in the 1981 elections until six months after the formation of his cabinet; importantly, not a single session was held by the committee during the First Lebanon War in 1982. Moreover, Yitzhak Shamir did not form a committee for security affairs throughout his first government’s tenure, which was formed in 1983 and lasted for about a year.¹²

In 1992, the Knesset voted on a new law that was mainly based on the customs adopted in the work of this committee. This new law defined the functions of the committee and the sphere of its action and its permanent members. The law stated that the prime minister heads the committee, which is composed of the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, finance, internal security, justice, and others. The law did not specify the number of the committee’s members and the prime minister usually appoints the ministers not mentioned in the law according to the considerations of his cabinet coalition.¹³

¹¹ Michael Breacher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 213

¹² Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-making*, p. 121

¹³ Aviezer Yaari, *Civil Control of the IDF*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004), p.23

The Office of the Prime Minister

The Office of the prime minister coordinates the work of the government and is staffed by a number of officials who contribute, in varying degrees, to the decision-making processes. At the head of the Office is the director general who is in charge of administrative affairs and the institutions affiliated with the Office. The director general of the office of the prime minister has an influence over decision-making by virtue of him heading various ministerial committees and chairing several work groups. The degree of his participation in decision making relates to the personality of the general director and his relationship with the prime minister. There were director generals who played important roles in decision-making and acted as de facto national security advisors, such as Ya`cov Herzog with Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, and Mordechai Gazit with Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin, and Elyahu Ben-Elissar with Menachim Begin.¹⁴

MILITARY SECRETARY TO THE PRIME MINISTER

The military secretary is the link between the prime minister and the security establishment, attending all of the prime minister's meetings with military and security officials, including sessions with the heads of Shabak and Mossad. Secret and top-secret material sent from any source to the prime minister passes through the hands of the military secretary. Notably, the position is usually filled by an officer in the army, ranging in rank between a major and a general. The secretary's influence and participation in national security decision-making depends on their personality, ranking and the nature of their relationship with the prime minister. This post was occupied by officers who sometimes had an outstanding relationship with the prime

¹⁴ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, p.123

minister, becoming the keepers of secret and men of confidence for their prime minister, such as Nehemiah Argov, who worked with Ben-Gurion, and Yisrael Lior with Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, while, conversely, Menachem Begin's military secretary had little influence over him.¹⁵

Cabinet Secretary

Upon recommendation from its chair, the cabinet appoints a secretary, who heads a small secretariat that is mainly composed of administrative staff, and, then, defines their function. The degree of the secretary's participation in decision making and his influence over them vary from cabinet secretary to another, and from one prime minister to another, depending on the nature of the relationship between the two people prime minister.¹⁶

The prime minister's office is host to a variety of temporary job posts, such as the political and the media advisors to the prime minister; it is noteworthy that these posts in the prime minister's office lack a committee, or institution, with a specialized staff that can provide essential material, such as data, analysis, proposals, and other necessary alternatives, to formulate decisions in a methodic and organized manner. Instead, each ministry or administration formulates its proposals and presents them directly to the prime minister's desk, where there is no staff to study and analyze the proposals in an organized and methodic way – especially when there are topics and decisions related to national security. In an attempt to fill this void, after repeated calls from the political elite, the National Security Council was established in the Office of the Prime Minister in 1999.

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 121

The National Security Council

The National Security Council was established by Netanyahu's first government in 1999 as an institution that is affiliated with the Office of the Prime Minister. The Council was founded as an authority that prepares consultations, information, and analyses, on issues relating to national security, to present to the prime minister and the government. The Council derives its power from the cabinet, acting under direct instructions from the prime minister, with the chair of the Council being directly dependent on the prime minister, acting as the prime minister's adviser in national security affairs.¹⁷

The Stature and Role of the Prime Minister

The government in Israel is the center of power in the political system, within which official and legal decisions are made. The prime minister is endowed with important powers, making the Israeli government into a prime minister's cabinet.¹⁸ The prime minister's influence emanates from the following factors:

1. They are the head of his party, and his party position often fortifies his standing in the government.
2. They head the government, chairing its sessions and setting its agenda.
3. Their resignation leads to the dissolution of the cabinet.
4. Since 1981, they have been capable of dismissing any cabinet minister.
5. Important decisions are usually made in a circle surrounding the prime minister.
6. Their functions and powers include the direct responsibility over two extremely important security organs: the Mossad (Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations) and the Shabak (Israel Security Agency)
7. They are directly in charge of the nuclear program (and heads the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission), as well as that of chemical and biological weapons, along with their various institutions and products

¹⁷ Aviezer Yaari, *Whom Does the Council Advise?* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006) p.22

¹⁸ Asher Arian, *Politics and Government in Israel*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Zmora, Bitan, 1985), p.265

8. It is true that the defense minister is responsible for the Ministry of Defense, representing the authority of the government over the army, but it is within the prime minister's prerogatives to call the chief of staff and the head of Israeli military intelligence (*A'man*) for consultations, with the knowledge of the defense minister.

In addition to the prime minister post, states usually have two important posts to create a balance when making national security decisions, the defense minister and the minister of foreign affairs. However, in Israel, the Foreign Ministry does not occupy a significant role in national security decision-making. In fact, Israel's foreign relations are dependent on the security institution and its considerations. "The mainstream notion of foreign relations among the elite and public opinion in Israel is basically one of power, giving primacy to strategic considerations over diplomatic ones. Violence is considered as a legitimate tool in relations among nations."¹⁹

In the first two decades of the state of Israel, this triad, which traditionally affects the policies of countries in national security affairs, did not exist. From 1948 until the 1967 war, Israel's prime minister occupied either the defense or foreign affairs ministry. Throughout his tenure, David Ben-Gurion was also defense minister, and in the two years of Ben-Gurion's resignation from his place as prime minister; Moshe Sharett was prime minister and minister of foreign affairs in 1954 and 1955. When Levi Eshkol succeeded Ben-Gurion as prime minister in 1963, he followed his predecessor's example, assuming the defense ministry until the eruption of the June 1967 war, when he was pressured, mainly by army generals, to resign from that post in favor of retired General and ex-Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan.²⁰

¹⁹ Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Trouble in the Utopia*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1990), p.256

²⁰ Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 249 – 251

THE ESHKOL-DAYAN AGREEMENT

Eshkol's forced resignation from the Ministry of Defense in favor of Moshe Dayan created a new situation in which the prime minister was not acting as defense minister. This scenario had occurred only once before, when Pinhas Lavon took over the defense portfolio for a short period in Moshe Sharett's 1954 cabinet, following Ben-Gurion's temporary abstention from official power. Lavon's tenure witnessed an intense struggle between the military and security establishment, on the one hand, and Lavon and Sharett on the other. The security and military establishment not only refused to cooperate with Lavon, as well as the prime minister, but went as far as executing operations and activities without their knowledge. The most notorious breakdown between all parties became known as "the Unfortunate Affair" or "the Lavon Affair," when Israeli military intelligence, under orders from the military and security establishment, executed a series of acts of sabotage in Egypt against Egyptian citizens and Western interests with the purpose of disrupting Egypt's relations with Western states. Neither Lavon nor Sharett had authorized these activities.

This new development led to the creation of a working formula between Prime Minister Eshkol, who was viewed by the military establishment as fickle and weak, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, who headed the general staff of the Israeli Army during the Lavon Affair, and was known for his political ambition and a drive to affect national security decisions in Israel. Indeed, Eshkol and Dayan reached an agreement on the eve of the 1967 war, defining the decisions and tasks that the defense minister cannot execute without the approval of the prime minister. These areas that needed the prime minister's approval include:

- First:** Waging of war against any state
- Second:** Embarking on military operations
- Third:** Starting military operations against any country that has not yet entered the war
- Fourth:** Bombing major enemy cities, unless the same enemy had bombed Israeli cities
- Fifth:** Launching retaliatory strikes in the wake of enemy action

In addition, the accord stated that the prime minister can call to meeting the chief of staff, as well as the head of military intelligence, the director-general of the Ministry of Defense, and the deputy defense minister, in order to demand information and assessments of the situation.²¹

Within days of the agreement, Moshe Dayan ordered the northern front commander, General David Ben Eleazar, to invade the Syrian Golan Heights, without receiving permission from the head of the government, Levi Eshkol, an obvious breach of the accord.²²

After the end of the war, Minister Yisrael Galili, along with the military secretaries of the prime minister and the defense minister, put forward a joint document coordinating prerogatives between the prime minister and the defense minister. The document was named “*Constitutcia*,” or “constitution,” and was formally adopted by Prime Minister Eshkol; ever since, each incumbent cabinet has re-approved this document. The “constitution” specified three levels for the Israeli Army military operations, with varying degrees of clearance from the political leadership. They are as follows:

²¹ Moshe Dayan, Avni Darech, *Autobiography*, (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Idanim, 1976) pp.422- 423. See also Aviezer Yaari, *Civil Control of the IDF*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004), p.16

²² Yoram Peri, “Patterns of the IDF’s Relations with the Political Establishment”, in Joseph Alpher, ed., *A War of Choice*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1985), p.43

First Level Operations: These include instances where the defense minister can authorize actions on his own, such as responding to enemy fire or intercepting an aircraft penetrating Israeli airspace.

Second Level Operations: These relate to military operations commanded by the defense minister with the knowledge of the prime minister, such as pursuing an aircraft that entered Israeli airspace and returned to within its state borders.

Third Level Operations: These operations are ordered by the defense minister only after receiving the approval of the prime minister, such as launching offensive operations behind enemy lines.²³

In the Israeli system, there is no post named “Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces”; therefore, despite the “constitution” document, and the “Eshkol-Dayan Accord,” the relationship between the prime minister, the defense minister, and the army chief-of-staff have remained uncertain. Following the 1973 War, the Agranat Commission was formed to investigate the “shortcomings” exhibited during the war. The Commission’s report affirmed the lack of delimitation between the functions of these three positions, recommending that the relationships between and the responsibilities of each be defined by law.

THE BASIC LAW OF THE ARMY

Following the recommendations of the Agranat Commission, in 1976, the Knesset enacted the Basic Law of the Army. Nonetheless, this law did not clearly distribute powers between the prime minister and the defense minister and the chief-of-staff, leaving a wide margin for interpretation. The Basic Law of the Army was brief, consisting of six concise articles, totaling only 81 words.

²³ Aviezer Yaari, *Civil Control of the IDF*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2004), p.17

The Law affirms that the Israeli Army is the army of the state, submitting to the authority of the government, and that the defense minister acts as the army minister appointed by the government, and that the army chief-of-staff is the highest ranking official and is under the authority of the government, subordinate to the defense minister.²⁴

DEFENSE MINISTER AND CHIEF OF STAFF

The defense minister in Israel represents an important link between the civil and military societies. He is appointed by the government as a minister over the army, therefore, he officially represents the authority of the government, and the chief-of-staff is officially subordinated to him. Nevertheless, several important questions surrounding the performance of the minister's duties are left unanswered. The defense minister is not a chief-of-staff of the armed forces, for no such position exists in Israel; instead, the chief-of-staff submits to the collective authority of the government. Despite the fact that the defense minister is appointed by the government over the army, it is unclear – in the text of the law – what fields and decisions need the permission of the cabinet, and which can be decided by the defense minister without consulting with the cabinet.

On the other hand, the Basic Law of the Army does not clarify the extent to which the defense minister can interfere in the decisions of the chief-of-staff, or object to them, and which military decisions require the chief-of-staff to obtain the minister's approval, and which can be carried out with the chief-of-staff independently. The "subordination" of the chief-of-staff to the defense minister represents a hierarchical ranking, without an agreement over the interpretation of this

²⁴ "Book of Laws 806", 1976, p.126

concept when applied in the terrain of reality.²⁵ There are three definitions, which offer three levels defining the concept of “subordination”, which need to be discussed in order to grasp the complex relationship between the defense minister and the chief-of-staff: absolute subordination, strategic subordination, and relative subordination.

ABSOLUTE SUBORDINATION

The holders of this interpretation view the defense minister’s authority towards the chief-of-staff – in degree and scope – to be exactly similar to that of the government, unless the government decides otherwise. This implies that the defense minister has the authority to interfere and issue orders to the chief-of-staff at will; when a disagreement arises between the defense minister and the cabinet, the cabinet’s opinion trumps that of the minister. Those who adhere to this notion – primarily university professors who specialize in constitutional law – argue that the defense minister is appointed by the government, and, therefore, possesses its authority, unless there is a difference of opinion between him and the government. They also hold that the Basic Law of the Army states that the chief-of-staff is “the highest level of leadership in the army” and not “over the army”; in contrast, the defense minister symbolizes and reflects the civil-political authority over the army establishment.²⁶

²⁵ Shmuel Even and Zvia Gross, “Proposed Legislation on the IDF”, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: The Institute for National Security Studies, 2008), p.13

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp13-14

STRATEGIC SUBORDINATION

The advocates of this position, mostly high-ranking officers and the security establishment, argue that the chief-of-staff's subordination to the defense minister is a specific one limited to strategic matters. For instance, the defense minister can issue an order to the top general to launch a military operation in order to free hostages, but cannot interfere in the actual military plan leading to the hostages' liberation. Those who promote this view say that it does justice to the word of the law naming the chief-of-staff as the highest official within the army. They also add that the defense minister is often a retired general or a former chief-of-staff, which raises fears that these two positions are interchangeable and transgress upon the post and role of the army chief.²⁷

RELATIVE SUBORDINATION

The proponents of this concept distinguish between the subordination of the chief-of-staff to the defense minister in strategic matters, which is an absolute subordination, in tactical matters, and military operations, where the defense minister plays a specific role in which they can approve or object to the plans of the chief-of-staff; they don't, however, have the right to draw plans or impose their opinion upon the chief-of-staff in that field.

Accordingly, the defense minister would have the right not only to order a military operation to free hostages, but also examine the operational military plan, and approve or reject it. If the minister rejects the plan suggested by the chief-of-staff, the latter will have to prepare an alternative plan and present it to the minister for approval. The mission cannot be carried out

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.14

until it receives the defense minister's approval. However, the defense minister is not allowed, under any conditions, to impose a plan upon the chief-of-staff, or to modify a plan proposed by him. The defense minister can present a recommendation to the chief-of-staff to effect changes to the plan of the chief-of-staff, but such a recommendation would not be mandatory as far as the army chief is concerned.

It appears that most defense ministers with a military background, which includes most previous ministers – as indeed most were former generals or chiefs-of-staff – acted according to this concept, not being content to simply approve or reject the army chief's plans, or express opinions regarding military operations; many have tried to veil such opinions with friendly rhetoric, such as *"I shall not tell you what to do on the operational front, but if I were you I would do so and so."*²⁸

When appointing high-ranking officers, the chief-of-staff must put any suggestions, from colonels and higher, forward for the defense minister's approval, with the minister allowed to reject the appointment, but without the right to suggest an alternative candidate. On the other hand, if the defense minister wishes to dismiss a high-ranking officer, he is required to garner for the chief-of-staff's approval, and the minister does not have the power to force the chief-of-staff to fire an officer.²⁹

The Basic Law does not address the capacities of the chief-of-staff, nor their responsibilities towards superiors and subordinates; the chief-of-staff is subordinate to the government as a "collective," as the Basic Law does not mention the prime minister. Neither

²⁸ *Ibid*, pp14-15

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 15

does it delimit the roles of the prime minister, the defense minister and the chief-of-staff, which leads to ambiguity regarding the responsibilities and rights of the chief-of-staff, permitting them to expand their authority; it also allows the chief-of-staff to interpret their subordination to the defense minister and the government, as they like, especially when no clear established policy exists, or when the chief-of-staff does not receive clear instructions from the defense minister.

There are other factors reinforcing the post of the chief-of-staff, as it is not only the civilian leadership who depend on the chief; the army generals and the top officers also rely on them since their promotions into high ranks and positions is dependent upon the chief's decision. Usually, the chief-of-staff succeeds in formulating a general perspective on security matters born out of a consensus within the ranks of the staff, and proposes this vision to the government. In case such a consensus was not possible, the chief is theoretically capable of ordering generals not to disagree with him in front of the civilian government, while attending cabinet meetings and when asked to provide their opinions on a specific security issue. This state of affairs could lead to the government adopting important decisions based on the sole opinion of the chief-of-staff of the army, without hearing opposing viewpoints from other generals, even if these views represented the majority. Such a scenario is generally unlikely, but it has occurred in the past.³⁰

War Decisions and Military Operations

The Israeli government is the only body permitted to take the decision to go to war. The Basic Law of the Government clearly states that “the state does not declare war except with a decision from the government.” The government is required to inform the Knesset Foreign Affairs and

³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 16

Security committees of its decision as soon as possible. The prime minister must also notify the Knesset with a speech from the Parliament's floor.³¹

The Army's Relationship with the Political Leadership

David Ben-Gurion, the prime minister and defense minister who had a most important and effective role in building and developing the Israeli Army, defined the status of the army and its relationship with the political leadership as follows: "The army does not decide on matters of policies, the regime, laws, or the government's role in the state. As a matter of course, the army cannot even decide on its structure, regulations, and fields of action. The army does not decide on matter of war and peace. The army is the executive arm of the Israeli Government; it is the arm of defense and security. The regime of the state, the political strategies domestically and internationally, declaring war and making peace, organizing the army and shaping its image, all of these tasks fall under the civilian authorities alone: the government, the Knesset, and the voters. The government is responsible for the demarche of the army towards the elected representatives of the people in the Knesset, and the army is subordinated to the government in all matters, and is a mere executor of the political line and the orders it receives from the legislative and executive establishments: the Knesset and the government."³²

This quote from Ben-Gurion, taken from a letter to the Israel Defense Force Chief of Staff Yigael Yadin, written on October 27, 1949, has been ceaselessly reiterated and stressed within army circles, in officers' training, the Command and Staff College, and the National

³¹ *Ibid*

³² David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destiny; Issues on Israel's Security*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, Maarachot, 1971), p.82

Security College whenever the relationship between the army and the political leadership is brought up.³³

This vision, expressed by Ben-Gurion, adopts a “functional model” for the relationship between the army and the political leadership. In other words, the army is a tool that executes government policy, submitting itself to the political leadership and to effective political monitoring, and is completely isolated from the political party establishment. According to this model, the political leadership sets the goals, and the army must implement them. This model also assumes that the political leadership determines the line separating the goals from the means to achieving them.

Amos Perlmutter was among the first and most notable of authors who discussed the “functional model” and defended it in the 1960s. Perlmutter drew a rosy picture of the relationship between the Israeli Army and the political leadership. He assumed that there is a civic culture in Israel, and that this culture, along with the maturity and strength of political structures, especially political parties and the Histadrut, and the quick rotation in the army leadership, and the army’s dependence on reserves – who constitute the largest proportion in its ranks – and the increase in the professionalization of the regular army, and the adoption of the same ideology by both the army and society, and the overlap between the army’s objectives and

³³ Yoram Peri, “The IDF in Israeli Politics”, in Pinhas Yeheskeally, ed., *Civil Military Relations* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2005), p.76

those of the society on the national and political levels; all of these factors prevent the army from interfering in politics and minimize to nil the possibility of a military coup in Israel.³⁴

THE “ARMED PEOPLE’S” MODEL

Since Harold Laswell developed the concept of “The Garrison State” in 1941,³⁵ a number of researchers questioned the relationship between the army, on the one hand, and the civil sector and the political leadership, on the other, especially in countries that are in a state of war and where national security occupies the top priority. The basic idea that was developed by Laswell argues that the existence of a nation in a continued state of war and tension with national security being the top priority, leads to the spread of military values and their rooting in society, as well as to the capture of authority by the experts of violence (i.e., the army). Political Science professors Dan Horowitz and Moshe Litsak deny that Israel fits the “fortress state” model, offering an alternative model that distinguishes civil-military relations in a state where the participation of citizens in the military effort is at its maximum. It is the model of “the armed people” (‘Am Ha-mosh) or “the people in garbs” (‘Am Bi-madim). The concept of the “armed people” rests on the notion that Israel is in a constant state of warfare; once a war ends, Israel is relegated to the state of latent war, which contains all the elements of a veritable war that could erupt in any day. Therefore, the people should always be prepared for war, and the best methods should be sought to recruit the entire people. The Army Service Law, which was passed by the

³⁴ Amos Perlmutter, “The Israeli Army in Politics: the Persistence of the Civilian Over the Military,” *World Politics*, Vol. xx (4), July 1968.

³⁵ Harold, D. Lasswell, “The Garrison State”, *American Journal of Sociology*, 46 (1941), pp. 455-468

Knesset in August 1949, represents this view because the purpose of the law is to prepare the entire populace to be a fighting people when needed.

Horowitz and Litsak note that the “armed people” model supposes a relationship between the army and the civilian sector that is more open and varied than in the “fortress state” model. The reason is that in the “armed people” model, the missions of the army expand and intersect with civilian missions, leading to the creation of a balance between the “civilizing the army” phenomenon, on one hand, and “the militarized society,” on the other.³⁶ This model, say Horowitz and Litsak, has allowed the army to interfere to a large extent in formulating Israel national security policy. This interference involves the following issues:

1. Professional advice that is offered by the chief-of-staff, and other high-ranking officers, in meetings of the cabinet and the ministers’ committee for security affairs;
2. The national assessment, which is presented by the Israeli Army military intelligence regarding war and threats of its emergence;
3. The participation of high-ranking officers in negotiations and contacts with Arab states;
4. Military rule, which is imposed over occupied Palestinian territories since 1967, allows for army interference in various civilian matters in the Palestinian territories;
5. The offensive Israeli military doctrine affects political decisions;
6. Ambiguous laws that separate civilian and military rights, especially between the chief-of-staff, the defense minister, and the prime minister, which creates a suitable climate to increase the chief-of-staff’s leverage over government decisions;
7. The formal and informal network linking the leadership of the army and the political leadership has turned into a “lobby group” as far as national security is concerned because the leadership of the Israeli Army, on the eve of the 1967 war, not only offered counsel, but used its political links to “convince the politicians with the need to wage the war.”³⁷

³⁶ Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Trouble in the Utopia*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, Am Oved, 1990), p. 252

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp 252-256

THE BEGINNINGS OF CHANGE

The “functional model” approach remained mainstream and dominant among researchers until the first half of the 1980s, when a number of factors emerged to challenge and degrade the “functional model,” even among some of its early supporters. These factors could be summed up as follows:

1. The Israeli Army’s failure in the 1973 war and the “shortcomings” that accompanied it opened a heated debate and conflict between members of the civilian administration and others from the military ranks, over who should bear responsibility for the failure. This rhetoric on “shortcomings” also flared, simultaneously, a struggle between Israeli Army generals over which group of them was responsible for the failure and the “shortcomings”. The failure itself and the struggle between political and military elites over who should bear its responsibility, resulted in the fading of the halo surrounding the army, and weakened the argument claiming that the generals do not interfere in politics.
2. The Agranat Commission report exposed a problem of separation of powers between the civil and military leaderships, especially in the relationship between the minister of defense and the chief-of-staff. The Agranat Commission report stated that “the lack in determining powers, widespread in the present situation in the security field, which is not surpassed by anything in importance, weighs over the efficiency of operations, and degrades the focus of legal responsibility, and causes uncertainty and confusion among the public as well.”³⁸

In its report, the Commission pointed out the importance of the government and the Knesset fixing this flaw; it also criticized the government’s sole reliance on military intelligence to assess the political-security situation and estimate the possibility of war, stressing the necessity of resolving this issue.

3. The combination of the fall of the Labor Party in the 1977 Knesset elections and the ascension of the Likud Party, for the first time in the history of Israel, ended the Labor government’s monopoly over the appointment of minister of defense and prime minister, thus ending the monopoly over the appointment of the chief-of-staff and high ranking officers, who used to be chosen from among Labor party favorites. In turn, this led to the

³⁸ Amir Bar-Or, “Stages in the Development of Government- Army Relations in Israel”, in Pinhas Yehzekally, ed., *Civil Military Relations*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2005), p.105

ascension of pro-Likud and rightist military figures to the highest ranks in the army, which caused tremors among the traditionally close relations between the Labor party members and the army leadership, with Labor leaders becoming more interested in the relationship between the military and civil sectors.

4. The first Lebanon war, which was launched by Sharon and Begin, caused the first split in public opinion over the war and its objectives in Israel's history, posing questions during and after the war on the nature of the relationship between the political and military levels and the extent of the control of the political leadership over the army. The aforementioned factors prodded leaders and researchers from security and political institutions to question the national security decision-making process, as well as the role and influence of the military establishment in the process, especially in the absence of a civil body or institution that is independent from the army that assesses national security. In this context, General Israel Tal affirmed that "the responsibility for national security falls on the shoulders of the governments," explaining that "evaluating the state of the nation is a political, not a military, matter," adding that "in order to empower governments to exercise their national security responsibilities competently, they need to rely on bodies that track the evolution of events and their paths in an organized manner, analyzing and assessing them methodologically"; thereafter, this general assessment of the situation is presented to the decision makers. General Tal stressed that "these bodies cannot be affiliated with the army or any other institution. They should be independent and take into account all the postures of the official organizations and their assessments and viewpoints when presenting the national assessment to the government."³⁹

The scholar Amos Perlmutter, who revisited the topic in 1985, noted that the Israeli Army may be the sole example in the world of an army that controls – incontestably – the entire spectrum of strategic and tactical issues related to national security. Perlmutter said that the military intelligence (A'man), the various planning bodies in the army, and chief-of-staff formulate the theory of Israeli national security, which greatly contributes to the process of national security decision-making; only in exceptional cases do civilian officials seriously affect decisions relating to national security.⁴⁰

³⁹ Israel Tal, "National Security", *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 27, (Spring, 1983), pp. 13-14

⁴⁰ Amos Perlmutter, "The Dynamics of Israeli National Security Decision-making", In: Robert J. Art, et al., *Reorganizing America's Defense: Leadership in War and Peace*, Pergamon, 1985, p.131

Another view is that of Aharon Yariv, who occupied the chief position in the army military intelligence between 1964 and 1971. In a 1985 article, Yariv argued that the Israeli Army alone has the institutional capacity to develop a national security strategy, affirming that all the ministers in the cabinet, including the defense minister, rely on the army in such matters. Yariv concluded that the army position carries – for these reasons – a strong influence in national security matters.⁴¹

A 1984 study by the National Security College, affiliated with the Israeli Army, found that national security decision-making process is tarnished by major issues, notably: the lack of comprehensive national planning, the treatment of each issue separately, the failure to define the objectives of national security and its policy, and the inability to re-examine and update the main premises after every major phase. The study sought to assess the Israeli prime minister's access to the necessary tools to secure an optimal national security decision-making process. It noted two main points: firstly, the absence of an organization that is independent from the army that offers decision makers data, information, analysis, and suggestions; secondly, the dominance of the military establishment in decision-making in the field of national security.⁴²

Another study conducted by Yehuda Ben Meir, found, based on interviews with thirteen high officials in the country's political and security institutions, that a these officials were in consensus over the Israeli government's lack of independent organized planning in national

⁴¹ Aharon Yariv, "Military Organization and Policymaking in Israel", in: Robert J, Art, et al, *ibid*, p. 128

⁴² Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, pp 89-90

security due to the absence of an independent body, and the hegemonic role of the army in national security decision-making.⁴³

THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

A number of political scientists and sociologists emerged in the mid-1980s questioning the functional model used to describe the Israeli Army, viewing the army as a tool that executes government policy and is subordinate to the civil-political leadership, completely separate from politics. Notable among those was Yoram Peri, a political science professor at Tel Aviv University, who developed the partnership model between the political and military institutions in national security decision-making, concluding that the military establishment has the greater influence within this partnership.⁴⁴ Peri mentions that the army counsels the government on issues related to security, in addition to its conventional function in executing its policies. However, if the army trespasses into other domains, such as defending the policies of the government with the public, or interfering directly in political issues, it would cease to be a professional army. Peri claims that a closer look at the army and its functioning would lead us to conclude that it defends the government policies and interferes in politics. Furthermore, Peri maintains that the army interferes not only in planning for national security and the security aspects, but also in foreign policies. The inseparable link between Israeli security policies and Israeli foreign policies has given the army a say in Israel's foreign relations. Therefore, Israel's foreign policy supports and defends Israel's security policy rather than being a partner in

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 103

⁴⁴ Yoram Peri, "Patterns of the IDF's Relations with the Political Establishment", in Joseph Alpher, ed., *A War of Choice*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1985), p.37

policymaking. This was expressed by Shimon Peres who said that “small states have no foreign policy, they have a security policy.”⁴⁵

Yoram Peri claims that the influence of the Israeli Army in planning foreign policy and security is not merely a result of Israel’s constant state of conflict; rather, it is mainly the result of a calculated policy devised by Ben-Gurion. Ben-Gurion adamantly sought to separate the field of security from the Israeli party system, its values, and the rules of the political game. He was intent that security decision-making would in no way resemble the political party process, which is dominated by concessions, compromises, and majority rule. Ben-Gurion was not content to professionalize the security services; he also decided to remove all security related documents from the hands of politicians, placing authority in security affairs in his hands and those of the army, which was naturally close to him and his ruling Mapai party. Thus, Ben-Gurion isolated the security from the politicians, but at the same time – as Peri says – opened the door for army leaders to interfere in politics because security affairs cannot be isolated from their security context.⁴⁶

Even though, at the moment of Israel’s creation, Ben-Gurion rejected the influence of political parties in the army, he maintained his influence and that of the ruling party on the army command. He also set up the mechanisms through which this influence can be exerted. Unlike Western democracies, where the ruling party has no potential or institutional arrangements to supervise and oversee their armies, Ben-Gurion founded a specialized department in his Mapai party leadership, staffed by a permanent crew of Mapai officials, entitled “the conscripts’

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 40

department” (Ha-Mehlaka Li-Mejusim). This department constituted an informal party cell for high-ranking army officers. Among the tasks of the “conscripts’ department” was the recruitment of army officers into the Mapai and the presentation of recommendations for the promotion army officers and appointment of officers to certain positions. The “conscripts’ department” created the impression, within army ranks, that “the officer who wishes to advance in the army must belong to the right party”.⁴⁷

The second mechanism devised by Ben-Gurion to maintain his party’s supervision of the army brass, which is still in effect today, was a legal formality mandating that any army promotion or appointment of an officer with the rank of colonel and up (Aluf Mishne) requires the approval of the defense minister. Due to this law, Ben-Gurion could interfere extensively during the 1950s, preventing the promotion of officers who were opposed to, or not members of, the Mapai. Ben-Gurion, and his Mapai successors, made sure to appoint, in sensitive positions and the general staff, officers who, in addition to professional abilities, were endowed with Mapai membership, especially the chief-of-staff. Yuram Peri posits that the party activism of Mapai in the army ranks contradicted Mapai’s slogan, which claimed that the Israeli Army is an official state army devoid of party interferences. For this reason, Mapai was careful to conduct these acts in a discreet and unpublicized manner. Yuram concludes that Ben-Gurion’s claim of separation was not fully applied, and that the limits that were set between the army and the political parties were not applicable to all parties equally, for they were completely closed to

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp 46-47

most parties and open to the governing Mapai; closed to state institutions with influence of political forces that do not belong to Mapai, and open to the ruling party elite.⁴⁸

In addition to the “partnership model,” a third approach developed among Israeli researchers to explain relations between the military and civil sectors. This approach stressed the cultural aspects of Israeli society and the expansion of its military culture to the point of preventing the emergence of a civil society that is disconnected from the military. The adherents of this approach argue that the military thinking of Israeli society and its adoption of the army’s values and symbols as a major component of its culture and identity, leads to the army’s hegemony over decision-making. The most notable proponents of this approach were the Hebrew University sociologist Baruch Kimmerling⁴⁹ and the scholar Uri Ben Elieazar⁵⁰.

THE “SECURITY NETWORK” MODEL

Scholars Oren Barak and Gabi Sheffer developed a novel analytic approach regarding the relationship between the civil and military sectors. The two authors posited that the application of Western models on civil-military relations does not suit Israeli reality because the boundaries between the military sphere, and that of politics, society, economy and culture remain unclear. The authors deny the existence of two separate establishments (i.e., one civil the other military), affirming the existence of an informal “security network” endowed with great power and decisive influence over politics, society, the economy, culture, and major national decisions. The members of this network are connected through informal links, adopting similar values and

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 48

⁴⁹ Baruch Kimmerling, “Militarization in Israeli Society”, (Hebrew), *Theory and Criticism* magazine, 4, 1993, pp.123-140

⁵⁰ Uri Ben-Eliezer, *The Emergence of Israeli Militarism 1936-1956*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1995). See also Azmi Bishara, “From the Jewish State to Sharon: A Study in the Contradiction of Israeli Democracy”, (Arabic), (Ramallah: The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, 2005), p.75-119

principles in matters of both national security and the most effective ways to serve it; they also feature similar – or conforming – personal interests, and cooperate together to influence politics on its various levels.⁵¹

Informal members of the “security network” generally belong to two main categories. The first includes notable figures from the Israeli security establishment, comprising the army and the various intelligence agencies headed by the Mossad, the Shabak, and the Nativ (Israeli general intelligence apparatus), in addition to Israel’s police, border guard, military industry, aerospace industry, weapons’ development authority, the Atomic Energy Agency, the Biological Research Center, and the security staff in the Ministry of Defense. The second category of the “security network” members comprises figures with an influence in the various civilian fields, especially politics. Since weakness struck political parties (e.g., the general trade union (the Histadrut), and the Kibbutzim and Moshavim movements in the late 1970s), they, together with civil institutions, began placing additional importance on specific goals, such as the allocation of budgets to specific social sectors and distributing posts to their members and supporters. Throughout this time, the security network was preoccupied with making political decisions on crucial issues, especially in matters of national security in Israel.⁵² The two authors say that the security network is greatly influential in the following fields:

- 1. In the political field:** Security figures in Israel have dominated the theme of national security, especially after the 1967 Israeli victory. They set its definition, the delimitation of priorities attached to it, and in providing its resources; additionally, all political, social, and economic matters related to national security, whether directly or indirectly are tied

⁵¹ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, “The Security Network in Israel and its Influence”, in Gabriel Shaffer, Oren Barak and Ameram Oren, (Editors), *An Army That Has a State?* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008), p.16.

⁵² *Ibid*

to national security. Security figures have penetrated the civilian and bureaucratic sphere and established strong links with major players on the level of the government and local rule.

2. **In the economic field:** The Israeli security establishment owns important and advanced industries that occupy an important position in the Israeli economy. Many ex-security personnel occupy administrative and influential posts in many major corporations, whether they are owned by the security establishment, or publicly and privately owned. Furthermore, many ex-security officials created a considerable portion of that industry which demonstrates that the progress of the Israeli high-tech industry was not only related to the development of Israel's military industries. For instance, ex-military intelligence personnel, especially in highly technical posts, and ex-air force personnel, have founded over 50 high tech companies in the 1990s, with 15 of them capitalized at 15 billion US Dollars.⁵³
3. **In Culture and Media:** The security network dominates the culture and the media of Israel. In addition to the military censorship imposed on national-security related information ever since Israel's creation, Israeli media practices self-censorship because of the dominance of the security network within, and because they rely on security sources to obtain information. The reporters belonging to various media outlets receive their information from the security establishment, often reflecting its views and acting as its spokespeople.
4. **Education and Research:** Many educational institutions are headed by ex-security figures, and the national educational level is often linked to national security. There has been an expansion in centers and institutes within Israeli universities that are headed and staffed by ex-security service people, such as "The National Security Institute" in Tel Aviv University, "the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism," in Herzliya's Multi-disciplinary Center, and the Begin-Sadat Center at Bar Ilan University. These centers, which are mostly led and staffed by ex-security figures, hold symposiums and seminars and publish works that do not abide by proper academic standards. In addition to that, the security establishment actively funds many research projects in fields of strategy, psychology, education, and many others.⁵⁴

Factors in Influence of the Military Establishment Over National Security Decisions

The decisive influence of the military establishment in the national security decision-making process stems from several important factors:

⁵³ *Ibid*, p.25

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, pp23-24

Participation in meetings

The military institution actively participates in two forms of practical decision-making meetings relating to national security. The first pertains to official institutional meetings, such as those of the Cabinet and the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs. The second form is that of informal gatherings, which are often considered most crucial in making decisions and are referred to as decision-making "kitchens".

Participating in Cabinet Meetings

Since 1967, the Israeli chief-of-staff regularly attends cabinet meetings, whether relating to security or other matters. In security-related sessions in the cabinet or ministerial committees, the chief-of-staff is accompanied by a number of generals, such as regional commanders, the chief of the air force, the head of the military intelligence (A'man), and the heads of the Mossad and the Shabak. These officers do not merely offer their professional opinion and then leave the civilian institution (i.e., the government representatives to make their decisions); they actively participate in the discussion until the end of the cabinet session and are present when the votes are taken. There is almost a consensus among all those who researched this issue that the chief of staff of the Israeli army and his generals have a decisive influence on the decisions that the government takes. Minister Dan Meridor described this influence in the decision-making process as follows: "When a group of half a dozen generals participate in cabinet meeting, it arrives with material that has been prepared for them by their administration in advance, and presents a unified opinion that it defends with an authoritative tone that leaves no place for doubt. The ministers listen to them without having the tools to analyze the generals' positions or propose alternative

ideas. Representatives of civil organizations never participate in cabinet sessions, which prevents the ministers from examining the issues under debate in a critical manner.”⁵⁵

Another description of the influence of the chief-of-staff and the generals in cabinet meetings is that of Ofer Shelah: “The chief-of-staff arrives with the commander of the relevant region, or with two regional commanders along with the chief of military intelligence, the head of research in military intelligence, and the air force commander. Each speaks for about fifteen minutes. Ministers are provided with neither alternative data nor a committee that collects information and studies them.” Shelah then wonders: “What could the ministers do besides raising their hands in approval? A former minister, Sweesa, once said: it is better not to know.”⁵⁶

Yehuda Ben Meir discusses the Israeli government’s patterns of behavior, and that of the Ministers’ Committee for Security Affairs, in national security decision-making through their reaction to a military operation against Israel, whether being carried out from the outside, domestically, or at the borders. He notes that the army staff, or the chief-of-staff, would decide, prior to the cabinet meeting, on the suitable course of response from the army’s perspective. After receiving the approval of the minister of defense and the prime minister, the chief-of-staff presents the operational plan to the cabinet. Ben Meir adds that: “In reality, the government has no practical alternative to the army’s decision and its plan.” He wryly adds: “Since the Israeli Army is a modern and organized army, it never presents the government with a single option, since that would be unacceptable. Instead, the chief-of-staff or his representatives present the

⁵⁵ Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How The Military Shapes Israeli Policy*, (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), p. 69

⁵⁶ Ofer Shelah, “The Relations between the Two Sectors in the Intifada of Al-Aqsa”, in: Ram Erez, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in Times of Military Conflict*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, 2006), p.72

cabinet with three options in a structured and convincing way. The first is to do nothing (i.e., not to react). Second, they are given the operation that is intended by the army. And third, they can launch a massive military campaign that does not suit the ongoing situation and has not been thoroughly studied by the general staff. In some cases, the chief-of-staff's presentation would be prepared by one of his offices, making it more effective, showing all the risks inherent to options 1 and 3 (along with some positives, occasionally) and all the benefits of the second option. Perhaps, the ministers would be under the impression that they are choosing from among real alternatives, while, as we previously mentioned, they really had one single option.” Ben Meir adds: “In reality, there are always beneficial and efficient alternatives, including a non-military retaliation, but there is nobody to present such options to the government.”⁵⁷

Informal Participation in Decision Making

Usually, there are two main phases to the decision-making process. In the first, the main ideas are sketched and developed; then, they will decide upon the desired action. In the second phase, these decisions are formally approved. More often than not, the first phase is effectuated by informal bodies that formulate the policies and decisions that will eventually be made (political “kitchen”); after this, the second phase begins when these proposals are placed on the government's agenda for approval. Rarely will the same body design and formulate policy decisions in national security, as well as approve them, because executives in parliamentary and presidential systems like to include minimal people in making and formulating national security decisions. An important factor that distinguishes national security decision-making from other

⁵⁷ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, p.121

areas of decisions is secrecy; consequently, it can be said that the more important the question at hand, the fewer the individuals involved in decision making. Usually, the prime minister gathers a small group of individuals, most of whom are not cabinet members, in order to jointly plan policy and “cook” decisions in the prime minister’s political “kitchen,” which will be presented at the cabinet’s “table” to be “eaten” and approved. In many instances, researchers treat decision making from the official institutional perspective, without delving into all the meetings and back dealings that take place before the government approves decisions; therefore, they tend to ignore the “black box” in the decision-making process and what takes place within it. Their point of departure would practically be the end point of decision making rather than the start. We have already seen how the military exerts a significant influence over the Israeli government in national security decision-making, but by going deeper into the process of making decisions in the Israeli prime minister’s “kitchen,” it becomes evident that the army’s role in this process is even greater than its influence within the government. To make this idea clearer, the following examples of these kitchens will illustrate these claims:

A. Ben-Gurion’s “kitchen”

Lewis Brownstein is considered to be among the first to note the important role of meetings and activities taking place outside the official institution in the decision-making process in Israel, terming these activities “the kitchen cabinet”. Brownstein says that the “kitchen cabinet” dates back to Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, who grew accustomed to drawing the main lines of policy in national security and developing them.⁵⁸

Ben-Gurion believed that the cabinet was not the suitable place to devise and formulate policy in matters of national security; therefore, he limited the

⁵⁸ Lewis Brownstein, “Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 92, 1977

government's role to stamping approval on national security policies that he would formulate in his kitchen. Members of Ben-Gurion's kitchen changed throughout his tenure, but we can easily deduce the high proportion of military figures in that kitchen, including Chief-of-Staff Moshe Dayan, other chiefs of staff, heads of the military intelligence (A'man), Mossad and Shabak Director Isser Harel, along with Ben-Gurion's military secretary Nahme Argov and General Moshe Karmel; additionally, Shaul Avigor, the security expert of the ruling Mapai party, and Shimon Peres who spent a considerable tenure as general director of the Defense Ministry, as well as Yetzhak Navon, Ben-Gurion's political secretary, were all in attendance.⁵⁹

Ben-Gurion listened to the army generals' views, formulated his policy in his kitchen and made the important decisions in national security matters, before presenting them to the government for approval. A widely-known example of this behavior was Ben-Gurion's preparation for the aggression against Egypt in 1956. Ben-Gurion made the decision to go to war in his kitchen, a decision that remained secret even to the cabinet until he called the ministers to a session to approve the war a few hours before the announcement of general mobilization in the Israeli Army.⁶⁰

B. Golda Meir's Kitchen

Golda Meir's "kitchen" is considered to be the most renowned among Israel prime ministers, witnessing the discussion of important national security matters and the planning of policy vis-à-vis these topics before presenting them to the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs and the cabinet. Meir's military secretary usually coordinated these meetings, which took place in Golda Meir's home (usually weekly and on Saturday evening). Participants would not be handed written material before or during the meetings, except for high ranking officers who would use maps to explain and detail the intended military operations. The meetings of Meir's kitchen were conducted informally and in complete secrecy with no fear of leaks, which led to open and free discussion between the participants even if there were serious differences of opinion within the military brass. For example, the director of the military intelligence apparatus (A'man) would pose a viewpoint that opposes that of the chief-of-staff, which would never take place in a cabinet session. The composition of the kitchen was altered, but was attended by a fixed selection of position-holders: the Prime Minister Golda Meir, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, vice-Prime Minister Yigal Alon, minister Yisrael Galili, the head of military intelligence, and a number of

⁵⁹ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, p.126

⁶⁰ Yonathan Shapira, *Democracy in Israel*, (Hebrew), (Ramat Gan, Massada, 1977), p.187

army generals including the air force chief, the commanders of theatres, and the head of the general intelligence apparatus (Shabak). In addition to this core group, meetings were regularly attended by the justice minister, the prime minister's political adviser, and the general director of the prime minister's office. Irregular attendees of the kitchen included Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abba Eban, and Finance Minister, Pinchas Sabir.

The military establishment had a wide influence in designing national security policy in Meir's "kitchen". Military figures were usually half of the total attendees, and were more involved – since they are considered as security experts – in the ongoing debates. Adding to that effect, the important ministers who participated in meetings (Dayan, Alon, and Galili) were former army generals, so their culture and manner of thinking were rooted in military culture. Even more significant was the fact that the military establishment, represented through its generals, was the only entity that possessed the data, information, analyses, and suggestions needed to treat the issues under debate, which afforded it with significant leverage; not even the prime minister, nor any other minister, was endowed with information-gathering bodies. At the end of the meeting, Prime Minister Meir would summarize the discussion according to the terms that were reached, and then present that summary to the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs and the government for approval.⁶¹

C. Yitzhak Rabin's "kitchen"

Rabin's "kitchen" was attended by a regular group of figures with few exceptions; the core group included Rabin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yigal Alon, Defense Minister Shimon Peres, the chief-of-staff and a number of army generals, including the director of military intelligence (A'man), the military secretary to the prime minister, and the general director of the prime minister's office. The meetings were held weekly in the prime minister's office and consisted of a discussion of national security related issues, and the formulation of policies related to debated issues, ending when they had reached a consensus. Thereafter, the prime minister would present the policies that were agreed upon to the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs and the government. In some cases, the important and significant matters would be discussed, planned and decided solely in the "kitchen," without involving the Ministers' Committee or the cabinet. For example, the strong relations that were developed between Israel and leaders of Lebanese Maronite militias at the time, which were under the purview of the Mossad, were discussed exclusively within the "kitchen," as was the case with many arms deals that Israel carried out in sensitive parts of the world.⁶²

⁶¹ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, pp.131-132

⁶² *Ibid*, p.136

The Army Bodies' Monopoly of Information and Interpreting Reality

A central question regarding the influence over national security planning is: who reads and interprets the situation? What state-approved institution, or institutions, read and interpret reality? There is a strong causal link between the reading we have of reality and its interpretation, on the one hand, and national security policies, on the other. Analyzing a situation in a certain way provides a different national security policy than would result from a varying analysis and interpretation.

Since its inception, the Israeli military establishment has developed bodies within the army that aid in reading reality and making decisions. These bodies have developed skills in the field of studies, offering analysis, preparing proposals and draft projects, and presenting different alternatives. When representatives of the military establishment participate in decision-making sessions, they are in possession of data, analysis, project proposals, and alternatives that are the result of the work well prepared by specialized military bodies who rely on extensive planning and organized methodology. This often leads to the generals' opinions and proposals defeating those of civilians during such sessions in case they had any.

Since the founding of Israel, the military establishment has monopolized the analysis and interpretation of reality, which provides it with significant authority in national security decision-making. It is true that the military institution does not limit its reading of reality to military aspects, but includes political, social, cultural, and religious dimensions; however, it reads reality from its particular perspective, premises, and priorities, in accordance with its understanding of national security and the national interest. This perspective places greater importance on military

factors and military thinking. The research department in the military intelligence apparatus (A'man) is not only the most important institution in the army, and Israel at large, responsible for reading and interpreting reality, but is also the institution that monopolizes these tasks in Israel – just as A'man monopolizes national security related information. It would be extremely difficult for any institution in Israel to compete with A'man, and its research department, since it would have the absolute advantage in budget, the number and quality of researchers, the intelligence information it has access to, and the comprehensiveness of the issues it treats and the regions it tracks.

In 2003, 600 individuals staffed A'man's research department, including 200 full-time researchers, including 120 specialized researchers in military research and military intelligence, and 80 researchers who were devoted to political, economic, social, cultural, and religious topics. The rest are involved in data collection, documentation, and other research-related fields.⁶³ In addition, the research department in A'man is the only department conducting research on all Middle Eastern states covering a wide spectrum of themes, including military, technical, social, economic, cultural, and religious themes, as well as these countries' relations with each other and with superpowers. The research department in A'man publishes a number of internal bulletins directed at a limited number of military and civil leaders; chief among those are:

1. Immediate reports on freshly-acquired intelligence information with practical value, which are distributed as “raw data,” the way they were received, with the addition of commentary by senior researchers
2. A daily report on events along with an analysis
3. Special reports on different topics throughout the year

⁶³ Shlomo Gazit, *Between Warning and Surprise: On Shaping National Intelligence Assessment in Israel*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies, 2003)

4. The yearly report, or “The Annual National Intelligence Assessment,” which is the most important in Israel, and is presented upon its publication to the general staff of the army, the government, and the security and foreign relations committees in the Knesset⁶⁴

The director of the Israeli military intelligence (A'man) presents a military intelligence report to the weekly meeting of the general staff of the Israeli Army, as well as the prime minister, the minister of defense, the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs, the government, and the security and foreign relations committees of the Knesset. In some cases, the director of A'man summons the head of the research department (with a rank of general) to accompany him to attend meetings held by the cabinet and the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs. This has enabled the director of A'man to garner significant influence over national decision-making.

Other research departments were created in the two intelligence organs (Mossad and Shabak), as well as the Israeli Foreign Ministry, but they remain incomparable to A'man's research department, despite their expansion and development. The potential competition with any A'man research department remains unlikely. For example, the Mossad created a small research unit specializing in military and strategic research, staffed with a dozen researchers, who are mostly former veterans in A'man's research department. However, this research unit, with its limited number of researchers, lacks “raw” intelligence information similar to that obtained by A'man research department, which has weakened its ability to compete with the latter.⁶⁵

In 1998, following the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada in 1987, and the intelligence community's failure in predicting its occurrence, the General Intelligence Apparatus (Shabak)

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p.29

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp 31-32

founded a research department with three divisions: the first specialized in Palestinian political affairs, the second in Palestinian military activism, and the third focused on Palestinian Arabs inside the Green Line. Shabak's research department recruited from among former A'man research center "graduates," as well as other academics. The main task of Shabak's research center was to formulate a strategic intelligence assessment of the three aforementioned Palestinian arenas, monitor their evolution and philosophy, and analyze them. While the intelligence assessment of the Palestinian situation should be the responsibility of the Shabak, A'man's research department continues to issue a similar assessment.⁶⁶

After the founding of the Israeli foreign ministry, a "Center for Political Research" was created within its framework, but this center never achieved the level of importance of intelligence-affiliated research centers, in terms of output, and its effect over Israeli decision-making, which demonstrates the inferiority of the foreign ministry in the field of decision-making when compared to the military and security establishment.⁶⁷

In conclusion, while the military institution has developed specialized bodies to assist in making national security decisions, by providing data, analysis, proposals and draft projects, the government is still devoid of a similar apparatus that continually prepares the basic material for the decision-making process, responding closely to the needs of the prime minister and the cabinet in the form of data, information, proposals and draft projects. The National Security Council was founded in 1999 as a body responsible for assisting the prime minister in specific

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp 37-38

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 33

issues; however, this council neither performs a methodical and organized mission nor prepares data and subjects related to national security for study and analysis.⁶⁸

Army Generals and High Political Offices

Israeli politics are notorious for the easy and frequent crossovers from the military field into politics. The military establishment has become an incubator for political leaders, many of whom end up occupying the highest, most influential positions in Israel, including the prime ministership, ministries, political party leaders, and Knesset memberships. In the last two decades, three former generals have become prime minister: Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Barak, and Ariel Sharon, as opposed to three “civilians” who assumed the post during the same period: Shimon Peres, Ehud Olmert, and Benjamin Netanyahu. Peres took over the post as a “legacy” for a mere six months following Rabin’s assassination in November 1995. In the last five decades, over 60 generals have assumed the ministerial positions in the succeeding Israeli cabinets. More than 100 generals became Knesset members and two became state presidents. These numbers pertain to those with the rank of “General,” not including brigadier general and lower.⁶⁹

When researching the influence of the military establishment over national security decision-making, the following question is asked: what is the line separating the civil sector from the military? Can we really determine who is “military” and who is not? Superficially, on the formal level, the answer is fairly simple: those sitting in the government and the Knesset are the civilians, and those sitting in the general staff, and carrying high army ranks, belong to the

⁶⁸ Aviezer Yaari, *Whom Does the Council Advise?* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006) p.13

⁶⁹ Dan Yahav, *The IDF’s Generals and Intellectuals in Israeli Politics*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Chrikover, 2008), p.47

military sector. As a matter of fact, most Israeli researchers deal with the topic using such standards. If, however, we dig deeper, the issue becomes much more ambiguous; a closer look reveals frequent intersections between the two levels. This overlap is not mutual, and, therefore, is not balanced since it originates from one direction, the military to civil society. Many of the current political leaders and political elite are former generals and high officers, and many of today's generals and officers will be tomorrow's politicians and leaders. Therefore, as Yusi Sarid says: "In Israel, when someone takes off his military uniform, he immediately puts on civilian clothes; until yesterday he was a high officer, a chief-of-staff or a general, and today he is a key minister or a prime minister. Therefore, it is not always clear which is which; if we consider the mentality, the training, the vision, and the perspective on national issues, they all come from the same school and similar formative experiences. As a result, the cabinet resembles the general staff, and the general staff resembles the cabinet."⁷⁰ The officer or the general can depart the army after decades of service, but the army, along with a military mentality and vision, as one's military contacts remain an unchanging part of themselves, and persist as the decisive element in their view on national security decisions. Their military approach, as well as thoughts and personality, have been shaped and polished during their decades of military service.

The Diplomacy of the Military Uniform

The military establishment has occupied an important role in all negotiations between Israel and Arab states since 1948. Israel's high officers participated in the Arab-Israeli negotiations and communications in 1948 and 1949, and had an effective role in the armistice agreement between

⁷⁰ Yosi Sarid "Relations Between the Political Sector and the Military Sector", in Pinhas Yehzekally, ed., *Civil Military Relations*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2005), p.133

Israel and Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon in 1949; most notable are Moshe Dayan, Yigal Aalon, Yitzhak Rabin, Yehoshavat Harkabi, and Mordechai Maklef. Their influence in the agreement was considerable, as it was with Israel's border delimitation, according to the armistice agreements. High Israeli officers also participated, and were the dominant component, in the Israeli delegation to the armistice committees with Arab countries; this delegation continued functioning during the 1950s and 1960s. Israel's high officers also attended the first direct Israeli-Egyptian talks, which were held at Kilometer 101 on the Cairo-Suez road, following the war, as well as the Camp David negotiations, the extensive negotiations with the Palestinians in the last two decades, Israeli-Syrian, and Israeli-Jordanian negotiations. In many cases, Israel's representation in the events was exclusively military. Furthermore, the Israeli army's position had a large impact on the results of these negotiations, since the military establishment generally defined Israel's security interests based on its reading of reality.⁷¹

The Effect of Military Doctrine over Political Decisions

Israel's offensive military doctrine affects Israeli political decisions since the doctrine presumes that Israel must launch the "pre-emptive strike" first and move the battle to "enemy territory," which clearly influences political decisions, whether at the beginning of the war or during war's course and progression.

The War's Objectives and the Invasion of more Territory than Mandated by the Government

⁷¹ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, "The Security Network in Israel and its Influence", in Gabriel Shaffer, Oren Barak and Ameram Oren, (Editors), *An Army That Has a State?* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008), p.32

The Israeli Army not only decides the military course of a war, but often interferes in determining the war's objective, as well as its results. Israel's cabinets tend not to define the objectives of war in a clear manner, often presenting a war's objectives as negations, such as "detering enemy plans," which allows the army to determine, on its volition, how to interpret the objectives of the war and its results in terms of the geographic territory the army will occupy.⁷² In addition to this, the Israeli Army tries to maintain the objectives during the course of the war, rather than the plans mandated by the political leadership, as the situation evolves. Wars and military operations have often ended with the occupation of more territory than the government demanded, often without its approval and knowledge. For example, the Israeli Army, led by Yigal Aalon, occupied Egyptian 'Umm al-Rashrash (Eilat) in 1948 without discussing the move with the cabinet or obtaining its approval.⁷³ In June 1967, the Israeli Army reached the Suez Canal in a clear contravention of the Israeli cabinet decision to halt at the Sinai pass, 30-40 kilometers away from the canal (at the straits of al-Metla and al-Jadey), without envisaging an advance towards Suez.⁷⁴ In 1978, the Israeli Army launched an operation in Lebanon against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that became known as the Litani Operation. However, the plan approved by the cabinet was limited, calling for strikes against the Palestinians and the occupation of a small number of Lebanese villages bordering Israel, but the operation "steamrolled" and the Israeli Army ended up occupying most of southern Lebanon, reaching as far north as the Litani river –all of this took place without the Ministers' Security

⁷² Yoram Peri, "Patterns of the IDF's Relations with the Political Establishment", in Joseph Alpher, ed., *A War of Choice*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1985), p. 38

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 53

⁷⁴ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, "The Security Network in Israel and its Influence", in Gabriel Shaffer, Oren Barak and Ameram Oren, (Editors), *An Army That Has a State?* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008), p.31

Affairs Committee or the Israeli cabinet discussing the move.⁷⁵ Despite Prime Minister Begin's assertions at the beginning of the 1982 war against Lebanon that the war objective was to push PLO fighters 40 kilometers from Israel's borders, and that his government will closely monitor the war events, not allowing for it to escalate as in previous wars, the army leadership escalated the war again, occupying more than half of Lebanon, cutting the Beirut-Damascus highway, and besieging Beirut without approval from the government.⁷⁶

Military Rule in Occupied Territories

Israel imposed military rule over Arab Palestinian areas within the Green Line from its founding until 1966. After 1967, the same measures were imposed over newly occupied Palestinian and Arab territories. In both situations, the Israeli Army was the sole governing authority according to Israeli military laws and directives. In addition to its military role, the army managed all aspects of Palestinian life, making constant policy changes, implementing them within the Palestinians territories occupied in 1967, significantly contributing to future Israeli policy towards the Palestinians'.

Influence over the Supreme Court in National Security Matters

The Israeli Army exerts significant effect over the Supreme Court in matters of national security. The Supreme Court of Justice listens to the army's testimonials and its position regarding cases related to Israeli national security. The "security considerations," presented by Israeli Army officials often altering the court's resolutions decisively, with clear political implications, such as

⁷⁵ Yehuda Ben-Meir, *National Security Decision-Making*, p.98

⁷⁶ Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *War of Lebanon*, (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1984)

the Court's resolutions on the Separation Wall, the policy of targeted assassinations against Palestinians, checkpoints policies, and other such resolutions.⁷⁷

Effects on Public Opinion and the Media

The army sports a very significant influence over Israeli public opinion and media in matters related to national security. This is practically channeled through the links created between army generals and newspaper editors and leaders in the audio-visual and written media, as well as the interviews and talks that are constantly conducted in the media by dozens of army officers, especially when a security or political event is underway.

DISOBEYING GOVERNMENT DECISIONS

When Ben-Gurion was head of the government, army leaders complied with his orders and national security policies. Nevertheless, when Ben-Gurion withdrew from the political scene at the end of 1953, retiring to the Sde Boker Negev settlement, Moshe Sharett became prime minister and Pinchas Lavon the defense minister; with these changes, the posture and behavior of the army elite changed radically. The heads of the army were not receptive to Sharett and Lavon's national security policy, and disobeyed their instructions and commands. In addition to that, the army waged several military operations in the context of "retaliation strikes" against Jordan and Egypt behind the backs of the minister of defense and the prime minister. In other cases, the army launched operations that were more extensive than what the cabinet or prime minister had authorized. In the same period, Israeli military intelligence conducted acts of

⁷⁷ Dan Yahav, *The IDF's Generals and Intellectuals in Israeli Politics*, (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv: Chrikover, 2008), p.45

sabotage in Egypt against civilian Egyptian targets, as well as Western interests. These events became known as “the unfortunate affair,” or “the Lavon affair”.⁷⁸

Whether these acts of retaliation were conducted at the behest of Ben-Gurion during his demission phase, or the sole initiative of the military establishment, they proved that when the military leadership was incapable of convincing the government to adopt its suggestions and resolutions, they stuck to its position and conducted its operations without the government’s knowledge and against its policies. Significantly, the government did not even contemplate taking action against those responsible for these operations. When Ben-Gurion returned to the helm of the defense ministry in February 1955, and to the prime ministership at the end of the same year, harmony was returned to government-army relations, and the army was, once again, responsive once again to both the defense minister and government orders and directives. This situation came to an end once again with Ben-Gurion’s second and final resignation in 1963. Professor Emmanuel Fald, who occupied the position of long-term military planning for the Israeli Army concluded that “Ben-Gurion was the only prime minister and defense minister who could control the army,” while the political weakness of his successors allowed the army’s power to expand, “which led to backfiring and a lopsided pyramid, where the military sphere controls the civilian authority.”⁷⁹ On the eve of the June 1967 War, the army leadership forced the “civilian” Prime Minister Levy Eshkol to step down from the defense ministry in favor one of its most noted generals, Moshe Dayan, who issued an order, days after his assumption of the ministry, to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights without the knowledge of the prime minister.

⁷⁸ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, London: A Lane, 1999, Chapter Three

⁷⁹ Amanuel Vald, *The Curse of the Broken Instruments*, (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1987), p.224

Since 1967 the Israeli Army influence grew, mainly due to its chief-of-staff. In the 1978 Litani Operation, the first Lebanon War in 1982, and during the first and second Palestinian intifadas, the army not only imposed its tactics over the cabinet, but it also took the initiative to escalate the fighting, thereby forcing the government to follow its will and adopt its policies.⁸⁰

Conclusion

The process of national security decision-making in Israel and the effect of the military establishment is a complex process in which many factors intersect and interact. Some of those factors are official, whether public or private, while others are unofficial and hidden from the public eye. The vast majority of scholars and researchers no longer accept the “functional model” to understand civil-military relations in Israel. The relations between these two levels, and the influence of military over the decision-making process, are too complex to be fully explained through a single model proposed by Israeli political scientists and sociologists. Nevertheless, the “security network” approach is more capable than the alternatives of understanding and explicating these processes.

Since the establishment of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, the founding father of the state, and the man who devised and developed the Israeli national security theory, separated the field of security from party politics and values, as well as the rules of the political game, which is rife with compromises, conciliations and majority rule. Ben-Gurion extricated national security matters from the hands of politicians, giving the authority to himself and to the army command, which was naturally close to him and his party because of administrative and legal measures he

⁸⁰ Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, “The Security Network in Israel and its Influence”, in Gabriel Shaffer, Oren Barak and Ameram Oren, (Editors), *An Army That Has a State?* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008), pp.23-33 and Amanuel Vald, *The Curse of the Broken Instruments*, (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1987), pp.224-236

had taken in his capacity as minister of defense. Thus, Ben-Gurion removed politicians from the national security domain, but also opened the door for army officials to go beyond having an essential contribution in planning national security policy. They were then able to interfere in politics simply because national security affairs cannot be separated from their political context.

Throughout his tenure as prime minister, Ben-Gurion made sure not to debate important security matters in the cabinet or the Ministers' Committee for Security Affairs. Instead, Ben-Gurion would draw national security policy with his army generals in the informal meetings held in his "kitchen". After decisions were formulated in the "kitchen," he would present them to the cabinet for approval. Since 1967, the Israeli Army authority over national security decision-making grew stronger and stronger. The Israeli society, where security occupies the most important place and where military power is sanctified and worshipped, along with the fact that the army represents it and is seen as the protector of Israeli existence, this society granted legitimacy for the "security experts" or "the experts in violence," to use Harold Laswell's terms, to draw national security policy and make the relevant decisions. Under these conditions, it became normal for the civilian elite, who do not belong to the "security expert" category, to willfully be sidelined in matters of national security decision-making.

Given the shrinking role of political parties, and the weakness of the major parties that have been fragmented into small to mid-sized parties rife with internal dissent, as well as their depreciation in value and stature, and their focus on achieving specific gains for their constituencies in the last two decades, the Israeli Army was able to enhance its position in society and its decisive role in making national security decisions. A group of factors contributed to this

state of affairs; mainly, the effective participation of army leaders in decision making sessions, the army's monopoly of data and bodies tasked with reading, interpreting and analyzing both reality and national interests, and the general's occupying positions in the upper echelons of the government, the Knesset, local authorities, the public sector, and economic corporations. In addition, the imposition of direct military rule over Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, the participation of the army brass in negotiations with the various Arab sides, and the army's influence over public opinion on national security issues were all influential factors.