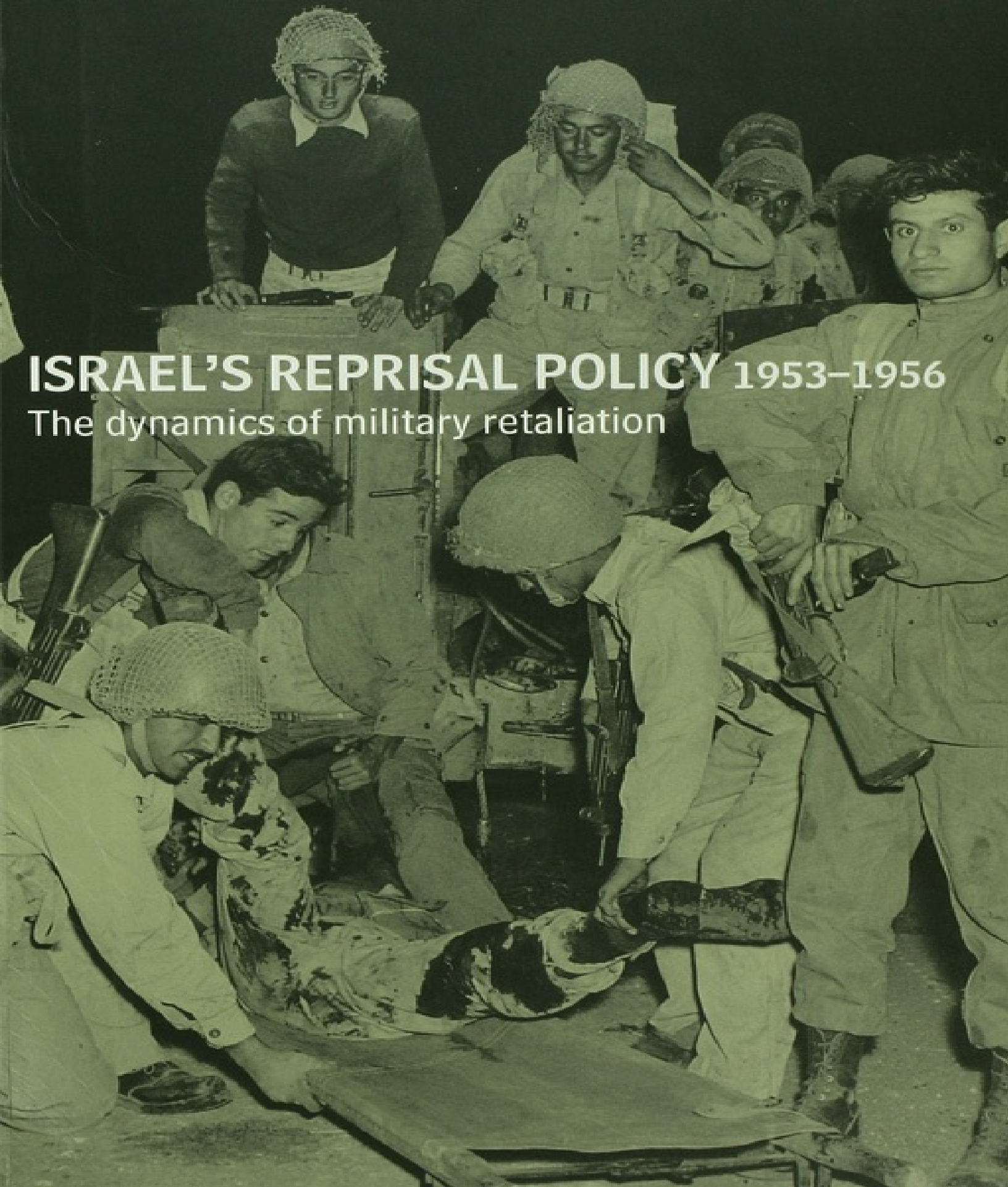


Ze'ev Drory

# ISRAEL'S REPRISAL POLICY 1953-1956

The dynamics of military retaliation



## ISRAEL'S REPRISAL POLICY 1953–1956

Following Israel's War of Independence in 1948–1949, the anticipated peace did not materialize and the new nation soon found itself embroiled in protracted military conflict with neighbouring Arab states. Demobilization of its armed forces led to the formation of special elite units under the command of Ariel Sharon to cope with cross-border infiltration, pillage and murder. A policy of deterrence was governed by the tactic of retaliation, which contained the seeds of escalation. At the same time, a military dynamic unfolded in which the logic of field unit response dictated both military and political policy and caught the imagination of a demoralized and war-weary Israeli society.

This book methodically examines the train of retaliatory actions conducted by the Israel Defence Force, the clashing orientations among Israeli political leadership towards the deteriorating military situation, the impact of massive immigration upon the social military fabric, and the restructuring of the Israeli army within the conceptual confines of field unit reprisal actions. A connected narrative of these actions provides case study illumination of the theoretical premises of study, namely the determination of security policy from below and the interaction between agency and structure in a military setting.

The myth of the Israeli paratroopers at the beginning of the 1950s and their heroic deeds in the reprisal raids embodied the new Zionist ethos for which the current Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, claims much of the credit. The book thus provides historical insight into some of the most intractable developments of the current Arab-Israel conflict.

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FRANK CASS  
LONDON • NEW YORK

First published 2005  
by Frank Cass, an imprint of Taylor & Francis  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX 14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

*Frank Cass is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group*

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*  
Drory, Ze'ev.

Israel's reprisal policy, 1953–1956: the dynamics of  
military retaliation/Ze'ev Drory. – 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Arab–Israeli conflict – 1948–1967.
2. Israel – Armed Forces – Parachute troops.
3. Reprisals. I. Title.

DS119.7.D463 2005  
956.9405'2–dc22

2004009531

ISBN 0–714–65632–1 (hbk)  
ISBN 0–714–68517–8 (pbk)

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# Foreword and Acknowledgements

'The army is the clearest and the most tangible of all possible manifestations of the State, and the one which is most firmly connected with its origins and traditions.'

(Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*)

The myth of the paratroopers at the beginning of the 1950s and their heroic deeds in the reprisal raids was the new Zionist ethos on which my generation was nurtured. Bravery, audacity, voluntarism, pioneering spirit, love of the homeland and the people, which found expression in the readiness to give, even to sacrifice, one's life, already had captured my heart at an early age.

For many years I served in the Israel Defence Force (henceforth, IDF) as a soldier and commander in the Paratroopers Unit. The heroes of my youth accompanied me throughout my military career. From the beginning of the 1960s, through the Six Day War of 1967, the 'War of Attrition' in the Suez Canal zone that followed, the hot pursuits after terrorist infiltrators into Israel and the personal trauma experienced in the battle at the 'Chinese Farm' during the Yom Kippur War, these exemplary figures served as personal models for imitation on the battlefields where I fought. Later, as a senior commander, in the framework of the National Security Academy, I decided to undertake an examination of the period that had been so glorified: the period of the reprisal operations.

By virtue of my standing, I had access to the military archives and I immersed myself in a sea of documents. The operational orders, debriefings, and resumes were not only a testimony to historical events; they also afforded a glimpse into the spirit of the times. As a veteran military man, I was familiar with the processes connected with the planning and implementation of special operations at various levels. In particular, I was intrigued by the problematic topic of civilian oversight and control over the military.

Long combat experience in this meritorious corps provided me with the means of comprehending its *esprit*, the fervour that flowed in the veins of the paratroop commanders: 'to be an integral part of, 'to be privy to', 'to play a leading role'. I shared in a feeling of responsibility for the fate of the nation and the state placed in the hands of a soldier in an elite unit whose duty was to defend and secure the safety of the citizens of the state. This *esprit de corps*, accompanied by the tensions and urgencies of the moment, which come to expression while drawing up battle plans and implementing military operations, cannot be found in the vast majority of written orders.

This research work became the basis for my MA thesis under Professor Yair Evron. The finished product was presented through the History Department of Tel Aviv University in 1987. The research illuminated in a sharp and clear manner the role of the army, and specifically, the Paratroop Unit, in the process of military escalation during this period. This Paratroop Unit, commanded by Ariel Sharon, today the Prime Minister of Israel, bore the operational burden of most, if not all, of the missions carried out in these years. The unit developed operational

doctrines, combat skills and an exceptional fighting élan, all of which brought about a revolution in the fighting capabilities of the IDF. This same unit broke boundaries and barriers not only on the battlefield but also in effect in matters of Israeli national security policy.

IDF Field Security did not give permission for the publication of my MA thesis. Categorized as a classified research document, it gathered dust for a number of years in a Tel Aviv University basement. The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians during the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the growing involvement of the IDF in determining the state's political agenda in the military field, in effect heightened the urge to see that the research with its attendant issues be published. In truth, current events and the occurrences that are the focus of this book are distant in time from each other – but there are many affinities between the two periods.

The hero of the story, the very same Ariel Sharon who hung up his uniform and embarked upon a lengthy and politically successful parliamentary career, has not changed his basic positions in regard to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Military power was the central, perhaps the only, instrument in the attempt to resolve the continuous conflict. Today, the army and its commanders occupy a central and leading role in formulating Israel's policy against the Palestinians. Again the issue of oversight and control by the political echelon over military operations looms large, and is especially salient in a limited and on-going armed confrontation.

Although the book deals with the events of the 1950s, the analysis of the escalation process and the lack of control over the retaliatory chain of events sets before the reader a single simple truth: only correct and responsible policy, accompanied by strict control over the army and its operations, can bring about a reduction in violence and allow the political process a decisive role in bringing an end to the conflict. Knights on horseback must be reined in and army commanders eager for battle and confident that they possess the key to the solution of the extended conflict, must be tempered.

During the course of the research and writing of the book I was assisted by many of my colleagues and I extend my deepest thanks to all of them. I wish to accord a special thank-you to my teacher, Professor Yair Evron, who, through his good advice and insight during my research work at Tel Aviv University, helped and guided my efforts. My warmest appreciation is extended to a close friend and teacher over the years, Professor Yoav Gelber, whose door was always open and whose professional advice and encouragement was ever welcome. To Professor Avraham Ben-Tzvi, in whose presence historical circumstances thickened and historical nuances multiplied, I am truly grateful. I also wish to thank the Department of History of the IDF, the past and present librarians at the IDF Archives and the University of Ben-Gurion in the Negev for their financial support.

Special thanks to Paul King for his translating and editing of the manuscript and to Judith King who became a full partner in the course of the editing and translating process.

I owe a thank-you and much appreciation to the team of Frank Cass Publications in England who graciously accepted my manuscript and made the publication of this book a reality.

Finally, the warmest appreciation goes to my partner and life friend, Dorit Harel, who was forced to listen and to bring her good advice to bear, hours and days at a time, on the vacillations which accompany every researcher and writer in the course of his work.

Ze'ev Drory  
Shilat, Israel  
Summer 2004

# Introduction

‘It was a dark and stormy night.’

This study describes and examines the train of retaliatory actions conducted by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in the early 1950s. These operations were not only entrenched military doctrine during these years; they were also part of a political policy which attempted time and again to bring closure to the conflict of Israel with its Arab neighbours. What began as armed sorties disguised as partisan raids of retribution by Israeli citizens eventually became full-scale military operations undertaken by a rapidly expanding and increasingly sophisticated army. The course of these events often appears to have been generated by impulse and random decision-making, suggesting an erratic pattern of skirmishes, raids and battles. However, closer analysis reveals, if we may coin an oxymoron, the operation of contingent logic, an accumulation of independently-induced micro-military responses and initiatives bearing an internal logic and an external rationale. Uncovering that logic and rationale is one of the primary objectives of this book.

Units conducting reprisal operations invariably set out and completed their mission between dusk and dawn. The scheduling of the operations was designed to achieve maximum surprise and to shock a population whose long-acquired traditions and cultural practices had instilled a fear of night-time activities. ‘Dark and stormy’, however, also serves as a literary description for the impact many of these operations had for the senior military and political echelons. The scope and outcomes of local field operations regularly exceeded their intended and authorized limits. Military and political leaders were often in the dark as to the actual nature of the military forces that they had set in motion; and the outcomes of these incursions resulted in storms of protest in the international arena as well as turbulent debate in domestic forums. Thus a central conceptual emphasis in this study is placed on the role played by the implementing field forces as formulators of military tactics and ultimately of military strategy and political policy. It is from this perspective, then, that the connection between the military and the civil echelon in Israeli society is examined from below and from the point of view of field strategy and military engagement rather than from the heights of diplomacy and negotiation.

With the release of archive material pertaining to the first decade of the State of Israel, the above issues can now be examined with a fine-tooth comb. The study of military activity during this period has received earlier attention. Books and articles by Mordechai Bar-On, Motti Golani, David Tal and Benny Morris focus upon different aspects of this period of retaliatory raids, but much work remains to be done in analysing and understanding the decision-making processes of the Israeli state leadership during these years under the conditions of protracted military conflict.<sup>1</sup>

This book attempts to scrutinize and comprehend the period which preceded the stage of full-scale battle in October 1956, a path marked by skirmishes and mini-engagements. It examines



the operational dynamic found at the level of battle units and battlefield action, the expansion of missions by the operational forces and the dialectics of the escalation process.

The test of a discerning policy resides in its capacity to control and manoeuvre with the available tools so as to attain the objectives of security and political stability that have been designated from the start. When a state is locked in a continuing conflict and attempts to refrain from escalation and all-out war, it must use its power with the utmost control and subtlety, sometimes even abstaining from employing military options. Indeed, during a period of 'no peace and no war', it is incumbent upon the civil leadership to seize the reins and maintain a tight hold over matters in order to control and check 'runaway horses'.

Periods of continuous armed conflict tend to make political solutions appear distant and unattainable, while increasing the tendency to resort to the use of limited violence. A policy of punishment and deterrent action begins to crystallize. When the use of violence turns into a 'normal' component in the system of bilateral relations, the likelihood of distortion and damage to the intentions and basic goals of the political leadership is greatly increased. In brief, long-term planning and decision-making are adversely affected. Indeed, field operations themselves take on unanticipated dimensions and become inextricably bound up with policy explication and, ultimately, determination.

In the decision-making processes of political and military bodies, there are inherent factors and processes which cause falsification and distortion of the intention of senior political echelons. The aim of the government may be changed and even distorted in the course of a single, isolated military action. A continuing series of actions may even bring about results which are the very opposite to those which were originally intended.

A state that undertakes a strategy of deterrence may perhaps find that this policy does not realize its full effect. Even when the danger of an all-out war is not in the offing, hostile activities can continue to occur all along the borders, and terrorist actions may impair the peace and security of citizens. Under these circumstances, a government committed to the safety of its citizens may feel obliged to take defensive or offensive military action.

A policy of retaliation directs the military forces to take punitive and deterrent measures with the objective of 'clarifying' to the other side that continuing its activities or failing to control what is occurring along its borders will result in its incurring greater damage than the perceived benefits resulting from its successful or even unsuccessful actions. The aim of the enforcement activity is to make the opponent cease his aggressive actions. This policy of 'compellence'<sup>2</sup> was not employed solely to impose punishment and take revenge but also to imprint the will of the injured state upon the enemy.

When this policy is undertaken as a leading or exclusive strategy, it creates an ongoing systemic process of near-automatic response to every enemy incursion or provocation. The dialectical nature of retaliatory action, in which hostile stimulus generates response which in turn becomes a stimulus for further enemy belligerency, spawns a course of events possessing an internal power and inertia of its own. This very inertia drags the political echelon into an escalation process, the supervision and control of which becomes difficult and highly unmanageable. Robert Jervis and his research associates, through their examination of the subject of spiral conflict and the arms race, have enhanced the understanding of the theoretical basis of escalating conflicts.<sup>3</sup>

The political message accompanying the deterrent act, which has the 'diplomatic seal of approval' attached to it when first enunciated by the civilian echelon, is often altered at the subordinate political and military decisional level and receives its final formulation when acted

upon by the operational military unit. Retaliation policy, then, reveals a subtle shift in which decision-making changes authors, if not authorization. The field actions carried out by the junior military echelons push and shove against the policy boundaries guiding its practice. These boundaries may be pushed out of all recognizable shape by intemperate military action. Reiterated, the consequences may be fatal for overall political policy, and even for military strategy. An ongoing policy of retaliation incurs a major risk of undermining deterrence capacity, with the consequent result that the relative quiet and security of the citizens will be exchanged for a spiralling conflict with neighbouring states. In these processes, the military echelon gains tremendous power and influence, which may only grow as the conflict progresses.

In order to grasp and analyse the political and security problems of the Israeli state at the beginning of the 1950s, it is imperative to examine the concepts of deterrence and enforcement, as well as the policy of retaliation, in their broader international context. The notion of limited nuclear war arose *part passu* with that of total war during the period of the nuclear arms race following World War Two. The bipolar international structure in which the two superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – each possessed nuclear weapons ushered in an era of mutual deterrence that became known as the Cold War. The doctrine of deterrence and enforcement, whose basis has been set out by William Kaufman, Bernard Brodie, Alexander George, Henry Kissinger and Paul Diesing, serves as a platform for theoretical discussion in this study. Thomas Schelling's *Arms and Influence* provided a helpful theoretical framework for understanding retaliatory actions.<sup>4</sup>

It is true that these studies dealt with the issue of nuclear war and mutual deterrence rather than with conventional armed conflict. Moreover, it is not clear to what extent these theoretical debates influenced Israeli decision-makers. However, because the very existence of international state entities was at stake in the former instance and an Israeli-held perception that the existence of the new state was in the balance in any military conflict, the debates do contain a relevant common denominator.

In recent years, numerous books, articles and studies have appeared in Hebrew on the topic of deterrence. The research of Yair Evron, Avner Yaniv and Yonatan Shimshoni in political science have explored Israeli policy on this issue over the years both in the nuclear and conventional framework.<sup>5</sup> They have contributed to an examination of the theoretical basis of policy and praxis during the period of retaliatory action between 1953 and 1956.

Retaliatory action was, from the start, a political decision formulated as the security strategy of the Israeli state. It was the cornerstone in the pyramid leading from decision-making echelons to policy implementers in the field. A decision that has implications on foreign policy and security requires coordination among the responsible ministries, especially the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office. But such was not the case. Friction between these governmental bodies spread across several fronts – ideological, political, bureaucratic and personal – and has been embedded in the very system of relations from that period up to the present day. Even when the personalities changed, the struggles among government ministries and their chief personnel thwarted any possibility of coordination and cooperation.

In order to understand the relations among the Office of the Prime Minister, the Defence Ministry and the Foreign Ministry, an examination of the personalities who headed the political system during these years – David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Pinhas Lavon – is required. The shaky system of interrelationships among them permitted the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, to influence decision-making well beyond what his domineering personality and military authority could otherwise have achieved.

The relations between the civilian and military leadership during a period of continuous armed conflict are enveloped in tension. It is the duty of the political echelon, under these circumstances, to act as a force for restraint, reining in and curbing any excesses in implementation. The military echelon has its own aspirations and needs. Internal forces are generated which are activist, vigorous and targeted toward action and operational success. To the military, it sometimes seems as if political considerations are foreign to its *raison d'être* and constitute a threat to its proper functioning. Moreover, to the military, creating and maintaining a record of operational success stands above any other consideration, for without such a record, the political echelon will not risk deploying this capability.

In this book, a central place will be devoted to the motives and capacities found in the military system, whose weight during the period of retaliatory actions was of the greatest import. Sometimes it would appear as though the military establishment dragged the political cart into actions that were excessive and escalatory, in number, scope and intensity. It was the military unit that delivered the operative political message. The messenger was, for the most part, the elite unit that the senior military leadership had trained and upon whose commanders operational capability and trust had been bestowed. The Chief-of-staff, knowing the chances and risks entailed in the course of each military operation, chose the elite unit because it possessed the professional skills, battle *esprit* and experience necessary for carrying out these special operations.

The interrelationship between the operational echelon and the Chief-of-staff included the training of commanders, the conferring of additional privileges on the operational echelon and a disregard of deviations in the areas of administrative and operational discipline. The operational unit bore the burden of the principal operations while at the same time coping with the social and psychological processes that take place inside it during and between military engagements. The commander of the unit had to possess a commanding presence, courage and high motivation. More than that, he had to be able to formulate a *Weltanschauung* for his soldiers and impart this through his personality to the entire unit. The outlook of the unit, its self-image and self-confidence, not only reflected inwards; it also influenced the army in general, especially the senior command echelons. The infantry unit under the command of Ariel Sharon was an elite group of the type described above. This unit brought about a revolution in IDF operational capability. It gradually produced a turnaround in the entire army's confidence, capability and basic fighting ethos. The operational capability and personality of Sharon, who headed this unit, were central to the policy of retaliatory action and, in the process, the deterioration of security along Israel's borders.

This study will focus upon the influence of the Paratroop Unit in the shaping of security policy during these years by attempting to examine the military operations the unit undertook and the outcome of those actions in light of the intentions of the political leadership.

During the time frame under study, there were operations that were not authorized by the political echelon. Training exercises and operations deviated more than once from the intended plan, a factor that caused tension and exacerbated relations among the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff and between the Chief-of-Staff and the commander of the Paratroop Unit, Ariel Sharon. More than once, the political leadership was stunned into silence by the superlative 'success' of a military operation. On the surface, this created an appearance of an overlapping consensus between the civilian and military echelons, but the undercurrents were quite the opposite.

In any operation a great deal of uncertainty hovers over the battlefield, affecting the planning

and the details of operational directives. This very uncertainty is a characteristically salient component in the deviations and distortions that arise between the intent of the political echelon and the outcomes in the field. Even if harmony and cooperation prevail within the government – and between it and the military echelon throughout the entire course of a planned action – there is still ample room for deviation in the implementation itself on the battlefield. The policy of retaliation created a long and cumulative process of hostile actions between the IDF and the Arab armies, which contained forces hidden from the politicians' sight.

Retaliatory actions led Arab armies to examine their armed forces, their power and their *modus operandi*. Hostile actions led to an escalatory process, an arms race and continuous deterioration of the security situation. Diplomatic steps and other means of amicable persuasion ceased to be applicable; and the voices that called for a 'first strike' and a 'preventive war' were increasingly heard.

# 1

## Conceptualizing the Policy of Military Retaliation The Israeli Path to Civilian Colonization and Local Imperialism

### The Theoretical Debate

‘The Utopians have only one aim in war – to gain that object which would have prevented them from going to war if they had previously won it. Or if circumstances prevent this, they exact so terrible a penalty from their enemy that fear restrains others from attempting the same.’

(Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*)

The unwritten security doctrine of the State of Israel maintains as its starting point that the state is a victim of continuing aggression. Thus its military operations come under the rubric of self-defence even when they become offensive actions.<sup>1</sup> The distinction between offensive and defensive actions is not simply a matter of aligning the use of offensive and defensive weapons used by parties to a conflict or accepting a belligerent’s motives. The well-entrenched concepts of ‘just war’, ‘preventive war’ and ‘wars of national liberation’ are contested terms that tend to weaken the utility of differentiating between the aggressor and the defender. Kenneth Boulding, who recognized that offensive weaponry could be used for defensive purposes, spoke of ‘an intermediate reaction – the offensive defense’, but failed to develop his term since he regarded continuous conflict as characteristic of economic competition among firms and less suitable to international conflict, which was interrupted by agreements and treaties introducing periods of peace.<sup>2</sup> However, some military scenarios are characterized by protracted conflict, a situation which has also been termed a cycle of violence in which there is neither peace nor war between the antagonists. The elongated nature of these bellicose encounters tends to blur the attacker/attacked distinction and, as in the Trojan War related by Homer, the initial cause is long forgotten and the rage engendered by battlefield events provides the motivating animus for continued strife.

Israel’s automatic assumption of a defensive orientation in its military representations is in part a response to two thousand years of Jewish exile and minority standing among the nations. At the same time, in contemporary Israel, there is an anticipatory edge to this posture, the impetus for which resides in a determination to overcome an ingrained sense of Jewish powerlessness.

The traditional reluctance of the Zionist leadership to identify with the joy of battle did not only arise from the universal recognition of the abhorrence of war and the desirability of peace but from deeper psychological predispositions. This reluctance stemmed from a Jewish aversion to the use of force.... The appearance of a national Jewish movement was not accompanied by a dramatic change with regard to this orientation. The self-image of the Jews... as a nation which had a disdain for violence in any form was deeply embedded in the national psyche and could not be changed overnight.<sup>4</sup>

Yoram Peri offers an even more blanket assessment for the contemporary period: the IDF is ‘a professional army with antimilitarist values’.<sup>5</sup> The foregoing views have been strongly contested along two lines of analysis: a culturally implanted religious trait and a socially acquired attribute brought about by a hostile environment. The former orientation asserts that Jewish tradition eschews the use of force, that Jewish normalcy is ethically rooted in a ‘commitment to powerlessness’<sup>6</sup> or the inverse claim, once raised by the philosopher/mystic Simone Weil in the late 1930s, that Jewish power in state form would release a dormant striving for domination.<sup>7</sup> Even the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, a member of the pacifist-oriented *Ichud* group, which espoused a conciliatory approach to the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine, could write in a letter to Mahatma Gandhi that he was prepared to ‘fight lovingly’ for justice.<sup>8</sup> The Israeli sociologist, Baruch Kimmerling, argues that Israeli militarism is ‘one of the *central organizational principles of the society*’ and attributes this to societal immersion in a protracted external conflict.<sup>9</sup> Revisionist Israeli historians such as Avi Shlaim, Simha Flapham and Benny Morris ascribe aggressive intentions to Israeli leadership in their military campaigns against the Arab states.<sup>10</sup>

Current Israeli martial terminology distinguishes between ‘wars of no choice’ and ‘elective wars’, a conceptual substitute for ‘defensive’ and ‘offensive’ war. It is a sign of the times and to the credit of constructive military criticism in Israel that these concepts are openly addressed and that apologetic defence establishment and regime arguments which every military and political establishment parades for its actions are eschewed rather than automatically, and often patriotically, accepted without question.

The contrast between defender and aggressor is also blurred by the intimate connection between the narrative of military policy and its implementation. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the language that came to dominate political/military parlance after World War Two. The orientation towards the use of power terminology and power politics was part of the international and national political culture of the period. ‘Balance of power’, ‘major powers’ and the disdain of power models found in the term ‘non-aligned nations’ (in effect, attempting to set up a moral power bloc of the weak and formerly oppressed) arose against the background of the events of World War Two. Power formulations were reinforced in Israel during the War of Independence and the border wars which followed in its wake. State leadership in Israel accepted the need to use power and military means and the lexicon of power fitted comfortably with several ideological streams of Zionism. Ben-Gurion likened the War of Independence to the struggle of the Maccabees. He greatly admired Jewish military prowess, cultivated individual officers, and waxed exuberant over the prospect of the military ethos eradicating the accretions of two thousand years of exilic powerlessness.

Many of the terms that made their debut in the academic political literature and among statesmen in the 1950s, such as ‘pre-emptive strike’, ‘preventive war’, ‘compellence’ and ‘deterrence’, were widely used and translated into the languages of the Middle East. In Israel, those who headed the political and military system developed and employed nuanced interpretations of this terminology in connection with the defensive and punitive policies and operations which they authorized. Several of the embedded expressions of Israeli military policy during this period – deterrence, compellence, reprisal policy and escalation – exemplify par excellence both the descriptive and justificatory narrative for military actions.

### ***What Is Deterrence?***

In its abstract formulation, deterrence is a method arising in the context of social or political relations in which one side tries to influence the behaviour of the other side in order to prevent the implementation of a programme or certain intention. Side A tries to influence side B from performing a certain deed by threatening the latter with the infliction of pain should it carry out its intention.

From the military point of view, deterrence is a situation, or series of actions prior to war or to a warlike act, designed to prevent war. Deterrence in the military sense has always been a practical method. In Raymond Aron's formulation:

Arms have always presented as a means designed to preclude or deflect the enemy from his intentions to go to war. Fortification is often, if not always, considered as an expression of deterrent strength in that it prevents the enemy not from going to war, but rather from undertaking certain steps and thus inducing a shift of his operation to an area where he thinks he has a greater chance to succeed.<sup>11</sup>

Deterrence is a threat against the enemy that should he employ certain means, the result will be a deadly reprisal operation. It may be conveyed by oral and written messages and/or certain acts. The aim of deterrence is to present the enemy with a cost/benefit calculation. What will be the damage or, in other words, what injury would he sustain should he carry out his programme, as against the benefit accruing from refraining to carry it out? Deterrence deals in intentions. It is concerned not only with an assessment of the enemy's intentions but with influencing these intentions. Thus deterrence should be viewed as part of a general policy and not only as an act or a military capability. If it is defined or restricted to its military aspect alone, its overall significance is impaired. Yaniv supplies a broad definition of the concept: 'Deterrence is a mode of thinking, the way in which one sees oneself and one's opponent, his deployment, his grasp of organization, the conception upon which governments operate in the sphere of national security.'<sup>12</sup>

Two levels of deterrence may be defined: comprehensive deterrence and immediately specified deterrence. General deterrence refers to the overall potential military threat. The power of the weaponry and the threat of its use are expressed in general terms. It is an expression of the strategic stature of the state, the sum total of the components of its strength. Immediate deterrence relates to a specific threat, either an intended or specific plan of the enemy. The shift from general to immediate deterrence indicates that a certain component or factor of deterrence is overturned. The ability to launch a preventive or pre-emptive strike is the term associated with immediate deterrence.

Paul Lauren emphasizes the characteristic lines of negotiation that accompany the threat of the use of force.<sup>13</sup> They comprise both strategy and tactics. Negotiations contain signals and communication between states. Lauren stresses the asymmetry in both the power and the motivation of the two sides. Above all is the credibility that the enemy will in fact carry out his threat.

Deterrence relates to decision-making processes and the opposition to them, and hence the great weight and decisiveness of the following factors:

1. The rationality and irrationality of the decision-makers, and extent to which the objectives of the leaders are perceived as rational. Sometimes what is seen as irrational behaviour is actually faked behaviour that has a rational purpose.
2. Concepts and their distortions of the enemy and his intentions. This may originate in

different cultural codes, different value systems and different hierarchies within that value system.

3. Credible communication of deterrence. How should the threat be conveyed and be authenticated? According to Schelling ‘the most difficult part is to bring our intentions to the attention of the enemy’.
4. The decision-makers and the process of decision-making – the entire complicated web of decision-making and collective thinking. In a state of continuous threat of aggression, the decision-making process is restricted to a very limited group (e.g. cabinet) which tends to adopt a hawkish position. Even the soft-liner may become a hawk. The group of decision-makers becomes very coherent and looks for a strong leader who will get them out of this constant threat of aggression and put pressure on those members who waiver to adopt a more activist line against the enemy. In this case, the role of devil’s advocate is abolished and the person who fulfils that role may even be regarded as a traitor who is challenging the leadership.
5. The status of the army in relation to the civil authorities and the political echelon. In a situation of protracted conflict, the army is perceived as the sole guardian of the security of the state and its citizens. The political echelon is in need of the military when diplomacy has failed and it realizes that the status of the army has risen in the eyes of the citizens.
6. Political and army bureaucracies. From the moment that a decision has been made in the highest political levels (e.g. cabinet) until the implementation of the decision, there are power struggles and influences on the political intent and performance guidelines which are liable to distort the original formulations.

All these factors and processes play a strong role in conveying understanding and messages between states caught up in a process of conflict and mounting tension. Each one of the subjects is a topic of study in itself for understanding the multiple difficulties in the decision-making processes of political and military leaders whose states are engaged in an armed struggle which could deteriorate to a situation of all-out war.

There is no question that successful deterrence also depends upon the personalities of both sides’ leaders. ‘Deterrent threats are a matter of resolve, impetuosity, plain obstinacy’, writes Schelling – a formulation which applies to Israeli leadership during this period.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Compellence***

The terms deterrence and compellence are often used interchangeably among Israelis. The distinctions made by Schelling help to sharpen the different meanings of the two terms. According to Schelling, deterrence is in general passive whereas compellence is active. Schelling sees compellence as a specific instance of deterrence. ‘There is, then, a difference between *deterrence* and what we might, for want of a better word, call *compellence*. The dictionary’s definition of “deter” corresponds to contemporary usage: to turn aside or discourage through fear; hence, to prevent from action by fear of consequences.’<sup>15</sup>

Compellence is a military act or step designed to bring about the cessation of action which the enemy has undertaken. Mordechai Bar-On regards the policy of compellence as directly derivative from deterrence, as an act which draws its strength and sustenance from deterrence.<sup>16</sup> A necessary condition for the success of compellence is that the enemy will not only understand



the message but also will have the vital interest and capacity to act according to the conditions of the side that is attacking:

The amount of pain that compellence by the deterrent side must inflict against the deterred must be clearly and tangibly greater than the price that the deterred may pay for the restraining action that he must undertake. In other words, compellence is designed to impact upon the ability of the deterred to control the situation by means of a drastic increase of the motivation to do so.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Reprisal Actions As Compellence***

The declared objective of reprisal actions is to break the chain – to bring an end to acts of violence at a certain point through a final and conclusive military operation. H. Brocher, a French lawyer in the nineteenth century, wrote that reprisals are a means of preventing war from becoming barbarous. Walzer writes:

Reprisals of this sort have as their purpose the enforcement of the war convention. In international society (as in Locke's state of nature) every individual member (every belligerent power) claims the right to enforce the law. The content of this right is the same as it is in domestic society; it is first of all a right of retribution, to punish guilty men and women; it is secondly a right of deterrence, to protect oneself and others against criminal activity.<sup>18</sup>

One may conclude from this that compellence must be guided by clear criteria which respond to the 'just' objectives that form its basis. It is significant that the execution of the military operation must be based upon a just cause and find its justification beyond the fact of success on the battlefield.

Compellence must be defined in terms of time, space, form, and quantity and quality of the participating forces. To the extent that the operation is not clearly defined by the political and senior military echelons, the outcomes are liable to be unforeseen and the intentions of the decision-makers thwarted. Schelling terms deterrent action 'a linguistic response in the war and diplomatic arena'.<sup>19</sup> The type and quantity of permissible violence must be wisely planned in relation to its impact on the expectations of the enemy. The enemy must be made aware of the costs of continued provocations and be moved to refrain from contemplating similar actions in the future.

Thus there is great importance in the message conveyed to the enemy. The retaliatory action must be strictly planned and designed in every detail. Stringency is required in order that the message be credible and clear; any accompanying 'noise' might result in the enemy failing to receive or comprehend the message.

There is a tendency to look for justice and reason in the execution of a reprisal, in order to win international support and the backing of the international justice system. These justice claims may be examined through verifying the links, both in time and location, between the criminal deed and the reprisal action. That is, that the reprisal act is a response to an unjust act and not simply a military act divorced from its justified setting.

There is a clear tendency for international law to censure reprisals which injure innocent victims. But there is still a clear ethical and political difference between the initial crime and the retaliatory response to it.

In order to give reprisal raids a semblance of justice and morality, there is a proximity in terms

of the timetable between the criminal act and the response. In addition, there is a geographic proximity between the departure point of those who strike first and the target of the reprisal action. The criminal act and the reprisal sometimes appear to be 'an eye for an eye'.

The importance of all this is supported by the political message found in the reprisal. The proximity between crime and the reciprocated action and the extent of the force used in relation to the size of the criminal deed are all factors in conveying the political message in a sharp and clear fashion.

The message contained in the reprisal operation contains a number of characteristics: in the first place, it must be linked time-wise to the hostile actions of the enemy. Secondly, it must be close to the arena where the crime occurred or to the point where the border was crossed. It must be of a scope and intensity which are not too large and painful on the one hand and not small and ineffective as a deterrent on the other. Finally, the military operation must be a suitable response to the criminal act. The punishment must fit the crime.

Formulating the political message along the above lines makes the military action more justifiable and purer. Taking into consideration the proper criteria for a retaliatory act meets human expectations and norms with regard to international communication among people, the sense of justice and of acceptable criteria in the area of international relations. In the framework of deterrence, reprisal operations are messages with a high degree of credibility which cannot be ignored; they exact the price of transgression at the right place and time.

### ***Escalation – The Failure of Deterrence***

One of the complicated problems in deterrence is to find a manner of executing the reprisal which will not cause fears and apprehensions among adversary leaders that their basic system of values is at stake. If their very foundations or most vital interests are threatened, then they will be immediately defended with all the force available, and hence the deterrent threat evaporates. Deterrence must know limits.

Reprisal actions that do not attain their objective – namely, active deterrence of the enemy in a short and reasonable time frame – turn into crisis situations which heat up the process of escalation. Escalation is built around mutual misunderstandings which grow out of the conflict situation. Reprisal raids that are carried out are threats which materialized. These actions are viewed by the foe as acts of aggression, and the political message and the deterrence entailed by it are often lost in the din of battle. The power of the military operation and the pain that it causes operate on the sensitivities of the enemy in a manner opposite to its intention and heighten the circle of violence.

Reiterative enemy incursions often invite a higher level of retaliation, since the punitive objective of the isolated act no longer suffices, and the attainment of deterrence 'once and for all' now becomes the central objective. We use the term 'escalation' to mark the gradual expansion of the armed conflict. Expansion can find expression in the size of the forces participating in the operation, in the quality and strength of the weaponry brought into the operation, in the expansion of targets and operation zone and finally in the selection of targets which are 'sensitive' for the regime of the foe. Thus there is a continual danger that despite the limitations that each side takes upon itself, the side under attack will try to find profit and relief by taking extreme and deadly measures, which will intensify the circle of hostility and violence.

Deterrence is thus a relative term, certainly when dealing with limited wars not in the theory of

nuclear deterrence. It has a more flexible and more opaque character, and thus is more difficult to control. In a continuing crisis, decision-makers are pushed to patterns of behaviour in which deterrence loses its force and becomes less effective.

The effectiveness of deterrence can crumble just when it is most vitally needed. Allison best explains the devaluation of the power of deterrence during a crisis:<sup>20</sup> In a crisis that develops slowly, the freedom for both foreign and domestic political manoeuvring in the international arena gradually diminishes, even if it is not felt. Opposing sides' leaders adhere to their beliefs because their opponents preserve for themselves reasonable flexibility of action and additional options outside the war option.

It will be difficult to change the course of a crisis which gradually unfolds by gradual means. Thus, when leadership arrives at the insight and recognition that dangers are about to erupt, it must attempt a courageous and sometimes even exceptional move in order to arrest the process.

### *Escalation*

Escalation theory made its debut in the 1950s in the context of studies on the characteristics of war in the nuclear age. The term 'escalation' was dramatized in the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. Robert F. Kennedy's step-by-step account of diplomatic developments and internal differences of orientation between civilian and military advisers indicates how ultimate decision-making was affected by keeping the consequences of escalation constantly in view:

Miscalculation and misunderstanding and escalation on one side bring a counterresponse. No action is taken against a powerful adversary in a vacuum. A government or people will fail to understand this only at their great peril. For that is how wars begin—wars that no one wants, no one intends, and no one wins.<sup>21</sup>

And he quoted the President's caution with regard to precipitate action when a U-2 reconnaissance plane was shot down over Cuban territory in the middle of the crisis: 'It isn't the first step that concerns me, but both sides escalating to the fourth and fifth step – and we don't go to the sixth because there is no one around to do so.'<sup>22</sup> Herman Kahn develops a 44-step process of escalation which begins with background tension and reaches the first use of nuclear weapons at rung 15.<sup>23</sup>

General escalation theory in its formative phase was essentially abstract and guided by the threat of nuclear or unlimited war. The notion of a 'limited nuclear war' was not conceptually convincing because of the perceived qualitative difference between conventional and nuclear weapons. However, students of the Korean conflict suggested that 'limited war' did have many identifiable gradients of scope and intensity. Thomas Schelling's theoretical scenarios of escalation under conditions of limited war depended upon the notion of tacit constraint, a mutual recognition of feasible limits. However, this was what was precisely lacking in the Israeli perception of Arab motives, which were seen as ultimately seeking the eradication of the Jewish state. Hence, unlimited war was ever-present in Israeli calculations and did not need to entail the use of non-conventional weapons.

Later escalation theory turned to historical studies but the focus was on the political context, the decision-making and perceptions of the meaning of escalatory steps. This was escalation from above.<sup>24</sup> The actual dynamic between field action and political pronouncement as the integral element in escalation appeared to escape analysis. Rather than examine the logic of

escalation decisions, this study explores the logic of developments which take place on the battlefield, as well as the interconnections between the tactical military echelons and their military and civilian superiors. It attempts to show that implementation is as much a formulator as it is an instrument of policy and that there is a danger of misunderstanding events by holding to the conventional wisdom that implementation automatically follows from policy.

Tactical field implementation of military policy may begin with detailed plans and rationally organized steps for their realization. But battle conditions are notorious for their uncertainty: one plan has many options for its execution, and these options have their own options in an infinite regress. The 'solution space' on the battlefield is in constant flux. In short, implementation is control which turns battle plan into process. Implementation, then, is a clash of means rather than a clash between means and ends and the ends emerge in the interaction of implementers. This model is not entirely adequate since it obscures policy formation by policy-makers and its impact, especially efforts by implementers to 'capture' the policy-makers for their own purposes.

On the other hand, implementation cannot entirely escape the impact of policy formulators. It defines the arena in which the operation takes place, the range of permissible tools for action, and in the long run supplies the resources. But as we shall note, data and information may also be supplied by the executing body, which knows the territory better than the policy-makers. Since implementation tends to be target-specific rather than applicable on a broad-based war front, the field forces have a major advantage in information delivery to the senior echelons.

In the course of implementation, objectives may change as opportunities narrow or expand. These fluctuating objectives may be freely chosen or might be reached as a matter of objective necessity stemming from the circumstances of the battle. Orders to minimize enemy casualties, for example, might be thwarted when the timing of the attack fortuitously encounters the enemy in the act of reinforcing or replacing its forces or when the element of surprise is foiled by the accidental discharge of a round of ammunition. Thus it is perhaps more apropos to focus upon the adaptability of policy to the outcomes of field opportunities rather than to measure the fit of implementation with planned objectives. Given the mounting resources employed in the implementation of a policy that for all intents and purposes remained relatively static in declaratory intent, it would seem that implementation is the independent variable and policy is the dependent variable. At the same time, such an approach could explain how a belligerent policy of reprisals ultimately became a war policy.

The line between discretion and arbitrary behaviour is a matter of judgement. Ultimately, it depends upon whose ox is gored. A military victory may be attributed to the discerning discretion of the military commander whereas a military defeat may be blamed on his arbitrary decisions. On occasion, the outcome is irrelevant; it is the principle of civil jurisdiction that is overriding. Thus Frederick the Great of Prussia chastised his generals for not carrying out his orders faithfully despite the victorious outcome, and President Truman fired General MacArthur even though he had reversed fortunes through his masterful Inchon landing. Majone and Wildavsky stress the priority of the existential over the pre-meditative: 'When we act to implement a policy, we change it.' And guarding against oversimplification, they conclude: 'Implementation will always be evolutionary; it will inevitably reformulate as well as carry out policy.'<sup>25</sup>

The escalation process amplifies the lack of trust between the opposing sides. Lack of trust and the basic security problems of each side lead to further escalation. Retaliation may employ fairly similar implementation guidelines but have quite different meanings dependent upon the objective of the retaliation. Thus, a deep penetration raid could be conducted to convey the

message of vulnerability or might be conducted in order to carry out an act of retribution against a specific target.

The 'security dilemma' that is basic for understanding the situation parallels the model in the 'prisoner's dilemma' in which each side takes up the policy of the prisoner who looks for security and is not prepared to trust his friend in the prison cell. Each side exits and both lose. A continuous crisis of the kind represented by acts of reprisal in the 1950s conceals a self-contained process of escalation whose ultimate outcome is war.

The psychological dynamic brings about an arms race which increases tension and suspicion. Jervis explains the arms race in terms of a spiral model: decision-makers reach conclusions and posit that the arming of the other side points to aggressive intentions, so that the might of the adversary's forces multiplies insecurity and anxiety in the state. The enemy is not only potential; rather he is already planning and carrying out hostile actions.<sup>26</sup>

The psychological dynamic explanation helps us to understand the conflict. The basic security dilemma becomes complicated and heightens misunderstandings. When a prediction of hostility exists, the prediction is self-fulfilling and at the end of the process a much higher level of conflict is reached.<sup>27</sup>

In a continuing crisis, pressures on decision-makers increase. As long as the crisis continues, the need for effective and pragmatic leadership among decision-makers becomes more felt. This is the theoretical basis for the creation of a 'kitchen cabinet' in every regime during a crisis phase. Snyder and Diesing emphasize the conservative factor among decision-makers.<sup>28</sup> According to them, it is difficult to expect any strategic change, but in the best circumstances there might be a change of tactics. If any change should come about among decision-makers, it is most likely to be from 'dove' to 'hawk'. A process of mutual support emerges among decision-makers which brings about the dismissal or disappearance of doubts or any re-examination of the situation. The crisis is simplified to a hostile, violent and aggressive action which requires a suitable response.

The crisis situation causes decisions to be taken under pressure and this often adversely affects the ability to think analytically and creatively. Michael Brecher, who devoted many years of study to the foreign policy of Israel, concludes that in the hour of crisis decision-makers grasp external events according to their perceptions of the enemy.<sup>29</sup> The same grasp of external annoyances generates a sense of pressure and depression. Decision-makers respond to the threatening developments with the adoption of one strategy or another as a policy definition. The strategy is constructed on the basis of a system of images of these decision-makers –how they see and understand the threat, their perception of the like-lihood of war and their assessment of the limited time available in which to act or exercise restraint.

This theoretical basis supports an understanding of the political and military processes that occurred during the early 1950s. Applying Schelling's conceptualization, Israel undertook such a policy against its neighbours following infiltration and acts of theft and sabotage originating from across the border. A policy of retaliation was undertaken against the background of the situation of Israel in the wake of the War of Independence and the years of mass immigration. The lack of stability along its borders, the problems of settling hundreds of thousands of immigrants and a sense of insecurity demanded a response from the Israeli Government to the security problem.

### ***Implementation Drives Policy***

An understanding of the operational dynamics involved in the civilian-military nexus may be drawn from analogous processes described in the political science literature.<sup>30</sup> Classical military science distinguishes between strategy and tactics, and classical political science makes a parallel distinction between policy and implementation. Conventional wisdom maintains that the former does and ought to govern the latter. Moreover, in democratic societies the military echelons and their strategies are subordinate to the popularly elected political echelons (see (Diagram I and II). Clausewitz gives a terse a definition of the military terms and their causal relation: ‘*Tactics* is the theory of the use of military forces in combat. *Strategy* is the theory of the use of combats for the object of war.’<sup>31</sup>

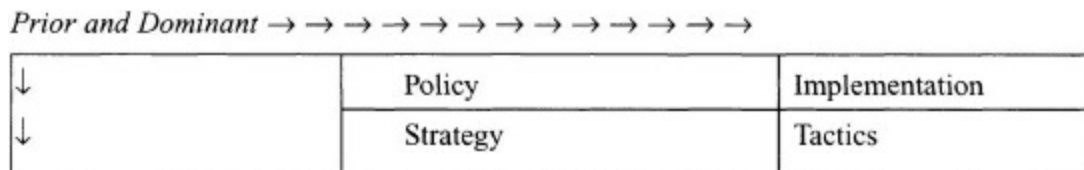


Diagram I Linear Model.

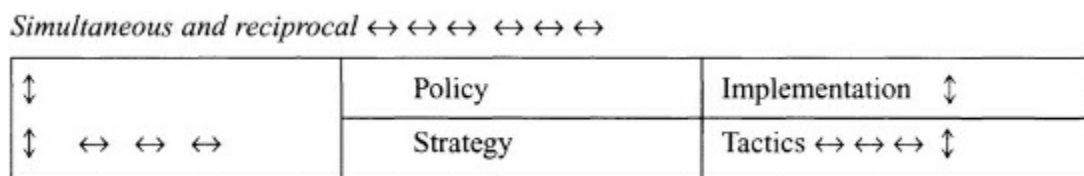


Diagram II Interactive Model.

That the art of war is subservient to political considerations is contained in Clausewitz’s most famous remark, that ‘war is...a continuation of political commerce... by other means’.<sup>32</sup> Aron refines the distinction by contrasting diplomacy based upon persuasion in the absence of force with strategy which employs violence. Both are tools of politics.<sup>33</sup> There is a logical priority of military strategy over military tactics and an equally logical priority of political policy over military strategy.

In the sphere of politics, conventional wisdom ordains that policy precedes implementation. First you plan, then you execute. This conceptual framework has been criticized for its compartmentalization and lack of empirical grounding.<sup>34</sup> In the fields of public administration and social service delivery, it has been argued that implementation is the crucible of policy formulation.<sup>35</sup> That implementation dictates and actually formulates policy has been explained by the cooptation or capture theory of interaction between governing and governed bodies. The latter are the most interested and intimately active agents of the governing regulatory channels. Another approach suggests that policies fail to materialize as formulated because they are general and hence blurred or multiple and thus potentially conflicting. These seemingly congenial policy characteristics engender various paths for implementation. However, even if clarity and specificity marks a policy, it does not follow that there is a unique path for its execution. Moreover, implementation itself is rooted in plans, programmes, decisions and guidelines, all of which are conditional on circumstances at the time of implementation. Majone and Wildavsky claim that ‘policies are continuously transformed by implementing actions that simultaneously alter resources and objectives’.<sup>36</sup> The policy emerges out of the deed. In those instances where

the deeds are intrinsically violent, the diplomatic means in politics are nullified – *post factum nullum consilium* (after the deed is done, consultation is useless).

A case having been made for implementation-driven policy, a single-path causal process in either direction should nevertheless be viewed with caution. Policy proclamations provide topographical arenas and operational limits, delineate principal actors associated with the policy and usually specify the resources available. In the Israeli case, carving out a public sphere which separates the public from the private, the bureaucratic from the personal, the civilian from the military has been difficult in practice and perhaps misleading. The following case study, drawing upon a military escalation process in Israel in the mid-1950s, explores salient elements of this intertwining of spheres which, for its maintenance, democratic doctrine has held to be discrete.<sup>37</sup>

### **Genesis of the Civil/military Dichotomy**

Ancient societies often relied on charismatic personalities to lead them in war and peace. Warrior functions were allocated on the basis of age cohorts or social rank. While this would seem to indicate clear allocations of social functions, such was not the case. In monarchical India, ‘ruling was a function to be exercised by a leader of the Kshatriya or warrior caste’ and in East Africa, where government in tribal society was quite limited, warrior and other protective services performed by the leadership blended with ritual and public speaking skills.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, one may at times discern the need to choose between civil and military orientations in these societies. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the tension is not in the content, where all life is personified as a battlefield, but in the fact that the military *Weltanschauung* of this saga is addressed to a king. Among the ancient Israelites, a warrior-king, Saul, is chosen as their first monarch and throughout his life gathers warriors into his innermost circle. The people and their civilian chiefs are warned of the consequences of appointing such a leader. The ancient Athenians chose their generals by ballot rather than by lot, not only to strengthen the bond between military leadership and the people but also to ensure control should this leadership prove itself lacking.

In the dedicatory address to his treatise on *The Art of War*, Machiavelli questions the validity of this bifurcation:

Many now are of the opinion... that no two things are more discordant and incongruous than a civil and military life.... But if we consider the institutions of the ancients, we shall find that there is a very close, intimate relation between these two conditions, and that they are not only compatible and consistent with each other, but necessarily connected and related.<sup>39</sup>

Like the author of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Machiavelli sought to infuse civil life with certain values drawn from the ethos of combat, to which he gave the name *virtu*. These conceptual issues bear on the Israeli context to the extent that the Israeli armed forces have been an intentional crucible for the formation of the Israeli national character, and to the extent that Israel’s immersion in military conflict and issues of national survival have won it the description of a ‘garrison state’ and a ‘nation in arms’.

The notion that war is too important to be left to the generals is a modern view associated with the rise of representative democracy and changing requirements in military organization. The social-contract theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries hypothesized a state of nature which was either equivalent to a state of war or developed into a pervasive hostile environment. This situation required that men compact together to create a sovereign authority

guaranteeing social tranquillity. While Hobbes regarded this transfer as irrevocable and concentrated political and military power in a single point, Locke and Rousseau left residual powers in collective entities, either the community or the people, should the promise of protection for life and property be violated. This notion of the transference of individual powers to authorize government placed military protection in a subordinate position to civil standing.

Utilitarian arguments for the separation of civil and military functions superseded contract theory. Adam Smith regarded national security as best defended by a standing army, an inevitable and desirable outcome of the division of labour. In order to guard against military usurpation of civil rule, he recommends that the sovereign authority itself undertake supreme military command. By placing military command in the hands of those who have the greatest interest in upholding civil authority, the people's liberty will be preserved.<sup>40</sup> The American Declaration of Independence<sup>41</sup> lists among the 'injuries and usurpations' of the British king a 'rendering of] the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power'. Thomas Jefferson, whose stamp is clearly imprinted upon the Declaration, wrote a Charter of Rights on the eve of the French Revolution which recommended to the French king that 'the military shall be subordinate to the civil authority' but acknowledged that this article 'may give alarm'.<sup>42</sup> The rise of mass levies and the phenomenon of Bonapartism, however, did much to firmly inscribe the relegation of the military to civilian control in democratic constitutions, whether written or unwritten, during the nineteenth century.

Most, if not all, researchers agree that in democratic states, the military command is a body appointed by the civilian leadership and authority is delegated to it by this leadership. One of the means of bridging this division is through the appointment of the sovereign representative as the chief military authority. Thus, in the United States, the President is also the Commander-in-Chief. Yet, the definitive nineteenth century turn towards political superintendence of martial affairs was not solely rooted in theories of popular sovereignty. Clausewitz develops a theory in which war is an instrument of policy based on a classical distinction between *technē* and *politē*. This distinction holds that politics is a master science which embraces all of human action, whereas war is only an instrumental part of this policy, containing limited and confined judgement. Thus it would be 'an irrational proceeding to consult professional soldiers on the plan of a war'.<sup>43</sup> Clausewitz's civilian precedence also derives from the emerging ultimate political form, the nation-state, especially the Prussian state, the embodiment of patriots. Wars of national passion are a new phenomenon and thus 'war...must be organized differently in principle' to what it was when states coldly opposed standing armies to each other.<sup>44</sup>

In his reflections on the terms 'end' and 'means' in war, Clausewitz concludes that the political goal is the aim and that combat is the means. According to this, means should not be separated from their ends. Clausewitz coined the well-known saying that 'war...has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself'.<sup>45</sup> War that is not restricted in its extent by policy will always arrive at an extreme, 'a senseless thing without an object', an 'unbridled element of hostility'.<sup>46</sup> Thus war conducted within the confines of its own *technē* may defeat the enemy but it has lost sight of its overall objectives.

Opposed to the position and opinions of Clausewitz was the well-known Prussian Field Marshall, von Moltke, who stated:

The objective of the art of war and its principal privilege with regard to policy is to prevent policy from making demands which counter the war and from using this implement in error through ignorance of its impact. The commander in his operation should by no means be instructed by political inspirations alone. He must always have before him the considerations of



military success.<sup>47</sup>

Von Moltke's position suggests that there is an inherent tension between the military and civilian ethos. Tzvi Lanir, describing this outlook from the civilian perspective contends that

this tension emanates from the fact that the definition of political perceptions of the war includes extra-military aspects, as well as because political outlooks change frequently relative to military outlooks which tend to reveal stability over time; it also stems from the fact that military systems are given to rational thinking and a language different from political reasoning and language.<sup>48</sup>

According to Ezer Gat:

The more difficult question arises when the objectives of the civilian echelon do not coincide with those who head the armed forces. The conflict here is not between suggestions for the use of different means, but between two different conceptions as to what is desirable. In this instance, the two parties have no common denominator to decide among different steps. Each has his own way, and the clash between the civilian echelon and the military command in this situation is inevitable.<sup>49</sup>

The dispute between the political and military echelons is aggravated even more by those who claim that civilian leaders are not qualified to manage those difficult and dangerous situations which arise in war. Having appointed senior military command and thereby shown trust and confidence in its abilities, they should not interfere in its appointed tasks, even if it is at the expense of prestige and influence for a certain period. Clausewitz did not abandon his position even on these complex points and claimed that the statesman must and needs to 'command' while finding a middle path for intervention in planning and managing operations.<sup>50</sup>

Although the constitutional, formal relationship between the civil and military sectors is firmly established in democratic ideology, their working relations are far more opaque than conventional wisdom assumes. There are in effect many points of friction which lack clarification and delineation in terms of the definition of authority and responsibility. In part, this occurs over the fundamental question of 'what is to be done' in crises of a military/political nature. Even in times of peace, the political and the military points of view do not necessarily coincide and may in fact on occasion be mutually opposed. Thus a picture emerges of multiple sticking-points between the two establishments, with the centre of gravity shifting from one echelon to the other, depending upon objective circumstances and the forcefulness of the personalities involved. The American admiral Henry Eccles regarded the problem of overlapping relations as an historically structured given: 'The subject of entangled civilian/military relations is described in all political and military writings from Thucydides up to contemporary books and periodicals. We can expect this debate to continue as long as state and military actions continue on the face of this earth.'<sup>51</sup>

The civilian and military positions sometimes become temporarily detached because of objective and necessary circumstances. A case in point is the Schlieffen Plan (1905), which was devised by the military and accepted by the political echelon as the sole strategic option should Germany go to war. The Schlieffen Plan's basic assumption was that Germany would turn its military attentions to France before commencing hostile activities on the eastern front. But as it turned out, the order of events at the outbreak of the First World War was different from that predicted by the plan. Because there was no alternative plan, German policy had to adjust itself

to the needs of the military plan. 'The political plan became shackled,' wrote professor Yehuda Wallach, 'whether or not it met the desires of the statesmen and army personnel... and the strategy was no longer in accord with the factual political situation.'<sup>52</sup>

The traditional approaches to relations between the civilian and military echelons no longer provide sufficient practical solutions. Strategy and policy have become integrated elements in the art of survival. In the modern age, their common objective has become the deterrence and prevention, no less than the management, of war, should it erupt.

Even if it is acceptable for the civilian echelon to intervene on issues such as when to use military force and with what intensity and scope, still many important issues in the techno-tactical arena remain. The very areas which are given over to planning and operation by the tactical, operational echelon create new focal points of friction and tension between policy and strategy, between strategy and tactics.

In a period of ongoing violent conflict, the problem of civilian control emerges as a problem of the first order. The role of the army and its leadership is to prepare the nation and the army for the critical hour. Commanders demand greater independence in planning and implementation in order to maintain and increase the level of security according to their conception and professional understanding. This very same professional point of view often causes clashes between the senior military command and the civilian echelon. The military echelon, claiming it has the expertise, demands the right to make decisions on essential questions which have political implications for foreign relations as well as domestic implications in the social and political sphere.

The military echelon finds itself placed in a 'political stockade' which constrains the extent, intensity and frequency of its actions. Its use of weaponry (artillery and aircraft) and the number of forces that participate in operations are restricted. All this creates friction and sometimes even confrontation with the civilian echelon. The military echelon sometimes attempts to absolve itself by raising professional problems – techno-tactical operational needs required for carrying out the mission – and emphasizing battlefield uncertainty, which requires wide margins in planning.

The problem of control and oversight over the military echelons becomes central during a period of continuous conflict. The political echelon wants to authorize military programmes in all their detail. Sometimes it will be involved in planning beyond the proper limits and will want to take a part in managing and controlling the operation itself.

In his book *The Soldier and The State*, Huntington claims that only in a democratic regime is the claim of civilian control over the military completely realized. But even in this type of regime deviations and exceptions may be found. Huntington goes on to state that the supreme imperative of every system of civilian control is to reduce the power of the army, which in principle is not a negative step. However, an incorrect interpretation of this principle is liable to bring about ruin.<sup>53</sup>

Huntington's claim has validity in peacetime, but the demand to trim the power of the military is clearly not applicable to a period of armed conflict, when state leadership needs the armed forces and its commanders. With the increase in tension and military clashes, there is a growing demand to strengthen the army, to enlarge its budget and to enable broader-based manpower to be mobilized according to operational needs as perceived by the military leadership. It is precisely at this moment that military commanders become aware of the problem as to whether they are serving the state more than the government ruling the state. This distinction between the state and the regime which is in the hands of political leaders, who operate from the vantage point of the party that brought them to power, often leads to a lack of insight and confusion

among army personnel. Prepared by profession to endanger and even sacrifice their lives for the nation, they do not easily accept any change in the sacred security outlooks of yesterday. Furthermore, they do not want to be victims of the goals and leanings of this or that politician. General MacArthur, who was in sharp disagreement with President Truman concerning the management of the Korean War, and was finally dismissed from his post as commander of the fighting forces by the president, experienced this very situation:

I find in existence a new and heretofore unknown and dangerous concept that the members of our armed forces owe primary allegiance or loyalty to those who temporarily exercise the authority of the Executive Branch of Government rather than to the country and its constitution which they are sworn to defend.<sup>54</sup>

From the words of General MacArthur and from the historical event connected to his dismissal, and in the Congressional investigation that followed, we can see the fragility of the relationship between the government and the military. Even if formally the military command has authority delegated to it by the political leadership and even if it has autonomous spheres of operation within the military framework, nevertheless, informally, the senior command has extensive power and influence originating from its delegated powers and instruments of great might which were placed in its hands.

This power derives also from the proper exploitation of power struggles within government echelons and among political powers situated in the regime, as well as from the prestige, appreciation and great trust that military commanders obtain in contrast to politicians.

Tension occurs not only between the political and military echelon. An additional unseen locus of tension exists between the senior military echelon and the tactical echelons – that is, the field units that carry out the policy in practice. The same tension between the decisional and operation echelons of the military is expressed, and is in fact more readily discerned, in periods of ‘low intensive war’ or – as leaders in former times referred to it – ‘neither peace nor war’.

During periods of continuous tension and military actions, when the governing strategy of retaliatory action is determined by the senior military echelon, the tactical echelon’s share and weight in policy determination increases, even if the stresses and strains between it and the senior echelons are more sharply and clearly delineated. In a period in which every activity, even of small military scope, bears a political significance and contains implications for foreign and domestic policy, the struggle over the authorization and control of these actions becomes harsher.

In this theoretical discussion, special emphasis is given to the influence of the military echelon in Israel. This will provide an appropriate background for understanding the process which the state underwent in the early 1950s, the period of the retaliatory actions. Bengt Abrahamson suggests a twofold division in the analysis of the relations of the army with state bodies and political power groups. At the formal level, structural factors may be explored; at the informal level interpersonal relationships may be examined.<sup>55</sup>

In Israel at the beginning of the 1950s Israel had a formal structure for decision-making and formulation of national security policy that was extremely impaired, if it existed at all. In addition, control over military authorities was given, according to the Basic Laws legislated by the Knesset, to the Knesset and its committees. The Agranat Commission, which drew lessons from the Yom Kippur War, formulated the problem before us in one of the more important clauses in its report:

We realized an absence of clear definitions in the division of authority regarding matters of security among the three authorities which deal with these matters, that is to say, the Government and the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence and the head of the General Command, who is head of the IDF, and of the interrelations between state leadership and the command of the IDF.<sup>56</sup>

The IDF directive of 1948, which served as the basis of the government's authority over the army, mentioned neither civilian authority nor the authority of the Defence Minister over the army. David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence during the first years of the state, insisted on his obligation and right to oversee and control the army without any hindrances. He regarded this as part of his comprehensive supervision and discipline over the senior command and even over operational decisions to ensure they were in line with his security policy. Thus by virtue of his personality and leadership, Ben-Gurion succeeded in determining regime norms of civilian control with regard to the army, but did not manage to anchor them in the Basic Laws of the Israeli state.

Only after the 1973 Yom Kippur War did the government initiate a law, passed by the Knesset in 1975, which defined in an unequivocal manner the subordination of the IDF to the government and the subordination of the Chief-of-Staff to the Defence Minister.

The Foreign Affairs and Security Committee and the Finance and Security Subcommittee were the bodies which should have undertaken supervision and control. Even today these committees have very limited powers, and in the 1950s when Israel was a fledgling state they had far fewer. At the informal level, the senior military echelon is involved either through direct active participation or through the presentation of its positions by the Minister of Defence. The army's views are represented at every discussion and decision-making forum. Among these are the Knesset committees responsible for matters related to foreign affairs and security; financial committees and their subcommittees dealing with security matters; state forums; the security cabinet and the government at large. This participation, active or passive in turn, is determined by the personality and principles of the incumbent Defence Minister. The existence of these relationships, formal or informal, of course allowed for the exchange of information, messages and mutual influence between the two systems, the civilian and the military. The quality of the relationships between those who stand at the heads of the civilian and military security systems determines the quality of the cooperation between the two.

Yitzhak Rabin, the Chief-of-Staff during the Six Day War and Prime Minister after the disaster of the Yom Kippur War, devoted many hours learning about and discussing the relations between the civilian and military echelons: one of the central questions focused on which of the two echelons bore responsibility for the Yom Kippur War.

For most of the years of the existence of the state, relations between the civil and military echelons were not delved into at length or in breadth. Nonetheless, following the Yom Kippur War, the Agranat Commission raised a number of issues in this area. It gave me an opportunity to become acquainted with the subject – a chance to put theory into practice – and from the two opposing vantage points. I had become acquainted with it as a military man at different ranks up to the Chief-of-Staff, and was acquainted with it for three years as Prime Minister. The question I asked myself during my incumbency as Prime Minister was how I see the authority and obligations of the civilian echelon with regard to the senior military echelon, and what are my expectations as a political representative [who emerged] from the senior military echelon.... In my view, it is the political echelon's responsibility to set goals, allocate resources, show the way,

and make decisions. Moreover, its authority does not come without responsibility. Thus, in my view, the civilian echelon bears responsibility for every decision that it makes, including those recommended by the Chief-of-Staff after he has brought information, considerations, options and recommendations before the civil echelon. From the moment that the civil echelon approves a recommendation in any area which is within the compass of the military echelon, the recommendation becomes one for which the civil echelon bears entire responsibility. It has no right or privilege not to accept full responsibility.<sup>57</sup>

When the powers of the civilian echelon were weaker, the powers of the military echelon increased, and vice versa. In periods when the system was headed by a dominant personality, for example, Ben-Gurion or a former Chief-of-Staff or senior general with military knowledge and experience such as Yitzhak Rabin or Ehud Barak, there was an effort to grasp the reins and dictate policy and military orders while maintaining strict control and oversight of the military echelon. Along with this, the continuous war in which the Israeli state found itself, including periods of the 'silent war', determined to a great extent the degree of influence of the military over the civilian echelon. This was even true in periods in which the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence were dominant and possessed past military experience.

Even though a process of militarization did not commence in Israeli society – an issue which in itself is subject to debate – nevertheless, in a state in which coping with security questions stands in the front rank of priorities and engages its citizens on a daily basis, the security establishment and its military operations stand above and outside the frameworks, posing many basic legal and ethical questions. Moreover, it may be claimed, and it cannot be overly exaggerated, that a percolation and mutual penetration of the two systems exists, with harmful consequences, from the liberal, civilian vantage point, for the civilian establishment. This same 'symbiosis', which in Israel exists in areas where IDF and societal activities overlap, places in the hands of military commanders far more power than is desirable at all levels of planning and implementation. It may be said that the three claims of the instrumentalist thesis are placed in doubt:

1. The IDF does not function solely as an operational instrument of government policy, but rather constitutes a power factor with great influence over the formation of policy.
2. Civilian control over the military is not sufficiently effective. Moreover, state oversight is lax and divided among many control mechanisms, which allows room for manoeuvrability.
3. The IDF, certainly in the 1950s, was firmly attached to the political party system, was influenced by it and even influenced it.<sup>58</sup>

The influence of the IDF on foreign policy and security formation was a product of Ben-Gurion's inspiration and deeds. As the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence who designed the institutions and patterns of behaviour, Ben-Gurion desired a complete detachment of security considerations from political party pressures. He wanted to keep state security matters under his personal control; he sought decisions grounded in professional considerations of security maintenance based on his understanding and experience of what constituted 'professional considerations'. Thus, although he removed security matters from the purview of the politicians, he did not institutionalize them in the framework of Knesset laws and transferred much authority to army personnel. As mentioned above, the final decisions remained with Ben-Gurion *ex officio*, as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Clearly, it was Ben-Gurion who assigned decision-making-areas to the army, especially to Moshe Dayan as Chief-of-Staff, a charismatic

personality who had access to the political corridors of power in Israel during the 1950s.

In any case, the position and influence of the Chief-of-Staff was decisive by virtue of his office and responsibility as commander of the army to prepare the nation for total war and to assure national and personal security in calmer times.

The fact that the Chief-of-Staff is the link between the civilian and military echelons greatly augments his power and influence. The Chief-of-Staff has at his disposal the instruments for strategic calculation, analysis and planning at all levels. These resources are not found among the civilian leadership. The Intelligence Branch provides national assessments on matters of security and its pronouncements are unquestioned. Even if this body's appraisals hold the possibility of a basic conceptual error, as the Israeli State has already experienced a number of times, the branch heads are invited on a permanent basis to present their findings and judgements to Knesset and Cabinet sessions.

All efforts after the Yom Kippur War to establish assessment bodies and strategic civilian think tanks, whether in the Foreign Ministry or in the Prime Minister's office, failed. The power, numbers and quality of personnel working in the military intelligence system leave them with exclusive control in this area, despite an understanding that additional institutional avenues of assessment should be established, such as a National Security Council.

A central aspect of the civilian echelon's oversight of the military focuses upon its ability to prevent deviations from the intentions of decision-makers during the planning and execution of military operations. The task at the political level is to curb the needs and desires of the military establishment, and to direct them towards political requirements alone.

What are the needs and desires of the military organization and those who head it? This central question, which few have addressed or delved into deeply, may lead to answers that help towards a better understanding of the role of the vibrant and demanding military system, which occupies a central place in the life of every state and society. A distinction should be made with regard to the status of the armed forces between peacetime and a period of continuous armed struggle. In peacetime, the army establishment is engaged in negotiations concerning the allocation of resources, the design and operation of work programmes, purchases and requisitions, weapons development and inspections in the operational field.

A central function of the military echelon is to prepare the army for wartime. The preparation of the army requires professional training at the level of commanders; the training of units; the scrutiny of new tactics and war techniques; the introduction of new weaponry and the assessment of their operation.

The army seeks to enhance the performance of its commanders and soldiers through raising internal morale and heightening self-confidence. These goals may be attained through elevating the professional level of training, gaining battle experience in minor military actions such as retaliatory raids and giving freedom of action and initiative to field commanders in matters pertaining to routine security measures.

In a period of continual violent conflict which threatens to escalate into total war, the army is primarily engaged in examining operational competence through an emphasis on its capability for integrated operations by all services and corps. The capacity for integrated military action, both inter-service and inter-corps, which is difficult to attain even in training exercises, becomes vital in preparing units for total war. The intention simply is to combine the armoured, artillery and engineering corps, together with units of infantry, in occasional operations. At a higher level, cooperative endeavours, including mutual assistance from the air force and navy in more complex operations, serves as a model for operative planning.

The combat experience of commanders and soldiers is highly valuable. This is the reason for the continuous push to expand the operative framework through the participation of additional units in operations. The natural competition among units brings pressure to bear on the senior command to obtain additional operations, as well as to expand the forces that participate in each approved operation.

Within the dialectical process of retaliatory actions, the enemy also develops a combat doctrine and tactics, improves its weaponry, augments its units and raises its preparedness and mobility. In turn, senior command is forced to respond to the operational challenges and anticipate the appropriate responses in the imminent combat arena. The scenario is similar to a boxing or wrestling match slated for a number of rounds: the army commanders seek to gain an advantage in every round despite the continuous deterioration of conditions from battle to battle.

Military planners, as well as commanders, are aware of the uncertainty factor contained in each and every battle. Consequently, they take into consideration the worst-case scenarios and devise full operational responses to them. As each side learns from its enemy, undertakes further preparation and adjusts its operations to the changing circumstances, this dynamic generates a need to expand the size of the forces required for every reprisal. If in the first stage of retaliatory operations groups of combatants number from three to six soldiers, eventually larger combat units are mobilized – platoons and companies, whose operative structure eventually reaches battalion strength. In far-ranging and dangerous operations, forces may even reach brigade proportions.

New operational needs, require the addition of stand-by security forces, supporting fire for advancing forces, blocking forces, evacuation reinforcements and motorized rescue teams, and the like.

The power of the weapons and munitions grow. In the earliest sorties, groups carrying retaliatory operations bear their own personal weapons, but soon forces have to be equipped with heavy machine guns, anti-tank weapons, light and heavy mortars and other weighty military apparatus. The ever increasing size of forces undertaking operations bring heavy demolition charges with them, necessitating the addition of half-tracks and coverage by armour and heavy artillery. The air force as well, may be placed on alert and even participate in operations.

To the outside observer, the professional needs of the army appear to dictate the process of escalation while the political echelon does nothing except watch with gritted teeth. Yet, the very approval of this limited form of warfare by state leadership creates the condition for a series of military operations whose pace and progress the civilian echelon cannot easily control.

Army commanders naturally wish to prove their operational capability to the civilian echelon. Military success and operational capability raise the confidence of the civilian echelon and permit the continuation of an offensive policy. The focal problem of civilian oversight and control loses its centrality in the 'din of battle', and victory with all its domestic and foreign implications receive priority in the eyes of the leadership.

The political implications of military actions are seen in a different light by the military. Political problems are largely addressed in terms of professional operations and solutions for them are drawn from military experience. In their opinion, these were complex problems in which any political involvement would only be disruptive; hence it would be best to leave the military echelon free to decide and to manage them.

*Per contra*, the statesman who focuses on the political elements that contribute to the solution of a problem and the expected outcomes of a military operation demands maximal control over the outcomes and their political implications. This can only be attained through oversight and

strict control. The political echelon's blatant unwillingness to clarify its intentions can often be discerned. It is manifest in its pronouncements relating to a national security concept as well as in its concrete management of affairs. According to Avner Yaniv:

The reasons for the stubborn opposition to every attempt to formulate and publicize officially the conceptual framework – or the doctrine – which guides defence policy is not unexpected. There is a clear preference for secrecy and obscurity in order to 'confuse the enemy' and to avoid superfluous confrontations with friendly countries; there exists an administrative and political tradition which prefers fuzziness (and the flexibility for action that this grants) over clarity; above all, there are deep divisions of opinion over fundamental questions such as defining the intentions of the Arabs or the importance of the territories for security.<sup>59</sup>

In the Israeli case, the obscurity and lack of clarity regarding intentions, which allow for flexible action, are also in effect the minefields in which the two participants are trapped. More than once the military echelon would wait for detailed and precise instructions from the civilian echelon in order to apportion the burden of responsibility for the outcomes and repercussions of a military operation. But the latter tarried in giving instructions and replies. Moreover, the instructions that were given were stated in broad terms and were susceptible of broad interpretation. The military, accustomed to working in the operative field, must receive precise definitions with which to interpret instructions from the politicians and accept responsibility for possible risks.

When the civilian echelon hesitates, when its instructions are not clear and precise, the burden of responsibility falls upon the Chief-of-Staff, and military operations are carried out according to his understanding. In this fashion, when accountability is removed from the civilian echelon, the military finds itself at the centre of public criticism in the light of an operation's outcomes and repercussions, without any backing from the political leadership.

Finally, any study retaliation must give attention and due importance to the key operational unit, the paratroop unit. Even in the period in which the senior military echelon undertook responsibility, the process of oversight and control did not cease. Here, the paratroop battalion, which carried out a majority of the operations, was an expression of the role and influence of the tactical military echelon.

The factor of uncertainty and the desire to bring about success on the battlefield allowed the tactical unit to manoeuvre between the civilian and senior military echelons.

In his assessment of the retaliatory raids and their outcomes in the 1950s, Dan Horowitz writes:

The third aspect, which is the most complicated, is bound up with the rational framework of military operations, that is, their dependence upon responses of the enemy. The use of limited military operations is conditional based upon advance expectations of enemy behaviour; if these expectations do not come to pass, unplanned escalation is liable to occur. The Israeli experience in the mid 1950s shows that the existence of different evaluations related to expected responses from the enemy allow not only political, but also moral, oversight to be side-stepped.<sup>60</sup>

The political echelon which chooses to be fuzzy and flexible also chooses to maintain 'clean hands' should complications or undesired political outcomes occur. Hence the political echelon is not averse to passing the 'hot potato' to the military in the hope that the latter will find an appropriate way to deal with the situation. Placing the matter in professional hands removes the



political echelon from any responsibility for deeds that are uncomfortable to explain and justify.

The senior military echelon as well allows considerable leeway for action and is tolerant of exceptional actions carried out by the operative unit. Nevertheless, the senior command echelon upholds the position that the operative unit will not deviate from the operative instructions it receives, or at least from the spirit of these instructions, even if not keeping to the very letter of the dry orders.

On 26 May 1954, 'Operation Whip 6' clarified the meaning of the term 'spirit of the instructions'. In his letter to the head of General Staff Branch, GHQ, Meir Amit, Moshe Dayan, responding to the paratroopers' deviation in Operation Whip 6 wrote: 'Depending upon the instance, I prefer excessive initiative and action, even if it involves some mistakes here and there, to the passivity of "sit and do nothing" and covering yourself with paper and seven authorizations for an operation before its execution.'<sup>61</sup>

The freedom of action given to an operative unit is an inevitable result of the reality of this type of operative action. Under these circumstances, the senior military echelon too assures itself of freedom of manoeuvre. It is this echelon, and not the field unit commander, who must provide explanations to the civilian echelon, should there be deviation from the intention or the manner of the action's implementation.

During periods of continuous reprisal actions, the power of the tactical unit is great, and the influence of the outcome of its action in the civil arena is also great.

### **The Tactical Unit: The Dimensions of Its Impact**

The forces assigned to conduct reprisal operations were elite units placed directly under the tutelage and remuneration of senior command. These units were also given responsibility for all field operations in their missions. Both the telescoped chain of command between general headquarters and the field unit and the relative autonomy granted the latter in implementing its missions provided conditions for experimentation and innovation in military tactics. The historical timing was also propitious for new initiatives in military organization and praxis. In an interlude between wars – the case in point of our discussion – senior command tends to give preference to the operation of a restricted number of units in order to ensure specialization, accumulation of experience, development of combat tactics and resources and, above all, dauntless commanders and soldiers.

Headquarters wishes to avoid failures and thus it will train commanders, instil confidence in their roles and tasks and see that they are skilled in all the minutiae of fighting techniques and night combat. The knowledge and experience gained in these areas on occasion enter into the category of secret and confidential, the early exposure of which would strengthen the enemy's preparedness. The element of surprise, a key constituent in the arsenal of the elite unit, coupled with its accumulation of 'private' knowledge in combat preparedness, creates an aura of election both within the unit and, with mounting battle successes, with the army, the political regime and the public at large.

It is clear that the army must concentrate its efforts on these elite units and not spread its human resources and materiel, as well as its battle experience and accumulated professional expertise, too thin. The knowledge gained and compiled by the operative unit may be passed on to other military units after study and the drawing of lessons. As has already been emphasized, the senior military echelon feeds off victory. It depends vitally upon military attainments in the

area of tactical operations and cannot allow its undertakings to be imperilled or meet with even the tiniest misadventure if it wishes to win the confidence of the civilian echelon and increase confidence in the capability of the army.

Over a continuous period of time in which many military operations are carried out, tension and psychological pressure rise among the commanders and soldiers in the unit bearing the burden. Commanders and soldiers who with mounting frequency undertake one mission after another, involving not only the action itself but also the constant preparation and accompanying tension for the next night of combat, are subject to a most demanding regimen. They undergo a strenuous period of training and indoctrination directed at preparing the individual soldier and the entire unit for reaching just one objective: victory on the battlefield.

The instructional regimen is difficult and laborious and the physical and mental demands made on every commander and soldier stretch them to the limits of their abilities. Long marches; night navigation and border patrols; carrying simulated injured on stretchers; physical training exercises and professional instruction in weapons use and demolition – all require the full accord of the soldiers with the unit and its commanders. The combatants must have confidence in the objective and the need to attain the required battle fitness prior to anticipated operations.

Secondary units engage in covert and open competition over the level of fitness that their soldiers and unit can attain. This competition contributes to the unit's high operational capability and the individual soldier's readiness to be at the forefront of the assault when the order is given. Mental tension bears more heavily than the physical exertion experienced in the regimen and pace of training. They return to combat, where killing, blood and destruction, ghastly scenes and experiences are constant companions that can leave a lasting impression on even the most hardened of soldiers. Every penetration to the heart of populated areas, especially injury to the civilian population, women and children, leaves its mark and can shake the unit's confidence in the justice of the mission.

Moreover, when unit comrades become casualties and the unit suffers losses and injuries, when combatants carry wounded and killed on their backs in the immediate wake of a reprisal raid, when comrades are borne to their last rest, the pressure and mental strain are immense. Unit commanders must find effective ways to maintain the fighting spirit of the unit and raise morale and self-confidence among the individual combatants and the unit as a whole.

Knowing why one sets out for battle and identifying with basic national values must become part of the ethical-psychological basis of the unit's *esprit*. During the course of training and operations, the group is fashioned into a unified social unit. Powerful psychological and sociological processes are at work developing unique characteristics of identity and belonging.

During the life of the unit, both in its routine and special operational modes of activity, unit commanders and soldiers must exhibit a number of basic traits such as courage, operational discipline, physical fitness, endurance, patriotism and even self-sacrifice, in order to achieve the implementation of missions. These characteristics become almost ingrained in the combat soldier. Finer regards 'the exercise of these virtues [as]... so essential to the career of arms that they constitute its distinguishing feature, define its own peculiar spirit'.<sup>62</sup>

An elite unit is not a random collection of recruits. Generally, it will be a unit of the choicest volunteers who are familiar with the basis of the ideological-national-social objectives for which they volunteered or were recruited. They must identify fully with the military goals set before them, as well as pledge solidarity with their comrades and commanders in the unit. Confidence in their immediate commanders, those who lead them in operation after operation, must be at such a high level that there is no shadow of doubt concerning their allegiance. Bernard Brodie,

historian and political scientist, in relating the social to the disciplinary aspects of military training, writes:

Today the conditioning has usually aimed at inducing various constraints besides fear of superiors, like pride in one's own unit or in one's role, or concern with one's image in the eyes of one's comrades. All who have written on military leadership have also stressed the importance of soldiers having confidence in both their immediate superiors and in their higher commanders.<sup>63</sup>

One of the unique elements in this social bonding as it applied to the elite corps was the combat leadership of commanders who were expected to take the initiative and occupy the forward position in assaults. 'Follow me' became a motto of the Paratroop battalion. Compared to other fighting forces, the percentage of IDF officers and commanders killed in action is high, perhaps accounting for the emphasis on legendary heroes, itself another factor in the social bonding.

Periods of continual combat and military responses in the framework of a reprisal policy require abilities and special types of operational capabilities both in the area of habits of preparedness and in planning for training and the routine of implementation. Since the senior echelons must have at their disposal the capability to deliver an immediate response, the unit must organize a routine of preparedness. Thus units engage in the development and organization of drills and automatic-response techniques so that they can fulfil operational requirements. In order to adhere to a condensed timetable, the unit also evolves reporting and updating procedures, so that from the moment that information is received about an incident or enemy strike, an independent and robust intelligence system with a capacity to assess the situation and make decisions in planning alternative targets of retaliation, is ready to hand.

The unit's intelligence bureau prepares folders designating enemy targets. This is followed by field reconnaissance and the setting up of look-out posts. Intelligence is then collected on the deployment, movement and operational routine of hostile forces and so forth. Likewise, the unit commences preliminary planning, equipment checks and inspection of weapons required for the mission. Sometimes, a simulation of the operation is conducted in order to identify expected problems.

The preparation stage engages the entire unit in a flurry of activities which is accompanied by mounting tension with regard to the impending operation. Not everybody is privy to the exact nature of the mission and to the orders received from the senior military echelon, but all share the feeling and urge to launch the operation for which they have planned and drilled. Unit commanders will necessarily be driven to execute these operations, which they have prepared and rehearsed with great assurance, in full knowledge of the details required to carry out the mission and with a sense of purpose. The tactical echelon radiates the confidence required for taking decisions emanating from senior army echelons.

Senior military and civilian echelons will more easily place their trust in plans that have been analysed down to the last detail by the operative unit itself. These plans, often proposed in the wake of an enemy reprisal raid, are presented in an official operational portfolio, signed by headquarters and then passed for approval to the civilian echelon.

Hence, the unit not only carries out the operation; it participates in determining operation objectives, planning it down to the tiniest details, and maintaining control over the operation itself. It should be emphasized that all the operation stages referred to above must receive the sanction of the senior command echelon, but the importance of the unit commander and the plan which he presents carry weight and are decisive. Generally the operational objectives will be

determined by senior command, but already in the early planning phase the unit has a major say in the preparation of the operation's file. The unit commander, in particular, discusses and suggests objectives, priorities and operational stages.

The unit commander is allowed a great deal of discretion in conducting the mission and consequently exercises the most influence over the operational stage. The professional and organizational capacity of the unit noted above gives it a decisive role in planning and determining the shape of the final plan. The senior echelon is constantly aware that it must grant freedom of action to the combatant operational echelon if it wishes to ensure the maximum chance of victory on the battlefield.

The Prussian commander-in-chief in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 –71, the elderly Moltke, insisted that his field commanders exploit unanticipated tactical opportunities without waiting to receive special orders from their superiors, even if they deviated from the operational plan. And he added most remarkably: 'Strategy becomes dumb in the face of tactical victory; it adjusts itself to the newly created situation.'<sup>64</sup> In his 'instructions to senior commanders' Moltke issued an explicit warning against unwarranted interference in command authorizations carried out by the lower military echelons:

There are many situations in which the officer is forced to use his discretion. It is entirely wrong to wait for orders at a moment in which there is little possibility of them being delivered. The best policy, of course, is that the officer carry out the operation along the general lines of the instructions of his superiors.<sup>65</sup>

Commanders who set out on a special mission behind enemy lines need the same freedom of action, initiative and execution. An operation may well end in a bad and bitter result if, at a critical moment, a commander waits for instructions from above while acting according to the letter of the received operational instructions, without initiative, daring or decisiveness.

The very elements which bring about unit solidarity also play a part in the implementation and discharge of energy and readiness, the skills and the inner drive contained therein, as lightning turns night into day. The unit must realize its power and capability. The battle spirit and the aggressive drive pulsating within, when united with a sense of national responsibility and the formulation of an ideologically grounded security conception, generates pressure on the senior echelons to grant opportunities to put training into practice.

Unit commanders also desire elementary things such as an operational test of those combat techniques that have been taught and rehearsed over and over again and new weapons that have been developed or purchased for the unit. Only on the battlefield will official and factual approval be given for what up to this point has been tested on the shooting ranges and field manoeuvres.

One may perhaps err in understanding the current analysis in terms of the 'professional soldier' model expanded upon by Morris Janowitz, but this is not the case. Janowitz's model deals with the type of soldier who must obey the civil government's orders and whose motives to fight are thus strictly professional. The Israeli picture must be examined in its entirety by applying the model of the 'garrison state', in which the soldier fights in order to secure and protect the national existence – that is, the survival of the Jewish state and the attainment of victory and national glory.

In order to maintain the battle spirit of the unit, the commanders must instil patriotism and national values:

What keeps any nation functioning as an integrated body politic, especially under the strains of war, is an aggregate of myths and beliefs concerning the unique identity of the nation as distinct from other nations.... Adherence to these beliefs is what we call patriotism, an emotion that is not easy nor always salubrious to dissect.<sup>66</sup>

In a nation of immigrants it may not always be easy to apply. In an army comprised largely of new immigrants, the inculcation of patriotism may be tipped over into chauvinistic excesses by those who seek to prove their loyalty to their newly chosen national home. Yigal Alon, commander of the Palmah, cautions against negative orientations arising out of parochial attachments fostered within the field unit:

Because of its decisive influence, it must be seen as an objective.... [But] the distance between a good *esprit* which forges healthy self-confidence, pride and love for the unit, and arrogance and disdain for one's fellow man – is precariously small. Thus, one must sense and perceive differences lest strong emerge from the sweet.<sup>67</sup>

For others, overwhelmed by personal concerns of adjustment and existence, and especially immigrants for whom the state is a sanctuary and not necessarily a first choice of refuge, patriotic values pale in significance compared to the individual's personal plight.

Patriotism is part of the attention to *esprit de corps*, pride and the feeling of fellowship and mutual responsibility that all combatants need. *Esprit de corps* is faith in the power and functioning of soldiers in the heat of battle where their very life is in danger. All the elements that go by the name of discipline – hierarchy, professional training and communication – as important as they are to the functioning of the unit, will be of little avail if the unit is not bound by a feeling of shared destiny on the battlefield. As Finer so aptly states:

This more or less organized ensemble of the beliefs and sentiments common to all members of the group is deliberately inculcated in armies and constitutes their vital spark – their *esprit de corps*. It is grounded on service to the cause... but more commonly, on service to the nation.<sup>68</sup>

Although patriotism might seem to dominate more abstract notions of human values as a motivating force in war, as exemplified in the rallying cry 'my country, right or wrong', wars are generated by abstract causes which are identified as the core values of the country. Thus the Napoleonic Wars embodied the universal ideals of liberty and equality proclaimed during the French Revolution, but in the name of the hegemony of a France which presumably embodied these ideals. The American Civil War placed issues of slavery and states' rights as the underlying reasons for the conflict, but the integrity of the nation stood foremost in Lincoln's concerns. Of course, the primacy of motives is notoriously difficult to authenticate and Lincoln's objective of preserving the union could also be regarded as a means of upholding a superior value of 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Likewise, the Southern Confederate cause was more than a constitutional issue of independence for local states; it sought to preserve a national way of life which contrasted with Yankee culture. Clausewitz regarded patriotic *esprit* as a characteristic of modern warfare, 'the heart and sentiments of the nation' constituting 'an enormous factor... in the product of its political and military strength'.<sup>69</sup>

Although *esprit de corps* cannot be quantified or calculated by any ordinary criteria of measurement, it makes a critical contribution to the operational efficacy of the field unit. It is the element that provides the strength to charge forward under enemy fire, to rescue a wounded

comrade from the battlefield and to elevate the combatant and the unit under difficult and hopeless conditions. In addition to enabling the unit to implement difficult missions, it creates pressures on the senior command to accede to the desires of the unit, such as tacit assent to freedom of action and support and understanding for aberrant deeds.

The competition among secondary units, the desire to operate above and beyond orders and to demonstrate initiative and an aggressive demeanour, often results in unpalatable deviations in the operational arena. Even if the basic intention was positive, the impact of these aberrant actions may be painful and difficult in broad military and political terms.

For the tactical unit, victory in battle is the most basic consideration. This is its be-all and end-all. It is its supreme need and drive and is not connected to any calculations or other assessments of the situation. 'The skills developed in the soldier,' writes Brodie, 'are those of the fighter, and not of the reflector on ultimate purposes.'<sup>70</sup> However, when soldiery excels in its task to the extent that its performers become exemplary figures in society, the values accompanying martial prowess come to constitute the very basis of the society's *Weltanschauung*: witness Samurai and their code of honour, knights and their ethic of chivalry, modern warriors and their ethos of patriotism. In this way, tactical units with their local history legends become the deliverers and redeemers for their society of reference. Finer gives a concise description of the consecration of esprit: 'The combined effect of all these sentiments – recognition of its unique mission in society, complacency with its self-sacrificial virtues and consciousness of its power – provides the basis for its belief in its sacred trust... the duty of the Army to intervene and "save the nation".'<sup>71</sup>

From all the military textbooks and throughout the course of history filled with endless wars and battles, one may learn the extreme commitment of the officer to the notion of victory for the sake of victory, as distinct from complicated questions such as 'What does one hope to accomplish through military victory?' Or 'Will victory justify the tactical, strategic and political price?'

By dint of circumstance, unit commanders develop their own political/military *Weltanschauung*. From their very role as the linchpin of the army and the basic demand that they supply an answer to the problems of security for the state and its citizens, a national consciousness is created and an ideology is generated around military actions and deeds.

The commander of the elite unit generally has the highest personal and military capabilities. He must be a leader and commander possessing personal ambition, energy and exceptional leadership qualities; otherwise he would not have been chosen for this tough and special duty. He must have a broad outlook with regard to the situation and gauge the share of the army in general, and the unit in particular, in solving security problems.

He will naturally have connections with both formal and informal senior military echelons, and his personal status will be grander and more prestigious than accorded him by his actual rank. During a period in which military operations increase, the relative weight of the commander's opinions will increase and his suggestions will be more readily accepted by the decision-making echelons. The capability of the unit and its success in carrying out the operation provide the elements which give the commander backing for his positions and demands. A sort of vicious circle is created in which more often than not the operation itself generates energy and power, permitting the unit commander to attain an elevated status well beyond his rank and authority, whereby he may continue to demand additional military operations.

To describe personal pride and unit prestige as the motivation for unit operations does not appear justified. The urge to act stems first of all from the faith that the unit possesses the

instruments that can help solve security problems in ways which are known and familiar to a military man.

The solution to foreign and security problems seen through the military binoculars of a field commander, whose conceptual world is necessarily more restricted, will be drawn from the military arena with which he is familiar. The development of this ideology and security outlook results in a strong desire to be involved in decision-making and the provision of practical, immediate solutions for routine security problems. It should be emphasized that this contribution takes place within the parameters of his field-based conceptual framework.

He feels that state security is invested in his hands and he is bidden to preserve that investment in every way possible. Some scholars claim that one can even find distortion of data in the outlook of commanders regarding their duty and mission, stemming from a *weltanschauung* that mixes full identification with the task with personality and personal ends in the ensemble of considerations.

The British military historian Liddell Hart formulated the problem of dedication and loyalty in military commanders in the following words:

I am presented more and more with how much our problems stem from a habit upheld by everyone to repress or distort what we know to be really true, and this occurs after we have committed ourselves to the objective, to personal whims or to the establishment. Commitments which in their foundations affect our very interests.<sup>72</sup>

## 2

### Grasping the Reins of Power Israeli Leadership and Security Policy

'I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem,  
They shall never hold their peace day or night.'

(Isaiah, 62: 6)

'The best defence is a good offence.'

(Anon)

In its early years, Israel's security policy was determined and guided by David Ben-Gurion, who held both the posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. The basic assumption underlying his policy was his perception that the Arab–Israeli struggle was a total conflict over the right to existence of a Jewish state in the heart of an Arab-dominated Middle East. In emphasizing the Arab threat against the Zionist enterprise, the Israeli leadership also stressed the ability of Israel to cope with this threat and to overcome it in the course of time. Avner Yaniv challenges this claim. He avers that there was no threat to the existence of the state from Arab hostility and that if the life of the state was truly and unalterably endangered, the Zionist enterprise was fatally flawed. He explains the dilemma as follows:

If the Arab threat is so serious to the point that the Israeli State has no chance of survival, then the history of the Zionist enterprise appears as a wild and irrational wager. On the other hand, if the gravity of the threat, as well as the ability of Israel to deal with it, is emphasized, then the whole course of the War of Independence is perceived as a reasonably considered risk.<sup>1</sup>

The view that a dire threat to its existence faced the state means that it was tempted to take more extreme measures in its defence, whereas the position of Yaniv, that the threat was less drastic than envisaged, would have allowed for a more compromising political policy and military strategy.

While Israel was striving to stabilize its standing and security in the region, the Arabs sought in every way to undermine it. This, at any rate, is how the Israeli leadership perceived enemy action along Israel's borders. The struggle was not viewed as a conflict over conventional problems or limited interests, such as a dispute about territory, borders or economic issues, but rather over the existence of the state itself. The essential issue centred on 'the rights to legal as much as physical existence – a dispute in terms of an all-out and continuing struggle for sovereign existence. Seclusion fosters a feeling of isolation and vulnerability... and the result is an atmosphere of national insecurity which has accompanied its diplomacy up to the present'.<sup>2</sup>

Two basic assumptions guided the governing security conception and its accompanying strategy:



1. that continuing conflict with the neighbouring states was a given, at least in the contemplated short run;
2. that the security margins of the state were tenuous. Vital factors contributing to the decision-makers' concerns about the viability of state security included the recognition that the society lacked a strong demographic, social and economically stable base; the army was taking its first steps and was in the midst of being re-formed and rebuilt; and there was a lack of strategic depth accompanied by lengthy, narrow-band borders which could be easily breached.

Given these considerations, state leaders adopted a policy that entertained the worst-case scenario as a guideline.

In a speech presenting his government to Israel's third Knesset, Ben-Gurion outlined his fears and forebodings:

In our case it is not only a matter of securing our independence, our territory, borders, the regime – but securing our very physical existence. Our enemies do not conspire only against our territory and our independence; we should have no delusions in regard to this matter. They intend, as many of them have openly said, to throw us into the sea: put simply, to annihilate every Jew in the Land of Israel. Let us not forget that during World War Two, most Arab leaderships followed Hitler and looked forward to his victory.<sup>3</sup>

Security policy governed Israeli foreign policy during these years. In fact, almost no significant room was left for diplomacy. The perception of the security dangers loomed so large for the leadership that it was not prepared to take any short-run risks in exploiting opportunities for building long-term relations of trust with the neighbouring Arab states.

In the first years, following the signing of the armistice agreements, the Israeli government undertook a policy of restraint in the face of infiltration across its borders and accepted it as a normal process of excesses marking the gradual end of the War of Independence. A perusal of the speeches of Ben-Gurion in government, Knesset, party forums and other locations, however, turns up numerous utterances expressing the intention to deter the Arab states from continuing infiltration and other hostile actions along the borders:

The Government of Israel is prepared without delay to faithfully observe the Armistice Agreements down to the minute details both in letter and spirit, but this obligation is also binding on the other side. An agreement violated by the other side is not binding upon us. If the Armistice lines open the border to terrorists and murderers, they will not be closed to those defending the gates. If our rights are infringed by acts of violence on land or sea – we will retain our freedom of action to defend our rights in the most effective manner.<sup>4</sup>

The normalcy attributed to tag-end border violations, presumed to be waning residues of the war, soon gave way to reactive steps of revenge and retribution. The Israeli approach to the conflict became pessimistic, sceptical and decidedly one-dimensional. The political leadership did not make a clear distinction between one bellicose situation and another. Infiltration and acts of violence along the state's borders were equally regarded as falling within the rubric of armed conflict and terror, calling for a uniform military response – that is, the controlled use of force as a means of deterrence and 'compellence'. However, this utilitarian ground for reprisal was preceded by a requisite period of punishment raids which focused on the target as much as the

means and impact of the reprisal act itself.

The initial responses of Israel at the beginning of the 1950s, following the failure of appeals to Arab governments and the United Nations, were 'civilian' operations designated as 'an eye for an eye'. If Arab civilians saw fit to take justice into their own hands and cross the border in order to pillage, injure and kill, then Israeli civilians would undertake reciprocal measures. Small bands consisting of a maximum of two or three soldiers would cross the armistice line, strike at targets similar to those that had been hit on the Israeli side and return to their base. In response to a herd stolen from Israel, a force would be sent out to 'return' a herd from Jordan. In response to Arabs who set fire to barns in Israel, threshing floors would be set alight in the south Hebron hills. A sabotage incident at a border moshav or kibbutz – the destruction of a water-pumping station, for example – might result in damage being inflicted to the house of a *mukhtar* in a neighbouring village close to the border or the blowing up of a well in an Arab village close to where the incident took place. To the extent that these were acts of retribution, they paid no heed to consequences, even more so when carried out from attributed motives of revenge. However, they acknowledged limits in their reciprocity and kept the magnitude if not the frequency and intensity of border conflict within bounds.

The government of Israel carried out these operations but did not admit responsibility for them. They were attributed to 'civilians', residents living along the border who took the law into their own hands and undertook acts of revenge. At this juncture, the Israeli government sought to define and confine terror and the response to it as a neighbourly quarrel, a dispute among citizens as it were, without any military intervention. The intent of this policy was to keep the conflict at a low level in order not to create a threat to the forces and standing of the governments and armies of Jordan and Egypt. At a government session on 11 June 1953 Ben-Gurion clarified the policy of 'low profile response' in these words:

When these were isolated incidents necessarily requiring a retaliatory response, we undertook this with the use of military forces and immediately announced publicly that the reprisal was carried out by the IDF. Lately, with the increase in attacks, especially against residents on the border, we have decided that border residents will be armed, and reprisal actions will be undertaken by them and not by the army. The reprisal acts succeeded and the government on the other side of the Jordan River did not even complain about these incidents.<sup>5</sup>

In practice, the Israeli government operated during these years with an intentional policy of retribution which also carried a message of deterrence directed towards the military and civilian echelons of the neighbouring Arab governments. However, the policy of punishment measured by circumstance had no influence on the number of infiltrators, nor on the acts of depredation – the thefts and murders along the border. The army then suggested punishing the perpetrators of armed robberies themselves by seeking them out in their villages across the border and harming their person and property. Such operations were subsequently carried out, most of them by the IDF in disguise and within the limitations dictated by the government's declared policy. Meir Amit, head of the General Staff at this time, wrote: 'The operational forces functioned in the framework of teams equipped with non-standard arms and were ordered to conceal their identity and all signs which might reveal it.'<sup>6</sup> This policy of reprisal and revenge was basically reactive. The operations were seen as a direct reply to provocation and damage to security and the economy, and to the extent that they struck at the perpetrators, they carried a greater element of justification than the more indiscriminate targets previously selected.

In the early phase of incursions, however, the bulk of the effort was devoted to defensive

measures designed to protect Israeli civilians in the border settlements by thwarting and repelling the infiltrators. The army was less than enthusiastic in undertaking tasks of this sort. Indeed, the IDF was unwilling to accept responsibility for watchman duties, regarding it as a problem for police and local citizens to handle. Moreover, the army claimed that it was not prepared to undertake defensive actions in the form of guard duty and night perimeter patrols because of a lack of capable soldiers and police and a scarcity of resources. David Tal, in analysing the army's attitude to the infiltration issue, pointed out that the military hierarchy saw its primary task as one of preparing units for war. Military leaders requested that the armed forces not be asked to siphon off contingents to perform duties which would divert Israel's soldiers from their original and primary goal.

Attempts to recruit IDF commanders for the 'war' against infiltration elicited disparaging remarks. A police commander in the Sharon district was told by army commanders that passive, preventive operations 'exhaust and nauseate people' and that the only way to cope with the 'disease' was to conduct reprisal operations.<sup>7</sup> When GHQ finally decided on a major reprisal operation, commanders of the designated forces replied that their troops were woefully unprepared.<sup>8</sup>

Operation Qibya in October 1953 changed the political-military line and opened up a new chapter in the security policy of the Israeli state. From this juncture, retaliatory operations became a systematic part of the policy of forceful compliance which the Israeli Government undertook against its neighbours. These operations sought to force the Jordanian and Egyptian regimes to subject their citizens to strict control, especially the refugees now settled along the borders, and to observe the cease-fire. This policy was also directed towards Syria because of its alleged interference with fishermen on the Sea of Galilee and the struggle over Israeli civilian activities in the demilitarized zone.

Unlike the so-called 'partisan raids', which sought to exact retribution or punish the guilty, reprisal operations were now undertaken to deter and influence decision-makers in the capitals of the neighbouring Arab states. To that end, their scope and intensity bore no relation to the terrorist act which prompted it. Their aim was to apply pressure on the Arab regimes to mobilize military and police forces, which were under army command, in efforts to prevent infiltration and terror.

Following Operation Qibya, in which 69 villagers, mostly defenceless women and children, were found dead in the rubble of demolished buildings, the rules of the struggle changed.<sup>9</sup> Official policy declared that innocent civilians would not be objectives in such actions. Henceforth, reprisal operations would target military and police posts with the aim of conveying to Arab regimes that only by deployment of their forces along the border in an active endeavour to prevent incursions by their own population could their defence establishments, and ultimately their regimes, be saved from crippling embarrassments. Dayan relates that

the conception was not to harm citizens; the assumption was that if we would strengthen and reinforce our operations, the sabotage would cease, but this was not the case. The IDF undertook the reprisal policy to remove pressure from the settlements and their inhabitants. And this snowballed in fact on the Jordanian more than the Egyptian front.<sup>10</sup>

Although the intended outcomes of the policy of regime retaliation did not fully materialize, it did slightly curb infiltration and terror. Without this policy, it would have been impossible to travel on the highways, to establish settlements and to live a normal life, not only along Israel's borders but also in the centre of the country. However, the reprisal operations brought about a

rise in the level of armed violence and friction with official armed contingents of the Arab states; but this was a consequence of changed Israeli reprisal targets.

Towards the end of 1953, the IDF set down its principles and areas of operation regarding reprisal methods. They were to be open rather than clandestine, and Arab villages would not be targeted without cause. Unarmed civilians would not be hurt. The principle of linking the location and type of operation to the hostile action was rendered null and void. The IDF would strike the enemy regime at a time and place of its own choosing.

Swiftness of response was decisive. Targets would be chosen on the basis of their importance to the enemy: military centres, camps, police posts, concentrations of the Jordanian National Guard and enemy bases in the hinterland. The aim was to carry out strikes that would cause the enemy maximum pain.<sup>11</sup> These instructions clearly entailed an escalation in the scope and intensity of this type of operations, with a prime emphasis upon deterrence through 'compellence'.

Despite the clear formulation of these instructions at senior IDF levels, the reprisals in the following years up to 1956 continued to bear the familiar stamp of the earlier operations. In other words, retaliation occurred close to the scene of the crime and the timing and character of the response were tied to the enemy's action. A central factor that received positive emphasis was the extreme care forces were required to exercise in treating civilians, principally women and children, in the wake of the great damage incurred in the Qibya raid.

Great emphasis was given to the war along the border. This was additional evidence of a pervasive lack of security felt among the leadership, civilian and military alike. Voices were already claiming that routine security measures were eating away at 'basic security'. The entire state leadership, it was maintained, was preoccupied with matters pertaining to terror and retaliation and was being drawn into a circle of verbal and operative escalation. This was occurring despite the clear fact that the infiltration activities served no political objectives for the Arab states. 'It appears that our heedfulness of the problems of routine security measures, infiltration, murder, robbery and theft was somewhat disproportionate to the more basic security problems, the independence, long-run integrity and peace of the state,' wrote Shimon Peres, Director of the Defence Ministry.<sup>12</sup>

The guidelines that delineated the policy of retaliation in these years may be termed reactive. The nature and intensity of that policy were determined by political and military echelons whose aim was to make political gains through the deployment of Israeli deterrence and preventive action in the reprisal operations. Despite the fact that planning and operations were to be under the control of the political echelon, a great deal of leeway was left to the initiative of the Chief-of-Staff; as a result, the operative unit's impact with regard to the character of the operation was considerable. Although operational outcomes were militarily impressive, they often clashed with and were harmful to the political objectives.

Shlomo Aronson and Dan Horowitz have already pointed to the latent functions of the reprisal policy with which heads of state had to contend in these years:

- an attempt to bring about a confrontation with one or more Arab states;
- the exacerbation of tensions as part of a deliberate policy which would lead to the purchase of arms;
- the improvement of morale and combat readiness of the IDF;
- domestic policy considerations and citizen morale;
- the impact on domestic developments in Arab states.<sup>13</sup>

The policy of retaliation was devised by a number of people who in these years held the reins of government. Four personalities associated with this policy are particularly salient: David Ben-Gurion in his capacity as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence; Moshe Sharett as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister; Pinhas Lavon, Minister of Defence when Ben-Gurion retired to Kibbutz Sde Boker; and Moshe Dayan in his post as Chief-of-Staff.

An analysis of their security conceptions and orientations with regard to the policy of retaliation and its resultant operations can shed light on the process of escalation which began towards the end of 1953 and continued until the outbreak of the Sinai Campaign in October 1956. The state leaders' grasp of the essential features of the struggle and the future relations of Israel with its Arab neighbours, as well as their orientations to the system of international relations, offers an insight into the process of deterioration which set in during these years. The following sections will focus upon the system of shaky and difficult relations that prevailed among these personalities, who determined policy, undermined trust, harmed the relations of authority and the rule of law – and thereby permitted army commanders to drag the chariot of war onto the battle fields.

## **David Ben-Gurion**

David Ben-Gurion in effect acted as Prime Minister before the state was actually established and was the political leader who headed the military establishment in the War of Independence. His leadership during the battles of the War of Independence and his central role in the building of Israel's defence forces after the war won him his unchallenged standing in security matters at the beginning of the 1950s.

From the time he was a labourer at Sejera, Arab animosity to the Zionist enterprise made a deep impression on Ben-Gurion. He understood that the Arabs viewed Zionism as an invasion and another attempt at the imperialist control of an area of the Middle East. Yet, deep as these impressions were, throughout his life the Arabs remained strangers to him. He was not acquainted with and did not understand their language, nor did he take an interest in their customs and their culture. During the War of Independence and at its conclusion, he formulated the conception that the Arabs would not recognize the state of Israel and would not come to terms with its existence:

'Why should the Arabs make peace?' he asked Nahum Goldman, a number of years after the establishment of the State. 'If I was an Arab leader I would never accept the existence of Israel. That is natural. We have taken their country. Sure, God promised it to us, but what does that matter to them? Our God is not theirs. We come from Israel, it's true, but two thousand years ago; and what is that to them? There has been anti-semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz, but was that their fault? They only see one thing; we have come here and stolen their country. Why should they accept that? They may perhaps forget in one or two generations, but for the moment, there is no chance.'<sup>14</sup>

According to Ben-Gurion, recognition or non-recognition of Israel did not depend upon Israel's behaviour. Whether Israel adopted a position of compromise or took an aggressive posture would not change anything in the Arab stance. The relationship of forces and the inferior position of the state of Israel in the face of the resources of the Arab world would remain with him for years to come. A map of the Middle East pinned to a wall in his work room, in which

Israel was delineated in colour as opposed to all the other states in the area, gave him no rest. Yitzhak Navon, who was his personal secretary, would relate that every morning, when Ben-Gurion walked into his office, he would stare for a good hour at the map and repeat: 'All night I didn't sleep because of this map. What is Israel? One tiny little smudge! One dot! How does it exist in this world of Arabs?'<sup>15</sup>

In his speeches Ben-Gurion would claim that the fact that the people of Israel are few and weak, and are attempting to settle in the heart of the Middle East, may strengthen the hands of adventurers, unstable politicians and warmongers among the Arab population. At the same time, he would repeatedly preach that there had to be a relentless effort to negotiate a solution to the conflict with the Arab leaders. Even if the matter appeared theoretical in the short run, no opportunity and no possibility should be missed even if it was the remotest of all possibilities. All negotiation with the Arabs must be based on faith in Zionism and its realization as a matter of life or death for the Jewish people. And if the fulfilment of Zionism interfered with a solution to the conflict, it had to be prepared for while acknowledging that the struggle with the Arab people would continue for many generations.

This outlook led to a policy grounded in force. Ben-Gurion claimed that the Israeli state should demonstrate its might and constantly react to Arab provocation and the incursion of infiltrators. With the accession of the Free Officers to power in Egypt on 23 July 1952, Ben-Gurion offered his hand in peace, but at the same time remained cautious and suspicious towards their leaders, Neguib and Nasser: 'We cannot ignore the fact that this Egypt shows no sign of good will to right the great sin committed by the ousted Faroukh. And there is no man among us who can state with certainty which way this Egyptian is going to turn: towards peace or war.'<sup>16</sup>

Ben-Gurion did not believe that there was any possibility of breaking through the wall of Arab resistance and arriving at a peace agreement. He believed that the Arabs were seeking a 'second round', an additional war, and that the Israeli state must operate on this basic assumption. He was aware of the internal contradictions in the Arab world, but with regard to its hatred of the state of Israel, he regarded their orientation as monolithic. 'The Arab world is large.... It is pan-national and homogeneous, and we should drive a wedge in it? The Christian world does not exist; there is internecine strife. But the Muslim world is a reality and it will stand behind the Arabs.'<sup>17</sup>

During the 1950s, Ben-Gurion held firmly to the view that the aim of the Arab states was to destroy and annihilate the Israeli state. If we can assume that this conception formed the basis of all his beliefs, thoughts and deeds, then this was also the ruling conception that guided the security establishment during these years. Even if additional thoughts and outlooks concerning Israel's foreign relations with the major powers and the European states were expressed, they were of secondary importance to security and military considerations.

The practical significance of this outlook was that preference was given to the security establishment and to military operations, even if they harmed and subverted Israel's relations with the United States. When he was asked at the beginning of 1955 about the risks for Israel-United States relations entailed in a policy of retaliation, Ben-Gurion replied: 'Although a [defence] treaty with the United States is important, security matters are no less important; and if they clash – then we can't avoid it.'<sup>18</sup>

Zaki Shalom points to the preference that Ben-Gurion accorded to military security considerations over all considerations of foreign policy and information dissemination during the entire period of the retaliatory operations:

It appears that Ben-Gurion was prone to accept the outlook according to which public opinion,

hostile to Israel on the basis of the retaliatory operations, was inevitable and Israel had almost no control over it. This public opinion, he claimed, is an expression of the basic animosity of the international community towards Israel, and its source resides, in part, in the history of the Jewish people and the system of relations which developed between it and other peoples over many generations.<sup>19</sup>

The period of the Holocaust vitally affected Ben-Gurion. The destruction of the Jewish people, without doubt, induced a sense of the sword at the throat. It was a feeling which gave first priority to amassing power and entrenching security matters. This feeling is often repeated in his speeches and indicates a real anxiety in his general world outlook:

With all the political modesty of an emissary of a small people and with all the moral authority as a member of the Jewish people [I say]: The people of Israel in their own land will not be like sheep led to the slaughter. What Hitler did to six million Jews without any hope for salvation in the ghettos of Europe, no other oppressor will do this to Jews who are free and rooted in their native land.<sup>20</sup>

In the hostile acts of the Arab states he saw this same sense of a strangling and besieging of a small and hounded people. The feeling of insecurity and uncertainty regarding the future of the state of Israel led Ben-Gurion to devote all his efforts during these years to the subject of national defence and to place it at the centre of the Israeli society's struggle for existence. In his memoirs from the 1950s, Ben-Gurion quotes extensively from Arab leaders and the Arab media on their threats to exterminate the Zionist entity. For example, in his diary he quotes Radio Cairo from 4 June 1955:

The Egyptian revolution was born on Palestinian soil. Egypt is capable of entering the campaign in accord with the Arab will and of carrying out to the end its mission of defeating the enemy. Egypt has built a strong army and standing behind it are 22 million citizens who will recover Palestine and will root out the Zionist criminals. In the second round, the Arabs will recover their honour, win back their land and purify Palestine.<sup>21</sup>

In his formulation of the operative doctrine of the IDF, delivered at a meeting of Southern Command in 1952, Ben-Gurion outlined one of the basic tenets in the IDF security doctrine. It was the task of the IDF to deter the Arab states and, should deterrence fail, the IDF would go to war and bring the war onto the territory of its enemy. Ben-Gurion was one of the designers of Israel's deterrence policy. This policy, which as noted earlier, was formulated at the beginning of the 1950s by political scientists in the United States against the background of the Cold War, was crafted under different circumstances by Ben-Gurion who added to it a policy of compliance and reprisal operations.

On 2 November 1955, in a speech presenting his new government in the Knesset, Ben-Gurion declared:

If our rights are impaired by acts of violence on land or sea, we reserve our freedom of action to defend our rights in the most effective manner possible. The state of Israel is obligated and has the right to defend the lives of its citizens and the integrity of its borders as would any other free, sovereign state. She must do it and she will do it with all the means at her disposal.<sup>22</sup>

Ben-Gurion was aware that retaliatory action required justification. It had to be seen as just and acceptable by the great powers and the nations of the world. In his Knesset speeches, at party forums and elsewhere he repeatedly cited international sources of legitimization for the implementation of the reprisal policy. He quoted clause 51 of the United Nations Charter, which granted the right of self-defence, and added that there was nothing in the United Nations Charter to challenge the right to self-defence, whether individual or collective: 'Our defence against murders organized and encouraged by the Egyptian and Jordanian governments are "reprisal acts." Even if the Charter of the United Nations had not explicitly secured the right of self-defence for every nation, this right exists and stands above it.'<sup>23</sup>

In resolute speeches Ben-Gurion called for sharp and aggressive reprisals so that Israeli blood would not be spilled in vain. Delivered both before and after operations of this type, his statements bore a clear message from the Israeli government to the Arab states. They conveyed signals, warnings and demands from the state of Israel to its neighbours to impose law and order on their borders.

Ben-Gurion considered that the Arab states were responsible for everything occurring from their side of the border, and that they had to be held accountable:

If the armistice lines along the border are open to terrorists and murderers, our defenders and those who stand on guard will be constantly vulnerable [to attack]. But if our rights are violated by violent acts perpetrated either on land or by sea, we reserve freedom of action.... We offer peace but we are not prepared to commit suicide.<sup>24</sup>

When Ben-Gurion returned to the Defence Ministry in 1955, he set down a policy of peace and security, but placed security before peace. With regard to principles, and in his endless arguments with Moshe Sharett, he constantly stated that when the rest of the world consisted of law-abiding regimes in practice, then the state of Israel would not have to employ force and would operate within the framework of the law and international norms.

Ben-Gurion understood the limits of power and the great risk they held for Israel's foreign relations. Thus, he sought to employ all the political means at his disposal in waging the struggle, both for domestic and foreign reasons. Disappointment with failed foreign policy efforts in the international political arena, especially in winning support for Israel's position in the United Nations, became one of the sources and propellants for the salience of the security/ military branch in determining the contours of policy.

In the light of the failure of Foreign Ministry policy to stabilize and calm the border situation, Ben-Gurion turned more and more to activism, enchanted by the power and strength of military might. He attributed greater importance to actions than to the dissemination of information and he was convinced that, at the end of the day, what counted was how the state of Israel would act and not what the outside world said.

In her memoirs, Golda Meir, who served as Labour Minister under Sharett, and then as Foreign Minister following Sharett's dismissal from the government before the Sinai Campaign, writes: 'He [Ben-Gurion] thinks in terms of sovereignty, security, consolidation and true progress. International public opinion was of no importance for him compared with these things.'<sup>25</sup>

In 1955–56, Ben-Gurion's security policy continued to be centred on reprisal operations. He drew back from advocating a preventive war but demanded harsh acts of retaliation in response to the hostile acts of the Egyptians, Jordanians and Syrians. On occasion, his position was more extreme and hard-line than his Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, but throughout this period he



reiterated his opposition to Israel initiating a war. In his view, it was possible to prevent a war through the purchase of arms which would not only assist Israel's defensive capabilities but also serve as a deterrent to the Arab states.

In a reply to rivals on the political right who demanded that Israel undertake a preventive war, Ben-Gurion retorted:

When I heard to my astonishment that he demanded that we go to war, and I believe it was in fact against Jordan, I asked myself and him, for the love of God, surely you know that we will encounter the British Army there?! There is a military pact between Britain and Jordan and Britain maintains armed forces there.... This argument also held for those who advocated setting out on other fronts. On every front in which we initiate [hostilities], we are liable to encounter a foreign army and not only that of the neighbouring country. There are heroic talkers who say let us thumb our noses at the world. I am not one of those heroes; I admit it. Accordingly, I do not claim that this is the only argument against a preventive war, but here I stick with this argument alone.... A preventive war is a mad idea, those for whom war is not a demagogic declamation alone, are promulgating a mad idea.... Thus, I will not permit a war adventure based on apparent speculation and dubious patriotism.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of his aggressive image, Ben-Gurion wished to maintain the territorial status quo. Violations of the Armistice dictated a 'strategy of controlled retaliation'.

Neither a preventive war nor a pre-emptive strike was part of Ben-Gurion's intentions or political programme. But this policy gave wide scope for action to the security forces, and especially to the senior military echelon headed by the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan.

The accumulation of power and momentum brought about by the reprisal raids created a situation neither foreseen nor desired by Ben-Gurion. The 1956 war was the end of an inevitable process of escalation, leading to an arms race and the search for allies in the conduct of a war, which the Chief-of-Staff wanted almost from the moment that he took up his duties.

When the political and military impasse brought Ben-Gurion to the point of decision, the success of the military echelon prepared the entire system for the campaign. The war received the authorization of Ben-Gurion only after he was absolutely certain that Britain was a full partner and would not threaten the course of the war through falling back on its military pacts with neighbouring states, and that France promised an 'air umbrella' and open skies.

## **Moshe Sharett**

Moshe Sharett (Shertok), a close friend of Ben-Gurion, was among the coterie of political and state leaders who had been at the forefront of activities during the pre-state years. Despite their joint labours in the Yishuv leadership, and despite the fact that they were jointly responsible for the political, strategic and tactical perspective of the Zionist movement and the state of Israel at the start, their political and security conceptions began to diverge radically in the years following the establishment of the state.

Moshe Sharett was born in Russia in 1894 and immigrated to Palestine with his parents in 1906. His father, Yaacov, who was a Zionist and believed in agricultural settlement, brought his family to Ein Sinia, a small Arab village on the Nablus-Jerusalem road. In the two years in which the family lived among the Arab villagers, Sharett acquired proficiency in Arabic and some acquaintance with his Arab neighbours. His experiences during this period shaped his

perceptions concerning the basic difference between the culture of the Arab-Palestinian community and that of the Jewish European community.<sup>27</sup>

During his schooldays at the Herzliya High School in Jaffa-Tel Aviv, he made the acquaintance of Eliahu Golomb and Dov Hos. Both friends married sisters of Sharett. Both became heads of the Hagana, the Jewish defence force, and were architects of the Yishuv's security policy.

Sharett gained early experience in the public sphere as secretary of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, where among other things, he assisted in formulating policy and initiating political activity among the Arab population. He was held in high esteem by party stalwarts for his political work among the minority populations. 'Can we really say', exhorted a member of Mapai's inner circle, 'that for this type of activity [among the Arabs] there is any other candidate than Moshe Shertok?'<sup>28</sup> After the murder of Haim Arlozorov in 1933, he was appointed director of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and became responsible, along with Ben-Gurion, for negotiations conducted in those years with the Arabs and the British.

He continued to build up his leadership among the Jewish people and in the Jewish state in the making. During World War Two, he fought for the establishment of a Jewish brigade in the British Army. At the end of the war, he was instrumental in sending a consignment of Jewish Brigade soldiers to Europe to rescue refugees who had survived the Holocaust and bring them to Palestine. Sharett was Foreign Minister of Israel from its establishment, and when Ben-Gurion retired to Sde Boker in 1953, he served both as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

Contrary to conventional accounts of his outlook, Sharett was pessimistic about the possibility of a solution to the Arab-Israel conflict. As early as the 1920s, he claimed that the roots of the conflict were embedded 'in racial and national instincts, the power of language, the sanctity of tradition and the grip of inertia'.<sup>29</sup> Sharett attributed the essence of the conflict to the religious, national and cultural foundations of the two peoples, and he did not see any way to bridge the chasm. However, he did not despair of arriving at a *pacific modus vivendi*.

Moshe Sharett's perception of mollifying the conflict differed from that held by Ben-Gurion on two central subjects: the first concerned their attitudes towards the use of military power; the second was the extent to which the world, and especially the major powers, would take an involved interest in Israel's policy.

For Sharett, the most judicious approach to politics was aimed at achieving a proper balance between the use of foreign policy and military power. From his previous experience in the political bureau of the Jewish Agency and his close working relationship with Haim Arlozorov, he acquired a political outlook steeped in moderation. Israel's foreign policy, he believed, must undertake those political steps which strengthen the state's relations with the United States and the countries of Western Europe. These states could assist in solving border disputes and animosities with Israel's Arab neighbours.

Sharett was the only leader who opposed Ben-Gurion's policy. Yet, as Foreign Minister in Ben-Gurion's government, he was able to mobilize a majority against the Prime Minister's position. When, on the eve of his retirement to Sde Boker, Ben-Gurion, in a special governmental session, reviewed security plans and the deployment of the IDF in advance of a second full-scale encounter with the Arab states, Moshe Sharett wrote in his diary:

I thought that we should seek out suggestions against the danger through non-military means: the implementation of solutions to the refugee problem through a daring and concrete proposal for compensation payments, repairing relations with the major powers, and unceasing efforts to arrive at an understanding with the Egyptians. Each one of these angles of operation might lead

us into a vicious circle; nevertheless we should not avoid trying to make the effort.<sup>30</sup>

On 25 January 1954 Moshe Sharett formed a government which held the promise of putting his more moderate policies into effect. (His central place as Foreign Minister in Ben-Gurion's Government, and his new role as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, placed the opposing strategies at the centre of political life in the middle 1950s.) However, he inherited a political rearguard action engineered by Ben-Gurion, which would effectively neutralize his strategies and make collective cabinet responsibility an unattainable democratic convention. Following Qibya, Ben-Gurion announced an extended leave from politics and Sharett became acting Prime Minister and Lavon Minister of Defence. These two positions became permanent appointments when Ben-Gurion dramatically converted his 'holiday' into retirement. Before his departure, he appointed Moshe Dayan as Chief-of-Staff and Shimon Peres as director of the Defence Ministry. In his consultations before this appointment, Ben-Gurion encountered the objections of Sharett, who was not only Foreign Minister but also second in importance in the government and the Mapai Party. Sharett launched a personal attack against Dayan: 'I immediately told [Ben-Gurion] that Moshe Dayan was a soldier only in time of war, but in peacetime he was a statesman. He has no interest in managing the military complex. His appointment would mean a politicization of command headquarters.'<sup>31</sup> Sharett foresaw what was in store for him as Prime Minister but could not prevent Ben-Gurion's appointment of Lavon as Defence Minister. 'If Lavon is in the government while I am Prime Minister, nothing will hamper his ambitions. I have a very pessimistic forecast of friction and continuous clashes and increasing tension in our relationships and affairs.'<sup>32</sup>

Ben-Gurion's appointments were a bitter pill for Sharett to swallow. Lavon's presence interfered with Sharett's efforts to formulate and implement a more moderate foreign policy. Moshe Dayan was, undoubtedly, the most political of the IDF's Chiefs of Staff. Moreover, he did not conceal his ideas and actions. Although he openly acknowledged his subordination to the policies of Sharett, he continued to see in Ben-Gurion the seat of supreme authority, even from his retreat at Sde Boker. In many respects, Sharett continued to be 'acting prime minister' while the effective reins of power were exercised from Ben-Gurion's retreat in the Negev.

In the 14 months in which Lavon served as Defence Minister (December 1953 to February 1954), both Moshe Dayan, as Chief-of-Staff, and Shimon Peres as director of the Defence Ministry, worked as one in guiding the defence policy of Israel. Lavon's desire to appear as an activist, following in the footsteps of Ben-Gurion, resulted in an expansion of retaliatory actions. The rivalry between the Defence Minister, who lacked political support, and the heads of the Defence Ministry and the IDF allowed Dayan, with the support of Ben-Gurion, to manoeuvre security policy and routine security measures according to his outlook. To Sharett it must have appeared that Ben-Gurion had put a halter on the government and its military command while holding the reins from a distance.

Years later, Dayan testified to the many disputes and clashes that took place over security matters during that period:

At that time one may have had the impression that Lavon-Dayan-Peres wished to oust Sharett. All three of us were completely divided over Sharett. We didn't hide it. Of course, there were no grounds for the impression that Peres and I sought the... Prime Minister's office.... But Sharett and his colleagues may have had the opinion that we were in fact conducting a policy counter to that of Sharett and were ignoring the fact that he was Prime Minister. That is to say, not that we would present him with *fails accomplis*, but that we would push the state toward an opposite

policy from that which the Prime Minister wanted. They could think that factually, but there was no organized collusion among us.<sup>33</sup>

Moshe Sharett, who also held the Foreign Minister's portfolio, regarded this channel as the path through which his policy could be implemented. However, personnel in the Foreign Ministry, who hoped that they could direct foreign and defence policy, at the very least through the Mixed Armistice Commissions, were severely hampered in their activities. The internal disagreements over reprisal operations worsened over the issue of the joint handling by the IDF and the Foreign Ministry of matters which related to the Mixed Armistice Commissions.

The wrangling over the perceived character of the armistice agreements had already begun in 1951, when Foreign Ministry personnel sought to orient and manage elements of foreign policy of the fledgling state within the framework of the Mixed Armistice Commissions. The Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, was displeased with the compromising and concessionary spirit of Foreign Ministry personnel during the Hula drainage crisis in March of that year. Although the Hula swamps were within Israeli territory, a comfortable eastern access would have greatly facilitated implementation of the project but entailed Israeli violation of the demilitarized zone. Foreign Ministry spokesmen indicated willingness to forego intrusion into this space but were relieved of their pro-active role on the Mixed Armistice Commissions by the Defence Ministry and their duties confined to observer status. The struggle over the handling of policy through the Mixed Armistice Commissions ended with the victory of the defence establishment and the IDF. Representatives of the Foreign Ministry received observer status without any right to intervene actively.<sup>34</sup>

The leadership dispute, which originally was over foreign policy and security matters, became personalized over the course of 1954 and turned into an unrelenting feud between Sharett on the one side and Lavon and Dayan on the other. Circles in the Foreign Ministry tended to define the myriad retaliatory operations with their expanding scope as 'irresponsible adventurism', while senior officials in the IDF voiced their opposition to the 'diaspora pleading' mentality which was widespread in the Foreign Ministry.

Sharett's diaries contain many entries describing his efforts to arrest the security policy that advocated retaliatory operations. He did not believe in that policy and regarded it as paving the way for deterioration and war. After the murder of a tractor driver at Mevo Betar in January 1955, Sharett wrote:

It was clear to me that I would have to authorize an act of reprisal and that this time it would be best for me to permit it. I stopped and blocked a lot in the last months, prevented a few explosive situations and brought about a lot of public tension. I must not test the public's patience, it must be calmed, and if it is not, there will be an outburst of anger to which many of my comrades will be party and thus I will fail in the effort of a grand educational conception of our people, and achieve the opposite.<sup>35</sup>

Sharett's actions reflected cognitive dissonance more than ambivalence. He regarded the policy of reprisals as ill-founded for the state but containing redeeming features for the nation. He was adamant with respect to the inefficacy of major reprisal operations and their negative implications for Israel's foreign policy relations with the rest of the world. On the other hand, he conceded that they carried social, psychological and political benefits for Israeli society. The military establishment stood opposed to Sharett's compromising policy and actions in regard to reprisal actions.

Sharett adhered to Clausewitz's position that military actions were a logical instrument of political decision-making. Much of his diplomatic activity was occupied with arms procurement, but he feared and sensed that Israeli foreign policy was being channelled and constricted by armed skirmishes and reprisal operations. He held that retaliatory activities had to be coordinated with foreign policy; otherwise, each would harm the conduct of the other. He was aware of the power of the military establishment. To the best of his ability, he tried during his tenure in office to restrain and moderate the military echelon and, more than that, to subordinate the plans and operations of the IDF to the authority of the political echelon.

In seeking to guide state policy as he had formulated it during his tenure as Foreign Minister, he found himself entering into a sharp confrontation with the defence establishment and its head, Pinhas Lavon, and afterwards with David Ben-Gurion, when the latter returned to the post of Defence Minister. Shortly after he became Prime Minister, Sharett wrote in his diary:

I am setting out on a difficult campaign whose aim is to bring about a radical reform in governing establishments and the constitution of a new regimen, namely the clear distinction between military and civilian authority, which became blurred during the regime of Ben-Gurion.<sup>36</sup>

Appearing before a forum of the general staff, Sharett made a clear pronouncement about the special authority of the Foreign Ministry in setting policy, about his central intention of firmly entrenching this policy and exploring the options opened up by diplomatic activities rather than resorting to the shorter route, the use of force.

Throughout his political career, Sharett was aware of the deteriorating impact of reprisal operations. In his diary there are many allegations raised against the senior and operative military echelons who were enthusiastic for battle and against units that used all their connections in order to carry out more and more operations. From these quarters there was miscomprehension of policy in all its breadth and a lack of consideration for the situation in its entirety. This tunnel vision stemmed from a military outlook of restricted horizons, confined to the short-run gains, real or apparent, of reprisal operations.

In the view of the Chief-of-Staff, Sharett's policy was a sign of compromise and defeatism. Dayan coined the term 'Sharettism' to symbolize concession and acquiescence with what is, rather than with what is desirable. Unquestionably, Dayan's reaction signified the difficult struggle between the two as to who would lead in the conduct of foreign and defence policy at this time.

After Operation Nitzana<sup>37</sup> in late 1955, Sharett became more insistent about his outlook and attacked Ben-Gurion. In a note to him, Sharett forcefully declared that Operation Nitzana would be used in foreign circles as proof of Israeli aggressiveness and justification for Arab arms purchases. Following Operation Kinneret<sup>38</sup> of 11–12 December 1955, Sharett again voiced his disapproval of military action. He was in Washington at the time, attempting to convince American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles that his administration should furnish Israel with arms. Sharett was furious. In his opinion, the military raid undermined the sensitive negotiations he was conducting with the State Department in Washington.

An unprecedented number of reprisal operations took place during Sharett's incumbency as Prime Minister. One can only conclude from this that he himself saw the necessity for a reaction to acts of sabotage and murder. Indeed, he did not seem indisposed to authorizing military ripostes on a limited scale:

I do not enter into the question as to whether the retaliatory actions will or will not have a stamp of approval from the IDF. Between these two extremes there is room for altering the formulation.... I know that we agree in this, that if we inflict blow after blow, the population will become frightened and will cease hostilities. But the intention must be to prevent these regimes from conducting a counter strike, to take drastic steps and wage war against these gangs, and to inflict punishment on villages which cooperate by hiding them<sup>39</sup>

While acquiescing in and supporting military counter-strikes as necessary, Sharett concentrated his efforts on subjecting them to political oversight and control lest they become a routine and runaway operation. He insisted that each and every planned operation be thoroughly checked through an examination of local data, the international situation and other matters on the agenda. Only after all the information was received and reviewed did he make a decision to authorize or postpone a reprisal raid.

In a meeting of the Mapai ideological circle on 22 June 1956, Sharett summed up his views on the supremacy of political thought over military strategy in the following words: 'Should this matter be considered or not? Is it possible to proceed blindly according to a rigid model? After all, this is a political decision, not a military order.' In terms of civil supremacy, Sharett made no distinction between military strategy and field tactics. Both had consequences for the political arena and required its supervision. He expressed his opinion more than once with regard to the dimensions and impact of an operative plan after it had been approved. The impression created by a reprisal act could not be ignored; it had political outcomes. Therefore the timing of the response, the scope and if possible the military outcomes of the action had to be considered seriously in relation to anticipated political repercussions following in the wake of the military operation.

After Operation Kinneret Sharett mounted a stinging verbal attack:

I maintain that every instance must be considered according to circumstances. And I maintain that the consideration concerns the dimensions.... Suddenly, it appears that we have only one routine, we can only respond through a military operation. That means an aggressive act, and thus many victims will die, and if we strike, we must strike with great strength. There may perhaps be an instance which demands a strike but I absolutely rule out that each and every instance must be like this.<sup>40</sup>

Sometimes, though, these instances related less to the magnitude of the terrorist acts and more to the pressures of public opinion and internal politics. Throughout his political life Sharett regarded reprisal raids as a pressure valve for the release of domestic tensions and as a compromise with the activist defence lobbies, but he was aware of the negative aspects of a continuing conflict leading to war and adopted blocking and delaying tactics at almost every opportunity:

It is clear to me that the murder was too much and there is a need to let off steam. This is the only reasonable course, and not any other. I don't believe that from the point of view of security, reprisal is very effective. On the contrary, I very much fear that it will be the opening link in a recurrent chain of bloodletting on the frontier.<sup>41</sup>

Sharett was acting Prime Minister from July to December 1953 and officially Prime Minister from January 1954 to November 1955; he also served as Foreign Minister from the establishment

of the state until June 1956, when he was dismissed by Ben-Gurion. In political rank, he held the second highest and highest positions in Israeli politics for eight consecutive years. He was the only political leader of any standing who opposed Ben-Gurion and attempted to curb his military policy during those years. With the help of moderate Mapai ministers and the support of the General Zionist parties, the Progressive Party and the Mafdal, he built a blocking majority against the positions of Ben-Gurion and Dayan. His opposition to a preventive war at the beginning of 1956 brought about his deposition on 18 June 1956.

Sharett remained faithful to his political path all his life. His hope of realizing his political outlook while occupying the top post in the political arena did not come to fruition.

Today, a generation after these events, with an analysis of events carried out not under the pressures to which the Israeli society was then given, when its self-confidence was shaken, Sharett's outlook appears to contain breadth and depth. It is an outlook that emphasizes political action and a system of relations and obligations towards the great powers and world public opinion rather than the naked use of force as a means of determining political outcomes.

### **Pinhas Lavon**

When Ben-Gurion took leave of office in 1953, he appointed Pinhas Lavon to take his place as acting Minister of Defence. Lavon obtained the defence portfolio outright at the beginning of 1954. He was 49 years old, and one of the younger members of his generation to attain a ranking political post. Lavon was a born leader, possessing a keen intellect, outstanding eloquence and a sharp wit. He was born in eastern Galicia and studied law at the University of Lvov. After a brief membership in the Hashomer Hatsair ('young watchman') Zionist youth movement, he became a founding member of the pioneer Zionist youth movement Gordonia.

Lavon immigrated to Palestine at the age of 25 and settled in Kibbutz Hulda. In 1938 he was elected secretary of the Mapai Party and in 1949 was elected general secretary of the Histadrut. His political-ideological outlook went through several phases. While he sharply opposed the 'activism' of the earlier period of struggle and rebellion, he later changed his views and at the beginning of the 1950s adopted an extreme militant position.

Lavon's parliamentary career was also meteoric. In 1950, he received the post of Agriculture Minister in Ben-Gurion's government. In 1952, he was appointed Minister without Portfolio and in July 1953 obtained the post of acting Defence Minister. Already at this point he treated Moshe Sharett with disdain. By not consulting with him and by refraining from reporting to him, he openly showed his disregard for Sharett's standing as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. On 14 August 1953, Lavon received the following note from Sharett:

Between myself and the Prime Minister [i.e., Ben-Gurion], there is an orderly procedure of announcing in advance all serious retaliatory action against any one of the neighbouring countries and every forceful step undertaken against the state's Arab population. This procedure has been kept neither with regard to the curfew and search in Tira nor in regard to the actions carried out on the evening of the 12th of this month. Thus I must request that from now on you inform me in advance about every serious action of the type I have described which is about to be undertaken under your instructions and authorization.<sup>42</sup>

Lavon was not adept in public relations and did not establish good working ties even among his colleagues in the top echelons of the security apparatus and the government. Within a short

period, a rift developed between him and Sharett, which then expanded to include impaired relations with Moshe Dayan, the Chief-of-Staff, and Shimon Peres, the director of the Defence Ministry. Likewise, his relations deteriorated with several Mapai government ministers, with Isser Harel, who was in charge of security services, and with a number of ranking IDF officers.

Lavon knew that Ben-Gurion and Dayan had no regard for Sharett, did not pass on information to him, and certainly did not request the permission of the Foreign Ministry for retaliatory actions. Lavon disagreed with Sharett's assessment of the political situation and did not accept his authority as Prime Minister. He treated him, in effect, as only a Foreign Minister, and curtailed his intervention in the implementation of a policy of retaliation and active deterrence.

As Minister of Defence, Lavon cooperated with Chief-of-Staff Dayan, consulted with Ben-Gurion and in effect directed defence policy while ignoring Sharett. In this he had the backing of Ben-Gurion who was now residing at Kibbutz Sde Boker. In the Olshan-Dori Committee hearings following the Egyptian spy mishap, Isser Harel, head of the Mossad at this time, detailed the matters that astonished him in the relationship between the army and the Defence Ministry on the one hand, and the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister on the other. As an illustration, he claimed that there were border actions about which the Prime Minister was not informed ahead of time, and after they occurred the Prime Minister received distorted reports about them.<sup>43</sup>

Serious divisions of opinion between Lavon and Sharett originated in their divergent views concerning policy and security needs during this period. For Lavon, defence policy was a policy of deterrence and forced compliance; a strategy of military retaliation. Lavon did not pin much hope on diplomacy and political activism. He regarded the entire diplomatic turn to the United States as containing a dangerous illusion, and advocated a reduction of unnecessary diplomatic initiatives in order to foreclose any opening for additional American or United Nations intervention.

When the acts of infiltration first commenced, Lavon did not regard them as part of a 'mini-war' waged by the Arab states. In his view, war entailed activities characterized by joint headquarters operations and a joint operational plan. Lavon, however, did believe that the continuation of these ongoing incidents and incessant combat situations, whether carried out by plunderers and thieves or by murderers and terrorists, created a warlike reality:

Infiltration is in effect one of the elements in the Arab plan to weaken the State of Israel. We must be aware of this and accept the fact that at this time we do not have a complete solution to this evil and that we must adjust to the idea that we have to live, build, exist, and brace ourselves within this reality. It is, therefore, imperative that we free ourselves from this mood of hysteria; hysteria does not lead to any solution, but a military response is imperative. It is imperative as a deterrent element and a reinforcing factor – an external deterrent and an internal reinforcement.<sup>44</sup>

Lavon understood that this reprisal strategy would continue for a long time. On this account, it was extremely important to employ the political echelon's authority for each and every military operation. The political echelon had to decide when to implement and when to act with restraint, what would be the scope of the military operation and what its method of implementation. Every military operation had to be guided by political constraints which had to be fully and unquestionably enforced.

Lavon was also aware of the tendency towards escalation contained in the retaliatory process, but he was dragged along by the activism of the military echelon and perhaps wished to



demonstrate that he was not out of step with them in regard to their ideas and actions. Like Sharett, he was aware of the rising power of the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, and sought by every means to restrain him and subordinate him to his own authority as Minister of Defence. He offered a number of suggestions for procedural changes in the security and defence establishment aimed at increased supervision and control of the IDF. His suggestions included basic legislation defining the supreme command of the army and the authority of the Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff, the establishment of a Defence Council, the appointment of a deputy Chief-of-Staff with the right to report directly to the Defence Minister and the creation of a General Supervisory Institution, subordinate to the Minister of Defence. His objective was to determine the constitutional basis of the military organization, which would define the term 'supreme command' and the authoritative jurisdiction of the Minister of Defence and the Chief-of-Staff.<sup>45</sup>

Lavon's views with regard to the subordination of the military echelon found repeated expression in his speeches in various public forums, including Knesset sessions, and in his meetings with senior officers in the IDF:

The IDF does not relate to the State of Israel, as if the two were different entities. The Israel Defence Force is the principal instrument of the State of Israel, but it is only an instrument. The IDF is not above the state, not outside it, not alongside it, but rather intertwined and connected in all its activities to the entire democratic fibre of the state. It does not dictate policy; it implements it.<sup>46</sup>

He sought to control and supervise the military establishment through the amalgamation of the offices of the IDF and the Defence Ministry spokesmen, the integration of their public relations offices, the direct subordination of the officer responsible for the Mixed Armistice Commissions to the Defence Minister, approval of all officer appointments in the IDF, even at the lowest levels, by the Defence Minister and the subordination of the military government<sup>47</sup> to the direct orders of the Minister of Defence.

Lavon's proposals and steps for their implementation brought about severe clashes and a growing lack of trust between him and the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan. The Chief-of-Staff regarded Lavon as a neophyte in defence matters and lacking experience in working with army personnel. Both Dayan and Shimon Peres, the director-general of the Ministry of Defence, gave vent to their opinions in a clear and sharp manner. Their various utterances directed towards the Defence Minister had the backing of their venerable mentor, Ben-Gurion, and at the same time exploited the split between Lavon and Moshe Sharett. In one of his outbursts against his Chief-of-Staff, who had requested a swift reprisal attack in response to an infiltration incident along the Jordanian border, Lavon wrote:

We must free ourselves from the fetishism of reaction. A reflex response is not a religious duty; rather it is a tool which serves political ends, strengthens the spirit of the Yishuv and deters the enemy. Often a response of this sort can in fact strengthen the resolve of the enemy and deter the Jews – a response of this sort is invalid at its very base.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast to his speeches, in which he lashed out against automatic responses and against being swept away by the reprisal syndrome, Lavon's actions and involvement in authorizing operational plans reveal a different side of his personality; some regarded his ideas as reflecting a 'wild activism'.

Already during the withdrawal of Ben-Gurion to Sde Boker, when Lavon was acting Defence Minister, plans for sabotage operations in Arab countries were discussed. Lavon, Dayan and Yehoshafat Harkabi (acting head of the Intelligence Corps, whose units were designated for these clandestine operations) dealt with various subjects which were brought forward for authorization. They rejected the plan for sabotaging the Amman bridge, which would have been a reprisal for the placing of a mine on railway tracks in Israel. These cloak-and-dagger subjects were close to Lavon's heart and he supported and even expedited sabotage operations on Western facilities in Jordan, Egypt and Iraq. Eyal Kafkafi's biography of Lavon shows a tendency to diminish Lavon's share in these plans with the claim that Lavon approved the operation but reneged when the acting head of intelligence presented his reservations and Dayan's objections to the plan which had received approval in its first stage:

In the days to come, Lavon was accused of being more extreme than Dayan, and thus initiated an order to Yehoshafat Harkabi, opposing Dayan, and bypassing the latter's operational instructions, to sabotage the British consular offices in Amman and the bridge, in order to create contention between England and Jordan. The plan was only cancelled with the intervention of Dayan.<sup>49</sup>

Harkabi himself later testified that the plan had received initial approval but its revised version, which contained the opinion of the IDF, was filed away by Lavon. Lavon and Dayan also differed over the handling of the planned 'fisherman's war' on the Sea of Galilee, in particular over the approval of regulations for the return of fire in the face of Syrian aggression, as well as over how much force was to be used. Dayan claimed that there was no need to obtain the approval of the Defence Minister, or even to inform him of responses to Syrian shooting at fishermen on the lake. He issued an operational order, 'Saadia no. 1', ordering aggressive replies to enemy fire, including the use of artillery and air power on Syrian posts in that sector.<sup>50</sup>

Sharett wished to avoid artillery fire and Lavon passed on an instruction cancelling the order for the use of aerial bombing of Syrian positions, regarding this step as a declaration of war. Dayan now had to conduct operations in a manner approved by the Defence Minister. He issued a revised operational order, 'Saadia no.2', which called for the air force to be involved only in aid and rescue, and on the basis of specific authorization. In principle, in these years IDF aircraft were only used to help besieged forces. Their release for operations required special permission. Nevertheless, Lavon was party to the notion of the IDF occupying and controlling the Syrian-Israeli demilitarized zone in the north, and the cutting off of the Gaza Strip from Egypt in the south, at the time of the overthrow of Adib al-Shishakli in Syria at the end of February 1954.

Lavon also became an enigma to his closest friends – in the unexplained turnabout which began in his thoughts, and in his system of beliefs and values upon undertaking the office of Defence Minister. Within a few months, he reversed his unblemished record of fighting for the rights of Israeli Arabs and, categorically rejecting a policy of transfer for the Arab minority, became a military hawk, holding audacious ideas and even raising them at government discussions and at general staff headquarters. 'Lavon's "adventurous activism" in 1954', writes Benny Morris, 'which included a plan to bomb American targets in Amman to cause bad blood between Jordan and the United States, was frowned upon by some of his military aides'.<sup>51</sup>

Moshe Sharett regarded the revolution in the thought and policy of Lavon as a consequence of the intoxication with power that accompanied his rise to the position of Minister of Defence. Throughout the time they worked together in the Israeli Government, the two were in constant confrontation with each other over the direction policy should take and over the approval and

reporting procedures between the Prime Minister and his Defence Minister. Lavon's deeds and his behaviour resulted in the establishment of a ministerial committee on security and foreign affairs. Its members, all of whom were affiliated with Mapai, included Moshe Sharett, the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, Minister of Labour, Pinhas Lavon, Minister of Defence, Levi Eshkol, Finance Minister, and Zalman Shazar, Minister of Education.

In practice, Lavon's authority was limited and his desires and political line were thwarted both by Mapai ministers who opposed his *weltanschauung* and by his close working comrades, Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres, who chose to neutralize any effectiveness he might have had in security issues, seeing in his political stance a danger to their status.

The return of Ben-Gurion to the Defence Ministry in February 1955 reduced Lavon to his proper proportions, although he continued to support an activist line in Ben-Gurion's Government right up to the Sinai campaign in October 1956.

## Moshe Dayan

Moshe Dayan was Chief-of-Staff between 6 December 1953 and 29 January 1958. Prior to this appointment, he had played a decisive role in the determination of Israel's Defence policy as head of the Southern Command and Chief of the General Staff. Dayan's official roles were undoubtedly enhanced by the fondness and great appreciation accorded him by Ben-Gurion. In appointing Dayan Chief-of-Staff, he pole-vaulted him over experienced and veteran candidates. He held fast to Dayan's word and granted him a world of confidence.

Dayan regarded the Arab-Israeli conflict as endemic. Employing a biological metaphor, he presented a fatalistic view of Israel's predicament:

Unfortunately, the absence of security for us has an organic foundation, perhaps an excessively organic foundation. If I may be permitted to use a current image, we are a heart transplanted into a region which other organs of the body have rejected.<sup>52</sup>

The root of the conflict in his eyes was the very establishment of the State of Israel, a state which created, from the Arab point of view, the problem of 'plundered Palestine'.

Dayan recognized the Palestinian refugee problem and separated it from the political and security issues between the fledgling Israeli state and the neighbouring Arab states – Egypt, Jordan and Syria. He saw the conflict with Egypt and Syria as territorial, but understood that the leaders of the Arab states were exploiting the results of the War of Independence and the Palestinian problem to continue the struggle and the fighting:

The declarations of intent by Arab rulers to attack Israel and destroy Israel were resumed a short time after they signed the 1949 Armistice Agreements at the end of the War of Independence. Moreover, these states not only refused to convert the Armistice Agreements into an arrangement for peace, as they had promised, but rather immediately after the cessation of battles, Israel's neighbours initiated border incidents and strikes against its citizens.<sup>53</sup>

Dayan, like his respected teacher Ben-Gurion, believed in the state's self-reliance and looked on its military forces' capabilities as a means of making political gains. He regarded the routine security incidents not as passing episodes and one-off events, but rather as a permanent situation for many years to come. The terror and infiltration activities undertaken by the Arab states were

in his view part of the military engagement with Israel; their motivation was a wish for revenge and compensation for the honour lost in the War of Independence. He was one of the designers of the early 1950s deterrence policy and of course was responsible for the planning and implementation of reprisal operations. It would appear that at this stage Dayan thought it possible to handle the border problems of Israel by means of reprisals without dragging the country through escalation to war. He claimed that the memory of failure in the War of Independence was still fresh in the minds of Arab rulers and they would not dare to bring about an escalation of the situation. The dynamics of escalation, initially discounted by Dayan, would soon bring about a change in his evaluation of the course Israel's future military strategy should follow. The war option eventually became an underlying current of his calculated reprisal strategy, losing all semblance of serving as a means of deterrence and compliance.

During the 1950s, the IDF possessed neither the instruments nor the manpower to close the borders hermetically in a way that would provide security for the population and for property. A defensive posture along the borders required extensive manpower. The standing army was in danger of being worn down by the exhaustive burden of guarding lookout posts and conducting patrols and ambushes along the border without a guarantee of success in carrying out this type of mission. Dayan's military experience with Orde Wingate and Yitzhak Sadeh in the late 1930s and early 1940s prepared him for a different and offence-oriented form of warfare.

From the beginning of his military career as a commander, Dayan promoted aggressive actions through commando operations and believed in the advantages contained in the surprise of the first strike. In effect he formulated the policy and security concept which lay behind the retaliatory actions.

In initiating the reprisal policy, Dayan, as mentioned above, assumed that the Arabs would not react militarily. Thus, given the inability of the United Nations and the major powers to impose a peaceful resolution of the conflict, reprisal operations would serve as a cheap substitute for a total war:

We must determine the rules of what is and is not allowed in our relations with the Arab countries, and we must be careful not to be acquiescent and acceptant of strikes against us, even if they are only of nuisance value.<sup>54</sup>

Dayan held Arab governments responsible for seizing and punishing infiltrators. Hence he saw the security task of the Israeli Government as compelling the Arab governments to enforce this responsibility, to fight against the gangs and extremist national and religious groups in their midst: 'The motivation which will bring the Arab governments and powers to do this, and the residents to understand this, must be tangible, real and certain – retaliatory operations by the Israeli military and a fear of them.'<sup>55</sup>

He was aware of the additional diplomatic means available to the state leadership to calm the situation and eliminate infiltration along the borders: the application of pressure on foreign governments and resolutions of the UN Security Council as well as other international bodies. However, he did not believe these channels could influence Arab governments. In his view, a firm and forceful element was needed to apply pressure on Arab leaders to prevent infiltration.

In all his speeches Dayan's consistent message to the Arab states and their leaders was that they would pay a price in the form of military retaliation should infiltration continue. In a lecture before senior IDF officers during this same period, Dayan stated: 'We have the power to exact a high price for the shedding of our blood, a price that would be dear enough, that would be too costly for the Arab population, the Arab military and the Arab governments to pay.'<sup>56</sup>

He regarded infiltration and terrorist incursions as a form of planned and organized war undertaken by the Egyptians. This was reinforced following Egypt's involvement in the creation of Fedayeen units. During the first stage of the retaliatory actions, they included a combination of punishment and deterrence. The targets were generally civilians. Those hurt included women and children, herds of cattle and sheep, and houses. The purpose of these hard and painful blows was to create fear and panic among the refugees so that they would put pressure on government to curb and constrain the infiltration.

Already as head of Southern Command, Dayan acted forcefully against Bedouin infiltration into the Negev. The Bedouin entered Israeli territory for the purposes of their livelihood, but their activities often went beyond seeking grazing land for their flocks or trade in goods: it involved theft and terrorist acts. The IDF conducted regular raids on the tented Bedouin settlements in the Arava and drove them into the Sinai Desert. The fact that the Bedouin had no definitive settlement boundaries and had a nomadic way of life made it difficult for the military government to make just or unjust decisions as to where they could tend their flocks.

In 1950 about 1,000 members of the Azazme tribe were expelled to the southern Hebron hills. Moshe Dayan was called on to explain the expulsion. He pointed out that 'the problem of the Arab refugees as a whole cannot be solved by returning some individual group to the country.... The army has explicit orders to drive back across the border all those who try to enter illegally.'<sup>57</sup> Dayan persevered in this policy all through his years as head of Southern Command and was personally present when actions were initiated in the Hebron hills and the Negev. During these years he witnessed the cruelty and abuse that IDF soldiers perpetrated against the infiltrators, and more than once he had to justify these deviant deeds done by the army.

In principle, Dayan regarded the Arabs as a fifth column and supported hardline methods in arresting infiltration. The infiltrators were not naive, he claimed; theft and robbery are liable to turn quickly into acts of murder and terror.

In a Mapai faction deliberation of 18 June 1950, Dayan defended the hardline policy taken against the infiltrators:

If we indeed we go by moral standards which Moses proposed [Sharett, with ironic Biblical allusion], then I wish to ask this: If the Arabs who cross over to harvest crops planted in our area – they, along with their wives and small children – and we open fire on them, will that stand up to moral examination? These are extensive areas, up to ten kilometres in depth, which no Jew has ever set foot in, and they are full of weeds, and on the other side sit 200,000 starving Arabs, and if they cultivate the fields and we shoot at them, will that stand up to examination? The Arabs who cross over to remove the crops that they left in their abandoned villages, and we cause them to enter minefields, and they return minus an arm and a leg... will that stand up to examination? It will not stand up to examination, I don't know any other method to guard the borders. If we allow the shepherds and the harvesters to cross the border, then tomorrow the State of Israel will have no borders.<sup>58</sup>

Dayan emphasized the ease with which Arab infiltrators could cross the border into Israel to steal, rob and murder and carry the booty that same night to their side. Sabotage actions and terror conducted by the Palestinians with the support of organizations associated with the Mufti, the Palestine government in exile, and Jamal el Hussein, led to painful and hard-hitting Israeli revenge and reprisal raids. Dayan supported and approved operations against the civilian population in order to extort a painful price and to punish collectively the village from which the perpetrators came.

Already in the early phases of the reprisal operations, before 'Operation Qibya' in October 1953, Dayan opposed the counter-strategy of launching 'Israeli Fedayeen-type raids' as a counter-strategy to infiltration:

I did uphold the adoption of *Fedayeen* tactics. If we wanted to kill Arab civilians, we could do so easily, by means of tank fire and army operations. Our question was not who will do this, but rather what should be done. I was against our doing to them what they are doing to us.... As long as the Arabs are not convinced that by deploying fedayeen nothing on their side will remain intact, the terror will continue.<sup>59</sup>

The Qibya village episode was undoubtedly a turning point in regard to the character and objectives of IDF operations. Also, from the point of view of Dayan as the new Chief-of-Staff, there was a need to cease attacking civilians, even if these blows might prove painful and yield clear advantages. Although the Arabs felt the heavy hand of the Israeli state, it was clear that

what is permissible to the Arabs and even to other peoples would not be forgiven and nor expiated by the Jewish people. Not only foreigners, but Israeli citizens and world Jewry as well, expect purity of arms far more than is the norm in any other army.<sup>60</sup>

An additional, but no less important, objective was on Dayan's agenda. He wished to form the character and improve the level of combat performance both of the individual Israeli soldier and of the Israeli combat units. He sought to build an army that attacks and storms the enemy and is committed to the implementation of its missions. He sought to change the negative image that the army had acquired in the early 1950s, to raise motivation, professionalism and competition in the carrying out of missions, both for commanders and for rank-and-file soldiers.

He was aware of the weakness of the IDF in the years following the War of Independence, of the level of the combat officers and of the many failed missions during these years. The IDF took a major share in settling new immigrants and founding and developing agricultural settlements but had become a less effective military instrument for a state at war.<sup>61</sup>

When he served as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Dayan presented a report on the gloomy situation of the IDF Infantry Corps. The level of the soldiers and officers allocated to the infantry was very low, and even those who were dispatched for command and officer duties quickly found a way to exit from the field units and to transfer to more comfortable duties in headquarters, the air force and the navy. The level of those who remained in the combat companies was even more problematic:

Despite the winnowing out of the good soldiers (to courses, to the professional corps), soldiers that were border-line cases with regard to discipline were posted to battalions, command headquarters or various military installations. Soldiers who smoked hashish, criminals and thieves ('graduates of the prisons'), pimps and the like were sometimes sent as reinforcements to battalions. The health classification given to soldiers before their recruitment changes within a short time after their recruitment. Within the first month of military service ten per cent of the soldiers manage to obtain low health classifications and are released from military duty or are transferred to other units. The health level of low-ranking officers is also low. The number of officers in infantry units is minuscule. There are almost no platoon commanders of officer rank. The length of stay of an officer in a unit is generally brief. The level of NCOs is low. The level of shooting in target practice is extremely poor.... Given these facts, the units lack the capacity to

become combat units. They remain only as units entered in an officially-listed ledger.<sup>62</sup>

The many military failures, which Dayan had pointed out, kept increasing: Beit Sira, Beit Marsim, Husan, Al Midya, Beit Awah, Rantis, Idna, Beit Liqya, Palmah and additional villages, objectives which were guarded by the Jordanian Legion. Against these forces, IDF units failed, either because of errors in direction-finding or because of retreat before the battle began. 'During this period,' wrote Dayan, 'many missions assigned to IDF forces were not carried out.... Even our elite units which were intended for special operations, such as the Paratroop Battalion, exhibited a shameful helplessness.... Many of our operations ended in failure.'<sup>63</sup> Reprisal raids served Dayan as a means of training and educating the army to new norms and combat values which had been eroded and forgotten in the routines following the War of Independence. Dayan examined the relations between Israeli and the Arab military forces according to the miniature model of reprisal operations. He ascribed utmost importance to the image that the soldier projects and the image of the army in the eyes of soldiers and the enemy:

An army does not improve overnight and if from now on we don't know how to set for ourselves a decent level of combat proficiency and [don't] ensure that it is maintained, it won't produce itself in the moment of war. Our army and commanders receive their training in the reality of their service.<sup>64</sup>

As part of his conclusions concerning the difficult situation of the infantry, Unit 101 was amalgamated with the Paratroop Battalion. Dayan appointed a young officer, Ariel Sharon, as commander of the Paratroopers. Sharon had been the daring commander of Unit 101 and Dayan believed that this appointment could raise the level of the unit and the quality of the commanders and soldiers. The aim was to create an elite unit that would produce combat norms and values and then serve as an example to the rest of the fighting units in the IDF.

Reprisal operations attained their principal military goals, morale rose and combat norms improved immeasurably. Dayan managed to inculcate combat values into the IDF field units, especially the regular forces. These values included uncompromising dedication to the mission, initiative and aggressiveness, the rescue of injured comrades and a striving for a professional level of performance with attention to detail in planning and implementation. The IDF in fact accomplished all this before the start of the Sinai campaign. The Sinai campaign victory would not have been attained with relative ease were it not for the basic change that took place in the IDF during the period of the retaliatory raids.

However, beside the major achievements initiated by Dayan during this period, questions have been raised about the extent to which his involvement brought about a deterioration in Israel's foreign relations and contributed to the process of escalation.

The demands and pressures from Moshe Dayan to execute reprisal operations more than once raised additional misgivings as to whether these operations were carried out to serve the needs of the army for training exercises more than they served state policy. Was this not a case, in effect, of being swept away by the desires of the military establishment and in particular, of the combat units? Did not these elements contribute to the escalation process which led to a preventive war?

The great loss in life which resulted from the increasing number of reprisal actions led to the conclusion that war could not be prevented by following this course and that, in fact, the opposite had occurred: these actions had paved the way to war. In the summary assessments after the Sinai campaign Dayan admitted

there was a dialectical logic, almost necessary, in the chain of events which brought us to the Sinai Campaign. After Kalkilya, we rebelled against the terrible price we had to pay for small, short-term political gains. No alternatives remained except one of two: to forego the path of reprisal – but the meaning of this was also to forego our political objective and our elementary rights – or to bring our relations with the Arabs to a showdown.<sup>65</sup>



# 3

## Israel in the 1950s The Search for Security

‘We hoped for peace, but no good came;  
And for a time of healing, but behold, terror!’

(Jeremiah 8: 15)

‘National security doctrine’ assumes an ideological and principled foundation for guiding national undertakings. It applies to a variety of areas assigned the task of ensuring national security in the short and long run. Broadly speaking, security doctrine is a cognitive framework or a comprehensive term containing various components such as: state objectives, resources, geo-strategic environments and so forth. In addition to the central concern of defence, national security doctrine involves other vital areas such as politics, economics, demography and technology.

The quantity and quality of human capital and the development of its potential is one of the central components contributing to national security capability. Quantitatively, what is included is not only the nation’s population size but also the optimal number of Israel’s population that can be conscripted for military service as compensation for the state’s numerical deficiency in manpower. Qualitative questions associated with the human potential touch on education, technological levels and the ability to integrate and operate advanced systems. National security ultimately is based on the ability of the leadership to draw upon the various components and vital areas and manage them within a single interlocking system.<sup>1</sup>

In-depth and extensive discussions on the issue of security and the principles applicable to Israeli security doctrine may be found in two recent publications: Avner Yariv’s *Politics and Strategy in Israel* and Israel Tal’s *National Security*.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1950s, the fledgling State of Israel faced monumental difficulties in integrating immigrants. In addition, exhausted by war, state and society had to contend with mounting security problems. Ben-Gurion, serving as both Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, placed the subject of immigrant absorption at the head of his concerns and tied it to security matters.

Even before the end of hostilities, Ben-Gurion set forth his ideas concerning the bolstering of military achievements accomplished in the War of Independence. In ‘Hannuka Reflections’, he asked himself: ‘What are the conditions for preserving our independence provided we succeed in preserving our inner aspirations for freedom?’ and jotted down his reply: ‘Military security (the eradication of Jewish dispersion), the rapid populating and intensive development of different parts of the country, a regime of freedom and equality, pioneering hegemony (education geared to pioneering), the regimen of science, a policy of peace, governmental stability (regime stability).’<sup>3</sup> Ben-Gurion regarded the handling of mass immigration in terms of nation-building. This entailed fashioning a society rooted in the land, speaking a common language and imbibing cultural values associated with modernity while resuscitating elements of an ancient Jewish heritage as the vital basis for rendering the new state secure. He considered the time factor

critical and believed that a one-time opportunity to rescue and unite the nation presented itself. The basic concern of bringing in immigrants and integrating them into the social and economic framework pushed aside all other social ideas.

Israel's first prime minister pondered the question of how this mixed multitude could be turned into one nation and a unified society that could face the security challenges anticipated in the near future. 'Are we a nation?' he asked and replied in a speech delivered to the first Knesset:

Without fearing that they will tell me that I have no faith in the people and that I lack a Zionist ideology, I answer: we are not a people yet. And I do not mean in the ideological or socio-philosophical sense of the term. I mean a unified community, rooted in its homeland and its culture, a nation bound by solidarity, capable of fighting to the last man and literally until the last drop of blood. I am certain that, in due time, we shall become a nation like this, committed, solidified, united, forged in the heart of the homeland, using our own language and managing our own economy. By having this feeling of independence and fulfilment we will become a people no less than any other people.<sup>4</sup>

Ben Gurion saw in the immigration wave – masses who could not read or write, and some of whom lacked a Jewish education and Jewish culture – an influx of communities and tribes possessing a multiplicity of foreign languages and clashing cultures. Entire communities arrived bringing with them a certain cultural and social solidarity peculiar to their country of origin. Thus this immigration increased the divisions already existing within Israeli society. Political parties, which in the pre-state era were cradle-to-grave patrons of immigrants, often mobilizing leadership in the country of origin in order to strengthen their membership potential upon arrival, continued to have major influence over the new arrivals who were settled in communal clusters, especially in the border areas of the country. Thus ideological antagonisms among the political parties also included conflicts of interest in the social, religious and economic spheres.

In effect, personal insecurity in the social, economic and cultural spheres coexisted with a collective search for military security in the state arena. A closer examination of the dimensions of the immigration wave of the early 1950s indicates how the government's immigration and security policies blended.

### **Society's Image in the 1950s**

The wave of immigration in the early 1950s doubled Israel's population. Between 15 May 1948 and December 1951, within less than four years, the number of citizens grew from 700,000 to 1,484,000. This demographic change created difficult economic and social problems.

There were two principal sources of immigration: one was Jewish remnants in Europe, survivors of the Holocaust, homeless and bereft of family, scarred in body and spirit by war and the concentration camps. The second source was Jews from the Eastern Mediterranean and North African countries, whose cultural and traditional background clashed with the cultural tradition of the country's Jewish inhabitants. Moreover, the majority of immigrants had little formal education and lacked economic resources and a business/employment background – factors that hindered their ability to become integrated into the country's economy.<sup>5</sup>

## The Structure and Composition of the Immigrant Population

From the establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948 to the end of 1951, 700,000 immigrants arrived in the country. In 1948, 102,000 arrived; in 1949, 240,000; in 1950, 170,000; and in 1951, 175,000.<sup>6</sup> This was mass immigration both in its absolute dimensions and in relation to the size of the host population, which numbered 650,000 on 15 May 1948.

The population grew at an annual rate of 20 per cent during the years of mass immigration and within three-and-a-half years (1948–51) doubled itself. At the end of 1953, the total Jewish population in Israel reached 1,484,000 inhabitants. Approximately 80 per cent of the population growth was due to immigration; the remainder was a result of natural growth. The immigration waves brought with them newcomers from different countries with foreign cultures, customs and tongues. Some upheld traditional religious values, desiring to preserve religious commandments (*mitzvot*), while others distanced themselves from any traces of religion and Jewish tradition. So large and varied an immigration in such a short period of time and the process of its integration into the country created difficult problems which had an impact upon the formation of the character of Israeli society for many years to come.

The immigration from Asian and African countries carried great weight in these years. About half the mass immigration came from these two continents. Between 1948 and 1953, 35.3 per cent of the immigrants came from the Asian continent, 15.4 per cent from Africa, 48.6 per cent from Europe and only 0.7 per cent from America and Oceania.<sup>7</sup> After World War Two, the Jewish Agency, the Joint Distribution Committee and the Israeli Government brought entire communities into the country from Europe. Beginning in September 1948, most of the residents of deportation camps in Germany, Austria and Italy arrived in the country. In addition, immigrants who had lived in detention camps in Cyprus arrived. In 1948–49, 37,000 Jews from Bulgaria and the majority of Yugoslav Jews entered Israel. The Libyan Jewish community, numbering 31,000, arrived in 1949; ‘Operation Magic Carpet’ brought 48,000 Jews from Yemen. In 1950–51, in ‘Operation Ezra and Nehemia’, 123,000 Iraqi Jews reached Israel. Other large communities arriving in the country during these years included Jews from Poland (106,000), Romania (118,000) Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (45,500) and from Turkey (31,000).

In 1948, the overwhelming majority of immigrants (86 per cent) were of European origin, but later Jews from African and Asian communities became more numerous. In 1951, 71 per cent of immigrants were Asian- and African-born. These changes in the composition of Israel’s immigrants brought about considerable changes in the social fabric and structure of the Jewish population in the country.

In 1948, native-born Israelis had constituted more than 35 per cent of the demographic structure of the state. Among the foreign-born residents at this time, 65 per cent had been in the country more than ten years. Eighty-five per cent of the foreign-born residents were of European and American origin. This population could be regarded as constituting a strong homogeneous core, which shared life experiences and formulated the social and political culture of the generation that founded the state. In contrast to this homogeneous social structure, by 1953 only 29 per cent of the country’s residents were native-born, and this included many offspring of recently arrived immigrants. More than 70 per cent of the country’s residents born abroad had lived in the state only a short time. Afro-Asians now constituted 38 per cent of all immigrants who had settled in Palestine, and later, Israel between 1938 and 1953.

The immigration from Asian and African countries included a high percentage of children and few elderly. Thirty-eight per cent of Asian and African immigrants were under 15 years old.

Only 2 per cent were over age 60. The age structure of the new immigrants was a consequence of a selective immigration policy that preferred youth of working age and tried to prevent the immigration of the elderly. The reason for this policy was the inability of the elderly to adapt to manual or agricultural labour as easily as the youth.

The educational level of the immigrants in the 1948–51 period was considerably lower than that of the non-immigrant population. Among new immigrant males over 15, only 16 per cent had completed high school, compared with 34 per cent of the veteran population. Among those of Asian and African origin, who constituted half the immigrants, only 8.5 per cent had received high-school education. Among males, from the Moroccan community, only 2 per cent had completed a high-school education. Among Libyan immigrants, the rate was 3 per cent, and among Yemenite immigrants less than one per cent.<sup>8</sup>

The above data reveal that mass immigration brought about basic socio-demographic changes in a number of key characteristics of Israeli society: population size, country of origin, age structure, level of education and employability. Immigrants from Asia and Africa had lower educational attainments than the veteran population. In their native countries, they engaged in petty trade and services, as well as in unskilled occupations. Their lack of economic means and large families relegated them to Israel's lower social and economic strata. Those immigrants who in their native countries engaged in trade and services had to undergo job retraining following their arrival. Almost all entered unskilled jobs in industry and agriculture, jobs with low pay and little possibility of advancement. As a result of these structural developments, the social and economic gap between the new immigrants and the established, non-immigrant population grew quickly, generating pockets of friction and bitterness even in these initial years of immigration.

The mass immigration included different social strata and varied ethnic and cultural elements. It was an encounter between worlds that clashed in their outlooks but whose common denominator was the Jewish religion and the desire to reach the land of Israel. However, this desire was a mixture of push and pull factors. Some were driven by ideological and national motivations, but most were refugees who immigrated to Israel under the necessity of circumstances. Thus they were unlike the second and third waves of immigration in the years prior to the establishment of the state, who were motivated by ideals and a pioneering ideology. The immigrants from African and Asian countries came from traditions, lifestyles and cultures unfamiliar to the native-born Israelis, and undoubtedly different from the customs of Western culture familiar to European and American immigrants. Some immigrants were drawn to the land by a religious/mystical feeling. Most of this immigration wave were bereft of all material possessions and were dependent upon Jewish Agency personnel and emissaries of the Land of Israel institutions. They were sent to settlements along the country's periphery, where conditions were hardly bearable, to transit camps or to collective settlements on the frontier. Many were sent to make-work projects and did not find appropriate employment for many years. These families were harmed both economically and socially. The family fabric – the honour due the father as head of the household – was also harmed, as were the traditions and religious values that constituted the foundation and backbone for the majority of immigrant families.

To the sum total of difficulties and shortages – the encumbrances of absorption and the search for a new identity, the loss of personal and social security – was now added the danger and threat from without. Lack of quiet on the borders and terrorist activities were elements which struck at morale and had negative implications for the IDF and security policy in general.

## **The Implications for Security**

The doubling of the population in the first years after the founding of the state affected security considerations in several ways. The numbers in themselves possessed vital significance for the future security of the state. Only through a critical population mass, numbering two to three million, could the state continue the Zionist enterprise despite economic problems and, even more, the presence of security threats. The doubling of the population contributed to the basic resources of national security.

In the age of total war, in which the entire population is mobilized, and certainly when the armed forces are based on military reserves, the size and strength of the population impacts directly on national security. At the same time, in modern warfare, in which populations and vital strategic sites in the heart of the state are legitimate targets, the resilience of the population becomes a security asset or burden during a period of continuous violent conflict.<sup>9</sup>

The strength of the state is also measured by the resilience of its frontier residents. During a period in which the defence burden is placed preponderantly upon frontier settlements, in which the daily coping with robbery, theft and damage to property and people brings fear to the doors of every house as evening sets in, a relatively greater weight is placed on the national security component of the frontier population and the capacity of the leadership to deal with this security challenge. The identification of the population with the state and its goals turned the entire nation into a de facto army. The resolution to withstand the daily security hassles, not only in time of war, constituted a significant part of the power of the state. The level of education and the technological capability of society had an immediate impact on the state's security and military capability.

Immigrant absorption and the doubling of the population in the early 1950s had a decisive bearing on state security in two main areas: the first pertained to problems of security on the immigrant agricultural settlements and transit camps, particularly those situated along the borders; the second concerned the human and qualitative composition of the combat units during these same years.

### **The New Settlement: Problems in Routine Security Measures**

The War of Independence did not solve the problem of the integration of the young Israeli state into the Middle Eastern region. Its very existence was not legitimate in the eyes of the Arab states, and its borders were recognized not as international boundaries but as ceasefire lines only. David Ben-Gurion regarded the ceasefire as a stage in preparation for round two, which threatened the very existence of the state. At a session with front commanders on 27 November 1948, he presented his outlook with regard to the conclusion of the fighting in the following words:

The end of the war! Was there an end to the war? Even if the war ends now, won't there be a violation of the truce? And if a peace treaty is signed – was there a war which was not preceded by peace? We should not look at decisions and position papers but rather at historical reality. What is the current reality? We dealt the Arab nations a blow. Will they forget this tomorrow? Seven hundred thousand people defeated thirty million. Will they forget this humiliation? We must assume that they have feelings of honour. We will make efforts for peace – but peace

requires two parties. Is there assurance that they don't want to take revenge?<sup>10</sup>

The Israeli leadership saw the territorial problems and the problem of refugees which the Arab states put forward as part of a grand strategy to destroy the Israeli state.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the political and military leadership did not foresee war with the Arab states in the near future. Their true concern was the fragile situation along the borders. Problems of infiltration, theft and, more than once, murder created demoralization and definite harm to national security, even if these violations could be termed border wars conducted in the framework of routine security measures.<sup>12</sup>

After the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees lived in temporary camps situated along the borders of the state and in Arab countries, waiting for the opportunity to return to their homes. The State of Israel was not prepared to allow their return and thus they stayed in the camps without a basic solution being found for their problems. Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, placed the onus of responsibility for the refugee problem on Israel, and refused to find a permanent solution for the refugees in their own territory.<sup>13</sup>

The Israeli position with regard to the refugee issue was in effect that of 'an exchange of populations'. The refugee problem for both sides would be solved through their integration into the countries to which they had moved. The Israeli leadership held up as an example the solution to the refugee problem in the wake of World War Two, when more than a million refugees were integrated into the countries where they were presently situated and began a new life with the assistance of their host countries and the United Nations.

After the War of Independence, Israel absorbed tens of thousands of immigrants, remnants of the Holocaust in Europe and refugees from Arab states, and settled them in locations that had been abandoned during the course of the war. Israeli policy was to settle new immigrants in the houses of refugees who had fled from Haifa, Jaffa and Jerusalem, Lod, Ramla, Safed, Tiberias, Acre, Beit Shean and Migdal. Immigrants and settlement groups of native-born Israelis settled in the abandoned villages or beside them and cultivated the land. The policy of settlement, as a vital component in the determination and securing of the borders, was a direct extension of the policy of Zionist settlement beginning in the days of the *Shomer* ['watchmen'] and continuing with the erection of settlements of the 'wall and watchtower' type – 11 locations set up in the Negev at the close of the Yom Kippur holiday in 1946.

Josef Avidar, one of the leaders of the Hagana,<sup>14</sup> a general in the IDF at its founding, and one of the architects of the policy of the 'conquering settlement', explained the concept at a conference on the subject:

During the entire period before the establishment of the state, the settlement strategy could not have been realized without the pioneering drive of the settlers, who were prepared to confront most difficult conditions from the economic vantage point and serious security dangers. This was, in effect, the principal military factor which won the fight for control over the land throughout the country.<sup>15</sup>

To fill in and close, even partly, the newly drawn-up armistice lines against border intrusions was a primary and vital element in the dispersal of settlements during the first years. The settlement policy was designed not only to solve the housing problem of the new immigrants but even more to respond to two worrying facts reflected by the settlement map. The first concern was that only 10 per cent of the state's land was cultivated by Israeli farmers. The second concern was that most of the Jewish population was concentrated in the central coastal plain

‘between Gadera and Hadera’.

The government proclaimed the following objectives: dispersion of the population, settlement in the frontier areas and in vital locations as defensive belts; and a hardening of the porous borders. In addition, there would be an effort to create an agricultural infrastructure to supply the basic food needs of the state’s population. From the beginning of Zionist settlement in the late nineteenth century until 1948, 250 settlements had been established. In the six years from the proclamation of the State to 1954 about 350 were founded, mostly agricultural in character, such as kibbutzim and moshavim.

The security concept, which for many years stood behind the settlement effort, was called ‘territorial defence’. The term is used to characterize a national policy for securing borders and settlement locations. The system relies principally upon the residents of the frontier settlements. The security establishment provides military training, equipment of various types for local defence needs and defensive fortifications.<sup>16</sup> The territorial defence system of the IDF served as a further instrument in the war against enemy infiltration in addition to its strategic objective – a defence shield and initial trip-wire against enemy forces, a cover in the absence of strategic depth and a territorial warning system.

The introduction of settlement policy as a component of the security outlook was expressed by Ben-Gurion in a Knesset debate on national defence: ‘Our defence is not only military... the settlements play a major role in our defence system. Every settlement must serve as a fortress of strength, a reliable bastion.’<sup>17</sup>

The integration of ‘territorial defence’ in the war against infiltrators during the summer of 1949 was an attempt to find a solution within whose framework all the forces involved in the struggle against incursions would operate: the IDF, the police forces, settlement agents and the settlers themselves. The territorial defence system was already in effect by October 1949. Settlers became an active component of ‘Operation Simhat Torah’, which was launched to halt infiltration from the ‘Triangle’, the geometrically-defined territory in the central/northern area of the country with a high concentration of Arab villages. In the following years, settlers would continue to participate in many operations aimed at curbing and preventing border infiltrators.

Increasing infiltration activities in the early 1950s, however, placed the settlers in dire straits. This led to a decision to expand the activities of the territorial defence network within the framework of the war being waged against border incursions.<sup>18</sup> The decision to involve new immigrant settlers in guard duty somewhat improved efforts to counter infiltration. The settlers underwent basic training in the use of firearms and took part in guard duty, a development which in part raised the self-confidence of the population. Nevertheless, the process of organizing and training settlement residents and preparing them for military missions in the war against infiltration was slow and complicated. Only by 1954 was significant progress made in this area.<sup>19</sup>

The public and state institutions had exaggerated expectations of the collective settlements’ abilities to cope with infiltrators and security problems, despite their close acquaintance with the latter’s personal and social problems. The establishment of immigrant moshavim as a security belt and as part of the security conception was of course a necessary reality at the time. Nevertheless, the socio-economic reality and the deteriorating security situation brought about by escalating infiltration and hostile activity often converted the asset into a security burden. In fact, the territorial defence system was neglected by the IDF, particularly towards the end of 1955, when the army was preparing itself for preventive war.<sup>20</sup>

The leadership and the heads of the settlement system were aware of the major disadvantages

and dangers in placing new immigrants along the border lines. The infiltrators threatened those very border settlements which had been purposefully erected to block these incursions.

The only human resource pool socially unified and with a self-defence capability available to the settlement institutions was the Nahal Unit soldiers.<sup>21</sup> The first fortified Nahal outpost, Nahal Oz, was erected in July 1951. Approximately 25 settlements were established by the Nahal units in the early 1950s, and later became civilian settlements with permanent settlers largely drawn from new immigrants. Opposite these settlements, on the other side of the ceasefire lines, masses of refugees who had abandoned their homes and land during the War of Independence congregated. The refugee camps became a breeding ground and base for enemy infiltration, which became a constant threat.

Already, in October 1949, Ben-Gurion established a clear stance with regard to infiltration:

Every additional Arab in the country increases the danger. I don't think that the Arab states will wage a war against us in the near future... but one thing is clear – there will be a guerrilla war in our midst and we must accept the fact that this situation will almost always exist. This may lead to war... it is impossible to expel them by moralizing... rather, they must be expelled at the point of a gun.<sup>22</sup>

The problem of infiltration became Israel's central security problem in these years. Incursions initially were the sporadic acts of farmers and shepherds returning to their land in order to cultivate it or gather in the crops, but it quickly turned into acts of robbery and theft. This infiltration was exploited by the Palestinian leadership and later by the leadership in the Arab states for intelligence-gathering purposes and to terrorize the local population, especially the frontier immigrant settlements. In the first 15 months after the War of Independence, 134 people were killed and 104 injured by infiltrators. Driving on the roads was dangerous, especially at night. Driving to Beersheva after dark was avoided and cars could only travel to Eilat in coordinated convoys placed under the surveillance of the IDF.

The battle over the frontier was in fact a struggle over the defining of the state's borders. The fear was that the unstable and temporary ceasefire lines would be annulled or shifted under the exigencies of circumstance and international pressure. It was widely held among the Israeli leadership that the facts on the ground would in the end determine the state's borders. Any compromise or neglect of the boundary line would bring about a situation with a pregnable border, leading to the return of the refugees in a political settlement and the renewed settlement of Arab villages abandoned during the war.

Selections from the annual reports of the Israeli Police and the IDF provide an understanding of the breadth and seriousness of the problem. Data from the Israeli Police indicate that during the first years the incursions bore a common character, even though increasing violence accompanied them. In 1951, there were 1,214 cases of theft, 54 robberies, 20 murders and 36 instances of sabotage and mine-laying. There were also 440 recorded occurrences of armed clashes. In 1952, the IDF estimated that there were 16,000 incursions, of which 11,000 were along the Jordanian border and 5,000 along the Egyptian border.<sup>23</sup> In the same year, there were 1,695 thefts, 46 robberies, 13 murders and 32 instances of sabotage and mine-laying. The report recorded 402 armed clashes. In 1953, there were 1,349 thefts, 58 robberies, 35 murders, 44 cases of sabotage and mine-laying and 443 instances of armed clashes.<sup>24</sup> In 1953–54, 52 people were killed and 54 injured as a result of terrorist and sabotage activities.<sup>25</sup> In 1954–55, 18 people were killed and 50 injured; in the following year, 1955–56, 27 people were killed and 79 injured. From May to October of 1956, there were 161 instances of theft, robbery and cultivation of land



and 139 cases of sabotage, terror and murder. During the entire year, 46 were killed and 133 injured.<sup>26</sup> These data do not include shooting incidents and retaliatory actions.

The data on terrorist and sabotage activities provided by the Defence Establishment for these years present a gloomy picture, not only because of the number of activities connected to infiltration, theft, robbery and destruction but even more because of the security threat to the life of the settlers. Much additional material concerning the problems of routine security measures and the border wars may be found in Mordechai Bar-On, Motti Golani, David Tal and Benny Morris.<sup>27</sup>

### **Abandonment of the Frontier Settlements: Loss of Security**

Infiltration activities not only caused loss of life and limb and inflicted heavy damage to the Israeli economy through its impact on the country's agricultural settlements.<sup>28</sup> It also exacted a heavy moral price. According to IDF Intelligence reports, the direct costs of these incursions to the Israeli economy amounted to 307,000 Israeli pounds in 1950, 225,000 Israeli pounds in 1951, 517,000 Israeli pounds in 1952, 583,000 Israeli pounds in 1953, 629,000 Israeli pounds in 1954 and about 263,000 Israeli pounds in 1955.

The damage to property and the economic toll were serious, but the worst impact was on the components of national security – on personal safety within the state borders and even more so among the frontier settlements. Abraham Ikar, head of the Security Bureau in the Settlement Department of the Jewish Agency, repeatedly complained to the security establishment about the difficult situation of the settlements. The situation was particularly bad among the new immigrant settlements. A report put together in 1953 on Arab infiltration into Israel stated that the impact of these incursions was identical to that of irregular fighting. It was stressed that among the immigrant settlements the incursions had brought about a war atmosphere and desertion.

The feeling of insecurity even spread to settlements situated well within the borders. There were numerous occurrences of people leaving the settlements, and sometimes immigrant settlements folded; the abandonment of an entire settlement was a recurrent phenomenon. During this period, six immigrant moshavim and one kibbutz, Neve Yair-Ein HaShlosha, were abandoned.

The majority of immigrants residing in these moshavim lacked education and were quite removed from the pioneering spirit and ideological upbringing characteristic of members of the kibbutz movement. At the beginning of 1951, half the population of Tel Shahar left the moshav and within several months the last of the settlers had departed. At the end of 1951, 40 houses on the moshav were still empty, despite efforts to settle immigrants there. A similar situation prevailed at neighbouring moshavim in the Latrun enclave: Kfar Daniel, Mishmar Ayalon and Gimzo remained half empty for many years. The settlements in the Jerusalem corridor, the 'Labour Villages', also suffered severely from the incursions and security burden, and many inhabitants left.

Ajur 'aleph' was totally abandoned; out of 120 families at Mesilat Tsion, 60 remained; at Moshav Ora, 45 families left. Many other settlements along the state's borders and in areas distant from the centre of the country were harmed by the departure of large numbers of families, sometimes approximating to 50 per cent of the total on the settlements: Ajur 'B', Bar Giora, Luzit, Ranen, Peduim, Zavdiel, Eliakim, Shlomi, Elifelet, Elkosh, Ya'arah, Goren and others.

Giora Yoseftal, director of the Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency, estimated that in the second half of 1951, about 1,000 families per month were abandoning the moshavim, kibbutzim and labour villages in the very locations that had been declared development areas and moving to agricultural settlements, transit camps, villages and towns in the heart of the country. According to a study by Benny Morris, this phenomenon of abandonment continued through the years 1953–56. Although the percentage of people leaving settlements declined, the phenomenon had severe social and security implications. Frontier settlements, which were to serve as a security belt for the state, became security burdens, hindering rather than expediting routine security measures.<sup>29</sup>

The army and the police had to establish a security system that would routinely safeguard every frontier settlement. The settlements were not able to sustain the security burden by themselves and needed additional support in the form of manpower, funding and military and police forces. Already in 1949, the war against the infiltration phenomenon led to the formation of a frontier corps under the command of General David Shaltiel. The corps received instruction on undertaking defensive and offensive actions against the infiltrators.<sup>30</sup>

The frontier corps was a failure even before it came into existence. The dispute between the IDF and the Police Force over funding sources and the poor quality of manpower allocated to the corps led the IDF to disavow any responsibility for the entire affair and the enterprise was discontinued in August 1950.

There were additional attempts by the Police Force to set up a border guard during these years, but lack of cooperation from the Army again contributed to the project's non-realization in the early 1950s. In July 1953, the Border Guard was established within the jurisdiction of the Israeli Police and received formal and practical authorization to safeguard the borders. The corps was reorganized under the command of Pinhas Koppel, gained knowledge and experience and assisted in impeding infiltration. At the same time, the IDF continued to have responsibility for safeguarding the borders for many years to come. The IDF, however, had not been trained to contend with infiltration, and encountered difficulties in preventing incursions despite the numerous ambushes and patrols conducted along the borders. It saw in the Border Guard the body that would help in this difficult undertaking. The army acted against the infiltrators with a firm policy that included strict orders to open fire, on the grounds that infiltration was part of the general struggle against the existence of the state.

In 1952–53 extensive efforts were invested in strengthening the defence capabilities of the frontier settlements but it became apparent that Israel had not found satisfactory responses to the infiltration activities. In 1955 Ben-Gurion stated: 'We have formulated means for securing routine security measures after much searching and many false starts. We did not have the necessary tools and what we had was not suitable for the job. In addition, the course chosen was not correct.'<sup>31</sup>

The security problems of the border settlements adversely affected government settlement policy. With regard to the moshavim, the government tried to settle each location with people originating from different countries. It was hoped that this would speed up the integration of the 'exiles' and instil in them a pioneering ethos, thereby integrating them with the pioneering institutions of the state. This assumption was quickly refuted.

As we saw, the immigrants did not spontaneously develop a pioneering ethos. Their principal motivations for settlement were grounded in personal security. Their subsequent readiness for change was relatively weak. Therefore, the breaking up of their primary groups created a great degree of anxiety and reduced their ability to adjust to new frameworks, especially as this

brought them into contact with many other groups with whom they could not develop any communication. Thus the level of their achievements and adaptation to the moshav were very low. Disputes broke out between different groups and many *moshavim* fell apart.<sup>32</sup>

The personal and social problems of the new immigrant population on the moshavim contributed to the instability and weakness of those very locations, which in addition to all their other problems could not maintain the added burden of defence. New immigrant moshavim situated along the borders in the frontier regions tended to disintegrate at a greater rate than those moshavim that were removed from such daily threats and anxieties.

Ben-Gurion was concerned about the ability of the immigrants to withstand infiltration and terror. After the murder of Varda Friedman from Kfar Vitkin, who was killed while attending a wedding at Moshav Patish, all the settlers demonstrated in front of the Knesset in Jerusalem where they expressed their desire to leave the moshav.<sup>33</sup> Ben-Gurion was quite shaken by this event.

In a Knesset speech on 2 January 1956, Ben-Gurion gave a positive assessment of the steadfastness of the new immigrants resident in the frontier settlements: 'The new immigrants, including those who came from backward and poor countries, evinced resolution in work, in the building of the economy and in the wilderness settlement, and there is no doubt that they will also reveal determination at the gates if, heaven forbid, war should break out.'<sup>34</sup> Mordechai Bar-On's assessment of the Prime Minister's remarks emphasizes a consistency in Ben-Gurion's attitude towards the problematic nature of the immigrant population's resolution in the face of adversities. The speech was pure rhetoric. 'The fact that he has publicly addressed this issue,' wrote Bar-on, 'manifests his doubts about it.'<sup>35</sup>

The mass immigration, although it contributed to frontier settlement and the number of army recruits, was limited in its capacity to advance nation-building because of its background and integration problems. The tasks imposed upon immigrants in settling the frontier were too heavy for them. They needed assistance and support from the government in all spheres of life and in effect were the source of problems rather than their solution. However, criticism directed towards them by the political leadership for deserting the frontier settlements and not facing the challenges of building the new state was unjustified in the light of the difficulties they encountered in rehabilitating their own lives and the lives of their families.

## 4

### The IDF Following the War of Independence The Implications of Immigrant Integration for the Army

‘For you need to understand this: that the best armies are those of armed peoples.’

(Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori)

In the wake of the 1949 Armistice agreements, significant structural and moral changes took place in the IDF. Demobilization and general erosion of military *esprit* contributed to widespread disorganization. Many officers resigned from military service and returned to civilian life. Some were exhausted after so many years of unstinted service and others departed for ideological reasons. Yitzhak Rabin noted the extensive malaise gripping the military at this time: ‘Palmah commanders began to demobilize not only of their own accord but from an unwillingness to cope with the hostile attitudes directed towards them.’<sup>1</sup> A sizeable proportion of Palmah commanders identified with the left-socialist Mapam Party.

Ben-Gurion, leader of the moderate socialist Mapai Party, regarded the doctrinaire socialists as anathema. He sought to rid the army of their presence through direct pressure and the use of key military appointments.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these factors, there was a period of letdown following the military victory, a relaxation of tension that weakened the ability of the army to maintain a state of preparedness.

By the summer of 1949, the dismantling of the army reached its peak. Except for three regular brigades – Golani, Givati and the Seventh – all the brigades that took part in the War of Independence were disbanded. In addition to these brigade formations, paratroop Battalion 890 and a Nahal unit consisting of two battalions remained intact.

General (Res.) Raphael Vardi, who later became head of the Manpower Branch, served at the beginning of 1950 as adjutant to the Chief-of-Staff. In this capacity he was involved in the structure and reorganization of the army. Vardi expanded on the reasons and sentiments which accompanied the process of demobilization in the period after the war.<sup>3</sup> The retirement of commanders followed by the rapid discharging of their units did not permit any sorting and recruitment of first-rate commanders. Many commanders did not seek an army career and had regarded their period of army service as a mission accomplished. They were convinced that the Armistice agreements would lead to a peace process, and thus remaining in uniform was no longer regarded as a challenge. Dwindling military manpower prompted the army magazine *BaMahane*, produced under the guidance of the Manpower Branch in GHQ, to encourage soldiers to sign up for a permanent army career. So foreign was the notion of a military career to the fighters of 1948, however, that when an issue of the magazine placed a logo on its front page portraying an army officer climbing a rung ladder, it aroused a storm of protest. Senior officers questioned whether or not a standing army should be based on a career pattern rather than on the motive of mission. And they received an answer from General Headquarters in the form of a cancellation of this issue of the paper.

The army was busy reorganizing General Headquarters, the various commands and the army corps in the course of forming a basic instructional system for senior commanders. While restructuring occurred at senior levels, there was serious neglect of the rank and file. One result was the drastic reduction of forces along the ceasefire lines. At the end of the war, the IDF numbered 100,000 soldiers, many of whom were about to be demobilized. Within a year of the war's end, the IDF numbered 35,200 soldiers allocated as follows: in the standing army 7,780; in compulsory service 27,420. With the mass influx of new immigrants, the number of recruits in compulsory service units grew: In 1950, the IDF inducted 3,220 soldiers from the 1930 cohort, 5,351 soldiers from the 1931 cohort and 6,255 soldiers from the 1932 cohort.<sup>4</sup>

The issue of forming a professional army never arose because of the ideological considerations behind the necessity of building a people's army. Like Machiavelli, Ben-Gurion regarded the army, in addition to its central role in national defence, as a forger of values akin to *virtú* and a republican instrument of national integration.<sup>5</sup> He sought a popular army and for that reason disbanded the partisan militias of the Palmah, Etzel and Lehi which had participated in key operations during the War of Independence. While shortage of military manpower was a major contributing factor in universal conscription, it was not the overriding determinant. The negation of diaspora personality traits and the ideological reformation of Jewish personality and society could be effectively advanced in the disciplined environment of a martial setting.

The ideological imperative that placed many new immigrants a short time after their arrival in the country in army boot camp presented immense obstacles in the path of building an effective fighting force. Moreover, the induction of new immigrants into army service during the first years after the war affected the image of the army and its capabilities in the eyes of the entire society. The socio-economic problems and education level of the new recruits became the army's central concern and the source of its weakness. Battle units received youth whose Afro-Asian origins stamped them as 'second-class citizens'. Most of these recruits were new immigrants from development towns and distressed urban areas. Of the few native-born who served in these combat units, most were commanders.

### **The Problematic Profile of the IDF**

In the next few years, the armed forces did not lack reports and research concerning its social fabric. In addition to the routine battle resumes filed following missions, specially commissioned examinations and independent academic studies were conducted in an effort to come to grips with problems ranging from leadership capabilities to combat capacities. With large-scale immigration, regular problems of adjustment to military life were compounded by social integration issues in the civilian sphere. On the individual level, many new recruits exhibited emotional and cognitive disorders that were disruptive and damaging to the military training programme and ultimately to the military fitness of the armed forces.

A detailed report on educational levels in the field units of various corps, dated 1 November 1951, presented a gloomy picture. The report included data on senior officers, field officers and junior command – those echelons that had the highest education in each Corps.

In the Nahal units among the 5,072 commanders and soldiers, 2.5 per cent lacked any education, 70 per cent had elementary-school education only, 22 per cent had received high-school education and 5.5 per cent high-school vocational training.

In the Artillery Corps, there were 3,004 commanders and soldiers, of whom 6 per cent lacked

any education, 68 per cent had elementary-school education, 20 per cent had high-school education and 6 per cent had high-school vocational training.

In the Armoured Corps, of 2,527 commanders and soldiers, 4 per cent lacked any education and 72 per cent had elementary-school education only. About 16 per cent had high-school education and 5 per cent had high-school vocational training.

In the Engineering Corps, there were 1,041 commanders and soldiers of whom 0.9 per cent lacked any education, 51.5 per cent possessed an elementary-school education only, 24.1 per cent a high-school education and another 8.3 per cent high-school vocational training.

In the Intelligence Corps, 50 per cent had a high-school education, and in both the Air Force and Navy, 30 per cent had a high-school education. These corps took the largest share by far of high-school graduates (see Table 4.1).<sup>6</sup>

An examination of reports on compulsory recruits for the 1930–33 cohort years reveals interesting data in the following categories: country of origin, educational attainment, command of Hebrew, IQ tests, physical fitness and family status.<sup>7</sup>

*Country composition:* Native-born Israelis constituted 21.1 per cent of the compulsory service conscripts. An additional 16.8 per cent of the conscripts had immigrated to the country before 1948. The remaining 62.1 per cent immigrated between 1948 and 1951.

*Educational attainment:* Among the inductee population, 6.5 per cent were illiterate (96 per cent in this category were new immigrants). Seventy-two per cent had elementary-school education and 19.8 per cent had high-school education. Sixty per cent of those with high-school education were born in the country or immigrated before 1947.

Table 4.1 Educational attainments of various Army Corps – 1951 (in per cent)

	No education	Primary school	Vocational education	Commerce high school	Academic high school	Higher education (technical)	Higher education (academic)
Nahal (5,072)*	2.5	70	5.5	0.6	20	0.3	0.1
Artillery (3,004)	5.8	67.6	3.5	0.9	19.6	0.3	2.3
Armored (2,527)	4	72	4.8	0.7	16.2	0	2.3
Engineering (1,041)	0.9	51.5	8.3	1.7	24.1	8.8	4.7
Intelligence (793)	0	28.9	3	2.3	47.2	3.2	14.6
Air force* (4885)	3	51.2	1.2	0.9	30.8	2.2	5.7
Navy (2071)	1	53.3	8.4	0.7	31.6	1.2	38

*Note*

\* Numbers include commanders and soldiers.

Air force – 5% educational attainments unknown.

Intelligence – 0.8 educational attainments unknown.

*Language proficiency:* Forty-five per cent of the inductees could read and write Hebrew, most of them native-born or immigrants who arrived before 1947. Forty-three per cent could only speak the language and 11.7 per cent could not read, write or speak Hebrew.

*Physical fitness:* Many of the soldiers in the field units could not adapt to the high and stringent demands made upon them and because of their unsuitability dropped out.

*Family status:* ‘An examination of Reports on compulsory recruits for the 1930–1933 cohort years divulges interesting data in the following categories: country or origin, educational attainment, command of Hebrew, IQ Test, physical fitness, and family status.’

Recruit profiles were a prime determinant of corps allocation. Underlying manpower policy was the conception that people with little education be sent to the infantry brigades, whereas the more educated were to be assigned to headquarters units. At the headquarters units, there was a demand for personnel with reading and writing abilities in Hebrew and a high-school education. As a result of this policy, infantry brigades experienced a drop-out rate of 35 per cent during basic training, and by the end of the platoon training phase the dropout rate had reached about 55 per cent. Frustrated battalion commanders demanded that unsuitable recruits be dropped not only because they did not train but also because they got in the way and in effect prevented the companies from undertaking their training exercises. In the Golani Brigade, for example, commanders demanded that more than 100 soldiers be dropped from each battalion. Meir Amit and his second-in-command in this brigade, Raphael Vardi, put together a body of 'unsuitables' numbering more than 300 soldiers. They sought ways of integrating them in order to prevent stigma and incessant harm. According to Vardi,

it was an impossible situation; new immigrants who had not yet been absorbed in the country [had] many welfare problems, and [were] in poor condition, both physically and health-wise. Many soldiers did not want to serve in the brigade. Some did not understand and did not grasp what was wanted of them. There were heart-rending circumstances where you didn't know whether to laugh or cry.<sup>8</sup>

Commanders' complaints and the inability of units to operate during these years led to the ejection of hundreds of soldiers who in effect would never serve in the armed forces. Some soldiers simply went AWOL or deserted army ranks; others, whom local commanders unofficially classified as 'rejects', became ensnared in a bureaucratic nightmare in which they were sent back and forth between the induction centre and the field units. A growing underclass of military cast-offs was turning a social solution into a greater social problem.

Several commanders' reports pointed to the damage caused to units, the implications of which went well beyond local repercussions. The commander of Battalion 904 (Nahal) wrote: 'During training exercises an average of 80 out of the 140 soldiers in the company were present. The remainder were excused for reasons of justified illness or lack of physical fitness.' His report added that 'in the Massuot Yitzhak company, no more than 15 men on average out of 50 worked'.<sup>9</sup> In an opinion of the commander of Northern Command: 'The unsuitables constitute the most grave disciplinary problems in so far as it is forbidden to assign many of them to work and to incarcerate others. The soldiers exploit these "idiosyncrasies," create disturbances and set a bad example to the other soldiers.'<sup>10</sup>

The strength of all IDF infantry units was below their effective capacity. Each battalion had at most two reduced-size rifleman companies and a reduced-size support company. Health and welfare problems, and the failure to supply manpower of sufficient number and quality, prevented these units from becoming combat forces and they remained units on paper only.

The seriousness of the situation in the first months after the war was noted in a report from an intelligence unit, Department 3, which in its new framework was also responsible for reporting on morale and the mood within the army:

The heightened urgency surrounding operations has declined, a black market between soldiers and the Arab population has increased... an unhealthy atmosphere is taking root which must be remedied. On all fronts there are cases of soldiers selling equipment and supplies, and this must be viewed as a deterioration of morale and surveillance, as well as the result of the financial

straits of the soldier.<sup>11</sup>

The cases of abuse, rape and depredation of the local Arab population perpetrated by combat units during operations and the maltreatment of infiltrators caught in the border areas had a damaging impact upon the moral character of the IDF. Dayan, General of the Southern Command in 1950, placed the blame for these criminal deeds on the ethnic background of the soldiers and the ethical norms by which they were reared. Referring to the expulsion of a group of infiltrators, which included women and children, into the Arava, without provision of food or water in the late hours of the night, and which ended in the deaths of 20 of them, Dayan stated that this was behaviour characteristic of a large part of the army, of immigrants from Morocco and Iraq, and that they constituted a large part of the population. At the same session of the Mapai secretariat, and in the presence of members of the Mapai Knesset faction on 18 June 1950, Dayan also related the trial taking place against 30 soldiers who caught an Arab woman, raped her and afterwards killed her. According to Dayan, these were not isolated incidents in the army and the reason for this behaviour was rooted in the difficult situation and low personal level of these same soldiers. Dayan emphasized that in no way did he justify the deeds of the soldiers but he could explain the circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

Mission performance was subject to critical evaluation. Units would set out towards an objective, but not carry out the mission. Infantry units would retreat at the first volley of gunshots fired by Arab village guards. Some units could not find their objective; the navigation (compass reading) was faulty, there was no daring, no dedication to the mission, no motivation or combat leadership. Dayan wrote in his memoirs: 'The level of the soldiers assigned to the infantry was among the lowest in the IDF; the few good soldiers leave the unit within a short time. Problematic soldiers are placed in battalions, hashish smokers, "graduates" of the prisons and others.'<sup>13</sup>

In light of the soldier profiles, the need for reinforcing the quantity and quality of the secondary command of field units was quite evident. The senior officers, who were almost entirely drawn from the veteran Yishuv, associated with the Hagana and Palmah of the 1930s and 1940s, were far removed from the new recruits and their problems.<sup>14</sup> The central problem, as put forward by Colonel Yaffe, was the lack of native-born commanders in the ranks of the IDF:

You will not find among the instructors and commanders native-born Israelis... If the head of a squad who will lead a platoon tomorrow teaches the soldier Hebrew and shows him the ways of the country – something which we have to force him to do – this will only be carried out under one condition: that the squad leader and the platoon leader will stay with their platoon. But we haven't even got any squad or platoon leader capable of doing this.<sup>15</sup>

Field unit commanders fought over every recruit who appeared to exhibit command potential, especially youths who had graduated high school. Squad and platoon commanders of excellence, the 'backbone' of the army, were the weak spot in the entire layout of the combat units. This problem was difficult to address given the inferior quality of the human resources in the 1950s.

At the conclusion of a commanders' forum on the subject of education, morale and discipline, the Chief-of-Staff bluntly reviewed the available manpower data:

Each year we have no more than 1,200 youth, equally divided between men and women, who are high-school graduates. From the 600 men, a small percentage – despite the fact that they are native-born and high school graduates – do not enter the army. Some do get to the Nahal units



but in the end what remains from this quality material are but 300–400 men per year and with this number we must satisfy the lions: not just one lion.<sup>16</sup>

On 18 September 1952, the Head of Manpower, General S. Mazya, established a committee to examine and recommend ways of dealing with the problem of soldiers found unfit for regular service<sup>17</sup> The letter of appointment defined the term ‘unfit’ as a soldier who could not be integrated into the framework of his unit. The team found a number of causes for unsuitability:

1. *Medical unfitness.* This was a major factor, especially in field units. The inductees did not stand up to the physical demands and fitness required for a combat unit. There was a major gap between the medical checks and the demands of the training officers. Doctors continued to change the medical classification of soldiers for a long time, and the medical bureaucracy helped many to shirk service, while others were waiting their turn to have their medical profile lowered. Along with many physical disabilities there were mental problems – people who had no place in the army and required hospitalization. The number of soldiers released for mental health problems increased threefold between 1950 and 1953. Because of the few psychiatrists in the military and the growing number of mentally ill who required hospitalization, the situation went from bad to intolerable.
2. *Unsuitability due to disciplinary and criminal reasons.* During these years, it was not customary to reject recruits on the basis of a past criminal record. As a consequence, commanders had to cope with difficult, sometimes deadly disciplinary problems. Field commanders had no means of controlling these soldiers with a criminal past, whose needs and desires could not be met by military service.
3. *Unsuitability for reasons of socio-economic situation.* Many soldiers fit into this category. The amount of financial help which the IDF gave them did not approach outstanding needs. Many soldiers were heads of households or came from large families or had additional welfare problems with which the IDF could not cope. These soldiers were concerned about their family problems, could not carry their weight in the unit and were in effect a burden for the commanders who were unable to assist them with their personal problems. The glaring outcome of so many welfare cases found expression in numerous military trials and an increase in welfare cases, who were then written out of the army for mental health reasons.
4. *Unsuitability because of low intelligence (IQ).*
5. *Unsuitability because of low educational level and no knowledge of Hebrew.* The factors of low intelligence coupled with a low educational level and lack of mastery of the Hebrew language constituted a common profile of the soldier population assigned to field units. This combination did not give commanders much chance of success in training or attaining combat fitness.
6. *Simulated unsuitability.* The subject of morale and the selection of quality manpower for the army continued to bother senior command during these years. The Branch for National Security Planning in the General Staff Branch/Planning distributed among the IDF units many questionnaires whose objective was to determine the quality of the armed forces. The data collected from the IDF units and analysed included: level of education, mastery of Hebrew, social education – that is, membership in a youth movement, service in Gadna<sup>18</sup> or service in the Hagana. In addition, the average health condition of every unit, the average age of the soldiers, their family status, occupation and family welfare problems were also recorded. Surveys also checked the country of origin of unit soldiers, the number of years

resident in the country (the year of immigration), and their place of residence (moshav or kibbutz; city, town or village; transit camp).

Beyond the various psycho-technical results, emphasis was given to the opinions of the commanders. Even though these were subjective assessments, this input contributed in a number of areas:

1. comparison of the quality of the former recruit unit with the current unit;
2. intra-unit comparisons according to various characteristics (ethnic origins, new immigrant/veterans, and so forth);
3. comparison with enemy forces and their chances in battle;
4. soldiers' attitudes towards officers and sergeants;
5. soldiers' attitudes towards the state;
6. soldiers' orientations to social values and national symbols;
7. soldiers' attitudes towards army property.

In addition to the above data, the researchers examined the level of discipline and cohesiveness of the units, measured by the number and type of military trials in the unit, as well as civil violations of the law, violent outbursts and drunkenness. Instances of going AWOL and verified medical problems were also recorded.

The questionnaires handed to the soldiers examined the extent of their satisfaction with the unit, the quality of food and sanitation, their opinion of their commanding officers, the degree of concern and attention paid by the commander to his soldiers, their health situation and social welfare.

All the questionnaires and studies by the Branch for National Security Planning focused on manpower in the regular and reserve brigades, as well as the population in those settlements defined as type A broad defensive perimeter settlements. The objective of this extensive work was to examine the potential and steadfastness of the IDF and Israeli society in the face of challenges and security threats.<sup>19</sup> The Manpower Branch of the IDF set up research and inspection teams to study the data and seek out responses and ways of attending to these problems in cooperation with the Ministries of Education and Health, as well as additional government bodies. In order to obtain a full range of assessments, IDF bodies also joined forces with the sociology department of the Hebrew University under the chairmanship of Professor Shmuel Eisenstadt, the Institute for Social Research directed by Professor Louis Guttman and the Henrietta Szold Institute headed by Dr K. Frankenstein.

Of especial interest is the report of a subcommittee for education at the end of 1952. This subcommittee had been instructed to examine the existing situation, forecast the number of future elementary- and high-school graduates, inspect tendencies towards schooling among the youth and the factors which impeded or facilitated studying. Data were categorized according to country of origin.<sup>20</sup>

The subcommittee's report, relying upon the state's Central Bureau of Statistics and on reports of the Personnel Management and Records Division, as well as reports of the Education Ministry, supplied the same gloomy picture as that presented by the Personnel Management and Records Division. However, the subcommittee maintained that the declining pace of immigration on the one hand, and the increasing length of stay of new immigrants in Israel on the other hand, would in the coming years raise the percentage of those who know Hebrew and thus improve their chances of integrating into society. The subcommittee noted the negative impact of

immigration on the level of education and intelligence (IQ) of demobilized soldiers and also pointed out that the general level of female soldiers surpassed the level of male soldiers, perhaps because of the self-selection of girls who enlisted (religious orthodox girls, in contrast to religious orthodox boys, do not join the military): the educational level of the girls who enlisted in the army was higher than that of male soldiers who were conscripted.

Data from the report pointed to an 80 per cent increase in the number of pupils attending elementary school between 1950 and 1952, and an increase of 35 per cent in the number of high-school students during the same period. However, only 30 per cent of those who entered high school completed grade 12, and of these only 50 per cent registered for the matriculation examinations. In the year 1952, 275 of the 1,100 students who registered for the examination did not achieve passing grades. Hopes were pinned on the enactment of a Compulsory Education Law which would reduce the dropout level and augment the number of elementary-and high-school graduates in Israel.<sup>21</sup> The report's writers relied on the great desire of youth to continue their studies (about 80 per cent of the respondents expressed such a desire).

One of the interesting findings of the subcommittee related to the intelligence level and the aptitude for study among Oriental youth as discerned by the Institute for Psychometric Testing. The subcommittee was sceptical about the validity of the results of the standard intelligence tests conducted in both the civilian and military institutions:

It has not been proven that the conventional IQ tests are not culturally biased and are more suitable for those originating in Western rather than Eastern culture. It is therefore likely that the country of origin of those who are tested has an influence on the results of the Intelligence Test. There are grounds for assuming that the tests are not valid with regard to new immigrants to the extent that they have not yet adjusted to the way of life in the country.<sup>22</sup>

The comprehensive validity of test results was further undermined by the opinion of various diagnostic agencies that military life in itself contains many factors that foster integration and success and cultivate leadership capacity and the disposition to command. Moreover, personality characteristics, a softer form of data for discrimination and evaluation, were regarded as key determinants in the degree of achievement in the military environment. In citing these reservations regarding research methodology, the subcommittee noted the conclusion of the research conducted by the IDF's Institute for Psychometric Testing, which affirmed that there was a different practical significance to the psychometric grades among people originating from different countries and new immigrants during different periods, and that the grades did not necessarily predict success in various courses, including officer training courses.

Nevertheless, alongside these comments and resolute claims regarding test validity, the subcommittee's conclusions showed that the average achievement in initial psycho-technical grading was higher among those from Anglo-Saxon countries than among Israelis. There was no difference between the average achievement of native-born Israelis and those of West European origin. On the other hand, the subcommittee emphasized that the lowest test achievements belonged to those from Oriental countries. An IDF research on cadets of Oriental origin pointed to below-average outcomes for immigrant soldiers from Yemen, Iran, Morocco and Turkey. Only soldiers originating from Egypt and Iraq received above-average grades. The encouraging data in these tests showed that the higher the education and the longer the test respondent had resided in the country, the higher the grade.

In tests for officers, undertaken by soldiers whose starting level was higher, native-born candidates still had higher test results than the rest of the soldiers, even though results for their

initial psycho-technical grading produced no country-of-origin distinctions. While 30 per cent of native-born candidates obtained a 'good' grade and 14 per cent a 'passing grade', only 5.2 per cent of Oriental candidates had 'suitable grades' and 6.4 per cent 'passing grades'. Approximately 88 per cent of the Oriental candidates did not pass the entrance exams for the officer's course and thus the way was blocked in those years for developing a cadre of officers of African and Asian origin. Integration into the IDF command echelons changed from a slow and graduated process in the 1960s to a large-scale measure of success in the 1970s, the results of which lasted for many years.

A document from the Adjutant-General Branch of GHQ, written at the beginning of March 1952, stated:

There appears to be agreement that the process of integrating Oriental immigrants and their utilization in the army has not been satisfactory. It is known that there are prejudices in regard to different ethnic groups and that there are tensions between them, and also that their assignment to military roles entails problems. The problem is countrywide; in the army, which is a planned, organized and to a great extent coordinated body, the immediate results are seen more readily, and may cause serious damage in times of emergency. Moreover, the educational function of the army – education of the soldier for citizenship (and as a reserve soldier), requires that attendance to the problem be done by the army in an organized fashion.

Absorption difficulties find expression in a general way:

1. In the group which is being integrated: through non-identification with cultural values and non-cooperation, aggressive behaviour, closure, poor work efficiency, health, and so forth.
2. In the host group, through undermining of existing values, a feeling of social insecurity, development of prejudices against the persons being integrated, and so forth.<sup>23</sup>

The document points to the practical implications of immigrant integration from Oriental countries for morale and trust in the military ranks. It cites occurrences of violent brawls, disrespect, lack of initiative, a negative orientation to the army, expressions of distrust towards military institutions and non-participation in every activity that smacks of culture or education. This damage to military idealism and morale might, according to personnel in the Manpower Branch, create a large group that would suffer from deprivation and possess low morale, and this could harm the fighting quality of IDF units.

By the end of 1953 and the beginning of 1954 no improvement was felt in the infantry battalions. A 1954 report on problems of morale in the infantry battalions and the regular armoured infantry battalions of the IDF examined the manpower situation, the personal statistics of the soldiers and commanders and morale problems and discipline among the units and commanders at various levels. The report, which was presented to General Headquarters and the generals of the area commands, contained very grave findings.<sup>24</sup> It concluded that at the operational level, 'it is possible to do a lot with these soldiers but it is impossible to rely upon them'.

Nevertheless, the report points to initial indications of native-born soldiers arriving in infantry units. At the end of 1953, these regular units included about 20 per cent native-born soldiers. The author of the report phrased this in an unconventional way: 'It is likely that IDF combat units will cease to be exclusively composed of "blacks".'<sup>25</sup>

The matter of Hebrew language acquisition was still a difficult problem: about 18 per cent

were illiterate, 22 per cent had a weak grasp of the language, 20 per cent mediocre competency, and 40 per cent a good level of Hebrew. Welfare problems continued to be the central cause of a lack of motivation and functioning in the infantry units. Absenteeism accounted for 80 per cent of the disciplinary problems in all the units of the infantry battalions and was directly connected to the soldiers' welfare background. This situation affected leadership formation at the lowest organizational echelon:

Currently, the squad leader courses do not produce a command stratum with a uniform educational level.... Today, most of the good soldiers don't want to be squad leaders, and the superior stratum among the new recruits generally seeks out more respectable and easier duties than squad leader. The stratum of sergeants and company sergeant majors in the IDF does not have that standing which would constitute them as 'the backbone of the army'.<sup>26</sup>

The evaluation of the officer class, which was placed at the end of the report, is negative, and points to fatigue, apathy and a lack of motivation proceeding from an unawareness of objectives and goals. There are signs of anxiety and severe doubts about the combat capability of the units. There is criticism of organizational shortcomings and negative phenomena in the area of ethical behaviour and honesty in the army.

The report points to a level of operational alertness that is lower than the minimum required for combat units. 'The fact is worrisome that organic units cannot be relied upon in the majority of operations which deviate from the routine activities,' writes the author of the report. A stable stratum possessing standing at the secondary command level is lacking. Junior officers up to the rank of company commander do not regard themselves as having the ability to cope with the gravity of their problems. Command problems in the IDF weighed heavily upon the capability of the army for a number of years and may even be detected during the 1956 Sinai Campaign, which fielded an army comprised of reserves who had been trained as regulars during the early 1950s.

The attempt to deal with these problems also led to simplistic suggestions such as the establishment of special training units comprised of Orientals, segregated from other soldiers. The intention was to develop command staff from among the Oriental soldiers. These commanders might then constitute a communication link from the cultural vantage point between 'Western' officers and the deprived Orientals. Proposals to establish special training and instruction camps for Orientals were rejected. Senior command did not envisage nine months of special training as the solution to the creation of a command staff of Yemenites, for example, qualified to lead mixed platoons. This idea was also rejected as contrary to the ideal of the integration of the exiles. The army establishment sought to comprehend the way of thinking, the desires and feelings of the Oriental soldiers in order to make their integration process easier. Who would be the best instructors? Which methods of instruction would be most efficient? How could these soldiers be made part of the culture and inculcated with the value system of the IDF commanders and Israeli society? The fear of establishing 'racial' units was great and it was even regarded as dangerous should the experiment fail.

The problems that faced IDF commanders were those of Israeli society as a whole and thus were not amenable to solution in the short run but only through considerable long-term investment in Hebrew-language acquisition and basic education. The comprehensiveness of the problems brooked no divisions, even those between military and civilian life. The IDF was ineluctably drawn into 'civilian' areas in order to convey to soldiers, who would be citizens of the state following their demobilization, basic values in the areas of Zionism, the geography and

history of the country, mathematics and basic education. These same soldiers would enter the ranks of reserve units upon demobilization, and the army understood the important contribution that the reserves had as a central part of its strength. A people's army, especially an army comprised largely of immigrants, required cultivation of a civil society as a requisite for sustaining military viability.

### **Post-Armistice Military Performance of the Idf**

All of the above findings bore witness to the insecurity that enveloped senior command in these years with regard to the capability of IDF units to carry out the missions requested of them.

In a discussion with Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, David Ben-Gurion, in April 1950, IDF generals expressed doubts and resentment in light of the difficulties which they had to face. General Josef Avidar of Northern Command claimed that a change of direction was needed in order to build up the fighting ability of the IDF:

The situation today is as follows: soldiers who arrived as volunteers from abroad and have now served for a year and a half have not attained, at least part of them have not attained, a level whereby they could be considered soldiers capable of carrying out those duties which we wish to assign them, that would bear the esprit which is necessary for battle when the occasion demands.<sup>27</sup>

The hard fact, according to General Avidar, was the impossibility of selecting suitable soldiers even for leadership courses for squads – the smallest army unit – from among soldiers in the Golani Brigade. The underlying value system of the veteran Israeli society and Zionist values were foreign to these soldiers. The new immigrants were concerned with domestic economic problems of the most basic sort and by personal and social problems.

Colonel Avraham Yaffe, too, addressed the problem of forging a socially cohesive military organization from the quality of manpower comprising Israeli society:

Are the order and norms that we are trying to impose on the army suitable for the people who arrived yesterday on 'Operation Magic Carpet' or from North Africa, and to those people arriving from Eastern Europe and to the same people who were educated in the Land of Israel? Can we place all these people in one cauldron and say that there is one remedy for all in order to reach our objective?<sup>28</sup>

The IDF at the beginning of the 1950s learned to live with military failures, whether they occurred in border clashes with the Syrians or Jordanians, or in dealing with acts of infiltration from the Gaza Strip. The Mutila and Palma operations are two illustrative examples of the inability of the IDF to wage effective localized warfare.

### **The Battle At Tel Mutila<sup>29</sup>**

In May 1951, a border incident took place on the crest of the heights dominating an area in northern Israel where the Jordan River enters the Sea of Galilee. This small-scale clash, however, turned into a five-day battle in which much blood was spent.

Initial tension began in March when Israel began to drain the swamps of the Chula Lake, a body of water in the Jordan rift situated directly south of the Sea of Galilee. The Syrians fired on the tractors which had entered the demilitarized zone. Israel, for its part, had persisted in the swamp-draining project in order to assert sovereignty over its sector of this zone. The demilitarized areas had been delineated in the ceasefire agreement between Syria and Israel at the end of Israel's War of Independence in 1949. They straddled both sides of the border at a breadth which varied between five and ten kilometres. Israel regarded the zone as its sovereign territory with an obligation to keep it free of military personnel but legitimately open to development for civilian purposes. The Syrians, on the other hand, maintained that the zone was a no man's land with no entry rights to either side, and certainly not for development or agricultural cultivation.<sup>30</sup>

At the beginning of April, Israel sought to assert its sovereignty over the demilitarized zone at El-Hama, where the Jordanian, Syrian and Israeli borders met. On 4 April, an IDF patrol set out for the zone and encountered a Syrian ambush. Seven Israeli soldiers were killed in the incident and the IDF responded with an air force bombardment of the Syrian police position close to where the hostilities took place. Two women were killed and six additional civilians were wounded. Israel was censured by the UN Security Council, the great powers and European states.

The Battle of Tel Mutila occurred, then, against the background of the heating up of the northern border area and shooting incidents with the Syrians. The opening incident occurred when a number of soldiers from the Golani Brigade ascended the Tel to capture a herd of cattle grazing on the height. The force was caught in enemy crossfire and four soldiers were killed.

Tel Mutila had strategic military importance because it dominated the area where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee. The peak of the Tel was 370 metres above ground level and gave the IDF a position of dominance over the entire demilitarized zone in an area controlled by Syrian military positions situated above on the Golan Heights. The IDF's Third Brigade, which was responsible for the area in which the incident took place, was supplemented by the Golani Brigade's 13th Battalion, whose duties consisted of routine security measures. On 2 May, a reserve force from the Third Brigade, assisted by two squads from the Golani's 13th Battalion, attacked and conquered Tel Mutila. The Syrians were concentrated in nearby military posts on the ridge overlooking the Tel and the entire Sea of Galilee basin. On 3 May, the 13th Battalion was reinforced by a company of squad officer trainees and succeeded in occupying the post where the Jordan enters the Sea of Galilee. The Syrians continued to harass IDF forces in the area with intermittent gunfire.

Battle command was transferred to the commander of the Golani Brigade, Colonel Meir Amit. Brigade units continued in their efforts to occupy the entire area which had been penetrated by Syrian forces; however, repeated attacks from 4 to 6 May failed to remove the Syrians. The final assault on a Syrian position maintained within Israeli territory was planned for Friday evening of 5 May. The company, composed mainly of new immigrants, under the command of Ze'ev Drory Sali, carried out three assaults on the objective and many soldiers were injured in the course of these attacks. The artillery barrage designed to support the attacking Israeli forces was not accurate and shells landed among the troops. Additional reserve forces from the 12th Battalion and the squad commander course of the brigade were sent into battle at the initiative of the brigade commander, Meir Amit.<sup>31</sup>

During the course of the fighting, the brigade commander requested air force intervention, but for political reasons this request was not approved. In the end, air force planes carried out

bombing drops without strafing the Syrian forces. However, there was a single exception. One pilot fired a few rounds at the Syrian command post. This resulted in the withdrawal of Syrian forces from the positions they had occupied. The battle ended.

The fighting continued for five days and resulted in the deaths of 40 IDF soldiers. This was the first major military encounter with the Syrians since the War of Independence and the significance of the failure spread like wildfire through all ranks of the army. Accusations were directed against the commanders who preferred to direct the military engagement from a command post in the area of the Sea of Galilee rather than from the battlefield. In addition, it was claimed that during the period of actual fighting there was no coordination between forces in the field and the command post on critical matters such as battle intelligence, alignment of supporting artillery fire, and coordination between the fighting force and the reserve forces.

Combatants contended that the commanders sent them into battle without knowing field conditions or the enemy. The success in removing the Syrians from the demilitarized zone was attributed to junior command at company level and below, and to the combatants who did not despair and continued to attack the Syrian outposts despite numerous casualties.<sup>32</sup>

Force commanders regarded the displacement of the Syrian force from Israeli territory as an achievement and victory. Remaining dedicated to the mission and sending wave after wave of combatants into battle brought about the victory. At the first meeting at GHQ after the battle, Deputy Chief-of-Staff Mordechai Makleff stated: 'An army like ours, which has changed its complexion so much, must learn as thoroughly as possible from this operation; the army must raise the quality of the infantry manpower available to it.' The Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, also agreed that senior command had neglected the infantry and had supplied it with manpower which lowered its level. At this same meeting, a special investigative committee was established to draw lessons from the battle.<sup>33</sup>

The next meeting at GHQ, too, was entirely devoted to the problem of the quantity and quality of infantry manpower. The Chief-of-Staff arrived at the following conclusion: 'Everyone ought to be convinced that a maximum effort must be undertaken in order to raise the level of the infantry, since until now we have principally focused on raising the level of the professional corps and have given the latter preference in the allocation of quantitative personnel.'<sup>34</sup>

The failure of the battalion from the Golani Brigade under the command of Rehavam Zevi ('Gandi') in the 1951 Tel Mutila incident was the factor which led to the appointment of an investigative committee under the authority of Lieutenant Colonel David Carmon. The report of the committee reiterated the reason for failure: a lack of native-born commanders or commanders who had lived in the country for many years and who could constitute the backbone of the IDF battle command. The report pointed to the poor quality and proficiency level of senior and junior command, the low-grade communication equipment, problems in the area of supply and difficulties with the identification of the bodies of the fallen.<sup>35</sup> An additional report following the Tel Mutila fighting dealt with combat in hilly territory and stressed the need for qualitative and skilled manpower which had undergone special training in mountainous territory.<sup>36</sup> Anyone who inspects these scathing IDF reports cannot but be struck by the numerous failings in almost every area, a manifestation of the level of the infantry corps and the entire army during these years.

Owing to the sense of failure which spread throughout the IDF in the wake of this battle, the Chief-of-Staff, Yigal Yadin, set about encouraging the Golani Brigade and its commanders. Yadin sent a letter of encouragement to the brigade commander, Meir Amit, in which he emphasized that the many committees established to investigate this operation might give the impression that it had ended in failure and that they were looking for someone to blame, but in



fact the debrief-ings were intended to draw lessons from the battle. In his letter, Yadin stressed that the commanders performed admirably and took pains to point out that Lieutenant Colonel Rehavam Zevi, commander of the 13th Battalion, 'did not let its spirit decline and directed the battle to its successful conclusion'.<sup>37</sup>

The commanders of the brigade and their head, Meir Amit, emphasized their dedication to the mission. Despite the large numbers of killed and wounded, the forces continued to wage a fight and did not retreat. The outcome of an operation, it was asserted, was not the only criterion by which an army judges its operations and commanders. Others, however, maintained that tenacity, fortitude, and valour were carelessly dissipated in faulty preparation and handling of the operation. During the fighting for Tel Mutila, numerous mishaps occurred in the command and control spheres, and in the areas of field combat, communication and maintenance.

Commendation and critique aside, although the IDF sought to improve its manpower in the infantry units following this battle, the change was minuscule and unnoticeable. The infantry units did not receive enough qualitative manpower and the level of commanders also did not improve in the forthcoming years.

## **The Palma Operation**

Two separate assaults on the village of Palma by a force from the Givati Brigade were among the more humiliating failures of this period. This village was regarded as a staging centre for infiltration activity. On the first assault on 23 January 1953, the Israeli force retreated after encountering heavy fire and became entangled in the village's fencing. One soldier was killed and his corpse was left in the fence complex. In addition, five soldiers were wounded.

Moshe Dayan, who at this time was head of GHQ Manpower Division, was angered by the disgraceful conduct of the assault force and sent a battalion in an additional offensive against the village a few days later. This time the IDF force succeeded in penetrating into the residential area and blowing up several structures. However, even this raid was marked by irresolute performances by IDF soldiers; some of the units failed to carry out their missions. Mordechai Zipori, one of the company commanders participating in this raid, did not accept the view that a military action should be judged only by its outcome. In Zipori's estimation, penetration of the village and the blowing up of a number of buildings were not sufficient criteria for judging the success of the mission. In his summary of the raid before a senior officer, he stated:

Sir, I am sorry, but what is described here is not in accord with the reality of the situation that I personally experienced in the field.... We set out on this action without adequate intelligence; there was no knowledge about fences, and thus there were no tools for breaking through them, not to speak of an estimation of the amount of gunfire emanating from the village. In the second assault, as well, there was no exhibition of determination to adhere to the objective. The opposite was the case. In my opinion, a number of officers should be brought to trial in order to warn against this sort of occurrence in the future.<sup>38</sup>

During the course of 1953 IDF units failed in almost all the military operations conducted against Palestinian villages in the West Bank. These failures added to the long list of unexecuted missions, falsified reports and impaired functional level of the operational units in the IDF. Table 4.2 presents several examples drawn from 46 military actions out of a total of 85, which were defined as failures during this period. In his memoirs, Moshe Dayan wrote:

Many missions assigned to our forces during this period were not carried out. If they penetrated a village and encountered a guard, or were discovered, this often led to a withdrawal of the force. Preparations were not sufficient, intelligence information was not updated. Even our elite units, trained for special actions, such as the parachute brigades, exhibited shameful laxity, and many of our actions ended in failure.<sup>39</sup>

*Table 4.2 IDF military failures in 1953*

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- 22–23 January 1953: company led by the commander of the 54th Battalion from the 5th Brigade – failure at Palma;
  - 28–29 January 1953: battalion led by the commander of the 54th Battalion from the 5th Brigade – failure at Palma;
  - 28–29 January 1953: company from Battalion 890 – failure at Rantis village;
  - 13–14 April 1953: failure in mining road in the Gaza Strip;
  - 18 May 1953: failure of troops from Battalion 890 in assault on Husan village;
  - 21 May 1953; failure of force from Battalion 890 at Midya village;
  - 12 August 1953: failure of a battalion from the Seventh Brigade in assault on Khirbet Beit Awah;
  - 12–13 August 1953: company from Battalion 890 – failure in assault on Idna village.

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The continuing failure of the retaliatory raids during 1952 and into the beginning of 1953 led to an undermining of the operational ability of the IDF and concern for the state's deterrent capability.

Any examination of operation reports from 1953 can only convey the impression of a number of operations that were not carried out at all, or that failed in the first stages of the assault and attained none of the military objectives determined by the military echelon. Following all these failures, Moshe Dayan wrote:

I have made up my mind to put an end to the disgraceful outcomes of the clashes between our units and the Arabs, and the apathy of IDF command who, at every level and rank, came to accept the shameful failures with the vapid excuse that 'we couldn't do anything about it'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Military Selection and Election**

In an effort to re-establish the army's fighting capability and to raise morale, Moshe Dayan chose to focus on improvements in routine security measures. Among his directives is the following Draconian injunction: 'Any IDF commander who recoils from fulfilling his mission before a majority, or at least half of his soldiers, have been incapacitated, will be dismissed from duty.'<sup>41</sup> Whether or not issued out of frustration or as a means to goad field officers into toughening training exercises, the pronouncement reflected the nadir of combat proficiency in the IDF. Fundamental reconstructive measures, however, were slow in coming.

As the military failures mounted, it was decided in February 1953 to establish an infantry branch in the IDF's Instructional Department. This was a compromise step, falling short of the demand to establish an officer training school for infantry and paratroopers. The latter military

institution did not come into existence until years later.

The formation of Unit 101 in August 1953 and its merger with the Paratroop battalion five months later must also be seen against the background of the military failures and the inability of IDF units to deal with the irregular nature of the security problems. Reserve Major Ariel Sharon was appointed by Mordechai Makleff, who was now Chief-of-Staff, to command this elite unit. He proceeded to establish battle norms and shape military policy along the lines he had employed for Unit 101. Sharon never denied the political elan behind the military bravura. References to the military achievements and political impact of the paratroopers in his autobiography may be regarded as self-serving, but they could be easily drawn from sources far less partisan: 'Starting in 1954, the paratroopers carried out almost every single operation undertaken by the Israeli army. And in one way or another each one of them was successful. One result of this was that I quickly became an object of attention.' Sharon is referring to his popularity in high political circles. While touting the correct line of military subservience to the civilian establishment, he does not disguise his objectives as a military commander: 'The development of the paratroop battalion into an effective-anti-terrorist strike force had a substantial impact not just military but politically. It injected a radical new element into the equation.' Sharon's independence was that of the tactical tail wagging the strategic dog. It applied equally to the military establishment with which he had 'a kind of running warfare'. At times, Sharon hints at the parity, if not the upper hand, which he sought to give to the field units in governing statesmen: 'I regularly found myself in the Minister of Defence's office involved in heated argument about the relationship between policy and implementation, *his policy and my implementation*'. [Sharon's emphasis] Sharon's leadership of the tactical echelon was conceived in strategic terms. At one point, he complained that 'General Headquarters was trying to limit the scope of the [Kalkilya] operation'.<sup>42</sup>

Sharon exhibited charismatic leadership in the classic sense of military daring and innovative action. He upheld Weber's characteristics ascribed to the charismatic personality – mission-oriented, anti-institutional, counter-traditional (of military norms), revolutionary (in tactics), disciplined in the 'ordeal' of military implementation, and supported by faithful devotees.<sup>43</sup> The charismatic warrior is also dependent upon a chronic state of war and a military apparatus that is oriented towards preparing for war. The serial, self-enclosed nature of retaliatory operations was an ideal setting for reaffirming the short-lived and clannish perimeters of this eruptive phenomenon.

The authority of charisma comes from its recognition by others, and it was not only the inner circle of combatants over which Sharon exercised a particular fascination and devotion. He also benefited from the 'gift of political grace' bestowed upon him by admiring state leaders. From a very early stage in his military career, he was invited into the confidence of Ben-Gurion, an association which further aggravated his relations with much of the senior military echelon. He had 'warm' contacts with Pinchas Lavon and his much-improved commando units provided the political authors of retaliation, and even the reticent Sharett, with a more credible policy.

Finally, there is an intimate connection between the charismatic element and its integration into the permanent values and functioning of society. The unorthodox and eruptive character of the charismatic military leader aims at a complete takeover of the military system, not necessarily in the personal sense of autocratic ambitions, but rather in terms of the types of actions in the military arena which all of society is eventually expected to respect and which the military will hopefully perform. Charisma seeks to turn exemplary behaviour into tradition and modes of behaviour into institutional structure. As such it draws upon tradition and feeds on

existing organizational entities in order to fortify and extend its legitimacy over time.

Jewish military tradition, the continuation of which was abruptly ended by two thousand years of exile, had stressed the small and select fighting unit over the efficacy of great numbers. Gideon's forces, reckoned by God as 'too many', were initially reduced from twenty-two to ten thousand. A second trial reduced the force to three hundred (Judges, 7). Although the meaning is not altogether clear, on several occasions David leads 'select' forces against the enemy and the reduced size of his forces is stressed more than once.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the Maccabee fighters were a close-knit unit, engaging enemies of very sizeable proportions.<sup>45</sup> The local military unit looms large in the determination of historical events. These legends also bolster morale for a tiny nation historically situated between major powers on the Nile and Euphrates as well as illustrating that tactical advantages can bring about military superiority.

Jewish military traditions were being rapidly formed within the Zionist movement and the exigencies of life in Palestine. To a great extent, the roots of these reprisal actions may be traced back to the late 1930s and the military tactics and doctrines introduced to Palestinian-Jewish military forces by the British soldier and adventurer Captain Orde Wingate. Wingate trained the Hagana, the Yishuv's fledgling military arm in guerrilla actions and night warfare. Ironically, his teachings drew upon his observations of Arab hit-and-run tactics. His first assignment in Palestine was to train the ghaffirs, a 3,000-strong Jewish contingent formed by the British, who 'moonlighted' for the Jewish Hagana under the blind eyes of the British authorities. Wingate's doctrine of 'active defence' and his organization of Jewish special night patrols combined strategy and tactics into a potent Jewish antidote to the Arab uprising (1936–39) and in particular Arab marauders.

Continuity between the short-lived night patrols (they operated for only a few months before British authorities ordered Wingate to leave Palestine) and the organization of the reprisal raids in the 1950s is well attested. The legendary commander of the Hagana forces, Yitzhak Sadeh, acknowledged that Wingate's contribution effectively changed the dimensions of the guerrilla raids prepared by the Hagana. Moshe Dayan, who participated in the first retaliatory action organized and led by Wingate, would state at the time that the reprisal policy was in full swing. 'In some sense, every leader of the Israeli Army even today is a disciple of Wingate. He gave us our technique, he was the inspiration of our tactics, he was our *dynamic*' And in a more personal vein Dayan disclosed: 'He taught many another Israeli soldier and me everything we know. We will be everlastingly grateful to the training he gave our boys in guerrilla warfare, in the influence and spirit he imparted.'<sup>46</sup> Many of Wingate's 'boys' later served as officers in the IDF.

One of the traditions of Israeli military culture which received its initial formulation at this time was the struggle between local autonomy and the central control of field forces, with a decided advantage accruing to the former. Yehuda Bauer anticipates and reinforces a central finding of this study, namely that 'the seed of the idea of a national mobile force as a security arm for the purpose of realizing a definite political line was sown in the days of the field squads'.<sup>47</sup> Wingate himself drew upon the Biblical military heritage for his inspiration, especially the disciplinary procedures of Gideon.

The little platoons that Sharon led at Latrun and at Qibya, and other platoons whose commanders attained rank and posthumous renown such as 'Moshe Levy, a platoon leader...who later became chief-of-staff' and 'a platoon under Moshe Yanuka' – were models of inspiration for a new generation of IDF recruits.<sup>48</sup>

Sharon himself notes the occasion on which he was 'promoted to platoon commander'<sup>49</sup> and the qualitative change of interpersonal relationships which soldiers can experience in this

military field unit. As the military operations grew in strength and tactical complexity, additional combat and logistic units not connected with the Paratroop Battalion participated in the reprisal operations. Despite the accumulating battle experience of a broad range of recruits, senior political echelons continued to entertain doubts about the fighting fitness of the IDF should a 'second round' of hostilities break out. In the end, the Sinai Campaign was spearheaded by the Paratroop troops with a major assault role assigned to the tank and armoured corps. Ariel Sharon was the Paratroop commander.

The saliency of Sharon's local units in the various military encounters of the early 1950s and their ability to impact adversely on foreign policy and diplomacy was a major factor in the senior political echelon's interest and involvement in implementation details. Indeed, the paratroopers under Sharon, even though they grew to full battalion proportions, were still called a 'unit', and lacked most of the support and auxiliary services which accompanied fully-fledged formations. The realization that such a 'unit' was capable of spearheading a major military campaign was outside the consciousness of the senior political echelons and in any case was frowned upon for a variety of reasons by the senior political echelon.

The social composition of the Paratroop Battalion was a cross-section of Israel. This meant in the 1950s a decided composition of new immigrants, many from the country's periphery and living in distressed areas. However, the commanders were almost entirely native-born, had fought in the War of Independence, were for the most part reared on kibbutzim and moshavim and were, with few exceptions, Ashkenazim. A number among them eventually became Chiefs-of-Staff. They exuded confidence not only in their leadership capabilities but also in the combat capabilities of their rank and file. What was clear was the logical spiral of escalation. Sharon affirms that 'in 1954 and 1955, then on into 1956, there were, altogether, some 70 actions, each more difficult and complex than the last'.<sup>50</sup> The political echelon, both fixated and often mesmerized by the accomplishments of the 'unit', did not realize that the military escalation had brought nearly all the IDF corps into action and high military preparedness. Moreover, they continued to entertain doubts regarding the capacity of new immigrants to cope with battlefield conditions in an all-out campaign. Nevertheless, the senior political echelon, pressured by the entire military and enticed by propitious international conditions, opted for a major military campaign.

# 5

## Reprisal Operations

### The Victory of Activism

‘For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.’

(Newton, Third Law of Motion)

Reprisal operations were the dominant component of the foreign and defence policy formulated by Israeli policy-makers in the early 1950s. This chapter will analyse the process by which these operations escalated as the political echelon lost control over their implementation, abandoning in effect policy governance to military commanders eager for battle.

The analysis will entail a close scrutiny of the political decision-making process, instructions given to the military echelon, operational and implementation orders for retaliatory missions and an examination of the military and political outcomes. Through exploring the structural and agential circumstances of these operations an explanation can be provided for the discrepancy which developed between the intentions and instructions of the political echelon and the military and political outcomes. In addition, the study will take into account the implications of these ground operations for state policy and civil/military relations.

An additional but no less important component to loss of control was the dispute over the management of foreign and defence policy. Dissension among state leaders was not only ideological but evolved into personal contention. The primary participants in the struggle to conduct foreign policy during these years were David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Pinhas Lavon. The principled and personal rivalry found expression in non-cooperation and the concealing and withholding of information. All this is clearly reflected in government sessions and correspondence among government ministers concerning the implementation of these operations, especially after their outcomes became known.

An in-depth examination of government proceedings provides evidence for a lack of control, coordination, and above all, criticism by many ministers over reprisal policy and the unlimited activism of the army. These military initiatives affected Israel’s diplomatic relations and reputation in the international arena. Efforts to put a palatable face on potentially damaging military actions led to public pronouncements distorting the true nature of military events, verbal clashes between leaders and a general lack of coordination in political and diplomatic activities and in defence policy. The result was numerous mishaps in decision-making and the formulation of policy. Amid these rivalries and contentions among policy-makers, the military echelon found considerable room for freedom of action.

Dozens of reprisal raids between 1953 and 1956 have been examined for this study. In every one of these operations, the military outcomes of which were often judged as overly successful, various factors contributing to the distortion of orders and instructions, the deflection of the political will and ultimately political damage outweighing any military benefits accruing to the state have been carefully explored.

In an almost natural fashion, the military operations created a process of escalation which became the basis for a 'policy of deterioration' conducted by the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan. Dayan sought to pre-empt a war against the Egyptians under conditions advantageous to Israel. The Qibya operation can be regarded as a starting-point in the process of escalation. Until Operation Qibya in October 1953, most operations were of a relatively small scope, some of them conducted under the cover of so-called 'frontier resident' reactions using unmarked ammunition and weapons and civilian dress. In the first stages, reprisal raids were directed at civilian targets with the intention of inflicting heavy damage as well as harming the guilty and potential collaborators.

Strikes at civilian targets were aimed at regimes, which were obliged to defend their citizens. Already in February 1953, Ben-Gurion had declared a hard-line policy against infiltrators and sneered at government ministers who demanded that the military avoid harming women and children. At the same government session, Ben-Gurion reviewed the summary list of those killed in infiltration incidents along the Jordanian border and called for a major operation at Kalkilya. He threatened to resign if 'the government does not decide to stop the killing and infiltration by means of reprisal operations, as guard duty and ambushes are not enough'. In Ben-Gurion's opinion, the violent infiltration and acts of murder perpetrated from the Jordanian border would not cease unless harsh steps were taken, including conquest and occupation of territories on the West Bank.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1953, acts of murder originating from the Jordanian border increased. During this month, five people were killed and seven injured in seven separate incidents.<sup>2</sup> Ben-Gurion demanded retaliatory action, but Moshe Sharett requested that the operation be postponed several days in order to allow the UN to handle the matter. The visit of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to Israel gave Ben-Gurion an opportunity to inform him of Israel's position with regard to reprisal operations while accepting Sharett's call to postpone this operation. Following Dulles's departure, IDF units simultaneously attacked a number of villages in Jordan from 18 to 25 May.<sup>3</sup> These reprisal operations had negative political repercussions for the state. Jordan hardened its position with regard to peace terms with Israel, adopting the stance of the Arab League, which sought to base peace with Israel solely upon Resolution 181 of the UN – the partition resolution of 29 November 1947 which included in its terms the return of Arab refugees to their lands.<sup>4</sup>

In Jordan, opposition to any arrangement with Israel grew. The Jordanian National Guard undertook military steps to seal the border with Israel. At the same time, a new situation was created when instructions from above were given to low-level Jordanian and Israeli officers in the local arena to cooperate on local security matters. These officers arrived at a mutual agreement whereby Jordanian forces would impede infiltration activities and Israel would refrain from reprisal operations.<sup>5</sup>

Cooperation in the local arena was guided from above by the head of GHQ, Moshe Dayan. On 29 June 1953, a meeting was arranged between Dayan and the Jordanian General Radi Ennab. Discussions between the two dealt with cooperation between Israel and Jordan against infiltrators and infiltration. A report from the British Embassy in Tel Aviv noted the continuation of meetings of lower-ranking local commanders, which would lower tension along the border and create a good basis for building a lasting arrangement.<sup>6</sup> The press post-haste reported the return of cattle stolen by the Jordanians in the Tul Karem sector.

Despite the agreements and the sincere efforts of the Jordanian regime and its military arm, the Jordanian Legion, to act vigorously against infiltrators, acts of murder and robbery did not diminish. Violent incidents all along the border raised suspicion among IDF officers regarding

the Jordanians' determination to halt hostile activities and doubt was raised with regard to the efficacy of the mechanisms to enforce the Armistice agreement. Against this background, on the evening of 12 August, IDF forces conducted Operation Revenge and Reparation against a number of Jordanian villages.<sup>7</sup>

From April 1953 until Operation Qibya in the middle of October, 29 civilians and two soldiers were killed and 14 civilians and one soldier were injured by infiltrators coming from Jordanian territory. The instances of shooting, tossed grenades and sabotage that did not result in casualties increased. Operation Qibya, which marked a turn-around in policy as well as in implementation orders to executing forces, must be examined against this background of rising violence.

## **Operation Qibya**

On the evening of 12–13 October 1953, infiltrators tossed a hand grenade into one of the houses in the outer perimeter of the Israeli village of Yahud. Susan Kanias and two of her children were killed; a third was lightly injured. The footprints of the perpetrators led to the Jordanian border. The commander of the Jordanian Legion, John Glubb, fearing a response from Israel, suggested that the Israeli trackers and their trained dogs enter Jordanian territory in pursuit of the infiltrators. The dogs lost the scent and the trackers gave up the pursuit. The legion's commander announced that Jordan 'would do the utmost to bring those guilty, if they are in Jordan territory, to justice'.<sup>8</sup> At the Mixed Armistice Commission that met following the incident, there was unanimous condemnation of the murders at Yehud. Among those participating was the Jordanian representative.

The IDF began preparations for retaliatory action immediately, in accord with standing orders for operations. The first set of orders from Central Command was already written by Tuesday 13 October, the day following the murders. The decision and the approval for carrying out the operation took place at an impromptu meeting during a military exercise in the north of the country. Ben-Gurion, who happened to be on vacation in Tiberias, was an observer at the exercise and participated in the decision, along with Pinhas Lavon, acting Defence Minister, the Chief-of-Staff, Mordecai Makleff, and the head of the Operations Branch/GHQ, Moshe Dayan. Moshe Sharett, who was acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at this time, did not take part in the decision, and only learned about it the next day from Gidon Rafael, his advisor on Middle East affairs.

The village of Qibya was chosen as the target for the retaliatory operation. It was a relatively large settlement, situated east of Beit Nabbalah, and two kilometres from the Israeli border. The choice of Qibya was based on its proximity to the border and the fact that it served as a staging base from which terrorists crossed into Israel. The decision was also based on the need to act as soon as possible, close to where the murders were perpetrated. The aim was to inflict massive damage by blowing up 50 houses in the village. Dayan conveyed the objective and also the message to the Jordanian Government: 'We cannot escape demonstrating to the Arabs – to the Governments and citizens alike – that if Israeli citizens cannot live in peace and quiet, neither can the Jordanians.'<sup>9</sup>

The reprisal operations were intended as an act of revenge as well as deterrence. Instructions were passed on to GHQ to convert them into the language of military command. Colonel Meir Amit, who was head of Operations Branch/GHQ at the time and was responsible for operational orders, explained: 'We said that we must do something effective; we certainly intended that



Qibya would be something which would have a resounding impact.’<sup>10</sup>

The ‘Operation Shoshana’ order that emanated from the Operations Branch/GHQ on 13 October 1953 defined the intent and the mission in the following words:

**Announcement:** During the past week a gang from over the border conducted operations against the settlements and transportation in the Beit Naballah region.

**GHQ Intentions:** The implementation of operations intended as a sharp response against villages which serve as bases for the above acts.

**The Mission:** a) incursions into the villages of Na’alin and Shukeiba with the intent of blowing up and sabotaging a number of houses and inflicting harm on its residents; b) an assault against Qibya village which is to be placed under temporary occupation, the demolition of houses and the infliction of injury on residents causing them to flee from the village.

**The Method:** Central Command will carry out the operation through Unit 101, a company from Battalion 890 and supporting weapons from Central Command – under the authorization of the commander of Unit 101. The operation against the three objectives will take place simultaneously. The operation will take place not later than the evening of 15–16 October 1953. The use of supporting weapons only to be used against Qibya village.<sup>11</sup>

As may be understood from the documentation, the operation was directed against the village of Qibya, with movement towards the two other villages serving as a feint and diversion.

The security clause in the order was of major significance for the behaviour of the political echelon after it was informed of the outcome of this operation. The clause ordered the forces assaulting Qibya to avoid by all possible means leaving any signs and footprints. Moreover, arrangements were to be made to ensure that operating units would not be identified.<sup>12</sup>

The operational order of Central Command heightened the content of the GHQ order by giving instructions to ‘assault the village and temporarily occupy it, and destroy and inflict maximum injury on human life with the intent of causing residents to flee from their houses... raid the villages of Shukeiba and Na’alin with the intent of sabotaging a number of houses and killing residents and soldiers in the village.’<sup>13</sup>

The operational order written in the handwriting of Ariel Sharon, operation commander, also points to a heavy-handed action against the village according to the command order: ‘the intention: attack Qibya village, occupy it, and inflict maximum damage on human life and property’.<sup>14</sup>

The operation took place on the evening of October 15 with the participation of 103 combat troops – a company from Unit 101 and the remainder from Paratroop Battalion 890. Twenty combatants from Unit 101 under the command of Shlomo Baum were given the task of occupying Qibya from the east. Twenty combatants from the paratroop battalion under the command of Aharon Davidi had as their mission to occupy the eastern part of Qibya and the military emplacement which protected the village. Forty combatants from the paratroop battalion carried 700 kilograms of explosives; their job was to blow up houses in the village. A group of five combatants from Unit 101, under the command of Eli Gozani, blocked the way from the village of Budrus in order to prevent reinforcements from coming to Qibya. An additional group of five combatants under Meir Har-Tzion blocked the route from Shukeiba to the east of Qibya. Another group of five from Unit 101 under Arik Shlaim blocked the route to Na’alin. A reserve

force was stationed on the Israeli border, and 81 mm mortars were used to prevent reinforcements arriving from Budrus. The forces also carried a ton of explosives, divided into charges of 10 to 15 kilograms each. The blocking group under Meir Har-Tzion was sent to the outskirts of Shukeiba to block the route between the two villages. They were discovered by guards protecting the Qibya orchards, and a shooting engagement ensued, which spoiled the element of surprise from the main assault force. The force continued to harass the village with small-arms fire for five hours and thus prevented any reinforcements from arriving at Qibya from this direction.

The Israeli assault forces, whose feint actually included an order to penetrate either Na'alín or Shukeiba and blow up several buildings, did not succeed in entering either village. The loss of surprise and the discovery of the attacking force permitted the Jordanian Legion to organize and defend the village and its residents to flee. At 22:00 hours, the main force broke into Qibya and by midnight the village was entirely occupied and the forces prepared to blow up the houses.

A summary report of the operation written by Ariel Sharon describes the sabotage of the village's main buildings which served as military posts for the Jordanian Legion. The building housing the National Guard, the police station, the grammar school, the water pumping station, two cafes and all two-storey buildings were demolished. In total, 45 buildings were blown up. The operation ended at 03:20.<sup>15</sup>

Israeli forces suffered one lightly wounded soldier. The report gives no figures for Jordanian casualties and notes: 'It cannot be correctly estimated but one can rely upon their [Jordanian] announcements.'<sup>16</sup> According to eyewitness accounts from soldiers who took part in the assault, the population fled at the beginning of the battle and the village was empty. No houses were searched, and explosives were prepared and set off under the assumption that the dwellings were not occupied:

'We thought that all the residents had fled,' related one of the members of the assault force; 'we did not search the upper storeys or the cellars. There was no instruction to do this. In one house an infant was found and in another house an elderly person; both were sent to the village of Budrus.'<sup>17</sup>

After the raid, Sharon reported that in his estimation the Jordanians had 12 National Guard killed as well as casualties inflicted by the blocking group. The next day the truth was revealed – 69 bodies, among them women and children, who were buried in the rubble of the houses. Benny Morris claims that most deaths occurred during mop-up operations before demolition took place and that the paratroop forces, who cleaned out the village houses, operated according to well-known regulations for combat in built-up areas; thus many of the residents who were casualties were killed in their houses during the occupation and mopping-up stage of the operation. Up to this point, the practice in built-up areas did not require inspection to locate civilians, women and children in houses; forces tossed grenades into houses and then entered while shooting. It should be emphasized that the battle orders themselves did not differentiate between the killing of the civilian population and the killing of soldiers from the Jordanian Legion and the National Guard. The goal was a maximum strike on human life.

According to the preliminary report by the Jordanian Legion of 16 October, 42 bodies were found, 38 of which were women and children. The majority were struck down by light arms fire and hand grenades.<sup>18</sup> Final results of the operation in Qibya were only known after the rubble was cleared. The Israeli summary of the battle reveals that the Jordanian Army had 15 wounded; 45 buildings were blown up, including most public buildings in the village.<sup>19</sup>

Nobody had expected that this would be the result of the operation. The response of Meir Amit, head of the Operations Branch, was one of utter surprise: 'What happened was seven times above and beyond what we thought it would be.'<sup>20</sup> Sharett was shocked by the outcome of the Qibya raid:

According to the initial information of the opposite side [the Jordanians], in Qibya alone 30 houses were destroyed. A retaliatory response of this magnitude had never been carried out before. I paced back and forth in my room, perplexed and in the deepest throes of depression, overcome by a feeling of helplessness.<sup>21</sup>

Operation Qibya aroused angry responses towards Israel within the country and in the world. There were vociferous protests in the international community, and the United Nations severely censured Israel and accused it of violating the UN Charter. Britain sent a letter to the Foreign Minister expressing shock at the deed and the dangers it held for peace in the region. In addition, the British government demanded that Israel investigate the circumstances surrounding the raid, pay compensation to the families who suffered casualties and withdraw the IDF from the border area. As mentioned, the British warned Israel that any further deterioration of the border area with Jordan might lead to the activation of the defence treaty between Britain and Jordan. The Israeli ambassador in London, Eliahu Elat, sent a letter which cited the fierce criticism and even astonishment that prevailed among friends of Israel in Britain. In the estimation of the ambassador, Qibya strengthened the anti-Israel elements in the British establishment and the application of sanctions and even British intervention would be viewed with sympathy if Israel continued its aggressive policy.

The French as well expressed their reservations about the operation, and the Americans, who replied very strongly, postponed a promised grant of one million dollars. Israel's ambassador to the United States, Abba Eban, estimated that the savagery and the cruelties that characterized the Qibya operation 'had brought Israel's international standing to the edge of the abyss.... This operation was the first since the establishment of our State that world Jewry refused to identify with Even Deir Yassin did not evoke such nausea'.<sup>22</sup>

Eban expressed the view that Operation Qibya had caused the greatest damage to the security of Israel since the end of the War of Independence. On 17 October, three major powers requested a meeting of the UN Security Council in order to discuss the rising tensions between Israel and its neighbours. The Security Council met and censured Israel.

Even Moshe Dayan, who was the moving spirit behind the policy of retaliation, understood that a military operation had to be seen as justified by international public opinion, and he summarized his views on the matter:

Israel learned that even when the Arabs harm peaceful citizens we must direct our responses to military targets. What is permitted to the Arabs –and even to other peoples – will not be forgiven and pardoned if done by Jews or Israelis. Not only foreigners but also Israeli citizens and Jews in the world expect us to honour 'purity of arms' much more than is expected from any other army.<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt from the reactions of all those involved that either because of the mistake of not checking buildings before they were blown up or because of the desire to create a shock impact on Jordan, Operation Qibya went beyond the bounds of what was acceptable and just in relations between nations. Eban would later remark that the 'raid in Kibya...was regarded by

most Israelis as excessive'.<sup>24</sup> Moshe Sharett, acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister at the time, was aware of the importance of propaganda and regarded it as a tool of great importance. He claimed that the moral dimensions of military operations should always be taken into consideration when determining the scope and intensity of reprisal objectives.

The results of the Qibya raid sharpened the debate between opposing schools of thought – between the power approach, which supported tough military actions, and the policy that sought compromise and mediation, more involvement by the Foreign Ministry and a curb on intervention and demands by military personnel to determine policy. Each side interpreted the outcomes of the operation within the framework of its own policy outlook and regarded the outcomes as justifying its position. Ironically, the Qibya raid had strengthened the hand of Israeli diplomats by shifting the Arab-Israeli issue from a local to a global concern, thus bringing about a dramatic diplomatic escalation of the conflict. The military's interpretation of events, on the other hand, was more insular, emphasizing the impact of the operation on stemming the tide of infiltration from Jordan. An assessment of the operation drawn up by the military's Intelligence Branch in June concluded: 'It appears that we have encountered about a 40 per cent drop in incidents of infiltration since Qibya, as a result of the operation or from the additional steps which the Jordanians took afterwards to prevent infiltration.'<sup>25</sup>

Personnel in the Foreign Ministry took issue with the defence establishment's position and emphasized the great political damage the Qibya operation had caused in comparison to the short-term military gains associated with the reductions in infiltration. Even if the Foreign Ministry claims were correct regarding the political damage incurred following the extensive killing of civilians in Qibya, the number of infiltrators and acts of murder and robbery declined by 50 per cent in 1954 from the previous year.<sup>26</sup>

Following the Qibya raid, the Jordanian Legion increased its activities along the border, Jordanian intelligence operated with more rigour to gather information on the activities of infiltrators and imposed severer punishments on those caught by the Jordanian military forces.

Qibya constituted one link in the long chain of military initiatives which deviated from the intention of the political echelon, and even on occasion from the intention of the senior military echelon. These military actions distorted by expanding on the written objectives, including those operational orders originating from superintending military commands. The knotty question, which never received a reply, is how it came about that the intentions of senior military command were changed – that is, orders originating from Operations Branch/GHQ received the extreme interpretation, to 'destroy and inflict maximum injury on human life with the intent of causing residents to flee from their houses'.<sup>27</sup>

It must be pointed out that reprisal operations which preceded Qibya were consciously directed against civilians and were in accord with the outlook of Moshe Dayan. Already in 1950, Dayan had expressed his views in the presence of the Mapai Secretariat:

The only method which has proven itself effective, not that it could be justified or ethically condoned, but effective when Arabs lay mines among us... [is that] we disturb the neighbouring village tranquillity, including the women, children and elderly; [and] then they wake up and complain to the government about the border crossings, and in this way the Egyptian and Jordanian governments are motivated to prevent incidents of this nature.... And they must prevent deeds of this sort, that is, they must stop them on the Arab side. The method of collective punishment has up till now demonstrated its effectiveness.<sup>28</sup>

Dayan continued to hold this aggressive outlook, even following Qibya, when government

policy limited IDF actions and forbade the selection of civilian targets. In an article summarizing this period of retaliation, written many years later, Dayan reiterated his position that attacking only military objectives after Qibya made reprisal operations less effective.<sup>29</sup>

Changing the order was in the spirit of command parameters and in the spirit of operational exercises in those days, even if they diverged from the written intentions of GHQ, and of course from the will and understanding of the political echelon. Nevertheless, the IDF action reduced infiltration in the short run – but it also heightened tension along the Jordanian border. The Jordanian Legion was deployed along the length of the border with Israel from fear of additional reprisal actions, and Commander Glubb Pasha threatened a Legion response if Israel attacked. There was an ominous threat of armies clashing. The gravity of the situation engendered by the raid led the British War Office to discuss the possibility of activating the Anglo-Jordanian Defence Treaty and the Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Harold Redman, declared that the British ‘did not want to fight the Israelis, although we would obviously have to do so, if they made a direct attack on Jordan’.<sup>30</sup>

The worsening situation along the Jordanian border was reinforced by a British shipment of weapons and armour to the Jordanian Legion and National Guard. This step was intended as a deterrent to Israel and a strengthening of the British position in Jordan. The failure of the Jordanian Legion to prevent Israeli operations and its inability to move reinforcements during such operations was a heavy blow to the Jordanians. There were those who saw the derogatory names and accusations of treason directed towards the legion commander and its British officers as undermining the standing of Britain in Amman and even throughout the Middle East.

Qibya also had implications for the issuance of standing orders in the Israeli army. Efforts were made to set down clear practices and implementation instructions for various types of operations such as military encounters with infiltrators and reprisal operations. Henceforth it was made clear in operational instructions that women and children were not to be harmed. Soldiers were equipped with flashlights so that every building designated for demolition would be inspected. In order to prevent injury to innocent civilians, operational instructions required a search of all buildings and an announcement through a loudspeaker that all people inside were to leave. The objectives chosen for reprisal operations would no longer be civilian targets but would be confined to army camps, military posts and police stations.

These revisions in the policy of retaliation were accepted following long and difficult discussions carried on by the government, in which the army was accused of lacking discipline and carrying out unrestrained activities. Government debates give an authentic picture of the struggle between the supporters of an aggressive policy, led by Ben-Gurion, and the supporters of a moderate diplomatically-oriented line, as represented by Moshe Sharett. These debates clearly delineate the central problems which constituted the basis of the reprisal policy. They also reveal the embarrassment of the majority of government ministers over the uncomfortable outcomes of these operations, the faulty and often non-existent decision-making process and the distorted situations created, in the estimation of some of the ministers, by the army directing Israel’s policy, uncontrolled and without a guiding hand.

Returning after his extended political hiatus, Ben-Gurion sided with the IDF’s position, which had been represented at Armistice Commission sittings, that the Qibya raid was not carried out by the IDF. Sharett attacked the army’s version of events, thus directly confronting Ben-Gurion. He stated that no one in the world would believe the government’s announcement. Sharett suggested that the government issue a public statement on the Qibya operation and express its sorrow over the action and its outcome. Ben-Gurion did not accept Sharett’s recommendations

and suggested releasing a statement claiming that residents of frontier settlements whose patience had been exhausted were the perpetrators.

The perceived necessity for specious announcements by the Israeli Government reinforced its sense of guilt and failure. Ben-Gurion felt the need to issue a fabrication in order to protect the standing and honour of the state, the IDF and the Chief-of-Staff. ‘There are no Jews,’ he retorted at a Government session, ‘at least among the Jews sitting here – and among them I include the Chief-of-Staff and the army, because I am acquainted with the *mores* of the army – who want to spill even one drop of Arab blood or rush over the Jordan to commit murder.’<sup>31</sup>

Ben-Gurion vehemently upheld the need for a policy of reprisal and at the same time ascribed this particular action to frontier settlers, even if this version was not credible to outside observers. Yisrael Rokah, the Interior Minister from the General Zionist Party disagreed with the operation, especially its outcomes:

I have some reservations about our response; I think that we are strong enough that we can do things of this sort without injuring women and children. We have in my opinion enough strength to remove within half an hour children and women from the houses and then to blow them up. It weakens our position in the world in general, and among world Jewry in particular, because from afar things appear differently.<sup>32</sup>

Rokach proposed that Israel announce that the perpetrators were a village civil guard.

The Justice Minister, Pinhas Rosen of the Progressive Party, also opposed the conduct of an operation carried out without government authorization, while emphasizing military tension in the north and south of the country at this time:

I am under the impression that the operation was done even without the knowledge of the acting Prime Minister; I don’t know if I am right or not, but that’s my impression. If this is the case – this is not a government; it is not possible for a government to work in this way, where such important and fateful steps are taken, I assume, on the judgement of the acting Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff.<sup>33</sup>

The Minister of Religion, Moshe Shapira (Mafdal), regarded Qibya as a most grave event causing ethical and moral harm beyond its political consequences:

I don’t want to discuss the political aspects of the matter; I want to discuss the moral question and address the conclusions and the outcomes. I contend that morally we cannot accept [reprisal] responses of this sort. Absolutely not. All the time we have opposed this, not only today, but also when Jews were murdered in the land of Israel; this was accepted before the existence of the State of Israel. We know how many fell week after week, month after month and at no time did we say: ‘Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?’ [Gen 18:23], including those who are innocent. This, never! We were always strict about this. We know what happened at Deir Yassin, how everybody rose up against the deed at Deir Yassin, that happened in the heat of war, when we were defending our very existence, when we feared that we would soon be thrown into the sea. Nevertheless we did not reconcile ourselves to this, we said that this was insupportable from a Jewish point of view. Jews cannot do this. It is clear to me that today as well, there are many Jews who cannot walk with their head held high after what has happened in Qibya.<sup>34</sup>

Shapira accepted Ben-Gurion's position on the official government version of events, believing that this was the only way to preserve the good name of the IDF. The government, he argued, should not pin an accusation for a criminal act on the IDF. He joined with those who criticized the decision-making process for erroneously not including the acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett. He demanded that future operations of the type carried out in Qibya receive government approval: 'There is no point in there being a government if it is not held accountable for things which might even result in escalation and war without its representatives being privy to the decision.'<sup>35</sup>

The ministers Josef Sapir (General Zionists) and Peretz Naftali (Mapai) joined the criticism against the operation and the decision-making process, demanding greater government involvement, even if it could not go into the planned details. Naftali opined that the State of Israel could not allow itself friction and escalation simultaneously on all its fronts, but more than anything else he was furious that the decision was taken by the acting Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff on the basis of narrow military considerations:

I see a great danger, if matters proceed in this way, that the army or in this instance the Defence Minister or someone acting in his place can create facts. In my opinion, this is a most dangerous situation; I cannot speak about whether it was possible to do this in a less brutal way. Perhaps this could not have been done less brutally. But if I regard the timetable, I must say it was dubious in my eyes. In my opinion, there is no need for an arrangement like this; not only pure military considerations must impact. I am not saying that the entire government must decide, but at the very least the Foreign Minister or the Ministerial Committee for Security Affairs must participate in the discussion of these things. We cannot always be in a situation in which one person agrees to a professional plan drawn up by army personnel, and we are confronted with a *fait accompli* and cannot do anything about it.<sup>36</sup>

In Naftali's view, the Israeli Government should have issued an announcement about the counter-operation. Not bearing responsibility was dishonourable and unseemly.

Pinhas Lavon, who was serving as acting Minister of Defence and who took the brunt of the criticism, claimed in response that the authority to implement reprisal actions was transferred by the government to the Defence Minister, and thus he did not deviate from the authority allocated to him. He did not know whether others knew about this or not, but he stood by the authority granted to him by a decision of the government. Lavon was hinting at Sharett's share in the decision when he reported on the operation, and even tried to postpone it, but in the end gave in to the decision formulated by Lavon, which itself relied upon the authorization of Ben-Gurion, who was present at an impromptu meeting which took place in a training area where the IDF was conducting some exercises.

An entry in Sharett's diary notes his struggle with Lavon to postpone the operation:

I terminated the meeting [of the Government] and beckoned Lavon to come into the corridor. I asked him if they were about to act. He replied 'Yes'. It seems that the Defence Minister must grant satisfaction to his people. Ben-Gurion, said [Lavon], did not accept my opinion [of Sharett]. The meaning of this is that there were two against one. We returned to the room and I wrote to him [Ben-Gurion] a note: 'There will be resignations over this sometime.'<sup>37</sup>

Lavon presented his position at this same meeting:

I do not frown upon strengthening guard duty in the settlements and I do not frown upon border police operations. But if we examine the picture as it is, we must come to the conclusion – if we want to combat this affliction at all – without establishing a situation in which the Arabs know that murder does not pay, there is no chance of restricting and certainly not stopping this matter.

To a question from Sharett as to whether he meant the Arabs in general he replied: ‘Arabs on the border and Arab governments, even Arab governments. There is a mutual impact between these things.’<sup>38</sup> In his estimation, reprisal actions would prompt the Jordanian Legion to take up positions along the border in order to block infiltrators from entering into Israeli territory.

Regarding the murder of women and children, Lavon tried to explain that sending a battalion into action would heighten the danger of killing occurring on both sides and our soldiers, too, could become casualties. In the future, this type of operation in which villages are attacked and civilian targets chosen may be waived, he said, but then we are talking about attacking the Jordanian Legion’s bases and fortified posts with all the political and military implications entailed in such an engagement. The likelihood of the IDF sustaining an increased number of casualties was a definite consequence of this change in the choice of military targets.

In effect, here is to be found the question that brought about a change in policy and planning reprisal operations. There would be no more attacks on villages with the likelihood of causing casualties among women and children. In its stead, targets would be selected consisting for the most part of fortified positions and Jordanian Legion emplacements in a calculated effort to compel them to guard and close the border to infiltrators.

Golda Meir, Minister of Labour, took a hard line with regard to Israel’s foreign relations with the major powers and other states. She claimed that there was no intention of Israel ruining her foreign relations and certainly not entering squabbles with other states. At the same time, state policy must be based upon the interests and challenges facing it, even if other states criticized and posed threats. Israel should be guided by similar criteria with regard to its development works in the north, in its diversion of the course of the Jordan River and likewise along the Egyptian border. Meir supported the policy of reprisals but wished to reduce the number of casualties as much as possible. Despite regret for casualties, she claimed that Israel had no other method by which she could protect her citizens, especially in the frontier area.

The Health Minister, Y. Serlin (Liberal Zionists) was aggressive on the Qibya question and attacked the moral stand of the Minister of Religion, Shapira. As a citizen of the state, he said, he did not want to read in the newspapers and hear on the radio, day after day, about murders and robberies committed by infiltrators. The sages have written, he said:

‘If someone comes to kill you, rise up and slay him’<sup>39</sup> and this too is an ethical command. This is his ethic and the ethic of many citizens in the state and not a policy of restraint taken from another era and from other circumstances. Today, in the sixth year of the state’s existence, to come and say things like this. If a foreign state operates in a planned way against us, then it is clear that we must oppose it, and this occurs every day, every week. Can anybody say today we must continue with the same restraint as in the past? Our very existence as a state is at stake, there will be no state, and it is this they are striving for, to create a situation like this in the State of Israel, where there will no longer be normal life. While you, Minister of Religion, sit with your hands folded. I don’t believe that Israeli citizens will sit with their hands folded.<sup>40</sup>

Serlin sided with Ben-Gurion’s proposal to announce that frontier residents were the perpetrators of the attack on the village and that casualties among women and children were to be regretted.



It was Moshe Sharett, in effect the second most powerful person in the country in terms of his political and public standing, who waged a campaign against the Prime Minister's position. Sharett was joined by ministers from government coalition partners in a vigorous attack against the security line of Ben-Gurion and the failure to relate to the stand of the United States, Britain, the United Nations and world public opinion. Sharett emphasized Israel's complete dependence on the assistance of the world, and opposed to this the isolation of the government wrapped up in itself and its own problems: 'I see a terrible contrast between our absolute, unavoidable objective dependence in the world, dependence upon the help of the world, dependence upon the sympathy of the world and our enclosure within ourselves, mental enclosure and our complete isolation from the world.'<sup>41</sup> Sharett was concerned about the UN debate against Israeli activities in the Syrian demilitarized zone and against Israel's aggressive activities, especially after Qibya. Since Israel had not complied with the UN's request to stop development work in the demilitarized zone bordering Syria, and now following the Qibya incident, it was clear to Sharett that Israel's standing in the world would be damaged. At stake was the possible forfeit of a 50-million-dollar grant promised by the United States. On the matter of Qibya, Sharett made it absolutely clear that he had indeed received the announcement about a reprisal raid following the murder of an Israeli mother and her two children and did not see any reason to oppose it. The plan for the assault was brought to him on Tuesday evening and only the next morning did he hear about the outcome at the Israeli-Jordan Armistice Commission meeting. At that meeting, Jordan was denounced for the murder and even the Jordanian representatives abstained and did not vote against the denunciation of their country. Sharett buttressed his claim by referring to 'his military past' in order to justify his knowledge of the system and his inability to halt it:

I sense that we are about to fail and that we are not doing everything to prevent or minimize the likelihood of this failure... I know that there is a decision which gives authority to certain activities, I never relinquished the right to appeal. There were situations in which I brought my appeal to the government. There were situations where I didn't appeal, there were situations where I appealed but didn't bring it to the government. There are different situations. I knew on Tuesday, before evening, of the deaths of the woman and her two children and the retaliation plan. I was very busy and I received the information only in the evening. A decision was taken to use all measures. I then went to the Defence Minister and gave my negative opinion. He said he would consider the matter. In the afternoon I learned an additional detail; I learned that there was a transmission from Glubb to Makleff in which Glubb thanks Makleff for the permission to use our dogs.... He offers thanks for our activity and announces that he is doing everything within his power to find the murderers and have them punished. Hence, I strongly reiterated my objection but I was told that it must be carried through, because it has already been set in motion.<sup>42</sup>

Sharett expressed regret that he did not call for a government meeting that morning to stop the implementation of the operation. In effect, he reverted to a bureaucratic excuse to justify the continued preparation and implementation for the reprisal by weakly explaining that it was not possible to stop what was already in motion from the moment it got the go-ahead.

Sharett was certainly not a party to the orders and planning of the operation which directed the destruction of buildings in the village and the injuring of a fair number of residents 'in order that they see and fear'. Had he been more decisive and adamant in his position, he might have demanded a presentation of the operation plan and a clarification of the orders given to the forces, and perhaps have stopped or at least reduced the damage caused in Operation Qibya.

Sharett criticized the operation not only because it caused casualties among women and children, but also because of its scope and the great damage it caused to the image of Israel throughout the world:

If it had occurred to me that this would be the scope of the operation, I would have roused government members from their beds.... The situation is this, that there is, sort of, an immediate response. It was, indeed, a terrible riposte, but there was a decision of the Armistice Commission. There was a denunciation; the strong hand should have been blocked, to [wait and] see what they would do. There is strong moral pressure on them. If another murder occurs – then [we should] strike a blow.

Sharett believed that the escalation would lead to war. An operation of the sort carried out at Qibya was a quasi-declaration of war by the State of Israel, which could no longer withstand the pressure of infiltration, terror and murder:

We were saying that the situation is so bad, better that there will be a war than to sustain infiltration, murders, theft, by the dozens. Once and for all a major decision on this matter must be made. We cannot slide into a war, we cannot be dragged into a war, either we want a war or we don't want a war, and on this basis we must direct our action.<sup>43</sup>

Sharett labelled Israel's behaviour as 'state hooliganism' and utter moral opacity. He asked for a government pronouncement that would place the blame on Jordan, while at the same time expressing sorrow for the spilling of blood.

Ben-Gurion summed up the meeting by replying to Sharett that he understood his anger and indignation that he had not convinced him of the justice of his political path, but since there was no agreement, matters had to be brought to a vote with the majority deciding. By a majority of three votes, it was decided not to put a temporary halt to the excavation of water channels in the demilitarized zone in the north. In other words, despite the deteriorating political and security situation, and despite the diplomatic offensive expected at the UN, the government decided to continue its hard and uncompromising line. In addition, the government told the Prime Minister to prepare an announcement concerning the situation on the Jordan/Israel frontier area, and bring it before the government for authorization. At the end of the meeting, Ministers Shapira and Rosen requested a cancellation of the government decision that gave the Defence Minister the authority to implement reprisal operations, but their suggestion was rejected.

Ben-Gurion succeeded in having his position upheld in the government and preserved his right to make decisions single-handedly on military operations connected to retaliatory actions. In a radio broadcast on 19 October, Ben-Gurion gave the Israeli version of the Qibya operation. He denied the involvement of the IDF and pinned the blame on the Jordanian Government:

Armed forces across the Jordan did not cease their attacks until the patience of people in several frontier settlements expired following the murder of a woman and her children in a Jewish village, and last week they attacked the village of Qibya, which was one of the centres of the gangs of murderers.... We checked and it became definitely apparent that no army unit, even the smallest one, was absent from camp on the evening of the attack against Qibya.<sup>44</sup>

Even after his radio announcement, government members continued to wrangle over the content of the government's official announcement formulated by Ben-Gurion. This took place against

the expected censure of Israel from the United Nations Security Council.

During two government sessions, a number of ministers, led by Sharett, Rosen, Rokah and Josef Sapir, tried to soften Ben-Gurion's stand and demanded that the Prime Minister's announcement be brought before the Ministerial Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence. The discussion focused on the government's announcement that it was unidentified civilian forces who were involved in the Qibya affair, although the truth of the matter was clear to all. The speeches revolved around the denial of the truth and opposition to the decision of the Security Council. It appears that the ministers themselves had already lost the sense of what was true.

Pinhas Lavon, who had a sharp tongue, placed the facts before the ministers:

Our position was that not the army and no regular forces whatsoever had any connection with this, that it was done by some unknown civilians, so how do we know what exactly happened? If you totally reject the account of Benika [the United Nations Truce Supervisory officer], then you must have carried out a thorough investigation and hence you know who did it.<sup>45</sup>

Sharett opposed the position of the Prime Minister and sought postponement of the government announcement until after the official announcement of the Security Council decision. In addition, he opposed the Prime Minister's position of placing responsibility for infiltration incidents and the murder on Britain, whose officers served as leaders of the Jordanian Legion and did not take effective steps to prevent murder and theft originating from Jordan. Thirdly, he opposed the Prime Minister's proposal to challenge the report of Benika, who adamantly asserted that it was a military attack by Israel. Sharett felt that it was inadvisable to go into details and an argument with the UN officer. Moreover, he rejected Ben-Gurion's formulation that Israel reserved the right to self-defence, claiming that these words contained an element of provocation. There was no disagreement regarding the right to self-defence, but rather a criticism of reprisal actions of the type that took place at Qibya.

Ben-Gurion, who had just returned from his vacation and was on the verge of resigning from the government, replied to Sharett's attack by resorting to a formal argument in order to clarify who held responsibility: he or Sharett 'I only have doubts on the matter of my status. I announced that I am leaving the government. I announced that I am staying for a short period in order to arrange matters, and thus I don't know what my position is.'<sup>46</sup>

Sharett retreated from his position of postponing the government announcement and accepted Ben-Gurion's demand to issue an immediate statement which might still influence the final formulation of the Security Council declaration. Ben-Gurion did not give in on the matter of the right to self-defence, demanding that it be included in the letter, and holding that this need not imply that Israel would repeat such an action.

The government accepted Ben-Gurion's position and decided that:

1. the Prime Minister would issue a pronouncement regarding the statements of the three major powers on the Security Council resolution on the issue of the Qibya incident;
2. the Ministerial Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence in conjunction with the Minister of Justice would draft the pronouncement;
3. the pronouncement would be issued before the Security Council decision.<sup>47</sup>

Ben-Gurion brought the proposed formulation in a letter to a meeting of the Ministerial Committee for Foreign Affairs and Security. In the letter, Ben-Gurion denied the version of the

three major powers, that the IDF was responsible for the Qibya operation. In addition, he attacked the one-sided position that did not note the murders committed by perpetrators from the Jordanian side of the border, the major factor for the deterioration along the Jordanian border. Finally, he placed the blame on Britain 'which in upholding the right of its ally, Jordan, cannot free itself of the responsibility which its standing on the other side of the Jordan River confers'.<sup>48</sup> The letter further stated that the position of the Security Council encouraged aggression and weakened the chances for dialogue in the area:

The State of Israel sees its primary responsibility as defending the lives of its citizens, and the cover which is given for whatever reason to murderous gangs by the proposal of the three powers will not lessen our obligation. Our women and children will not be abandoned to gangs of murderers who come from over the Jordan or from any other Arab country.<sup>49</sup>

Suggestions made by ministers following the reading of Ben-Gurion's letter focused on two central points: the first entailed a slight softening of its formulation so that it would not sound too aggressive. Secondly, many felt that it was inappropriate for Ben-Gurion to make a pronouncement which was one hundred per cent incorrect and untruthful. The ministers, whether or not they accepted the detailed report on Operation Qibya, understood that GHQ had a connection to the operation. Some of them knew the core of truth and all of them were not at ease with the Prime Minister's pronouncement that no IDF units were involved, and that the perpetrators were enraged frontier residents. Minister Bachor Shitrit asked whether it was obligatory to place any emphasis on the Israel Defence Forces in the language of the pronouncement. Ben-Gurion reiterated that those who committed the deed were residents of the frontier settlements.

We did not say that Israelis did not do this, but rather that frontier settlement people were involved. Not all were from the border area, but mainly they were settlement people. We did not say that the Arabs did this, and we will not claim this now. We won't say anything which is untruthful. We said only who did not do this.

The Justice Minister also regarded this matter seriously. 'If it is said that "there is no basis for assigning the Qibya operation to Israeli armed forces" – if the intention is to the Israel Defence Forces – can this be understood as that we have two kinds of armed forces?' And Ben-Gurion repeated the mantra: 'We will say that they were frontier residents.'<sup>50</sup>

Another interesting issue that came up in the debate was the ministers' concerns about a response from Britain and the other major powers. Throughout the entire debate reservations were expressed about the numerous references, which had an air of aggressiveness about them, to the assigning of responsibility to Britain for the actions of the Jordanian state and the behaviour of the Jordanian Legion. In the end, Ben-Gurion acquiesced to the ministers' requests and withdrew the repetitive assignation of blame to Britain for the Jordanian Legion and its behaviour. At the end of the debate, Ben-Gurion's pronouncement was approved and he made the statement the next day. Israel was censured by the Security Council on 24 November 1953.

Operation Qibya exposed for the first time the major gap between the intentions of the political echelon and the military outcomes of an operation. Decision-making and operation approval were faulty throughout the entire political process, and emphasized the division and lack of coordination in the political echelon between Ben-Gurion, Sharett and Lavon. The full impact of the GHQ order, which was distorted by Central Command, took effect on the

battlefield. The operational echelon conducted itself according to the *esprit de corps* of the unit commander and the norms of the IDF during these years, and in doing so attained the hoped-for results, perhaps even exceeding expectations. Dayan expressed this in the following way:

Most important was the lesson drawn by the IDF. Government decisions and instructions from GHQ were not unrealistic desires but rather minimal projections. In place of units that in the past returned and gave excuses as to why they did not succeed in carrying out their missions, these paratroop units now had to explain after every action why they did more than was expected. Self-confidence has returned to the auricles and veins of the IDF.<sup>51</sup>

It might have been expected that following Qibya, the borders would be calmer, but this in fact did not occur. Infiltration activities continued despite the intensive activities of the Jordanian Legion forces. During the course of 1954, the paratroop units kept up their violent incursions over the country's borders, but operational instructions were now restricted to military targets alone.

### **The Raid On Hebron**

On 16 December 1953, two IDF soldiers were killed by infiltrators in the Beit Gubrin area. Sharon recommended a reprisal operation deep within Jordanian territory in order to shake the self-confidence of the Jordanians and force them to stop infiltration activity. Despite reservations at GHQ, the operation was approved and two groups under the command of Meir Har-Tzion and Shlomo Baum set out on a mission on the evening of 19 December. Their objective was to attack all vehicles travelling along the road from Bethlehem to Hebron, without any written instruction to avoid civilian vehicles. The force set up an ambush at a curve in the road which leads to Hebron, beside Solomon's Pools, and a second group under Baum's command set up an additional ambush in the direction of Bethlehem. The first ambush stopped a civilian Chrysler car coming from Jerusalem in a hail of bullets, killing the driver, Dr Mansour Awad, a medic in the Jordanian Legion. The second force did not carry out its mission for fear that the passing vehicles were half-tracks of the Jordanian Legion. The next day, the Israeli newspaper *Ha 'aretz* printed an announcement on the murder of a Legion doctor:

Dr Mansour Awad, a medical officer in the Jordanian Legion, was killed Friday at 9:00 in the evening close to Solomon's Pools on the Bethlehem – Jerusalem road. A spokesman for the Jordanian Army.... put forward the information that the perpetrators were Jews. At the place of the ambush an empty bottle of cognac was found, a product of the Carmel-Mizrahi winery and the gun shell casings had Hebrew markings.... The perpetrators took with them the rank insignia of the person murdered.<sup>52</sup>

The acting Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Moshe Sharett, heard about the incident on the radio. In his diary he wrote: 'I asked Lavon if there were identifiable signs of IDF involvement and he replied "Yes". When I arrived home I wrote to him, in all friendliness, that I could not be compromised by these shenanigans; that there was a firm arrangement that nothing would be done without my knowledge.'<sup>53</sup>

The adventuresome behaviour of Lavon as Minister of Defence, and the lack of trust, coordination and reporting between him and the Prime Minister troubled the atmosphere between

the two during this short but eventful period. These personal animosities became an inseparable part of the dispute concerning the direction the State of Israel ought to take in responding to infiltrator activities.

On December 22, a group of four soldiers from the 101 Commando Unit under Meir Har-Tzion raided a house on the outskirts of Hebron. Despite its distance –some 21 kilometres from the city – and the snow which made movement difficult, the group carried out its mission, burst into the house which was chosen randomly, killed two men and a woman, injured an additional man, and then withdrew behind the Israeli border. Even today, the Hebron raid is considered to be one of the most difficult and daring actions by this unit. The nature of the mission and its outcomes did not bother the commanders and the combat soldiers. The entire attention of the command echelon was directed to its daring, its operational ability and steadfastness. This reaction symbolizes the victory of activism over political insight and the limits of morality.

### **The Murder At Ma'aleh Akrabim**

On the evening of 17 March 1954 a group of infiltrators attacked an Egged Company bus at Ma'aleh Akrabim (Scorpions' Pass), situated on the road from Eilat to Tel Aviv. The gang of murderers broke into the bus and killed 11 passengers. Three additional passengers who pretended to be dead escaped with their lives. Despite the desire to place the blame on the Jordanians, the IDF did not possess enough evidence to verify any accusation against them, and there were doubts as to the identity of the assailants and their dispatchers.

There was immense pressure on Sharett to make a retaliatory response. However, he was opposed to this step and wrote in his diary: 'A reactive deed in the face of this bloodbath will only blur its terrible impact and place us as equals with the murderers.'<sup>54</sup> After a lengthy debate on 21 March, the government decided to refrain from retaliatory action. Instead, it opted to exploit diplomatic channels in an effort to place pressure on Arab governments, through the United Nations and nations throughout the world, to curb infiltration activities and murder. The mixed Armistice Commission abstained from censuring Jordan because of lack of evidence for direct responsibility and suspicion that Egyptian intelligence had a hand in the operation.

Jordanian Legion Commander John Glubb reported to the British Government on the results of an investigation he had conducted, which pointed to 'tribesmen from the Beersheba area driven from their land and relatives massacred various times by Jews... the gang appears centred in Quseima... in Sinai. All planned and carried out from Sinai.'<sup>55</sup>

Sharett did not succeed, despite support from Britain and the United States, in bringing about Jordanian agreement to political talks on political relations. Jordan retreated because of pressure from the Arab League. Against the background of this failure in diplomatic activity, Sharett could not withstand the pressure for retaliatory action after the murder of a guard at Moshav Kessalon on 27 March 1954. Chief-of-Staff Dayan demanded a limited action and regarded the absence of a response as a loss of deterrence and a demonstration of the incapacity of Israel and the IDF to cope with the problem of infiltration.

Sharett approved the operation presented to him but demanded the avoidance of a broad response and civilian casualties. He feared that the action would be interpreted by the outside world as a reply to the murder at Ma'aleh Akrabim. Sharett also requested that the operation not harm political efforts currently taking place in the Security Council. Defence Minister Lavon promised a limited operation and the orders sent out reflected this.

## Operation Nahlin

Operation Nahlin, code-named 'Operation Arieh [Lion]' was assigned to Paratroop Battalion 890. This was the first operation of the battalion following its unification with the paratroopers. Its mission was to strike the Jordanian National Guard in a village while avoiding harm to women and children. The force set out under the command of Ariel Sharon from Mevo Betar in the Judaeen hills west of Bethlehem. The combatants were furnished with flashlights for checking houses before their demolition. Village residents fled and the force burst into the houses, killing four members of the National Guard and a civilian, the *mukhtar* of the village. According to Legion reports, an additional woman was killed during the battle. Jordanian Legion reinforcements from Hussan village set out to join battle at Nahlin but were intercepted by an Israeli blocking force. Three soldiers were killed and five wounded; the force was blocked and never reached the village.

Sharett was taken by surprise when he heard the account of the operation on the Arab radio station in Ramallah. The station reported heavy losses in the village and the mining of the mosque and many buildings. The rumours were denied by the Defence Ministry, and Sharett saw in the operation an opportunity for control over foreign and defence policy through limiting the 'activism' of IDF commanders.

On the other hand, the Chief-of-Staff, Dayan, averred that the operation was received with satisfaction by the Israeli public and that 'in the country there is a widespread feeling that there is a point beyond which there is no place for the diplomacy of Mr Sharett, of entreating here and complaining there'.<sup>56</sup>

Operation Nahlin pointed to the capacity of the political echelon to control within limits the army's programmes. In light of the constant pressure applied by the army for the implementation of reprisal operations, it was only a matter of time before its demands would be answered, even if it did not receive everything it requested. According to Benny Morris, the Jordanian Government hardened its stance following Operation Arieh and was unanimously opposed to talks with Israel.<sup>57</sup>

Following the raid, Israel's relations with Britain and the United States were again eroded. Both regarded Israel as a bellicose state. In the judgement of the American State Department, Israel was trying to impose peace talks on the Arabs, a goal which was unattainable under the conditions at that time. The reaction to the Nahlin operation was similar in all European states. It was viewed as a mistake and a continuation of the disaster and erroneous policy of Qibya. In any case, the operation did not contribute in the least to a reduction in infiltration along the border with Jordan.

## The Incident At Tsurif

Border incidents did not cease in the first months of 1954, and the acts of infiltrators now began to draw Israeli mortar fire and punitive acts against villages close to the border. On 9 May a Border Guard force, through a navigational error, entered Jordan in the area of Tsurif village. Jordanians attacked the force and two border policemen were killed. In the incident, which took place in an area where Jordanian and Israeli troops were stationed, another soldier was killed and the Jordanians suffered a number of casualties. Despite the decision not to respond, Border Guard units set out to avenge their fallen comrades, set up ambushes and placed snipers all along

the border. Border Guard reconnaissance patrols crossed the demarcation line and in the continuing action three Jordanian *fellahin* (farmers) were killed and two men and two women wounded.

Yehezkel Sahar, Inspector-General of the Police, promised Sharett that 'these wild reactive acts will not be repeated'.<sup>58</sup>

## Operation Shott 6

In response to the theft of a herd by infiltrators from the Hebron Hills at the Dead Sea settlement of Ein Gedi towards the end of May 1954, there was an attempt to steal a flock of sheep beside Beersheva in the Southern Hebron Hills area. When the operation failed, the mission was assigned to Battalion 890. A squad from the battalion set out on its mission on 26 May. Its objective was to make off with a flock of sheep and bring it back to Israel. Ten combatants under Ariel Sharon headed for Hurvat Geneva in the Judaeen desert. The force did not find a flock in this location. While interrogating local Arabs, the force encountered the Jordanian National Guard. In the exchange of fire which ensued, four guardsmen were killed. The Israeli force then returned to their base with two rifles, having failed to carry out the mission.<sup>59</sup>

Operation Shott 6 was carried out on the evening of 26–27 May 1954. In the report written by Major Sharon, the commander of the operation, it was stated that the Jordanians opened fire on the Israeli force, and this led to the killing of three members of the Guard. The fourth casualty was a *fellah* [farmer] who attempted to flee and was shot.<sup>60</sup>

Sharett, who had not been updated with regard to the ongoing operations along the borders, felt that he was losing control: 'Things are happening that are not brought to my attention. I heard announcements on Israel radio and read about them afterwards in the newspapers without my knowing their real background.'<sup>61</sup> He summoned Lavon and Dayan (who did not arrive for the meeting) 'in order to put an end, once and for all, to the wild behaviour of crossing the border every Monday and Thursday without any thought to the bitter outcomes'.<sup>62</sup>

Operation Shott 6 demonstrated once again not only the lack of control and coordination permeating the upper echelons of the political arena, but also the operating force's lack of discipline and over-extended actions which deviated from operating orders and instructions and caused unneeded casualties. Dayan wrote to the head of GHQ and demanded an explanation for the deviation of the paratroopers: 'Why did Unit [i.e. Battalion] 890 act in contravention of the GHQ/Operations order concerning the manner of implementation of Shott 6?'<sup>63</sup>

In a letter to Defence Minister Lavon, Chief-of-Staff Dayan wrote:

I regard Operation Shot 6 as one of the military failures during this last period. Nevertheless, in the clash we emerged victors. But the execution of this operation in this manner is a serious breach of discipline among the highest ranks of the army. Instructions called for the prevention of killing. In place of this, the operation was carried out in the way it was carried out.<sup>64</sup>

The dispute between IDF command and Defence Minister Lavon in regard to the lack of control over operational forces and being dragged into unnecessary acts of murder along the borders continued after Dayan's letter. Both Sharett and Lavon sought to tighten their control over actions of the operational units and reduce the growing damage occurring in the border area. The IDF issued instructions that soldiers were not to open fire toward Israel's borders with its neighbours during their training exercises.



Infiltration activities as well as Egyptian intelligence operations provided the IDF with its justification to respond and to act along its borders on a daily basis.<sup>65</sup> Despite pressures applied by Sharett and Lavon, the IDF's rustling of cattle and the stealing of flocks, reconnaissance border incursions, sniper fire, provocative incidents such as raids to capture Egyptian and Jordanian officers and soldiers in order to exchange prisoners and numerous other operations continued. It was not within the power of the political echelon to halt and restrain the military operations conducted by the IDF units within the framework of routine security operations and the policy of retaliation.

## **The Gaza City Operation and Its Implications**

'Operation Black Arrow', the code-name for the raid on Gaza City on the evening of 28 February 1955, marked a turning point in the escalation process. The scope and outcomes of retaliation brought about a change not only in the positions of Egypt and Jordan, but also in the foreign policies of Britain and the United States towards the Middle East region. The raid on Gaza clarifies once more the part taken by the operational force, the paratroopers, as well as the uncertainty of the battlefield in the expansion of an operation above and beyond the intention of the political echelon and the operational orders themselves.

From the middle of 1954 to January 1955 there was relative quiet on the Gaza Strip border. The Egyptian Government sought to strengthen its control in the Gaza Strip, coping with unruly elements in the Muslim Brotherhood and Palestinian supporters of the mufti, Haji Amin el Husseini. It also dealt with infiltration activity from this territory into Israel, constraining and directing their activities according to its needs – among them intelligence gathering. Despite Israel's complaints, the Egyptians were trying to prevent infiltration, and in fact there was a significant decline in the number of border incidents during this period.<sup>66</sup> A report from the Intelligence Branch on Operation Gaza stated:

The second half of 1954 and the beginning of 1955 were marked by relative quiet along the demarcation line with Egypt, particularly following steps undertaken by the Egyptians to prevent infiltration and to curb elements disturbing the Egyptian regime. Regular Egyptian forces generally refrained from getting caught up in serious engagements with our forces.<sup>67</sup>

A combination of circumstances and occurrences from January 1955 prepared the ground for Operation Gaza. On 13 January 1955, Uri Ilan committed suicide in his prison cell after being badly tortured. Uri was a soldier in an Israeli Intelligence group who was taken prisoner by the Syrians during a military operation on the Golan Heights. On 18 January, two members of the Mevo Betar settlement were killed by infiltrators coming from Jordanian territory. On 21 January an IDF lookout fortification was attacked by an Egyptian unit. In this incident, an Israeli soldier was killed and two were injured. On 25 January two incidents occurred at the same time. In the first, an Israeli in the town of Rehovot was killed by infiltrators who came from the Gaza Strip. In the second incident, which took place at Kibbutz Ein HaShlosha, a tractor driver was killed and his comrade injured by Palestinian infiltrators from the Gaza Strip. On 31 January, Dr Moshe Marzuk and Shmuel Ezer, members of the Israeli espionage ring in Cairo, who were caught in the notorious case known as the 'Affair', were sentenced to death. The hanging of the accused, the suicides of two other members of the spy ring and the affair of the boat, the *Bat Galim*,<sup>68</sup> created an atmosphere of revenge on the Israeli street. The IDF waited for the

opportune moment to respond and strike the Egyptians.

Infiltration continued over the following months. In the last week of February, there was an incursion into Israel from the Gaza Strip of groups belonging to intelligence units and infiltrators who undertook intelligence gathering, engaged in sabotage and committed several murders. On 23 February, a group of infiltrators penetrated a security facility in Rishon LeTzion and stole maps and documents. This same group broke into the Biological Combat Institute at Nes Tziona and stole equipment and a telephone. On their way back to the Gaza Strip two days later, they killed Henry Levi, an Israeli citizen. This group twice encountered IDF forces on its return journey, and in the second engagement one of their members was killed.

On 23–24 February, intelligence-gathering groups entered Israel. One of the units was ambushed by IDF soldiers south-east of the Gaza Strip and fled, leaving behind one dead and intelligence reports. Tension along the Egyptian border mounted. The Egyptians regarded the return of Ben-Gurion to politics as Minister of Defence as a bad omen of things to come. The supreme command in the IDF rejoiced in his return to public service, and now saw the way clear for a policy of reprisal and active defence.

Battalion 890 received a warning order to prepare for a raid on a number of targets in the Gaza Strip, and waited for the operational order. On 27 February Operation Gaza was presented for the approval of the Prime Minister (Moshe Sharett) by the Defence Minister (Ben-Gurion) and the Chief-of-Staff (Moshe Dayan). Dayan, who for a long time had wanted to take revenge against the Egyptians and had not been able to convince Sharett in September 1954 ‘to stop the complacency of Cairo about what is occurring along the Gaza Strip borders and arouse them to take preventive action by means of a reprisal action of major dimensions’, now had his request granted.<sup>69</sup>

In the end, Operation Gaza was approved by Sharett. Against the background of recent occurrences in the Middle East – the signing of the Baghdad Pact, the bellicose pronouncements of the Egyptians and the feeling of isolation fostered by the American refusal to give security guarantees to Israel – he could not maintain his stance against the Chief-of-Staff, supported by David Ben-Gurion.

The Chief-of-Staff submitted the targets of the operation to those present. Two paratroop platoons would comprise the attacking force. Their mission would be the demolition of the military camp facilities. Dayan estimated that there would be about ten Egyptian casualties. Ben-Gurion said that if the Egyptians fled at the time of the operation, then there would be no casualties on the Egyptian side. Sharett warned against the unnecessary spilling of blood and the expansion of the operation beyond what was required, and Ben-Gurion requested an adjustment. Accordingly, in the operational order of GHQ, clause 5 was changed from ‘enemy soldiers will only be harmed if they interfere with the execution of the mission’ to ‘enemy soldiers will not be harmed unless this is essential for the carrying out the mission and for the defence of our soldiers’.<sup>70</sup>

The operational order gave permission to local command to enlarge the force in accordance with what was required to carry out the mission and to be supplied with weapons at battalion strength. The order stressed that the implementing force should be equipped and operate with weapons bearing no IDF marks. The commander of the paratroops, Ariel Sharon, after studying the plans for the mission, requested approval to include an additional number of targets within the area selected for the raid. He received permission to blow up the train station and the water tower which was situated alongside the army camp. In a request to the battalion’s intelligence officer, the demolition of the central telephone exchange tower was also approved.<sup>71</sup> During

these years, the granting of an expansion of the military operation was not an exceptional occurrence in the work procedures established by headquarters between the operational echelon and GHQ.

Sharon called up a company of recruits under Motta Gur and planned a wider operation which embraced three objectives: first, the army camp, which was situated along the railway tracks a kilometre north of Gaza City. The camp was 150 × 150 metres, surrounded by barbed-wire fencing, and contained a number of huts, tents and a warehouse. The second target, a water tower, was also enclosed with barbed wire and contained three stone buildings, a number of pup tents and a hut. The third target was the Gaza train station. This structure was located southwest of the army camp and contained many structures, warehouses and huts.

Israeli intelligence estimated that the objectives were protected by two platoons of the Egyptian army. The northern sector was guarded by a 'Palestinian division' with headquarters at Khan Yunis and reinforced by a company from the Camel Corps. There was information about an additional Egyptian company from the Eighth Battalion, which had responsibility for the southern sector of the Gaza Strip. The Israeli paratroops had British diagrams and maps from 1947 to aid them but these proved to be inaccurate. Knowing that the Egyptians could call upon rescue assistance from Gaza City and Khan Yunis, it was decided to place a blocking force at a road intersection six kilometres south of Gaza City.

Sharon's plan was to attack the objectives from the north, with the division of tasks arranged according to the targets:

- Company A, 40 soldiers under Saadia Elkiam ('Supapo') would attack the army camp and the water pumping station and sabotage various structures and facilities.
- Company D, 34 soldiers under Motta Gur, would capture the train station and sabotage structures.
- A reconnaissance platoon from the battalion, commanded by Dani Mat, would block the Gaza-Rafiah road for two hours at the beginning of the attack and destroy reinforcements travelling in the area of the operation.
- A platoon from Company A, consisting of 25 combatants under Moshe Yanukah, would secure the path of the incursion.
- A platoon from Company D, commanded by Company Sergeant-Major Avraham Chalawa, would serve as a reserve force.

The entire force numbered 149 combatants under the direct command of Ariel Sharon and his second-in-command, Aharon Davidi.

On the evening of 28 February, at 6:30 pm, the force began to move from the border kibbutz of Kfar Aza towards the demarcation line. The force crossed the border and immediately encountered an Egyptian patrol. The advance guard under Supapo charged the enemy force using grenades and killed three of the Egyptian soldiers. The factor of surprise for the entire Gaza operation was lost.

Sharon stuck to his plan of operations, and his forces continued to move toward their objectives while a reserve force secured their withdrawal route. The main force under Supapo identified a lit-up camp as the planned target, and the order to attack was advanced by half an hour. Companies A and D advanced to their assault positions, and the deputy battalion commander, Aharon Davidi, ordered Supapo to launch the attack. In fact, the lit-up location was the water tower, and company A, in attacking it, mistook the structure for the main army camp. The reason for the error was an old aerial photo which the paratroops had used in planning the

operation. A more serious mistake occurred later in the operation. The water pumping station was also manned by Egyptian forces. The incursion was accompanied by the tossing of grenades from trenches and three combatants were injured. The force burst into the building and cleaned it out. Only then did they realize their error.

The encampment west of the main road was the central objective and gunfire from the Egyptian force stationed there steadily increased. Company D, the force of Motta Gur, which constituted the reserve force, had already been sent towards the train station, and Davidi ordered Supapo to leave the water tower and assault the camp. Under heavy fire, Supapo's unit proceeded alongside the camp's perimeter fence towards the main gate but suffered heavy losses, including the death of Supapo. Davidi took over command, ordered a withdrawal, and directed the commander of company D, Motta Gur, to leave the train station and assist in the seizure of the army camp. Gur's forces, which had completed their occupation of the train station with two killed and a number of soldiers wounded, reorganized and joined the force which was completing the occupation of the army camp.

Following the occupation of the main military camp, Sharon transferred the tactical headquarters to the camp grounds itself, gathered the wounded together, and prepared for the withdrawal. Gur was delegated responsibility for carrying the dead and wounded. The return trip with improvised stretchers proved difficult and the paratroops encountered enemy ambushes which resulted in additional casualties. A medical team and ambulances met the returning forces at the border, evacuating the killed and wounded. The force continued to make its way to Kfar Aza, singing all the way.<sup>72</sup>

The Israeli casualty toll was eight killed and 13 wounded. Egyptian losses in the army camp, the pumping station and the train station numbered 14 killed and 15 wounded. In addition, two Palestinians were killed and an additional two wounded. Most Egyptian losses were incurred by the blocking force. The reconnaissance platoon under Shimon Kahaner ('Kacha'), which belonged to Dani Mat's blocking force, placed themselves as planned on the main Rafiah-Gaza road and waited for Egyptian reinforcements to pass. Despite troublesome fire from a nearby Egyptian guard post, the force did not return fire and continued to wait until a convoy of trucks travelling north with full headlights appeared. At 22:45 the blocking force opened fire with anti-tank launchers (bazookas) and machine-guns, halting the Egyptian force in its tracks. The shock was great and a majority of the Egyptian force fled, except for the lead truck of the convoy which had been caught in the fire of the ambush. The force assaulted the soldiers trapped under the truck tarpaulins, killing and wounding many. At midnight, a withdrawal order was given and at 02:00 the reconnaissance platoon arrived. The Egyptians sustained 22 dead and 14 wounded. The blocking force had one lightly wounded soldier.

The Gaza raid extracted a heavy price from the Egyptians. In the final count, they had 38 killed and 32 wounded. The honour of the Egyptian Government regime was sullied and President Nasser regarded the IDF operation as a threat to his regime. The president referred again and again to the severe shock caused by the Israeli attack and how it changed his basic outlook regarding the possibility of co-existence between the two countries. During this same period, Nasser had laboured diligently to impose his authority over the Egyptian leadership and there were fears that the results of the operation would bring about his downfall. Angry demonstrations against the Egyptian Government and UN observers took place in the Palestinian refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. The protests turned violent and four Palestinians were killed by the Egyptian army.

The impact of the Gaza operation found expression in a speech by Nasser before graduates of

the Egyptian Military Academy in Cairo. He spoke of the betrayal of allies, including the Security Council of the United Nations, as a factor in the defeat of the Egyptian army in Gaza. He then stated that Egypt would no longer rely upon the Security Council in all matters relating to Egypt's defence and if attacked would reply with military might.<sup>73</sup>

The Gaza operation was a major factor in Egypt signing an arms deal with Czechoslovakia, a step which accelerated the arms race and the pace of escalation, and finally led to the Sinai War. Up to the time of the Gaza Operation, the Egyptian Government sought to prevent infiltration into Israeli territory. After this event the number of shooting incidents between Egyptian posts and IDF patrols increased. Instances of infiltration accompanied by sabotage and murder, now under the control and direction of Egyptian Intelligence, expanded. Direct confrontation between Egypt and Israel became the dominant mode of relations between the two states.

The gap between the intentions of Sharett, and even those of Ben-Gurion, and the outcomes of the Gaza operation led to a fabricated announcement by the IDF spokesperson under the instruction of Ben-Gurion. The explanation released to the press was that an IDF force had been ambushed by the Egyptians. The IDF forces then pursued the Egyptians, crossing into the Gaza Strip.

On Monday evening at 21:00 hours, an IDF unit was attacked beside the ceasefire line opposite Gaza City. An intense battle ensued between the attacking Egyptian force and the Israeli unit which began in Israeli territory and continued into the territory of the Gaza Strip. The enemy force was repulsed. After contact ceased, our unit returned to its base. The unit suffered a number of casualties.<sup>74</sup>

Moshe Sharett, who was a leading opponent of the policy of reprisal raids, regarded the approval of Operation Gaza as his greatest failure as Prime Minister. Privately addressing Ben-Gurion, he wrote:

To DBG, first reflections on the operation last night: 1. I suppose –although I am not entirely certain – that the shift from 10 – the number I heard from the Chief-of-Staff – to 37 came about as an unavoidable result of the military chain of events. But we must be aware that in these matters quantity becomes quality, and the number of casualties gives the entire occurrence a totally different character from what we intended. 2. According to the news, the Egyptians are about to turn not to the mixed Armistice Commission but directly to the Security Council. The meaning of this is that after a lengthy interlude we again will sit in the dock of the accused and our difficult task will be to appear as the victims of evil. I am instructing our representatives in this direction, for the purposes of disseminating information to other governments and the press. 3. The IDF spokesman's version, that the battle developed from an Egyptian strike against us will be denied by the Egyptians to the UN and the press and it will perhaps be proven to be false. The maintenance of this version by our representatives is liable to cause an additional complication for us in the Security Council. It may well be that we cannot avoid this, although I am not sure that a deeper consideration would not have led us to avoid publicizing a story of untruth, which must be obvious at first sight, in the light of the facts.

(M.S.)

And he added:

4. This deed will make our information dissemination more difficult, as well as our pressure on

the government and the public in the United States against our security isolation. On the other hand, it also proves the danger entailed in this isolation. In this respect, there are both pros and cons, and I hope the first possibility won't win.<sup>75</sup>

In the Mapai Political Committee meeting of 16 October 1955 Sharett presented Nasser's view of the operation:

28 February was a serious turning point for him – the evening of the attack on Gaza. Until then he was inclined to believe in the assurances of America and England... that Israel was a state which had a deep interest in peace and that its desire to reach peace with Arab countries was intense.... But along came the evening of 28 February. This was for him a tremendous shock. It opened his eyes. It destroyed his faith in England and America. He came to believe that they were a cover for the evil intentions of Israel.<sup>76</sup>

Ben-Gurion rejected Sharett's claims outright and at the weekly meeting of the government on 6 March he reported to the government as Minister of Defence on the operation. Ben-Gurion emphasized his strict order not to harm civilians except to the extent necessary to implement the mission and to safeguard the lives of soldiers.

Ben-Gurion defined the actions of the soldiers as the 'height of bravery' and added that if the Israelis had a unit like this in the War of Independence, they would have liberated the entire city of Jerusalem and even captured Latrun. Pinhas Rosen, Minister of Justice, was the only one who opposed the operation:

I openly admit that I am not among those mentioned by the Prime Minister as accepting this operation willingly... I too praise the Israeli heroism that was again revealed in this operation. But I am of the opinion that the benefit of this operation is questionable. Even if in the eyes of its planners it could have reinforced our security, it is still of very questionable benefit in my opinion because of its great political and economic cost.<sup>77</sup>

Rosen went on to claim that the operation was a hard blow for Israeli tourism and financial investment from abroad, and that he had doubts whether in fact internal security would be strengthened and the murderous acts committed from the Egyptian border would be reduced. 'We never learned this from experience.... I am certain that this operation will increase the number of killings, robberies and other responses of the Egyptians, and as to security, where will these acts get us to, what will we do next time?'<sup>78</sup> The Justice Minister continued his attack and claimed that operations of this kind would in the end lead to war and would provide an excuse for the United States to arm the Arabs and they would unite the Arab League against Israel. Ben-Gurion rejected each and every one of his claims and remained firm and forceful in his opinion that 'the Jewish world and the Jewish people in our land should know that our might is greater than all the Arab states. Not all of the world knows that.'<sup>79</sup>

Minister Peretz Bernstein (General Zionists) also spoke against the fabricated announcement of the IDF spokesperson and claimed that it caused damage to the credibility and name of the IDF. In his view, the IDF response to incidents did not improve the security situation on the borders and the murders would continue just the same after the responses of the IDF.

However, the foregoing were isolated voices, and in effect most speakers expressed views in line with Ben-Gurion's pronouncements on the issue. Such near unanimity of outlook among Israel's political leadership allowed Ben-Gurion to ignore any demand for ministerial

participation in decision-making on security matters. His charismatic personality left Moshe Sharett in the shadows and, more than that, the latter's policy and position were hardly heard in the political arena, despite the fact that he was Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

Ben-Gurion rejected criticism of the political implications stemming from the military raid. In his view, building deterrence and IDF strength in the face of the strongest Arab nations were more important because of their contribution to self-confidence in the Yishuv and the IDF. The outcomes of the operation, in his view, held no importance for the major powers and in any case they would favour the Arab states because of their possession of strategic and broad expanses of territory, the size of their population, and the oil resources found in their territories. Ben-Gurion then asked for government approval to thank the paratroops for their heroism and sacrifice in the name of the entire government and received its consent.

It should be pointed out that Sharett's forecast with regard to the policy of the United States and Britain was verified within a short time. The major powers censured the operation and Israel was given a severe warning of the consequences expected if this aggressive policy continued. The United States suspended the examination of Israeli requests for defence assistance, and Secretary of State Dulles wrote to Sharett that 'the United States would have to reassess its consideration of these requests in order to take account of the raid which has rekindled animosities in the area'.<sup>80</sup> Britain, too, stopped the planned shipping of Centurion tanks to Israel.

Within the defence establishment, Operation Gaza was regarded as a great victory. Reverberations from the action raised morale in IDF units and in the general population. At a Battalion 890 victory parade, Ben-Gurion appeared in khaki uniform, a form of dress he loved to wear on military occasions, and paid tribute to the soldiers in a military parade organized in his honour.

The Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, read Ben-Gurion's letter to the soldiers of the Battalion:

By appointment of the government I have been asked to bring to the unit which took part in the battle, to the soldiers and commanders of the entire paratroop unit, feelings of pride and appreciation for the spirit of Jewish heroism displayed in this battle. The love of the people in Israel is bestowed upon this paratroop unit which again proved, before the entire world, the pre-eminence of Jewish heroism, and added a glorious page in the recital of Israel Defence Force victories. Your courage, your unlimited dedication, your physical and moral fitness, will serve as an example to every soldier in Israel's Defence Force and to all the youth in our people.

Ben-Gurion signed the letter with the words 'in fondness and admiration'.<sup>81</sup>

The paratroopers and their leader, Ariel Sharon, continued to mourn their comrades who fell in this battle, but were proud of Ben-Gurion's letter and the wave of appreciation and admiration they received from the public at large. Ben-Gurion told a group of officers: 'You are the first. The IDF will continue to draw lessons from your methods and your incomparability. There is one thing that no one can take from you – your originality.'<sup>82</sup>

No one can deny or diminish the bravery of the paratroopers or the mythological role they played in the reversal of values and combat doctrine of the IDF stemming from this military encounter and those that followed. It is the combatants' duty to achieve victory in every action and in every battle, and in this the paratroops laid the basis for the revolutionary changes that occurred throughout all the combat units of the IDF. These values include dedication to the mission, the will to volunteer, courage and personal example and comradeship among combatants who never leave their wounded comrades behind on the battlefield. All these became assets of inalienable value for all IDF units, commanders and soldiers alike.

The question regarding the pre-eminence of activism and the ability of the senior echelons to control it so as to limit undesirable externalities remained an open issue for the leadership. The statesmen and politicians, who sought to control and direct a policy so it would not lead to the type of military adventurism and escalation that occurred following the Gaza operation, had to take into consideration the grave outcomes arising from an assault on an major Egyptian military base, as well as the course of battle, the results of which no one could forecast. An analysis of the decision-making process, military planning and the course of the battle once again demonstrates the role of the operative unit in the expansion of the mission as a result of the constraints of military planning, as well as the pressures of various company commanders to take part in the operation.

The Gaza operation was a turning point in the process of deterioration of the political climate between Israel and its Arab neighbours, although it would be excessive to assign to this military event definitive responsibility for all the elements connected with the escalation process. Operation Gaza and its outcomes should not be isolated from the rest of the factors that drove the Egyptian president to adopt a bellicose and aggressive policy which brought about an arms race and the Sinai War. Nasser's considerations were much broader than the local conflict. They included the standing of Egypt in the Arab world, as well as its relations to the major powers and especially its approach to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, his assessment of the power relations between Israel and Egypt in the light of the Gaza clash undoubtedly contributed to his decision to prepare for an armed confrontation and to arm the Egyptian military forces as quickly as possible in anticipation of a 'second round'.

## **Operation Elkayam**

On 24 August 1955, the President of Egypt announced the cessation of all negotiations with Israel and sent fedayeen forces to attack Israel. A fedayeen unit under Mustafa Hafaz, head of military Egyptian intelligence in the Gaza Strip, was reinforced towards the end of 1955. Its strength consisted of 600 men in four companies. The fedayeen operations were intended to sow dissension and reap destruction, to disrupt transportation routes and, in short, to create panic in Israel. On the evening of 25 August the area commander of Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was killed. That same evening, the fedayeen blew up water-pumping facilities and planted mines beside the Erez junction. On 27 August, an attack on an Israeli car travelling toward Ashkelon killed one Israeli soldier and injured two civilians. The following day, two Israeli soldiers were killed and two were injured when their car hit a mine beside Be'eri. That same day, Egyptian planes penetrated Israeli air space. On 30 August, fedayeen undertook actions in the Koviva transit camp, close to Rehovot. One man was killed and four women and children injured. That same evening, four Israeli workers were killed in the orchards of Beit Oved, bordering Rehovot. The murderous deeds of the fedayeen continued. Four civilians were killed when their car was attacked; grenades were tossed at a house at Beit Nahala.

The trail of death and destruction was designed to undermine public confidence in the government and the Israeli military, to induce emigration from the state and reduce immigration to the state.<sup>83</sup> Moshe Dayan demanded an expansive retaliatory operation but was forced to acquiesce in a first-stage operation, as was already stated, in small-scale operations along the Gaza Strip border. After he had handed in a letter of resignation, and in the light of the continuation of fedayeen activity, Dayan's request for military action was approved on the



evening of 30 August. At GHQ it was decided to attack the headquarters of the Palestinian Brigade stationed at the Khan Yunis Police Station on the evening of the 30–31 August 1955.

Operational Order No. 1 of the Operations Branch/GHQ to the headquarters officer at Central Command defined the intent and method as follows:

*The Intent:*

3. Assault on police station at Khan Yunis, inflicting damage on it and harm to its occupants.

*The Method:*

4. Implementation on the evening of 30–31.8.55.

5. Half-tracks will be sent over the border – if they are needed to carry out the mission.

6. Rescue of our forces and evacuation of the injured must be carried out even if this requires occupation of any Egyptian military position which is in the way.<sup>84</sup>

The final operational order sent down to unit commanders that same day was resolute and reinforced the first operational order. It dictated the occupation of military emplacement 132, the insertion of offerees and a great quantity of explosives on half-tracks, and widespread damage to enemy forces. The order given to the operational force stated:

1. Occupation of the police building in Khan Yunis for the purpose of demolishing it and the headquarters of the Palestinian units stationed there. A major strike with maximum effect against military personnel and structures in the building and courtyard.
2. Occupation of military emplacement 132 at the entrance to Kfar Abbasan in order to secure withdrawal and the destruction of the force located in it.
3. Avoidance of harm to civilians... and absolute avoidance of harm to women and children.
4. Implementation on the night of 30–31 August
5. The half-tracks will operate beyond the border...<sup>85</sup>

The raid was officially code-named ‘Operation Elkayam’ in memory of Saadya Elkayam, a company commander who fell in Operation Gaza on 28 February 1955. The Khan Yunis police station was situated east of the town, about six kilometres from the Israeli border. The building was named the British Taggart Police Station, a two-storey structure with two towers. Along with neighbouring tent encampments and other structures, it housed a company of infantry, headquarters personnel and police.

The second objective in this operation was the taking of emplacement position 132, which dominated the Khan Yunis road and was vital for securing the withdrawal route. Two squads armed with light weapons and machine guns were stationed at the emplacement. Plans drawn up at battalion headquarters called for the use of half-tracks for the first time in a reprisal raid. Their presence allowed for the swift and protected movement of advancing forces, provided an element of surprise, shortened operational time in enemy territory and afforded rapid withdrawal with more comfortable means of evacuating the wounded under the protection of armoured combat vehicles. In addition, the half-tracks could transport heavy arms, such as anti-tank weapons, assault forces armed with heavy machine guns and troops carrying hundred of kilograms of explosives for demolishing the police headquarters.

Company D under Motta Gur was given the main mission of assaulting the police station and blowing up the structure after overcoming any resistance. To carry out this assault, the force received 12 half-tracks. Company E under the command of Rafael Eytan (Raful) was ordered to

take emplacement 132 and hold it until IDF forces returned to Israeli territory.

Egyptian reinforcements from the north and south were blocked by two platoons: platoon 'D' set up barricades to the north and south of Khan Yunis on the coastal road; platoon C, undersized, using half-tracks and jeeps, constituted a reserve and rescue force.

Central Command approved the battalion's plans, including the request for half-tracks, but the latter did not arrive until 19:00 hours. Ariel Sharon, battalion commander, decided to postpone the operation. The desire to carry out a mounted vehicle operation and to exploit all the advantages contained in this system determined the timing of the operation as well as its outcomes. Motta Gur's forces set out on the evening of 31 August mounted on 12 half-tracks. One of the vehicles broke down 300 metres from the border and its occupants were randomly assigned to the 11 remaining vehicles. In a navigational error, the force went through Bnei Suheila and quickly moved towards the police station. The convoy of half-tracks was spotted by the enemy several hundred metres from the military placement at the highway junction and machine-gun fire was directed on it from this position and from the police station as well. The premature detection of the force necessitated a change of operational plans. Gur decided to avoid attacking the police station and instructed his driver to break through to the building east of it. The driver erred and the command vehicle penetrated the fenced perimeter of the police station and came to a halt between the police station and the hospital next to it. The force stood between the two military emplacements: the hospital and the police station. The enemy forces stopped firing for fear of hitting their own forces. Two additional half-tracks from the battalion were stopped close to the Khan Yunis junction and opened fire on the tent encampment and the mosque which was close to the police station. The force took cover for 15 minutes until they broke through the police station doors. A rearguard force of the battalion gained control of the hospital and the junction position, both of which were unoccupied by enemy soldiers, except for three who were killed in the fighting for control of these objectives.

The breach force blew up the internal enclosures of the police station with the help of specially-prepared small explosives and an additional force reached the entrance doors of the police station. A grenade was thrown at the team breaking through the doorway, injuring the commander, Mordechai Gur, and an assault pioneer. Gur managed to evacuate himself to the half-tracks and his second-in-command took over the operation. Until the final breakthrough at the entrance was accomplished, several additional combatants were injured by the specially-prepared small explosives and 17 kg of explosives. The ground floor of the police station was cleaned out by the paratroopers and explosive charges were laid. The battalion's demolition officer, Irmi Bardanov, and his team, put in place 500 kilograms of explosives pre-wrapped in plastic bags. The forces returned to the half-tracks on the Khan Yunis road where they made a check-count of all the wounded they had evacuated. Fifteen minutes after they placed the explosives, there was a terrific explosion and the front of the police station structure collapsed. At 22:45 the deputy commander of the battalion announced that the mission had been accomplished and the force had suffered nine casualties. The force continued and blew up the hospital and the petrol station nearby, and then began their withdrawal. A half-track which served as a rearguard tossed grenades into the yards of the village houses at Banei Suhalein on their way back in order to generate shock and to prevent any interference with the withdrawing force.

The occupation of emplacement 132 was carried out by 135 combatants from company E commanded by Rafael Eytan. The force advanced on foot and at 21:30 crossed the border. After softening up the objective with artillery fire, the force attacked the emplacement and found that it

had been abandoned shortly before the attacking force arrived. Emplacement positions were blown up and the force took up surveillance positions to cover the withdrawal of company D. An Egyptian force which tried to approach the neighbouring Abbasan emplacement was discovered and hit by a security force. The task forces did not encounter any Egyptian forces. The platoon commander of the southern blocking force blew up the train tracks and several telegraph poles on his way back.

Elkayam Operation was completed after midnight on 1 September. The attacking force had one killed and 17 wounded. In this operation 72 Egyptians were killed and 58 wounded. During the operation, the front wall of the police building, the hospital, petrol station, positions in emplacement 132 and a number of buildings in the village of Abbasan were destroyed.

The reprisal raid on Elkayam constituted an additional phase in the escalation process and reflected once again the dynamic influence of the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, on the decision-making process. Dayan from the beginning wanted an operation of great strength that would rock the Egyptian regime at its foundations and force it to bring the fedayeen raids to an end. The first-time use of mounted armour in the raid was a significant escalation in the retaliation policy. The major advantages in using these vehicles were mobility, surprise and the quantity of weapons and ammunition which the combatants could carry to their objective. The half-tracks allowed a rapid approach to the target while overcoming ambushes and obstructions with a minimum of casualties.

The large quantity of explosives permitted the demolition of the front of the police station, the hospital and the petrol station and in effect left a conspicuous impression of destruction in the entire area. The operation served as a model in the IDF armoured reprisal raids for many years to come.

Operation Khan Yunis led to a ceasefire initiated by the UN on 4 September. Nasser and the Egyptian government halted the fedayeen operations from the Egyptian border and sought to prevent further escalation which would unsettle Egyptian control of the Gaza Strip and even lead to war.

## **Operation Sabcha – A Milestone in the Policy of Deterioration**

Operation Sabcha, code-named ‘Har-Ga’ash’ [Volcano], was the largest reprisal action undertaken by the IDF since the War of Independence. The operation took place on the evening of 2–3 November 1955 and was conducted in response to the incursion of an Egyptian force into the demilitarized zone and its taking control of fortified positions at Sabcha and Ras Siras. The operation followed a rise in tension along the Egyptian border, marked by border incidents and reprisal actions which became more pronounced since Operation Gaza in February of that year. Operation Sabcha constituted a milestone in the transition from a tactical conception of reprisal actions and a war against infiltration and terror to a strategic confrontation between states. The pretext for the military confrontation on the Egyptian border during the September–November period was not connected to infiltration activity but rather the struggle over control of the demilitarized zone of Auja–Nitzana and the determination of a defined border with Egypt in the area.

Beyond the political aspects which concern the demand of Israel to have its control over the demilitarized zone recognized, there were important military objectives associated with Operation Sabcha. The IDF at this time was deeply engaged in drawing up war plans which covered more than half the Sinai peninsula and the Gaza Strip. The operational plans ‘Omer’ and ‘Shahar’<sup>86</sup> called for IDF control of the demilitarized zone as a central route for the potential occupation of the Sinai.

Since the announcement of Egyptian arms purchases from Czechoslovakia following Operation Gaza, Chief-of-Staff Dayan increasingly pressed for a preventive war. Operation Sabcha was to serve as tactical support for the ‘policy of deterioration’ through which Dayan hoped to bring about an early clash with the Egyptian army, to harm and even to topple the Egyptian regime. In the fall of 1955, fearing that its capacity for deterrence was waning, IDF commanders led by the Chief-of-Staff sought to escalate the situation, expand retaliatory operations and initiate a preventive war. Isser Harel, head of the Mossad (Israel’s intelligence service) suggested occupying the Gaza Strip and causing the fall of the Egyptian president. Yehoshafat Harkabi, head of the intelligence branch at GHQ, also put forward the same suggestion, fearing a progressively strengthened Egyptian military force relative to Israeli military capacity.

In 1955, Dayan had already pressed for major military action to seize the Straits of Tiran. His military conception was that a ‘second round’ between Egypt and Israel was an inevitable reality and it was better that Israel take the initiative. Dayan’s ‘policy of deterioration’ exploited Israeli claims of Egyptian violations of clauses in the ceasefire agreements. He desired massive military strikes which would activate an Egyptian response and thus provide the pretext for an all-out

attack on the Straits of Tiran and the Gaza Strip.

## **The Dispute Over the Demilitarized Zone At Auja**

In the context of infiltration, acts of robbery and terror along Israel's borders and the policy of retaliation undertaken by the IDF against Arab policy, a crisis with Egypt developed towards the end of 1955 over the plotting of the border in the demilitarized zone. The UN General Assembly Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947 provided for the inclusion of the Nitzana area in Arab state territory. During the course of the War of Independence, Arab forces had advanced into Israel via Nitzana and proceeded north-east to Beersheva, establishing military lodgements along the Nitzana–Beer Mashabim route.

In Operation Horev, which began on 22 December 1948, forces of the Eighth, Harel and Negev brigades attacked fortified emplacements at Hatmilia, Bir Aslogi and Auja el-Hafir, while the Golani Brigade conducted a feint operation towards the Gaza Strip. On 27 December 1948 armoured forces from the Eighth Brigade and Battalion 9 of the Negev Brigade raided Tel Auja and its adjacent settlement. That same day, the Beersheva–Auja road was opened to IDF vehicle movement.

In the ceasefire agreement with Egypt signed on 24 November 1949, the area around Auja el-Hafir (Nitzana) was declared a demilitarized zone. The Mixed Armistice Commission was located in houses in the village, and armed forces were not permitted to enter the zone. In the agreement, the nearest Egyptian forces would be stationed in the area of Quseima and Abu Ageila. Following this agreement there were various interpretations of the Armistice Agreement which brought about changes leading to the positioning of Egyptian forces in forward positions within the demilitarized zone. The Armistice Commission, which allowed the establishment of Egyptian military emplacements on the Egyptian side, did not permit Israel *quid pro quo* rights on the Israeli side of the demilitarized zone. In 1953, Nahal military settlements were erected at Givat Rahel (Ketsiy'ot). Under the designation of 'an agricultural settlement', Israel sent military forces and weapons into the zone and it became an active centre against smuggling by Bedouin tribes and the infiltration of fedayeen engaged in sabotage and intelligence-gathering.

Except for the Nahal settlement at Ketsiy'ot and an additional IDF emplacement disguised as a police checkpoint at Be'erota'im, there were no additional Israeli settlements in the demilitarized zone. The closest Israeli settlements to the border were Mashabei Sadeh, Sde-Boker and Revivim, about 40 kilometres from Nitzana. At the beginning of 1955, an agreement was reached between Israeli and Egyptian representatives to mark the border along the entire demilitarized zone. On 5 August, this task was completed. Israel regarded these boundaries as markers of the permanent border with Egypt, thus strengthening its claim over Israeli control of Nitzana in the demilitarized zone. During the marking of the border, it became apparent that two Egyptian emplacements were within the area defined as Israeli territory. UN observers confirmed the Israeli claim but the Egyptians did not accept the newly-placed border markers and destroyed them at the beginning of September. On 21 September, an IDF force took over the demilitarized zone in violation of the Armistice Agreement and evicted the Egyptian military unit which was stationed at UN headquarters.

The Nitzana incident was an example of excessive initiative on the part of the operational echelon. The military unit was ordered to enter the zone without violence and then declare that they would leave only after the Egyptians vacated the demilitarized zone. However, the

execution of this operation was completely different. The military unit entered the Auja camp, injured two Egyptian soldiers, took over the Armistice Commission huts and pushed out the Egyptian force stationed there. Ben-Gurion admitted that this should not have been done and suggested that Israel apologize to the Egyptians through General E.L.M. Burns, Chief-of-Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervising Organization (UNTSO), and that Israel did not object to the return of the Egyptians to Auja.

Nehemia Argov, Ben-Gurion's military secretary, told Sharett in a telephone conversation: 'Deputy Chief-of-Staff Haim Laskov maintains that our forces committed a serious crime at Nitzana. The order in its original form did not deviate from the final briefings... but there were grave shortcomings in implementation.'<sup>87</sup> An entry in Sharett's diary reads:

This wild deviation from a clear and detailed summation of yesterday's consultations has caused me convulsions. Has the Chief-of-Staff added his own personal touch or has the local commander cast off all disciplinary restraint and gone on a rampage? It makes no difference how this serious mishap came about. It is clear that we are again facing convincing evidence of the obtuse instincts of the IDF and its fermenting desire to run amok.<sup>88</sup>

IDF forces vacated the zone after the Egyptians agreed to the completion of work marking the border. The crisis over the demilitarized zone led to Egypt's demand to expel all Israeli presence, both military and civilian, from the demilitarized zone. They also demanded the evacuation of the Nahal military settlements at Ketsiy'ot which had been established in 1953 in order to establish clear facts with regard to control of the zone.

On 26 October 1955, Egyptian forces attacked the IDF emplacement at Be'erota'im. One IDF soldier was killed, two were wounded and two were captured. Additional forces took over Sabcha and entrenched themselves in the area.<sup>89</sup> IDF retaliation came in the form of Operation Egged, conducted on the evening of 28–29 October at Kuntilla. A paratroop battalion under Ariel Sharon raided the military guard at Kuntilla, not far from the Israeli port of Eilat on the Red Sea. Two hundred combatants participated in a raid which occupied and destroyed the police post there. The Egyptians counted 12 killed, six wounded and 29 taken prisoner. Two soldiers from the raiding party were killed and two were wounded.<sup>90</sup>

Following the report on the Kuntilla operation, Ben-Gurion instructed the Chief-of-Staff to react sharply if the Egyptians launched a counter-attack: 'If the Egyptians undertake a real response – the IDF will occupy Khan Yunis and Rafiah. If the Egyptians use planes – the Israeli Air Force will attack the airfields along the Suez Canal.'<sup>91</sup>

Operation Kuntilla was, in fact, a deception designed to give the IDF time to organize its forces for war on all the Egyptian fronts should the broad military operation at Sabcha develop according to the 'policy of deterioration'.

Dayan instructed the paratroop commander at Kuntilla, an area quite distant from Sabcha, to carry out a diversionary operation. The IDF continued with its intensive preparation for Operation Sabcha and, parallel with this, prepared its forces in the likelihood that the situation would deteriorate and war would actually break out. On 31 October the following was recorded in the diary of the Chief-of-Staff:

Discussion on planning for emergency. Agreed that responsibility for the home front during war is that of the government departments and the army is not to attend to civilian problems. The government will appoint committees for different areas and the army will send its representatives. Moshe [Dayan] gives his approval to the Air Force to film Cairo and the Canal

tomorrow.<sup>92</sup>

The IDF mobilized reserves, concentrated considerable forces and prepared to implement Operation Shahar, the occupation of the Gaza Strip. In the framework of Operation Sabcha and the preparation for an expanded response, all the regular and reserve units were placed under Southern Command: tank battalion 279, an armoured company from Battalion 9, a company from the 82nd Brigade of the Armoured Corps, the Golani Brigade, the Fifth Brigade – comprising Givati, Nahal units and the paratroops, Engineering Battalion 601, Artillery Battalions 403 and 404, the 1 lth Brigade from Central Command and additional supportive combat units and logistics which were intended to give a response to anticipated developments. Likewise, the air force and navy were placed on alert, and pilots, as well as maintenance and ordnance teams from the airforce were mobilized.<sup>93</sup> Anyone who examines the IDF orders for Operation Sabcha cannot but be impressed by the full operational alert and preparation for a broad-based, major military strike in case the Sabcha Operation triggered an Egyptian response that would justify a response of such magnitude.

It was the Chief-of-Staff who prepared Operation Sabcha on such a grand scale in hopes of launching a ‘detonation wave’ which would lead to the real campaign, namely the occupation of the Gaza Strip and the fall of Nasser’s regime.

## **Operation Sabcha**

Operation ‘Volcano’, the code-name for the Sabcha Operation, was the most extensive undertaking by the IDF since Operation Horev in the War of Independence. In an appendix from Intelligence which was attached to the order for Operation Har Ga’ash, Southern Command surveyed and analysed the contours of the territory, the lay of the land, and the deployment of Egyptian forces.<sup>94</sup> The area in which the operation was to take place is divided by Wadi Siram and the Sabcha Valley into three blocks: the Mount Ezuz area (Jebel Aziz), which reaches a height of 717 metres, and its mountain range, whose ridge is cut by the Quseima-Nitzana road, which overlooks it in two directions. Second, the Jebel Sabcha block climbs to a height of 451 metres and dominates the wadi and the road from the other side. Third, the hills of Jebel el-Atar extend northward to Sabcha and complete the domination over Wadi Siram. The Sabcha area, which is inside the demilitarized zone, is characterized by rocky heights and large flint rocks. The soil is not porous and thus enemy emplacements are basically surface structures and fortified posts are earth embankments which do not provide protection against bombardment. Because of the river beds and numerous channels which criss-cross the area, navigation is difficult.

The responsibility for the entire zone was given to the Seventh Infantry Brigade. They were deployed throughout the area. Brigade headquarters was located at Abu Agila and beside it was Battalion 3, a mobile reserve force. Infantry Battalion 7 was stationed at emplacements on the Abu Agila–Nitzana route. Infantry Battalion 16 was concentrated in army camps. Battalion 333 (‘Fedayun’) took up positions at emplacements in the demilitarized zone and carried out ambushes and reconnaissance in the sector. A field artillery battalion was entrenched within the perimeter of Umm Katef. At the same location was an antitank squadron. The principal force was a reinforced company of Sherman tanks (a total of 16–24 tanks). Infantry Battalion 11 was responsible for the demilitarized zone in the Quseima sector. Two companies were stationed at Quseima and two companies occupied emplacements in the demilitarized zone. Battalion 336,

the 'Fedayeen', under the command of Battalion 11, also manned posts in the demilitarized zone.

Company 4 – mobile armoured guard – 14 armoured Staghounds with 37 mm canon and 14 upgraded jeeps. Headquarters for company 5 – border vehicles (platoons from the company at emplacement 250 and emplacement 256). The Egyptian objectives which the companies were supposed to attack were emplacements in Wadi Siram and Sabcha, as follows:

### ***Emplacements in Wadi Siram***

*Emplacement 260A, Emplacement Rivka*: situated on two banks of the wadi, joined by barbed-wire fence and defended by land mines. The emplacement was manned by an infantry platoon reinforced by two anti-tank cannons and two medium machine-guns.

*Emplacement Tamar – 260*: on a hill at border marker 372, west of the Rivka emplacements, manned by two infantry squads.

*Emplacement 312 – Emplacement Rina*: a company emplacement held by a unit of platoon force. Manned with four to five vehicles. Sectoral reserve force.

*Emplacement 262*: situated south-west of Emplacement 260. A number of tents and two vehicles.

*Emplacement 263*: discovered abandoned.

### ***Emplacements in Sabcha Area***

A deployment of defensive battalions reinforced by soldiers from Battalion 11 who manned the emplacements 'Lili' and 'Tova' in Greater Sabcha.

*Emplacement 265 (Lili)*: manned by two platoons equipped with heavy machine guns, mortars and anti-tank weapons. The emplacement was extensive, protruding into Israeli territory.

*Emplacement 265A (Tova)*: south of 'Lili', manned by an infantry platoon.

*Emplacement 268 (Miriam)*: a concentration of reserve forces of platoon strength from Battalion 11. In the evening, the soldiers reinforced forward emplacements. There were possibilities for company-level reinforcement of emplacements beyond the existing local reserves stationed at emplacement 268, located in Quseima. An additional reinforcement group could arrive, but only from the Abu Ageila area.

Opposite the Egyptian forces, the IDF positioned a force approximating the size of a brigade which included a paratroop battalion reinforced by two reserve companies, a battalion from the Golani Brigade and soldiers from the Nahal squad commanders' course.

Battalion 890, reinforced with a Nahal company, was divided into six subdivisions:

*Force A*: company E from Battalion 890 under Rafael Eytan, reserve company A and company B, under the command of Musa Efron, all under the battalion command of Aharon Davidi, were given the mission of occupying emplacement 'Lili' and the positions around it.

*Force B*: a company of graduates from squad course under the command of Tzvi Levanon whose objective was occupation of emplacement 'Tova', emplacement 265 A.

*Force C*: company A, a reconnaissance unit under Meir Har-Tzion whose objective was the



Greater Sabcha emplacement, including emplacement 268, and the establishing of a base at Sabcha.

*Force D:* two reservist platoons under Elisha Shalem and Yehuda Reshef; a reserve force.

*Force E:* two platoons from company D under the command of Tibi Shapira whose task was to block any movement of enemy reinforcements on the Quseima–Sabcha route. The roadblock was set up 8 km south of the area of the military operation.

*Force F:* a jeep platoon and machine-gun platoon under Levi Hofesh, which joined the operation in a supporting capacity. The attacking force received the support of three batteries of 120 mm mortars, two squads of 81mm mortars and a battery of 175 cannon.

Battalion 12 of the Golani Brigade under Lieutenant Colonel Uri Bar-Ratzon was assigned the task of occupying ‘Rivka’ and ‘Tamar’. Kalman Magen of company B received the order to take emplacements ‘Rivka 1’ and ‘Rivka 2’. The 13th Battalion of the Golani would constitute a brigade reserve force during the occupation phase.

The start of Operation Har Ga’ash was scheduled for 2 November 1955 at 20:00 hours.

### **The Battle for the Sabcha Emplacements<sup>95</sup>**

On 2 November at 17:45, Battalion 890 and a Nahal company arrived at the designated staging area in Nahal Ezuz. Combatants from the Golani brigade reached their staging area at Ketsiy’ot at 18:00 hours. The force began to move out from Mount Ezuz at 19:00, passed over the crest and descended its slopes in a north-west direction. Because of the moonlight, the force travelled close to the mountain on a path which led to Sabcha. The infantry were led by the reconnaissance forces of Meir Har-Tzion; behind him were the troops of Rafael Eytan, then the command staff of Sharon, the squad commands of Nahal under Tzvika Levanon and Motta Gur pulling up the rear.

The last intelligence report received before the operation indicated changes to previous information about the enemy. This necessitated a change of plans. Sharon, commander of the operation forces, altered the attack plan and instead of attacking from south to north, decided to attack from east to west. Artillery targets were changed accordingly.

Fifteen minutes before zero hour, a convoy of the 890th Battalion began to move out from Ketsiy’ot in the direction of Sabcha. The convoy, comprising 30 vehicles with headlamps fully lit, gave the impression of a large force about to launch an attack. It may be supposed that this feint unsettled the morale of the Egyptian forces in the emplacements. The raining down of artillery on the objectives selected by Battalion 890 began at 21:50 and continued for ten minutes more than the designated time. Rafael Eytan’s forces arrived within 150 metres of the ‘Lili’ emplacement, and those of Levanon to within 300 metres of emplacement ‘Tova’. Both forces launched assaults while the shells were still falling on the Egyptian positions. The charge of Eytan’s platoons on the headquarters and northern posts stunned the Egyptians and they immediately fled. The majority of Egyptian losses in this emplacement occurred in the initial phase of the fighting. Eytan’s forces continued the assault without any order, leaving positions and ground which had not been cleared of enemy soldiers.

Company B came under effective enemy fire from the dominant terrain of the mountain slope. The company returned fire and silenced the source from which the rounds were fired. The force, continuing its advance towards the mortar position, its next objective, encountered machine-gun

fire from an ammunition dump stored in a cave and camouflaged by a net. The force fired a rocket into the cave and silenced the machine-gun nest. The net caught fire and the storage area exploded. Explosions continued for more than two hours from this storage depot. During the assault, a number of soldiers from the force were injured.

Company B under Musa Efron was composed of cadets. When the shelling ceased, they followed their commander in the assault on the position but did not encounter any resistance. One of the force's platoons passed an Egyptian position without detecting the presence of enemy soldiers. The Egyptians opened fire and the company commander ordered the third platoon to assault the position while the other two platoons assaulted the Egyptian position from the rear. The Egyptians actively defended their position and the battle turned into hand-to-hand combat. The attack from both forward and rear positions confused the Egyptians and part of their contingent fled. After the occupation of positions 2 and 3 in the Lili emplacement, Egyptian forces took flight. The company took over the military positions and set up a defensive formation on the northern slope of 'Lili'.

The Nahal company, lacking battle experience, received the lighter task of occupying emplacement 'Tova'. The company set out from the staging area and moved to the rear of the battalion convoy. After two hours, it split off from the battalion and headed for its objective. Its commander, Tzvika Levanon, advanced towards the target, laying down artillery fire until the force reached the vicinity of the objective. With the help of the shelling, the force got within 60 metres of the Egyptian posts, at which point they were discovered and came under machine-gun fire. Platoon 1 came over the southern side of the emplacement and occupied it without any resistance. Individual Egyptian soldiers fired from their tent area and trench posts.

The second platoon entered the central area of the objective and encountered anti-aircraft positions and machine-gun nests. Hand-to-hand fighting ensued from post to post. The Israeli combatants used sub-machine guns and hand-grenades. Two Israeli soldiers were killed and one was injured. The battle lasted several minutes.

The third platoon made a navigational error while on its way to eliminate an exterior enemy post and ended up on the northern edge of emplacement 'Tova'. The platoon was encircled by Egyptian soldiers and fire from a machine-gun nest ripped through the force. The force charged forward behind its commander, who encountered an Egyptian soldier and overcame him with a blow from the butt of his rifle. A grenade thrown by one of the force's soldiers struck the commander of the platoon and the commander of the squad, injuring both. The force froze in place and waited for orders. After some time, in which no order was forthcoming, one of the soldiers yelled 'Is there a commander?' and when he heard no response, shouted 'Get up, comrades, forward' and the force continued the fight, engaging in hand-to-hand combat until the mission was accomplished. Private Dan Flash was awarded a medal for his initiative.

Years afterward, Dan Flash related that

the situation was not very encouraging. We were in a psychological crisis. It was clear to all that someone had to take the initiative. We were only metres away from an Egyptian position which had been conquered but there were other positions not too far away. I knew that if we did not do anything, they would seize the initiative.<sup>96</sup>

The battle ended after ten minutes but the company suffered 11 casualties –five killed and six wounded. In the entire Sabcha operation, the IDF incurred five killed and twenty-four wounded. The Egyptians numbered 18 killed and 11 soldiers taken prisoner, including an officer. Their commander fled.

The reconnaissance unit of Meir Har-Tzion attacked Jebel Sabcha from the south. A majority of the Egyptian force fled, and only in a few places did an exchange of fire occur. The occupation was accomplished quickly with little resistance from the Egyptians.

The blocking force of Tibi Shapira, composed of two undersized platoons, set up their ambush on the road between Quseima and the Sabcha emplacements. The platoons took up positions 150 metres from each other in the channel of the river bed. Each platoon placed demolition charges on the shoulders of the road which could be set off by the pull of a rope. At 23:00, the soldiers spotted a convoy of six tanks advancing along the road without lights in a tight line. The commander allowed the first three tanks to pass and then activated the explosive charges as the fourth tank went by. The tank stopped and within seconds explosives were detonated by the second blocking platoon. The Egyptian force was trapped and the first and fourth tank damaged and then destroyed by anti-tank fire. The fifth and sixth tanks escaped in the darkness. The second tank, which was not hit by anti-tank fire, tried to help the first tank.

After it fired two shells at the blocking platoon, it manoeuvred under machine-gun fire and left the area. The third tank went off the road, made a complete circle and began to fire at machine-gun nests in the course of full circuits of its turret. The tank continued to go on a firing rampage against the machine guns. When its commander exited from the tank hatch, he was hit by Israeli fire. The tank continued to engage the force until contact with it was lost beyond the train tracks. The Israeli force received an order to continue its road ambush one kilometre north of the previous location. The force set up in its new position and set out to look for the rampaging enemy tank. A second encounter with this tank took place but the anti-tank team missed its target and the machine gun fight ended with the flight of the tank from the area. The operation ended, the jeeps evacuated the casualties and at 03:00 the Jeep force and the machine guns of Levi Hofesh replaced the blocking force until they too were ordered to sever any contact and return to base.

## **The Battle for the Siram Emplacements**

The conquest of the Siram emplacements was assigned to Battalion 12 of the Golani Brigade under the command of Uri Bar-Ratzon. The battalion commander believed that the 'Rivka' emplacements should be attacked, while the brigade commander asserted that the 'Tamar' emplacement was more important because its occupation could serve as a blocking point against any reinforcements which might arrive from the direction of Sabcha. The outcome of this division of opinion was a decision to assault both objectives.

The battalion travelled 16 km by foot with a navigator at its head followed by company A, the battalion headquarters, company C, and company E. When the company arrived within 600 metres of the 'Tamar' emplacement, its identification became problematic. The company commander gave an order to open fire on the target and then led an assault with two companies. One company charged the emplacement's positions and the second quickly advanced towards the posts of the administrative echelon. The objective was taken with almost no resistance. It turned out that the place was manned with only a few soldiers. One of them was killed, three captured and the rest fled.

The company organized its defences at the conquered objective and one squad was sent to block the path which went up to the 'Rivka' emplacement. The squad was in the stages of preparing an ambush when seven Egyptian soldiers suddenly appeared. The latter did not notice

the ambush and were taken prisoner with no resistance. At this point, the force was fired upon from the southern sector of the emplacement. After some difficulty in detecting the location of the Egyptian force, company E was sent up the southern incline of 'Rivka 2', to destroy the enemy force with the assistance of artillery. The company charged up the hill but found the area devoid of enemy soldiers. The Egyptian force had disengaged and retreated following the shelling. The company continued to sweep the hill in search of the enemy and by 02:30 the battalion's mission was completed. The Egyptian defence set-up collapsed and was destroyed within 25 minutes of the beginning of the assault. The combing of the hill and surrounding territory continued for two hours.

In the entire Sabcha operation, 81 Egyptian soldiers were killed and 55 were taken prisoner. The IDF captured three lorries, 15 vans, two jeeps, two half-tracks, a number of anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns, 13 mortars, 12 machine guns and dozens of sub-machine guns and rifles, communications equipment and ammunition. Five Israeli soldiers were killed in the operation and 35 wounded.<sup>97</sup>

Before the break of dawn, the Chief-of-Staff sought to have all forces remain in the occupied positions. Dayan hoped that the operation would elicit a major response from the Egyptians, thus allowing him to put into effect the plan for Operation Shahar, which would extend the occupation to the Gaza Strip and northern Sinai. Ben-Gurion, fearing American and British sanctions, did not accede to Dayan's request and instructed the forces that took part in the operation to return to Israeli territory before dawn. The IDF immediately vacated the positions.

The Egyptians acted according to Dayan's prediction and attacked the next morning. After laying down heavy artillery fire, the Egyptian troops attacked the empty Sabcha sites. Egyptian propaganda paraded the 'victory' over the Israeli forces and reported on 200 Israeli soldiers killed and 70 casualties among the Egyptian forces. The Egyptians flew foreign correspondents over the area. Bodies of Egyptians strewn over the ground from the battle with the IDF on the previous night were presented as slain Israeli soldiers. The Egyptians held a national funeral for 'the heroes of the battle at El-Sabcha' and the Egyptian president announced another victory in the campaign against Israel.<sup>98</sup>

## **Summarizing Operation Sabcha**

Operation Sabcha at the beginning of November 1955, although it ended with a military victory on the battlefield, did not constitute the spark that would set off the major explosion hoped for by Dayan. From the military vantage-point, the operation achieved much, and the lessons drawn following the battle were useful for all the IDF fighting units and combat support corps. In the attack on the Egyptian emplacements, units attached to the Golani Brigade and Nahal were combined for the first time." These units had no connection with the paratroop forces, and up to this point had not been involved in reprisal operations, a military strategy that had been monopolized by a narrow sector of the armed forces since the merger of Unit 101 and Battalion 890.

Operation Sabcha was also the first time since Operation Horev in the War of Independence that infantry units of brigade strength had cooperated with armoured, artillery and engineering contingents. This became the basis for drawing lessons and studying the operation of large field formations. It also raised the level of command and control in the IDF. The spirit of battle and morale of the paratroop unit, as well as its combat doctrines and the techno-tactical methods,

became a model for imitation by all IDF units. The insertion of additional forces in reprisal operations created a competitive atmosphere and a desire to imitate the paratroop units' training methods and instruction and to measure up to the paratroops on the battlefield.

Following Operation Sabcha, in which Nahal soldiers proved their combat proficiency, Dayan wanted to integrate them with the combat brigades – Golani, Givati and the paratroops. Nahal soldiers were not assigned to the field brigades as Dayan desired, but at the end of the year a Nahal paratroop battalion attached to the Paratroop Brigade under the command of Ariel Sharon was established. This integration, however, was not formally approved.

Beyond the military aspects, Operation Sabcha in effect opened a year of IDF preparation for the Sinai War. Beginning in October 1955, the IDF went into high gear in anticipation of war. It was not a question of 'if', but 'when'. After the failure of the 'deterioration tactics' in Operation Sabcha, the Chief-of-Staff devised a plan which would drag the Egyptians into a general confrontation through the capture of the Straits of Tiran. Dayan estimated that the occupation of the straits would force Nasser into a response or lead him to distort and blur the facts as occurred following Sabcha. The instructions given to the IDF at this time were clear about an impending general war. Courses and advance studies were cancelled, appointments were frozen, and Southern Command was re-established under Meir Amit. A new brigade was formed under Haim Bar Lev with the mission of occupying the Straits of Tiran.

The manner in which Operation Sabcha concluded gives more than a glimpse of the gap between the two personalities who governed the foreign and defence policy of Israel in these years. Whereas Dayan sought to lead Israel into a preventive war, Ben-Gurion reined in these proposed steps until international backing could be obtained. He feared that unilateral Israel action would provoke the major powers, especially the United States and Britain.

The refusal of Ben-Gurion to allow the forces controlling Sabcha to stay in their positions and await a response from the Egyptians revealed his fears not only of a reaction on the part of the United States but also whether the IDF could cope in an all-out military confrontation with the Egyptians. The questionable quality of IDF combat forces, which was principally based on its infantry, continued to bother the leaders of the political establishment, and first and foremost Ben-Gurion. After Operation Har Ga'ash, Ben-Gurion requested a meeting with the commanders of the forces. At an arranged gathering on 7 November 1955, Ben-Gurion interrogated the commanders of the companies that took part in the battle on issues of manpower and morale among the combatants. His queries continually returned to the question of the quality of the human factor, the composition of the combatant population, with an emphasis on the Oriental population (Jews of North African and West Asian origin) and their military capability.

When the commander of the Nahal battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Bar-Ratzon, replied that among the members of the company who bore the principal burden of combat, 80 per cent were Orientals, Ben-Gurion stubbornly requested to know exactly their countries of origin. How many were from North Africa? How many were from Yemen? How many from Iraq? And so forth. The Minister of Defence asked for socio-cultural data which, according to his understanding, had an influence on the capability and readiness for combat of these same soldiers: 'How many years have these soldiers been in the country?... Are they all Hebrew speakers?... Are they already Israelis, more or less?... What is their *esprit de corps*'<sup>100</sup>

Only after these basic data were clarified did the interrogation of the battalion and company commanders commence. Ben-Gurion asked about the quality of training the soldiers acquired and their behaviour on the battlefield. His questions reveal his lack of confidence in the battalion's combatants, despite the fact that they returned victorious from the battlefield. In his

assessment, the judgement of the officers in regard to the combat level of their soldiers was impaired since the enemy soldiers, for the most part, fled the battle arena, and the military encounter did not develop into hand-to-hand bayonet fighting. Thus, he queried: 'And our boys when they encountered the enemy did not cringe?' To which the battalion commander replied: 'Sometimes they did but afterwards they continued.' Ben-Gurion continued in his questioning: 'Was there no need to exercise force or threats on them?' The battalion commander replied that the personal example of the company commander was sufficient, but Ben-Gurion persisted in his interrogation. He asked whether in the opinion of the battalion commander all brigade soldiers exhibited the same level. In this long and almost impertinent conversation, Ben-Gurion was trying to ascertain whether it would be possible to send these regular soldiers into battle and whether they would stand up to their missions, as the paratroopers had done.<sup>101</sup>

Company commanders demanded that they be involved in reprisal operations in order to gain experience and knowledge, as well as to raise pride and morale among their soldiers. Only then, they said, could they confront without anxiety any mission assigned to them. For Ben-Gurion, however, this admission raised a fresh wave of questions in which he tried to find out if the unit commanders were confident in their soldiers and if there were cases of evasion from service in combat units among the recruits. The questions and the conversations with force commanders revolved around the level of the IDF regulars, the capabilities of the commanders and the level of motivation and morale of the soldiers.

In effect, the two parties were talking past each other. The subject of combatant anxiety, perhaps in the nature of things real enough, also served as a rhetorical ploy on the part of the commanders to pursue their professional destiny as *active* combatants and extract the maximum number of missions from the senior echelons. On the other hand, Ben-Gurion took to heart this confession of doubt which strengthened his pre-formed belief that these soldiers would not perform in the face of full-scale war. Ironically, it would appear that both had the same ultimate objectives and that the matter of timing and the misunderstanding of motives resulted in mutual incomprehension. However, it should not be concluded that military echelons in the field were solely driven by a lust for battle or that Ben-Gurion was only seeking a pretext for not undertaking a decisive military encounter. Structural constraints had as much to do with these apparently opposed positions as did the agential or subjective factors.

Even the conceptual separation of structural and agential elements in the constitution of military policy is misleading. These elements were intimately related, mutually reacting one upon the other. National morale was raised by the perceived success of the paratroop raids, leading to their expansion and the participation of other military units and corps anxious to replicate and exceed in bravura the earlier exploits which were already becoming legendary. This led in turn to more daring and more spectacular military operations with their concomitant impact upon civilian *esprit de corps*. The subjective factor of euphoria, of support for charismatic leadership, the very existence of which Weber has shown depends upon continuous exhibition of mass reaffirmation, created a spiral of escalation in subjective aspirations and objective capabilities.

In the field of action, Operation Sabcha was an important milestone in Israel's security policy leading to a general war with Egypt and was a cornerstone in the IDF's organization of and preparation for the Sinai Campaign which would follow within a year.

## **Operation Alei Zayit**

The military operations in the northern and eastern sectors of the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) were preceded throughout 1955 by a number of military events. The first, which perhaps influenced the political and defence line of Moshe Dayan, was the cancellation by Ben-Gurion of Operation Omer, a plan calling for the occupation of the Straits of Tiran at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba in the Red Sea. The reasons for Ben-Gurion's decision went beyond the consideration of the number of victims this step might entail. He feared that Israel would appear as an aggressor state in world public opinion and that this would result in its isolation and ostracism, leading to an arms embargo precisely when the Middle East was in the midst of an arms race.

Ben-Gurion's decision was greeted with great disappointment by the officer echelon of the IDF. Following instructions to halt preparations for executing Operation Omer, 'battle spirit' in the senior echelons of an IDF plummeted. Dayan asked Ben-Gurion to meet the senior staff in order to explain his position with regard to a preventive war:

If we reflect on all these difficult considerations, and I know that each consideration means life or death, then the critical factor is to make all efforts to obtain weapons for the improvement of the army (in face of the looming threats) and not to endanger ourselves in an aggressive war, a war which might end in a military defeat and the entrance of a foreign force which we could not oppose, and would certainly end in a global moral defeat, and we would stand isolated from the rest of the world. Because of this, according to my familiarity [with the situation], the position taken by the government is the correct one, that we will not undertake a preventive war.<sup>102</sup>

Although Ben-Gurion had doubts about the Americans' intentions and willingness to supply arms to Israel, he was obliged to give Sharett full backing in the latter's efforts to obtain European or American sources for weapons. Sharett failed to obtain his goal in his meetings with foreign ministers of the major powers in Geneva, and put all his faith in a planned meeting with John Foster Dulles. Senior personnel in the Foreign Ministry in Israel believed that a policy of restraint, which entailed constraining Israel's reprisal operations, would secure agreement from the United States to supply Israel with weapons. Operation Kinneret coincided with Sharett's mission in the United States, and it is no wonder, when he learned about it, that he spoke out in very harsh terms:

Ehud phoned...a reprisal raid has been conducted against Syria... I was stunned... again the impression of a desire for blood and provocation of war. The operation was not preceded by any murder, there was no preparation of public opinion, and there was no antecedent announcement.'<sup>103</sup>

In opposition to Sharett's outlook, Chief-of-Staff Dayan gave the efforts to secure defensive weapons from the United States no chance. His objective was an escalation and deterioration aimed at war on the Egyptian front. The attack on the Syrian emplacements was intended as a provocation to draw the Egyptians into an expansive response, which would justify a planned Israeli attack on the Egyptian front. This thesis of provocation was already raised by Mordecai Bar-On in 1958 and was not rejected by Ben-Gurion, Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres or Haim Laskov, recipients of the document at that time.<sup>104</sup>

In 1955, Israel dominated most of the demilitarized zone in the area of the Sea of Galilee, but the Syrians more than once directed gunfire on Israeli fishing vessels from their fortified heights overlooking the water basin. Despite the arrangement by which the international border passed ten metres inland from the east bank of the Sea of Galilee, there was no way of preventing Syrian

farmers and fishermen from using the waters for irrigation and fishing. Syrian emplacements were located at the water's edge and provided protection for the farmers and fishermen. For years the Syrians had requested a change in the border westward to the middle of the Sea of Galilee, or at least to permit joint use of the lake.<sup>105</sup> (The Sea of Galilee is a fresh-water lake, but it has a relatively high saline count.) Israel was not prepared to offer any compromise with regard to control over the sources of water vital for its economic development and agriculture. From the end of 1953 and the beginning of 1954 firefights broke out between Syrian posts and Israeli patrol vessels on the Sea of Galilee. The Syrians wanted to fish in the north-western sector of the Sea and when they were chased away by the Israeli police patrols, the Syrians responded with gunfire, often directed at the Israeli fishermen in the area. Israeli police patrols were replaced by armoured patrol vessels of the navy equipped with anti-tank weapons and machine guns.

During 1954–55, firefights broke out over the issue of sovereignty on the Sea of Galilee. GHQ explained the objectives of its military operations as the need 'to respond in an aggressive manner to every attempt to harm Israeli fishermen on the Sea of Galilee in order to emphasize our right to the entire area of the lake'.<sup>106</sup> At the beginning of October 1955, the head of the Operations Department, Colonel Uzi Narkiss, was already suggesting retaliatory raids on emplacements at the village of Kursi and its vicinity. A scenario originating from GHQ, which was brought to the attention of the Defence Minister, projected the involvement of Israeli fishermen in an operation staged in the Kursi area. A battery of 25-pound cannon would be stationed in full view in the Tabcha area and then ordered to open fire on Syrian emplacements if they were fired upon first. The incident would then be used as a pretext to carry out a raid by water on Kursi and nearby emplacements.<sup>107</sup>

In effect, the IDF had for a long time planned an attack against Syrian emplacements in this sector as a definitive reply to an extended period of provocative actions and continuous shooting. Operation Kinneret took shape against this background and its dimensions expanded in the immediate period before its execution. It should be noted that according to all intelligence reports, this operation was not preceded by any aggressive Syrian actions in the sector. Even Israel had undertaken just one action against the Syrians, in April 1951. In this action, the Israeli Air Force bombed Syrian emplacements following the killing of seven soldiers patrolling in the area of El-Hama. There had been no incursions from the Syrian border and Israel had incurred no losses.

On 1 December Dayan raised the issue of fishermen on the Sea of Galilee before the Defence Minister and requested permission to shell civilian targets as a reply to Syrian aggression against the fishermen. Ben-Gurion did not give his approval for this option but did give the go-ahead to attack military targets.<sup>108</sup> In the weekly meeting between the Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff on 8 December which followed the approval of this action, Dayan stated: 'Solving the fisherman problem doesn't matter to me; the Egyptians fear that we will clash with the Syrians and they, because of a binding agreement, will need to do something. They will have to take the first aggressive step.'<sup>109</sup>

Dayan's concern, then, was not the livelihood of some Israeli fishermen but rather the security situation of the State of Israel in the light of Egyptian armament, the mutual defence pact between Egypt and Syria and the desire to exhibit sovereignty over the Sea of Galilee. He undoubtedly had additional considerations, and these led him to request a broader and more hard-hitting operation. Dayan sought to strike a heavy blow on the Syrian Army, which would serve as a warning for any future Arab-Israeli confrontation. A final and humiliating strike against the Syrian forces, if it did not bring Egyptian assistance, would impair the credibility of



the Egyptian-Syrian pact and the prestige of the Egyptian leader Nasser.<sup>110</sup>

The operation on the Sea of Galilee, code-named Alei Zayit (Olive Leaves), was implemented on the evening of 11–12 December 1955. The objectives were Syrian military emplacements along the north-east shores of the lake from Ein Gev to where the Jordan river enters in the north-east corner. The tasks were to strike Syrian soldiers, destroy military positions and take prisoners. The prisoners were to be exchanged for four Israelis who had been captured in October.

The first operational order relayed down to Battalion 890 was limited to occupying and destroying the Kursi emplacement in the southern sector, the Shefech emplacement in the northern sector, and taking prisoners. Two companies from Battalion 890 and one reserve company, as well as blocking forces, were assigned for this mission.<sup>111</sup>

During the course of a second batch of orders on 10 December, a decision was made to expand the operation. Originally planned by GHQ as a battalion-size raid, it became a full-sized brigade operation. A company from the Givati Brigade was added, and the paratroops requested the participation of Reserve Battalion 771 which had just been formed under the command of Aharon Davidi. Reserve para-troop units joined battalion 890, even though they operated as a separate unit under the operational network of Ariel Sharon. Paratroop commanders convinced Northern Command of the operational necessity of attacking all Syrian emplacements in the area simultaneously in order to ensure success and to ensure an impact.

The operational order of Northern Command for Operation Kinneret, which was passed on to Operations Branch/GHQ after the operational plans were completed on 10 December, dictated the following steps: 'Occupation of Syrian emplacements from the Jordan waters entry point to the border of the DMZ north of Ein Gev on the eve of 11–12 December, capturing Syrian soldiers and killing those who resist, destruction of fortifications, maximum plunder [of military equipment].'<sup>112</sup>

Ariel Sharon was appointed commander of the operation. Under his command were Battalion 890, Battalion 771, an advanced training company of Nahal and company C of Battalion 52 from the Givati Brigade, two batteries of cannon from Battalion 402, a battery of 120 mm mortars, a Dakota plane for communication purposes, four infantry landing-craft vehicles, a large fishing boat and a small motor boat.

In all the Alei Zayit orders, operational and administrative, from Northern Command there is no mention of Battalion 771, and in effect, the operational force was doubled to reach the dimensions of a brigade under the cover of Battalion 890. The putting-together of the operational force for a special action such as Operation Alei Zayit was not constructed according to the routine framework but rather adjusted to the objectives and goals of the operation. Since it was decided to expand the operation and additional forces were added to Battalion 890, it was possible to plan the occupation of additional objectives and to take over all Syrian emplacements on the north-east side of the Sea of Galilee.

The decision to occupy all Syrian locations simultaneously and the desire to prevent complications arising from engagement with enemy reserve forces were central considerations in the enlargement of the raiding forces. In addition to this, there was uncertainty regarding the professional capability and combat fitness of the Syrian soldiers. These were among the considerations which guided the requests of the paratroop commanders to attack objectives with a decisive superiority of forces at each and every target.

Supreme command was well aware of the size of the attacking force, and in debriefings conducted following the operation, there was a detailed report of each of the participating forces.

At the same time, it appears that Ben-Gurion, who approved the operation, did not go into the details and was not aware of the full composition and number of troops that were ultimately to take part. Thus he expressed doubts regarding the capacity of the Paratroop Battalion to carry out and realize the mission in its entirety.

### ***Arena of Operation***

The arena of operation was divided into two main topographical sectors, with the dividing line in the area of the village of Akib.<sup>113</sup> In the southern sector, the Golan mountain range approaches quite close to the Sea of Galilee and the coastal strip is narrow. From close to the shore, the Golan cliffs rise steeply and the only passage from sea level to the upper ranges of the heights is Wadi Samak, which rises from Kursi and along whose length is the trail to Skopia and Pik. In the northern sector between the village of Akib and the Jordan River, the mountainous terrain is more distant from the waters of the Sea of Galilee and from the Btaiha Valley. The valley is inundated with water and swampy; several streams cut through it and flow into the Sea of Galilee including Sheikh Ali and Wadi el-Hauwa and Zaki. In the area there were several villages and tents of Palestinian refugees and Bedouin. Close to the area where the Jordan River enters the lake, there was a large agricultural farm and within its premises was located a large house called Beit HaBek and other structures. The Syrians maintained emplacements on the slopes overlooking the lake and on its shoreline. The Syrian emplacements in this sector were:

*Border emplacement, reference point 21092463:* fortified emplacement with trenches and protected posts. The emplacement was encircled by dual-sloping fences and cattle fences and was manned by two squads.

*Emplacement Nukaib:* a small emplacement, partially trenched and fortified, close to the village, and manned by ten members of the Syrian National Guard.

*Emplacement Kursi:* comprised of five sub-emplacements:

1. the northern emplacement, reference point 21052488, above Wadi Samak. A communication trench and a number of firing positions;
2. the anti-tank emplacement, reference point 21062483. A number of houses and beside them a communication trench and an anti-tank position;
3. the central emplacement, reference point 21072480. A trenched emplacement with communication trenches and bunkers around the ruins of ancient Kursi;
4. the southern emplacement, reference point 21102475. A large, elevated pillbox, surrounded by fences and connected by communication trenches to a small emplacement to the north;
5. the eastern emplacement, reference point 21062478, east of the village of Kursi at a road junction. An entrenched and fenced emplacement, including a pillbox, communication trenches and firing positions. The emplacement was manned by a reinforced platoon and two anti-tank teams and a sector equipped with medium machine guns. The total military force was approximately 70 soldiers.

*Akib Emplacement, reference point 21072518:* emplacement situated south of the village with dug trenches sloped with bunkers and fortified combat posts, dual-sloped and reinforced. The village contained a number of structures used to house soldiers. Military population: a Syrian platoon of 22 soldiers and an additional ten soldiers from the Syrian National Guard.

*Shefech Emplacement:* at the place where the Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee.

*Beit HaBek:* agricultural farm in the Shefech Emplacement area with a two-storey farmhouse in centre. Housed officers but was not manned as an emplacement.

In the Pik–Harb village sector, the Syrians maintained an infantry battalion from Brigade 6 which was responsible for the sector from Kfar Akiv to Wadi el-Hama.

The Syrian force at the emplacement beside the entry of the Jordan into the lake consisted of the Seventh Infantry Battalion, a reserve battalion which was encamped at Beit – Hameches (the Customs Station) at Mishmar HaYarden.

A sectoral reserve force allocated additional forces in the Pik area: the Eighth Infantry Battalion, a supporting battalion and an armoured reconnaissance company.

Israeli intelligence tended to underestimate the size of Syrian forces manning the emplacements and in the sector in general, but these were minor errors except for the mistaken estimate of forces at Kursi and Beit HaBek. Kursi was estimated to have 20 soldiers, but figures for the outcome of the battle revealed the number of killed and captured at 54, in addition to an undetermined number who fled. The underestimation led to an allocation of too small a force to the Kursi emplacement; however, the IDF force succeeded in carrying out its mission.

The topographical contours, the transportation routes and the deployment of Syrian forces required the military tasks to be divided between two main forces: Battalion 771 under the command of Aharon Davidi was assigned the northern sector, and the remainder of the forces under Ariel Sharon had responsibility for the central and southern sectors. All the forces which took part in the operation in all the arenas of action were directly subordinate to the command of Sharon. Sharon's headquarters was initially located on a patrol vessel on the Sea of Galilee and the Dakota plane was used as a communication link to maintain control over the many forces spread throughout the sectors.

The pretext for the reprisal operation was concocted by enticing Syrian fire on an Israeli police craft which approached close to the Syrian shore. This occurred on 10 December, the evening before the planned raid. At the same time, an intelligence team was sent to spot Syrian military posts following the batch of orders which considerably widened the scope of the operation.

### ***Task Forces***

*Contingent A:* three paratroop companies under Major Davidi whose mission was the occupation of emplacement Shefech and Beit HaBek, and the blocking of the routes to the emplacements in the area of Hurvat Dika, reference point 21022583.

*Company E* under Rafael Eytan was to occupy the dominant terrain around the area where the Jordan empties into the Sea of Galilee, destroy bunkers and kill or capture soldiers in the emplacement.

*Company F*, an undersized unit commanded by Elisha Shalem, was responsible for the occupation and demolition of Beit HaBek. A company under Marcel Tobias was responsible for securing the bridge over the Jordan River. A platoon from company B under Moshe Efron took up a blocking position beside Hurvat Dika, reference point 20952590.

An *additional platoon* commanded by Deputy Company Commander Moshe Efron undertook blocking action on the route to the emplacements (reference number 21152185). An additional reserve force at platoon strength from company B and cadet staff were responsible for establishing a beachhead.

Additional forces under Sharon included:

*Contingent B:* a reconnaissance company under First Lieutenant Meir Har-Tzion, whose mission was the occupation of the Kursi emplacement.

*Contingent C:* company C from Battalion 52 under the command of Shmuel Goldberg, whose mission was the occupation of the Border emplacement.

*Contingent D:* company B from Battalion 771 under the command of Captain Yitzhak Ben-Menahem (Gulliver) whose mission was a landing from the lake and occupation of the emplacement at Kfar Akiv.

*Contingent E:* a platoon from Company G of Battalion 890 under the command of First Lieutenant Biro, whose mission was to block the route Skopiya-Kursi.

*Contingent F:* two platoons (50 soldiers) from Company 890 riding on five command cars, whose mission was to gain control of Nukayib and open up the Ein Gev–Akib route. An additional mission was to be a reserve force in the first phase for contingents in the southern sector and to assist in phase two with the evacuation of casualties, prisoners and booty on the coastal road.

*Contingent G:* four patrol vessels and a reconnaissance motor boat whose missions were to land Contingent D and evacuate casualties and Contingent D.<sup>114</sup>

All seven contingents were placed within one communications network. The headquarters of these seven field units were linked to command headquarters and to the artillery posts. Because of the complexity of the operation, the difficult terrain conditions and Syrian control of the transportation routes, it was decided to approach the targets slowly with uniform timing for the start of operations set at 22:00. The operation of each contingent was calculated and set down to the last detail in the 'Aleï Zayit Debriefing Report'.<sup>115</sup>

Battalion 779 under Davidi crossed the Jordan after a difficult march in the foothills of the mountain and crossed it by foot 'soaked from head to foot' because of leaky water craft. Eytan's company occupied emplacement Shefech, incurring injuries to the commander and an officer during the assault on a machine-gun nest.

The undersized company of Elisha Shalem attacked Beit HaBek, which was found empty of soldiers, but showed evidence of recent military habitation. The house was inhabited by a number of civilians who were evacuated before it was demolished.

In this sector, the final IDF casualty toll was one soldier killed and two wounded. The Syrians had nine soldiers killed and one taken prisoner.

The blocking actions which took place in the vicinity of the military operations, set up in place of those that had been planned in more depth, proved effective in halting the Syrian platoons that approached the Jordan River crossing. At 03:30 the contingent began its withdrawal and completed it at 05:15.

The occupation of the Kursi emplacement began with a march from Ein Gev at 17:45. The force circumvented the village of Nukaib and by approximately 21:10 hours was deployed at its attacking location. As they were crawling towards the fenced village, a shot accidentally went off from one of the rifles. Despite the loss of surprise, the soldiers burst into the emplacement. Har-Tzion threw a demolition explosive into the officer's building, effectively ending the battle. Six additional Syrian soldiers from an adjoining room surrendered.

Another team from reconnaissance attacked the anti-tank emplacement and an additional team lead by Oved Ladizinski, after a difficult fight, overcame fortified positions and the two-storey pillbox. A team under Micha Kaposta gained control over a Syrian anti-tank position and,

following the battle, captured nine Syrian soldiers.

The Israeli forces gathered the prisoners and the large quantities of military booty into one location, from which they were evacuated to Ein Gev by forces arranged for in advance. The attacking force itself was evacuated via the lake at 02:00. Twenty-seven Syrian soldiers fell in the battle with Har-Tzion's reconnaissance patrol and 27 were captured. The Israeli contingent had two lightly injured soldiers.

On disembarking from its water craft, the company of Yitzhak Ben-Menahem (nick-named 'Gulliver' because of his size) set out towards the village of Akib. Approaching its target, the company began the assault after forces had opened fire on Kursi. In the course of the assault against the living quarters of the Syrian soldiers, a grenade was tossed, killing Ben-Menahem. His second-in-command, Tibi Shapira, took over and gained control both of the emplacement and the village as Syrian soldiers fled the area. During the operation, a Syrian officer and a soldier were taken prisoners. The final Syrian tally was eight soldiers killed and two captured. The IDF company sustained two killed, including the commander, and two injured.

The company of Shmuel Goldberg from Battalion 52 of the Givati Brigade was selected to participate in the battle in order to gain combat experience and to raise morale among the IDF infantry units in general. The company attacked an emplacement to the north of the village of Nukaib. The force set out from Ein Gev at 19:00 hours and climbed onto the crest of the hills in order to reach the Syrian positions. On approaching the fence, a shot accidentally went off from one of the rifles, giving their location away to the defensively positioned Syrians. Breaking through the fences, one of the assault pioneers was injured and a squad leader was killed. The company commander changed the direction of the attack and with the cover of a force outside the emplacement overcame the Syrian positions. During

the breakthrough, four additional soldiers were injured. The Syrian soldiers deserted the emplacement immediately after the force broke into the inner perimeter of the emplacement. After 20 minutes of fighting, the emplacement was conquered and the force began collecting the extensive military booty in the area. The company sustained one killed and seven wounded. Syrian casualties numbered two killed.<sup>116</sup>

Arieh Biro's platoon was given the assignment of blocking the Syrian reserve force in the Pik area. At 17:00, this unit left Ein Gev and set up an ambush on a dirt road close to the village of Skopia. As soon as the battle commenced at Kursi, 15 Syrian soldiers entered the ambush; seven were killed and six wounded.

The summary report for Operation Alei Zayit listed six IDF soldiers killed, five seriously wounded and nine with light wounds. According to both an IDF and a UN report, the Syrians had 54 killed. The Israeli account reported 30 Syrians taken prisoner, while the UN report gave 32 missing and 9 seriously wounded. The discrepancy between those taken prisoner and those missing is attributed to two Syrian soldiers who drowned in the Sea of Galilee and hence were counted as missing.

Much booty was taken in the operation including 50 mm anti-tank cannon (part of which was exploded *in situ*), dozens of heavy and light machine guns, mortars, bazookas and over 120 rifles. In addition, considerable ammunition and a large quantity of important documents bearing on intelligence were collected. Most of the Syrian positions and fortifications in the sector were demolished and many structures were raised to the ground.<sup>117</sup>

The military outcomes of this operation were consummate. All the attacking contingents completed their missions with a relatively small number of casualties. Despite the resolute military victory, Ben-Gurion expressed his displeasure at a meeting in the Defence Minister's

office the day after the operation. The logbook of the Chief-of-Staff's office recorded: 'Ben-Gurion does not appear very pleased. The operation was too good.'<sup>118</sup>

In spite of the heavy blow received by the Syrian military, their military operations renewed the very next day. Within a short time, the destroyed emplacements were reconstructed and shooting at Israeli fishermen and farmers continued for many years until the occupation of the Golan Heights in the Six Day War of 1967. Dayan's idea that this gambit would provoke the Egyptians to intervene militarily also failed. Nasser engaged the Israelis only in diplomatic chatter. In the internal political arena, this operation intensified the dispute and raised tensions between the camps of Moshe Sharett and Ben-Gurion to the point of freezing their relations and in effect ending their joint journey in politics. Sharett regarded Ben-Gurion's decision to conduct the operation at a critical point in his diplomatic contacts with the United States when he himself was out of the country as a 'stab in the back'. In his diary he remarked cynically: 'Ben-Gurion, Minister of Defence, consulted with Ben-Gurion, Foreign Minister, and received approval from Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister.'<sup>119</sup>

Other leaders from the entire political spectrum joined the criticism of people in the Foreign Ministry such as Abba Eban and Josef Tekoa. At a meeting of the Committee for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Menahem Begin, the leader of the arch-rival Herut Party, called for Ben-Gurion to resign. In the Knesset, Begin questioned the timing of the operation alongside praise for the combatants:

But, one must ask the government: What were your considerations? It was known that the operation could not change our strategic situation. The Syrians returned. When will they open fire? Nobody knows. But it is possible to say with absolute certainty that shooting will also be renewed from there. It was an operation which had local, momentary and fleeting tactical value. If because of Operation Sea of Galilee, we do not obtain the amount of weaponry which perhaps has been promised us, or we receive it after some delay – what in the end was the consideration of the government?<sup>120</sup>

Even members of Achdut Ha'Avodah, a party which generally followed an activist line, criticized the wretched timing of the operation and the lack of coordination between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister.

The internal criticism in Israel not only in the government and in the Knesset but also in the press did not relate only to the matter of timing, but also to the intensive strike that the IDF directed against the Syrian army and the possible implications for Israel in the international arena and within the Arab world. The newspaper *Ha'aretz* wrote that the operation 'lacked all proportion' in contrast with Syrian actions. The expansion of the arena of action and the size of the forces that took part was at the centre of public debate, with some claiming that the Defence Minister did not control the Chief-of-Staff and that the latter was leading the government towards war. Mordechai Bentov, a member of the government, claimed that 'the soldiers and officers do not always know how to preserve some proportion in response'.<sup>121</sup> Ben-Gurion was forced once again to come to the defence of IDF commanders, as he had done following Operation Gaza, and affirm in every forum the loyalty of the IDF and the Chief-of-Staff to the state and to civil authority.

In his speech in the Knesset a number of weeks after the operation, Ben-Gurion stated:

We hear in public moral pronouncements and sermonizing against the officers of the IDF: that the IDF has no right to operate on its own initiative, that the army is only the executive arm of

the government, and it is subordinate to the instructions of the government, and only through the authority of the government can it operate in special circumstances. These pronouncements are in themselves correct. But the IDF and its commanders do not need this preaching. As Defence Minister I made sure, according to the strict letter of the law, that there is no unconditional subordination of the military to the elected institutions of the state, and that all commanders of the Israel Defence Forces are loyal and will not carry out any action on their own initiative, only on authorized orders from above, from the democratic government in the state.<sup>122</sup>

In foreign relations, the outcomes of the operation were like a two-edged sword. The more the results appeared successful in the eyes of the military establishment, the greater was the criticism and protest in all world capitals. The Americans protested and accused Israel of a reprisal raid which lacked all proportion. Israel's request for arms assistance and various types of equipment was postponed and its standing in Washington in those days was severely impaired. The foreign ministers of the United States, Britain and France reaffirmed a ban on supplying weapons to Israel, the continuation of a declaration given by the three states in May 1950. The British Foreign Office censured Israel and suspended an arms shipment for which there had been a signed agreement.<sup>123</sup>

Operation Alei Zayit had been one of the high marks in the policy of retaliation. From a military point of view, the operation became a model for the next generation of combatants to imitate and a central component in the battle heritage of the IDF. The success on the battlefield raised morale and self-confidence in IDF units, and undoubtedly added to the renown of the operational capacity of the IDF in states around the world.

The decisive operation against the Syrian emplacements contributed to the IDF's power to deter the Syrian regime, which avoided taking a part in the Sinai War in October 1956. However, the outstanding success in the operational arena led to political failure and an awareness of the danger contained in giving excessively wide freedom of action to military commanders in planning and implementing operations.

The pressure on all fronts, both domestically and abroad, also became apparent in the responses and decisions of Ben-Gurion. Despite his stormy responses to all those who attacked his policy in general, and its most recent and representative exemplar, the Sea of Galilee Operation, in particular, Ben-Gurion knew in his heart and understood that he erred in the timing of the operation and that it had overstepped reasonable bounds in its scope and intensity. Even though he reiterated that in warfare neither the results of a military action nor the number of victims and casualties on both sides could be foreseen, he knew that this time he failed. His failure to delve into the details of the operational plans and the scope of the raid – the latter coming at the request of the paratroop leaders – was what brought about a disproportional expansion of military operations. Ben-Gurion understood that without entering into the details of the plan, the exact size of the forces participating in the reprisal mission and the orders and the instructions which the field forces had been given, it was not possible to control and channel the results of such operations.

After Operation Alei Zayit, the Defence Minister requested that each and every operation be laid before him, to the last detail of operational forces slated for participation. He did not want to fall again into the trap of an uncontrollable military operation. In tightening his oversight, he did not rely only on strict instructions issued to the military regarding new initiatives for reprisal actions. He himself initiated the government decision that every major military retaliation be presented for government approval. In so doing, he restricted his own freedom of decision-making in the security area.

No reprisal operations were approved for a long time after the Sea of Galilee operation. Strategic planning in the IDF underwent a major reorientation and the armed forces were compelled to receive and implement the instructions of the Defence Minister to plan for defensive deployment in the likelihood of an Egyptian attack.

### **Toward Operation Kalkilya: Jonathan, Garandal, Lulav**

Following the Qibya operation in October 1953, the Jordanian border remained relatively quiet. The commander of the Jordanian Legion, John Glubb 'Pasha', refrained from unnecessary clashes with the IDF and sought to lower the level of tension along the lengthy armistice lines. The Jordanian Legion, however, was not in full control of the security situation within its jurisdiction, as an examination of data on infiltration into Israel bears out. Israeli documents record the number of shooting incidents and resultant casualties from 1954 to 1956. Although there was a significant decline in all categories of incidents during these years, the number of infiltrations and other types of hostile occurrences were still substantial.

Israel conducted a policy of restraint and in effect, from the time of the Laqiya reprisal at the beginning of September 1954 until September 1956, the IDF did not carry out any military operations against the Kingdom of Jordan.<sup>124</sup> On 2 March 1956, on orders from King Hussein, John Glubb, along with other senior British officers, were ousted from their command in the Jordanian Legion. This development arose against the background of pan-Arabist sentiment in the region that was spearheaded by Egypt's President Nasser and concretely directed at ousting the remnants of imperial British influence in the Middle East. The new Jordanian Chief-of-Staff, Rawdi Eynav, failed to impose his authority over the Jordanian armed forces or to control the Palestinian population in the West Bank. Jordanian stability was undermined and, more specifically, there was a loss of control over Palestinian elements because of Egyptian intervention and meddling in internal Jordanian politics. Egyptian intelligence operatives infiltrated the Hashemite regime's intelligence apparatus and instigated infiltrations into Israel in an attempt to bring about a deterioration in Jordan-Israel relations and overthrow the Jordanian monarch. The more vulnerable Jordan became before an Israeli attack, the greater would be its dependence upon British support, and this would fan the fires of Pan-Arabism in the kingdom. King Hussein decided to play the Nasserite card. Eynav was replaced by Ali Abu Nuwar who, as Chief-of-Staff, maintained a pro-Egyptian line and was prone to Nasser's influence. His policy of encouraging border incidents led to an escalation of the situation.

Despite Jordanian stated intention to stop terrorist activities originating from its territory, hostile acts continued to increase during July and August 1956. On 9 July two Israeli workers were killed in the vicinity of Ein Yahav in the far south of the country, and an Israeli tractor driver hit a mine near Afula in the north of the country. On 14 July a young Israeli was killed by a Jordanian patrol on the Yahud-Wilhelma road in the centre of the country.

The situation along the borders continued to deteriorate and it was clear to all that the Jordanian Legion was responsible for these provocations – the shooting and infiltration. Many placed the blame for the worsening situation on the Egyptian attache stationed in Jordan, Colonel Tzalah Mustafa, who exploited the infirmity of the regime and the cooperation of the Legion commander, Abu Nuwar. In September 1956, Jordan joined the Syro-Egyptian Defence Pact, thereby placing its armed forces under Egyptian command. An increase in shooting incidents along the Jordanian border followed.



On 10 September, the Jordanian National Guard attacked a group of IDF academic cadets undergoing orienteering training in the Beit Gubrin area about 100 metres from the Jordanian border. Six students were killed and their bodies dragged across the border and desecrated. The government did not approve the Chief-of-Staff's request to attack the village of Idna, which was close to where the incident took place, and issued instructions that no civilian targets be attacked. On the evening of 11–12 September, the IDF Paratroop Battalion under the command of Ariel Sharon launched Operation Jonathan, a raid on Ar-Rahwa Police Station. More than 29 Jordanian soldiers were killed and the police compound was blown up. The paratroopers suffered one killed and three wounded. Among the wounded was Meir Har-Tzion, commander of the reconnaissance patrol, whose life was saved by a unit medic performing an operation on his throat while under fire. That same evening, three Druze guards were killed at an oil-rig site at Ein Ofarim in the Arava bordering Jordan. Israel intelligence sources reported that the Jordanian police had apprehended the suspects, confiscated weapons they had taken from the Druze guards and extracted confessions to the murderous deeds. The Jordanians denied the Israeli claim that the suspects were released without a trial; on the contrary, they announced that the suspects were in detention.

Israel took revenge for the murder of the three Druze guards in Operation Garandal. On the evening of 13–14 September, in an operation also code-named 'Gulliver' in memory of the company commander Yitzhak Ben-Menahem, who fell in Operation Alei Zayit, the paratroopers raided the police station at Garandal and blew up the stronghold and its inhabitants, as well as an empty school which stood nearby. Jordanian casualties included 16 killed and six wounded. The raiding force had one killed and 12 wounded. Despite angry reactions in Jordan, the attack was received with 'understanding' by UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) which regarded the military action as a reply to the killing of the Druze guards.

The reprisal operation resulted in communications that ran at cross-purposes. While Israel tried to convey a message of deterrence to the Kingdom of Jordan, the aim of which was to pressure the regime and its Legion forces to gain control over extremist elements and infiltration activity, King Hussein regarded the raid as an indication of an imminent Israeli attack. He flew to Iraq for talks with King Faisal, and urged the stationing of Iraqi forces in Jordan. Egypt sent a military delegation to the Jordanian capital, along with three planes packed with weapons intended to reinforce the Jordanian armed forces and forestall efforts of Jordan to lessen the grip of Egyptian influence.

On 21 September, the Israeli Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, issued an operational order whose objective was to reduce friction and border incidents with Jordan:

Against the background of the West's disputes with the Arab world over Suez, and following our military response [Garandal] – we must do all in our power to prevent incidents along our borders. GHQ intends to reduce patrols along the border to the minimum necessary and vital for protecting settlements, property and residents.<sup>125</sup>

It was imperative that this front remain quiet as Israel concentrated upon an impending military drive from its southern border.<sup>126</sup>

During September, preparations for Operation Kadesh went ahead, and the framework of relations between Britain, France and Israel gained in importance over this or that response to terrorist activities of the infiltrators. Ben-Gurion did not want to endanger relations with Britain over the Jordanian clashes, fearing that military cooperation, which had been reached with great effort for the common campaign against the Egyptians, would be harmed.

While Israel was coping with the outcomes of the Garandal operation, a massacre of participants attending an archaeological conference at Kibbutz Ramat Rahel occurred. On 22 September, machine-gun fire from Jordanian Legion positions opposite the kibbutz was directed towards a crowd of conference attendees. Four were killed and 20 injured. The Jordanians claimed that the shots were fired by a deranged soldier whom they arrested and interrogated following the incident. Israel rejected the Jordanian claim and presented evidence from conference participants, who claimed they heard automatic weapons fire in addition to single-shot rifle fire. Israel was unwilling to participate in the interrogation of the Jordanian suspect and held the Kingdom of Jordan accountable for the deterioration of the situation. UN observers accepted the Jordanian version of events, even before they undertook a serious investigation of the incident.

The day following the Ramat Rahel incident, shots were fired by a Jordanian legionnaire at a woman and her daughter as they were gathering firewood beside their house at Aminadav. The daughter was killed and her hand was cut off by the murderers. An additional incident occurred on the same day at Kibbutz Maoz Haim in the Beit Shean Valley. A member of the kibbutz working in the fields was killed and his body dragged over the border.

Israel could no longer act with restraint and Ben-Gurion instructed the Chief-of-Staff to carry out a reprisal operation of limited scope in the vicinity where the attack occurred. On the evening of 25–26 September, paratroopers attacked the Hussan police station and outposts of the National Guard located in this sector. Two paratroop battalions participated in ‘Operation Lulav’: Battalion 890 under Rafael Eytan and Battalion 88, a Nahal contingent of paratroopers led by Motta Gur.<sup>127</sup> Battalion 890 assaulted the Hussan police station and Battalion 88 advanced against the Jordanian fortified position on the border in order to secure a withdrawal route for the IDF forces. The paratroopers occupied and demolished the Hussan police station as well as three military positions close by. The Jordanians sustained 39 killed and 12 wounded. The successful execution of the raid was tempered by Nahal paratroop losses – six who fell in battle and an additional four soldiers killed in a road accident in the vicinity of the operation. The serious casualty toll again raised questions about the effectiveness of these operations and the rationale of continuing retaliatory raids against the Jordanian army.

Operational conclusions from the reports and analyses of these three engagements remained unchanged. Chief-of-Staff Dayan and paratroop commander Sharon regarded the costly outcomes as an inevitable price of the continuing bloody struggle between Israel and its neighbours. Although heavy blows were inflicted upon the enemy, there was no cessation of hostile activities along the Jordanian border. Infiltration continued and border tension rose, as did mutual suspicion in the face of mounting escalation. On 4 October, five workers were killed near Sodom on the Dead Sea. The perpetrators were members of the same gang who had killed the three Druze guards at Ein Ofarim. Although the Jordanian police arrested them, King Hussein ordered their release and bestowed upon them the honour of ‘combatants’.

Ben-Gurion now rejected appeals for retaliation and took the path of restraint. His focus was elsewhere. Preparations for Operation Kadesh were in full swing, and the fate of the British–French alliance was the criterion guiding tactical military decisions.<sup>128</sup> The government, not privy to Israel’s new international liaisons, nevertheless approved Ben-Gurion’s decision to exercise restraint.

### **‘Operation Shomron’ – Kalkilya**

On 9 October 1956, two Israelis were killed while working in an orchard beside the village of Even Yehuda in Shomron. The victims' ears were cut off, a defiant symbol of the perpetrators' disdain for the enemy. Despite fear of a British reaction that might adversely affect the fate of the joint military venture secretly planned against the Egyptians, Ben-Gurion reluctantly decided to approve a retaliatory response. There were strong pressures to do so. The fact that the murders took place in broad daylight in the central region of the state demanded such a course of action. Continued restraint would be interpreted as a sign of weakness both at home and abroad. The target selected was the Kalkilya police station. Sharon, who had selected this objective, pointed out that 'the Kalkilya police station had been chosen for its location in the heart of a densely populated Arab town, and for the extensive public and propaganda effect its blowing up would have'.<sup>129</sup>

The Army's plan was approved at an emergency session of the government the day following the murders. Ben-Gurion announced that the objective of the operation would be the demolition of the police station and ruled out any assault on Jordanian fortified positions nearby. He made clear his reason for keeping the military operation within strict confines:

The plan is first of all based upon limiting the number of casualties among our forces, as well as keeping enemy losses as much as possible to a minimum. But this [military response] should be a serious warning, because this is a Taggart building, one of the large police buildings.<sup>130</sup>

In addition, the government unequivocally stated that in the course of the operation the IDF combat forces should not enter the town or any residential areas in order to preclude harm to residents.

The operational order called for the occupation and blowing up of the police station, the destruction of the Jordanian forces present at the site, and the avoidance of harm to innocent civilians.<sup>131</sup> The amount of time granted to planning and preparing the operation was only 24 hours. This restricted time frame was criticized by GHQ and the Paratroop Unit. The forces assembled only several hours before commencing the operation and underwent a dry run using the Kfar Saba police station, which was structurally similar to the one in Kalkilya, as a model. The Kalkilya police station was two stories in height with turrets, and surrounded by communication trenches, firing positions and fences. To the east of Kalkilya, the Hurvat Tsufin ruins overlooked the police area. In Sharon's operational plan, a force under Rafael Eytan was selected to occupy this post, which was strategically located on a height overlooking the Kalkilya–Azun road. The limited scope of operations did not allow for the occupation of the Hurvat Tsufin post, and the force designated to take this position received cancellation orders from senior headquarters during the military action.

The main mission was assigned to Battalion 88 under Mordechai Gur, travelling in half-tracks with the support of tanks and artillery. Their objective was to occupy and blow up the police station. Flares would be used to light up the police station during the attack. An additional reconnaissance contingent of paratroopers led by Yehuda Reshef was placed as a blocking force on the Kalkilya–Azun road. A unit from Battalion 890 under Rafael Eytan had the dual function of acting as a blocking force between the police station and the town of Kalkilya and serving as a reserve force to Battalion 88. An additional contingent of half-tracks from the Givati Brigade received orders to act both as a reserve force and as a rescue force for units undertaking blocking actions. The operation was scheduled to begin at 20:00 hours on 10 October 1956.

Motta Gur's forces were assigned three independent tasks: Company C under Abraham Orly was to tie up the police station. Company D led by Ze'ev Drory Wax would assault the station,

and Company B under the command of Natan Hocherman would have responsibility for blowing it up.<sup>132</sup>

Approximately half an hour before the start of the operation, the forces were in position, ready for the assault. An Arab who was passing by discovered the poised troops and this led them to open fire prematurely. The police station was lit up through the firing of flares, and artillery fire was directed toward it as combat troops charged into the compound and the structure itself, clearing the rooms of its occupants. The majority of resident policemen and their families fled and were not injured. Explosive charges were set in place and their detonation at 23:30 reduced the building to rubble. Casualties among the IDF forces amounted to 8 killed and 29 wounded.

While the main battle was taking place, the reconnaissance company, which was serving as a blocking force, became entangled in an engagement with the Ninth Battalion of the Jordanian Legion. Initially, the Israeli force blocked the Legion rescue contingent, which consisted of armoured vehicles, two jeeps and a truck filled with soldiers. An armoured vehicle was hit and burst into flames; the jeeps were also hit and the truck overturned. The Jordanian rescue force of about 20 soldiers was annihilated and the entire area was lit up by burning vehicles. An additional force of 17 Jordanian vehicles advanced towards the Israeli blocking force, which had now deployed in an ambush position located at a deserted outpost.

The Legion soldiers, who had studied the paratroopers' blocking and ambush tactics, left their vehicles and advanced on foot, encircling the IDF blocking force. These soldiers of the Ninth Battalion then attacked the Israeli reconnaissance force and inflicted heavy casualties on the command echelon. At this juncture, a young officer, Dovik Tamari, took over as commander of the IDF force. He assembled the injured and remaining forces on the crest of the hill, while simultaneously waging a battle against Jordanian forces attempting to advance up the hill towards them. When the Legion forces were within a short distance of the remnant IDF force, the artillery officer, Shlomo Gudelevitz, gave the command to open fire on the slopes of the hill where the reconnaissance force was dug in. In the ensuing barrage, the reconnaissance force was pinned in by a ring of artillery shells, some of which landed within a few dozen yards of the paratroopers. Jordanian efforts to advance up the hill, despite heavy losses from artillery and paratroop fire, continued until 03:30 hours.

The situation of the IDF reconnaissance force was desperate. When Sharon asked for the half-track rescue force to be brought in, he met with the refusal of the Chief-of-Staff, Dayan. Dayan was afraid of sending the convoy in the dark of night along a narrow road where there was a high risk of exposure to Jordanian fire. At this point, the possibility of sending a company under the command of Rafael Eytan was considered, but the late-night hour and the distance to be travelled to reach the entrapped force eliminated this option as well. The continuation of the fighting and the worsening situation of the IDF troops finally forced command to bring in the mobile rescue force.

At 03:30, the lights of the half-track rescue company came into view, and the reconnaissance troops, half of whom were injured, understood that help was on its way. However, the rescue plans went awry. One of the two half-track contingents took a wrong direction in the streets of Kalkilya; the second contingent consisting of eight vehicles under the command of Yitzhak Hofi, deputy commander to Sharon, continued to advance in the direction of the reconnaissance force. At the same time, the Israeli Air Force went into action. Ben-Gurion had given Dayan permission to use it.<sup>133</sup> Two Mustangs and three Harvard trainers managed to drop just two bombs. However, their intervention in the battle brought about the retreat of the Legion soldiers and allowed for the rescue of the reconnaissance force.

While returning to base, the rescue force, weighed down with casualties, encountered fire from the Tsufin outposts. Two half-tracks succeeded in getting through, but the third was hit and overturned. The remaining half-tracks managed to by-pass the overturned vehicle and crossed back over the border. Six soldiers from the damaged half-track managed to free themselves as the battle raged and retreated by foot to Kibbutz Eyal. The half-track carrying two injured soldiers remained stuck. When it became known that the two injured soldiers were still inside the overturned vehicle, the rescue force returned for them. While trying to extricate the trapped soldiers, a demolition engineer, the legendary paratroop officer Irmi Bardanov, was killed. Bardanov had joined this operation as a volunteer. The Kalkilya operation exacted a heavy price. Eighteen soldiers were killed and 68 injured. The Jordanians had about 100 police, national guard and civilians killed.<sup>134</sup>

The downcast mood which gripped the paratroopers and senior command of the IDF was not due to the large number of casualties alone. Everyone had the feeling that the policy of reprisals had reached its limit, that this military approach had exhausted itself both on the battlefield and in the political arena.

On October 14 1956, the Government met to discuss the outcomes of Operation Kalkilya. Most criticism focused on the censor's failure to conceal details of the Operation and its results from the public. Ben-Gurion was at pains to clarify that, with increasing exposure of battle accounts and growing public discontent, he gave orders to Dayan and Sharon to meet with newspaper editors with the object of relating in general to this military operation, but not releasing details of its outcome nor the constraints dictated by the political situation. Out of fear of creating an air of depression in the country. He explained to Government members that battle tactics had been guided by a desire to refrain from harming civilians, a factor which in his opinion led to an increase in the number of IDF casualties. An example of this exercise of meticulous care in the midst of battle was the instruction to check every room of the police station before blowing it up in order to make sure that no family members of the police were inside. He pointed out that the structure could have been destroyed through bombardment from the air, without IDF losses, but an operation of this sort would have likely entailed the deaths of innocent civilians.<sup>135</sup>

In this, as in previous operations, there were clear implications in the international arena. During the operation, King Hussein of Jordan and his Chief-of-Staff asked the British to employ air squadrons stationed at Amman against Israeli war-planes. Although these planes were not sent into action, Jordan told Israel in the midst of the fighting about the request to Great Britain for air intervention and called for a cessation of the operation.

Following the operation, the British Foreign Ministry warned Israel against the use of Ceylon aircraft or Centurion tanks against Jordan. This military hardware had been purchased from Britain and their deployment threatened to bring about the implementation of the Britain-Jordan Defence Pact.<sup>136</sup> Despite these clear warnings, Britain continued its covert efforts to conclude a military pact with Israel against Egypt. Indeed, this pact had top priority among senior British policymakers and mitigated political damage to the Israeli state.

On the domestic front, the Israeli scene was far more stormy, despite a coalescing consensus that a reassessment of the policy of retaliation was in order. Moshe Dayan, an architect of the reprisal approach, openly admitted that this policy, in its current form, had reached a dead end. His conclusions, however, did not lead him to abandon the role of force. In the state's chief political forum, the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, and before its leading military body, General Headquarters, he pointed to the indecisive position in which the state now found

itself.

This situation of no peace and no war cannot continue; we must force our Arab neighbours to choose between a cessation of terror against Israel or the start of a war against us. We can do this in one of two ways. We can levy reprisal strikes during daylight hours and thus employ aircraft and armour, thereby reducing our losses and damaging the prestige of the Arab states, primarily Egypt, but also Jordan and Syria.... The second approach is to cross the border, occupy key outposts which overlook the area and make their evacuation conditional on the cessation of terror.<sup>137</sup>

Both Ben-Gurion and the senior IDF command also came to the conclusion that an escalation in the nature of the reprisal strikes would not restrain terrorist and infiltration activities. Operation Kalkilya demonstrated, more than anything else, that the escalation process, which continued to exact a most heavy human toll, was not answering Israel's security needs.

Dayan, however, found himself juggling accusations emanating from the civilian echelon above and from the military echelons below. Unquestionably, the operation had developed well beyond political and military logic and embroiled the IDF in a military confrontation involving armoured, artillery and air forces. Dayan became fearful and was angry over how battlefield plans had evolved. The ensuing tension and dispute between Dayan and the paratroop commanders – first among them, Sharon – would continue for many years.

Already, at the military debriefing session summarizing the operation on 14 October, the dispute had reached major proportions. Paratroop commanders criticized the GHQ decisions that had approved the initial operational plan. Their central objection concerned the restrictions placed on the operational plan presented by the paratroopers and approved by General Tzvi Tsur of Central Command. According to Sharon, the success of the mission would only have been guaranteed through the addition of other operational objectives beyond that of the police station.

Sharon claimed that a blocking force ought to have been placed on the Nablus road beside Azun, in order to capture the Legion position at Hurvat Tsufin to the east of Kalkilya, as well as to occupy Legion positions north of the town. The Paratroop Brigade had been told that the changes came about because the operation's objective was restricted to the destruction of the police station and thus there was no need to occupy additional objectives and thereby risk unnecessary losses to the forces. The paratroop command reluctantly accepted the restricted mission.<sup>138</sup>

As a result of harsh accusations directed against him, Dayan assembled the senior army officers for an additional debriefing on 17 October. At this meeting, he explained that political constraints had dictated changes in the operational plan. The central matters that concerned the political echelon were the reduction in scope, and hence in resulting damage, of the operation, and the avoidance of harm to civilians. If the operation had extended beyond the dimensions stipulated, the British Air Force would have likely intervened.

The recurrent large number of losses in these operations also bothered the decision-makers and they sought to reduce the number of casualties as much as possible. Dayan reiterated his justification for a limited operation. He stated that he wished to avoid unnecessary clashes with the forces of the Jordanian Legion and National Guard in order to limit the number of casualties among the paratroopers. The sole objective was to blow up the police station, and in order to accomplish this Dayan called for the use of artillery fire aided by projector lamps. This tactic would spare the paratroops from making an unnecessary assault on the target. Consequently, he reduced the number of military emplacements with which Sharon's troops would have to

contend, asserting that their occupation would result in additional and unnecessary casualties. Dayan also ordered a reduction in the number of blocking actions, and assigned them positions close to the central arena of military action in order to make rescue operations easier if required. All the remoter blocking operations suggested by Sharon were cancelled except for that on the Azun Road. In addition, Sharon's plan to conduct a preventive reconnaissance patrol through the heart of the town was not approved by Dayan and this was accompanied by a clearly detailed instruction not to drive through the civilian area of the town. 'The plan was to focus on the police station, blow it up, and return home, and to try and do that economically through a heavy artillery barrage; when has any unit been given so much supportive fire?' he asked.<sup>139</sup>

Dayan chastised the paratroop officers, accusing them of lacking sensitivity to battle losses and willing to endanger their soldiers for the sake of obtaining the factor of surprise in the battle. In his opinion, the assault on the police station before artillery fire had softened up enemy positions stationed there, as well as the remote deployment of the blocking force, were the main causes for the heavy IDF casualties. Much later, reflecting on the period of the reprisal operations and the role of the Paratroopers, Dayan claimed that

the superb battle fitness of the Paratrooper Unit, and their readiness, which knew no bounds, to run risks should not absolve their commanders at all ranks from seeking ways and means to attain the operational objective with little risk-taking, as much as it is possible. In my conversations with senior commanders of the brigade, I then said that in my opinion, the failure to use artillery against the police station was not only a tactical error, but worse than that, it was evidence of an absence of sufficient effort for utilizing the unique conditions [which arise] in every operation.<sup>140</sup>

Dayan then reiterated his long-held position of principle that a military operation is not self-contained and does not have the immediate target as its sole objective. Rather, it is executed within the larger framework of political objectives.

## Summary

Operation Kalkilya exposed and accentuated the might of the tactical military echelon, those units which implement military strategy on the battle field. Unquestionably, this operation revealed the further influence of the tactical unit on policy. The Chief-of-Staff's authority was fully tested in the light of Sharon's implementation and the latter's severe indictment concerning Dayan's intervention in the operational plan and operational decisions during the course of the battle. The commanders of the operational forces, Motta Gur and Rafael Eytan, did not accept the decision of the Chief-of-Staff to limit the mandate and scope of the operation. In a commander debriefing after Operation Shomron, Eytan, who was in charge of Battalion 890, stated: 'From the moment that GHQ ruled out seizing the Tsufin fortification and the Kalkilya emplacements, Unit 202 ought to have refused to carry out its operational orders.'<sup>141</sup> The debriefing continued:

The Chief-of-Staff sharply criticized the Paratroop commanders who continue to grumble and utter criticism and accusations in the presence of the lower echelons against the higher echelons. This is the danger entailed in 202 [the Paratroop battalion], and if this indicates their true feelings, it constitutes a danger if they in fact said 'If this and that condition does not exist, then

we will not carry out [the mission]'. Each individual in 202 is first and foremost a soldier in the IDF and not a member of some 'private clique'. This type of discipline brings with it danger and cannot be tolerated.<sup>142</sup>

Dayan continued his harangue, emphasizing the unquestioned place for detailed oversight of operations by supreme command and the strict observance of lines of authority.

There are two different levels and there is no comparison between them. The proficiencies of a brigade commander may be superior to those of a Chief-of-Staff in leading the brigade, but the Chief-of-Staff must not be prevented from going into the details of the forces and the teams if he wishes to do so. Despite the unpleasanties, one must always remember that the Chief-of-Staff is the supreme commander, without any consideration of politics. Even in the purest military case, he has the last say; he may be mistaken, and if he errs often he will be removed and a better one put in his place, but hierarchy in the army must never be changed and there is no possibility of cancelling the authority and right of the Chief-of-Staff to go into matters, to make determinations and to prescribe.<sup>143</sup>

Dayan then criticized Sharon for bragging about not fulfilling commands in the presence of his officers and of vilifying and castigating the senior military echelons in front of his own troops. 'It is very dangerous to slide into the depths of boasting, accusing and sterile criticism. If some one is interested in "glorifying" the prestige of the IDF's Chief-of-Staff, he can go and accuse for the sake of accusation, but in me it arouses military nausea.'<sup>144</sup> Dayan was very caustic in his opinion of Sharon's personality, on the nature of his aggressiveness, the expansion of reprisal operations and the 'activism at all costs' of the Paratroop Unit:

There is no doubt that Arik is a commander by grace. If it had not been for him, the blocking action would not have been carried out. But in these matters, he does not know any boundary or proportion. He has spirited steeds, he tells them to run and they run. In this respect he is drunk.... Perhaps this is a natural approach of a commander who wants the maximum – the maximum missions, the maximum enemy dead – but in my opinion, Arik has gone beyond the limit.<sup>145</sup>

The failure of Operation Kalkilya led to Dayan's angry outburst. He charged Sharon with inability to control his personal drives, with consistently expanding his military operations without regard for outcomes and with ignoring the instructions and restrictions of GHQ. In summing up the operation before the paratroop commanders, Dayan returned to the painful issue of operational discipline of the field unit in light of GHQ decisions.

In summary, the negative outcomes of Operation Kalkilya sowed the seeds of doubt regarding the viability of a policy of reprisal and a reliance upon military force. The entire military echelon, including Moshe Dayan, became aware of the political damage and the military losses resulting from the inability to control the paratroop commanders and developments on the battlefield. There are claims that it was the Sinai Campaign of November 1956 that reined in and brought about IDF military restraint following the armistice of 1956. However, beyond the relative quiet which reigned on its borders after the Sinai Campaign, Israel undertook a policy of restraint, even in those cases in which infiltrators and terrorists penetrated the borders during the 1960s. The memory of the political consequences stemming from the failures of the reprisal raids was the most influential factor guiding Israeli statesmen until the Six Day War of 1967.



## Conclusion

The struggle of the fledgling state of Israel over the determination of its borders following the War of Independence constituted the basis for the formulation of the Israeli concept of retaliation. This struggle was shaped by the continuation of the Arab states' hostile orientation.

Following the War, many difficult and controversial problems remained to be solved between Israel and its neighbours. Neither the Arab states nor the United Nations recognized the ceasefire lines as permanent borders. Hundreds of thousands of Arab refugees were living in temporary crowded quarters along Israel's borders, often in full view of their houses and fields, but unable to return to their former lands and possessions. Many of the Jewish refugees from the Holocaust and new immigrants from the Arab countries, who arrived in Israel during and after the war, were settled in vacated Arab property.

For the Arab states, the border issue was not of paramount importance. In 1947, they did not accept partition of the territory of Palestine and thus did not recognize Israel's right to existence. They were waiting for an opportune moment to commence the 'second round' of fighting which would correct the military failure and restore the stolen lands to their lawful owners.

Israel sought to preserve the quiet attained by its successful completion of the War of Independence and to establish the ceasefire lines as the state's permanent borders. During the first years after the war, government policy stuck to the territorial status quo, demarcated by the demilitarized zones adjoining the ceasefire lines, and their status as delineated in Israel's interpretation of the Armistice arrangements. The Israeli Government was initially prepared to overlook the many border incursions affecting daily life along its borders with Egypt and Jordan as long as it did not see in these violations any threat to the state's sovereignty.

The Israeli Government did not seek out a war. Activist Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion did not believe that the Israel Defence Forces possessed the capability to cope with the military might of the Arab states. Moreover, he deemed the likelihood of a localized conflict erupting into a full-scale war to be highly probable and feared that such a confrontation would bring British intervention on the side of the Arab states. Despite Ben-Gurion's overwhelming political dominance over state matters in these years and his cautious orientation with regard to Israeli belligerency, he found himself in a very short time embroiled in the approval, and eventually the oversight, of an ever-growing number of military operations.

The problem of infiltration into Israeli territory was *the* issue that bothered the security establishment during these years. The war along the borders took place between the Arab refugees, who freely crossed the ceasefire lines in order to return to their houses, to cultivate their fields or to reap their crops, and the newly-settled Israelis in these frontier areas. In its initial phase, this infiltration was carried on 'innocently', motivated by a desire to return home, but as it became increasingly accompanied by theft, smuggling and the like, it quickly turned into armed and violent incursions. The infiltrators became more adept in executing these forays. Border violations became economically 'profitable'. In the refugee camps and Arab villages stretched along the Israeli border, bands of robbers organized and operated nightly within Israeli

territory. Thus, in addition to those who sought to return to their inheritance, visit their families and relatives or bring back food for their families in the refugee camps, hundreds infiltrated who plundered everything in sight in the frontier settlements of the new immigrants. In the earliest stages, at least, these infiltration activities did not receive support from the Arab countries. It was essentially regarded as a localized affair, a conflict between frontier settlers and refugee infiltrators intent upon smuggling and theft.

In the first phase of the 'frontier war' (1950–53), the reprisal actions of the IDF targeted civilians with the purpose of harming those Arab villages from which the infiltrators set out. These reactive operations, which were labelled and justified as 'an eye for an eye', sought to damage property from these villages and create pressure on the Arab regimes to prevent the infiltration. Despite the widespread actions of the IDF, infiltration activity continued, unaffected by the large number of trespassers who were killed and wounded in clashes. Penalizing actions by the IDF against the Arab villages did not bring about the hoped-for results and it appeared that Israel had no response to the problem of infiltration.

Israel regarded the phenomenon of infiltration as a threat to its sovereignty. Moreover, it feared a situation in which an increasing stream of returning refugees would endanger the demographic balance of the new Jewish state. In addition, the return of refugees and their control over grazing land and cultivable fields raised the spectre of a loss of Israeli territory along the unrecognized borders, blurring potential demarcation lines for state borders. However, the greatest threat of all was the serious insecurity to which the residents in the frontier settlements, mostly new immigrants, were subject. Many residents abandoned these settlements for safer havens in the central area of the country, thereby weakening the settlements' social infrastructure and making them even more vulnerable to murderous attacks and robbery. In the national arena, the infiltration activities had a negative impact on the morale of society and a concern that many Jews would leave the country for more secure lands.

The Qibya raid in October 1953 was a turning-point that marked a change in IDF policy with regard to the border war. After the publication of the results of the military operation, in which 69 civilians, half of them women and children, were killed, the Israeli Government ordered the IDF to refrain from attacking civilian targets and to concentrate on military objectives in their retaliatory operations against Arab states. It should be pointed out that the widespread reverberations over the outcomes of the Qibya operation brought about a significant reduction in infiltration along the border with Jordan. The establishment of an Israeli border guard unit within the framework of the Israeli Police made a notable contribution to quieting Israel's eastern border. In addition, the Jordanian Legion under the command of John Glubb Pasha, undertook responsibility for closing the Jordanian border to infiltrators, and did everything in its power to bring about quiet along the lengthy border between Israel and the Kingdom of Jordan.

Among the groups that lent a helping hand to terrorist activities against Israel were a political organization headed by Hajj Amin al-Husseini, a former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and the Muslim Brotherhood, which operated from the Gaza Strip and Jordan.

The growing confrontation and escalation with Egypt along the Gaza Strip border supplanted the tension along the Jordanian border. Border clashes with the Egyptian army and increased infiltration activity directed by high-level Egyptian intelligence officers led to the formation of a 'Fedayeen Battalion'. The Fedayeen (sacrificial souls) was an organization for intelligence-gathering and the perpetration of terror. Their activities, which took the form of murder and sabotage and were directed at civilians in the centre of the country, amounted to small-scale warfare with potentially widespread demoralizing consequences.

The Gaza Operation of 28 February 1955 was a turning point in Israel–Egypt relations. The devastating IDF military strike was a humiliating blow to the Egyptians and to the stability of the new Egyptian regime of ‘Free Officers’. In its wake the Fedayeen conducted dozens of terrorist attacks, in an effort to restore honour to the Egyptians. The Gaza Fedayeen unit received reinforcements from Egypt and became a select military unit. Similar units were established by Egyptian intelligence in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

The growing wave of Nasserism led to the expulsion of British officers from Jordan at the beginning of March 1956 and their replacement by radical forces, opening the way to infiltration activities from Jordan into Israel and again raising the level of violence and inter-state tension.

The increasing number of violent incidents along the Egyptian border during the course of 1954–55 brought the opposing political/security conceptions held by the heads of the political and military establishments in Israel to a head. Moshe Sharett, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister during this period, sought to moderate the conflict through diplomatic means, expecting that a partial solution of the problems would reduce the degree of military friction between Israel and its neighbours. Sharett and personnel in the Foreign Ministry regarded the policy of retaliation, of which the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, was the leading proponent, as a basic error which harmed the vital interests of the state, especially its ability to promulgate an effective foreign policy in the international arena. In their estimation, the military operations brought about a process of escalation and extreme hostility within the Arab states, whose end result would be another war. The Minister of Defence, Pinhas Lavon, and the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, opposed the diplomatic approach. As long as Sharett remained Prime Minister, he tried to rein in, as best he could, the initiatives of Dayan and the army, but more often than not he failed because of the working methods and norms of updating, confirmation and reporting by the army to the political echelon.

The return of Ben-Gurion to Sharett’s government as Minister of Defence in February 1955 strengthened the standing of Dayan and removed any barriers in regard to his IDF initiatives for advancing a policy of retaliation. The process of escalation towards war began with the Gaza Operation and the arms race, which commenced in the Middle East during these same months.

It may be said that at this stage a ‘policy of deterioration’ dominated Dayan’s security concept. He believed that the current situation was opportune for bringing about a war against the major enemies of Israel - that is, before the Czech arms deal with Egypt and the general arms race in the area ate away at Israel’s military advantages.

On the issue of the timing for a war, a significant gap existed between the positions of Ben-Gurion and Dayan. Ben-Gurion did hold to an uncompromising security policy which replied with force to infiltration incidents and violence across Israel’s borders, but he stopped short of pursuing a war path. He opposed the rapprochement line of Sharett and did not agree with his request for intervention by the major powers and the United Nations in the conflict, fearing that such a course would infringe upon Israel’s sovereignty and independence. On these matters his position was identical to that of Dayan and thus he gave his backing to the policy of retaliation. However, Dayan’s pressure to bring about a war with Egypt met with Ben-Gurion’s resistance, until the conditions became ripe through the alliance with the French and British in the middle of 1956.

Despite Dayan’s overweening determination, Ben-Gurion did not allow the policy of reprisal to deteriorate into a general war. The Sabcha operation of November 1955 and Operation Omer, scheduled for December but not approved, are cases in point in which Ben-Gurion reined in the war horses.

While issues concerning the extent and viability of the policy of retaliation were played out by political actors in the senior political and military echelons, the framework itself was being forged and its process fanned by military developments on the field of battle. In many respects, local military initiatives and their logical dynamic determined the parameters within which military strategy and state policy operated. The leading agent in this determination from below was the Paratroop Unit and its commander, Ariel Sharon.

Unit 101 was given its duties against the background of the military failures from 1951 to the end of 1953. The incapacity of the IDF to cope with infiltration activities and the terror of the Fedayeen required a non-conventional solution, the emergence of which was far more probable outside the confines of the regular hierarchy and conservative routine of the IDF. The special Unit 101 under Ariel Sharon provided the sole opportunity to employ unorthodox and nonconformist means towards this problem. This unit of about 40 soldiers became the fulcrum for the revolution which began in the security conception of the IDF and the state in general. The merger of Unit 101 with the 890 Battalion paratroops served as the military canvas on which the battle values and operational capabilities of the IDF as whole and the policy of reprisal espoused by the Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan, were realized.

The Paratroop Unit bore the routine security burden and carried out the vast majority of reprisal operations from the end of 1953 to the Sinai War in October 1956. Its achievements were not attained easily. Unit soldiers underwent arduous and rigorous training exercises based on the development of innovative combat doctrine. Motivation was bolstered by the cultivation of a fighting spirit and shared pride in the unit by commanders and soldiers alike. Many patrols and raids were conducted over the borders deep into enemy territory, and the capability of the commander and his unit were tested at least as much through the execution of these missions, if not more so, than through the preparatory drills. The value of dedication to the mission stood above all other combat values and above any order or instruction. The operational capability of the unit was continually tested and there was no room for error. One of the principles of fighting developed by the paratroopers was the desire to engage in hand-to-hand combat. This principle, among others, depended upon certain tactical operations of the unit such as the imperative assault charge against an enemy post or the surprise of ambush at the moment of engagement. For example, the tactic of reverting to an assault tactic when hitches in an operation occurred was demonstrated in the conquest of an Egyptian fortification during Operation Kissufim in 1954, in Operation Black Arrow in Gaza in 1955 and in many other operations. Combat tactics against fortified objectives, the occupation and detonation of British Taggart police stations, the doctrine of forays and night fighting, values such as the commander taking the lead in battlefield engagements and calling out 'follow me', the camaraderie of soldiers, which found expression in the iron rule 'not to abandon wounded on the battle field', the importance of personal example, courage and the taking of personal responsibility – all became established principles of action which brought about a revolution in command and combat norms in all IDF units. In short, the Paratroop Unit functioned as a military school for the IDF.

The sensitivity and concern for any soldier who was taken prisoner would bring the paratroopers to fever pitch, with demands to carry out a kidnap-rescue at any price. The paratroopers set out on independent operations, without authorization, to kidnap Jordanian officers and soldiers in order to exchange prisoners – as in the case of their comrade Yitzhak Gibly, who was taken prisoner in Operation Ezun. Dayan, who was witness to the enthusiasm and pressure of the paratroop officers to carry out such an operation, gave authorization for the continuation of these operations even after he had censured Sharon for carrying out a kidnapping

without the approval of GHQ.

The preparedness exhibited by the paratroopers gave them the power to influence the senior military echelons, and their capabilities on the battle field enabled them to win the confidence of army commanders and the civilian echelon. In particular, the response capacity of the unit, in terms of both immediately presentable operational plans for a specific retaliation and the rapidity with which the unit could organize for implementing a plan, provided then with a near monopoly of means for desperate politicians and statesmen in search of policy realization. 'Confidence and capability flowed upward' stated Sharon in a remembrance ceremony commemorating 50 years of reprisal operations. 'Our duty as combatants was to stamp with our feet, ready for battle. The civil echelon generally has the role of moderating; it sees all the political considerations. Stamping the feet should always come from below, and so we stamped.'<sup>1</sup>

From 1953 to 1956, the Paratroop Unit carried out more than 70 reprisal operations. Almost all the missions it undertook were originally suggested by the commander of the unit, Ariel Sharon. According to Sharon, the incubation and shaping of the policy of retaliation took place in the Paratroop Unit, not only at the operational level, but also at the ideological and political level:

The paratroopers did not stop at implementation of their operations. The paratroopers under my command in these years had a hand in the determination of the objectives and the pace of the operation's implementation. One could say that the ideology of the reprisal operations was to a great extent formulated in the Paratroop Unit.<sup>2</sup>

In effect, Israel's security policy during these years was determined in the field. The civilian echelon busied itself with 'moderating' as best it could the perceived excesses.

The military-security outlook of Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon dominated the foreign and defence policy of the State of Israel in the early years of the 1950s. The political leadership and, above all, Moshe Sharett as Prime Minister, did not manage to restrain the military echelon and was dragged into accommodating themselves to the reprisal policy, which stood opposed to their very basic political outlook.

The political and military power of Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon was built in these years, when Ben-Gurion and Pinhas Lavon, as Ministers of Defence, became prisoners of the militarily activist positions of prominent army commanders. Sharon's influence as commander of the operational unit far exceeded his rank and standing for this type of military action. Even though the Paratroop Unit reached battalion size, it remained for its inner coterie 'a unit'.

The image of a victorious army conferred a feeling of security and pride among Israeli citizenry. The status of the IDF and its commanders rose in public consciousness during these years. They became heroes whose lustre shone for many years. The Israeli public's feeling of pride (encouraging and glorifying acts of heroism so that they became living legends) reinforced the military in its activism and retaliation strategy, heightening escalation and continuing the violence that originated from over the borders.

The process of escalation and armed confrontation along the borders, which was harmful to the state's deterrent capabilities, also produced mounting frustration among military leaders. A policy was not operating according to its intended effect yet remained an imperative means of responding to immediate situations. Necessity was the mother of contention. The view that there was 'no choice' but to respond also accentuated a military outlook fixated on reaction. Preventive war was the mirror image of a policy of reprisal, the paradigm of military initiative. In many respects, it was a dialectical outcome of the reactive policy of retaliation, qualitatively

different in appearance but retaining the kernel of might as its *raison d'être*.

When the security policy of reprisal operations is examined for these years, it becomes evident that reliance on military force was the decisive factor. Given the balance of power throughout the region, force and 'activism' substituted for policy and became the central factor in forming the area's ambience, which was almost entirely determined by Israel's relations with its Arab neighbours.

The failure of the strategy of retaliation as the central policy of the government in attempting to bring calm to Israel's borders found expression not only in the number of military and civilian casualties, but also in the feeling that only a preventive war could resolve the security problem. Army commanders increasingly gained a great deal of influence over the decision-making process in the civilian arena and dragged the ship of state into an escalating process, entailing military might whose final outcome would be in the form of a preventive war, the Sinai Campaign.

The story of what was done during the period of retaliatory operations provides ample scope for an in-depth discussion of decision-making processes during a period of protracted conflict. The attempt to deal with decision-making processes using the analytical scalpel knife of a political scientist seems pretentious in the 'fog of war' and in the light of the hidden complexities of the political process and military action.

A melancholy fact is that in many instances the evidence needed to reconstruct the difficult cases no longer exists. In other instances, there is conflicting, incomplete, faulty and false evidence. Despite all the aforementioned, conclusions may be reached and a full picture formulated with regard to the functioning of the operative echelon, that is the military unit and its actual impact on policy. I would say that it is necessary to examine in a renewed manner the role and power of military action as an independent variable in the determination of security policy on the basis that the superintending echelons must cope with the outcomes and formulate policy according to what is done in the field. They are often obliged to give their backing to the military unit and its commanders, to keep a stiff upper lip in the light of unpalatable outcomes and to come to their assistance when subjected to domestic or foreign criticism.

In a process of protracted armed conflict, the control of the civilian over the military echelon progressively diminishes. The weight and impact of the operative force and its commanders grow in direct relation to the indispensability of that force, its successes and the status of the senior military echelon.

To regain civilian hegemony over activist military commanders, political leadership must define *long-term strategic goals* and use this framework for considering events and processes which develop out of border disputes and hostile actions. Means and manner of response must be subordinated to state policy, especially under the circumstances of limited armed conflict.

The factor of uncertainty is central and must always be in the forefront of the decision-makers' consciousness. Even if the objectives appear clear, the number of variables that are not within the estimation capability or control of the decision-makers are so great that every decision necessarily contains errors and hidden obstacles. Decision-makers are not able to evaluate with complete and grounded confidence the attainment of their goals or the accompanying results. Thus those who turn to force as a strategic response in the form of continuous reprisal direct their country onto a subterranean path of violence whose fate is continuing escalation. The considerable uncertainty as to whether or not a major military operation may succeed risks provoking sensitive and extreme responses of hatred, cries for revenge, and the desire to restore national honour.

In an era of limited war and continuous struggle against terrorism, military operations are perceived as possessing minor political risks compared to their many political and policy gains. Each military operation gives the appearance of being self-contained, confined in scope and hence manageable. Under these circumstances, the temptation to use force as a quick fix is quite large for all politicians, as well as for army commanders. When a government seeks a general war, processes such as reprisal operations and limited combat allow decision-makers to be dragged into an unwanted policy while deceiving public opinion.

The ultimate outcomes of a policy of reprisal are dependent on the responses of the enemy but, more than that, on the cultural world and the values with regard to life and death of the adversary. Rational decisions undertaken by one side may be perceived as suicidal actions lacking all reason and purpose by the other side [Elaborate].

Given the basic assumption that policy is directed towards calming the borders and bringing about peace, a defensive policy along the borders which executes operations to harm terrorists and their infrastructure is likely to attain the ultimate objective while reducing risks of increasing violence.

If an activist military is infringing upon the priority of civilian policy-making, the civilian echelon may launch an offensive intervention into the traditional decision domains of the military in order to curb their influence. While this can take many forms, the civilian echelon must be involved in decision-making processes when it comes to the stipulation of military objectives and their attainment at all levels. This involvement means that the decision-makers must have the capability to follow closely the translation of their policy instructions into defining military targets, and to place on them the required limitations in the early stages.

In a continuing process of violent actions, an undesirable process in itself, a wide number of military units should be included so that implementation is not left in the hands of one element alone. The participation of many deputy commanders produces mutual criticism and prevents a monopoly of knowledge and experience from exercising excessive influence and power.

Technological progress has placed in the hands of state leaders the capacity to use sophisticated and accurate methods and has led to advantages in the rapidity of an operation, precision in hitting the target, control over the intensity of the military strike and, above all, the ability to control, oversee and monitor. An interesting military phenomenon emerges: paradoxically, a leap in the level of intensity and quality of weapons and armament makes a significant contribution to the capacity for control and perhaps curbs the uncontrollable escalation during battle.

The age of advanced technology on the battle field is just coming into its own during the opening stage of the war against terror. Many questions are posed to decision-makers, and it is reasonable that lessons from past wars should remain within their ken before the galloping horses of war are released onto the victorious battlefield, and shouts of jubilation emerge from their throats.

## Appendix: Statistics on Terrorism and Violence 1953–1956

*Table 1* Violent acts of infiltrators (not including sabotage and mine-laying)

	<i>1953</i>	<i>1954</i>	<i>1955</i>	<i>1956</i>
Northern Command	20	13	11	17
Central Command	49	22	18	19
Southern Command	18	28	22	50
Total	87	63	51	86

*Table 2* Israeli casualties

	<i>1953</i>		<i>1954</i>		<i>1955</i>		<i>1956</i>	
	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>
Northern Command	5	9	2	4	3	13	3	12
Central Command	26	29	9	5	12	10	10	15
Southern Command	20	7	7	38	5	20	26	40
Total	51	45	18	47	20	43	39	67

*Table 3* Results of military actions against infiltrators



<i>Infiltrators</i>	<i>1953</i>	<i>1954</i>	<i>1955</i>	<i>1956</i>	<i>1957</i>
Northern Command					
Killed	6	2	2	1	1
Captured	99	61	0	21	67
Surrendered	2	0	0	1	7
Clashes without result	24	13	3	15	13
Central Command					
Killed	11	5	4	1	2
Captured	35	4	4	5	24
Surrendered	2	2	0	0	0
Clashes without result	126	14	7	14	26
Southern Command					
Killed	108	45	18	56	33
Captured	95	83	16	96	66
Surrendered	6	2	0	1	9
Clashes without result	91	61	17	44	102
Total					
Killed	125	52	24	58	36
Captured	229	148	20	122	157
Surrendered	10	4	0	2	16
Clashes without result	241	88	27	73	141

*Table 4* Routine security measures 1953–1956 – shooting incidents

	<i>1953–1954</i>	<i>1954–1955</i>	<i>1955–1956</i>	<i>1956–1957</i>
Lebanese border	3	3	0	3
Syrian border	19	59	66	69
Jordanian border	102	153	51	102
Egyptian border	10	86	319	119
Total	134	301	436	293

*Table 5* Israeli killed and injured

	<i>1953–1954</i>		<i>1954–1955</i>		<i>1955–1956</i>		<i>1956–1957</i>	
	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Injured</i>
Terror and sabotage	52	54	18	50	27	79	46	133
Shooting incidents	11	30	12	55	12	51	21	44
Reprisal actions	1	4	16	49	15	63	29	126
Total	64	88	46	154	54	193	96	303

*Table 6* Hostile actions against Israel by year and sector during term of office of tl Chief-of-Staff, Moshe Dayan

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Terms of office</i>			
	<i>1953–1954</i>	<i>1954–1955</i>	<i>1955–1956</i>	<i>1956–1957</i>
Lebanon				
Shooting incidents	3	3	0	3
Terror and sabotage	16	8	4	13
Clashes	0	0	0	0
Syria				
Shooting incidents	19	59	66	69
Terror and sabotage	0	0	1	1
Clashes	0	0	0	0
Jordan				
Shooting incidents	102	153	49	101
Terror and sabotage	75	40	41	91
Clashes	0	0	2	4
Egypt				
Shooting incidents	10	86	321	120
Terror and sabotage	14	40	43	67
Clashes	2	1	5	4
Total				
Shooting incidents	134	301	436	293
Terror and sabotage	105	88	177	172
Clashes	2	1	7	8

## Glossary of Hebrew Terms

- Gadna**A pre-military programme for youth between the ages of 14–17. The name is derived from the Hebrew initials for ‘Youth Battalion’ (*Gdudei Noar*). The programme was founded in 1941 within the para-military underground organization, the Hagana, in order to prepare Jewish youth for active service. The young trainees learn field craft, acquaintance with terrain features, orienteering, basic signal training, first aid and light weapons training.
- Hagana**The central and principal military wing of Jewish population in the Land of Israel, organized in 1920. It was the main fighting force from the start of the War of Independence on 30 November 1947 to the founding of the Israel Defence Force by the new State on 29 May 1948, at which point it was disbanded.
- Kibbutz**A form of collective settlement established in the early 1920s. It is based upon principles of common and equal ownership of the means of production and provision of consumption items.
- Mevo Betar**The name of a *moshav* [see next entry] in the Jerusalem hills.
- Moshav**A rural settlement whose members are organized in a collective association. Terms of communal association: common participation in purchasing the means of production and collective marketing of the agricultural product. Each family cultivates its own private plot and is fully responsible for this property.
- Mukhtar**Head of an Arab village, usually appointed by the government, who represents the affairs of the village before the ruling authorities.
- Nahal**The initials for ‘Fighting Pioneer Youth’ (*Noar Halutzi Lohem*). A designated Command of the IDF, founded in 1948 in order to assure a continuous supply of pioneering manpower for the kibbutzim. It combines full military training and activities with settlement activity in the frontier and desert regions of the country.
- Palmah**The initials for Bridgehead Companies (*Plugot Mahatz*), a striking force of the Hagana from the early 1940s until the War of Independence in 1948. Palmah soldiers combined military training with work on a kibbutz, which also served as a military base for individual Palmah units. Their civilian work served to finance their basic needs. At the time of the War of Independence, it consisted of 3 brigades which became reserve forces at the end of the War.
- HaShomer**A secret organization established for guard duty and defence of the agricultural and rural settlements in pre-State Israel. Founded in 1909 and disbanded with the formation of the Hagana in the early 1920s. At its peak, it comprised about 100 members.
- Yishuv**Collective name, given to the organized Jewish population in the Land of Israel until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

# Notes

## Introduction

- 1 Mordechai Bar-On, *Challenge and Encounter – the Path to the Kadesh Exercise – 1956* (Sde Boker: The Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1991). See fn. 27, ch. 3.
- 2 This awkward term was reluctantly coined by Thomas Schelling, professor of political science at Harvard. ‘Forced compliance’ may be an infelicitous substitute.
- 3 Robert Jervis, *Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Centre for International Affairs, 1976).
- 4 Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Centre for International Affairs, 1986).
- 5 Yair Evron, ‘The Interrelationship between Foreign Policy and Defence Policy in the Years 1949–1956’, *Skim Hodshit*, 35, 11 (December 1988); Josef Evron, *Suez 1956 from a New Perspective* (Tel Aviv: Modan, 1986); Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence Without the Bomb: the Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987); J. Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

## 1 Conceptualizing the Policy of Military Retaliation

- 1 Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Haifa: Sifriat Poalim, 1994), p. 30.
- 2 Kenneth Boulding, *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 259.
- 3 See, for example, David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987).
- 4 Anita Shapira, *Sword and Dove* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), p. 364. The Hebrew book title captures the value tension that the advance towards political sovereignty brought to Jewish life.
- 5 Yoram Peri, ‘Civilian Control During a Protracted War’, in Ernest Krausz (ed.), *Politics and Society in Israel* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985), p. 368.
- 6 Michael Selzer, *The Wineskin and the Wizard: The Problem of Jewish Power in the Context of East European Jewish History*, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1970, p. 119.
- 7 Simone Weil, who equated Jehovah with a ‘god of armies’, wrote in 1939 a propos of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine: ‘There is no need today to bring into existence a nation which, in fifty years will become a threat for the Near East and for the entire world. The existence of an old Jewish tradition in Palestine is precisely a reason for creating a Jewish home elsewhere than in Jerusalem.’ Quoted from *Nouveaux Cahiers*, No. 38, 1–2, 1939, pp. 18–20 in Paul Giniewski, *Simone Weil ou la Haine de Soi*, Paris: Berg International, 1979, p. 34. Weil also ascribes an identical tendency to domination among Arabs, derived from the Muslim religious tradition. See Simone Weil, *Connaissance Surnaturelle*, Paris: Gallimard, 1950, p. 171.
- 8 Martin Buber, *Pointing the Way*, ‘A Letter to Gandhi’, Morris S. Friedman, trans. & edit., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963, p. 146.
- 9 Baruch Kimmerling, ‘*Militarism in Israel*,’ *European Journal of Sociology* 34, 1993, p. 199 [196–223].
- 10 See Simha Flapham, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, New York: Pantheon, 1987; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*, Cambridge, UP, 1989; Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan*, London: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- 11 Raymond Aron, lecture at the opening of semester studies at the Inter-Service School of the French Army, 9 October 1974.
- 12 Avner Yaniv, *Deterrence without the Bomb: The Politics of Israeli Strategy* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1987).
- 13 Paul Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: new approaches in history, theory and policy*, New York: The Free Press, 1979, ch. 8, ‘Theories of Bargaining with Threats of Force’, in *Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy*, pp. 183–202.
- 14 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 141.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- 16 Mordechai Bar-On, ‘Reprisal Operations as a System of Deterrence’, in Motti Golani (ed.), *Black Arrow: The Gaza Operation and Israel’s Policy of Retaliation in the 1950s* (Defence Ministry, 1954).
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

- 18 Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), p. 209.
- 19 Schelling, *Arms and Influence*.
- 20 See Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston, MA: Little Brown & Co., 1971), p. 31.
- 21 Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days* (New York: Signet Books, 1969), p. 125.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 23 See Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (New York: F.A. Praeger, 1965).
- 24 Ole Holsti, *Crisis, Escalation War* (Montreal & McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972); George Queser, *Deterrance before Hiroshima* (New York: U. Wiley, 1966); Frederick Sallagar, M., *The Road to Total War* (New York: Von Nostrand Reinhold, c. 1969) [1974 or 1975].
- 25 Giandomenico Majone and Aaron Wildavsky, 'Implementation as Evolution', *Policy Studies Review Annual*, 1978, pp. 114, 116.
- 26 R. Jervis, 'The Spiral Model and Intentions of the Adversary', in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).
- 27 Kenneth E. Boulding, 'National Images and International Systems', in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 422–31.
- 28 Glen Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision-making and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).
- 29 Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- 30 For an overview of the political science perspective on civilian-military relations, see Peter D. Feaver, 'Civil-Military Relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999): 211–241.
- 31 von Carl Clausewitz, *On War*, in Anatol Rapoport (ed.) (Pelican Books, 1968), p. 173.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- 33 Raymond Aron, *Paix et Guerre Entre les Nations* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1966), pp. 34ff.
- 34 G. Majone and A. Wildavsky, 'Implementation as Evolution', *Policy Studies Annual Review*, 1979, pp. 103–17.
- 35 J. Pressman and A. Wildavsky, *Implementation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); E. Bardach, *The Implementation Game* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1977); L. Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).
- 36 Majone and Wildavsky, 'Implementation as Evolution', p. 109.
- 37 An interactive process between policy-making and implementation should not be confused with a synthetic approach known as 'fusionism', in which the two components are homogenized. This latter theory, initially put forward by Amos Perlmutter in *The Military and Politics in Modern Times* (New York: Yale University Press, 1977), has been developed both conceptually and empirically. See, for example, B. Boene, 'How "unique" Should the Military Be? A Review of Representative Literature and Outline of a Synthetic Formulation', *European Journal of Sociology*, 31, 1 (1990), pp. 3–59 and Y. Ben Meir, *Civil Military Relations in Israel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995). For a counter-position, see Douglas L. Bland, 'A Unified Theory of Civil-Military Relations', *Armed Forces & Society*, 26, 1 (1999), pp. 7–26, which argues that political culture criteria create separate spheres of military and civil undertakings, thus enabling fluctuating patterns of shared responsibility.
- 38 D. Mackenzie Brown, *The White Umbrella* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1964), p. 18; Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government* (Penguin Books, 1962).
- 39 Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Art of War* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 3.
- 40 Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), pp. 667–8.
- 41 Martin Bimbach, *American Political Life: An Introduction to United States Government* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1971), p. 555.
- 42 Adrienne Koch and William Peden (eds), *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: The Modern Library, 1944), pp. 470–1.
- 43 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 406.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 295.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 402.
- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 Yehuda Wallach, *Military Doctrines* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1977), pp. 92–3.
- 48 Tzvi Lanir, 'State Objectives and Military Goals in Israel's Wars', in a collection of articles, (Tel Aviv: Kav Adom Publishers), p. 118.
- 49 Ezer Gat, *War Policy in Modern Military Circles* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1984), p. 30.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Henry Eccles, *Military Concepts and Philosophy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1965).
- 52 Yehuda Wallach, *Military Doctrines*, pp. 92–93.
- 53 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 82.
- 54 Quoted in Telford Taylor, *Sword and Swastika* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 354.
- 55 Bengt Abrahamsson, *Military Professionalization and Political Power* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1972'), p. 158.
- 56 Yoram Peri, 'The Constitution', *Davar*, 12 November 1982.
- 57 Yitzhak Rabin, *In the Oppositional Desert*, articles by Yitzhak Rabin 1977–1979, article dated 9 June 1978 'The Civilian and the Military Echelon: Which of the Two Bears Responsibility?'
- 58 Yoram Peri, 'Linkage Patterns of the IDF to the Political System', in *A War of Choice*, (Tel Aviv: Kav Adom Publishers,

- 1985), p. 33.
- 59 Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Haifa: Sifriat Poalim, 1994), p. 14.
- 60 Dan Horowitz, 'The Israeli Conception of National Security, 1948–1972', in Benjamin Neuberger (ed.), *Diplomacy in the Shadow of Confrontation* (Tel Aviv: The Open University, 1984), p. 123.
- 61 Zionist Archives 8/56/19. Dayan to the head of the General Staff, 9 June 1954. On 26 May 1954 an IDF force set out to seize a flock of sheep from over the border as a response to the theft of a flock of sheep from the Nahal stronghold at Ein Gedi. The force, under the command of Meir Har-Tzion, killed villagers for no rhyme or reason and Dayan himself viewed the raid as a military failure. In Dayan's memorandum to the Minister of Defence he noted that 'the execution of this operation in this fashion is a serious violation of discipline at high ranks in the army; orders were to avoid any killing'. But a short time after he vented his anger and gave the required explanation to the Defence Minister, he wrote to the Head of the General Staff, Meir Amit, summarizing his general faith in this operative procedure.
- 62 S.A. Finer, *The Man on Horseback* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 11.
- 63 Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), p. 304.
- 64 Quoted in Yehuda Wallach, *Military Doctrines* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1977), pp. 92–93.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Brodie, *War and Politics*, pp. 219–20.
- 67 General Yigal Alon, 'Education of Combatants', *Ma'arachot*, 82–83 (July 1950), p. 149. Alon draws on word juxtaposition in Judges 14:14, 'And out of the strong came forth sweetness', but with a different meaning.
- 68 Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, p. 9.
- 69 Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 295.
- 70 Brodie, *War and Politics*, p. 492.
- 71 Finer, *The Man on Horseback*, pp. 33–4.
- 72 Liddell Hart, *Why We Do Not Learn from History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972), p. 35.

## 2 Grasping the Reins of Power

- 1 Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1994), p. 15.
- 2 Aharon Kleinman, 'Continuity and Change in Israeli Diplomacy', in Benjamin Neuberger (ed.), *Diplomacy in the Shadow of Confrontation* (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1984), p. 39. See also Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 213, on motivational bias in strategy selection when survival is defined as the key strategy problem. The 'there is no choice' option turns what is necessary into the possible.
- 3 David Ben-Gurion, *Sinai Campaign* (Tel Aviv: Sifria Eynot, 1959), p. 18.
- 4 Ibid., p. 13.
- 5 Ibid., p. 23.
- 6 Meir Amit, 'The Period of Reprisal Operations', in *The IDF and its Halo - The Encyclopaedia of the Army and Security, 1948–1968*, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1981), p. 8.
- 7 See David Tal, *Israel's Concept of Routine Security Measures* (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1998), p. 27. In his study, Tal expands upon the failure to cope with infiltration during the early years of the state because of the unwillingness of the IDF to occupy itself with this matter and because of the failure to establish border guard units until 1953.
- 8 See Ariel Sharon with David Chanoff, *Warrior: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), p. 87. Sharon leapt into the military performance breach and inaugurated his illustrious and/or infamous martial reformation of the IDF. See chs 4 and 5.
- 9 For a description of this operation and its outcomes see Ch. 5.
- 10 Yaakov Erez and Ilan Kaffir, *Conversations with Moshe Dayan* (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1981), p. 32. These interviews took place shortly before Dayan's decease.
- 11 Meir Amit, 'Period of Reprisal Actions', in Ilan Kfir and Ya'acov. Erez (eds), *The IDF and Its Corps: Encyclopaedia of the Army and Defence*, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1981), p. 8.
- 12 Shimon Peres, 'On Guard for our Security', in *Fruitful Group Utterances*, Vol. II, booklet 3 (Tel Aviv: Igud HaKvutzot and HaKibbutzim Publishing Company, June 1954), p. 413.
- 13 Shlomo Aronson and Dan Horowitz, 'The Strategy of Controlled Retaliation – the Israeli Case', in Dan Caspi and Yaakov Bluestein (eds), *State and Government*, Vol. I (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1971), pp. 77–99.
- 14 Nahum Goldman, *The Jewish Paradox* (Israel Universities Press, 1968), p. 99.
- 15 Yitzhak Navon, *David Ben-Gurion: The State of Israel Renewed* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), p. 484.
- 16 Ibid., p. 484.
- 17 Labour Party Archives, speech at the Mapai Secretariat, 18 September 1947.
- 18 Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1978), p. 1018.
- 19 Zaki Shalom, *Policy in the Shadow of Dispute* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot Publications, Ministry of Defence, 1996), p. 73. But see David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), pp. 4ff., singling out as uncharacteristic this particular continuity of a Jewish history theme in Ben-Gurion's foreign policy of 'survivalism'. It

- cohabits uneasily with Ben-Gurion's Zionist outlook, namely that normality through a viable Jewish state will end the perennial diaspora concerns of survival.
- 20 David Ben-Gurion, *The State of Israel Renewed* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), p. 470.
  - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 486.
  - 22 *Ibid.*, p. 484.
  - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 521.
  - 24 Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, 3 vols. (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), p. 1152.
  - 25 Golda Meir, *My Life* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1975), p. 207.
  - 26 David Ben-Gurion, 'The Sinai Campaign', Session 140 of the Third Knesset, 19 June 1956, p. 129.
  - 27 Gabriel Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett, Biography of a Political Moderate* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 15.
  - 28 Protocol from the Mapai Central Committee, 2 October 1931, p. 5. See Gabriel Sheffer, 'General Solution vs. Moderation of the Israel-Arab Conflict: A Re-examination of the Clash Between Moshe Sharett and David Ben-Gurion,' in *Zionism and the Arab Question* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Centre, 1979), pp. 119–61.
  - 29 Moshe Sharett to Ben-Gurion, 24 September 1921, Labour Party Archives, 1041IV
  - 30 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, 19 October 1953.
  - 31 *Ibid.*, 12 October 1953.
  - 32 *Ibid.*, 12 October 1953.
  - 33 Shabtai Tevet, *Moshe Dayan* (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publications, 1971), p. 419.
  - 34 When expropriation of Arab land began, hostilities ensued. A cease-fire was engineered by the United Nations Security Council, and in the end Israel continued to dry up part of the Hula without infringing upon the DMZ. Tal, *Routine Security Measures*, pp. 139–62: 'The Struggle Over the Mixed Armistice Commissions'. For a brief account of the incident, see Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel*, pp. 445–7.
  - 35 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 670.
  - 36 *Ibid.*, p. 340. But see Abba Eban, Israel's representative at the United Nations at the time, who recognized that 'Sharett... could not always hold out against demands for military action' and saw his struggle in the context of 'a clash between the short-term need for retaliation and the long-term need for defensive arms' rather than as a civilian–military encounter. Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 179, 198. According to Eban's biographer, 'he [Eban] engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Prime Minister Ben-Gurion about retaliatory raids'. Robert St John, *Eban* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1972), p. 286.
  - 37 See Ch. 6: 'Operation Sabcha'.
  - 38 See Ch. 6: 'Operation Alei Zayit'.
  - 39 Quoted in David Ben-Gurion, *Things as I Experienced Them* (Tel Aviv: Am HaSefer, 1965), p. 13.
  - 40 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, pp. 1517, 1519.
  - 41 *Ibid.*, p. 673.
  - 42 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 514 (letter of Sharett to Lavon, 14 August 1953).
  - 43 H. Eshed, *Who Gave the Orders?* (Jerusalem: Edanim Publications, 1979), p. 44.
  - 44 Pinhas Lavon, 'Confronting the Mini-War', in *On Values and Assets* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Meuchad Publications, 1954), p. 121.
  - 45 With regard to the relationship between Lavon and Dayan and the drive of Lavon for grounding a legislative and normative system to guide relations with the Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff, see Eyal Kafkafi, *Pinhas Lavon – Anti-Messiah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, Sifriat Zaggagi, 1998), ch. 24, pp. 204–20.
  - 46 Pinhas Lavon, The Israel Defence Forces Stand on Guard, *Leket* 75, General Federation of Labour in Israel, March 1954 [collection of articles].
  - 47 Military administration was in force following the War of Independence in heavily populated Arab areas of the country for the purposes of security.
  - 48 Personal note to the Chief-of-Staff, 14 July 1954, Personal archives of Pinhas Lavon, file 218.
  - 49 Kafkafi, *Pinhas Lavon*, p. 187.
  - 50 *Ibid.*, p. 188. See Arie Shilo, *Cooperation in the Shadow of Confrontation*, p. 285.
  - 51 Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars 1949–1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 308.
  - 52 Moshe Dayan, *A New Map, Other Relations* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1969), p. 30.
  - 53 Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (Tel Aviv: Am HaSefer, 1965), p. 9.
  - 54 Moshe Dayan, 'Military Operations in Peacetime', *Ma'arachot* 118–19 (1959), pp. 54–61.
  - 55 *Ibid.*, p. 50.
  - 56 *Ibid.*, p. 56.
  - 57 Tevet, *Moshe Dayan*, p. 385.
  - 58 Labour Party Archives (LPA) 3-1-11, Protocol of the Mapai Faction in the Knesset with the Secretary of the Party, 18 June 1950.
  - 59 Moshe Dayan, 'Retaliatory Operations', in Ilan Kfir and Ya'akov Erez (eds), *The IDF and its Corps: Army and Security Encyclopedia of the Army and Defence*, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv), p. 101.
  - 60 Moshe Dayan, *Milestones* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1976), p. 115.
  - 61 Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Haifa: Sifriat Poalim), p. 103–23. There is an analysis of the security and military situation of the State of Israel during this period and the situation of the IDF in the chapter, 'The Use of Power'.
  - 62 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 111.

63 Ibid., p. 121.

64 Dayan, 'Military Operations in Peacetime'.

65 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 349.

### 3 Israel in the 1950s

- 1 See Israel Tal, *National Security, Few Against Many* (Tel Aviv: Debir, 1996).
- 2 Avner Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* (Haifa: Sifriat Poalim, 1994); Tal, *National Security*.
- 3 David Ben-Gurion, *War Diary*, ed. G. Rivlin and A. On (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1982), p. 902. The title 'Hanukah Reflections' does not appear in the original article, but is given in the table of contents at the end of the booklet. The central components of his security outlook appear in a discussion on the 1949 Military Service Law (15 August 1949), *Army and Security* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1955), p. 103.
- 4 David Ben-Gurion, 'A Response', *Vision and Way* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1957), p. 233.
- 5 Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *From Settlement to State* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1977), p. 293.
- 6 M. Sicron, *Immigration to Israel, 1948–1953* (Jerusalem: Academon, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1957). See also M. Sicron, *Mass Immigration: Its Dimensions, Characteristics, and Influence on the Israeli Population Structure in Immigrants and Transit Camps* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Tzvi in *Edan* 8, 1987), pp. 31–52.
- 7 Ibid., p. 15.
- 8 Ibid., p. 43. Much data is available from *11 years of Immigrant Absorption: Facts, Problems and Numbers* (Tel Aviv: The Jewish Agency, Department of Immigrant Absorption, 1959).
- 9 David Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception: Its Origin and Development, 1949–1956* (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1998). See esp. 'Introduction: The Essence of the Problems Concerning Routine Security Measures', pp. 8–19.
- 10 Ben-Gurion, *War Diary*, p. 853.
- 11 See Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*.
- 12 See Tal, 'Introduction: Essential Elements of Routine Security Measure Problems', in *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*, pp. 8–19.
- 13 Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Problem* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1986).
- 14 The Hagana was the military arm of Jewish settlement in Palestine. It was founded in 1920 and became part of the Israel Defence Forces following the State's declaration of independence in 1948. Hagana membership was based on voluntarism and personal commitment. The organization espoused party neutrality but was closely tied to the major national institutions of the Yishuv and was subjected to their political policy. From the perspective of the British Mandate, the Hagana was an underground organization.
- 15 Josef Avidar, 'The Strategy of Settlement before the Establishment of the State', *Dapei Elazar*, 3 (Amikam and University of Tel Aviv, 1981).
- 16 Rafael Eitan, letter from Chief-of-Staff to IDF commanders, 20 July 1979.
- 17 David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Destination* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1972), p. 160 (5 March 1951). For expansion upon on the security outlook and settlement, see Ze'ev Drory, *Utopia in Uniform*, ch. 2, 'The IDF and Settlement', forthcoming in 2004, Frank Cass.
- 18 Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA) S – 15/9786, letter of Lt. Col. Harsina, Operations Branch of the General Staff: 'Security Guidelines for Planning Agricultural Settlements and their Location', February 1953.
- 19 State Archives 22/2393, report from General Headquarters/Intelligence Branch on 'Fortification of Frontier Settlements', 10 February 1955.
- 20 Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*. The subject of 'Territorial Defence Organization' is dealt with on pp. 52–6.
- 21 Short-form for Pioneer Fighting Youth. Nahal drew its recruits from kibbutzim, moshavim and the urban socialist youth movements where Zionist idealism was especially high. After basic military training, corps groups were sent to agricultural settlements or became the nucleus for civilian agricultural settlements. Nahal recruits also undertook educational functions directed at new immigrants, such as language instruction and social acculturation.
- 22 State Archives, Protocol of Government Session, 11 October 1949, pp. 29–30.
- 23 For a detailed account of the nature and impact of infiltrations on the border settlement population, see Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 28–117.
- 24 State Archives 5/2428, 'Survey of Armed Clashes on all the Fronts'; Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*, p. 26.
- 25 Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*, p. 26.
- 26 Ze'ev Drory, 'The Policy of Retaliation in the 1950s – The Role of the Military Echelon in the Escalation Process' (MA Thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1988), Appendix 5.
- 27 Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza: Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955–1957* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994); 'Challenge and Encounter – the Path to the Kadash Exercise, 1956' (Sde Boker: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1991); Motti Golani, *There Will be a War This Summer: The Path to the Sinai War, 1955–1956* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot Publications, Ministry of Defence, 1997); Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception*; Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*.
- 28 Benny Morris, *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).



- 29 Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, pp. 110–17.
- 30 CZA 150/86, letter of David Shaltiel to the Minister of Defence, September 1949.
- 31 Labour Party Archives 26/55, Session of the State Committee, 28 December 1955.
- 32 S.N. Eisenstadt, *Israeli Society* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), p. 14.
- 33 Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza*, p. 56.
- 34 Knesset Proceedings, Vol. 19, p. 676.
- 35 Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza*, p. 56.

## 4 The IDF Following the War of Independence

- 1 Yitzhak Rabin, *Military Service Record* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma'ariv, 1979). p. 84. The Palmah was an elite corps of the Hagana established during World War Two. Recruitment was based on the kibbutzim, and the force would play a leading role in the War of Independence.
- 2 General Yitzhak Sadeh, the legendary commander of the Palmah was forced to go home when Ben-Gurion, as Minister of Defence, dissolved its headquarters and placed all fighting forces under a unified command. Yigal Alon, a protege of Sadeh and a member of the left-wing Ahdut Avoda/Mapam Party was replaced by Moshe Dayan as head of Southern Command. Although many Palmah veterans did continue military careers in the newly formed IDF, the Palmah, which prided itself on being an elite force which in future would set the tone for army training and an exemplary military ethos, was effectively smashed. It would take several painful years of military shortcomings before this vacuum would receive renewed content.
- 3 The following account is based on an interview by the author with General (Res.) Raphael Vardi, 8 January 1998.
- 4 CZA Archives file 122 52/108, statistical data – manpower, 15 November 1950.
- 5 For a discussion of Machiavelli's view of the military as an instrument of civic instruction and national unity, see Neal Wood, 'Introduction' in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. ix–lxxix.
- 6 CZA file 55/65 293, Manpower Report on Educational Attainment According to Corps, 11 November 1951; Memorandum Determining Military Quality, Branch for National Security Planning, November 1951.
- 7 CZA file 55/65 312, Composition of Inductees into Compulsory Service, 11 March 1951.
- 8 Interview with Raphael Vardi.
- 9 Ibid. Excerpts from commander of 904 Battalion (Nahal).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 CZA file 104/51/56.
- 12 The subject, including Dayan's ethnic designations, is given detailed description in David Tal, *Israel's Day-to-Day Security Conception: Its Origin and Development, 1949–1956* (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1998), p. 37.
- 13 Moshe Dayan, *Milestones* (Tel Aviv: Debir, 1976), p. 111.
- 14 Yishuv is the name given to Organized Jewish society (Community) in Palestine before getting the Independence 15.5.1948. It was marked by secularism and active reclamation of territory through farm production.
- 15 Education and Morale in the IDF, GHQ/commanders forum, 6 April 1950.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 ZA, file 1091 55/65, appointment of a team to examine the problem of unfit soldiers in the regular service, Manpower Branch/GHQ, 18 September 1952.
- 18 Gadna was a paramilitary corps which operated within the framework of the educational and defence system during the 1930s. Its principal task was to prepare youth aged 14 to 18 for military service. After the independence, the Gadna projects dealt not only in Para-Military programmes but especially to advance and care for the weaker sectors of this population who were concentrated in poor urban neighbourhoods and distressed peripheral settlements in the country. They were encouraged to participate in national endeavours and educational programmes which provided physical training as well as instruction in the country's geography. Gadna was a key instrument in the integration of new immigrants.
- 19 CZA file 55/65/260, Questions on the Potential of the State of Israel, GHQ/Planning, Branch for Strategic Planning, Memorandum Determining the Quality of the Army, Planning and National Security Branch, November 1951.
- 20 CZA file 55/65 1310, Report of the Auxiliary Team for Education, Research Team for the Quality of Manpower, September 1952.
- 21 'The passing of a Compulsory Education Bill in its entirety is the most important factor for influencing the general level of education in the State.' Ibid., p. 8.
- 22 Ibid., p. 9.
- 23 CZA file 702/60 115, Research on the Problem of Military and Social Absorption of Oriental Immigrants, GHQ/Adjutant General Office, 6 March 1952.
- 24 CZA, Report of Colonel Wallach. Survey of Morale and Operational Capability of Infantry Brigades in the IDF, 1954.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Education and Morale in the IDF, GHQ/Commanders forum, 6 April 1950.
- 28 Ibid.

- 29 Sources that describe the course of the battle include: ZA 137/53/89, Report of the Team assigned to draw battle lessons from the area north of the Sea of Galilee, 2–6 May 1951, 10 May 1951; Arieh Itzhaki (ed.), *The Battle of Tel Multia*, booklet in memory of those who fell in battle. (Society for the Father of Tel Multia, 1997.)
- 30 The Syrian-Israel Armistice Agreement of 20 July 1949 referred to ‘the gradual restoration of normal civilian life in the area of the Demilitarized Zone’. Cited in Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (Jerusalem: Steimatzky, 1976), p. 351.
- 31 Meir Amit, Conference of Battalion commanders and staff officers from the Golani Brigade 1950–51, February 1951.
- 32 Evidence from combatants was taken from a debriefing for a film, ‘The Tail of a Shell’, Nachon Productions, October 2000. In addition, evidence was taken in interviews with combatants conducted by Meir Pe’il, together with the company commander, Ben-Brown. This material is in the author’s possession.
- 33 ZA 665/51/2, letter of the Chief-of-Staff to the commander of the Golani Brigade, 7 June 1951.
- 34 ZA 665/51/2, letter of the Chief-of-Staff to the commander of the Golani Brigade.
- 35 ZA 447/53/16, Report of the Branch for Strategic Planning on the topic of mountain fighting, 14 September 1951.
- 36 ZA 447/53/16, Report of the Strategic Planning Branch on the subject of fighting in hilly terrain, 14 September 1951.
- 37 ZA 665/51/2, letter of the Chief-of-Staff to Commander of the Golani brigade, 7 June 1951.
- 38 Mordechai Tsiptori, *On a Straight Line* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1997), p. 108.
- 39 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 121.
- 40 Day’an, *Milestones*, p. 113.
- 41 Cited in Shabtai Tevet, *Moshe Dayan – A Biography* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1971), p. 384.
- 42 All quotes are taken from Sharon & Chanoff, *Warrior*, pp. 97, 100–102, 137. For unabashed laudatory accounts of the early military career of Sharon see Uri Eban, *Arik Sharon: Path of a Fighting Man* (Tel Aviv: Boostan, 1974); Uzi Benziman, *Sharon: An Israeli Caesar* (Tel Aviv: Adam Publisher, 1985).
- 43 See H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Galaxy, 1958), pp. 245–52. For a brief discussion of the routinization of charisma, of how it becomes embedded in the bureaucratic structure of society, see Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), pp. 662ff.
- 44 For ‘chosen’ men see 2 Samuel, 6: 1; reduced numbers are emphasized in 1 Samuel, 25: 13 and 1 Samuel, 29: 9 ff. ‘David and his men’ often are counterposed to ‘troops’, a more formal military contingent.
- 45 See Maccabees, 1.9.5–7: ‘Jonathan... went with a small number’; ‘three thousand chosen men’ become ‘not... more than 800 men’; 1.9.65–66: ‘Jonathan... went with a small number’. The most renowned account of ‘a small company’ overcoming a ‘great and strong multitude’ is Judah Maccabee’s speech to his troops before the battle at Beth Horon with Seron, the commander of the Syrian forces, Maccabees, 1.3: 18ff.
- 46 Leonard Mosley, *Gideon Goes to War* (London: Arthur Barker, 1955), pp. 63–4, 252.
- 47 Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970), p 14.
- 48 Sharon and Chanoff, *Warrior*, pp. 105, 118.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

## 5 Reprisal Operations

- 1 Eyal Kafkavi, *Pinhas Lavon – Anti-Messiah* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1998), pp. 160–2.
- 2 Israeli State Archives (hereafter SA), 2257/10, Report of warrant officer I. Tzvia, Intelligence Officer at Central Command, 21 December 1953.
- 3 Operation *Shifon alei Derekh* (‘Viper by the Road’ – see Genesis 49: 17) was conducted from 18 to 21 May 1953. The following villages were attacked: Beit Sira, Beit Nuba, Hussan, Paron and Medyia by details from Battalion 890 of the paratroops. In the framework of this same operation, a detail from the Givati Brigade conducted night raids from May 20 to 22 against the following villages: Beit Lakiya, Beit Nuba, Shwika and Kfar Sheva.
- 4 See David Tal, *Israel’s Concept of Routine Security Measures* (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1998), p. 75.
- 5 SA, 2432/3, ‘An Arrangement of Local Commanders’, 8 June 1953.
- 6 PRO (London), FO 371. 111107, R1091/267, documents of the British Foreign Office. Signed by Furlong, the military attache at the British Embassy in Amman, reporting to the Foreign Office and the War Office in Britain.
- 7 Operation Revenge and Reparation took place on the evening of 12–13 August 1953. Units from the Givati Brigade attacked the following targets: several villages in Wadi Fukien, inflicting injuries and demolishing houses (a squad from Brigade 16 killed two women and injured an additional five); Hurvat Beit Aveh, in which Brigade 7 failed in its assault; the village of Idna, assaulted by a company from Battalion 890.
- 8 Quoted from Benny Morris, *Israel’s Border Wars 1949–1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 258.
- 9 Moshe Dayan, *Milestones* (Tel Aviv: Debir, 1976), p. 115.
- 10 Michael Bar Zohar, *Ben-Gurion* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1977), p. 975.
- 11 Central Zionist Archives (hereafter CZA), 644/56//207, Order ‘Operation Shoshana, Order of Operations Branch/GHQ to Central Command, commander of Unit 101, Battalion 890 commander, and so forth, signed by major Shmuel Meller for

- General Meir Amit (in his absence), 13 October 1953.
- 12 Ibid., clauses 14, 15.
  - 13 CZA, 644/56//207, Order 'Operation Shoshana', Central Command/GHQ, signed by Major Alex Sharon for the command operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel David Elazar, 13 October 1953.
  - 14 CZA, 644/56//207, Order 'Operation Shoshana'. Major Ariel Sharon, Unit 101, 14 October 1953.
  - 15 CZA, 644/56//207, Report 'Operation Shoshana', evening of the 14–15 October; Report of Unit 101, dated 16 October 1953 by the commander of the operation, Major Ariel Sharon.
  - 16 Ibid.
  - 17 Uri Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Shalgi Publishers, 1985), p. 230.
  - 18 Cited in Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 261.
  - 19 CZA, 644/56//207, Report 'Operation Shoshana', evening of the 14–15 October; Report of Unit 101, dated 16 October 1953 by the commander of the operation, Major Ariel Sharon.
  - 20 Bar Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, p. 979.
  - 21 Moshe Sharett, *Personal Diary* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1978), entry of 15 October 53.
  - 22 Quoted in Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 268.
  - 23 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 115.
  - 24 Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 173.
  - 25 SA, 2324/- 1/10, GHQ-Intelligence Branch: Special Report - Statistical Analysis of Infiltration from Jordan, May 1951-December 1953, 18 January 1954.
  - 26 The Police Report for 1953 listed 4,140 individual cases of infiltration in 1953 compared to only 2,175 in 1954. In 1953, 46 civilians were killed by infiltrators from Jordan compared with 28 in 1954. See Tal, *Israel's Concept of Routine Security Measures*, p. 83.
  - 27 CZA, 644/56//207, Order 'Operation Shoshana, Central Command/GHQ, signed by Major Alex Sharon for the command operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel David Elazar, 13 October 1953.
  - 28 Quoted in Tal, *Israel's Concept of Routine Security Measures*, p. 84.
  - 29 Moshe Dayan, 'Reprisal Operations in the 1950s', in I. Kfir and I. Erez (eds), *The IDF and Its Corps: Encyclopaedia of the Army and Defence*, Vol. I (Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1982), p. 100.
  - 30 PRO, FO 371–104926, Extract from Chief-of-Staff (53) 121st meeting held 27 October 1953, and attached letters. Quoted in Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 263.
  - 31 SA, Government Sessions, meeting 18 October 1953.
  - 32 Ibid.
  - 33 Ibid.
  - 34 Ibid.
  - 35 Ibid.
  - 36 Ibid.
  - 37 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, entry for 14 October 1953.
  - 38 SA, Government Session, meeting 18 October 1953.
  - 39 Taken from Rashi's commentary on Yoma 85, referring to Exodus 22: 1 (22.2 in King James version) and the non-application of the *lex talionis* for the apprehension and killing of a thief.
  - 40 SA, Government session, meeting 18 October 1953.
  - 41 Ibid.
  - 42 Ibid.
  - 43 Ibid.
  - 44 *Davar*, 22 October 1953. Speech of the Prime Minister on Israel Radio.
  - 45 SA, Government session, Session 22.11.53.
  - 46 Ibid.
  - 47 Ibid.
  - 48 Ibid.
  - 49 Ibid.
  - 50 Ibid.
  - 51 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 115.
  - 52 The *Ha'aretz* quotation may be found in Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I, p. 239.
  - 53 Moshe Sharett's government was officially sworn in on 26 January, but Ben-Gurion left the government for Sde Boker and Sharett functioned as Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, and Pinhas Rosen became Minister of Defence. The quote is from Sharett, *Personal Diary*, 20 December 1953.
  - 54 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, 19.3.54.
  - 55 Quoted in Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 312.
  - 56 Ibid., p. 328.
  - 57 See Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, pp. 316–17.
  - 58 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, 18 May 1954.
  - 59 Summary of the Reprisal Operations Period, Archives, Department of Instruction, History, Historical Branch, File 1949–1956.
  - 60 CZA, 636/56//13, 'Report of Operation Shot – evening of 26/27.5.54', Major Sharon, 27 May 1954.

- 61 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, 19 May 1954.
- 62 Ibid., 31 May 1954.
- 63 Quoted from Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 320.
- 64 CZA, 19 56/8//, Dayan to the Defence Minister, 31 May 54.
- 65 Summary of IDF Operations for 1954.
- 66 Tal, *Israel's Concept of Routine Security Measures*, pp. 172–8.
- 67 SA, 2454/5, Special Survey: Gaza Incident – Summary and Assessment of the Situation, Intelligence Branch – GHQ, 22 March 1955.
- 68 *Bat Galim* was a transport vessel, sent by Israel to pass through the Suez Canal, which the Egyptians had closed to Israeli shipping. The mission was designed as a test of international opinion and sought to place Egypt's competency to control passage through the international waterway in doubt. The boat set out from Masswa in Eritea and was stopped by the Egyptians on 28 September. The Egyptians regarded this as an act of provocation and impounded the vessel and its cargo and imprisoned its crew, who were not released until 1 January 1955. The incident occurred against the background of the impending Anglo-Egyptian Treaty and the removal of British troops from the Canal Zone, giving Egypt sole control over the international waterway.
- 69 The murder of a resident of Beit Shikma on 25 September 1954, Dayan claimed, was the last straw, and he proposed blowing up a key government building through a major retaliation operation. Sharett, dreading an expanded operation and loss of control over events, did not give his approval. Having Qibya in mind, he feared that the outcome of such an operation would damage the state.
- 70 CZA, 637/56/44, Operational order of Operations Branch, GHQ, Operation Black Arrow, 27 February 1955, signed by the head of Operations Branch – Lieutenant Colonel Menahem Abramovitz – in the name of the head of Operations Bureau. The revised document originated from Operations Department, file 123 721.
- 71 CZA, 637/56/14, 'Operation Black Arrow', Operation Debriefing. For Sharon's account of the operation, see Ariel Sharon with David Chanoff, *Warrior: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), pp. 102–9.
- 72 Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I, pp. 288–306. Operation Black Arrow – The Raid on Gaza, Office of the Chief Education Officer, 1992.
- 73 Tal, *Israel's Concept of Routine Security Measures*, pp. 184–5.
- 74 *Ha 'aretz*, 2 March 1955.
- 75 Moshe Sharett, *Private Diary*, 1 March 55. For the exchange of letters between Moshe Sharett and Ben-Gurion see Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I, pp. 310–12.
- 76 Labour Party Archives, Political Committee, 16 October 1955.
- 77 SA, Fifth Government Session, 6 March 1955.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Cited in Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 346.
- 81 Ben-Gurion's letter was published the day after the government session in all the newspapers, and for many years appeared on the back of a large billboard placed at the entrance to the Paratroopers' base at Tel Nof. For partial contents of the letter, see Uri Eban, *Arik Sharon, The Path of a Soldier* (Tel Aviv: Boostan, 1974), pp. 114–15.
- 82 Ibid., p. 115.
- 83 For treatment of the fedayeen units and their actions at the end of August 1955, see Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, pp. 370–6.
- 84 CZA, 637/56/15, Operational Order No. 1, Lieutenant-Colonel Menahem Aviram, Head of Operations Branch of Central Command/ Officer GHQ, 30 August 1955.
- 85 CZA, 626/57/10, Operational Order No. 1, Lieutenant Colonel Menahem Aviram, Head of Operations Branch of Central Command/ Officer GHQ, 30 August 1955. A full description of the operation may be found in Mordechai Gur, *Company D* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1977), pp. 200–219.
- 86 See 'Reprisal Operations, Operation Elkayam', Headquarters of the Chief Educational Officer and Gadna, February 1993. During September and October 1955, the IDF formulated a plan for a preventive war against the Egyptians. The operational plans for occupying the Straits of Tiran (Plan 'Tsefa') and for the occupation of the Gaza Strip (Plan 'Hoi') were already drawn up by May 1955. Before the onset of the autumn, these plans were updated and their names changed to Operation Omer and Operation Shahar respectively.
- 87 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 1,158.
- 88 Ibid., p. 1,162.
- 89 State Archives, 2428,1, 'The Niztana Demilitarized Zone'.
- 90 See 'Operation Egged', Summary of the Reprisal Operations Period, Archives, Department of Instruction, History, Historical Branch, File 1949–1956. Instructional Department/GHQ, 1958. In addition, see the description of the battle in Rafael Eytan, *Rafal: The Story of a Soldier* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1985), pp. 55–6; Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 157; M. Yanukah, *From Qibya to the Mitla pass* (Tel Aviv: Bitan, 1967).
- 91 Log book from the Office of Chief-of-Staff, 28 October 1955. See also Mordechai Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972), p. 68.
- 92 Ibid., 31 October 1955. See Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I, p. 348.
- 93 IDF Archives 11,626/1957. GHQ/Operations Branch, Operational order Har Ga'ash No. 21/55, 8 November 1955 (an order to disperse the concentrated forces and reserve units that were mobilized for the implementation of Operation Sabcha and the stand by order for the implementation of Operation 'Shahar').

- 94 IDF Archives 11,626/1957, Southern Command, GHQ 145/144/, Operation 'Har Ga'ash', Operation order No. 1, Intelligence Appendix. Details and intelligence updating were added to the operational orders of Brigade 1 Headquarters, 1 November 1955, and 2 November 1955 at 04:00 hours.
- 95 Description of the battle is based on operational reports of Southern Command, the Golani Brigade and Battalion 890. These documents are found in the IDF Archives 11, 626/1957 Southern Command, Main Conclusions and Emphasis Points in the Conclusion to the Report on Operation Har Ga'ash; Operational Report of Operation Har Ga'ash, Battalion 890; Operation Har Ga'ash, Bureau of History, Department of Instruction/GHQ, 1955; Booklet on battle traditions of the IDF, *The Raid on the Sabcha Emplacements – Operation 'Har Ga 'ash'*, Headquarters of the Chief Educational Officer, June 1979. See Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. I, p. 354.
- 96 Ibid., p. 354.
- 97 CZA, 629/57/3 Debriefing Report - Operation Har Ga'ash, Operations Branch/GHQ, Captain Yoel Odem, 22 November 1955.
- 98 Bar-On, *Gates of Gaza*, p. 69.
- 99 Nahal was involved not only in settlement and education projects but also took an active part in military operations. This was particularly true of the Paratroop Nahal Battalion and units formed from the squad commander courses.
- 100 CZA, 204/21, file 6031, meeting with the commanders of the companies who carried out the operation at Nitzana, Jerusalem, 7 November 1955, p. 3.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 Mordechai Bar-On, *Challenge and Confrontation: The Path to Operation Kadash, 1956* (Sde Boker : Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1991), p. 60.
- 103 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 1307. The message was dated 11 December 1955.
- 104 Mordecai Bar-On, 'AleI Zayit: The Raid on the Shores of the Sea of Galilee on the Evening of 12 December 1955,' *Studies in Zionism, The Yishuv and the State of Israel*, 11 (1991), pp. 87–95.
- 105 For a description of the disputes and discussions on the border along the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee see A. Shilo, *Cooperation in the Shadow of Confrontation* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1989), ch. 2.
- 106 Operational order 'Saadyia 1', quoted in Shilo, *Cooperation in the Shadow of Confrontation*, p. 285.
- 107 CZA, 629/57/180 'Retaliatory Actions', Document of the Operations Branch/GHQ to the Deputy Chief-of-Staff and Commander of Northern Command. Signed by colonel Uzi Narkiss, head of Operations Department. A letter is added on the back of the document: 'letter transmitted for discussion to the Defence Minister'. The Operations Branch/GHQ discussed three retaliatory operations. The first related to the disputed area in the north-east of the Sea of Galilee and was intended to determine final Israeli sovereignty over the entire lake. In addition, a proposal was raised to occupy Settlement Heights, map reference point 20962330, by the Golani Brigade - it was located in the demilitarized zone and had been occupied by Syrian forces. The third proposal was a raid by Battalion 890 to kidnap Syrian officers in rear emplacements, in order to apply pressure to release the four Israelis captured by the enemy on 8 December 1954.
- 108 Dayan, *Milestones*, pp. 169–70.
- 109 Ibid. Quoted in Bar-On, 'AleI Zayit', p. 96. CZA, protocol file of meetings of the Minister of Defence, Protocol of the weekly meeting of the Defence Minister and the Chief-of-Staff and the Headquarters staff of the Defence Ministry, 8 December 1955.
- 110 For an expanded analysis of the reasons behind Operation Kinneret, see Zaki Shalom, *Policy in the Shadow of Controversy: The Routine Security Policy of Israel 1949–1956* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1996), ch. 5, 'Considerations in Operation Kinneret', pp. 81–97.
- 111 CZA, 629/57/180, Operational Order for AleI Zayit 25/55, Operations Branch/GHQ to Northern Command, 9 December 1955.
- 112 CZA, 629/57/180, Operational Order 'AleI Zayit' 11/55 (as an approval to an oral order), headquarters of Northern Command to Operational Branch/GHQ, 10 December 1955.
- 113 CZA, 629/57/180, Debriefing Report of Operation AleI Zayit, written after the operation, December 1955. Bar-On, 'AleI Zayit'.
- 114 CZA, 627/57/180, 'AleI Zayit' 25/55, Interim Report, headquarters of Northern Command to Operations Branch/GHQ, 13 December 1955. Operational order 'Pach v'shemen' [Cruse and Oil], 890, and Report 'Pach v'shemen', Paratroop Infantry Battalion 890, 9 January 1956. Battalion order 'Pach v'Shemen' was the first name given to the operation, which then changed to 'AleI Zayit'.
- 115 See Bar-On, 'AleI Zayit'.
- 116 CZA, 629/57/180, 'Report on the Operation "AleI Zayit" Border Emplacement', Infantry Battalion 52, December 1955.
- 117 CZA, 629/57/180, 'Intelligence Summary of Operation AleI Zayit', headquarters of Northern Command/Intelligence Branch, captain S. Goren. Acting Headquarters Intelligence Officer.
- 118 Logbook of the Chief-of-Staff's Office, 13 December 1955, quoted in Bar-On, 'AleI Zayit', p. 112.
- 119 Sharett, *Personal Diary*, p. 1,310.
- 120 Knesset Proceedings, Session 50 of Third Knesset, 21 January 1956, pp. 681–2.
- 121 *Ma 'ariv*, 13 December 1955.
- 122 Knesset Proceedings, Session 50, 2 January 1956, p. 674.
- 123 See Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 385.
- 124 Logbook of the Chief-of-Staff's Office, 21 September 1956, quoted in Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza*, p. 245.
- 125 Operation Beit Likiya took place on the evening of the 2/3 September 1954 as part of 'Operation Benjamin'. This military

- action came as a response to attacks from the Jordanian border in the Latrun enclave. Paratroop Battalion 890 attacked objectives in the Latrun sector with the intention of rendering a blow against rescue forces and taking Jordanian prisoners for a future prisoner exchange. The camouflaged operation was to occupy the village school of Likhya but the attempt failed. Jordanian Legion forces which rushed to the area were tripped up by a paratroop unit ambush resulting in two Jordanian soldiers killed, three captured, and their armoured half track destroyed.
- 126 This did not forestall a military feint towards the Jordanian border immediately prior to the commencement of Operation Kadesh in order not to arouse Egyptian suspicions. See Sharon, *Warrior*, p. 142.
- 127 A description of the operation is given by Uri Dan and Abraham Vered in 'Never Ever Terror: The Raid on the Hussan Outposts,' *BeMahane*, 3 October 1956. See also Gur, *Company D*, pp. 224–6.
- 128 On 6 September 1956, two days after the murder, Ben-Gurion sent a letter to Dayan in which he explains his objection to a reprisal action. The letter is cited in Bar-On, *Challenge and Conflict: The Road to Operation Kadesh, 1956* (Sde Boker: Centre for Ben-Gurion Studies, 1991), p. 230.
- 129 See Eban, *Arik*, p. 230.
- 130 SA, Government Session, 10 October 1956. Taggart buildings were large fortified structures built by the British throughout Mandate Palestine, for the most part during the 1936–39 Arab 'uprisings' and used as police stations for the British forces. Upon British withdrawal from Palestine, Jordanian military and police forces occupied Taggart compounds in areas under their control. These buildings were imposing structures in the local architectural and psychological landscape.
- 131 CZA, 776/58/8. Operational Order Shomron No. 1, Lieutenant Colonel Yeshayahu Gavish, head of Operations Branch/GHQ, 10 October 1956.
- 132 A detailed description of the assault may be found in Milstein, *The History of the Paratroopers*, Vol. II, pp. 418–32.
- 133 CZA 2885, Logbooks – Diary of Ben-Gurion, entry on 10 October 1956. 'Moshe asks whether we can employ airplanes to destroy the Jordanian force. I told him to do everything within his power to save our boys.'
- 134 CZA 776/58/8, Brief of the Kalkilya Operation, 14 October 56.
- 135 SA, Government Session (tet/shin, yod, zion), 9 Heshvan 1956.
- 136 Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 427.
- 137 Moshe Dayan, *Sinai Campaign Diary* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1965), p. 53.
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## 6 Conclusion

- 1 Address of the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, at a ceremony establishing a monument to reprisal operation combatants, 15 April 2003.
- 2 Ibid.

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**FO, PRO:** Foreign Office, Public Records Office (London)

**IDFA:** Israel Defence Forces Archives (Givatai'im)

**IDFAh:** Israel Defence Forces Archives, Department of History (Tel Aviv)

**LA:** Lavon Archive (Kibbutz Hulda)

**LPA:** Labour Party Archives (Beit Berl)

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2. The Raid on the Gaza Army Camp (Operation 'Black Arrow'), February 1955.
3. The Raid on the Khan Yunis Police Station (Operation 'Elkayam'), August 1955.
4. The Raid on the Sabcha Positions (Operation 'Har-Ga'ash'), November 1955.
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## **Relevant Articles in the Army Journal B 'Mahaneh**

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9 September 1953	Amos Lev	Night Patrol
26 May 1955	Ra'anan Luria	How We Took an Egyptian Post
31 August 1955	Amos Lev	Warm Days in the Strip
5 September 1955	Amos Lev	A Strike in the Heart of the Strip (Operation Khan Yunis)
5 September 1955	Moshe Dayan	Military Operations in Peacetime - Lecture to Commanders
14 September 1955	Moshe Dayan	Military Operations in Peacetime - Lecture to Commanders
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25 September 1965	Moshe Natan	Oded Ladijinsky – Portrait of a Soldier who Twice Won Citations
13 October 1965	Yadin Duda'i	Portrait of Colonel Arik Sharon as Commander of the Paratroops in Reprisal Operations in the Sinai
5 June 1967	Mordechai Naor	One Police Force and Two Citations – Report of the Raid on the Khan Yunis Police Station
6 August 1968	Yosef Argaman	Then We Went to Zimmerman – Report on Unit 101
6 August 1968	David Dayan	October 1956 – The Days and the Events which Preceded Operation Kadesh
3 October 1973	David Dayan	Evening of Hand Grenades from Room to Room – The Story of the Blowing Up of

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Ruth Leviav

the Kalkilya Police Station  
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