

How Did the *Intifada* Affect the IDF?

by
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INTRODUCTION

The Israel-Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) agreements signed in Cairo by Yitzchak Rabin and Yassir Arafat in May 1994 constituted a military turning-point as well as a diplomatic revolution. Without doubt, it would be too sanguine to expect those agreements to bring an immediate conclusion to the chronology of inter-communal conflict which has embittered Arab-Jewish relations in the Middle East for most of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the Israel-Palestinian accord, originally forged by secret contacts in Oslo and first dramatized when the two parties publicly signed a "Declaration of Principles" in Washington in September 1993, did raise hopes that the spiral of violence might decelerate. Together, the 1993 and 1994 agreements augured a stage leading toward the end of the Palestinian *intifada* (Arabic: lit. "uprising" - the generic term applied to the wave of disturbances which had become widespread in the West Bank and Gaza Strip throughout the previous five years). As such, they also invite an initial assessment of the *intifada* and its various consequences. This article examines one such cluster of consequences. Specifically, it analyzes the *intifada's* effects on the corporate character of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and on the overall standing of the military within Israeli society at large.

The evolution of IDF policy toward the *intifada*

Sub-conventional (i.e., Palestinian) challenges to national security have been a constant feature of Israeli life since 1948. Thus, the *intifada* did not constitute the IDF's first experience of low-intensity conflict. As early as the 1950s a system of regular border patrols against infiltration had been developed; so too had the policy of cross-border retaliation known as "reprisal raids." After 1967, the IDF also became accustomed to counterinsurgency duties of an intra-border nature. In 1970-71, for instance, relatively large concentrations of troops were assigned to the Gaza Strip in order to thwart attempts to undermine Israeli rule there. Still heavier were the operational burdens encountered in southern Lebanon between September 1982 and July 1985, when the IDF army of occupation was regularly harassed by a combination of PLO remnants, Shi'ite fundamentalists and Syrian-backed irregulars.¹

Notwithstanding their persistence, low-intensity challenges to Israel's security have been accorded a relatively low priority on the country's military agenda. Standard Israeli strategic parlance traditionally relegated them to the level of no more than "on-going" concerns.² Thus designated, they usually have been considered less critical than the formidable challenges to "basic" security concurrently

posed by two other categories of threats. One, particularly apparent between 1948 and 1979, was represented by the presence of large and hostile Arab regular forces along most of Israel's elongated land frontiers; the second, and most recent, consists of the nuclear ambitions reportedly harbored by Israel's outer arc of Islamic foes (a category which included Iraq as early as 1981 and has since expanded to include Pakistan, Iran and Algeria).

However, the longer the *intifada* persisted, the less appropriate so clearly stratified a hierarchy appeared. Contrary to original intelligence expectations, the Gaza riots of December 1987 did not soon peter out, but swiftly spread to the West Bank too. At a subsequent stage – albeit on a minor scale – the *intifada* also eroded public security within Israel's pre-1967 borders. As a result, the IDF was compelled to accord greater priority to counterinsurgency operations of an intra-border variety. For all the importance still attached to the maintenance of constant vigilance on Israel's northern borders (and in 1991 to the protection of its major cities from attack by Iraqi 'Scud' missiles), force missions designed to suppress the *intifada* constituted the IDF's most persistently burdensome operational commitment between 1988 and 1993.³

Public admissions that such was the case became especially pronounced after the spring of 1991. Thereafter, senior Israeli military sources regularly conceded that the *intifada* had assumed a new form.⁴ No longer could it be regarded (as was once the case) as a virtually spontaneous welter of sporadic riots, conducted for the most part in and around refugee camps by a motley collection of stone-throwing youths and women. Instead, three other features of the insurgency had become evident. One was the underlying political dimension of the *intifada*, which evolved into a well-publicized (and possibly coordinated) expression of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and national liberation from Israeli rule in the territories occupied by the IDF in 1967. The second was the integration and synchronization of the phenomenon of mass demonstrations and riots with such non-violent forms of public resistance as boycotts of Israeli goods, strikes and large-scale resignations by Palestinian lawyers and policemen from any work which involved co-operation with the Israeli military authorities. The third feature of note was the mutation of the *intifada* into a campaign of terror. In this guise the insurgency was characterized by assassinations of suspected Palestinian "collaborators" and by armed attacks on individual Israelis – civilian as well as military – in both "the territories" and, increasingly, in Israel itself.

Statistics released by the IDF are particularly illustrative of the latter development. Periodic oscillations notwithstanding, between 1991 and 1993 the overall number of large-scale riots declined (by as much as 45 percent on the West Bank). What rose, conversely (by over 60 percent in the Gaza Strip), was the incidence of the use of knives, firearms and grenades by organized squads of Palestinians. Many such squads were allegedly affiliated with the *Hamas*, an Islamic fundamentalist organization formed in the same month that the *intifada* first broke out. By September 1993, IDF sources attributed the deaths of 154 Israelis

(most of whom were civilians) to the attacks carried out by Palestinian activists of one sort or another during the previous six years.⁵

IDF operational responses to the *intifada* reflected the Israeli defence establishment's changing appreciation of its burgeoning nature. During its embryonic stage, the General Staff regarded the insurgency as little more than a threat to local law and order on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. As a result, the IDF's somewhat nebulously defined operational goal was to restore "normal life" (Arab and Jewish) to those regions, and military actions to achieve this were hastily contrived. Largely based on precedents established when short-lived disturbances had occurred previously, they often consisted of the hurried despatch of assorted military forces to disaffected areas. Few, if any, of the troops had received special training in the constabulary roles which they were now required to perform; many were not even issued with appropriate riot control equipment. Unit commanders, too, were not always the most talented of the available junior- and middle-rank officers, a situation which reflected a belief among the personnel concerned that counterinsurgency duties were less prestigious than other battle-related assignments.⁶

After 1991, however, this perception gradually changed. Command quality was upgraded at all levels, so much so that by June 1993 senior field positions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were being filled regularly by officers reported to be the most talented of the IDF's new generation of brigadiers.⁷ At the apex of the command structure, successive Chiefs of Staff appointed senior military "advisers" on *intifada* affairs, an office not disbanded until after the signature of the Cairo Agreement in April 1994 and the retirement of its last incumbent. Most reports also noted improvements in coordination between unit commanders and local representatives of the "Civil Administration" (themselves usually Israeli military personnel acting in a civilian capacity), who have since 1981 possessed administrative responsibility for the government of the regions conquered in 1967.⁸

At the tactical level IDF responses to the *intifada* underwent even more substantive changes. Its earliest manifestations had generated punitive measures, usually of a collective nature. In their more benign form, troop operations were characterized by: the imposition of extended curfews on Arab villages and towns; the insistence that Palestinian storekeepers reopen the shops and businesses which they had closed in compliance with occasional PLO or *Hamas* directives; and the large-scale administrative detention of suspected "terrorists" in the huge prison compound established at Ketziot, in southern Israel. Equally frequent, however, were IDF attempts to suppress the uprising by a resort to physical force. The troops initially despatched to the scenes of violence were exhorted to use their "muscle power" when attacked by large crowds (whence arose the now notorious recommendation that they "break the bones" of Palestinian rioters). Early in 1988 a special unit, known by its Hebrew acronym as ALPHA, was established to design non-lethal means of dispersing demonstrations, and within a few months had developed purpose-built water and gravel dischargers and a new type of plastic bullet.⁹

Notwithstanding such innovations, however, the use of live ammunition to suppress public disturbances remained common and resulted, according to some reports, in over 500 Palestinian deaths between 1987 and 1988 alone.¹⁰

Riot control duties continued to be a common feature of Israeli military activity, especially in Gaza, until as late as the summer of 1993. But by that stage of the *intifada* they no longer constituted the principal item in the IDF's counterinsurgency menu. Instead, they had been complemented by three other categories of more discriminate operations: containment; surveillance; and pursuit.

Containment measures, designed to restrict the Palestinians' freedom of potentially hostile movement, were characterized by the periodic establishment of IDF mobile roadblocks, which conducted intensive searches and identity checks. This policy reached an apotheosis when a "closure" was imposed on virtually all Palestinian traffic between "the territories" and Israel late in March 1993. Surveillance, meanwhile, was improved by wider covert use of the General Security Service (GSS), and by detailing specially-trained squads (identified by their Hebrew acronym as HENZA) to act as observers in or near locations where experience had shown that Palestinian stone-throwers were particularly active. Finally, pursuit was implemented by harassing what was termed the *intifada's* "hard core." In liaison with the GSS, the IDF identified persons active in incitement to revolt and recommended that they be deported. Such action was taken against 400 members of *Hamas* in the winter of 1992. At the same time, suspected members of armed Palestinian squads were hunted down by "special" IDF units, some of which (known in Hebrew as *mista'arvim* ["masqueraders"]) posed as Palestinian activists.¹¹

Precisely how much such measures might have contributed to bringing the PLO to the negotiating table is difficult to ascertain. Citing the massive reductions in the number of "terrorist suspects" still at large, senior Israeli military sources had predicted as early as October 1992 that the *intifada* was "on the wane."¹² However, the continued incidence of violence thereafter casts doubt on the inference that the 1993 Washington agreement might have deprived the IDF of the operational success which lay within its grasp. The search for which (if any) of the sides might have emerged "victorious" from the *intifada* – even in a narrow military sense – may in any case be a fruitless exercise. Quite apart from posing intrinsic difficulties of definition, it also threatens to divert attention from an examination of the long-term effects which that confrontation may have produced.

For the Israeli defence establishment, especially, the latter are the more salient issues. As much has been conceded publicly by Lt.-General Ehud Barak, the current (since 1991) Chief of the IDF General Staff. Notwithstanding the agreements with the PLO, he has pointed out, Israel's armed forces are still burdened with the wide range of extensive military commitments which they have always had to carry. At the "on-going" security level, they must continue to be prepared to suppress the threats posed by extreme opponents (Jewish as well as Arab) of the autonomy accords. At the "basic" (i.e. high intensity) level, they must still be wary

of the dangers posed by such hostile and well-armed neighbors and near-neighbors as Syria, Iraq and Iran.¹³

Whether or not the *intifada* might have impaired the IDF's ability to cope successfully with this compound agenda of duties is a topic of major operational concern. It is also a complex question, and not entirely amenable to synoptic analysis. Much will depend on the effect which the *intifada* exerted on Israeli military doctrines and – more specifically – on the force structures of the IDF itself. In wider terms, equally influential are likely to be the *intifada*'s repercussions on the fabric of the IDF's bonds with various segments of domestic society, and on the tone of civil-military relations in Israel at large. Each of these issues will be analyzed in turn.

The *intifada* and Israeli military doctrines

Overall, the IDF's adaptation to the *intifada* was a process of trial-and-error. Although in part the result of the evolving nature of the *intifada* itself, so haphazard a procedure is also attributable to organizational constraints. Other armies similarly have found it difficult to deflect their attention away from what they perceive to be central (usually high intensity) threats, and to adjust their operations to the specific requirements of "small wars."¹⁴ For the IDF, however, the modifications required were particularly difficult.

One major reason is that the *intifada* compelled the IDF to adopt a *modus operandi* which contrasts markedly with standard Israeli military doctrine. It soon became apparent that the *intifada* could not be suppressed in a single decisive blow. Consequently, IDF counterinsurgency operations had to be conducted within an overall strategic framework of attrition. This was clearly understood by Yitzchak Rabin (Minister of Defense 1984-90, and who since 1992 has combined that post with the office of Prime Minister). As early as 1988 he conceded that the *intifada* "cannot be resolved in one go. What will bring the violence to an end is a cumulative process of physical and economic fatigue and the disruption of the frameworks of [Palestinian] daily life."¹⁵

Statements of that sort went very much against the grain of traditional IDF thought and behavior. Mindful of the stresses which extended military engagements are bound to impose on Israel's brittle social structure and fragile economy, its defence establishment has generally exhibited an aversion to protracted warfare. Instead, it has preferred to employ the IDF in an "annihilatory" mode. "Decisive acts of force" – exemplified by the June 1967 attack on Arab air forces and the 1981 destruction of the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osiraq – have long been regarded as typical of the IDF's operational style. So influential was this "model," in fact, that the "short and sharp" doctrine was also thought applicable to Israel's sub-conventional foes. It was implemented against Palestinian irregulars by means of IDF "reprisal raids" in the 1950s and during the Entebbe and Litani Operations of 1977 and 1978, respectively. More forcibly – albeit less successfully – an "annihilatory"

posture likewise underlay planning for Israel's most concentrated attack against the PLO, launched when IDF forces invaded Lebanon in June 1982.¹⁶

In retrospect, the difficulties of matching the IDF's preferred mode of warfare to a sub-conventional context should have become fully apparent in 1985, when Israeli troops had to be withdrawn somewhat ignominiously from Lebanon. But old habits apparently die hard. Indeed, Rabin's own initial reaction to the *intifada* was to order the IDF "to strike it off the agenda."¹⁷ For an army and society long accustomed to military campaigns which were for the most part short and often glamorous, the protracted failure to carry out those instructions was a sobering experience. It also generated a considerable degree of introspective scrutiny.

Long before the 1993 Washington agreement, several analysts had begun to question the continued credibility of Israel's existing deterrence posture – conventional, sub-conventional and non-conventional alike. Some had called for a radical re-consideration of all current IDF doctrines, arguing that changes in Israel's strategic environment in any case now require deployments which emphasize extended containment rather than retaliatory or pre-emptive destruction.¹⁸ The *intifada* reinforced that message. Constituting yet another illustration of just how resistant low-intensity conflicts are to the sort of "surgical" treatment which Israel has always favored, it compelled the IDF to adopt alternative operational procedures at a pace – and to an extent – unanticipated in earlier Israeli strategic thought. Combined with the unprecedented experience of (enforced) "passive belligerency" during the Iraqi 'Scud' missile attacks in 1991,¹⁹ the experience of the insurgency may have moderated further many of Israel's former predilections for "annihilatory" military operations in other contexts as well.

The *intifada* and IDF force structures

Just as acute as the overall doctrinal dilemmas posed by the *intifada* were those which flowed from its influences on Israel's military force structures. The eventual realization that counterinsurgency operations require a particular type of military expertise also necessitated the establishment and deployment of several units specifically trained to cope with the unique challenges posed by the *intifada*. This measure certainly proved more effective than the earlier assignment of counterinsurgency duties to assorted infantry and armored units, whether regular or reserve.²⁰ At the same time, however, it also generated several internal contradictions in the IDF's overall planning for its future force dispositions.

To date, the most authoritative and comprehensive formulation of IDF forward thinking is contained in the "Multi-Year Plan," (code-named *Mirkam*), drafted by the General Staff in 1991. In origin, the plan owes much to the stimulation provided by a far-reaching review of Israel's security postures conducted in 1987 by the "Meridor Committee," a sub-group within the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee of the *Keneset* (Israel's parliament). More immediately, *Mirkam* encapsulates the IDF's institutional response to the reductions which Israel's treasury has progressively imposed on the military's share of the national budget

since 1985. Defence requirements, which at their peak in 1973-74 consumed some 17 percent of the domestic national product (and were still running at 14.3 percent in 1984) had been cut by 1992 to the pre-1967 level of 8.5 percent.²¹

Where manpower is concerned, *Mirkam* emphasizes quality rather than quantity. Indeed, it articulates the vision of "a smaller and smarter IDF" propounded by Generals Dan Shomron (Chief of Staff, 1987-91) and Ehud Barak (Shomron's one-time deputy and current successor). At one level, accordingly, the plan advocates increasing the resources allocated to training and equipping "high tech" branches, in which talented recruits are encouraged to contract for lengthier periods of professional service. But the expansion of forces thus required is to be offset by equally substantial reductions in the overall IDF complement in other areas. For instance, the plan envisions shortening the term of compulsory female duty from two and a half years to 18 months; pruning the swollen service echelons, where over 2000 salaried employees have already been retired since 1991; and halving by 1995 the total number of reservists called to active duty.²²

The burden of *intifada*-related duties did not altogether preclude the implementation of such proposals. But they do seem to have been responsible for several delays in the process. At their height the disturbances required the IDF to station far larger garrisons of troops than usual in "the territories." Even during periods of relative quiescence, the numbers of troops employed there on foot patrols and guard duty exceeded the regular quotas. In retrospect, Rabin himself estimated that as many as 250,000 IDF troops had experienced service in the territories at one time or another between 1987 and 1993.²³

Admittedly, the quantitative strain thus exerted on overall IDF manpower resources must not be exaggerated. In fact, it was to some extent masked by two other circumstances. One was the "baby boom" which had followed the end of the 1973 Yom Kippur War; the other was the influx into Israel after 1989 of over 500,000 new immigrants from Ethiopia and the former USSR (some 10 percent of whom were of military service age). Combined, both of these factors considerably enlarged the cohorts of conscripts enlisting in the IDF ranks during the *intifada*, and even produced a surplus of manpower in several units. Nevertheless, the persistent need to carry out massive demonstrations of force in response to the disturbances generated by the *intifada* undoubtedly limited whatever benefits the IDF and its budget might otherwise have reaped from that situation.²⁴

Whereas the quantitative liability which the *intifada* imposed on the IDF is difficult to calculate, its qualitative onus seems to have been far more apparent and profound. The 1991 Multi-Year Plan, after all, did not simply urge reductions in the overall size of the military establishment. In advocating a more streamlined IDF, Barak's objective was to fashion a fighting force trained to a higher level of technical and operational proficiency. Only thus, he maintained, could it meet the challenges which are likely to be posed by the battlefield of the future.²⁵

It was in the context of that conceptual background that the *intifada* most posed a threat to the IDF's evolution in the desired direction. Some critics have

suggested that one expression of its deleterious effect can be discerned in the extent to which the experience of *intifada*-related duties has impaired the willingness of troops and their commanders to show initiative, a quality once considered a hallmark of Israeli military practice. A succession of highly-publicized military trials, resulting from accusations that units had in the early stages of the *intifada* employed unwarranted force against Palestinian civilians, allegedly generated an entirely different attitude. This was particularly the case since, as experience frequently showed, there existed inherent difficulties in interpreting the precise applicability of the IDF's written "rules of engagement" to each and every circumstance that arose. Confronted with predicaments which were legal as well as moral, troops at all levels (so it is charged) often came to consider discretion to be the better part of valor. As a result, they either avoided confrontations with the perpetrators of violence or "doctored" the reports which they submitted when action was taken.²⁶ As yet, there exists no hard evidence to suggest that such behavior might have become the norm in other spheres of IDF activity. However, the operational consequences of that possibility, should it occur, could obviously prove very serious indeed.

Still more apparent are the detrimental effects exerted by the *intifada* on the composition of the IDF and its allocation of available manpower resources. Indeed, these were cogently specified less than two years after the insurgency first erupted by Ze'ev Schiff, Israel's most authoritative military correspondent. *Intifada*-related duties, Schiff noted, were distorting the IDF's military dispositions. First, he asserted that "members of the High Command feel that the *intifada* is taking up far more of senior officers' time and thinking than is either necessary or desirable. They fear that this will have an adverse affect on the IDF's main and more important missions."²⁷ Furthermore, he reported, the calls made on regular and reserve units by the frequent rotation of constabulary duties in "the territories" were interrupting their programs for conventional troop exercises and training. More perniciously, they were also turning the IDF into a relatively "primitive" army. Counterinsurgency, after all, requires that troops act in small packets and at a "low-intensity" level, which is precisely the opposite of the performance expected of the state-of-the-art military machine that the IDF aspires to become. Schiff goes on to argue that,

An entire army has become a police force; and this must impede its military and professional standards ... It is eerie to hear members of elite units boast about their ability to approach a target; what they fail to notice is that they are not referring to the Syrian army ... but to an Arab village which we control. Are hamlets like Nahlin and Beita really the IDF's most fearsome foes?"²⁸

Paradoxically, Schiff's case was reinforced by IDF tactics during the *intifada*'s second stage. The creation of such specialized units as the "Masqueraders," together with the steps taken to beef up the "Border Guard" (a largely professional force, which is nominally a police command and contains a large complement of Arabic-speaking Druze troops), provide two cases in point. Al-

though comparatively cheap to maintain and operate, both forces nevertheless constituted a disproportionate drain on the IDF's pool of available talent. This was particularly the case because the troops assigned to such specifically *intifada*-related units (many of whom were volunteers) often comprised the cream of the IDF's annual intake of new recruits. As Schiff argued with specific reference to the "Masqueraders":

Precisely because of [their] record of operational success, it is important to remember the other operational facet. The IDF has no choice but to win this war [against the *intifada*]. But one cannot help feeling that confrontation with citizens, and with a people subject to Israeli conquest, has generated a distortion in the IDF. Our elite forces, the flower of our youth, should not be focusing their attention on the slaying of wanted suspects – even if they are murderers. Their eyes should be on other targets and on different enemies.²⁹

The Washington and Cairo agreements offer little hope that the IDF will be entirely relieved of counterinsurgency duties. Rabin has himself predicted that those burdens might even intensify, due principally to Israel's declared political interest in helping the PLO to maintain its own domestic standing against the opposition of other Palestinian groups.³⁰ If so, the IDF could continue to labor under the burden of the disorientation in its force structures to which the *intifada* first gave rise (and which intra-organizational pressures to maintain the "special" units already in place seem to have further intensified). Doubtless, the IDF is still capable of meeting all its immediate operational commitments. What remains open to question, nevertheless, is whether many of the very best of its recent cohorts of recruits might have been diverted from the "high-tech" missions to which the Multi-Year Plan originally intended them to be assigned. Should such indeed be the case, then the IDF's ability to cope effectively with the medium-term challenges of the modern battlefield may well prove to have been impaired.

The *intifada* and the domestic status of the IDF

Israeli society has long exhibited characteristics attributed to a "nation in arms." At one level, that designation reflects Israel's condition of protracted armed conflict with its neighbors. But it is also warranted – and fostered – by the distinctive tripartite structure of the IDF itself, in which long-term professionals have always been outnumbered by conscripts and even more so by reservists.³¹ Since not even Barak's proposed manpower reforms seek to transform that structure, in the foreseeable future the IDF will continue to be located closer to the "institutional" rather than the "occupational" end of Charles Moskos' I/O scale.³²

In large part, the IDF's "three-tier" framework was initially designed to meet economic and social needs. Principal among these were the integration into Israeli life of new immigrants and the evolution of the armed forces into a focus of national loyalties. At the same time, however, the IDF's distinctive structure of service also conferred distinct military benefits. Compulsory conscription and reserve duty, for

instance, promoted both intra-unit cohesion and civil-military integration, particularly in times of national crisis.³³ As the late Dan Horowitz pointed out, however, “nations in arms” also possess distinct strategic deficiencies. Specifically, the militia structure of their forces renders their military effectiveness contingent on a high degree of national consensus with respect to the validity of their operational activities. Only when such a consensus exists can units act effectively; at times of public dissension, they are prone to falling apart.³⁴

Some of the dangers inherent in the latter situation were already apparent during Israel’s Lebanon War (1982-85). Quite apart from being the least successful of the IDF’s campaigns thereto, it was also the most controversial. Indeed, by Israeli standards it generated a comparatively large incidence of “conscientious objection,” especially among reserve formations. During the *intifada* similar problems re-surfaced.³⁵ True, public opinion surveys suggest that the esteem enjoyed by the IDF among prospective recruits suffered only a marginal dip.³⁶ Far more drastic, however, was the decline in the military’s almost totemistic status as one of the very few institutions commonly thought to represent a national consensus and thus considered to be beyond the pale of public contention. It is in this – more insidious – sense that the *intifada* helped to erode the overwhelmingly deferential attitudes which most sectors of Israeli society traditionally have displayed toward the IDF as a unique national solvent.

Admittedly, the *intifada* was not exclusively responsible for that development. The IDF’s immunity to domestic public scrutiny had already been dented by the 1973 October war and the 1982-85 Lebanon campaign. In both cases, even the details of its operations were subjected to severe censure – by judicial tribunals as well as by Israel’s increasingly intrusive media. During the *intifada*, however, the phenomenon of critical review became particularly pronounced.³⁷ It also assumed a blatantly political complexion. Almost from the first, debates over the appropriate military response to the *intifada* tended to overlap with those which pertained to the future disposition of “the territories,” thereby involving the IDF – in its corporate capacity – in one of the most contentious topics on Israel’s public agenda.

Significantly, domestic criticism of the IDF’s *intifada*-related operations between 1987 and 1993 was not confined to any particular segment of the Israeli political spectrum. Instead, it emanated from two – otherwise mutually antagonistic – sources. One, broadly categorized as the “left,” indicated the intrinsic iniquity (and even folly) of Israel’s continued retention of “the territories.” In its most extreme version, this view castigated virtually every measure which the IDF undertook to suppress the *intifada*. Singled out for special condemnation was the allegedly brutalizing effect which the prolonged experience of direct military rule over a million and a half Palestinians might have exerted on the personnel involved. Reservists, several of whom communicated their own obloquy to the domestic and foreign press, were said to be particularly affected.³⁸ But equally a target of moral outrage in these circles were such predominantly conscript units as the “Masqueraders,” whose allegedly “trigger-happy” comportment even generated calls for their disbandment by left-of-center members of the government.³⁹

Entirely different was the position articulated by sections of the “right” in Israel’s political spectrum, where the government’s response to the *intifada* was often depicted as pusillanimous. This view became particularly pronounced among Jewish settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, who bore the brunt of *intifada*-related attacks on their traffic and lives – and many of whom in any case invest the retention of “Greater Israel” with religious meaning.⁴⁰ From their perspective the IDF’s failure to suppress the insurgency not only jeopardized their own personal safety; it also endangered the very existence of the Jewish state. Most settlers placed responsibility for that risk on the government, which they accused of having “shackled” the IDF’s freedom of operational manoeuvre. Some, however, assigned at least partial blame to the weakness – ideological as well as professional – of the IDF high command itself, whose authority they increasingly became ready to challenge. A small faction of the “Bloc of the Faithful” (*Gush Emunim*) had in 1982 already come to blows with IDF units despatched to remove Jewish settlers from Yamit, the township in northern Sinai which Israel evacuated in accordance with the 1979 Camp David accords. By 1991, however, confrontations (mostly verbal) had become endemic. Indeed, they tended to recur with almost ritual regularity in the wake of every Jewish settler death attributed to the *intifada*.⁴¹

Throughout the *intifada*, civilian analysts forecast that the pressures thus exerted by both wings of domestic critics could tarnish the supra-factional status which the IDF traditionally had enjoyed in Israeli Jewish society. Likewise, military sources warned that continued overt censure of IDF counterinsurgency operations might undermine the fighting spirit of individual troops and strain unit cohesion.⁴² Although most such dire predictions remained unfulfilled, the IDF did not emerge from the *intifada* entirely unscathed. To judge by their press interviews, unit commanders became increasingly sensitive to the criticisms levelled against the prudence of their operational decisions, especially with regard to the “rules of engagement.” On occasion, they were also reluctant to employ reserve formations in “the territories” – for political as well as operational reasons.⁴³

The significance of such admissions lies in the extent to which they indicate that the fear of arousing potentially debilitating domestic dissent might have reduced the IDF’s ability to undertake autonomous action. In this respect even a formal end to the *intifada* would provide little respite; if anything, the Israeli-PLO accords of September 1993 and May 1994 might exacerbate the problem. The prospect that, as a result of those agreements, some of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip might have to be dismantled – if necessary by force – has generated an even more strident round of public protest. Conscientious objection (once a phenomenon restricted to left-wing opponents of government policies) has now also begun to become apparent in right-wing circles. As early as September 1993 a group of more than 50 reservists, including some retired officers of senior rank, publicly called upon IDF troops to disobey any order which they might receive to remove Jewish settlers from areas conceded to the PLO. In the wake of the

Hebron massacre of February 1994, that call was echoed by three prominent rabbinical leaders of the national-religious segment of orthodox Jewish Israeli society.⁴⁴ At the time of their publication, such proclamations articulated only a minority opinion, even among the settlers themselves.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, they already served to illustrate the increasing extent to which dissonance in the political arena had begun to spill over into previously autonomous military spheres.

The *intifada* and civil-military relations in Israel

In contrast to the turbulence which infuses much of the country's public life, civil-military relations in Israel have generally been marked by harmony at the apex of the governmental pyramid.⁴⁶ According to one recent view, this phenomenon reflects the altogether "uncivil" nature of Israeli society. Alternatively, it has been attributed to the ease and frequency of lateral movements by elites from the military to the political domain.⁴⁷ Whichever the case, one prime manifestation of Israel's civil-military "concordance" has been the confluence of her military goals and political objectives. In large part, the IDF's ability to tailor the scope and form of its operations to political purposes has been a consequence of its own participation in the decision-making processes whereby those purposes were themselves defined.⁴⁸

The *intifada* marked a break with that pattern. Indeed, General Shomron's repeated (and forlorn) insistence that the insurgency required a "political solution" in effect amounted to a confession that he was not being provided with precise ministerial guidelines.⁴⁹ Matters undoubtedly improved after Rabin's return to the Defence Ministry in 1992, where his working relationship with Barak was reported to be particularly close. But the inherent strain which the *intifada* placed on the traditional harmony of Israel's civil-military partnership nevertheless remained. As much was signified by the conduct of the secret Oslo talks with the PLO. For the very first time in Israel's history, a diplomatic arrangement containing military components was negotiated without any direct IDF representation. Indeed, senior military sources (Barak included) were apparently as much surprised by the accord as were most other citizens and – to judge by their initial public reactions – also somewhat skeptical of the military viability of some of the terms which initially had been reached.⁵⁰ Formal military participation in the talks with the Palestinians did not commence until after the Declaration of Principles was signed in Washington. And even though the principal negotiating team then was led by the Deputy Chief of Staff (General Shahak-Lipkin), his freedom of manoeuvre was clearly restricted by the tight rein which Rabin personally kept on the Israeli side of the agenda.⁵¹

Far more important than the immediate and personal results of Rabin's behavior are the long-term and corporate implications. His actions reflect, and respond to, an underlying shift in the IDF's role in the entire process of Israeli decision-making on matters of national importance. Altogether, the country's political elite has in recent years evinced an increasing readiness to balance narrowly-defined military concerns with wider diplomatic, societal and economic

requirements. In so doing, it has also become more resistant to the pressures toward “military role expansion,” which in the past ensured the IDF a paramount voice in most major policy debates affecting its own manifold spheres of interest.⁵² The management of IDF operations against the *intifada* added further impetus to that process of change in Israel’s civil-military balance; the manner whereby the confrontation was eventually brought to a formal conclusion may have heralded its summation.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the dark forecasts of several early analysts, neither Israel’s military apparatus nor (for that matter) Israeli society disintegrated as a result of the prolonged nature of the *intifada*. If anything, this form of armed struggle – like others before it – was “routinized” by the Israeli polity, and thereby rendered tolerable.⁵³ Even so, the intra-organizational problems to which the *intifada* gave rise within the IDF do nevertheless warrant specific attention. Because it posed unique strains, the conflict substantively modified the doctrines hitherto favored by Israel’s armed forces, and affected their structure and overall status within Israeli society. The need to come to terms with these changes will doubtless occupy IDF attention for some time to come.

Endnotes

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3. Stuart A. Cohen, “Israel’s Changing Military Commitments, 1981-1991,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15 (1992), pp. 330-50.
4. Interview with the Deputy Chief of Staff, Gen. Amnon Shahak-Lipkin, *Ma’ariv*, (Hebrew daily) Tel-Aviv, 5 April 1993.
5. *Ha-Aretz*, (Hebrew daily) Tel-Aviv, 3 September 1993.
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9. Interview with the commander of the unit in *Ba-Mahaneh* (IDF weekly, Hebrew), 27 April 1994.

10. Don Peretz, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), pp. 39-82; A. Shalev, *The Intifada: Causes and Effects* (Tel-Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 1991), pp. 99-122. The total of Palestinian casualties during the *intifada* is probably impossible to compute. *Bezelem* (an Israeli Human Rights watch-group) estimated that 1058 had been killed by Israeli forces; a further 58 by Israeli civilians; and 771 others (accused of "collaboration") by the Palestinians themselves. *Kol Ha-Ir*, (Hebrew weekly) Jerusalem, 10 December 1993.
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12. Interviews with General Moshe Ya-alon (CO, IDF Forces on West Bank) and Col. Yomtov Samia (CO, the Gaza Strip), *Ma'ariv*, 30 October 1992 and 29 April 1993, respectively.
13. Interview in *Ba-Mahaneh*, 4 January 1994.
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17. Yitzchak Rabin, interview on Israeli TV, 13 January 1988, transcript in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17 (Spring 1988), p. 153.
18. Ariel Levite, *Offense and Defense in Israel's Military Doctrine* (Tel-Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies and Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988); Efraim Inbar and S. Sandler, "Israeli Deterrence: a Re-Assessment," *Ma'arivot* (IDF journal, Hebrew), 328 (February 1993), pp. 9-19.
19. Z.L. Eisenberg, "Passive Belligerency: Israel and the 1991 Gulf War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 15 (1993), pp. 304-29.
20. Interviews with Gen. M. Ayalon (CO, Judea and Samaria), *Ha-Aretz*, 24 September 1992, and with Commander Y. Aharonovitch (CO, the Border Guard), *Ba-Mahaneh*, 1 December 1993.
21. For a retrospective account, see *Ha-Aretz*, 25 April 1993.
22. Many of these measures were formally recommended by the "Shaffir Committee" on IDF manpower, whose report to the Chief of Staff is summarized in *Ma'ariv*, 29 November 1993.
23. Interview in *Davar* (in Hebrew), 1 April 1994.
24. Admitted by senior Ministry of Defense official in *Ha-Aretz*, 11 February 1993.
25. Interviews in *al Ha-Mishmar* (Hebrew, left-wing daily), 27 September 1992 and *Davar*, 5 April 1993.
26. The subject is extensively discussed, albeit in a semi-fictional tone, by Col. (Res) M. Givati, *Bond of Silence* (in Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv, 1993). Givati was himself forced to retire from active service in 1988 after directing helicopter fire at a fleeing civilian suspect. The legal complexities generated by the *intifada*, and the initial imprecision of "the rules of engagement," are analysed – not entirely objectively – by Gen. (Res.) A. Strasnov, the former IDF Advocat-General, in *Justice Under Fire* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1993).
27. Ze'ev Schiff, "What has Happened to the IDF in the Intifada?," *Ha-Aretz*, 16 June 1989.
28. *Ibid.* The military historian, Prof. Martin van Creveld, also warned: "What used to be one of the world's finest fighting forces is rapidly degenerating into a fourth-class police organization." Quoted in *Jerusalem Post International*, 18 February 1989.
29. "The Other Operational Facet," *Ha-Aretz*, 1 May 1992; also, Y. Peri, "The IDF's Identity Crisis," *Davar*, 4 December 1992.
30. Rabin's testimony to the Foreign and Security Committee of the Knesset, reported in *Ma'ariv*, 20 October 1993.
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40. On the background, see Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
41. Ze'ev Schiff, "Settlers against the IDF," *Ha-Aretz*, 17 June 1992; and A. Melamed, "The End of the Period of Restraint," (in Hebrew) *Nekudah* (the monthly organ of the Jewish Settlers' Council of Judea, Samaria and Gaza), 155 (January 1992), pp. 22-3.
42. See, for example, the interview with Dr. Arik Shalev, the Director of the Unit for Post-Traumatic Injuries in the Hadassah Medical Center, Jerusalem, *Ha-Aretz*, 5 February 1992; and the "Report to Prime Minister Rabin" by Prof. Ehud Sprinzak, a political scientist at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, published in *Tzomet Ha-Sharon*, (Hebrew weekly) 21 May 1993.
43. Comments by Deputy Chief of Staff in *Davar*, 25 April 1993.
44. For texts, see *Ha-Tzofeh*, (Hebrew daily, published by the National-Religious Party) 25 September 1993 and 30 March 1994.
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