

Military Contrarianism in Israel: Room for Opposition by the Chief of Staff to Politicians

Yagil Levy

This article offers a structural analysis of the relations between the military and the political echelon on the basis of theories concerning the military's bargaining space vis-à-vis the government. It contends that when the military perceives the conduct of politicians as harmful, it has a tendency to resist by demonstrating its independence and attempting to thwart the politicians' will. The form and intensity of the military's opposition is derived from the intersection between the level of perceived harm done to the military and the power relations that exist among the echelons. The military demonstrates over-independence and resistance, and expands its power the more it views the harm done to it as significant and the more politicians who hold executive governmental positions require its "legitimization services" in the face of opposition, or when the military realizes politicians will refrain from restraining it due to a fear of delegitimization by the opposition.

Keywords: Professional autonomy; exchange relations; legitimacy; military contrarianism; civil oversight; military restraint

In January 2013, the Israeli public was outraged by a report the state comptroller published on what was known as the Harpaz Affair. A document allegedly forged by Col. (res.) Boaz Harpaz detailed a strategy on how to appoint Major General Yoav Galant, Commander of the Southern Command, as the new Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Those drafting the document were driven by the goal of discrediting Galant

Prof. Yagil Levy is a member of the faculty at the Open University.

and undermining his candidacy. The document was exposed by the media in August 2010 and opened a Pandora's Box of bad relations between Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi.

In examining the affair, the state comptroller found that the chief of staff's bureau had gathered slanderous material on the defense minister and his associates. This was done with the partial knowledge of Chief of Staff Ashkenazi in a manner that was not consistent with the duty to subordinate the military to the political echelon.¹ In a *Haaretz* editorial, it was even stated that "civilian control of the military is the problem at the heart of the crises that has divided Israeli society, the political system, and the media" from the time of David Ben Gurion's dismantling of the Palmach underground organization until today.² As explained by Ashkenazi's aide, the chief of staff's bureau attempted to protect the chief of staff and his ability to function in light of the action taken by the defense minister's bureau, which was perceived as impairing the chief of staff's ability to function professionally.³

This is, however, not the first time that the chief of staff acted in a contrarian fashion toward the defense minister or the prime minister. The Harpaz Affair then serves as an invitation for a broader analysis of the mode of conflicts between IDF chiefs of staff and the politicians under whom they serve, as well as the methods selected by chiefs of staff to oppose politicians.

This article offers a structural analysis of the relations between the military and the political echelon on the basis of theories concerning the military's bargaining space vis-à-vis the government. I will argue that when the military perceives the conduct of politicians as harmful, it has a tendency to resist by demonstrating its independence and attempting to thwart the politicians' will. The form and intensity of the military's opposition is derived from the intersection between the level of perceived harm done to the military and the power relations that exist among the echelons. The military demonstrates over-independence and resistance and expands its power the more it views the harm done to it as significant and the more politicians who hold executive governmental positions require its "legitimization services." These services are necessary, for example, to support moderate political measures in the face of opposition from the right, military action in the face of opposition from the left, or

when the military realizes politicians will refrain from restraining it due to a fear of delegitimization by the opposition. The chief of staff's mode of contrarian behavior is divided between direct contrarianism—modes of resistance that are relatively strong and open to the public—and indirect contrarianism—a moderate pattern of resistance that frequently seeks tools outside the immediate area of the parties' dispute. The first part of this article will present the theoretical framework, while the second part will illustrate the argument within the Israeli context.

The Military's Space for Action

One of the main theoretical questions is what leads the military to accept civilian authority, a phenomenon that arose in Europe in the seventeenth century. The most comprehensive structural explanation is provided by the theory of state formation, which asserts that with the appearance of gunpowder and mass conscription the military became dependent on civilian institutions to finance its operations and support recruitment. This dependency was gradually translated into civilian control, as a massive military cannot raise an abundance of resources by itself, and herein lies the conspicuous difference between the modern military and the feudal military. When the military is not dependent on civilian institutions' mobilization of society's resources for its maintenance, the civilian control of the military weakens. This also explains the relative independence of the military in Asian, African, and Latin American countries during the 1950s-1980s, when the military was often directly financed by outside powers and did not need the state institutions to mobilize society's resources for its maintenance.⁴

Oversight of the military can therefore be conceptualized in terms of exchange relations between the military and civilian institutions: the military accepts the subordination and the limitations placed on its autonomy in exchange for resources that are mobilized by civilian state institutions. These resources range from material resources, such as budgets and manpower, to legitimacy resources, that is, mobilizing legitimacy for war and the use of force.⁵ It should be emphasized that this is not a formal or explicit exchange relationship in which each party is aware of the assets it is trading. Instead, the exchange relationship is of a structural pattern in which each side's satisfaction with the emerging situation leads it to institutionalize the exchange relationship and expand

it until it is fixed within the civil political culture. As legitimacy resources play a role, politicians may often adopt a military worldview in exchange for the military's acceptance of their authority.⁶

Dissatisfaction of the military with the exchange relations appears when it subjectively perceives these relations as unbalanced. Such dissatisfaction develops in one of the following situations: (1) The military feels that it is not receiving material or legitimacy resources in a manner suited to its tasks; (2) The military's room for autonomous action is constricted by politicians; (3) Political-cultural processes threaten the military's identity or its organizational interests, such as democratization or liberalization, which challenge the militaristic character of society and its status; (4) The military is given tasks in which it is likely not to succeed, and as a result, a doctrinal dispute develops and intensifies as the military's concerns increase regarding its future organizational interests that could be harmed by failure; (5) Politicians do not respect the military leadership personally or institutionally.⁷

A perception of an unbalanced exchange could lead the military to resist political authority in different ways. This resistance can range from a bureaucratic conflict between the military command and the politicians, as often takes place in Western democracies (in the United States, this is known as a "crisis in civil-military relations"), or a military coup, as happened particularly from the 1950s to 1970s in non-democratic societies. This article, however, comes to examine the type of moderate conflicts that characterize democracies like Israel.

Since explicit disobedience is not legitimate in democratic systems, the military can perform certain acts to show its dismay, such as a military figure's resignation due to disagreements with the political echelon's orders, or a failure of the military to carry out orders by means of foot dragging. Another option is to publicly express a position that challenges the politicians' positions or decisions, and to mobilize other forms of support in the attempt to thwart the will of the elected politicians. One of these forms of mobilization is the recruitment of retired senior officers—at the military's initiative, or at the initiative of others but where the military benefits—who speak for those in uniform. Indeed, the military's right to speak out against a policy that it opposes has been subjected to disputes among American scholars and military personnel since the Vietnam War.⁸

The military's dissatisfaction grows the more its dispute with the politicians is doctrinal or organizational and the more this dispute concerns a wide range of military institutions and not just personal relations between military personnel and politicians. The more intense the dispute is, the greater the ability of the military commanders to justify their contrarian behavior.

Whereas the military's motivation to resist its superiors is derived from the perceived level of violation of the exchange relations, the level of the military's opposition is derived from the balance of power among the echelons, and can be assessed by the military's dependency on civilian institutions. High dependency may dictate restraint, but when the civilian institutions have a limited ability to hurt the military's flow of resources or object to its operations, this dependency becomes especially low. This situation occurs when politicians are dependent on the military as well. In other words, a high level of dependency by politicians on the military weakens the dependency of the military on the politicians and increases the military's independence.

Politicians' dependency on the military grows mainly when they need its legitimization services. As C. Wright Mills explained, the politicians bolster their support for or opposition to policies vis-à-vis their political opponents, as well as strengthen public opinion by framing military policies as being "above politics."⁹ The military then helps to "sell" the policy that the politicians are seeking to promote, which has clearly been common in the American politics of recent decades.¹⁰ Legitimization services could be necessary in curbing the opposition of "doves" to the use of force (when the military supports restraint), or alternatively, for military restraint in the face of pressures from "hawks" who lobby for a military action.

The importance of these legitimization services increases according to the level of debate concerning the military's mode of deployment, as well as the parties' aspiration to mobilize support. In this situation, the military's opinion will greatly influence policymaking, as it would be used by those politicians it serves against their opponents and provide the military with relatively broad autonomy in executing the policy. In that sense, the more the military attempts to loosen the reins of the political oversight or to disagree publicly with the government's position, the more limited will be the politicians' ability to punish it for deviating from instructions or from the rules of conduct.¹¹ Accordingly, the less divided the political

elite is on questions concerning the military deployment, the greater is its ability to discipline the military. Under such conditions, the military has a limited ability to maneuver between competing political groups or branches in order to raise the support necessary to advocate against the policy or instructions dictated by the government.¹²

The freedom of operation given to the military is, therefore, an asset in the exchange relationship: freedom of action (professional autonomy) is given to the military in exchange for obedience, as identified in Samuel Huntington's classic work.¹³ At times, freedom of action can also be exchanged for the military's refraining from political mobilization that would thwart the will of the elected politicians, or at least reduce the extent of such mobilization if it has already begun.

Similar to the divisions within the political system, the military establishment is divided at times as well. Under these circumstances, the politicians can exploit the internal military divisions by assisting one group to persuade its opponent to bring the military to accept the politicians' position. This situation, for example, helped George W. Bush to convince the military to accept the surge strategy in Iraq in 2007.¹⁴

The military restraint also increases when the politicians in charge of the military have military experience. In the United States, for example, leaders who lack military experience may be prone to extend the use of force to deal with interstate conflicts that do not represent a substantial threat to national security. Unlike leaders who do have a military background, however, once leaders without previous military experience have deployed the military, they tend to place limitations on the use of force.¹⁵ In other words, a "civilian" leadership finds it more difficult to restrain the use of force, whether the use is demanded by the military or stems from pressures by hawkish groups in the political system. In terms of the exchange relations, political reliance on the military's legitimization services is higher when "civilian" politicians are in office.

In conclusion, the military scope of options for contrarian behavior toward politicians is shaped by the intersection between the military's perception of the intensity of harm caused by the politicians and the balance of power between the military and the civilians. This theoretical framework provides the tools for explaining the IDF chief of staff's repertoire of opposition to the political leadership.

Military Contrarianism in Israel

Background

The principle of political supervision over the military was consolidated in Israel even before the formal establishment of the state in 1948, with the subordination of the main underground paramilitary organizations to political authority, largely thanks to the development of strong pre-state Jewish institutions. These funded the paramilitary organizations and recruited the human resources (volunteers) needed, thereby establishing the material dependency of the organizations on the political institutions.

In spite of this, however, friction between politicians and generals developed in the state's first years over the delimitation of authority between the military and the state's politicians. Tensions were also evident on the eve of the Six Day War (1967) when disputes over the use of force and the military's deployment arose. However, the civilian control of the military grew much tighter in years to come: The *Basic Law: The Military* (1976) established the military's subordination to the political authority. Concurrently, arrangements were established to limit the military's freedom of operation. Its ability to challenge the politicians whether by initiating a retaliatory action without explicit political approval as occurred in the 1950s, or by exerting heavy pressure to go to war like the "waiting period" of 1967 was gradually reduced.

The 1973 War and, more profoundly, the first Lebanon War (1982) marked a change in the mode of civilian control with the emergence of extra-institutional control mechanisms. Extra-institutional control is action generally taken by non-bureaucratic actors (mainly social movements and interest groups) acting in the public sphere in an attempt to bargain with the military or to restrain it, either directly or through civilian state institutions. Extra-institutional actors monitored various spheres of military activity, such as draft policy (particularly in regard to reserve duty and the service of the ultra-Orthodox and women) or action in the territories (through settler and civil rights organizations).¹⁶ With the increasing involvement of both lawmakers and the Finance Ministry's Budget Department, oversight of the military's financial resources also gradually became stronger. These processes led military researcher Stuart Cohen to argue that the military's was becoming "overly subordinate" to civilian oversight.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the leeway given to the IDF—like that of any other military operating in a democratic environment—is not only derived from formal

arrangements but is also greatly influenced by the balance of power between the military and the state's civil institutions. This balance dictates rules of conduct in situations where formal rules leave gray areas, influences the formation of new formal rules, and shapes the politicians' room for action in implementing the formal tools for enforcement at their disposal. Even if the politicians are equipped with appropriate formal powers, they will not always make use of these powers to force a policy the military will oppose or is likely to oppose.

In this article's terms, civilian oversight of the IDF depends on an exchange relationship between the military and civil institutions. In this relationship, the military subordinates itself to civilian rule in exchange for the generous resources the state possesses and provides to the military, its superior symbolic status as "the people's military," and its senior partnership in shaping foreign policy, which has gradually been dominated by military modes of thought¹⁸ (including the shaping of diplomatic processes, such as the Oslo Accords, as described below).¹⁹ This exchange relationship has been very influential in shaping the nature of the interaction between the military and the politicians.

As noted in the theoretical section, the military's room for operation is widened to the extent that its dependency on the politicians is lower and their dependence on it is higher. There are a number of measures within this room for action that the military can take in order to influence policy and adopt a contrarian approach toward the politicians when it feels that the exchange relations have been violated, or, more particularly, that the politicians' decisions harm or could harm it. Since the politicians' dependency on the military is mainly for legitimization services, which are needed when the political system is divided on matters of the use of force and the military's deployment, it is appropriate to focus the empirical analysis on the years following the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The period prior to these years from the mid-1950s on (particularly from 1956-1973) was characterized by a relatively general consensus regarding military policy. By virtue of this consensus, starting in the early years of Israel, the arrangements for political control over the military grew tighter. While the division within the political system since 1973 played a key role in shaping the relations between the military and the politicians, it is difficult to identify any significant role played by divisions within the military on which politicians could capitalize for their benefit.

Direct Contrarianism

As noted, the military has the ability to demonstrate independence and expand its powers when politicians need its legitimization services. These services are required, for example, for support in moderate diplomatic moves that do not rely on broad legitimacy, such as when the Yitzhak Rabin government presented the Oslo Accords in 1993. The military criticized the Oslo parameters, which were formulated without its input, and which Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, who categorically rejected the approach of interim agreements, described as “Swiss cheese that has many holes.”

But the military did not oppose the government publicly, particularly since the process was led by a military authority like Prime Minister and Defense Minister, and the former Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin. As political opposition to Oslo increased and the government’s need for the military’s legitimization services grew, the military’s role in shaping the arrangements gradually expanded. The military then had an important role in legitimizing the process vis-à-vis the right-religious front that opposed it, or at least in mitigating this opposition. Thus, after a short period in which the process was managed by Foreign Ministry personnel, Rabin entrusted the military with the task of implementing the Oslo arrangements and expanded its role to the point that the Oslo arrangements were shaped by the military and took on a military character.²⁰ The exchange relations were reshaped: the military gave its support to the Oslo arrangements in exchange for its role in shaping the arrangements. Chief of Staff Barak’s opposition to the government remained muted and the potential for direct confrontation was eroded.

More thunderous was the opposition of Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz to the decision by Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ehud Barak in 2000 to withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon, which was a commitment Barak made to voters during his 1999 election campaign. The military expressed its opposition to a unilateral withdrawal, as it considered it to be dangerous and therefore likely to harm its standing as a provider of security in the future, and this opposition leaked out.²¹ When the government ordered the military to prepare for the withdrawal, Chief of Staff Mofaz announced publicly that “the military does not choose its missions.” This statement, asserted then-Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Uzi Dayan, was a form of defiance, showing that in the event of a failure during the withdrawal processes, the military would place the responsibility for

negative consequences on the politicians.²² Nevertheless, the chief of staff's ability to oppose the move was limited due to the withdrawal being an election promise made to the general public that overwhelmingly opposed the continuation of Israel's blood-soaked presence in Lebanon. In this case, the politicians were therefore not very dependent on the military's legitimization services.

The politicians' dependency on the military, however, increased around the same time of the withdrawal from Lebanon as the government attempted to advance the signing of a peace agreement with the Palestinian Authority. Unlike the withdrawal from Lebanon, the peace process engendered significant opposition from the right-religious front, and thus the military's legitimization services were extremely important, especially if the talks with the Palestinians led to a politically disputed deal. With the politicians' dependence on the IDF's legitimization services, Mofaz's concerns that he could be exposed to personal risks if he spoke out against the government were probably relatively mild. Although the military did not publicly express opposition to the negotiations with the Palestinians, the politicians' dependency on the military allowed Chief of Staff Mofaz to expand the scope of his indirect opposition to the government in a series of public, independent statements when disagreements between the sides arose in other areas. The most scathing display occurred when Mofaz publicly criticized the government's decision to appoint outgoing Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Uzi Dayan to head the National Security Council at the appointment ceremony itself.²³

When the Camp David talks with the Palestinians failed and the second intifada erupted in September 2000, Chief of Staff Mofaz was already operating more independently. From the military's point of view, the exchange relations with state institutions had become unbalanced. The trends toward liberalization and demilitarization of the second half of the 1990s forced the military to compete for its identity in a new reality in which it was gradually losing its centrality within Israeli society. The military's resources were reduced with the last cut dictated by Prime Minister Barak upon his departure to the July 2000 Camp David summit. The withdrawal from Lebanon, which ultimately was perceived as a withdrawal under fire because of pressure from civil protests (and especially those staged by the Four Mothers movement), harmed the self-image of the military, and its public image as well. The imbalance of the exchange relations

was potentially exacerbated with the outbreak of the intifada and the consequences of what followed in further undermining the image of the military as failing again to provide security for the community of citizens. This all followed the collapse of the Oslo Accords, of which the military was one of the architects.

As the balance of the exchange had been violated, the military was pushed to defend its status. A perception that the political leadership was harming the military provided Chief of Staff Mofaz with the motivation to adopt contrarian behavior. This motivation intersected with the ability to stretch the boundaries of the permissible in the formal framework that institutionalizes the military's subordination to political authority. The chief of staff recognized that this was a situation where the political echelon was dependent on the military, and that the military and diplomatic moves conducted were guided by a government that had lost its parliamentary majority. This government would later become a transitional one.

Against this background, Mofaz and other military commanders criticized the government's policy of restraint and containment in dealing with the Palestinians' hostilities, stating that it would not calm the situation.²⁴ At the same time, the government attempted to promote the political track by holding a dialogue on President Clinton's parameters for an agreement with the Palestinians. The government accepted the parameters, but Chief of Staff Mofaz declared that they constituted an existential danger. Then-Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami viewed this comment as being almost tantamount to a military coup.²⁵

The military's independence was demonstrated not only in words. Field commanders were given a great deal of freedom in conducting policy on aggressively suppressing Palestinian uprisings, which frequently deviated from governmental decisions. At times this created a sense that the government, and in particular, Prime Minister and Defense Minister Barak, had lost control of the military.²⁶ Former Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin Shahak, who served as a minister in the Barak government, gave voice to Barak's weakness in restraining the military: "Barak knew it could be publicized in the media that he gives the military guidelines that were not to the military's liking. He was very concerned about that. I have no doubt that he feared that such leaks could undermine legitimacy."²⁷ In this case of violated exchange relations, the politicians avoided punishing the military for its deviations in exchange for the military's partial restraint

and its refraining from mobilizing even more massive support against the politicians, a move that Barak feared from most.

The exchange relations became much more balanced in 2001, when the government of Major General (ret.) Ariel Sharon replaced the Barak government. The transition to a more aggressive policy toward the Palestinian Authority, which reached its peak in Operation Defensive Shield (2002) during which Israel partly re-occupied the West Bank, allowed the military to rehabilitate its status. Sharon's approach was that the military should be allowed victory²⁸ so its motivation to behave in a contrarian fashion toward the government would be reduced. Furthermore, a right wing government, and in particular, one led by a renowned military figure like Ariel Sharon, was less exposed to pressures of using military force than a left-center government, and had more of an ability to deal with such pressures. The politicians' need for the military's support was, therefore, reduced, and so too, the military's ability to contrarianism. These factors led the military command to experience less friction with the prime minister and minister of defense.

When tensions were present, the Sharon government had more effective tools than its predecessor for disciplining the chief of staff. In October 2001, for example, around the time the cabinet discussed easing the conditions for the Palestinians, the IDF spokesman announced that Chief of Staff Mofaz opposed a military withdrawal from the Hebron region neighborhoods and easing of conditions for the Palestinians, as he believed this would create a security risk. In the cabinet's discussion, the ministers who opposed these moves relied on the opposition of the chief of staff. Prime Minister Sharon, however, did not find it difficult to put an end to these objections by criticizing the chief of staff's statement, which, in Sharon's opinion, spilled over into the realm of politics. Later, the chief of staff was reprimanded by Defense Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer, and issued a clarification, coordinated with Ben Eliezer, that "he did not object to the cabinet decision...but only advised against it."²⁹

But the relatively balanced exchange was again undermined in the following years. During the first few years of the intifada, the military's operations had a broad public support, which rehabilitated its status. Cracks, however, began to develop later, mainly from 2003, as conscientious objection grew, the organization of released conscripts (Breaking the Silence) formed and exposed abuse of Palestinians, and criticism was

voiced regarding the harm caused to Palestinian noncombatants as a result of targeted killings and regarding the IDF presence on the Philadelphi Corridor, which led to many casualties. The erosion of legitimacy at home, along with the fear of the erosion of international legitimacy for IDF operations, gave rise to the disengagement plan, which, according to Dov Weissglass, head of the prime minister's bureau and one of the plan's architects, was greatly influenced by the domestic process.³⁰

Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon viewed the disengagement plan as a security threat. Along with this basic view, he objected to the fact that the political decision was, as he believed, decided on without the military.³¹ Having the military take part in decision making processes was one of the assets the government granted it in exchange for its subordination to political authority, which Yoram Peri called the "partnership model" between the military and the politicians.³² From the perspective of the military, a political move that involves risk like the disengagement has the potential to expose the military to criticism for its inability to provide security, if the risk is realized in the future. From another standpoint, appointing Shaul Mofaz to be the defense minister only a few months after he retired from serving as the chief of staff had the potential to create tension in the relations between the military and the politicians. Minister Mofaz's intervention in allocating troops for the disengagement plan,³³ along with allegations about direct contacts between the prime minister's bureau and military officers, exacerbated the tension between the sides, to the point that Yaalon considered resignation.³⁴ In this case, the violation of the exchange by means of undermining the military's status, restricting its autonomy, and not considering its professional outlook, paved the way for contrarian conduct by the chief of staff. In this instance, the contrarian conduct took the form of a public statement made by Yaalon against the plan in March 2004, which he said "would give a tail-wind to terrorism."³⁵ Right wing politicians used this opinion to counter the disengagement.

But the room for opposition by the chief of staff was limited: the move was led by a right wing government headed by military authorities, such as Prime Minister Sharon and Defense Minister and former Chief of Staff Mofaz, and had relatively broad public support. As mentioned previously, the politicians' dependency on the military is generally weaker when a political process has broad legitimacy (even though in this case the dependency increased slightly the more the government moved from

conventional fighting against the Palestinians to a withdrawal). The chief of staff's restraint, therefore, was effective: in the first stage, Yaalon prepared the military for the move, and in the second stage, a year later, the defense minister decided not to extend Yaalon's term for a fourth year. In a certain sense, this was a dismissal of the chief of staff, and the task of leading the disengagement was given to Yaalon's successor, Dan Haloutz.

In circumstances such as these, the military can be restrained, even without an exchange in the form of partnership in decision making. Similarly, the right wing Menachem Begin government that led the peace process with Egypt during the years 1977-1978, backed by a broad consensus even though it involved many concessions but did not include the military in the political management of the process. In this case, even if the military had reservations about the process, they remained silenced.³⁶ It is reasonable to assume that had the center-left Labor government led this process, the politicians' dependency on the military would have been greater, given the powerful opposition of the right, which the military could have leveraged to strengthen its position in the decision making process.

Indirect Contrarianism

When the politicians' dependency on the military weakens, the military personnel's ability to adopt contrarian behavior toward the politicians is reduced. In these situations, military officials, and the chief of staff in particular, are restrained, and the ability of the prime minister and the defense minister to discipline the military grows stronger, even at the price of harming what military officials perceive as the military's organizational interests. In such situations, contrarianism is channeled into more indirect means of opposition that may bypass the area of the direct dispute between the military and the politicians.

The years Lieutenant General Moshe Levy was chief of staff under Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin were characterized by a great deal of restraint by the military. Rabin and Prime Minister Shimon Peres needed the military's support to lead the unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 1985, which gave rise to opposition from the right. This opposition was relatively muted, given the inclusion of the right in the national unity government established after the 1984 elections. But following the withdrawal, the dependency of the politicians on the military decreased, especially because the security situation was quiet for several years.

These years were exploited for one of the more significant cuts made to the defense budget, which gradually reshaped the military's economic behavior as it absorbed the cuts. Under these circumstances, the political echelon could only be challenged by indirect contrarianism.

When in late 1986 Defense Minister Rabin decided to appoint Major General Dan Shomron, who was viewed as Levy's adversary in the General Staff, as Levy's successor, Levy was indirectly contrarian. Levy attempted to thwart the appointment, but could not directly challenge the defense minister's decision, since Shomron's appointment was legitimate and opposition to it included only a few senior military officials. Nevertheless, in discussing the appointment with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Levy argued that Shomron was a homosexual, which in those years could have thwarted an appointment in the IDF as it was still limiting the promotion of homosexuals to sensitive positions. An inquiry even revealed that the chief of staff had allegedly persuaded senior officers to testify on Shomron's sexual orientation.³⁷ This was a move to foil the politicians' selection of the chief of staff. The response by Deputy Chief of Staff Major General Amir Drori was even harsher: he told the media that the decision to appoint Shomron would cause more damage to the State of Israel than was caused by terrorist organizations. Defense Minister Rabin ordered the chief of staff to dismiss Drori but the latter objected by using legal arguments. Ultimately Drori apologized and the crisis passed.³⁸

Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin Shahak's conduct toward the first Netanyahu government between 1996 and 1998 was also characterized by indirect contrarianism. During this period, relations between the government and the military were particularly tense. Netanyahu, as a right wing politician, perceived the military as part of the old elite he sought to undermine, especially in light of the military's support for the Oslo Accords, with which Lipkin Shahak was identified more than his predecessor, Barak. Beyond the disputes over policy, which to a large extent were mitigated with the mediation of Defense Minister Major General (ret.) Yitzhak Mordechai, criticism of the military was voiced by members of Netanyahu's party and close circle, while military criticism of the prime minister leaked out. The hostility of the government increased the challenge that the Oslo period posed to the military's identity, as noted above.

But beyond these conflicts, relations of mutual dependency developed: the military leveraged the politicians' dependency on it to maintain the

Oslo Accords. IDF commanders thereby provided legitimacy to the government to curtail the left wing opposition, which was backed by the US administration, and objected to Netanyahu's hawkish approach to the Palestinians. In this case, the military successfully restrained Netanyahu so that he was unable to translate political rigidity into military aggression (particularly after the bitter experience of Western Wall Tunnel crisis that generated clashes with Palestinian militias in 1996),³⁹ and security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority flourished. Still, however, the military was more dependent on a right wing government that was at times hostile to it. This government maintained the political agreement with the Palestinians without advancing it, and was therefore less dependent on the military to legitimize peace moves. In the context of this balance of power, the chief of staff mainly showed restraint after receiving freedom of action in the realm of security relations with the Palestinians. Contrarianism here was reflected in what Yoram Peri called "the democratic putsch"—reserve military officers, including Lipkin Shahak and Mordechai, joining together to establish a centrist party in order to oust Netanyahu. This move led to Barak's election as a prime minister in the 1999 elections.⁴⁰

In similar circumstances, Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi engaged in indirect contrarianism in the Harpaz Affair. Ashkenazi served as chief of staff under the Ehud Olmert government with Ehud Barak serving as Defense Minister. During that time, the centrist government was relatively dependent on the military and needed its legitimization services for its attempts to promote a political process with the Palestinians. At the same time, the government also contended with pressures from the right to react firmly to the firing of rockets and missiles at Israeli civilian communities from Hamas-controlled Gaza. Especially crucial was the cooperation between the sides to contain intense pressure for a deep ground operation in Gaza, which the government was not in a hurry to perform and which Chief of Staff Ashkenazi opposed. Ashkenazi supported the December 2008 Cast Lead operation against Gaza only in circumstances in which it was possible to mobilize domestic and foreign legitimacy for the operation that required significant harm to civilians in Gaza in order to reduce the risk to IDF soldiers.⁴¹

But the balance of power changed again when the Netanyahu government was formed in 2009. The military's dependence on the politicians increased as the politicians became less dependent on the

military. The right-center government improved its position vis-à-vis the military as its ability to fend off political pressures for a military action exceeded that of the Olmert government and did not need the military to lead the peace process, which was deadlocked at the time. Ehud Barak received the defense portfolio again, and the prime minister's dependency on him for maintaining the government and its international legitimacy gave Barak broad power in conducting military affairs, similar to Rabin's status in the Shamir government between 1986 and 1988. Barak did not have this status in the Olmert government.

At a later point, the government needed the reluctant military to support an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, but the military once again blocked military moves, as it had done during Netanyahu's first term. This legitimization service became especially relevant after former security figures, headed by former Mossad Director Meir Dagan, set off a public debate on the matter. This, however, only occurred in 2011, after the retirement of Ashkenazi and the appointment of his successor, Benny Gantz, both of whom are among the proponents of military moderation. In fact, it is possible that in the future (as has been the case in the United States since the 1990s), politicians will need the military in order to give legitimacy to military moves in the face of left-center opposition, and not only for military restraint or territorial concessions in the face of right wing opposition.

Given the new balance of power, Barak had the ability to restrict Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi—along with the motivation to prevent Ashkenazi from leveraging his public popularity into political power. This popularity was achieved by Ashkenazi through his image of the military's rebuilder, particularly after Operation Cast Lead, which improved the military's prestige after the perceived fiasco of the Second Lebanon War (2006). The restraints on the chief of staff then began with the formation of the Netanyahu government in 2009, following two years of good relations between Barak and Ashkenazi.

Whether these moves by the defense minister were legitimate as he acted to impose his authority over the chief of staff, or were a show of force (such as the minister's public attack on IDF Spokesman in February 2012 for his alleged role in publicizing information about the possibility that Ashkenazi's term would be extended for a fifth year), they were interpreted in the chief of staff's bureau as an attempt to harm him and his ability to

function. Colonel Erez Weiner, an aide to Chief of Staff Ashkenazi, stated in a testimony before the state comptroller that he was determined to “protect the chief of staff and his ability to command the IDF appropriately.”⁴²

The chief of staff’s bureau then acceded to the proposal by Boaz Harpaz, a reserve intelligence officer known to be well-connected in the defense establishment, to collect information on the defense minister’s bureau. In May 2010, Harpaz provided Ashkenazi with a document allegedly written by strategic advisers to Major General Yoav Galant presenting a plan to promote Galant’s candidacy for chief of staff upon Ashkenazi’s retirement while damaging Ashkenazi’s image. The chief of staff refrained from undertaking a thorough inquiry or relaying the document to authorized powers, as in his assessment it was prepared by someone close to the defense minister. Several weeks later, the document leaked to the press.⁴³

If the balance of power had tilted in favor of the military as in the past, Ashkenazi could have involved the prime minister, but he believed that Netanyahu would give full backing to Barak. As noted, the greater the division in the political system, the greater the ability of the military to maneuver between different parties or branches. In Israel, the division is not only between coalition and opposition, but also between the prime minister and the defense minister, particularly when they are from different parties or rival wings of the ruling party. With a moderate political division however, the military’s ability to maneuver was weakened in the Harpaz Affair.

With a different balance of power, Ashkenazi could have also done what his predecessors sometimes did and come out openly against the minister under whom he served, but the chief of staff’s weakness pushed him to remain silent. Furthermore, in contrast to Netanyahu’s first term, and in spite of the shaky relations between the minister and the chief of staff, the military’s status was not damaged. As part of the budgetary framework established after the Second Lebanon War the military’s budgets actually increased, the government treated it respectfully, and its public standing improved, as is evident from the increased public confidence in the military. Thus, there was no basis for expanding the interpersonal conflict into an inter-institutional conflict. The chief of staff’s aide entered the vacuum that was created, and with mainly passive backing of the chief of staff or at least the latter’s knowledge (recorded in the state comptroller’s report), worked in indirect ways.

During the time this article was written, Israel's Attorney General ordered a criminal police investigation of Ashkenazi and his aides who are suspected of breach of trust and alleged to have taken actions against their superiors. But the fact that the Former Chief of Staff and his aides turned to actions hidden from the public eye (the investigation is based on the documents and recordings suggesting that Ashkenazi may have been much more involved in the affair than previously thought) indicates that the chief of staff internalized the limits of his power. This was very far from the public shows of strength by former chiefs of staff.

Conclusion

Even if the principle that the military is subordinated to civilian control is not questioned, in democracies in general and in Israel in particular, tensions between generals and politicians have the potential to weaken political authority. This could be the case when officers demonstrate opposition to politicians in various ways when they feel that the politicians are harming or could harm the military. From their point of view, this is a violation of the exchange relationship that establishes civilian control over the military.

Military commanders have a repertoire of means to challenge the decisions of politicians without risking a flagrant violation of the principle of political authority over the military. The choice of means is derived from the intersection between two factors. The first is the perceived intensity of the violation: the greater the violation, the greater the motivation to demonstrate contrarianism. The second factor is the balance of power between the military and the politicians—the military's ability to demonstrate independence toward the politicians or even to attempt to thwart their will increases as the politicians' need for the military's legitimization services grows. This rule also works in the opposite direction, and the civilian independence, or alternatively, the dependence of military officials on politicians, increases the military's restraint.

This article has presented the repertoire of contrarian methods and their use in recent decades: from chiefs of staff who spoke out publicly against moves by politicians in direct contrarianism (such as Mofaz and Yaalon) to more indirect contrarian behavior (Levy, Lipkin Shahak, and Ashkenazi), and in contrast to situations involving relatively great restraint, which sometimes characterized the same chiefs of staff when there was

a different balance of power vis-à-vis the politicians. Figure 1 illustrates the argument by charting the various cases (the location for each case is in relation to the other and does not necessarily indicate absolute values).

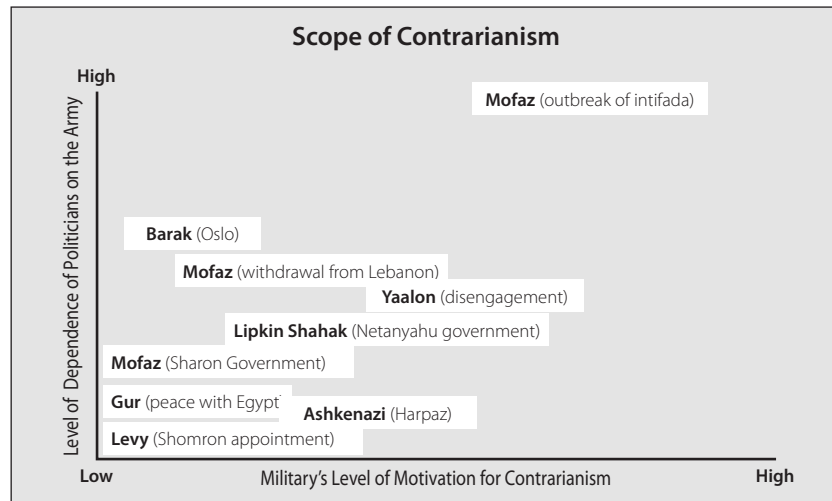


Figure 1: Instances of Contrarianism

As shown by the analysis of the above cases, the key for analyzing civilian control is not the “black box” of relations between the military and the politicians in general, or the personal relationships between the actors in particular. Even the formal rules do not exclusively shape the relationship and instead delineate it with coordinates that have been narrowed over the years, but still leave room for conflicts between the military and the politicians. The key to understanding the relationship is the degree of the politicians’ ability to mobilize legitimacy for political and military moves. The greater this ability, the less dependent the politicians are on the military’s legitimization services and the greater their ability to discipline the military, even if the military feels that its interests are being harmed. This is an important conclusion for anyone who is worried about the excessive power of the military in Israel but is counting on the ability of formal arrangements to regulate this power.

Notes

- 1 State Comptroller, *Report on the Harpaz Document Affair*, State Comptroller's Office, Jerusalem, 2013.
- 2 Editorial in *Haaretz*, "A Criminal Investigation is Needed," *Haaretz*, January 8, 2013, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/editorial-articles/1.1902505>.
- 3 State Comptroller, "Report on the Harpaz Document Affair," p. 32.
- 4 See in particular Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1992).
- 5 Yagil Levy, *Who Governs the Military? Between Control of the Military and Control of Militarism* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010).
- 6 On this type of exchange see Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Rethinking the Civil-Military Relations Paradigm: The Inverse Relation between Militarism and Praetorianism through the Example of Israel," *Comparative Political Studies* 30, no. 3 (1997): 356-74.
- 7 For a summary of this approach see Yagil Levy, "A Revised Model of Civilian Control of the Military: The Interaction between the Republican Exchange and the Control Exchange," *Armed Forces and Society* 38, no. 4 (2012): 529-56.
- 8 See, for example, Martin L. Cook, "Revolt of the Generals: A Case Study in Professional Ethics," *Parameters* No. 38 (2008): 4-5.
- 9 Wright C. Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 200.
- 10 Richard D. Hooker, "Soldiers of the State: Reconsidering American Civil-Military Relations," *Parameters* 33, no. 4 (2003-4): 4-18.
- 11 Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- 12 Deborah D. Avant, "Are the Reluctant Warriors out of Control? Why the U.S. Military is Averse to Responding to Post-Cold War Low-Level Threats," *Security Studies* 6, no. 2 (1996): 51-90.
- 13 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957).
- 14 Peter D. Feaver, "The Right to Be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35, no. 4 (2011): 87-125.
- 15 Peter D. Feaver and Christopher Gelpi, *Choosing Your Battles* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
- 16 Yagil Levy and Kobi Michael, "Conceptualizing Extra-Institutional Control of the Military: Israel as a Case Study," *Res Militaris- European Journal of Military Service* 1, no. 2 (2012, electronic journal).
- 17 Stuart A. Cohen, "Changing Civil-Military Relations in Israel: Towards an Over-subordinate IDF?" *Israel Affairs* 12, no. 4 (2006): 769-88.
- 18 Levy, *Who Governs the Military?*
- 19 Yagil Levy, "Militarizing Peace: Why Did the Israeli Military Spearhead the Oslo Accords?" *Contemporary Politics* 14, no. 2 (2008): 145-59.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006), pp. 94-5.

- 22 Uzi Dayan, "The Reality and What is Desirable in Civilian-Military Relations," in *Civil-Military Relations in Israel: Influences and Restraints*, ed. Ram Erez, Memorandum No. 68 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), p. 26.
- 23 Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, pp. 103-4.
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.
- 25 Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 272.
- 26 Ben Caspit, "Rosh Hashanah 5763: Two Years of Intifada," *Maariv NRG*, September 5, 2002, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/archive/ART/344/233.html>;
- Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, pp. 104-7.
- 27 Interview conducted by Kobi Michael (personal communication with Kobi Michael, 2007).
- 28 Dov Weissglass, *Arik Sharon: A Personal View* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Books, 2012), pp. 126-28.
- 29 Linoy Bar Geffen and Attila Somfalvi, "Mofaz: Won't Resign, Sorry about the Crisis," *Ynet*, October 15, 2001, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-1197630,00.html>.
- 30 Ari Shavit, "The Big Freeze," *Haaretz.com*, October 8, 2004, <http://www.haaretz.com/the-big-freeze-1.136713>.
- 31 Knesset State Comptroller Committee, Protocol No. 195, June 28, 2005.
- 32 Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- 33 Weissglass, *Arik Sharon*, pp. 223-25.
- 34 Moshe (Bogie) Yaalon, *The Long Short Road* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Books, 2008), pp. 186-87.
- 35 Erez Halfon, "Chief of Staff: Evacuation under Fire Won't Solve the Problem," *Ynet*, March 8, 2004, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-2885606,00.html>.
- 36 Kobi Michael, *Between Militarism and Statesmanship in Israel: Military Influence on the Transition Processes from War to Peace* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The University Institute for Diplomacy and Regional Cooperation, 2008).
- 37 Amir Oren, "It Could Happen to Anyone," *Haaretz.com*, February 28, 2008, <http://www.haaretz.com/general/it-could-happen-to-anyone-1.240317>.
- 38 Amnon Strashnov, "Control of the IDF Judicial System," in *Civil-Military Relations in Israel: Influences and Restraints*, p. 42.
- 39 Yossi Werter, "His Nightmare Returns," *Haaretz.com*, June 10, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/week-s-end/his-nightmare-returns-1.366931>.
- 40 On relations between Lipkin Shahak and the Netanyahu government see Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, pp. 77-90.
- 41 Levy, *Who Governs the Military?* pp. 144-74.
- 42 State Comptroller, "Report on the Harpaz Document Affair," p. 32.
- 43 State Comptroller, "Report on the Harpaz Document Affair."