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**The Influence of Religion on the Character and Conduct
of the Israel Defense Forces: A Review of Selected Works**

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**The Influence of Religion on the Character and Conduct
of the Israel Defense Forces: A Review of Selected Works**

by

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**The Influence of Religion on the Character and Conduct
of the Israel Defense Forces: A Review of Selected Works**

by

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In light of an ever growing gap between Israel's religious and secular communities, it is perhaps inevitable that the phenomenon would come to capture the interest of Israel-oriented scholars. Yet efforts to address the extent to which religion affects the nature and operations of the Israeli army and the degree to which that influence is advantageous – or perhaps detrimental – have been far from comprehensive. A manifestation of the religious-secular conflict, the religious-military cleavage within Israeli society has long been at the heart of Israel-focused research. Scholars have remained intrigued by the conflicts that arise when a soldier's religious background is at odds with the inflexibility of army life. Many researchers have sought to measure the degree to which religion affects army cohesion and success in war, and determine whether or not religious influence on the State's force is largely harmless or a looming threat.

While scholars of both camps have posited credible theories crafted out of sound analyses, a review of selected scholarship on the subject suggests that the influence of religion on the Israeli military is benign. Opponents of religious influence on the military have failed to appreciate the benefits of integrating devout troops into the force and the successes of mediating mechanisms that have become instrumental to the IDF. Such mediators may have been implemented in an effort to accommodate religious soldiers, but the entire force has stood to benefit.

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The Influence of Religion on the Character and Conduct of the Israel Defense Forces: A Review of Selected Works

Chapter 1: The Juxtaposition of religious Jewish groups and the military in Israel

Israel-oriented academics have long been intrigued by the troubling yet fascinating issues that surface when a soldier's religious background clashes with the rigors of army life. The situation is all the more complex given the fact that Israeli society is not merely composed of *hilonim*, or secular Jews, and *haredim*, the ultra-Orthodox; rather, Israel is far more religiously varied. A slew of devout groups exist along the religious spectrum, among them the *datiim*, or Religious Zionists and the traditional *masortiim*. The ultra-Orthodox highlight the importance of enforcing a distinct separation from the other groups to maintain their traditions, while Religious Zionists and *masortiim* are more actively involved in Israeli society.

As passions surrounding the influence of religion have yet to be eased, it is perhaps inevitable that the issue would come to capture the interest of scholars who examine cleavages in Israeli society, among them Eyal Ben-Ari, Uri Ben-Eliezer and Yagil Levy. Many have sought to assess the extent to which religion affects army cohesion and success in battle, and determine whether or not this impact is largely innocuous or, in fact, threatening.

Yet while considerable scholarship on the subject has already been published, efforts to address the extent to which religion affects the nature and operations of the

Israeli army and the degree to which that influence is beneficial – or perhaps harmful – have been far from exhaustive. While no shortage of Israel-focused scholars have devoted a great deal of research to covering what has been termed the ‘religious-secular cleavage’ in Israel and have covered the friction that arises between the nation’s religious and secular citizens, which is amplified in an army context, there remains a scarcity of scholarship on the possibility of tension fueled by Israel’s religious community transferring over and ultimately influencing the nation’s military (Cohen, 173).

Not only has the issue remained unsettled; it has spiraled into a heated, polarizing debate. As rabbinic leaders use their position of authority in religious circles to affect Israeli policy and alter the strength and cohesiveness of the nation’s force, the influence of religion on the Israeli army is bound to give rise to further deliberations among the State’s policy-makers and military officers, and spark impassioned debate among Israeli soldiers and civilians, all of whom run the gamut in terms of adherence to religious convictions.

These circumstances are aggravated by the fact that Israel does not enforce a separation of religion and state and lacks a written constitution to formally curtail the influence of religious leaders on the nation’s civil and military matters, which is likely to keep the relationship between religion and politics mired in controversy. In their coverage of the role of religion in local and national issues and the link between religion and politics in “Separation of Religion and State in the Twenty-First Century: Comparing the Middle East and Western Democracies,” authors Jonathan Fox and Shmuel Sandler contend that “there is no agreement on the link between religion and democracy. Many

assume that the two are incompatible, yet many argue the opposite (Fox and Sandler, 318). The degree to which the nation's religious camp has affected the Israeli army and the extent to which its prominence in the military has been advantageous or detrimental to military performance certainly warrants further study.

Given the divisive nature of the subject and the reality that there remains a lack of consensus on the issue, it is to be expected that scholars would posit – and defend – a host of positions that may clash with one another. Since various theories have been crafted on the basis of research and subsequent analysis, it is important to recognize that the positions of scholars across the spectrum are of merit and deserving of consideration. As research results can be interpreted and framed in a variety of ways, and scholars may choose to emphasize certain realities at the expense of others, it is natural to find a variety of opinions come to the fore. It is crucial to avoid wholly espousing the arguments of a single academic or group and subsequently disregarding those who have adopted deviating positions.

Yet while both camps retain strong arguments, and all claims should be acknowledged and evaluated, a review of selected scholarship on the subject suggests that the influence of religious values on the Israeli military is benign. Some scholars maintain that the impact of religion on the Israeli army is cause for concern, and their apprehension on the issue is certainly not unfounded – there is a growing gap between religious Israelis and their secular counterparts, and the religious-secular split in Israel may, in fact, be regarded as the most serious of the state's social cleavages – yet external religious influence on devout troops remains harmless and may even result in benefits for

the IDF as a whole. Critics may charge that religion has a detrimental influence on army cohesion, and have plausible arguments to boost the validity of their claims, yet the fact remains that their concerns have yet to prove warranted. The religious-military divide may indeed be urgent and deserving of greater attention, yet this finding does not mean that religion is bound to have a detrimental influence on the army, nor does it necessarily entail reducing the likelihood that the IDF will prevail in war.

Yagil Levy has expressed concern that appeasing smaller groups within the larger force will result in undermining the IDF as a major national symbol, and has emphasized the fact that the army runs the risk of having components of the force strip senior commanders of their authority to enforce discipline. While these arguments are certainly reasonable, Levy fails to acknowledge the fact that his concerns have hardly materialized. Not only have his concerns not panned out, but the scholar fails to consider the possibility that a willingness on the part of secular army officers to accommodate religious soldiers may stand to benefit both the devout conscripts themselves and the IDF at large.

The army does cater to smaller groups within the larger force and it is subservient, to an extent, to the mandates of mediating mechanisms such as the Garin program, but there is no indication that accommodating religious troops necessarily entails granting these soldiers an undue level of authority over secular soldiers. Not only have mediating mechanisms been beneficial to religious soldiers, allowing them to maintain their allegiance to both their rabbinic guides and to army commanders, but the army in its entirety has reaped their benefits as well. Students who took part in the midrashot have reported that their participation in the program better prepared them for service and

enabled them to cope with the challenges of army life. Midrashot students have developed into strong soldiers and, in particular, have become effective teachers in the army's education sector (Rosman-Stollman, 167).

A number of scholars who claim that religion ultimately has a threatening influence on the army fear that soldiers who prioritize their religious and ideological beliefs over their obligation to the military might – inadvertently or not – encourage dissension throughout their units. These critics fear that, should religious soldiers continue to value their personal beliefs over their duty to serve, the influence of religion on the character and conduct of the army might be even more harmful. In fact, Cohen introduces the possibility that religious troops may multiply so quickly to the extent that they might outnumber non-religious soldiers. Religious-oriented soldiers may find themselves in leadership positions that allow them to infuse Israel's security policy with their religious outlook. Yet as Ben-Eliezer has made clear in his research, the large majority of high ranking army officers are secular, and current trends indicate that this situation will remain true.

Cohen raises the possibility that devout troops may refuse to perform the demands made of them and may even rebel against their commanders. While this was a prospect with which secular officers had to contend, particularly during the Sharon administration when the disengagement plan was to be carried out, and it may have even been deemed quite likely that religious soldiers would act according to their convictions and not in line with army-mandated commands, the fact remains that this plausible outcome remained hypothetical and did not pan out. While a backlash on behalf of religious troops toward

proceeding with plans of disengagement had been anticipated – in fact, it was expected that an overwhelming number of devout soldiers would refuse to comply with the mission – and the concern was understandable, these fears proved to be unwarranted. The army’s secular commanders did not have to worry about the increasing influence of rabbis who might encourage defiance on religious grounds. Some rabbis have actually become well-known for being adamant about avoiding acting in a manner that may weaken army cohesion (Cohen, 185). In fact, unjustified fixation on the potential for religion to cause harm to army character and success on the battlefield has diverted attention away from real, formidable sources of friction between religion and military service in Israel (Cohen, 175).

Despite the fact that the arguments of scholars in defense of religious influence on the armed forces appear stronger and able to withstand criticism leveled by detractors, it is nonetheless crucial to examine the core arguments of academics who maintain that religion is damaging to the IDF and a potential obstacle to successfully carrying out military operations. Stuart Cohen, a professor of politics at Bar-Ilan University in Israel and leading scholar in this camp, has published prolifically on the subject, authoring a number of books on the influence of religion on the Israeli army, among them The Scroll or the Sword? Dilemmas of Religion and Military Service in Israel and Militarism and Israeli Society.

Cohen argues that failure to acknowledge and sufficiently address this possibility was justified, perhaps as a way to guarantee that the army would not be influenced by conflicts of ideology. Yet while the involvement of the nation’s religious soldiers was

largely unrecognized as of the mid 1980's, it is no longer common practice to ignore this sector of the army. The fact that the religious-secular divide in Israel has captured the interest of a slew of academics attests to the fact that differences between religious and secular troops have become more significant.

As Cohen notes, disparities among Israeli troops in terms of religious background tend to surface when they are drafted (Cohen, 174). Research conducted by Lipkin-Shahak in the mid 1990's revealed that troops of less religious backgrounds are inclined, for the most part, to favor the welfare of the individual over that of the group and customary motivations to serve in the army (acting on one's patriotism and serving one's country) are no longer as highly regarded. Newer, more self-fulfilling motives are assuming greater importance for these soldiers.

Yet Cohen maintains that the influence of religion on Israeli soldiers cannot be overlooked. Those who attended religious high schools have exhibited a strong interest in, and dedication to, serving the Israeli community at large and do not seem to have demonstrated similar ulterior motives and self-interest for proceeding with army service. Cohen makes clear that while the tendency of Israel's religious women to dodge military service is not a new development – they were known to claim that they are excused from the responsibility to serve because of the terms of the 1953 National Service Law – the same does not apply to the nation's men. In fact, very few of the nation's religious men sought to delay army service, and they became, as Cohen put it, “a fully integrated component of the IDF” (Cohen, 174).

Signs of religious observance in the army environment are rather easy to spot. It is

not uncommon to see religious troops wearing kipot, and the number of kipot-wearing troops is particularly high among those who voluntarily committed to army service, and those in combat units. Not only has religion exerted a clear and undeniable influence on a number of Israel's soldiers, but its effect seems to have only increased since the mid 1990's. As Cohen mentions, approximately thirty percent of the Israeli army's soldiers wear kipot and, since 1994, the number of religious graduates of the army's pilot training program has increased by more than fifty percent (Cohen, 175).

While the contributions of religious troops cannot go unrecognized, the pervasiveness of religion in the force ultimately does more harm than good.

Cohen concedes that religious soldiers have become a vital asset to the IDF, yet the scholar simultaneously notes that some characteristics of observant troops are troubling. As Cohen explains, it is possible a number of these religious conscripts retain a deep-seated connection to the notion of continued Jewish control over the West Bank; in other words, they may be unwilling to execute orders that call for the demolition of Jewish areas there. Yagil Levy argues that in the long term, the fact that the IDF had become entangled in devout groups was detrimental to sustaining the professional nature of the military as it oversaw the disengagement plan go into effect. It was crucial for religious leaders to recognize that maintaining the symbolic nature of the army was in the best interest of both the rabbinate and observant troops (Levy, 403). The scholar contends that a high degree of accommodation of smaller groups within the larger force will lead to the undermining of the IDF as a significant national icon. Levy also warns that the

army is quite vulnerable to the makeup of its units to the extent that its power to impose discipline is severely threatened.

Should the IDF fall prey to the religious orientations of its senior officers, discord and rebellion within its ranks will only be encouraged, and the religious convictions of a small minority will ultimately polarize the army instead of making it more cohesive.

Those who claim that religion ultimately has a threatening influence on the army fear that soldiers who prioritize their religious and ideological beliefs over their obligation to the military might – intentionally or not – provoke rebellion within the force. These critics fear that, should observant soldiers continue to hold their religious convictions in higher regard, they may weaken army unity. Opponents of religious influence on the army maintain that there remains a real, dangerous possibility that religious troops may soon outnumber secular soldiers and find themselves in senior positions that allow them to instill their religious outlook into Israeli security policy.

Although the religious community is undoubtedly entitled to its own opinion regarding the effectiveness of adhering to Jewish texts and religious tradition, Cohen has the upper hand here as he points out that Israel's religious leaders represent a rather small community, "a point of view shared by only a minority of the Israeli population at large" (Cohen, 395). The scholar's clarification here begs the question: Why should members of a minority group be able to exert unrestrained influence disproportionate to their numbers?

Yagil Levy echoes these concerns. The scholar makes clear that while the nature of army conduct is bound to be affected by the backgrounds of its recruits – their personal

convictions and ulterior motives could interfere with overriding military initiatives - the overarching goal of the Israeli military is not to advance the particular interests and views of this sector of the army; rather, the army's objective is to focus on the successful execution of operations that are for "the benefit of the national community as a whole" (Levy, 385).

In a similar vein, Levy warns of what might result should the interests and values of a segment of the army – perhaps those of the religious contingent - assume a greater degree of importance disproportional to the number of soldiers who harbor such sentiments. The scholar warns of the 'civilianization of the army,' 'subjective control' in which these smaller groups scrutinize army operations with their particular interests in mind, and the 'demise of the military's professional identity' should this happen (Levy, 386).

Yet despite the undeniable problems that arise when religious and secular soldiers come together for the first time in an army setting, Ben-Eliezer's counter-argument is airtight; the scholar maintains that fear of religious recruits filling senior military positions and disproportionately representing themselves among officers, exerting an excessive influence on the army and dominating the general staff is unwarranted and not grounded in fact (Cohen, 193). As the scholar acknowledges, the large majority of senior army officers are secular, and recent research suggests that this military make-up will remain (Cohen, 193).

Conceding to the army's religious troops raises the possibility that observant soldiers may refuse to proceed with orders that clash with their religious convictions.

Cohen makes clear that the religious community's adherence to the army and the expectation of military service is "by no means assured" (Cohen, 182). The potential of religion to inform the makeup of the Israeli army is indisputable. As Cohen explains, the number of religious Israeli men of army age who claim to be excused from mandatory service since they have dedicated their professional lives to Torah study is astronomically high, and as many as eighty percent take this stand (Cohen, 187). Interestingly, these devout individuals maintain that their devotion to the Torah is every bit as valuable to Israel's security as military action.

Cohen maintains that the dedication of Israel's religious soldiers to military orders hinges on whether or not they believe that the army acts in accordance with "the religious Zionist understanding of security" (Cohen, 183). The scholar makes clear that, in the event that soldiers deem military commands to be counter to the religious Zionist outlook, the troops may be reluctant to carry out the demands made of them and perhaps rebel against their commanders. Not only is this plausible; Cohen argues that it is, in fact, quite likely that these soldiers may act on their convictions. The possibility that they would act in this manner has been increased as the strong sense of unity and camaraderie among the nation's religious troops would facilitate such behavior. Cohen brings a sense of urgency to this reality through citing a series of grave historical examples. Perhaps the most well-known in recent years was the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin

in November 1995 - a murder carried out by an ardent, religious individual outraged by “treacherous withdrawals from Israel’s God-given inheritance” (Cohen, 184).

The Israeli army, further segregated on account of religious influence on the force, deviates markedly from Ben-Gurion’s vision of an integrated army unaffected by religion.

It is interesting to note that while Ben-Gurion was adamant about fostering a unified army that lacked divisions along religious lines, Cohen points out that many observant troops are inclined to somewhat segregate themselves from their secular counterparts and form smaller groups within the larger force. As these groups are said to be more conducive to Orthodox Jewish practice, many religious soldiers have demonstrated a preference for serving within such homogeneous collectives as opposed to serving ‘as individuals in the IDF as a whole’ (Cohen, 194). Cohen argues that, should current trends continue and the religious community works to cordon itself off from the rest of the force, the IDF will no longer be the “people’s army” it was intended to be. As Cohen aptly put it, instead of the army serving as a powerful “nation builder,” it may evolve into a “nation divider” (Cohen, 195).

Cohen’s reference to Ben-Gurion’s mission ever since the establishment of Israel’s armed forces raises critical questions regarding whether or not there can be a clear and complete separation between army and religion. As Cohen explains, Ben-Gurion’s aim from the outset was to have the nation’s army serve as a vehicle for Jewish nation-building (Cohen 190). The scholar also clarifies that Ben-Gurion effectively prevented the creation of distinct army units for observant soldiers. Ben-Gurion was, in

fact, unyielding in his position on the issue. He feared that the designation of particular military units for religious soldiers could breed anti-religious sentiment throughout the force and run counter to the overarching goal of creating a unified army. Ben-Gurion maintained that the most appropriate course of action is to train army officers to demonstrate respect for devout troops.

Yet while Ben-Gurion spoke of the conditions favorable to creating a united army devoid of religious-secular tension, Cohen argues that this ideal has hardly materialized. The scholar claims that religious and secular troops have become ‘increasingly segregated’ (Cohen 191). Perhaps due to the varying environments from which these troops came, it has become more difficult for religious and secular conscripts to suddenly come together and work alongside one another in the army.

Despite the constructive outcomes of mediating structures, the religion-military clash has been exacerbated by recent political developments.

Though the tension that arises when religious values and army life coincide is nothing new – in fact, it has always been a feature of the army - it remains a problematic reality that continues to provoke a backlash from the religious and non-religious alike. In recent years, the competing influences have surfaced to the extent that they no longer affect minor issues and few members of the force. The issue has become more developed and further complicated to the point that the conflict has come to affect issues of considerable importance to far more people – to the nation’s secular and religious communities. As Cohen explains, relations between the religious and secular camps in Israel have been characterized as ‘increasingly ferocious’ as their views differ on a wide

range of issues. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the religious have become increasingly politically powerful since the decline of the Labor Party (Cohen, 177). Not only has Israel's religious community acquired greater political and demographic weight; the nation's secular and religious are inherently at odds in terms of their values and ways of life. As a result, opportunities for reconciliation and compromise have shrunk.

Cohen also addresses the plight of political leaders of the settlement communities that constitute the West Bank - many of whom happen to be of a religious background – and notes that, while this is not the norm among them, they have at times been rather vocal in expressing their criticism of IDF conduct. These local leaders allege that a number of army commanders have inadequately dealt with Palestinians who have attacked Jewish homes and land. After the failure of the Oslo Accords, some of these leaders – albeit a small fraction of them – supported the concept of potential new conscripts avoiding military service by claiming conscientious objection.

Earlier research may have revealed a benign influence of religion on the IDF, but it is imperative to reexamine dated studies and subsequently revise previous scholarship.

While Cohen has written extensively on the clashes that surface when tensions between Israel's religious camp and the nation's secular community flare up in a military context, his research published in *Armed Forces & Society* certainly merits a closer look. Cohen's recent work on the influence of religion on the IDF reveals a deviation from analyses conducted decades earlier. As the scholar explains, studies conducted in the early 1980's suggested that the impact of religious influence on Israel's force was

overwhelmingly positive. In fact, Cohen goes so far as to claim that coverage of the topic could have ended on “an affirmative note” (Cohen, 392). Discourse on the subject would have undoubtedly been “celebratory in tone,” conveying an “overall picture of harmony,” citing the capacity for Jewish convictions to “inject an ethical code of conduct into the IDF’s corporate behavior, thereby moderating the brutalizing influences that military frameworks, by the nature of their purposes, often exert” (Cohen, 392).

Yet Cohen emphasizes the fact that research conducted in Israel far more recently – a mere eleven years ago as opposed to nearly thirty years prior – unveils a vastly different picture of the nation’s religion-military relationship. Cohen stops short of claiming that previous studies are no longer valid, yet makes clear that at the very least, updated data demand a review and subsequent revision of earlier work. The scholar argues that research recently conducted suggests an enlarged gap between religious Israelis and their secular counterparts. Not only do these studies reveal a widening rift between these two communities, but Cohen demonstrates the urgency of the situation, claiming that the religious-secular split in Israel is regarded as the most serious of the state’s social cleavages (Cohen, 393).

Cohen appears to have rather harsh words to describe the newfound influence of religion on the character and makeup of Israel’s armed forces. While religious values may have functioned as “homogenizing catalysts” in the past, mitigating differences in background and custom between secular and religious soldiers as they converge, likely for the first time, for service in the IDF, the scholar strongly conveys the message that the previously held notion of “an overall picture of harmony” is a thing of the past, no longer

a fitting description of current circumstances. Cohen maintains that differences between Israel's religious and secular communities have only become more pronounced in the army setting and have resulted in "the corrosion of religion as an agent for institutional cohesion" (Cohen, 394).

Cohen's research also implies a direct relationship between the religious-secular division and youth, a finding which is certain to have profound implications for the Israeli military, which drafts Israeli eighteen year olds for a period of two to three years (Cohen, 387). The scholar offers two explanations for his data that point to a break from earlier trends. Cohen cites the widening cultural distance between the state's religious school systems and the secular national ones, and points to differences in lifestyle between religious and secular youth. Recently collected data reveal that religious Israeli youth today abide by traditional norms more closely, which has led to a rise in the number of citizens who identify themselves as ultra-Orthodox. In fact, Haredi communities have grown dramatically since the state's establishment in 1948. As their representation in the Knesset has increased from five seats in 1951 to fourteen in 1996, the Haredim today enjoy far more political clout than they did in the past (Cohen, 395). Yet the degree to which secular Israeli youth remain loyal to Jewish values is declining (Cohen, 394).

While there remains merit to the arguments of deviating scholars, who maintain that religion continues to have a benign, advantageous effect on the IDF, and perhaps Cohen should have addressed his detractors, the scholar's claims are nonetheless on solid ground. Not only does Cohen endow recent trends with a sense of urgency demanding

greater attention; he identifies the problematic circumstances that have emerged as a consequence of increasing numbers of Israelis self-identifying as Orthodox: non-service, segregated service and conditional service. As Cohen explains, Israel's most devout citizens have historically encouraged resisting the draft, emphasizing the fact that Jewish law demands preventing women from serving and that rigorous study of Jewish texts does far more than battle to defend Israel (Cohen, 394-395).

While the refusal of the ultra-Orthodox to serve in the army may not pose a numerical problem for the IDF – the military can draft new immigrants to fill its ranks – the symbolic importance of the Orthodox objection to serve has affected how their secular neighbors have perceived them and, consequently, has further soured religious-secular relations.

Cohen makes a surprising conclusion regarding the significance of high rates of non-enlistment so often found among Israel's religious communities. While increasing numbers of Orthodox residents would be expected to pose a problem for the army, the scholar does acknowledge that because of the large waves of immigration to Israel from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union, the issue of religious citizens seeking exemption from service is not as pressing as one may assume for a nation that must sustain a strong army to ensure its continued existence. While this may be true, the concession seems to weaken Cohen's argument. Yet the tendency of the devout to seek exemptions from service is not to be disregarded; as Cohen addresses, there is considerable symbolic significance here. Observant Israelis continue to strictly adhere to the terms of Jewish law while the majority – secular Israelis – continues to consider army service as the most important way to serve the state.

Despite changing opinions among Haredim with regard to army service, most deem military involvement to be a danger to their community and to the Jewish tradition. While some Haredim do complete army service today - their numbers tend to be higher in army units that are religious and service-oriented – most Haredim are excused from serving. Interestingly, a number of Haredi leaders believe that it is necessary to abstain from military service in order to ensure that Haredi values and practices are sustained.

Yet their exemption from army service has provoked a backlash by those who perceive the situation in an entirely different light. Many of Israel's more secular citizens find that the Haredi refusal to serve is anti-Zionist. In fact, a number of individuals who oppose exemption for the religious have actively demonstrated against its continuation. In essence, high rates of exemption from service among the religious have not helped to mend the divide between the nation's religious and secular communities that has only grown in recent years. As Cohen put it succinctly, "their nonservice has helped to stimulate societal contention" (Cohen, 396). The images Cohen puts forth of young secular Israelis who devote substantial time to serving in the army and then being on reserve duty powerfully draws allies to the secular camp; it is easy to identify with secular Israelis who serve and examine the religious community from their perspective. It is to be expected that secular soldiers would come to harbor feelings of resentment toward their Haredi counterparts who do not recognize this national duty. Clearly, while religion may have previously served as a cohesive agent in the army, abridging the gap between devout and secular soldiers, mandatory army service remains a point of contention between the two camps, and friction on this issue has only been aggravated.

Chapter 2: Fear of religious-oriented officers exerting influence beyond their numbers may be justifiable, yet the fact remains that plausible effects of a more religiously guided force are mere hypothetical scenarios that have yet to occur.

Perhaps it is to be expected that conflicts between religion and military service which arise in an army context will likely be all the more explosive given the restrictive nature of the military as a national institution (Cohen, 176). Yet while these possibilities are certainly not far-fetched and should be acknowledged as plausible outcomes of increasing religious influence on the army, Cohen provides a strong counter-argument to those who fear the military will succumb to the influence of national religious troops: these potential outcomes remain hypothetical and have yet to materialize. In fact, preoccupation with these concerns has meant that insufficient attention has been paid to other sources of friction between religion and military service in Israel (Cohen, 175).

Cohen notes that it is unlikely that the large majority of religious troops will refuse to proceed with a demanded withdrawal from parts of the West Bank, and the army's secular commanders do not have to worry about the increasing influence of rabbis to encourage defiance on religious grounds. In fact, some rabbis have even become well-known for their vocal opposition to, as Cohen put it, "any action which might impair the unity of Israel's armed forces" (Cohen, 185).

Like Cohen, Levy also addresses the notable increase in religious soldiers, a trend that has been documented for nearly thirty years (Levy, 133). While Cohen briefly mentions the *hesderim* – schools that were created to accommodate religious troops as they allowed for simultaneous Torah study and army service – Levy elaborates on this explanation and claims that many rabbis had initially expressed concern that exposure of

devout soldiers to the secular nature of the army would ultimately harm them. As the number of religious soldiers increased following the First Lebanon War, their rabbinic guides eventually assumed greater authority and found themselves in a position to consult with army officers to wield even more influence on the nature and conduct of army operations.

As Levy explains in his article, “The Embedded Military: Why did the IDF Perform Effectively in Executing the Disengagement Plan?” the process of disengagement – implemented in the summer of 2005 under the Sharon administration which entailed the Israeli military-led removal of Jewish settlers residing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip – provides a relatively recent prime example of religion’s potential to influence the course of military operations.

Levy acknowledges that the initiative was carried out smoothly and efficiently, yet emphasizes the reasons for this success; the army was able to ensure unity among its soldiers and evade religious troops’ refusal to follow through with army commands (Levy, 382). As the scholar clarifies, the possibility of devout soldiers refusing to act on officer-instructed orders to implement disengagement was a reality with which commanders had to contend since a number of religious conscripts’ political views were closely aligned to those of the settlers. Interestingly, a backlash on behalf of religious troops toward proceeding with plans of disengagement had been anticipated – in fact, it was expected that an overwhelming number of devout soldiers would refuse to comply with the mission – yet these fears proved to be unwarranted. Levy argues that the Israeli army was able to successfully complete the disengagement process since it effectively

limited the influence of its religious servicemen on army operations and, as Levy aptly put it, “reinforced the army’s status as an apolitical and universal people’s army” (Levy, 382).

Despite the clear advantage of curbing the influence of religion on the IDF, the benefits derived from incorporating religious soldiers cannot be disregarded.

The positive attitude toward military service as exhibited by the nation’s more religious troops has been beneficial to the army at large, as they have given the force, as Cohen phrased it, ‘a particularly cohesive pool of high-quality and highly motivated manpower’ (Cohen, 175). Levy highlights the advantages of integrating religious troops into the army and delineates the benefits of their service. As Levy explains, a number of devout soldiers, primarily from mainland Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements, had begun to fill high-ranking army positions and solidify their status in the military by the end of the 1990’s.

Recruiting these soldiers was conducive to fulfilling army goals. Drafting them not only increased military strength; these troops were also dedicated to serving in the army and were motivated, as Levy put it, by their ‘ethno-national ethos’ (Levy, 392). Interestingly, Levy argues that assimilating devout soldiers into the fabric of army life ultimately aided the military in achieving its main political objectives and fending off anticipated protest. Army commanders actively recruited soldiers who exhibited a sincere commitment to the military and sought to do so ‘without mobilizing their civilian networks to protest against the army’ (Levy, 392). The scholar cites the outcome of the al-Aqsa Intifada as a clear example of the effectiveness of recruiting religious soldiers.

Levy proceeds to claim that not only did religious soldiers enhance the army, but the conscripts themselves also stood to benefit. Levy maintains that it is best to consider the enlistment of observant troops as the beginning of a contract; under the terms of this contract of sorts, recruits are obliged to serve the national community and make personal sacrifices in pursuit of this goal, yet in the process they attain the power to ideologically influence the army and perhaps diminish its secular nature. As the scholar makes clear, these soldiers could envision their army service as an undertaking to defend Israel's borders, an outlook that jives well with military ambitions.

The army is a 'greedy institution' that seeks to hold a grip on its soldiers and curtail the impact of competing influences. Mediating structures allow devout soldiers to serve without compromising their religious practices. Such mechanisms benefit not only religious troops, but the force as a whole.

Cohen makes clear that the Israeli army seeks out 'hegemonic loyalty' and aims to diminish the influence of outside forces that affect the conduct and allegiances of its soldiers. Many religious troops experience difficulty accepting this demand, firmly believing that the army must cater to their religious backgrounds and practices. For example, many observant troops insist on retaining the right to access non-military appointed rabbinic guides.

Based at Bar Ilan University, Elisheva Rosman-Stollman cites the work of Lewis Coser, a sociologist who labeled the army and religious leadership "greedy structures" that seek to lay claim to an individual's "loyalty, time, and attention" (Rosman-Stollman, 159). In an effort to capture this among new troops, these so-called 'greedy structures' demand that their members abide by certain standards of behavior which, according to

Rosman-Stollman, ultimately require soldiers to discard external commitments that similarly vie for their attention (Rosman-Stollman, 159).

The scholar explains that while such structures aim to monopolize one's loyalty, the reality is that most people across the globe – not only Israelis – are affiliated with multiple 'structures,' namely various religious groups, the army, among others. Consequently, it is challenging for any of these structures to completely retain one's loyalty. In light of this, mediating mechanisms come into play, allowing several structures to operate simultaneously and have overlapping members. In effect, these mediators serve to mitigate friction that may develop between troops and the overarching structures to which they may be loyal (Rosman-Stollman, 160). For instance, should a soldier pledge loyalty to a religious group as well as to the army, a mediating structure would intervene, as it would likely be in an ideal position to resolve the problem of conflicting allegiances.

Though the research interests of Elisheva Rosman-Stollman coincide with those of Levy – both scholars evaluate the extent to which religious convictions have permeated army life and influenced the nature and course of army operations – they diverge on the question of whether or not this influence is ultimately favorable or detrimental to the IDF. In Rosman-Stollman's research, partly covered in her *Israel Studies* journal article "Women of Valor: The *Garin* Program and the Israel Defense Forces," Rosman-Stollman sheds light on religious female Jewish soldiers who elected to take part in the program, an initiative that merges religious-oriented studies and army service, often through participation in the military's education unit.

As Rosman-Stollman explains, the Garin program functions as a ‘mediating mechanism,’ an aid of sorts to religious students as they complete their army service. The Garin program serves as a link between its members, the army and the religious community. Interestingly, despite demands for army exemptions on the basis of religious observance and conscientious objection, a rather high percentage – thirty percent - of female religious high school graduates in Israel complete army service. Nearly all remaining female religious Jews become involved in volunteer work for National Service as opposed to pursuing the traditional track of service in the IDF. The option – taken advantage of by roughly sixty nine percent of young religious Jewish women – is deemed more fitting by the religious Zionist camp in Israel as it prevents devout young adults from exposure to aspects of army life that would clash with their lifestyle, such as living in close quarters with their male counterparts. While the most observant of religious Jews are against military involvement in any form for women, some types of army positions are regarded as more respectable than others. For example, in the case of a woman who feels strongly about serving in the army, her rabbinic guides may urge her to complete service in the IDF through participation in the education sector so that she will work alongside other religious women and keep her religious convictions and practices intact.

Rosman-Stollman powerfully conveys the importance of the Garin program to the IDF as a whole. Although the program enrolls few students, the IDF has worked to make sure the program continues, clearly an indication of the army’s interest in catering to smaller groups within the larger force. The scholar portrays the Garin program as a benign component of the lives of religious Jewish women who choose to serve in the

IDF; while members attend religious-themed courses, the *midrashot* primarily serve to monitor their students' mental and physical well-being (Rosman-Stollman, 160).

Rosman-Stollman demonstrates that the army is subservient, to an extent, to the mandates of the Garin program; officers are required to relieve religious soldiers of military responsibilities so that they may take advantage of Garin program courses. Not only are devout soldiers entitled to attend these classes in lieu of completing traditional army tasks, but Rosman-Stollman claims a number of observant soldiers have found the religious-oriented instruction to be an integral component of army life. As the scholar explains, the courses and Garin program-led monthly meetings offer religious troops much-needed intellectual stimulation and the opportunity for exposure to subjects outside of army domain – amenities that are not afforded to secular soldiers (Rosman-Stollman, 163).

Rosman-Stollman makes it clear that the influence of the *midrashot* cannot be underestimated. To some degree, these schools affect military judgments that concern their students. The scholar claims that *midrashot* inadvertently mold the army experience for its soldiers. As described in “Women of Valor,” the *midrashot* exert influence not only by actively intervening in students' affairs and mediating in situations where devout conscripts feel torn between fulfilling army obligations and meeting the demands placed on them by religious leaders; the potential of *midrashot* to be called on by students to mediate is arguably more significant. Rosman-Stollman also argues that the *midrashot* function, intentionally or not, as a de-stressor of sorts. Since students begin their service together in preparatory courses, their entry into the army is not as challenging as it is for

secular troops (Rosman-Stollman, 165).

Interestingly, Rosman-Stollman acknowledges that participation in the Garin program often leads to unintentional, negative outcomes. Student members have found that despite the advantages of taking part in the midrashot, fellow participants often harbor attitudes that are not conducive to furthering army aims. As Rosman-Stollman explains, midrashot students may feel that, through the assistance of the Garin program, they can change a particular course of events in their favor which, in the long-term, may endanger the army (Rosman-Stollman, 166). This attitude has led students to become self-absorbed to some extent, often showing a lack of respect for the officers under whose authority they serve.

Yet Rosman-Stollman makes an equally compelling case in defense of the midrashot and counters those who hone in on its flaws. The majority of the students who take part in the Garin program are graduates of rigorous high schools; as a consequence of their academic background, they tend to be articulate and uninhibited when it comes to raising questions and expressing their opinions. Garin program members may initially find it challenging to understand IDF-related situations from the perspective of an officer since the civilian perspective has been ingrained in them. Yet at the same time, students in the program have brought a greater degree of creativity to their work in the army and have proven more adept at taking on new demands and managing on their own with minimal supervision. Despite the setbacks that their background may bring to the table, midrashot students have turned into strong soldiers and, in particular, have become effective teachers in the army's education sector (Rosman-Stollman, 167). Students who

took part in the midrashot found that their participation in the program better equipped them for the rigors of army life and ensured that they would be prepared to serve.

Rosman-Stollman argues that while there are numerous advantages to taking part in the Garin program, the benefits are primarily “practical and psychological in nature” (Rosman-Stollman, 167). The program offers students the chance to work in the education unit and, in a general sense, receive guidance as they complete a year of study and service. Students who have gone through the Garin program have reported that their participation in the program not only strengthened their religious identities, but also afforded them a period of time to re-evaluate what is important to them. Many students have found that this time was well spent, as it psychologically geared them up for army service (Rosman-Stollman, 168).

Rosman-Stollman claims that including religious soldiers in the army through simultaneous enrollment in the midrashot benefits not only the devout troops themselves but also the IDF at large. Interestingly, secular officers have their own motives for recruiting religious soldiers; many see the move as a necessary step to ensure that the IDF remains a ‘people’s army’ (Rosman-Stollman, 170). Since religious soldiers have proven to be an asset to the entire force, the IDF has been willing to accommodate its devout conscripts and accept some degree of religious intervention. As Rosman-Stollman phrased it, the IDF has found that “the benefits from the [Garin] program balance its costs” (Rosman-Stollman, 172).

While mediating structures have become a presence in the Israeli army and their accomplishments should not be overlooked, their efforts are a mere beginning. Despite the constructive intentions of the Garin program, midrashot and similar programs, none of these initiatives has done enough to fully integrate religious soldiers into the fabric of army life.

Aryeh Newman's brief analysis of the experience of devout troops serving alongside their secular counterparts contains a number of sweeping generalizations that are not followed by statistics to strengthen his arguments, nor does he identify particular soldiers who share the sentiments he claims they have expressed.

Newman, a former scholar at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, sheds light on how religious soldiers feel at the start of their service when they begin serving alongside less observant troops but implies that all devout conscripts are bound to have the same experience serving in the army simply because of their degree of adherence to religious tradition. The scholar writes that, "when the observant civilian enters the armed forces, there is no doubt that he feels his remoteness and the difficulties of his position as a practicing Jew" (Newman, 28).

Perhaps there are some underlying similarities in the army service of religious soldiers, but Newman simply cannot speak with certainty for them all. In addition, while religious recruits may constitute a minority in the armed forces and may serve under the authority of secular officials, one cannot assume that these non-religious officers are inevitably un-sympathetic toward their troops' desire to remain practicing Jews, and observant soldiers are not doomed to an isolating experience in the army simply because most of their fellow soldiers are not nearly as religious. Newman claims that unless religious soldiers decide to join *Nachal*, an exclusively religious agricultural unit formed

by the army that combines farming and military service, devout conscripts are “isolated and on the defensive” (Newman, 28). The scholar claims that while the creation of Nachal marks an effort to give observant soldiers the opportunity to serve without compromising their religious practices and the unit is afforded special privileges such as time devoted specifically for prayer and religious studies, its significance is otherwise limited. The few soldiers who take advantage of this program are hardly of great importance and the unit retains a symbolic meaning at best.

Not only is Nachal just one example of a mediating structure designed to ease the transition into army life for observant troops and ensure that religious soldiers can serve Israel and abide by religious standards at the same time, but Nachal has grown from a small group of thirty soldiers into a unit of nearly one thousand troops. In fact, Nachal aspires to become a high functioning infantry brigade and continues to expand its programs to meet the religious and military needs of Israel’s increasingly pious community.

Newman also fails to address the accomplishments of the Garin program, midrashot and similar initiatives that assist religious troops in completing their army service without having to forfeit religious obligations. Given the fact that such programs have already been established and have achieved notable success, it is suspect that the hypothetical soldier Newman writes of is destined for an isolating experience in the army. Newman acknowledges that the accomplishments of the Military Rabbinate in providing some semblance of a religious environment for devout soldiers are noble efforts not to be disparaged, yet maintains that “this type of activity stops short of any striking

manifestations of Jewishness in the broadest sense” (Newman, 29). Perhaps Newman’s criticisms have some merit, and efforts already undertaken to make army bases religious-friendly are only a first step, yet Newman’s failure to propose satisfactory additional measures the Military Rabbinate could consider to accommodate devout soldiers ultimately weakens his argument.

Chapter 3: Haredi involvement in the work of ZAKA can be regarded as a mediating mechanism. The organization has afforded the Haredi community the opportunity to serve Israel in accordance with – not against - its members’ religious beliefs.

As Eyal Ben-Ari’s name is bound to surface in an analysis of the extent to which religion has influenced the nature and conduct of Israeli military operations, the professor’s collaborative work with fellow scholars of similar interests is particularly important to examine. In conjunction with Nurit Stadler and Einat Mesterman, both of whom are also based at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Ben-Ari has conducted a comprehensive analysis of ZAKA, the Ultra-Orthodox Identification Teams for Victims of Disasters in Israel, in an effort to address their collective interest in religion and military affairs. At the outset of their research, the scholars acknowledge that despite numerous instances of terrorist activity that plague the Middle East as a whole, only recently have organizations sprung up to respond to the aftermath of terrorist activities.

ZAKA has distinguished itself in Israel as a relatively new religious-oriented organization. The group’s importance to Israeli society cannot be overemphasized given the increase in terrorism in Israel in the last decade; in fact, the surge in terrorist activity has been particularly sharp since the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada (Ben Ari, 623). True to the nature of the organization, the several hundred all male ZAKA volunteers are drawn almost entirely from the most devout of Israel’s religious groups – the Haredi community. The agency’s makeup alone differentiates it from other organizations with similar missions; as the scholars explain, members of Israel’s ultra-Orthodox community are often fierce opponents of ‘modernity and national duties’ (Ben-Ari, 624). As it

addresses both the tragic aftermath of war and the religious practices that inevitably become involved when handling the deceased, ZAKA has come to focus on properly caring for victims of terrorist activity and ensuring that all casualties receive a Jewish burial. As the scholars describe, “the handling of terror victims was linked to a religious act seen to be especially significant in terms of the Jewish theology of death, burial and salvation” (Ben-Ari, 624). While the organization has remained true to its original ideals, it has since expanded its services and now provides medical assistance and support for both survivors of terrorist attacks and the families of terror victims.

Interestingly, this type of work, carried out in response to the devastation brought about by terrorism, is sanctioned by the religious leadership. As a religious-oriented service organization, ZAKA functions under the supervision of a number of rabbis who offer ‘spiritual guidance’ and make decisions regarding treatment of the deceased and meeting Jewish standards of purity. As the scholars point out, it is crucial to note that these religious leaders provide ‘theological justifications for the organization through the use of traditional Jewish sources’ (Ben-Ari, 630). Yet in the event that devout ZAKA volunteers are called to work on the Sabbath, the violation of religious dictates was deemed acceptable – a negligible infringement – in light of ‘the importance of saving the lives of innocent civilians’ (Ben-Ari, 630-631). As the scholars have emphasized, Haredi ZAKA volunteers have, for the most part, been able to serve the organization without compromising cherished religious values. In fact, a number of Orthodox ZAKA service workers claim that the need to show respect toward the deceased and honor those who have perished, which the religious describe as *kavod hamet*, is regarded as ‘a

commandment of greatest value' (Ben-Ari, 631). In fact, proceeding with a proper Jewish burial immediately following a person's death – one that meets religiously-dictated standards - is regarded as a great *mitzvah*, or good deed, one so important that it legitimizes a break from Torah study and violating the Sabbath (Ben-Ari, 632).

As the scholars concisely put it, despite the undeniable importance of religious convictions to devout ZAKA volunteers, "if a controversial religious dilemma appears, it is likely that it will eventually be religiously approved if it serves the purposes and goals laid out by the organization" (Ben-Ari, 631). During the organization's early years, rabbis allowed only limited relief work to be conducted on the Sabbath, and the agency's operations on high holidays were restricted to treating and reviving the injured. Yet eventually, following a rise in terrorist activity in Israel, the religious leadership relaxed its regulations and permitted the removal and handling of the deceased (Ben-Ari, 631).

While the task of treating survivors of terrorist activity is considered the domain of state institutions, many Jewish Israelis regard carrying out the mission of ZAKA as "a central religious duty" (Ben-Ari, 624). As religious ZAKA volunteers go about handling the remains of individuals who perished in acts of terror, they regard the process as not only beneficial to terror victims; carrying out this line of work is in service to what these devout workers understand to be *hesed shel emet*, or true kindness, regarded as "the ultimate act of generosity" since reciprocating this display of compassion cannot be expected. In their publication, Ben-Ari and his colleagues quote a ZAKA volunteer who cited his motivation for becoming involved with the agency: "You can contribute as a person ... this is a real measure of kindness because the person cannot say thank you

back to you. So it's not that I do a favor for someone and then expect a thank you in return. It is to know that a person that has been killed in a terror attack and his body is dispersed all over, will at least get the respect owed to him and be buried the Jewish way like every one of us would like" (Ben-Ari, 633). Another ZAKA volunteer reported similar sentiments and claimed that respecting and honoring those who have perished is synonymous with true kindness since "you cannot expect the dead person to give you something in return." Echoing the opinions of fellow volunteers, "there is nothing holier than a proper Jewish burial" (Ben-Ari, 633).

Fulfilling this obligation requires religious ZAKA volunteers to serve in public, be available for work at any time and disregard their commitments to the yeshivot and their community as a whole (Ben-Ari, 629). Not surprisingly, since involvement in ZAKA missions entails a considerable degree of commitment and sacrifice on the part of Haredi volunteers, particularly since it calls for them to prioritize service to the organization over attending to religious studies, Haredi men who become ZAKA volunteers often exhibit some degree of distance from fellow Haredim who oppose military involvement, demonstrating that there are vast differences of opinion even within the Haredi community. Refraining from army service became quite common among Haredi men, so the minority who chose to go ahead with army service despite the unpopularity of the decision were regarded by fellow Haredim as men who could not excel in a religious, academic setting.

While a number of Haredim are against even the sector of the army created with their interests and needs in mind, other Haredim, primarily younger ones, concede the

importance of completing army service and helping to defend Israel's borders. The organization's religious volunteers are remarkably more modern than Haredim who are not affiliated with the agency, more inclined to be politically involved and a number of them have served, albeit for a short time, in the Israeli army (Ben-Ari, 630).

It is interesting to note the dramatic change in the Haredi view toward ZAKA. When the organization was established, a number of prominent Orthodox rabbis of the time objected to it and maintained that the agency symbolized 'heresy and sin' (Ben-Ari, 624). These religious leaders argued that Haredim are obliged to devote themselves to Torah study, and any interruption to fulfilling this requirement was deemed sinful (Ben-Ari, 627). Rabbis were particularly concerned that exposure to non-Haredi volunteers and victims in public could potentially threaten Haredi culture. The religious leadership often countered claims that it was state-dependent and had yet to make a substantive contribution to Israeli society by claiming that the Torah is "the primary path within an ascetic life" that, consequently, allows "withdrawal from the material world" (Ben-Ari, 627). In effect, the nation's most devout residents, along with the leaders of their communities, cited this argument to justify their exemption from army service and other responsibilities to the state.

Through functioning as a mediating mechanism, ZAKA has, to some extent, improved relations between Israel's Haredi and secular communities.

As the Intifada turned into a protracted conflict, it prompted more Haredim to become ZAKA volunteers. In fact, Haredi participation in ZAKA, an organization that has become established and highly-regarded in Israeli society, has had the unintended

consequence of shedding a more positive light on the nation's religious community. While many secular Israelis are known to resent the nation's devout residents and claim that the religious community accepts the benefits of citizenship without assuming the responsibilities, Haredi involvement in ZAKA initiatives has helped to allay concerns among secular Israelis that their religious neighbors are a societal burden who do not contribute to the welfare of others. Haredi men who have elected to serve with ZAKA are regarded as "the good Haredis, participating in the first time, with social duties, problems facing the state in times of conflict and Israeli suffering (especially in contrast to their absence as soldiers in Israeli wars)" (Ben-Ari, 624-625).

Many religious ZAKA volunteers consider their service to the agency to be a fitting alternative to army service yet every bit as valuable to the state. The scholars imply that this claim is not without merit; in their publication, the researchers note that "Heroic stories disseminated within the organization ... bear remarkable similarity to such accounts found in and around the Israeli military" (Ben-Ari, 637). Not only does their service to ZAKA clearly stand to benefit the individuals that the organization aims to help, primarily terror survivors and their families, but as the organization's Haredi volunteers assist those affected by terrorism, they are simultaneously accomplishing a mission that Orthodox rabbis regard as 'sacred work.'

The authors argue that ZAKA's actions are justified since the organization's practices are, as the scholars phrase it, "grounded in Jewish traditions" (Ben-Ari, 620). As Ben-Ari and his colleagues explain, ZAKA has used this element to its advantage in order to treat victims of terrorism. In other words, the work of ZAKA volunteers has been

deemed legitimate since it meets Talmud-specified religious requirements with regard to death and the ways in which the deceased are to be treated. Interestingly, as ZAKA carries out its work, it incorporates ideas, theories and traditions from a variety of institutions: the police force, army and medical organizations, among others. Despite the fact that ZAKA is clearly a religious-oriented group, it works closely with state agencies that focus on disaster relief. As the scholars make clear, this partnership has had the important effect of rationalizing the organization's actions.

A closer look at the nature of ZAKA makes for an interesting case study in which to examine the intersection of terrorism and the religious values that come into play when handling war's aftermath. It is no surprise that tackling the consequences of war inevitably brings to the fore varying religious practices. As the professors explain, responding effectively to the havoc wreaked by war demands drawing on the skills and expertise of a wide range of specialists: doctors, psychologists, army officers as well as religious leaders (Ben-Ari, 621). In short, the crux of the authors' argument is that ZAKA, along with similar organizations, not only embodies a 'social response' to the devastation resulting from terrorist activities, but also serves as an influential cultural vehicle through which to, as the scholars put it, "produce new meanings and practices in the public sphere" (Ben-Ari, 621).

In "Terror, Aid and Organization: The Haredi Disaster Victim Identification Teams (ZAKA) in Israel," Ben-Ari and his fellow researchers argue that the immeasurable toll of war in terms of costs incurred, supplies used and resulting casualties is bound to collide with religious and culturally-shaped values. As the scholars explain,

we tend to succumb to the notion that death is a strictly biological event, yet casualties of war and cultural practices are inextricably intertwined, as cultural traditions determine how the deceased are handled. Interestingly, the scholars distinguish between deaths resulting from war and deaths from other causes. As the researchers make clear, casualties from war warrant consideration in their own category since the deceased are not removed from the public eye; rather, they become the focal point of media outlets and images of human remains become seared in the minds of surviving civilians. Treatment of wartime casualties hinges on ‘cultural interpretations and re-interpretations’ (Ben-Ari, 622).

The effects of military-led operations also merit close attention because unlike natural disasters, wartime activity is perpetrated by humans, and despite the fixed period during which a war rages, the consequences are severe and long-term. Ben-Ari and his fellow researchers make an interesting and ideologically-sound argument that while military-initiated activity can bring about unintended casualties, the events of war afford scholars a valuable opportunity to tackle, as the authors put it, “basic questions about social organization and social life” since “during such occasions many of the social fissures, individual set of ties and relations and cultural assumptions about order emerge” (Ben-Ari, 622).

Ben-Ari and his colleagues distinguish their work from similar research conducted on the intersection of religion and terrorist activity in Israel. A number of scholars have studied and written extensively on the long-term consequences of war, social and cultural elements of terrorism, individuals who initiate such acts of violence

and survivors' coping mechanisms both at the individual and socio-cultural level. Yet the focus of Ben-Ari's research and that of his fellow scholars differentiates them from other academics with similar interests. Ben-Ari, Stadler and Mesterman shed light on people, many of whom are first aid medics, policemen, firefighters and military officers, who work in conjunction with other agencies to provide help to survivors of terror attacks. These workers treat both terror victims and survivors on the scene and are involved with revival efforts, removal of the deceased and helping survivors and families of victims cope with the shock and pain they have endured. The scholars demonstrate that this research focus is particularly urgent and deserving of further attention; as they mention, incidents of terrorism have surfaced across the globe – in the United States, throughout Europe and Asia as well as in Israel. In light of this reality, the scarcity of scholarship on the subject is a red flag and the need for further research in this area cannot be overlooked.

The creation of ZAKA and the firm place it has secured in Israeli society, as well as its incorporation of the Haredi community – a move that has powerfully prompted secular Israelis to dispel popular stereotypes of the state-reliant religious – is certainly noteworthy. The authors mention that since the agency's founding in 1995, its accomplishments have been quite impressive given its young age. ZAKA volunteers are often the first to attend to victims of terror and have been credited with carrying out a number of successful resuscitations (Ben-Ari, 629). The organization's "capacity to provide creative and immediate responses to dynamic terror conditions has strongly reinforced its legitimacy and power not only in the eyes of the Haredi public but also

within society at large” (Ben-Ari, 645). Yet it should come as no surprise that an organization like ZAKA has developed and become a success story. As Ben-Ari and his fellow researchers note in their *Anthropological Quarterly* article, religious movements in Israel have developed remarkably over the last sixty years (Ben-Ari, 626).

It is worth mentioning that for all the success it has achieved in Israel, ZAKA is not an entirely new organization. As Ben-Ari and his colleagues explain, “its institutional and cultural roots are embedded in Haredi culture and in the community’s many charitable, nonprofit social services and educational networks” (Ben-Ari, 633). Haredim have always regarded the services carried out by ZAKA as a core component of their community. As the scholars aptly put it, this line of work is “anchored in Jewish values.”

Yet Ben-Ari and his co-authors are quick to note crucial distinctions that powerfully set apart ZAKA from other Haredi organizations with overlapping objectives. As they aptly put it, “ZAKA has a unique role to play that differs substantially from that played by the other organizations that operate in the wake of [terror] attacks” (Ben-Ari, 644). The scholars make clear that, unlike similar agencies, ZAKA operates in the public eye and aims to meet the needs and ensure the security of all Israeli citizens, including Israeli Arabs. It is perhaps this organizational feature that is most striking, yet ZAKA has distinguished itself from similar agencies in a slew of other ways as well; for instance, not only has the agency come to specialize in death and become renowned for its willingness to collaborate with state institutions, but its volunteers operate against a backdrop of increasing terrorist activity worldwide. ZAKA has achieved a high degree of success in Israel since it has proven capable of rapidly mobilizing volunteers, assigning

them varying tasks depending on their skills, collaborating with other institutions and restoring normalcy following a terrorist attack (Ben-Ari, 635).

It is also interesting to juxtapose the Haredi ZAKA volunteers' outlook alongside that of many secular Jews who charge that the relationship between Haredim and the Israeli government is akin to that of a parasite on a host – a mere burden on the larger community that must shoulder the costs. As Ben-Ari and his colleagues describe, ZAKA volunteers maintain that their actions are motivated by their religious convictions and powerfully demonstrate their dedication to ensuring the well-being of others. This position suggests that the Haredim display feelings of social responsibility – a sentiment many of Israel's secular citizens perhaps had not realized in a community known to evade fulfilling obligations to the state (Ben-Ari, 635).

Chapter 4: Rabbinical influence on soldiers is on the rise, yet this does not undermine the effectiveness of military operations. Religious Zionists may object to disengagement yet simultaneously serve the State of Israel.

Though her scholarship does not specifically address the evolving position of Haredim in Israeli society, Etta Bick has similarly investigated the close link between religion and politics in Israel and the undeniable influence of the religious leadership on the morale and conduct of the IDF. Based at the College of Judea and Samaria in Israel, Bick has sought answers to her research interests with a focus strikingly similar to that of Yagil Levy. Like Levy, Bick also covered the summer 2005 disengagement process that entailed Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Disengagement led to the demolition of twenty one settlements in Gaza as well as four settlements in Northern Samaria, which had been home to approximately ten thousand Israelis. The army had been charged with the task of removing the settlers and destroying the settlements (Bick, 306). Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had called for disengagement in an effort to address Israel's demographic problems and ensure that a Jewish majority in Israel would be sustained (Bick, 308).

As is the case with any proposed government policy, the terms of disengagement were bound to be polarizing. Religious Zionists, in particular, vehemently opposed the initiative yet were ultimately unsuccessful in demonstrating against it. While Bick acknowledges the value of previous literature – which has concentrated primarily on relations between religious authorities and state institutions in Israel as well as changes in the structure of Israel's political parties – the scholar focuses on the tense relationship between Israel's religious and secular communities. As Bick explains, Israel's devout and

secular camps became increasingly confrontational with one another in the 1990's, and she attributes the decline in religious-secular relations to the influential role of the ultra-Orthodox in the formation of political alliances (Bick, 307).

As the scholar makes clear, the religious leadership was particularly outspoken in its condemnation of the proposal to proceed with plans of disengagement. In fact, many ultra-Orthodox rabbis led the opposition to the withdrawal and attempted to take advantage of their position of power, albeit in the religious realm, and use their authority to achieve favorable political and military outcomes. As both Bick and Levy mention, some vocal rabbis went so far as to issue halakhic decrees that urged soldiers to refrain from carrying out the evacuation (Bick, 307). In short, despite clear similarities in research interests, Bick's studies, as covered in "Rabbis and Rulings: Insubordination in the Military and Israeli Democracy," primarily address the rulings of well-known rabbis on issues of noncompliance in the army, the political significance of these decrees and their potential long-term consequences for the nation's religious community and for Israeli democracy as a whole (Bick, 307).

At the outset, Bick simply states the undeniable truth: rabbis have assumed an increasingly prominent presence in Israeli society and have had a mounting effect on the politics of Israel's religious Zionist community and on the National Religious Party (Bick, 307). In other words, the rabbinic leadership has built on its authority in the religious sphere and extended its influence into the political arena. In doing so, they have voiced their opinions on public policies and have encouraged followers to vote for certain candidates over others. Perhaps most important, the religious authorities have historically

been active within their communities in efforts to further expand and strengthen their allegiance to the state and its various agencies. As Bick aptly put it, the religious Zionist community's support for the Israeli government and its interest in working with secular politicians has been 'unqualified' and has been conducive to enforcing both 'state legitimacy and service to it' (Bick, 308). Along with Levy, Bick also contends that there has been a dramatic rise in religious studies undertaken by devout young adults, and more and more of them are ascribing greater importance to abiding by Halakha and maintaining close proximity to religious authorities for rabbinic consultations.

In the context of disengagement, religious Zionists objected not only on political grounds but also on account of religious reasons – parting with a section of Israel (Bick, 308). In light of this element of Prime Minister Sharon's initiative, many rabbis saw no other option than to speak out on the issue and become involved in political debate. Given the complex situation that gave way to Sharon's proposal, the announcement to disengage and the reactions it provoked on the part of soldiers, rabbis and civilians combined to create an unsettling stir in Israeli society.

To be expected, the call for disengagement, polarizing as it was, makes for a fascinating case study. As Bick explains, Israel faced a difficult theoretical dilemma: it could not simultaneously retain its democratic elements and continue to occupy the territories without granting political rights to Palestinians. Yet the situation was aggravated by the fact that Israel also sought to remain a Jewish state. In keeping with its objective to ensure that Israel would not shed its Jewish character, Israel could not further integrate Palestinians without running the risk of jeopardizing Israel's 'Jewish majority

and national character' (Bick, 308).

Despite eliciting protest and accepting the possibility of civil disobedience, Sharon publicly defended the plan to disengage, arguing that removing the Israeli presence in Gaza would take pressure off of Israeli soldiers to guard the settlements and would ultimately bolster Israel's position in the international arena. Proceeding with disengagement would allow Israel to determine its own borders and avoid having national boundaries drawn by the Palestinian authorities. Rather than consider it a rash concession, Sharon urged Israelis to see the plan as one that would successfully protect Israel's interests (Bick, 308). Most Israelis reported in a number of polls taken at the time that they accepted the government's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip in an effort to make strides toward peace.

Yet despite earning the approval of the majority of Israeli voters to disengage from Gaza and Northern Samaria, the proposal shocked settlers and members of the National Religious Party. In fact, critics of the plan organized massive protests and solicited like-minded volunteers to convey to politicians that proceeding with disengagement would put the safety of Israelis on the line.

The issue of disengagement is a classic case in which religious beliefs and army demands collide. As Bick makes clear, the government's order for IDF soldiers to carry out the evacuation was problematic for troops who were against the initiative, and this bind was particularly pronounced for those from the religious Zionist camp (Bick, 309). Not surprisingly, devout soldiers found it more difficult than did their secular troops to proceed with disengagement since many of them either had friends or family members in

Gaza and, in contrast to most secular Israelis who hardly ever paid visits to Gaza and do not have much of a relationship with settlement residents, many religious Zionist soldiers had strong connections to settlers in the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria.

Not only were devout soldiers motivated by their personal and familial relations to oppose disengagement, but in the larger picture, their principles clashed with what they were being commanded to do. The large majority of religious Zionists supported the settler movement and believed that land conquered during the 1967 war constituted a core part of Israel. These devout troops also strongly opposed granting land to Palestinians. As Bick describes, religious soldiers were personally conflicted when commanded to evacuate settlers in Gaza and Northern Samaria because the situation raised questions regarding the strength of their allegiances; in other words, would they ascribe greater value to heeding state interests or Halakhic law? (Bick, 310). Bick gives the question a sense of urgency; weighing the importance of abiding by military orders in the service of state interests against personal ideologies has great bearing on the cohesiveness of the IDF. The issue is all the more pressing for the military given its makeup; thousands of religious Zionists serve in the army and a number of them have taken on senior positions within the force.

It is important to examine the prospect of disengagement from the perspective of the army as well as the religious establishment.

Though the connection between religious recruits and the military at large was akin to a contract beneficial to both sides, the nature of this contract turned out to be far more complicated – and far less advantageous – for observant soldiers, and this reality

came to light during the period of disengagement. Though the participation of devout conscripts had been construed as a benefit for them, this element did not pan out; in fact, disengagement posed a threat to them. Since army service was not ultimately helpful to religious soldiers, the contract relationship with religious soldiers could no longer be upheld. In essence, the army was faced with the task of having to proceed with an order that clashed with the convictions of many of its own soldiers. Not surprisingly, these soldiers were influenced by the sentiments of their rabbis, many of whom maintained that religious laws prohibited the forced removal of Jews from their homes. A number of outspoken rabbis who vehemently opposed disengagement gave instructions to observant troops to defy army commands and refrain from participating in the displacement of settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Given the large number of religious soldiers already serving, the possibility of these servicemen falling prey to the words of their rabbinic guides was a formidable challenge with which the army had to contend, as it raised the possibility that many devout soldiers would refuse to proceed with disengagement and claim conscientious objection as their justification. Levy notes that the risk was real; hundreds of soldiers affirmed their plans to act in accordance with the wishes of their rabbis. Such a stance would severely weaken the army's ability to successfully carry out the disengagement plan. Not only does Levy argue that religious soldiers put army unity at risk, but the scholar maintains that the threat they posed to the army as a whole far exceeded the threats posed by other segments of the army (Levy, 393).

As Levy explains, rabbis who were vocal during the time of disengagement

ultimately gained a ‘foothold’ in the army to an unprecedented degree (Levy, 395). Their influence on the nature and course of army conduct was far-reaching; they assumed the authority to negotiate with officers on the conditions under which religious recruits would serve, created the *hesder* schools for religious soldiers and sought to ensure that the army would accept the tendency of rabbis to put forth religious decisions on secular issues and consider military actions in light of religious considerations (Levy, 394-395).

It is noteworthy to mention that while the involvement of religious troops in military operations posed challenges to army commanders, devout conscripts also faced problems of their own (Levy, 398). On the one hand, heeding the instructions of their rabbinic guides to refuse to carry out disengagement would have relieved them, as this plan of action would have been in line with their personal convictions, yet at the same time, their defiance may ultimately be detrimental to their standing in the army. Interestingly, tarnishing the status of the army – the apolitical, ‘people’s’ army – may also bring about unintended negative consequences for religious troops; doing so may have reduced the influence of a national icon and hindered military efforts to successfully complete army operations, which were deemed critically important by Zionist-leaning, religious rabbis (Levy, 398). In essence, soldiers’ noncompliance would challenge the power of the IDF, which necessarily meant disparaging the importance of the religious sector of the army.

Not only would a display of soldier disobedience undermine their own standing in the army; it would have also put their accomplishments on the line, many of which were achieved over the last thirty years (Levy, 399). Perhaps more importantly, their

insubordination may prompt army officers to cast doubt on the loyalty of these conscripts and question their commitment to achieving army goals. In light of this, refusal to carry out army commands would hurt the likelihood of these soldiers climbing the ranks of the IDF and raise the possibility that officers may become unwilling to negotiate special arrangements with religious leaders that accommodate the army's religious cohort.

Even more crucial, Levy argues, was the reality that since the standing of the army's religious soldiers was inextricably tied to the status of the army as a whole, maintaining the military as a national symbol and a people's army was crucially important, and this entailed preventing conflict between soldiers and the settlers who were to be evacuated as well as avoiding conscientious objection to pursuing disengagement (Levy, 400).

It is worth noting that, for all the resistance disengagement provoked among religious settlers and the rabbinic leadership, the devout sector did not regard it as the most pressing issue (Levy, 400). Interestingly, they were far more occupied by matters that did not loom nearly as large: weighing the costs and benefits of military service as opposed to Torah studies, army service potentially interfering with holiday observance, relations with secular soldiers, among others. Many religious troops found that, in their service to the army, they were perhaps compromising their relations with the religious leadership.

Not surprisingly, in an effort to mitigate religious-secular tension in the army, a number of IDF officers sought to exploit rabbinic influence for the army's benefit. While the military's secular commanders continued to negotiate with rabbis, they

simultaneously urged religious leaders to encourage devout recruits to comply with military-ordered operations (Levy, 401). Army officers even went so far as to threaten to close the *hesderim* and incorporate religious soldiers into the rest of the force should rabbis seek to promote conscientious objection. Along the same vein, army commanders took advantage of rabbinical influence to curb instances of noncompliance among religious soldiers by widening the scope of the chief military rabbi's authority.

Conclusion: The arguments against the introduction of religious values into the Israeli army are plausible and worthy of consideration, yet the claims of those who defend religious influence as a benign – even beneficial – impact on the IDF are far more airtight, free of the loopholes that riddle the concerns of critics.

Given the widening rift between Israel's religious and secular communities and the fact that this cleavage has ramifications not only for secular army officers but for Israeli society as a whole, it comes as no surprise that the subject of religious influence, particularly on the character and unity of the Israeli military, has piqued the interest of numerous scholars of Israel and elicited a range of responses from them. While the issue is further complicated by the fact that both camps retain compelling arguments, and recent political developments and new scholarship demand revisiting – and perhaps reconstructing – previously crafted theories on the nature of religious influence on the army, critics of religious influence on the IDF have an inherent loophole in their stance for which they have yet to account: their fears of religious soldiers overpowering the army's secular majority and opting for conscientious objection as opposed to carrying out officer-mandated commands may have been warranted at times, particularly during the period of disengagement in the summer of 2005, but the fact remains that these concerns did not prove justified as the dreaded situations did not arise in the end. Not only was their apprehension unfounded, and as a result, actual causes of friction between religious and secular soldiers were not given sufficient attention, but critics have failed to appreciate the advantages of integrating religious soldiers into the force and the accomplishments of mediating mechanisms that have become vital to the IDF. Perhaps

these institutions were initially put in place to accommodate devout conscripts, but the entire force has stood to reap their benefits.

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