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## POPOLNJENOST IZRAELSKIH OBRAMBNIH SIL V ZAČETNIH LETIH: OD SOCIALNE KOHEZIJE DO STRATEŠKE KRIZE NA PODROČJU PRIDOBIVANJA IN ZADRŽEVANJA KADRA

## ISRAEL DEFENCE FORCES MANPOWER IN ITS EARLY YEARS: FROM SOCIAL COHESION TO A STRATEGIC RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION CRISIS

**Povzetek** Članek obravnava razvoj krize zaposlovanja v izraelskih obrambnih silah med izraelsko vojno za neodvisnost in v zgodnjih letih države. Njegov namen je razširiti razumevanje organizacijskih in družbenih problemov izraelskih obrambnih sil, tako da jih opredeli kot razširjeno postkolonialno strateško krizo, ki je prizadela vse enote kopenske vojske. V nedavnih raziskavah se osredotočamo na tisti deli problema, ki zadeva predvsem teme, povezane s področjem delovanja. V članku želimo raziskave razširiti še z opisom glavnih značilnosti in meja krize. Z razumevanjem izraelskega primera se bo okrepilo naše poznavanje načina oblikovanja postkolonialnih vojsk in njihovih načinov spopadanja s svojo družbeno raznolikostjo.

**Ključne besede** *Civilno-vojaški odnosi, pridobivanje in zadrževanje kadra, Izrael, popolnjenost, kriza, postkolonialno obdobje.*

**Abstract** This article examines the evolution of the manpower crisis in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) during the Israeli War of Independence and in the early years of the state. It aims to widen the understanding of the IDF's organizational and social problems by describing them as a post-colonial, overriding strategic crisis that affected all army units. Recent research studies have focused on parts of the issue, concentrating mainly on themes related to the field of operations. This article wishes to add to those studies by describing the main characteristics and boundaries of the crisis. Understanding the Israeli case will contribute to our knowledge of the ways post-colonial armies are formed, and their ways of coping with their social diversity.

**Key words** *Civil-military, recruitment and retention, Israel, manpower, crisis, post-colonial*

## Introduction

The establishment of the IDF during the War of Independence was an integral part of the Israeli nation building<sup>1</sup> process. From the beginning, the IDF was designed to be a large, modern, technological army. For the newborn state, this was a complex organizational effort, especially during the War, in which the army had to organize and prepare for several parallel efforts. The first and the most important was the need to fight off the invading Arab forces and to win the War. Another effort was the urgent need to build the army and its units, including the fighting forces and the auxiliary forces. Other scholars who have researched social changes in the army have focused mainly on combat units (Gelber 1986; Morris 1996, 2008; Drori 2000, 2006; Turgan 2008). It seems that their focus on combat units limits the understanding of the dimensions of the crisis which, in fact, was much more widespread and affected all army units. These army efforts were parallel to the country's economic and social efforts caused by massive waves of immigrants from various nations that tripled the population of the state in just a few years.

This article aims to describe the characteristics of the manpower crisis, including non-combat aspects such as discipline issues, ethnic tensions and social issues, and the lack of professional manpower, which all contributed to the malfunction of the army during those years. Combining these issues and issues in other scholars' work will make it possible to configure and understand the depth of the manpower crisis in the first few years of the IDF. The main argument is that during the War of Independence, and even more so in the years to follow, the great immigration of the early years of the state of Israel changed Israeli society, resulting in a total and multidimensional manpower crisis, influencing all army units and soon becoming a strategic problem within the overall conception of Israel's security needs and operational activities.

At the heart of the crisis stood the changes in the Israel Defence Forces' (IDF) social composition, resulting in a change in the IDF from an ethnically homogeneous army to an ethnically heterogeneous army, suffering from a severe shortage in manpower for command and army professionals at different levels, from low-level roles such as cooks and drivers to academic professionals such as physicists and physicians. The new army was characterized by severe discipline<sup>2</sup> problems, including a large number of deserters. In the army units, problems between soldiers based on ethnic differences were very common and the cultural differences made it very hard for the commanders to manage the units. This was reflected in many operational activities. These problems, which occurred not only in the regular army but also in the reserve units, raised questions about the ability of the IDF to manage its missions. The problems that characterized the IDF in the early years were not all unique and can be found in other post-colonial armies (Barany 2014; Chari 1977;

<sup>1</sup> For a definition of nation building see Smith 1986, Premdas 1989, and Sheath 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Army discipline is defined as systematic action designed to provide army recruits with the army way of life and hierarchies. On the efforts made by the IDF to enforce army discipline in its first years, see Yoav Gelber 1986, *The Emergence Of a Jewish Army – the Veterans Of The British Army In The I.D.F. (Jerusalem:1986): 466-461 [Hebrew]*.

Cohen 1998). Although established under quite similar circumstances, different countries created different types of armies (Barany 2012). The differences derived from many variables, including the social composition of the post-colonial state, economic variables, and the ability of the state to allocate resources for the new army (Barany 2014, Adekson 1976, Barua 1992). There are a significant number of post-colonial armies, but modern technological armies in a democratic state are rarer. There are cases like India in which similarities to the Israeli case can be found, but still the Israeli case holds several characteristics that make it unique. For example, in contrast to other post-colonial armies characterized by a low technological level, the establishment of the IDF is characterized by a continuous effort and desire to build a high-tech army based only on local manpower<sup>3</sup> (Yitzhak 2006). That approach applied not only to command personnel but also to professional personnel and to the research and development of military technology<sup>4</sup> (Neemani 2006; Barel 2009). The concept of trying to operate and develop on the basis of local potential created a gap between the ideal and reality. In reality, most of the new recruits were considered by the IDF commanders and high command to be low-level personnel with very limited capabilities, which cast doubt on their ability to fulfil the tasks awaiting them. This gap became a strategic crisis during the War and in the years to follow, requiring the high command to deal with its consequences.

## 1 THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND THE CHANGES IN THE IDF'S SOCIAL COMPOSITION

On the eve of the War of Independence, despite being small and lacking military equipment and military doctrine, the Jewish forces enjoyed several advantages in relation to the local Arab forces. One was the existence of command and control mechanisms and units in the Hagana and the Palmach subordinated to those command centres. These served as an infrastructure for IDF units and command with the establishment of the state. Another advantage was the strong social solidarity that characterized the Hagana and the other organization personnel. They were strongly committed to the goals of the Zionist movement and its values, and to the idea that these justified the use of force (Shapira 1992); this led to them being considered a great pioneering fighting force. Being ethnically homogeneous, mostly native Israelis and Hebrew speakers, added to their ability to operate together. To all those advantages must be added another main advantage, which reinforced their social solidarity; it was the “*yeshuv*”, the strong feeling of being with their backs to the wall due to the holocaust horrors, and their strong belief concerning Arab intentions to destroy the Jewish community. Those advantages stood by the Israeli forces in the first part of the War, leading to a defeat of the enemy on all fronts and a total collapse of the local Arab community.

<sup>3</sup> *Other armies like the Jordanian army continued to lean on British personnel, especially in command positions (Yitzhak 2006).*

<sup>4</sup> *Regarding the Israeli efforts to develop military technology during the War of Independence and in the years to follow, see Neemani 2006, Barel 2009.*

During the War of Independence and in the years to follow there was a dramatic change in the social composition of the IDF, resulting in a general decrease in the military quality of the new recruits (Drori 2000, Turgan 2008, Oren 2002). In May 1948 there was an invasion of Arab forces from the neighbouring states; these armies were equipped with advanced weapons, including an air force and armoured corps, and this forced the newborn army and state to a different, much greater position in terms of buying or manufacturing military equipment and training personnel to operate and maintain the systems. In addition, it was necessary to increase the size of the fighting force on a dramatic scale, while creating new battalions, brigades and support forces including logistics and medical units (Gelber 1986, Naor 2003, Morris 2008).

The rapid growth in recruits during the war was also meant to fill the ranks due to the large number of casualties. This urgent need to enlarge the IDF created a gap between what was necessary and what was available. In contrast to the Hagana and other organization personnel, the new recruits were mostly new immigrants or veteran Israelis who had not taken part in the same social melting pot as the underground organization personnel. More than twenty thousand new immigrants, called the *gahal* (Markovitzki 1995, 1996), joined the army during the war. This name was given to all the new immigrants who enlisted in the IDF during the War and in the years to follow. *Gahal* is an acronym made up of the Hebrew initials for 'recruits from abroad'. This group included soldiers coming from many cultures and countries, and the use of the acronym was pejorative. Towards the end of the War, new immigrants made up one fifth of the army personnel. In contrast to the native-born Israelis, these new immigrants did not receive sufficient military or ideological training. This lack of preparation caused major problems in most army units. These problems kept increasing as nationwide recruitment was implemented. A concrete manifestation of the poor quality and lack of motivation of the new recruits can be found in the high percentages of draft evaders, which stood at 20% of the recruited force (Gelber 1986).

As the immigrant part of the army increased dramatically, the issue of its poor quality began to occupy the minds of the high command, which started to gather information about the characteristics of the new manpower. Soon these researchers painted a picture that confirmed their concern about the drastic change in the composition and characteristics of the army's manpower. One study, conducted in December 1948, showed that due to changes in ethnicity, only 21.4% of the army were native Israelis; 27% were from Poland, 11% from Romania, 8% from Germany and 5% from a variety of nations.<sup>5</sup> This heterogeneity was also reflected in the period that the soldiers had lived in Israel before they enlisted in the army. A study showed that 21% of the fighting force had been in Israel for less than a year, 11% for less than three years, and 16% for more than three years but less than ten years.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See the categorization and placement section in the manpower branch report on army personnel from 13 February 1949. *The Israel defence forces and defence establishment archives (IDFA) file 14-6722-1949 [Hebrew]*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

These changes led to serious problems connected to the poor quality of the new recruits, and their ability to function as soldiers and to understand and obey orders. The language problems and cultural differences made it very difficult for the commanders to manage the units, and this resulted in a very poor operational level. As the War continued these problems did not get the proper attention due to the need to win the War.

In terms of the quality of personnel in the army, the situation got worse in the years after the War. Mass demobilization of high quality personnel, which started during the War, continued and even escalated after the War (Luttwak and Horowitz 1984). The enforcement of the Defence Service Law (Hadar 1979) required the army to recruit all personnel who met the enlistment criteria (Hadar 1979; Gelber 1986). Simultaneously the army was to adopt organizational changes aimed at reducing the army to a peace standard of 30,000 members (Greenberg 1991, Oren 2002). In reality, the military managed to reduce its personnel to approximately 35,000 soldiers (Drori 2006, Gelber 1986, Greenberg 1991).

At a meeting of the IDF general staff that was dedicated to the dramatic changes in personnel during and especially after the War of Independence, the Chief of Staff, Yigael Yadin<sup>7</sup>, estimated that in the year 1950, 20,000 new recruits would be enlisted and 30,000 would be discharged. Half of the new recruits would be new immigrants (*gahal*). General Yossef Avidar, the commander of the Northern Command<sup>8</sup>, estimated that in a large portion of the army's units, the percentage of new immigrants would rise to 80% of the unit's manpower.<sup>9</sup> Yadin argued that in the light of those statistics, if the IDF failed to act in a broad, decisive way, the results could be catastrophic. He added that a failure to address the educational and cultural problems could result in a total defeat on the battlefield:

“For the first part of the War, which is the critical part of our war plan, we are building our defences to rely on the regular units. In the next war, we could be facing such a disaster that any analogy to what happened two years ago would be fundamentally misguided. In terms of numbers, the situation might be similar, but in terms of fighting spirit the situation could be totally different.”<sup>10</sup>

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Defence, David Ben Gurion, reinforced Yadin's words by saying in another general staff meeting:

<sup>7</sup> He was born in Jerusalem in 1917, joined the Hagana at the age of 15 and served in a number of command positions including Head of Operational Division. Appointed to the Chief of Staff position in November 1949, and served as Chief of Staff until December 1952. After leaving the army, he turned to archaeology and politics, serving as a member of Knesset and as acting Prime Minister of the ninth Knesset. He died in 1984.

<sup>8</sup> He was born in Ukraine in 1906, immigrated to Palestine in 1925. Served in the Hagana in a number of command positions, including the commander of the old city of Jerusalem. After the establishment of Israel, served as General in a number of command positions, including the commander of the northern and central front. After leaving the army, he was appointed Ambassador to Russia. He died in 1995.

<sup>9</sup> See the protocol of the general staff meeting of 12 February 1950. IDFA, file: 14-847-1962 [Hebrew].

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

“Our army does not recruit manpower similar to the manpower in the British army. We receive manpower similar to the Iraqi army manpower and this is terrible.”<sup>11</sup>

In terms of education, the level of the soldiers was poor and did not improve in the early fifties.<sup>12</sup> (Drori 2006; Turgan 2008) The high command faced a serious problem because, on the one hand, the soldiers’ level of education was declining as the waves of new immigrants continued to flood the country and the percentage of new immigrants serving in IDF units increased. On the other hand, the need for educated personnel kept rising due to technological improvements that began in the form of purchasing new and advanced weapons and military systems. For example, at the end of 1951, the percentage of soldiers with only elementary education<sup>13</sup> or less was 52.7%. By the beginning of 1953, this percentage had risen to 80%, staying the same in the years to follow until 1956. At one end of the educational ladder there were soldiers with no formal education, not even knowing how to read and write; they were 8% of the IDF force at the beginning of 1953 and 5% in 1956. Only 1% of the soldiers had had an academic education.

One educational area that did improve was learning and knowing Hebrew by the new recruits and soldiers. This improvement can be related to two parallel factors. One was the efforts that were made by the army to teach the immigrant soldiers the Hebrew language and Zionist values, an effort that caught the attention of foreign armies which had similar problems.<sup>14</sup> The second factor was the time the new immigrants had spent in Israel prior to their enlistment<sup>15</sup> (Turgan 2008). Although some progress was made in the educational area, this part showed a massive change for the worse, affecting the quality and the cohesion of the army personnel, as it developed over a very short time.

## 2 THE SHORTAGE OF SUITABLE MANPOWER FOR COMMAND

One of the main manifestations of the manpower crisis that started during the War and intensified in the years after the War was the severe shortage of suitable manpower for command at different levels, including officers and low-level commanders like squad commanders and sergeants (Gelber 1986). Sagi Turgan (2008) researched this characteristic. The shortage appeared in most army units, including both regular and reserve units. A demonstration of the seriousness of the situation can be found in the words of General Zvi Tzur in a letter he sent to the deputy of the Chief of Staff,

<sup>11</sup> See David Ben Gurion’s words at the general staff meeting at the 23 of April 1953. IDFA, file: 25-847-1962 [translated by the author].

<sup>12</sup> See compilation of data regarding the IDF education in (Drori 2006, pp.412-429. See also Turgan 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Up to 8 years at school.

<sup>14</sup> See a report from the head of education at the education and youth corps about techniques of teaching soldiers to read and write. IDFA, file: 15-798-1960 [Hebrew].

<sup>15</sup> See the IDF buildup report 1950-1955. Made by the manpower branch, p.17. IDFA, file 1165-1034-1965. [Hebrew] See also Turgan, *Training Combat Leadership in the IDF 1949-1956*, Doctoral dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, (Jerusalem, 2008): 215 [Hebrew].

saying that in the years 1951-1952 there was a shortage in the regular army of 2030 officers and 2189 non-commissioned officers.<sup>16</sup> The report shows that there had been some progress, but the shortage was still severe. For example, in October 1953, the army lacked 1157 officers; in November 1953, the army lacked 1218 officers.<sup>17</sup>

In view of the acute shortage, a discussion arose in the general staff about the proper way to manage the new recruits and the existing command personnel. In order to reduce the damage to the combat units, the army gave priority to those units, mostly sending them the personnel that were considered more capable (Turgan 2008). These were the native Israelis, Hebrew speakers and educated personnel. This priority was given due to the low intensity war situation that continued after the War, especially at the borders. In doing so, the general staff increased the shortage of educated soldiers in the non-combat units. In a review given to the general staff, it was presented that, as of November 1951, there was a severe shortage of logistics officers in all divisions and commands.<sup>18</sup>

In the reserve units, the shortage was so severe that the IDF were unable to reduce it for several years in a row. According to the IDF build-up report 1950-1955, signed by General Zvi Tzur of the manpower branch in 1950, during the work year of 1951-1952 the army expected a shortage of 2500 reserve officers and 12,000 NCOs.<sup>19</sup> Referring to the general shortage in command personnel, General Zvi Tzur said:

“The number of officers in the army today does not fit the needs of the army list that was based on 12 reinforced brigades. The shortage in that area is so severe that even if we take into account that priority will be given to the training of commanders, we will still be very far from meeting the required number of commanders.”<sup>20</sup>

The shortage in personnel suitable for command continued to be a problem for the IDF throughout the 1950s, as part of the developing manpower crisis.

### 3 THE SHORTAGE IN PROFESSIONAL MANPOWER

Another main characteristic of the manpower crisis that has received little academic attention was the shortage or absence of professional military manpower able to deal with the technological challenges that the IDF faced. The professional manpower shortage affected all army units in a large variety of functions during the War and in the years to follow. Purchasing new and advanced weapons intensified the need

<sup>16</sup> NCOs. See personnel report on officers in the army, sent by the Head of the organization section to the Head of the staff section, at the manpower branch dated 18 November 1953. IDFA, file: 312-55-1965 [Hebrew].

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> See the protocol of the general staff meeting on October 28, 1951. p.5. IDFA, file:178-1559-1952 [Hebrew].

<sup>19</sup> See the IDF buildup report 1950-1955. Made by the manpower branch. IDFA, file: 1165-1034-1965 [Hebrew].

<sup>20</sup> See a report by the Head of the planning staff in the general staff, General Zvi Tzur. The report was sent to the deputy of the Chief of Staff on December 29, 1950. IDFA, file: 4-346-1961 [translated by the author].

for professionals. During those years, the human resource pool from which the IDF could recruit or train military professionals was very limited, and far from what was needed. This need was felt during the War of Independence and especially afterwards, as severe shortages were faced in logistics, medical, electronics, ordnance and other functions. At the beginning of the War, professional personnel came from two main sources; one was the recruitment of British army veterans (Amitzur 2003) and the second was the ordnance section of the Hagana organization, which was very small.<sup>21</sup>

During 1950-1951, a special committee headed by the Chief of Ordnance was founded in order to inspect all the ordnance workshops and bases. The committee's conclusions were presented to the army general staff; with regard to the shortage in professional military personnel, the committee concluded:

“The situation regarding the lack of professional military is most alarming. The military command has noted a constant decrease in the numbers of professionals due to them leaving the service. The main cause for their leaving is the army’s lack of ability to compete with the civilian market on wage conditions.”<sup>22</sup>

Another factor causing the shortage was the lack of training and learning facilities designated to army needs. Even in cases where the army succeeded in training soldiers in military courses a problem occurred, as the length of military service of two years was not enough, especially in cases of long courses that left little time for the soldiers to practise their military profession. An expression of that problem can be found in the words of deputy Chief of Staff General Mordechai Maklhef, at the general staff meeting in June 1951:

“In the current situation we have 2000 trainees in the military vocational schools in the army. The length of their training is such that it is not possible for the army to take advantage of the knowledge acquired. For example, a radio technician course lasts between 11 and 16 months. A soldier that finishes the course has no more than 10 months to serve in his new profession.”<sup>23</sup>

Another example of the seriousness of the situation can be found in the words of General Zvi Tzur, the Head of the Planning Branch, about the possibilities the IDF had in its efforts to deal with the professional military personnel during 1952:

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

<sup>22</sup> See the protocol of the general staff meeting of June 2, 1951. p.2. IDFA, file: 100-1559-1952 [translated by the author].

<sup>23</sup> See General Mordechai Maklief at the general staff meeting on November 12, 1950. p.2. IDFA. File 37-61-1952. [translated by the author].

“It is obvious the needs of the army are great – so great that there are not enough professionals in the country that can fulfil the military needs in addition to the civilian needs in 1952.”<sup>24</sup>

This shortage continued to burden the IDF in the years to follow. For example, in May 1956, the Chief of the Manpower Branch, Colonel Gideon Shoken, reported on the severe shortage of manpower in several army positions, including the lack of 345 logistic personnel such as cooks and drivers, 271 air force professionals, and 355 ordnance soldiers and professionals.<sup>25</sup> According to Colonel Shoken, the numbers did not reflect the true nature of the crisis; to understand the whole picture it was also important to address the poor quality of the existing manpower. He said:

“Looking at these diagrams gives only a quantitative point of view of every profession. In some of these professions, there is also a severe quality problem. For example, in comparison to the 370 standard for quartermasters we have only 300 in reality. Out of those 300, only 100 are regular soldiers, mostly of a very poor quality.”<sup>26</sup>

In March 1952, the Chief of Staff, Yigael Yadin, wrote to David Ben Gurion, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, about the shortage in professional military manpower. In his letter, Yadin said regarding this issue that the situation was difficult in all army units and could result in severe damage. According to Yadin, the situation was not improving but getting worse over the years. Yadin said:

“I think that it is my duty to once again raise the alarm about the severe situation we have regarding the rapidly and steadily increasing quantitative and qualitative shortage of professional manpower. The alarming signals can be seen not only in a decrease in the operational level, but also in a general decrease in the quality of all general activities in the army. The lack of sergeants, clerks, receptionists, air force administrative manpower etc. can already be seen in a reduction and difficulty in problem-solving, causing great concern. Reports and letters I received and my personal impression all show that the situation is most alarming and could develop into an irreparable situation.”<sup>27</sup>

The manpower that the army needed could be divided into two groups by the level of expertise and education required. The first group was professional, with high levels of expertise including positions that required an academic education, such as laboratory workers and physicians, electronic and mechanical engineers, lawyers

<sup>24</sup> See a letter from the deputy Chief of Staff from Zvi Tzur the Head of the planning team for the year of 1951-1952. Dated December 29, 1950. IDFA. File 4-346-1961 [translated by the author].

<sup>25</sup> Colonel Shoken received the rank of General in 1959.

<sup>26</sup> See a report from Colonel Gideon Shoken about personnel problems to the deputy Chief of Staff from May 13, 1956. IDFA. File 58-776-1958 [translated by the author].

<sup>27</sup> See a letter from the Chief of Staff, Yigael Yadin, to the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, David Ben Gurion, from March 17, 1952. IDFA. File 20-1559-1952 [translated by the author].

and financiers.<sup>28</sup> The other group included professions that required a low level of expertise or education, including cooks, drivers, radio technicians, mechanics and others.<sup>29</sup> The shortage in professional manpower, as well as the shortage in suitable personnel for command, demonstrates the two major components of the manpower crisis, creating continuing difficulty at the core of the army.

The next sections will show the daily manifestations and the operational manifestations that defined this extremely difficult crisis as a whole.

#### 4 DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS

Another significant characteristic of the manpower crisis was the problem of discipline. The high command wanted to implement order based on the kind of discipline that was common in other modern armies, mainly the British army (Drori 2006; Ostfeld 1994). The field of military discipline was considered one of the most important components in the transfer from being an underground organization to a regular army with a clear and binding set of rules (Ostfeld 1994). In order to succeed in that transition, the high command decided on a set of actions designed to implement the new rules and to reduce the discipline problems that could occur during the transition. As a main action, an emergency regimen was implemented with regard to discipline issues.<sup>30</sup> As part of the emergency regimen, enforcement was tightened, punishment of disciplinary violations was increased, commander's conferences were held, and the military police were ordered to tighten their enforcement on driving violations, military appearance and capture of deserters. At the same time, an effort to shape and adjust the rules was made.<sup>31</sup> Despite the army's efforts, discipline remained poor and discipline problems were very common.

An expression of the importance of discipline in the eyes of the high command can be found in the words of the Chief of the Manpower Branch, General Shimon Maza<sup>32</sup>:

“The enormous tasks placed upon the IDF and the nature of the new recruits required stricter enforcement of discipline in all fields. This chain of compliance, starting with

<sup>28</sup> See internal document from the organization wing at the manpower branch at the general staff. In the document, there are further details on other shortages of professional manpower. The document is dated June 20, 1954. IDFA, file 312-55-1965 [Hebrew].

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> See the IDF report by the Chief of Staff, Yigael Yadin, from 9.11.1949–30.3.1950. The report was presented to the general staff on May 22, 1950. IDFA, file: 36-68-1955 [Hebrew].

<sup>31</sup> See a report on the actions of the manpower branch to the year 1950. The report is attached to a widely circulated letter from Major Daphna at the manpower branch. IDFA, file: 357-831-1953 [Hebrew].

<sup>32</sup> He was born in 1907 in Russia. Grew up in Germany and immigrated to Israel in 1931. During World War II served in the transportation corp. and as the transportation officer of the Jewish Brigade. During the War of Independence served as the IDF transportation corp. commander. In October 1949 assigned to the Head of the manpower branch at the general staff. He died in 2000.

the general staff and ending with the last private, is a fundamental condition for the existence of the army and for its ability to operate at short notice.<sup>33</sup>

The Head of the Manpower Branch based his statement on data showing poor discipline that had accumulated during and after the war. For example, in a report presented by the Head of the Strategic Planning Branch in the general staff branch (GHQ), a sharp increase of 34% in the number of soldiers who were sentenced due to disciplinary offenses between 1949-1951 was documented. In addition, there was a sharp increase of 27% in the number of soldiers sentenced for property crimes, including theft and negligence.<sup>34</sup>

The definition of a discipline problem was divided into several fields. For example, the most common disciplinary offences in 1952 were military uniform infractions. In that year, only 22,912 indictments were filed, representing 20% of that year's indictments. Another 20% were driving offences, including reckless driving.<sup>35</sup> There were also serious military infractions that were dealt with by the military police and investigated by the IDF criminal investigation division.<sup>36</sup> For example, in 1952, six hundred cases resulted in indictments. The most common offence (33.5%) was theft of military equipment and money. Many severe cases can also be found, such as 22 suicide cases, 21 murder and manslaughter cases and five attempted murders, all during 1952.<sup>37</sup>

## 5 THE PROBLEM OF AWOL<sup>38</sup> SOLDIERS AND DESERTERS

Another serious discipline problem was that of absentees and deserters. It is hard to determine the exact numbers during the War of Independence; however, proof of the existence of this as a major problem can be found in several fugitive capture operations held during the War, as well as other activities (Gelber 1986). From the annual reports of the military police for the years after the War, we learn that in this area, the situation was difficult. In every report until 1956, there were thousands of absentee and deserter cases dealt with by the military police. It can be presumed that those figures, as well as the other discipline problems, do not present the entire picture, due to the fact that numerous cases were dealt within the units themselves without reporting them to the military police.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix A. in the report on the manpower branch guidelines for the year 1951-1952. Inside the IDF, work order and guidelines for the year 1951-1952. IDFA, file: 36-68-1955 [translated by the author].

<sup>34</sup> See report by the Head of the commander of the strategic planning section at the general staff branch. From September 10, 1952, p.12. IDFA, file: 72-488-1955 [Hebrew].

<sup>35</sup> See the annual report of the military police of the year of 1952. p.17. IDFA, file: 107-63-1955 [Hebrew].

<sup>36</sup> Criminal investigation police.

<sup>37</sup> See the annual report of the military police of the year of 1952. p.17. IDFA, file: 107-63-1955 [Hebrew].

<sup>38</sup> *Absent Without Official Leave*: a term used in the United States Military to describe a soldier who has left his or her post without permission but is still not considered a deserter. In Israel the term deserter is used to refer to an absence of more than 21 days from a unit.

The 1952 annual military police report compares the 1952 data to previous years, showing the stability in the number of fugitives. In 1950 there were 7475 reports to the military police about desertion. A small decrease can be found in the following year, during which 7295 reports were made. In 1952, the number rose to 8177 deserters, including 2400 reserve soldiers.<sup>39</sup> During that year, the military police managed to capture 29% of the deserters.<sup>40</sup> The annual report also deals with the reasons that drove the soldiers to desert, stating that the main reason was the will of the soldiers to come to the aid of their families, who were suffering from poverty mainly at the new immigrant camps, the “*maabarot*.”<sup>41</sup> The report states that an expression of the army’s failure to solve the problem could be found in the fact that the same soldiers deserted repeatedly. Repeated desertion shows, according to the report, a failure not only in meeting the soldiers’ and their families’ economic needs, but also a failure in implementing army discipline on the population of the new immigrants of the *maabarot*.<sup>42</sup> Similar statistics for deserters can also be found in the years 1953-1955.<sup>43</sup> Another expression of the problem as being mainly, but not entirely, based on economic reasons can be found in the words of the Head of the military police, Colonel Baruch Yitzhak:

"From investigating this phenomenon, it appears that the main reason is the difficult economic situation the soldiers’ families are in, mostly new immigrants, living in the *maabarot*. The main reason for a soldier’s desertion is his desire to help his family by working outside the army, since army assistance is not enough. There are additional factors, such as the hard lifestyle, service in distant places or other family problems. In all of these cases, desertion comes after the army's refusal to comply with the soldier's request for help.<sup>44</sup>"

## 6 HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND ARMY DISCIPLINE

A good example showing that military discipline was not appropriate for all the types of people serving in the army were the new immigrant recruits that had survived the holocaust. The recognition of the fact that this group was problematic started to circulate

<sup>39</sup> See the annual report of the military police for the year 1952:14. IDFA, file: 107-63-1955.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> The “*maabarot*” were temporary camps built by the Israeli government in order to provide accommodation for the new immigrants that flooded the new state in the early 1950s. The word comes from a Hebrew word that means transition. Most of the *maabarot* residents were housed in temporary tin dwellings. The residents of the *maabarot* suffered constantly from various problems including poverty and the lack of infrastructure. Slowly the tin dwellings were replaced with more suitable housing, transforming the *maabarot* into neighbourhoods and towns. The last camp was dismantled in 1963.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, a military police summary report from September 1953, sent to the Chief of Staff by the Head of the military police, Colonel Baruch Itzhar, on October 19, 1953. IDFA, file: 60-636-1956 [Hebrew]. See also the military police summary report from October 1953, sent to the Chief of Staff by the Head of the military police, Colonel Baruch Itzhar, on November 10, 1953. IDFA, file: 60-636-1956 [Hebrew].

<sup>44</sup> See the annual report of the military police for the year 1952. p.14. IDFA, file: 107-63-1955 [translated by the author].

among the high command during the War. Reports came from different units regarding the hostile attitudes or strange behaviour of holocaust survivors in response to the implementation of military discipline or in stressful situations such as combat. The problem continued after the War, as more and more holocaust survivors joined the army.

In addition to the holocaust survivors' suffering due to their encounters with the lifestyle of the army, there was another difficulty. Due to the severe discipline problems, unit commanders had tightened the enforcement of rules. That tough approach was not only in order to enforce the rules, but part of a wider approach that prevailed in the army in the early 1950s. According to that approach, the attitude toward new recruits had to be harsh in order to eliminate all civilian characteristics and engrain the army way of life into the new soldiers. As if that was not enough hardship for these holocaust survivors, there was also the lack of understanding on the part of the native Israelis of the horrors that these people had survived.

An example of a case that emphasized this difficult situation can be found in Avraham Adan's book, *The Ink Flag* (Adan1984). In this book, he described an encounter he had as a company leader of the Negev Brigade during the War of Independence with a holocaust survivor. Adan met with his men individually for personal meetings; one soldier entered the room mumbling and grumbling in Yiddish, saying that he was not a soldier and did not understand what Adan wanted from him.<sup>45</sup> After two failed attempts to explain the behaviour expected from him and after the soldier began to curse, Adan rose from his chair and punched the soldier in the face. After the situation calmed down, the soldier was thrown into prison for a few days. From the inquiry Adan conducted with the other men in the unit, it turned out that the soldier's radical behaviour was a direct result of the horrific experiences he had had during the holocaust.<sup>46</sup>

As the number of cases involving holocaust survivors rose, the problem caught the attention of the high command, who began to understand the importance of examining the correlation of military discipline with the backgrounds of all the groups that populated the army, including the holocaust survivors. In 1951 a symposium dedicated to the issues of discipline, education, leadership and morale was held for the IDF high command, in order to discuss the problems and come to a better understanding of the discipline issues, including those of holocaust survivor soldiers.

An explanation of the understanding that military discipline was not suitable for all groups can be found in the words of Yehuda Wallach,<sup>47</sup> the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade commander:

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>46</sup> Avraham Adan (Bren), *The Ink Flag, The Ministry Of Deffence, Tel Aviv, 1984,pp.227.*

<sup>47</sup> *He was born in 1921 in Germany. Served during the War of Independence as battalion commander of the Givati brigade. After the war stayed in the army, serving as brigade and division commander. After retiring from the army turned to an academic career as a military history researcher at Tel Aviv University. He died in 2008.*

“There are other phenomena that we need to take under consideration. It turns out that the problem is not with the Mizrahi group, but with the European group of immigrants, former concentration camp prisoners. Our approach to punishment as part of military discipline does not suit them. Those people have the mentality of “*Iber Laaben*,”<sup>48</sup> because they survived and came here. Once they encounter a regimen of stress, pressure and punishments, naturally it evokes in them a terrible comparison between their [IDF] commanders and the Nazi camp regime. Both regimes are considered by them to be regimes of compulsion.<sup>49</sup>”

Other commanders made similar claims. The main claim or fear was that army discipline, which was based on western army methods and values, was not appropriate for many of the groups serving in the Israeli army, which was composed of people from a variety of nations and cultures, including Arab nations and holocaust survivors. A good summary of the essence of the problem can be found in the words of Colonel Avraham Yaffe, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade commander:

“It is not a simple problem. To a person who is dealing with an Australian mentality there is no problem. In our army, things are very different and one must ask if the discipline we are implementing is suitable for these young people that just yesterday came from Yemen or North Africa. Or for the people coming from Eastern Europe, or for the native Israelis? Can we put all of these into the same cauldron and say that there is the same cure for everyone in our way to achieve our goals? In reality, this is what we do. We do not distinguish between the components that we are adding to the stew, treating them in the same way.<sup>50</sup>”

## 7 INTERETHNIC TENSIONS – THE ARAB NATIONS’ IMMIGRANTS AND THE ARMY

Another characteristic of the manpower crisis and an expression of the social problems that characterized the IDF during those years was the existence of ethnic tensions, tensions between veteran Israelis and new immigrants and other groups. That issue cannot be fully addressed here, and although it has received some attention (Hacohen 1994, Markovitzky 1996), it has not been sufficiently researched. The wave of immigrants that flooded Israel during its first years created a complex heterogeneous society with vast ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic differences. The social gaps and the gap between the new immigrants’ expectations and reality created feelings of deprivation and frustration that drove them even farther from the

<sup>48</sup> This Yiddish term refers in general to the survival efforts made by the individual or by the whole society during the holocaust and in the light of the terrible circumstances. For more information regarding this, see the Yad Vashem web site: [http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/he/holocaust/resource\\_center/item.asp?gate=2-49](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/he/holocaust/resource_center/item.asp?gate=2-49)

<sup>49</sup> See the words of Yehuda Wallach, the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade commander in the protocol of the Regime, Education, Leadership and Morale Symposium. Held on June 22, 1951. p.6. IDFA. File 100-1559-1952 [translated by the author].

<sup>50</sup> See the words of Avraham Yaffe, the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade commander in the protocol of the Regime, Education, Leadership and Morale Symposium. Held on June 22, 1951:1-2. IDFA. File 100-1559-1952 [translated by the author].

veteran Israelis (Hacohen 1994). In the IDF during the War and afterwards as part of implementing the security service law, soldiers from all ethnic groups were assigned to the same units, transforming them into a cultural cauldron in which diversity and differences prevailed.

The commanders and the high command failed to understand the differences between the various immigrant groups, not only between eastern and western immigrants, but also between groups of immigrants that might be considered to belong to the same group, for example, holocaust survivors in the blurring of the 'Ashkenazy' group, and the differences between immigrants from Iraq and Morocco in the Mizrahi group. A major factor that contributed to the blurring of the issues during those years and in future research was the inclusion of all immigrants under the name *Gahal*, a name that was usually connected to negative characteristics.

Ethnic tensions were common in most army units. Prejudices and stereotypes in which new immigrants were presented as primitive and wild were very common in the army units and in Israeli society in general (Lissak 1999, Tzur 1997). Immigrants from Arab nations were commonly tagged as those who were not mentally capable of coping with the challenges of modern society, as those who were lacking readiness for self-sacrifice and mutual aid (Tzur 1997). That tagging did not only apply to those coming from the Arab nations; European immigrants were considered to be selfish individuals, lacking the will to come to the aid of others and only interested in their own survival and welfare, as shown before in the matter of the holocaust survivors. In general, new immigrant soldiers were considered low quality manpower, not capable of fulfilling their assigned tasks or even meeting basic army requirements.

As the percentage of new immigrants rose in the years after the War, the problem intensified and started to occupy the attention of the high command. A manifestation of the fact that this was a problem and a major issue deserving attention can be found in the protocol of the manpower branch staff meeting held on June 28, 1952, in a review given to the Head of the Manpower Branch by a staff officer:

“...for the army this is only part of the manpower problem. All the doctrines on which the IDF is based originate in western cultures and societies. At the same time the army is filled with people coming from totally different cultures and societies, strangers to those values.<sup>51</sup>”

On the complex relationships between the new immigrant soldiers, the staff officer added that it was very important for the army to learn the differences between the groups and soldiers, in order to understand the ways that discipline could be implemented. His words express the army's recognition of the need to address the

<sup>51</sup> See the protocol of the manpower branch staff meeting, from June. 28, 1952. p.3. IDFA, file: 443-702-1960 [translated by the author].

different immigrant groups in a particular manner, instead of including them all under the pejorative name *Gahal*:

“We need to understand the relationships between one ethnic group and another. Research has found that a Yemenite soldier is willing to sleep and live with a Bulgarian soldier. The Bulgarian does not rule out the Yemenite soldier completely. At the same time we have learned that we cannot put Yemenite and Iraqi soldiers together.<sup>52</sup>”

In order to get a better understanding of the issue and the claims about the discrimination of new immigrants from Arab nations, General Haim Laskov, the Head of the Training Department at the general staff initiated some social research to be carried out from April to June, 1951. The research was conducted by Major Ezra Aharonson and was classified as top secret. The research included visiting and interviewing squad commanders, cooks, artillery soldiers and others.<sup>53</sup> The research came up with serious findings showing widespread discrimination against new immigrant soldiers from Arab nations. In his opinion, the cause of the problem did not lie only in the relationships between the soldiers themselves or between them and their commanders, but was rooted much deeper in selection processes and recruitment.<sup>54</sup>

According to Major Aharonson’s report, the new immigrants from Arab nations found it hard to find their place in society due to hundreds of years of culture and development that separated them from the native Israelis and the European immigrants. Therefore, there was no point in trying to solve the problem with administrative tools. Major Aharonson also opposed the idea of creating elite groups among immigrant soldiers by training them for command positions. That kind of artificial training would only increase prejudice and hatred from the soldiers under their command. In his opinion the solution to the problem could be found in a much better and deeper understanding of the eastern cultural social background, which would allow the IDF to prepare a training doctrine suitable for the characteristics of that specific group.<sup>55</sup>

The findings of Aharonson’s study, which were only partially implemented, provoked criticism in the Manpower Branch, which was expressed in a response letter in which the acting Head of the Manpower Branch claimed that Aharonson’s

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> See the research report by Major Aharonson, made for General Laskov about the discrimination against immigrants from Arab nations in the IDF. The research took place from the 15 of April to 30 June 1951. IDFA, file: 357-831-1953.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See a report entitled “The problems of the Mizrahim in the IDF – Remarks to the report of Major Aharonson”. Attached to a research proposal on the subject of Arab nation immigrants in the IDF. Signed by Major Daphna in the name of the Head of the labour branch at the general staff. Dated 6 March, 1952. IDFA, file: 115-702-1960. See also a story in *Haaretz* by Shai Hazkani from August 12, 2015. “The Silenced History of the IDF’s ‘Mizrahi Problem.’” [Hebrew].

conclusions were incorrect with regard to the roots and causes of the discrimination and the ways to solve the problems.<sup>56</sup> According to the Manpower Branch, the problem of the absorption of the new immigrants in the IDF was much wider and more complex. It was part of the nationwide problem of the absorption of so many immigrants, mostly coming from nations with vastly different cultural orientations. These immigrants had problems adjusting to local western society, resulting in many social problems such as a high crime rate, a high percentage of school dropouts and in numerous characteristics perceived as unacceptable or negative according to prevailing norms.<sup>57</sup>

## 8 THE MANPOWER CRISIS IN LIGHT OF THE OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The characteristics of the manpower crisis were widely researched, not only regarding the operational level, but also regarding the influence of the human composition of the IDF on operational activities (Morris 1996; Drori 2006). In the field of operations, the changes in the social composition of the IDF resulted in a poor operational level and in failures which started during the War. In his book, Avraham Adan described a situation in which new immigrant soldiers under his direct command refused to get up and charge, despite repeated calls made by him and the other platoon commanders (Adan 1984).

After the war, during the first half of the 1950s, operational failures were very common as the IDF attempted to defend the country from Arab infiltrators who tried to cross the borders for various reasons such as trying to reap harvests in their old villages, stealing, murdering and spying (Morris 1996; Drori 2006). These failures caused a sense of despair among the settlers, driving many civilians to leave their homes, and creating fear among political leaders that there would be a total abandonment of settlements (Drori 2006). As the situation along the frontiers remained harsh, the IDF adopted an offensive approach against the infiltrators in the form of reprisal activities that were meant to reduce the motivation of infiltrators and their dispatchers.

Until 1953, more than 30 reprisals were carried out against various targets. A large part of those reprisals ended without achieving their goals. Some of the reprisals were characterized by a lack of fighting spirit among the soldiers and a lack of dedication. Others were characterized by a lack of desire to attack the enemy, resulting in sometimes refusing to charge and sometimes in uncontrolled withdrawal.<sup>58</sup> There were well-known and researched operational failures that revealed the influence of the manpower crisis on the operational level. Two well-known examples were the failed reprisals against the Jordanian villages Idna and Falame (Morris 1996; Drori 2006). Another operational failure occurred during the fighting around Tel-Motila,

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

which took a toll of 41 dead and approximately 70 wounded. Research and evidence regarding the reprisals show that a main factor for the widespread operational failures was the low quality manpower. In many operations, commanders found themselves trying to motivate and move soldiers that refused to charge; in other cases commanders tried to prevent soldiers from fleeing the battlefield.

**Conclusion** In this article, I have pointed out the processes and problems that led to the emergence of a general and strategic crisis in the IDF during the War of Independence, and more intensely in the years to follow. In those years, the issue of manpower and its poor quality grew from an issue that needed to be handled as part of the operations and management of the manpower of the newborn army to a strategic issue that affected all army units and could jeopardize the army's ability to win the next war. At the heart of the crisis stood the drastic changes in the army's social composition, which turned the army overnight from a homogeneous army that enjoyed a high level of solidarity into a heterogeneous army in which problems and trends of disintegration occurred in most army units.

In a broader, worldwide vision, it seems that the problems that concerned the army during those years were not so different from the problems that concerned numerous post-colonial countries. Nevertheless, it seems that in three major factors the Israeli case can be seen as unique. Firstly, there was the tremendous degree of ethnic diversity, including groups of immigrants from dozens of cultures and nations. Secondly, there was the fact that the IDF had to organize itself while fighting a war of survival that continued at a low intensity of conflict in the years to follow. The last factor was the recognition of the high command and the political leadership that the solution to the problems had to rely on local resources only. Understanding the processes that led the IDF in its early years to an all-encompassing strategic manpower crisis can give us a better understanding of the ways new post-colonial armies are formed, and the problems involved in the process.

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