TEN

Intentional Ambiguity

Why Do Crises in Relationships between the Defense Minister and the Chief of Staff Reoccur Repeatedly?

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In the summer of 2010, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Ehud Barak informed Chief of Staff (CDS) Gabi Ashkenazi that they intended to declare a “P=30 command” on Iran. This command requires that the military be prepared to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities with only thirty days’ advance notice.

Backed by the heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet, the CDS refused, arguing that P=30 cannot be kept secret. Reservists must be called up within five days; they must be trained and the state must prepare supplies, including fuel, blood, and weapons. “There isn’t an intelligence organization in the world that wouldn’t pick up on it,” they warned. Security officials told the politicians that the mere beginning of the implementation of these steps would force Iran to respond, instigating a chain reaction that would inevitably lead to war—even though no clear decision to go to war had been taken.

Netanyahu and Barak also heard legal arguments on the matter. The CDS contended that only the Cabinet, and not the defense minister or even the prime minister, is authorized to make this decision. Therefore, he said, he was not obligated to implement these instructions (Caspi 2013: 377).

A much longer and more complex drama that had taken place just prior to this incident had already provided clear evidence to those who frequent the corridors of power, and to anyone in Israel who follows the
news, that the relationship between the CoS and his political superiors was not going smoothly. The relationship between Defense Minister Barak and CoS Gabi Ashkenazi had been unbelievably tense for two years; it reached fever pitch when, on August 6, 2010, Israeli television revealed the "Har' Paz Affair," a series of events that was reviewed by the State Comptroller, investigated by the military investigative police and the intelligence and investigative departments of the police and ultimately landed up in court.

"In the State of Israel, where the security establishment is an existential system and part of the national ethos, trust in the heads of the security establishment must not be undermined by bitter relationships that have deterred to the point of feuding and mistrust," is how the State Comptroller described the incident (State Comptroller Report 2012: 8). This description was considerably milder than others. The Defense Minister himself referred to the events as a "putch," "a putsch in the Defense Ministry" and a "colonels' revolt" (Aluf Benn, Haaretz, August 18, 2010; Ari Shavit, Haaretz, August 26, 2013, and October 18, 2012). On February 2, 2013, Barak appeared on TV to accuse the CoS of suffering from "severe professional and ethical problems." Subsequently, the minister defined the CoS' activities in a conversation with the State Comptroller as "a putsch ... illegal activity" and stated that "divisive and unilateral steps had been taken to undercut the defense minister" (State Comptroller Report, 2012: 244). The minister was most blunt in his deposition to the court, in which he accused the CoS of "acting against the political echelon through illegal and criminal behavior and attributed behavior "that violates the criminal code, Basic Law: The Military, norms of command and the spirit of the IDF" (Haaretz, August 14, 2013). Accusations hurled at Minister Barak by the CoS and his supporters were no less harsh. This was not an attempt at a putsch by the CoS against the Minister of Defense, they argued; it was a putsch by the Defense Minister against the government (Amir Oren, Haaretz, August 25, 2013).

Barak had attempted to appropriate the authority vested in the government, and, when he failed, he began to implement a "plan intended to spoil the CoS' standing ... to the point of ostracizing him or even removing that he would end his term battered and worn-out" (State Comptroller Report 2012: 244). Throughout this period of time, numerous examples of the minister's insulting behavior towards the CoS and the military itself filled the press.

While those events during the second decade of the twenty-first century were certainly dramatic, there have been numerous other examples of flaws in the relationships between the political and military echelons throughout Israel's political history. In some instances, the defense minister was on the verge of dismissing the CoS; but as I will show later, the prime minister prevented him from doing so. Indeed, the history of civil-military relations in Israel is replete with a variety of incidents described by scholars as "crisis-ridden." As Stuart Cohen wrote in 2006, "civil reaching an unprecedented state of crisis" (Cohen, 2006).

Yet when discussing a fundamental, recurring, and essentially structural issue, doesn't the term "crisis" lose its meaning? The question becomes even more compelling when the indifference shown by the Israeli political establishment is contrasted with responses in other democratic societies. In 2010, U.S. Commander-in-Chief President Barack Obama did not hesitate to dismiss his commander in Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal, after McChrystal showed disdain for his civilian superiors. In Britain, civil-military scholars continue to analyze the mystery by the British Army in Curragh, Ireland, in March 1914, which took place 100 years ago, and the other hand, countless words have been tossed around yet the situation persists.

For this reason, there are those who suggest that the word "crisis," should not be used at all. Yagil Levy, for example, describes these incidents as "oppositional actions on the part of CoS' against the defense minister or prime minister." He suggests that the events should be considered within a broad analytical framework that examines "acts of resistance" and the "space for resistance by the CoS against the political echelon," including the "active opposition" as well as "more restrained opposition." (Levy, 2013)

According to Levy's theoretical position, there is a space within which the military bargains with government. The nature of the relations between the military and its superior civil institutions enable the military to barter its subordinate position and compliance with the limitation of its autonomy in exchange for the material resources and legitimacy that it receives from the civilian echelon. When the military feels that these resources it needs, when its operational degrees of freedom are which it cannot succeed, when its organizational interests are at risk of being jeopardized and so forth—the military will express its opposition to political authority.

The political echelon has limited ability to restrain the military, since it needs the legitimacy that the military provides. The greater the political echelon's need for legitimacy—in a situation, for example, in which major decisions must be taken on issues that lack public consensus, such as if the, it would be hard for it to sign a peace agreement—the greater its loss of leverage vis-a-vis the military.

Despite Levy's convincing explanation, it is justifiable to refer to the two events that occurred at the beginning of this decade as "crises." While in most previous incidents, the friction between the military and political echelons revolved around policies, more recent cases have re
vealed bitter disputes over the rules of the game and confrontations about the very principles that guide political-military relations. Examples of the former cases are Lieutenant General Ya'alon’s rejection of the plan for disengagement from Gaza, CoS Molaz’s opposition to withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and CoS Barak’s criticism of the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Most tensions between the CoS and the Defense Minister have focused on opposition to policies, allocation of resources, or appointment of senior officers. Such incidents can be seen as a form of negotiation that is characteristic of a political-military partnership (Peri, 2006). It is reasonable to expect that the number of these incidents will grow if the military is subjected to prolonged, low-intensity warfare, during which boundaries between political and military spheres become blurred.

In contrast, the cases described above involving Ashkenazi and Gantz during the years 2010-2012, along with other previous crises, are of a very different nature. This was a fundamental dispute and even a power struggle over the very nature of the relationship between the military and the political superior—that is, over the guiding principles according to which the institutions operate, a conflict over the very principles of the political-military partnership.

Scholars, practitioners, civilian experts, and military officials all agree that military-political relations in Israel are problematic. “The relationships between the prime minister, defense minister, and CoS are dicey,” wrote Yehuda Ben-Meir. “At times, they lead to inappropriate conduct and power struggles” (Ben-Meir 2005: 107). For decades, experts and academics have continued to deal intermittently with the dilemma (Krennitzer and Bendror, 2006; Even and Gross, 2008) and they have suggested numerous ways to correct the state of affairs (Levy, 2011; Michael, 2008; Barak and Shefer, 2008).

Indeed, it would appear that this question has been so extensively researched that both the empirical and theoretical analyses have been exhausted. The means and measures to correct the malfunctioning system have also been discussed, ever since they were first raised by the Agranat Committee. In 1974, this Committee, which investigated the failures of the Yom Kippur War, determined that the division of authority and responsibilities among the prime minister, defense minister, and CoS were not sufficiently defined. However, the Commission merely recommended that such authorities and responsibilities be anchored in law and did not prescribe a detailed or clear formula by which they should be defined. In analyzing the relationships between the military and the political echelons, Stuart Cohen provided an important contribution to the discussion by emphasizing its institutional aspects and determined that the potential for deteriorating relations between the government and the military stems not from the IDF but rather from the civilian sector (Cohen, 2006). At the same time, it is important to complete the picture by focusing on the other side of the equation and also considering issues of agency (Feurer, 2008), as we will show below.

Following the publication of the conclusions of the Agranat Report, in 1976, the Knesset legislated Basic Law: The Military, which determines that the “military is subject to the authority of the government” and that “the minister in charge of the military on behalf of the government is the minister of defense.” That is all it defines. The new law solved neither the ambiguity in the definitions of the military echelon’s areas of responsibility and authority nor the ambiguity between the political and military echelons. Thus, it did not prevent subsequent conflicts.

And so, from time to time, the dilemma is brought up once again, whether by academics, experts, or practitioners (Krennitzer and Bendror, 2006; Even and Gross, 2008) or by commissions of inquiry appointed to analyze the causes for military failures and new crises (such as the Wino- grad Commission, appointed to investigate the 2006 Second Lebanon War). However, despite this preoccupation and the widespread recognition that yet another crisis is inevitable, and even though the outlines of a modification have been articulated and are well-known, the law has not been amended and the situation has not changed. As far back as 1998, Gobi Ben-Dor wrote, “This is an amazing phenomenon and points to the inability or lack of willingness to reform old patterns of decision-making regarding national security” (Ben-Dor, 1998). Neither then, nor after the two new incidents in the beginning of the current decade, has the central question addressed!

The question is not what needs amending but why—even though the way to correct the system is well-known—has no reform been really implemented? Who is benefiting from the status quo and what would be the lose if the law were to be changed? Why are most of the initiatives for change coming from the judicial system and academia rather than from the political establishment? And how is it that when there was just such a political initiative—such as was in 2003 when the Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee discussed Basic Law: The Military within the framework of deliberations regarding a “constitution by consensus”—that initiative did not come to fruition? (Protocol no. 112, December 5, 2003).

This issue—why nothing has been done to change a situation that all agree needs to be changed, circumstances that disrupt the proper functioning of the security system and cause repeated and recurrent crises between the political and military levels—has yet not been discussed by researchers who focus on civil-military relations and this is the topic of this paper. Unlike previous research, which dealt with the two echelons, I seek to focus on the two main protagonists, one in each echelon, who stand at the center of the relationship between the government and the military: the Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defense.
The Institutional Explanations for the Crisis: The Coalition Structure of the Government

Israel's constitutional structure is the primary reason for the crises between the CoE and the political echelon to which he is subordinate. The government is composed of a multi-party (usually between four and six) coalition. Therefore, the military has no commander in chief and the superior civil echelon to which the military is subject is composed of not just one person but an entire government acting as a collective entity. The principle of the supremacy of the elected civilian echelon stems back to the period of the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine), following disputes with Hashomer, the organization that preceded the Hagannah, and its two competitors, the Irgun and Lehi. As a result, from the very inception of the state, the Hagannah and its legal successor, the IDF, have accepted the principle of formal subordination of the military to the political echelon.

However, despite this general principle, the concrete significance of this subordination has remained ambiguous. Precisely to whom is the military subordinate? In the United States and France, where the president is also the military Commander in Chief, the head of the joint Chiefs of Staff answers to the president. In Germany's parliamentary system, the defense minister is the commander in chief of the military, but in an emergency that authority is vested in the hands of the prime minister. In most countries in which the military and national defense are accorded top priority, authority to supervise the military is consolidated in the hands of one person—usually the prime minister—even when the government is an executive, collegial, body. This is how it works in countries such as Britain, Greece, and Spain, for example.

This is not the case in Israel. The coalition structure leads to division within supervision over the military, while inter- and intra-party tensions, which are characteristic of all Israeli governments, impact on the government and the manner in which it relates to the military and its commander. In the first years following the establishment of the state, when well-revered David Ben-Gurion served as both prime minister and defense minister, the CoE knew exactly to whom he had to report. Once the roles were divided into separate portfolios in 1953, uncertainty crept in, constituting a source of friction and crisis, which Moshe Sharett, who became prime minister after David Ben-Gurion during this very stormy period, described in his diaries.

If the leader of the largest party in the government enjoys political power within both his party and the coalition, he will prefer to hold both portfolios, as did Ben-Gurion in the 1950s, Levi Eshkol in 1965, Menachem Begin for a short period after Ezer Weizmann left government in 1980, and Ehud Barak in 1999. But more frequently, the ruling party cannot harness enough power to allow its leader to claim both portfolios.

This is why Prime Minister Eshkol from MAPAI was forced to hand over the defense portfolio to Moshe Dayan from RAFT and why Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir from the Likud had to cede the position to Yitzhak Rabin from Labor when they formed the national unity coalition.

The same practice applies if the prime minister is forced to share political power with rivals within his own party; as was the case in the Likud between Begin and Weizmann and later Sharon and in the Labor Party between Rabin and Shimon Peres. In all of these cases, the prime minister did not willingly forfeit his control over the security establishment but was forced to do so by coalition or intra-party constraints.

In contrast to the political divisions in the top government echelons, the structure of the high command in the IDF is much more centralized. This unified structure places the CoE above the commanders of all military branches and holds him responsible for building up forces and preparing for war as well as overseeing operations in time of war. This gives the CoE vast organizational and political power, especially in comparison with chiefs of staff in other militaries.

Every time an investigative committee has been formed to examine the causes of a crisis between the military and political echelons, the committee has found that the dominant factors were the divisions within the civil authority that pervaded over the military. It is not the division itself that weakens civil monitoring of the military; that situation is caused by the divisions and disputes over delegation of authority and roles both within the political echelon—the government, prime minister, and defense minister—and in their relationship with the military. Basic Law: The Military provided explicit, de jure definition to the long-accepted de facto norm: The military is subject to the authority of the government. But it did not attend to the ambiguity within the political echelon or in the political-military relationship.

Indeed, not only did the new law not deal with the general status of the prime minister—it did not even mention his existence. The Agranat Commission thus gave expression to the generally accepted approach in Israeli constitutional law, according to which the entire government is the superior echelon of the executive branch and each minister is responsible for reporting to the entire government regarding the activities of his or her ministry.

However, these legal definitions ignore long-time practice, according to which the prime minister plays a significant role in the power triangle composed of the government, the prime minister, and the defense minister. In May 1967, only several days after Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was forced to leave the defense ministry, the first misunderstanding broke out between Eshkol and Dayan, who had specifically instructed the commander of the Northern Command to begin an offensive in the Golan Heights—for which he went over the head of the prime minister above him and bypassed the CoE who was subordinate to him.
In response, Minister Israel Galili drafted a document, dubbed "The Constitution," in which he specified the military operations for which the defense minister is obligated to obtain prior authorization from the prime minister (Peri 2009 [1982]). During the 1982 First Lebanon War, when Prime Minister Begin became aware that Defense Minister Sharon was misleading the government, he suspended Sharon’s authority to activate the air force. Even during routine periods, operations carried out beyond Israel’s borders require authorization from the prime minister.

Due to the political rivalry between them, when forming his government in 1974, Rabin did not want to assign the defense ministry portfolio to Peres. To his colleagues in the party leadership, Rabin argued that Peres had a tendency to leak state secrets on sensitive issues; the truth is that Rabin was concerned that Peres, whom Rabin had defeated in the primaries by only a small margin, would take advantage of his position in the security sphere to bolster his own political clout and undermine Rabin’s—which, in fact, he did.

When he was elected prime minister, Barak remembered these political intrigues, which is why he appointed himself defense minister. “I am embarking on a controversial peace process, so I want to be confident that I have full control over the military and that I am not dependent on a defense minister who can play independent political games against me,” he said in a personal interview in 2003.

The political culture of the government is even more troubling. Leaders in the other parties that make up the coalition also aspire to authoritative security roles and demand the opportunity to participate in security decisions. In the past, it was the Ministerial Committee on Security that demanded to be involved; subsequently, unofficial coalition groups emerged, such as “the Cabinet” — an inner group in Netanyahu’s government initially made up of seven and later eight ministers, including ministers who hold opposing positions on defense matters.

None of these officials has any interest in ensuring that the status and authority of the prime minister or the defense ministry are cemented into binding legislation or procedures. It is much more convenient for them to leave matters unclear, since then they can simultaneously accrue de facto operational power and avoid taking responsibility for any failures or oversights.

WHAT REALLY IS THE EXTENT OF THE MINISTER’S AUTHORITY?

The relationship between the two echelons is no less complicated, especially with regard to the defense minister’s relations with the CoS. According to Basic Law, the defense minister supervises the military on behalf of the government and the CoS is therefore subordinate to his authority.

But what does this subordination to authority actually mean? According to the commonly accepted interpretation of Basic Law, the defense minister does not have independent standing vis-à-vis the military and derives his authority from the government. The government operates the military and the defense minister serves as a form of conduit between them, representing the government to the military and often relaying messages to the government from the military—without hindering the government’s authority to take direct action vis-à-vis the military (Even and Gross, 2008: 13).

But is it really that simple? Ever since Basic Law: The Military was passed, there has been no consensus regarding the role of the defense minister and the exact nature of the CoS’s subordination to him. Different interpretations of the law attribute different degrees of involvement in military affairs to the defense minister. This has been a major cause of disputes between CoS and defense ministers throughout Israel’s history.

In November 1977 then military legal advisor (today’s Supreme Court judge) Hanan Melzer presented to the Ministry of Defense a legal opinion ([1977]1957—1958) regarding the three approaches to the term subordination, which correspond to three different levels of intervention: Absolute subordination, strategic subordination, and relative subordination. According to the concept of absolute subordination, the CoS is subordinate to the defense minister in all aspects of military operations. In both power and scope, the defense minister has the same authority over the CoS as the government. He is authorized to intervene and instruct the CoS in any matter he chooses, whether strategic, tactical, or operative. The government’s stand will carry more weight only in cases of substantive disagreement between the CoS and the defense minister.

Thus, according to this approach, the law does not define the CoS as “the supreme command level of the military,” but rather as “the supreme command level in the military.” In other words, within the military but not beyond the military. Still, this also means that the defense minister cannot issue orders to IDF soldiers without going through the CoS (Even and Gross 2008: 14).

Opponents of this approach claim that the absolute subordination of the CoS to the defense minister renders meaningless the legal provision that defines the CoS as the supreme command in the military. These critics believe that the correct approach is strategic subordination, which means that the CoS is subordinate to the defense minister solely with regard to issues of strategic and political significance. In other matters, the CoS is free to act according to his own discretion.

Advocates of this more constrained approach argue that without this understanding, the minister will become precisely what the Agranat Commission did not want him to be—an “uber-CoS.” This is especially important in Israel, where defense ministers are often former chiefs of
Intentional Ambiguity

staff and are naturally predisposed to interfere in the military's daily operations.

On the interface between the broad and limiting approaches is a middle ground that advocates relative subordination. According to this interpretation, the CoS is absolutely subordinate to the defense minister on strategic and political issues; with regard to tactical-operational issues, the minister can choose to authorize, reject or suggest alternatives but he may neither initiate actions nor impose his positions (Even and Gross, 2008).

Thus, for example, they may instruct the CoS to conduct a military mission to free hostages and he may ask to see and approve the operational plan. He may choose not to approve the plan that the IDF presents to him and ask for an alternative plan. However, he is not authorized to force any changes or other plan onto the military.

According to all three approaches, the government has the authority to intervene at all levels of the decisions taken by the CoS. (This authority can be transferred to a small group of ministers acting in the government's name and under its auspices; this group can be a cabinet, a ministerial committee, an ad hoc small team of ministers, and so forth.)

Throughout Israel's history, the military has generally operated according to the principles of relative subordination, even though this has never been explicitly articulated. The fluid, evasive, and vague arrangement has opened up a huge chasm, rife with misunderstandings and created conditions for bargaining and power struggles between the CoS and defense minister. The situation has worsened as a result of the nature of relationships between government and military in Israel, which I have defined as "a political-military partnership" (Peri 2006). There is a structural, inherent tension in this model, generated by the internal conflict between the in-principle acceptance of the superiority of the political echelon on the one hand and, on the other, the de facto, more equal relationships that reveal the actual balance of power (Bland, 1999).

CoS Meledcsa (Motta) Guv, for example, stated that he accepted the fact that the defense minister is responsible for policies and strategy and the CoS for military tactics. But he added that there are areas in which the two are blurred and the CoS must address the former as well (Guv, 1998: 329). But who defines such "in between" areas or situations? And on what basis? CoS Ehud Barak for instance pushed the envelope when, two weeks after he began working under Defense Minister Arens, he demanded control over strategic weapons (Amir Oren, Haaretz, August 8, 2013).

The ambiguity that stems from a situation of relative subordination is more convenient for both sides, especially during times of protracted conflict such as the Israeli-Arab struggle. If the decision to go to war, for example, requires governmental authorization, what is the status of a military operation that is less than a full war? Such ambiguity allows the

prime minister to function without governmental constraints (Nun, 2002), especially in situations of Low Intensity Warfare, when actions taken by the "strategic military corporal" (a low-ranking soldier) could have a significant impact on long-term policy. And, on the other hand, the most senior political levels do tend to intervene in operational details of minor operations.

POTENTIAL AREAS OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE MINISTER AND THE COS

Tensions between the CoS and prime minister over policy issues usually attract the most public attention. Such was the case, for example, when CoS Moshe objected to Prime Minister Barak's decision to withdraw the IDF from South Lebanon in 2000 and when CoS Ya'alon did not support the disengagement from Gaza under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2005. The public is less aware of disputes when they deal with operational matters, even though these occur frequently. They did several times during the Second Intifada, between CoS Mofaz and Minister Barak and later Sharon; or between Olmert, Ashkenazi, and Barak during Operation Cast Lead in 2008.

The history of relations between CoS and defense ministers is filled with disputes that stem from the tension between initial efforts by the CoS to establish their autonomy in the ongoing management of the military and, alternatively, from the ministers' efforts to expand their involvement in military affairs. Frequently, issues that deal with the extent of the CoS's authority to conduct direct contacts with officials outside the military without prior approval from the defense minister, and the extent to which the defense minister can meet military officers without going through the CoS.

An event that illustrates this gap between reality and law occurred in 2007, when Barak assumed his position as defense minister in the cabinet headed by Prime Minister Olmert. Barak informed Olmert that he would no longer allow the CoS to continue the long-standing tradition of meeting personally with the prime minister every two weeks. When Olmert objected, Barak simply forbade the CoS to attend the meetings. Olmert could not legally revoke the minister's decision and, in a typical political maneuver, he responded by forbidding the heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet (CSS), who report directly to the Prime Minister, to participate in the routine weekly meetings held in the defense minister's office. Barak understood Olmert's game and gave in (Caspi, 2013: 187).

Despite his attempts to prevent the CoS from meeting with other officials, Defense Minister Barak did not shy away from holding personal meetings with senior officers without the CoS's presence or knowledge and sometimes even behind his back. Furious, CoS Ashkenazi claimed
that these meetings made his own work less efficient and undercut his command authority. Even the fact that Barak was acting in contradiction to long-standing norms in the IDF, even since the Lavon Affair, was of no avail, even though it was precisely this kind of meeting between Defense Minister Pinchas Lavon and Military Intelligence Head Boyamin Gibi, without the knowledge or approval of Defense Minister Dayan, that ignited the affair in 1950. The Lavon Affair was Israel's largest political scandal and sparked the question: Who gave the order to proceed with the implementation of 'the unfortunate business.'

Involvement of the political echelon in appointment of senior officers has been another source of friction. Here, too, the question is not what is formally permitted according to the law, since the law clearly requires that appointments of senior officers must be approved by the defense minister. The issue is how deeply the minister is involved in the process and what is the balance of power between the two major players.

The ambiguity allows the minister, as well as the COs to negotiate, pressure (by suspending appointments, for example, manipulate, and maneuver to serve their interests. The dispute between Ashkenazi and Barak continued for over two years, leading the state comptroller to rebuke the minister for suspending appointments and blocking judicial actions (including his blockage of approval of supreme command orders, which weakened the military's functional capabilities).

The appointment of the deputy COs is especially problematic. The COs have an obvious interest in the appointment of an individual with whom he will be able to maintain a good working relationship. The minister has other considerations, including political interests. In order to encourage pluralistic thinking at the top level of the military, Ben-Gurion would appoint deputies who were not compatible with the COs. No less important for the political echelon, including the minister and the prime minister, is the opportunity to use this appointment to create a counterweight to the power of the COs by appointing a deputy who will serve as an additional focus of power. In the case of Barak and Ashkenazi, it is difficult not to view Barak's efforts to appoint Yoav Gallant as Ashkenazi's deputy as an illustration of this type of thinking.

Even though this ambiguous situation has been such a fertile breeding ground for disputes and crises ever since enactment of Basic Law: The Military in 1976, nothing has been done to define these relationships more clearly. This stems from the fact that the ambiguity has provided numerous advantages to all three key protagonists: the prime minister, the minister of defense, and the COs.

This is especially striking with regard to the role of the prime minister. How is it possible that Basic Law makes no mention of the prime minister, even though the significance of his role is self-evident? The prime minister is, after all, the supreme authority for security. He is in direct control of the various security organizations, including the SHABAK (CSIS) and the Mossad; he is the arbiter of disputes between the finance minister and defense minister regarding the defense budget; government regulations determine the operations that he must approve as well as other security-related responsibilities. Although the defense minister makes a recommendation for the appointment of the COs, the prime minister has ultimate veto power, since it is he who determines the cabinet agenda and presents the candidate to the government for approval.

So why haven't successive prime ministers over the generations made any attempt to anchor their authority in law? Because ambiguity provides them with greater maneuverability in the operation of the defense system. When, in 2008, Defense Minister Barak suggested that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert sign a kaddita (impeachment) agreement with Hamas, Olmert told him that his signature would require a cabinet decision. Barak tried to pressure him not to involve the cabinet, knowing that there would not be a majority for the signature, and added—truthfully or not—‘Rabin used to make such decisions behind the cabinet’s back...’ let the ministers find out for themselves after it happens’ (Caspi, 2013:695).

On the other hand, it is expedient for the prime minister to have an individual who is directly responsible to him and acts as a channel to the military. This is especially so when the prime minister lacks professional authority and must rely on the status of the defense minister for legitimacy in the eyes of senior military officers. Such was the state of affairs during Netanyahus’s first term and even more so in his second. At times, the prime minister prefers that a mediator conduct negotiations with the military—particularly when difficult decisions that could exact a high political price and especially when issues of failure or lapse of judgment are involved. The prime minister can then shirk responsibility by claiming that the fault lies elsewhere—with the defense minister.

In fact, ambiguous relations between the COs and the defense minister are also very convenient for the prime minister and serve to further his political interests. Given the ambiguity, if the COs and the defense minister do not agree, they must turn to the prime minister to make a decision. The power of the prime minister to influence the appointment of the COs enables him to support a candidate who is closer to him than to the defense minister; in this manner, he is able to reduce the minister's control while enhancing his own position.

This, for example, is why Eshkol preferred to appoint his crony, Haim Bar-Lev, as COs, despite opposition by Defense Minister Dayan, who preferred his own crony, Weizman. Golda Meir did the same when she appointed her crony, David Elazar, over the candidate proposed by Dayan.

However, while it may seem that the defense minister would prefer absolute responsibility, which would clarify and buttress his position, in reality, this is not the case. The ambiguous responsibility serves the defense minister’s political interests, too. When a minister’s power and au-
thority rest on the professional esteem in which he is held, he need not worry about competition from the prime minister or the CoS. This was the position enjoyed by Dayan, Rabin, Sharon, and Barak, all of whom were popularly known as "Mr. Security." Barak was not even hesitant to adopt a policy in opposition to the position of Prime Minister Olmert (for example, his position towards Hamas in Gaza in 2008 (Caspi, 2013: 409). This state of ambiguity also permits the minister, whether or not he is "Mr. Security," to evade responsibility when it serves him. In his defense, he need only plead that his authority is not absolute and that the power he wields is very limited. Moshe Dayan employed this tactic as his key explanation in his efforts to spare himself from a devastating ruling at the hands of the Agranat Commission for his part in the debacle of the Yom Kippur War. I merely provided the CoS with "ministerial advice," Dayan said at the time. Since then, "ministerial advice" has become a derogatory term in Israeli political culture, associated with politicians' evasion of responsibility.

The question of the duration of the CoS' term of service offers an excellent example of the advantage that the ambiguity provides for the defense minister. Customarily, the CoS is appointed for three years and then his term is extended for one more year. But in the cases of Ya'alon in 2005 and Ashkenazi in 2011, the appointment was not extended; this was regarded as a de-facto dismissal and discharge, with clearly negative connotations.

As a result of this problematic situation, the possibility of fixing the duration of service at four years was raised, and received the support of the Comptroller in his report in 2013. This proposal however was not adopted and for obvious reasons: Knowing that the fourth year is not guaranteed, every CoS must attempt to please his political bosses if he wants to be granted that extra time. Could any other mechanism of control be more effective?

Incidentally, precisely for these reasons, Defense Minister Barak prevented articulation of a clear legal definition of the status of the Army Radio Station and preferred to maintain the temporary regulations under which it operates. Their concern that the station might be closed down was the most effective and least costly way for the minister to keep critical journalists in check.

The CoS also benefits from the ambiguous status of his superior minister. In situations in which the Minister does not enjoy professional status, it is easier for the CoS to increase his maneuverability. This is what happened to Minister Ben Eliezer with CoS Moshe Ya'alon and to Minister Perez with CoS Elazar. He can convey his objections to the defense minister's decisions to the prime minister, thereby enhancing his own status and de facto equating his position with that of the defense minister. Political proximity to the prime minister, if it exists, will indeed raise the CoS' status relative to the minister's; this is why ministers have frequently objected to these meetings unless they take place with their knowledge, approval and, most likely, participation. As noted, this was part of the relationship between Barak and Olmert.

AMBIGUITY AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF POLITICAL CULTURE

Ambiguity is a prominent feature of Israeli political and organizational culture. Israeli politicians have always preferred flexibility and vague procedures over clear and binding definitions, which might constrain them. In Israel, ambiguity serves as a " lubricant" for the political system (Friedberg and Sharan, 1997). The ease with which basic laws have been frequently and easily changed to allow for political solutions (such as an increase in the number of deputy prime ministers or cabinet ministers determined by law and an extension of the legal term of service or age of a state functionary) are only a few such examples.

The bulk of inter-party skirmishes focus on the rules of the game rather than on substantive issues. In 2008, Labor Party leader Barak instructed Parliamentary faction chairman MK Itzik Shilo to recommend that the President task Barak with forming the coalition. Kabel responded in surprise, "You know this is legally impossible since you are not a Knesset member." To which Barak responded, "Don't worry, just recommend me. We'll change the law." (Caspi, 2013: 412).

The few attempts that have been made to establish more institutionalized, formal frameworks in the security sphere have not been successful. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Minister of Justice Yaakov Shapira complained about the unconstitutional situation that ensued when Haim Bar-Lev, a member of the Cabinet that has authority over the military, simultaneously served as Commander of the Southern Front and was thus subordinate to the CoS, who reports to the Cabinet. Prime Minister Meir responded that times of emergency do not allow for splitting hairs over formalistic issues. Although a close political ally and friend of Meir's, Shapira resigned from the government.

Tensions between the CoS and the defense minister are expressions of other Israeli cultural attributes, which are not exclusive to the military. The characteristic management style that defines the relationship between the chairman of the board of directors of large organizations, especially public organizations, and their CEOs is another example. There is a distinction to be made between the delegation of maximum authority on the part of the chairman and micromanagement. Public life in Israel is filled with incidents of confrontations between a chairman who is trying to manage the daily life of an organization and his CEO, who zealously guards his freedom or tries to push the chairman away. The history of the Israel Broadcasting Authority is a prime example of such recurrent conflicts.
In analyzing Israeli strategic culture, Dimitri Adamsky has determined that "egalitarian social norms set by the founders of the State have created extreme patterns of informal behavior and lack of attention to hierarchical norms. This is the result of the fact that Israel is a society with 'small power gaps,' that is, extremely narrow distances in superior-subordinate relationships" (Adamsky 2012, 175). One aspect of this characteristic is that it encourages a plethora of ideas that originate in the lower echelons and grow upwards through informal organizational shortcuts; the other aspect is the ambiguity in relationships between managerial levels.

Resistance to accepting authority is another friction-causing organizational pattern characteristic of Israel's culture. Preference for the informal lack of attention to bureaucratic rules and regulations; excess consideration given to the "chemistry" between individuals rather than to formal, fixed procedures; preference for flexibility and improvisation at the expense of binding formal work processes—all these create potential for disputes within the hierarchy. In this sense, the military is no different from civil organizations.

Although jurists and academics, as well as military officers and politicians, have argued ever since its passage that the ambiguity inherent in Basic Law: The Military is not conducive to healthy governance, the situation suits the general pattern of behavior in the Israeli public sphere and the top political and defense echelons have had no real interest in changing the law. They have preferred to leave the state of affairs as is—until the next crisis erupts.

Indeed, this is what happened during the 2006 War in Lebanon. The Winograd Commission was appointed as a response to the failed war and no one was surprised when its first report, published in January 2008, included recommendations for improvement in decision-making processes within the political echelon. On page 378 the Commission reiterated what is by now a well-known observation: "The present situation must be corrected by, inter alia, clarification of the authority and responsibility of the political echelon and the security echelon and the interface between them."

However, once again, nothing has happened. Several of the Commission's recommendations were actually implemented and a few heads did indeed roll, but with regard to the division of authority between the CoS and his minister and regulation of the relationship between and within the military and the political echelon, nothing has changed.

THE BARAK-ASHKENAZI CONFRONTATION

Thus, by the end of the first decade of this century, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the national security establishment became embroiled in a crisis worse than any of the previous crises—worse, indeed, than the revolt of the generals during the War of Independence and then the Lavon Affair, the Yom Kippur War and the Shin Bet's Bus 300 episode.

The relationship between the Minister and his staff and the CoS and his staff deteriorated until it became "bitter and charged," as the Comptroller (under)stated in a report that exemplifies the extent to which the Minister of Defense and the CoS worked against each other, causing damage to the entire defense establishment over a period of two years.

The "Harpaz Affair" relates to a false document that revealed the CoS and his supporters' ostensible plan to prevent the promotion of General Yoav Gallant, the candidate chosen by Minister Barak, to the position of CoS. The exposure of the alleged document revealed that Lt. Colonel (ret.) Boaz Harpaz, who was close to the CoS, had, over a period of time, collected information that was meant to cause damage to the Defense Minister and those close to him. However, it became clear that the appointment of the CoS was merely one in a series of severe disruptions in the CoS and the minister's operating patterns and, indeed, in the operating patterns of the entire military and defense establishments. At the same time, it also became evident that the CoS' improper behavior was a response to the minister's ongoing undercutting of his position, undermining of his authority and sabotaging of his ability to lead the IDF.

To cite just a few examples of this behavior: appointing of senior military officers (including the deputy CoS and the IDF spokesman, among others) against the will and even without the knowledge of the CoS; delaying for months the appointment of hundreds of other senior officers; refusing to approve High Command Instructions that regulate the mission and function of several of the directorates in the general staff; forbidding the CoS to meet with civilian officials, in defiance of custom; forbidding various civilians from giving lectures to the military, despite approval by the CoS and his staff; and—and for the CoS, this was the cause bell—initiating a round of interviews of candidates for the position of CoS, many months before it was necessary, in order to turn the incumbent CoS into a lame duck. The Comptroller detailed this behavior in his report and did not hesitate to condemn the minister's behavior.

Throughout this period, senior officers were involved on both sides, white aiding to the minister and the CoS attempted to incite their bosses. The case of the IDF Spokesman, Brigadier-General Avi Benyahu, is particularly striking, because he has been accused of working behind the scenes, according to the testimony given in court by officers and journalists (Maarit, August 19, 2013). But there were numerous other incidents that pointed to the crisis—or perhaps pathological—nature of the situation that prevailed at the highest levels of the military at that time.

Indeed, throughout that period, the two camps, the officers of the Minister and the officers of the CoS, systematically leaked information, in-
cluding highly sensitive information, in their fight over public opinion; they trounced over who would put out statements to the press; they published photographs intended to cause damage of the CoS, the minister, or their supporters; they forbade officers from this camp or the other to participate in meetings; they did not regularly update senior officers regarding conclusions and ongoing decisions that directly impacted on their areas of responsibility. It is hardly surprising that even discussions over operational activities, including during the Cast Lead Operation in Gaza, turned into an arena for disagreements between Prime Minister Olmert, Minister Barak and CoS Ashkenazi, each of them motivated by political and personal interests; no wonder that the situation has been described as “the worst crisis of leadership in the history of the IDF” (Margalit and Bergman, 2011).

All this was clearly an attempt on the part of the Defense Minister to undermine the status of the CoS and his ability to function, so that he would quit the IDF. The CoS, for his part, defended himself against the minister by undermining his status and authority and pushing him out of decision-making in the IDF. Ashkenazi attempted to sabotage the minister’s plans for the appointment of the next CoS, and, ultimately, tried to change Basic Law: The Military in order to clip the minister’s authority, thus making the CoS directly subordinate to the government.

For over two years, the Israeli media dealt with the drama known as the Har Paz Affair. Most of the pages of the Comptroller’s report also dealt with the different ways in which the Minister and the CoS tried to sabotage each other. Only a modest part of the report, however, attends to a story that the news media also almost ignored, even though, in principle, it is much more significant than the other stages and components of the affair. I am referring to the Instructions to the High Command: the General Staff. More than anything else, this incident reveals the extent of the structural crisis in the relations between the military and political echelons in Israel.

In the face of the fierce enmity between them and the minister’s ongoing attempts to constrain his power and position, Ashkenazi tried to improve his position by redefining the relationship between the CoS and the Minister. Since the legislative branch, the Knesset, had refused to deal with this, the CoS decided to operate in the arena in which he could—through an amendment to the section of the “High Command Instructions,” according to which military law is composed of the “general Instructions issued by the CoS and approved by the defense minister, intended to determine the principles related to the military’s organization and administration, regime and discipline therein and to ensure its proper operation.”

Early in 2008, the CoS ordered the IDF’s Planning Directorate to prepare the new Instructions; the project took nearly two years to complete. In October 2009, the new order was approved by the CoS and in Nove-
"The facts show that for a long period of time, the CoS has detached himself from the defense minister, changed Basic Law: The Military, and for all practical purposes, has assumed himself as the commander in chief of the military who has no need for a defense minister. These actions have no place in a democracy."

The contention that the CoS is directly subordinate to the government as a whole, Koren argued, "undermines the authority of the defense minister, while eliminating the link between the defense minister and the IDF. The CoS is upgrading his status from the head of the general staff to the commander of the military, completely removing the defense minister from the equation." Furthermore, Koren attacked the constitutional change that the CoS had made to the military because these issues are the province of the legislative branch. "This means that the High Command Instructions amend Basic Law: The Military and create a situation in which the IDF is ostensibly above the law and does not need the Knesset in order to change legislation." (Caspi, 2013:196)

As can be expected, the CoS' position was diametrically opposed. In his testimony before the Comptroller and in duels that his cronies waged for him in the media, they explained that the amendment to the Instructions was made in order to improve the military's functioning and make it more efficient, as part of the lessons that the IDF had drawn from the Second Lebanon War. As evidence, they emphasized that the amended Instructions had been forwarded to Minister's offices and that Barak had fully approved them. Therefore, it was the Minister who had acted inappropriately, first by rescinding his approval and then when he issued instructions to cancel a legal order. Furthermore, they contended, he had done these things as part of the war he had declared on the CoS and with the intent of diminishing his professional position, making it difficult for him to operate the IDF properly, and constraining his ability to function within and outside of the military.

Impartial interpretation, such as in that provided by State Comptroller's report, reveals the full picture. The original wording, which had excluded the defense minister from the High Command Instructions, clearly went too far in its interpretation of Basic Law. But wasn't that a form of retaliation by the CoS? After all, he felt severely constrained by the defense minister, who, he believed, was damaging his ability to run the military in an effort for force him out as soon as possible.

Barak's motivation is related to the main theme of this paper regarding the reasons for the ambiguity in the relationship between the political and military echelons: the nature of the Israeli political game. As his public support waned, Barak felt that the public credited popular CoS Ashkenazi with rehabilitating the military after the Second War in Lebanon, that Ashkenazi had taken even greater political strides following Operation Cast Lead in Gaza and that these gains were coming to Ashkenazi at Barak's expense. Thus, this was a head-to-head battle over the

"Mr. Security" title, a zero-sum game in which the success of one side depended on the defeat of the other—even if one of the sides was Israel's senior uniformed military officer, on one hand, or minister, on the other.

Barak assumed that Ashkenazi intended to convert his public support into political capital and that he would join the Labor Party after retiring from the military to position himself as an alternative to Barak, whose leadership was waning. Barak had to block the ambitious officer before the situation got out of hand. The first step was to tarnish his status by cutting his period of service short and forcing him to leave the military "battered and worn out." Doesn't this sound familiar? As Prime Minister, Netanyahu used the same rationale in his relationship with popular CoS Amnon Lipkin-Shahak.

In the summer of 2013, the Attorney General instructed the police to begin a criminal investigation of this episode—which guarantees that we will be dealing with it for a long time. In the meanwhile, both Basic Law: The Military and the Instructions remain unchanged—as does the ambiguity.

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF

The position of the CoS of the military is inherently political. Especially in Israel, where political-military partnership exists, the military is engaged in a protracted low-intensity conflict and it is deeply involved in the country's central political dilemma—the future of the Occupied Territories and relationships with the Palestinians.

For this reason, officers with a political orientation, from Moshe Dayan to Moshe Dayan to Ehud Barak, are attracted to the position of CoS. The intense involvement in national politics has also sucked some senior officers into the political arena, even if they initially had no plans to enter political life after retirement. This is what happened to some CoS' who had not intended to embark on a military career, such as Lipkin-Shahak, and to those who had been appointed to the position precisely because they were initially considered to be apolitical, such as Rafael Eitan and Shaul Mofaz. Indeed, thirteen out of nineteen IDF CoS became full-fledged politicians after their discharge.

Thus, compatibility or conflict between the political interests of the defense minister and the CoS is one of the most crucial factors in the quality of their relationship. In the second instance, as with the situation between Barak and Ashkenazi, the conflict creates fertile ground for a severely confrontational relationship, such as those between Barak and Ashkenazi. In contrast, as CoS, Barak's political aspirations did not threaten Defense Minister Rabin and their political proximity encouraged the veteran to groom his then-young disciple.
These principles also apply to the relationship between the prime minister and the CoS if the prime minister is more dominant than his defense minister. In his first term, Prime Minister Netanyahu felt alienated from the senior IDF brass, which he viewed as Labor Party collaborators. He was especially concerned, without justification, that his popular CoS, Lipkin-Shahak, would compete against him in the political arena. Therefore, Netanyahu employed various tactics to show his lack of appreciation, even his disdain of his popular CoS, such as refusing to schedule regular joint work meetings. As a result, Lipkin-Shahak, who initially had no political aspirations, decided to jump into the political water in order, he declared, to put an end to the rule of Netanyahu, whom he regards as a danger to Israel. The relationship between Sharon and Ya’alon had some similar characteristics.

In Israel, the military is a highly valuable resource for political capital, status and prestige. As a result, the battle between political players for involvement in defense matters is particularly fierce—it’s a struggle to make political gains out of military achievements and avoid blame for military failures. This battle determines political fates (see the success stories of Dayan after the 1967 Sinai campaign and Rabin after the 1973 Sixth Day War, in contrast to Sharon’s failures following the First Lebanon War in 1982 and Dan Halutz’s failures following the Second Lebanon War in 2006). Control over the field inevitably becomes a source of tension between the CoS, who may be a potential politician, and the defense minister, to whom the CoS is currently subordinate.

When selecting the CoS, both prime minister and defense minister face diverse considerations, including professional assessments regarding the officer’s suitability for the supreme commanding level in the IDF, political considerations regarding the candidate’s ability to fulfill the political-security goals of the civilian echelon; as well as political considerations regarding the extent to which the CoS will be loyal and accept the minister’s authority despite the enormous political power vested in him. In the first years after the establishment of the state, a CoS’ loyalty was measured by his affiliation with the ruling political party. It would be a mistake to assume that considerations of loyalty have disappeared in the early twenty-first century, despite the demise of Israel’s political parties. Politics have changed and now they are much more personal.

Knowing that CoS Ya’alon objected to disengagement from the Gaza Strip led Defense Minister Mordechai to instigate Ya’alon’s dismissal and to replace him with Halutz, who was regarded as more acceptable and close to Sharon’s political inner circle, popularly known as the “forum on the ranch,” the strong political kernel of Sharon’s camp. Ya’alon has acknowledged that he was offered to join this exclusive group but preferred to pay a steep personal price because he believed that becoming part of the “forum” would run counter to his professional principles as CoS (Ya’alon, 2008).

This combination of close relationships and personal loyalty on the one hand, together with identification with the political-strategic position on the other, led Barak to prefer General Yossi Gallant as the replacement for CoS over other candidates supported by Ashkenazi. Barak wanted someone who would execute without reservation an attack on Iran’s nuclear facilities. It was doubtful that the candidates supported by Ashkenazi would adopt this policy.

It is clear why the appointment of the CoS is so significant that the procedure for the appointment is spelled out in Basic Law: The Military Section (Q) determines that “the CoS shall be appointed by the government in accordance with the minister of defense’s recommendation.” Yet once again we see that the definition is ambiguous. The law does not even mention the prime minister, despite his definitive influence over the procedure. After all, in the final analysis, it is the prime minister who will bring, or will decide not to bring, the appointment to the cabinet for approval and thus he can force his opinion on the minister.

According to tradition, although the outgoing CoS has no formal standing in the defense minister’s decision, great weight is given to his opinion. Disagreement between the CoS and the minister may engage the two in a protracted struggle that, at times, can have a negative effect on the entire military system. This is what happened when Ashkenazi objected to Barak’s attempt to appoint Yossi Gallant as his successor, and this was the basis of the Har Paz Affair.

The appointment of the deputy CoS creates a similar dynamic. Harmonious relations between the minister and the CoS will facilitate the process, but the relationship can also become a source of friction, especially when the defense minister or prime minister wants to appoint a deputy who is not close to the CoS. As noted, Ben-Gurion used to justify doing this with the ostensible need to maintain pluralism at the highest levels of the IDF, but in many cases this was merely a cover for something else—an attempt by a minister or the prime minister to create a counter-weight to power wielded by the CoS. That is what Barak was trying to do when he attempted to appoint Gallant as Ashkenazi’s deputy CoS in 2006; one year later, he tried to have him appointed as CoS.

As political party affiliation has become less important as a test of compatibility between the minister and the CoS, a new form of affiliation has become dominant. This new form is based on membership in the bvy “chief” or “guild”—such as the armored corps, the Golani infantry brigade, the paratroopers, and even service in smaller elite units, such as the Sayeret Matkal commando unit. In many cases, these relationships have been forged over many years of collaboration and personal bonds between senior and more junior officers (such as the bonds between Lipkin-Shahak and Barak or between Ya’alon and Moshe). If the CoS and his superior minister do not have such a bond, or if they belong to different
or rival factions in the military, the chances of friction between them increase significantly.

CONCLUSION: THE NATURE OF POLITICAL-MILITARY INTERDEPENDENCE

Since it is very difficult to foresee any change in the structure of Israel’s coalitions or in its political culture, in which the government provides a fertile arena for battles between the coalition partners, there is little reason to expect any reform in the relationships between the military and the political echelons. The division of authority within the political sphere—government, prime minister, and defense minister—will persist. The ambiguous definitions regarding the military’s relationship with the government will also remain unchanged. For these reasons, there will not be any changes in the relationship between the Minister of Defense and the COF, as described in the analysis above. The interests of the Defense Minister and the COF will continue to maintain their ambiguous relationship, in power plays that can readily deteriorate to a “balance of terror.” This balance is rooted in the fact that the government needs legitimacy from those in uniform. As former deputy COF and deputy defense minister Matan Vilnai once put it: “The political echelon is dependent on the military echelon. It cannot move without the military, it needs it for public legitimacy and for coping with challenges in the field” (Michael, 2008: 138).

On the other hand, senior officers are subject to the good graces of the politicians, on whom they depend for their professional advancement. As former minister Yossi Sarid observed, “The political echelon has one clear point of strength that gives it an advantage over the military echelon and provides leverage for action. The political echelon appoints senior officers, promotes them and can also freeze or damage their careers. Since officers also want to get ahead in life, the military echelon relies on the good will of the political echelon and tries not to make it angry. After all who wants an officer who is a trouble-maker?” (Sarid 2005: 136).

An abundance of recurring recommendations by various investigative committees, private bills, academic publications and editorials in the media have all called for reforming the present system. They spell out the advantages for both the military and government with regard to decision-making processes and Israel’s overall security policies. But these are no match for the political interests of the major protagonists. This is why there has never been any fundamental difference between the positions of the Labor, Likud, and Kadima parties that have led Israel’s coalitions at different times in history.

For this same reason, other recommendations by various investigative committees have never been implemented, especially those that have called for the establishment of an effective National Security Council. The commonly found explanation is that the IDF has impeded numerous efforts to establish such a council because it has not been willing to give up its monopoly over defense issues. This argument is true—but only in part. No less significant is the nature of Israel’s coalition government. No prime minister (or defense minister) would be prepared to hand over any of his power to a Security Council.

Israel’s top political hierarchy’s modus operandi involves working with a small staff rather than with a bureaucratic, heterogeneous, pluralistic body that is relatively exposed to external political influences. Trust has always been considered much more significant than style as described by managerial experts. The lack of trust that characterizes the Israeli politician leads him or her to prefer working with a small and loyal group “that won’t cause trouble and will do what I want and need in the best way possible,” as COF (Res) Uzi Dayan, then head of the National Security Council, bitterly observed (Michael, 2008: 149). Extensive evidence about actions taken by Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Itzhak Rabin, and Benjamin Netanyahu all illustrate this point.

And yet, despite the tension, confrontations and even crises, no COF has ever been dismissed. In several instances, the defense minister requested that he be sacked but the prime minister did not agree. In 1972, Defense Minister Ezer Weizmann asked Prime Minister Begin to fire COF Guri, who tried to torpedo the peace efforts with Egypt. Begin refused. Twice Minister Ben Ezer had wanted to dismiss COF Mofaz after Mofaz published positions contradicting government policy. Here, too, the prime minister smoothed things over. In Levy’s terms, the resources of legitimacy with which the military establishment provides the prime minister are far too precious (Levy, 2013) and he would be loath to be seen by the public as a politician who caused damage to the military and its senior commanders.

Ultimately, Israeli history demonstrates that even when the COF opposed a significant political-security decision taken by the prime minister and his defense minister, they nevertheless managed to achieve what they wanted. This is what happened when Ben-Gurion decided to retreat from the Suez in 1957 despite COF Guri’s opposition, and when Rabin signed the Oslo Accords despite Barak’s objections. It also happened in 2000, when Barak ordered a withdrawal from south Lebanon despite Mofaz’s opposition and when Sharon pulled Israel out of the Gaza Strip in 2005 over the objections of COF Ya’alon.

On a few occasions, strong prime ministers and defense ministers knew how to ignore the COF and kept him out of the loop of the political process. Begin and Weizmann did not inform COF Guri about the early arrangements for President Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem; Rabin kept Barak in the dark about the early negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993; Ya’alon was unaware of Sharon’s Gaza disengagement
International Ambiguity

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plan until it had already been formulated, discussed and gained the support of the U.S. government.

However, it is important to keep in mind that these dramatic cases have been few and far between. More commonly, the CoS does not operate contrary to his political superiors policies. Yet on the other hand, the prime minister and defense minister have seldom taken decisions that conflict with the military's positions. The military usually finds sophisticated ways to influence the government's policies or intervene at the decision-making stage or by employing what Peter Feaver has termed "foot dragging" (2003) when the decisions are supposed to be implemented.

The manner in which CoS Mofaz forced the IDF's response onto the government during the Second Intifada is one example. But Mofaz might have smiled when he recalled — if he recalled — that Yigal Alon (Southern Commander during the War of Independence) and his troops had cleverly circumvented Ben-Gurion's instructions and reached the sea shore of Elat sixty-two years earlier, or the manner in which IDF forces reached the Suez Canal without any approval by the political echelon during the Six Days War in 1967.

What happened in the second decade of the twenty-first century during the term held by Defense Minister Ehud Barak that led to two consecutive crises with two CoSs? Feaver's explanation is relevant here: "Agency theory would predict that intrusive monitoring by the civilian leadership combined with shirking on the part of the military—evading the principal's wishes and carry out actions that further the military's own interest—would result in the highest levels of civil-military conflict" (Feaver, 2003).

The ambiguity in the relationships between the Minister and the CoS who are subordinate to him, stems both from constitutional structure and from political culture, which create a background that is ripe for conflict. Barak was a minister who made every effort to intervene intensively in the IDF, because his political stature was facing a critical historical test. And he was facing a CoS (Ashkenazi) who opposed the minister's aggressive policies towards Iran and was very aware of the fact that should the military be asked by the government to act—the responsibility for the fate of the military action would, in the final analysis, fall on his shoulders, as it had in the past. The stakes on both sides were so high that both sides were willing to create an escalation that led to the crisis. The crisis blew over because both of them vacated the arena. But the conditions for the next crisis remain.

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ELEVEN
Swords, Scrolls, and Civilization of the Military

Stuart Cohen and His Work in Context

Elishava Rosman-Stollman and Roni (Aharon) Kampsinsky

In his past forty years of scholarship, Stuart Cohen has branched out into many fields of research. From British foreign policy in Mesopotamia to the "Masqueraders" (mis'arim) in Israel, from the formal aspects of peace conferences and the Jewish polity, to the halakhic (religious law) dilemmas of religious (Jewish) soldiers in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces). Throughout, his work is methodical and comprehensive, while also always innovative and thought-provoking. Most importantly in the context of this volume, Cohen has made substantial contributions to the field of civil-military relations in Israel and is widely regarded as one of the founding fathers of the field of religio-military relations in the IDF.

This chapter seeks to take a new look at Cohen's work and asks two questions: where do we see Cohen's original contributions to the field of civil-military relations in Israel, the field he has done most of his work in; and might we identify a theme throughout his scholarship beyond this specific contribution. In order to answer these questions, we begin with a general survey of Cohen's work and focus on its most prominent aspects. Next, we attempt to place his scholarship in a broader context of the existing scholarship and highlight his contributions to it. Finally, we note recurring themes in his scholarship that are not usually noted when reading and discussing his work.