

An Assessment of the Early Israel Defense Force as Typical of a Post-colonial Military

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Abstract

The paper evaluates to what extent the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) can be considered a typical post-colonial army, contextualizing its evolution in the post-colonial era since 1948 and scrutinizing its civil–military relations. Most recent studies view the IDF as an emerging Western military shaped by the post-war challenges arising after the War of Independence period. Through a comparative analysis of the key characteristics and issues typical of post-colonial armies, the paper demonstrates that the IDF was, in its early stages, a typical post-colonial military, facing many of the same issues with which other post-colonial militaries had to cope at their inception. These issues stemmed primarily from the withdrawal of colonial rule, which left behind stable military infrastructures that nonetheless presented wide-ranging organizational challenges.

Keywords: Israel, civil–military relations, military education, military recruitment and retention, military leadership

Introduction

Many new military institutions have been created as a result of the establishment of new post-colonial states in the 20th and 21st centuries. Such post-colonial militaries often have been formed hastily, sometimes in periods immediately preceding, or even during, times of war, and have been established mostly in countries lacking adequate military infrastructures. This paper addresses the following key question: Can the early development of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) be characterized as that of a typical post-colonial military, or was the IDF, from its inception, a Western military organization that simply faced specific challenges during its early stages? Focusing on a number of the problems typically faced by post-colonial militaries, as identified in numerous studies of the subject, this study examines whether these problems were also factors in the creation of the IDF.

The paper considers several recently published studies on post-colonial militaries (e.g., Barany, 2014; Ejiogu, 2007) and other studies that discuss post-colonial militaries without defining them as such. There is wide-ranging scholarly discourse on the militaries of developing countries, most of which are post-colonial states that have experienced similar challenges following the withdrawal of colonial rule (see Vajpeyi, 2014). This paper considers the five main challenges typically faced when establishing post-colonial militaries: the difficulty of enforcing politicians' authority over the military; balancing the aspiration for independence against immediate needs; the lack of suitable command and professional personnel; the challenges of military intervention; and the issues of ethnic diversity in post-colonial military forces. Examining these challenges in relation to the IDF will enable us to assess whether it is indeed a post-colonial military force. Scholars have hitherto tended to view the early development of the IDF as affected primarily by post-War of Independence difficulties and the waves of immigration that rapidly transformed Israel into a multi-ethnic country (Levy, 1993, 2003). While these studies often make very valid points, they do not present the full picture.

The paper adopts a definition of post-colonialism that is broader than that typically found in critical discourse (e.g., Fanon, 1963, 1967), and uses the term both to delineate the chronological period in which countries were freed from colonial rule and to highlight

common challenges experienced in establishing new military institutions in post-colonial countries. Defining these countries in the context of the challenges they experienced as early post-colonial states facilitates comparisons between the Israeli experience and that of other countries, including those dissimilar to Israel in many ways. This allows us to compare diverse types of states (from republics to monarchies, democracies to autocracies, and so on), as well as both developing and underdeveloped nations across Asia, Africa, South America, and elsewhere within the framework of post-colonialism. It incorporates countries with very low levels of development (such as Ghana and Sierra Leone), those with higher levels of development, such as Indonesia (see Halder, 2014; Lee, 2000) and India, and highly developed countries, such as Israel and Singapore. Some, such as Ethiopia (Abate, 1984, p. 382), developed single-leader, authoritarian governments, while others, such as Cameroon, developed single-party authoritarian governments. Nkrumah in Ghana created single-party authoritarian governments in the later stages of his rule before being overthrown in a 1966 military coup (Adekson, 1976; Babou, 2010; Hettne, 1980; Hutchful, 1997; Plave Bennett, 1973). Among the countries that established stable democracies following the withdrawal of colonial rule are India (Barua, 1992; Chari, 1977), Malaysia, and Israel. The current article comparatively reviews representative examples of the challenges that affected nascent militaries in a number of post-colonial states, with a focus on locating Israel's development within that context.

The Challenge of Political Authority over Post-Colonial Military Leaderships

One of the central issues that arises in post-colonial states is whether political rulers, democratic or dictators, can control the military and prevent it from rebelling. Most post-colonial countries, as newly established states, struggled to maintain political stability. The new military forces established posed potential problems, being both a source of power for civil authorities as well as the potential vehicle for a coup, thus testing the state's ability to control the institution of organized violence it had itself established. Such new states, needing to leverage the former colonial powers' ability to separate the military

and the political, tried to achieve this mainly by recruiting and promoting officers who would be loyal to the government. However, many of these new states were unsuccessful in accomplishing this goal, often resulting in military coups, and few political elites have been able to decisively establish their authority over the military in post-colonial states.

To try to strengthen their control over the military, political leaders have used a variety of methods to limit the military's involvement in politics and diminish the possibility of a military coup. A key method has been the development of training, practices, and regulations for the military elite designed to try to guarantee its loyalty, with an emphasis on appointing officers and commanders perceived as loyal to political rule, or at least unlikely to initiate or join a coup. For instance, under the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia, only soldiers viewed as loyal to the ruler were promoted to the rank of officer, and their further promotion was contingent on their continuing to prove their loyalty (Abate, 1984, p. 382). In many such countries, perceptible loyalty was often a more important consideration than professional ability and other criteria when making military appointments. As far as was possible, state leaders sought military personnel without political aspirations. Ahmed Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, for example, appointed and promoted military officers and security personnel seen as loyal to his objectives and rule (Halder, 2014). However, this did not prevent his subsequent ousting by Chief of Staff Suharto.

In 1935, Yemeni King Yahya Muhammad Hamid al-Din (Imam Yahya) sent a group of cadets to study at a military academy in Baghdad for the first time. He chose them himself, ensuring that none were Zaydi Shiites (the largest religious community in the Kingdom and the one to which he belonged), or came from powerful tribes or leading families. Most were lower-class orphans, and boys from cities were preferred to those from villages (Fattah, 2010). While Yahya was killed in 1948 during a failed coup bid by a competing tribe rather than by his own military, his grandson, Muhammad al-Badr, was overthrown in 1962 in a military coup led by Nasserist, Pan-Arabist republican officers only one week after inheriting the throne.

The decision by many post-colonial leaders to send promising officers and soldiers to study in western military academies, particularly Britain's Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, reflected similar aims. These academies, as well as training military officers,

foster an acceptance among the cadets of politicians' right to rule, an attitude innate in western militaries that is often lacking in post-colonial states. Good examples of this practice are the new Indian and Pakistani militaries established after the withdrawal of British rule. These emerged directly out of the British Indian Army, absorbing thousands of soldiers and officers from a colonial military that had notably served the British in two world wars. In several cases, entire units from the previous military were absorbed into the Indian and Pakistani militaries, albeit not always smoothly. This continuity was also reflected in the training of military elites in British institutions or local ones already established by the British, such as the Indian Military Academy (Vajpeyi, 2014). These institutions had markedly curbed military involvement in politics by training officers to maintain their military professionalism and limit their engagement with current public affairs.

Another factor bolstering political leaders' ability to assert their authority over military forces were resilient forms of rule emerging out of well-organized bureaucratic systems. The British, for example, established many bureaucratic systems in their colonies, including legal systems and a number of established political institutions that continued to serve as stabilizing forces in the post-independence era (Barany, 2014, p. 601). India is a clear example of a country that abided by the British tradition of strict separation between the military and the political, and upheld democratic civil authority in the post-colonial period (Barany, 2014). The strength of the ruling parties was an important factor in this. The broader the support they had from the various ethnic and other communities, the more economic resources they had at their disposal, and the fewer opposition forces they faced, the better able they were to reinforce their control over the military (Barany, 2014).

The failure of many governments to establish political authority over their militaries led to military coups in numerous countries. To some extent, military coups became the default for many post-colonial states. For instance, in 1963, the military assumed power in Peru for a year, and in the same year, militaries also overthrew the governments of Guatemala, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. In 1962, failed coups took place in Lebanon, Portugal, Turkey, and Venezuela (Finer, 2017, p. 1). There were also coups in Syria, Burma, El Salvador, South Korea, and other countries around the same time (Finer, 2017). Military coups were attempted, sometimes successfully, in most post-independence African countries (First, 1970, pp. 5–30). Some of the most

prominent examples are Ghana (Plave Bennett, 1973), Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Togo, Mali, Egypt, Congo, and Benin. Bebler notes that there were military coups in 15 different African states between 1965 and 1973 (Bebler, 1973, p. 68). It is estimated that two-thirds of the post-colonial countries in South America, Asia, and the Middle East underwent various forms of military intervention. There were at least 90 plots to overthrow the government, as well as 60 attempted coups, 50 of which were successful, in these states between 1960 and 1982 (May & Selochan, 2004, p. 2).

Between Aspirations for Independence and Immediate Needs

Another central debate in relation to Israel and other post-colonial countries is how and to what extent each was influenced by the outgoing colonial regime. Many countries encountered tensions between their strivings for independence and the immediate needs and shortcomings they experienced that drove them to rely on often long-established colonial knowledge and traditions, as well as personnel. This included certain bureaucratic mechanisms, values, and practices that became integrated into these newly independent countries (Barany, 2014; Chari, 1977). It furthermore affected the establishment and activity of their militaries, with a substantial proportion of personnel trained by colonial militaries or local military functionaries employed under colonial rule, who continued, at a higher rank, not surprisingly, to serve in the newly independent states' militaries. This sometimes helped to mitigate inherent civil–military tensions, as those who had served in the colonial military had internalized their values, including those of a separation between the military and politics (Barany, 2014, p. 599; Vajpeyi & Segell, 2014). Post-colonial countries, including Israel, seemed to experience tension between the aspiration to pave their way independently and eschew the legacy of colonial rule, and the will or need to preserve aspects and practices of colonial rule that had proven to be effective (Barany, 2014; Chari, 1977). One ramification springing from this gap between aspiration and realistic abilities in real time is the shortage in key resources to which we now turn.

The Lack of Suitable Military Command and Professional Personnel

This section first addresses the issue of the shortage in military command and professional personnel in post-colonial states in general, before turning to the IDF specifically regarding such shortages.

Command and Professional Personnel Shortages in Post-Colonial Militaries in General

One of the most challenging issues for many post-colonial states was the severe shortage of qualified people to fill the military's leadership and professional ranks. This often stemmed from the nature of the colonial experience, where foreign rulers did not train enough local manpower at the right level and quality to meet the subsequent needs of new post-independence militaries. Under colonial rule, local militaries were often relatively small. In times of peace, they were mainly tasked with internal policing and, during the two world wars, some were sent to the battlefield. Although a small, elite group of colonial subjects had been trained in military institutions, principally at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst (Chandler, 1991; Yardley, 1987), the establishment of a new, often much larger national military required large numbers of commanding officers that were simply not available. In many such states, including Israel, as we will see, hundreds, even thousands of commissioned and non-commissioned officers were needed. This absolute shortage, coupled with the low quality of commanders actually in the field, forced the newly independent states to find solutions, driving many to recruit British soldiers who resumed commanding roles in the post-colonial militaries.

The experience of India and Pakistan are cases in point here (Barua, 1992; Chari, 1977; Marston, 2009). During the colonial period, the Indian military was under British command, which was, in turn, subordinate to British politicians. Concerned about their rule being undermined, the British ensured that they maintained their control over the Indian military and, despite training local officers, always kept British officers in the highest ranks up to the time of independence in 1947 (Chari, 1977). The establishment of Pakistan, independent of India, which involved armed conflict between the two,

exacerbated the shortage of senior commanders in the Indian military. Seeking to solve this problem, India recruited British officers into its military, who continued to serve in it for more than a decade. Thus, for example, it was not until 1958 that an Indian officer was appointed to the Indian Navy, replacing his British predecessor. A similar situation prevailed in Pakistan. At its inception, the Pakistani military needed 2,500 officers, and roughly 500 British mercenary officers filled such positions until a generation of local officers became qualified enough to replace them. Thus, during the 1947–1949 Kashmir conflict, it was not only local NCOs and junior officers, former colleagues from the British Indian Army, who stood on opposing sides, but British officers as well (Barany, 2014, p. 600).

Jordan is another example where British command personnel were employed post-independence. The Arab Legion (the official name of the Jordanian military until 1956) operated for 10 years under the command of Lieutenant-General John Bagot Glubb ("Glubb Pasha"), a senior British officer who had established the Arab Legion (Jordanian Military) in 1939 and had commanded it until the end of the colonial period in 1946. He was its commander against the Israelis in the War of Independence and his anti-Semitic beliefs fueled his staunch opposition to Zionism (Morris, 2007). Morris states that upon the outbreak of the Israeli War of Independence in May 1948, 37 other British officers and several dozen British NCOs served under Glubb in the Arab Legion as well (Morris, 2007). However, unlike the Indian and Pakistani examples or the NCOs in the Jordanian military, Legion commander John Glubb was not a mercenary, but served as an emissary and official representative of the British Government.

The armed forces of Ghana, which gained full independence in 1960, also suffered from a severe shortage of command personnel, and British soldiers served as commanders there until 1961. Only 29 Ghanaian officers served in its military initially, and matters were even worse in other African countries (Barany, 2014, p. 601). In Ghana, although parliamentary and presidential elections were held following the withdrawal of the British, the government became progressively dictatorial over time, until it was overthrown in a 1966 military coup (Adekson, 1976; Hettne, 1980).

Yemen had earlier found a similar solution to manpower shortage (Rabi, 2014, pp. 43–45). Upon the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, Imam Yahya declared

Yemen independent, although the British continued to rule its "Aden Protectorate" until 1963. Imam Yahya did not have enough suitable officer material and had only traditional, tribal combat capacities at his disposal. His solution was to recruit Turkish former Ottoman Empire officers (Fattah, 2010).

The shortage of military command personnel in the new states was directly related to the other, highly complex challenge facing new rulers already discussed here: the ability to cultivate military commanders who were both skilled and loyal to political rule. Another major aspect of the military manpower crisis was a shortage of technical professionals, a subject to which we now turn.

The Early IDF's Shortage of Command and Professional Personnel

The shortage of capable technical professional in post-colonial states underlay the low technological capabilities in the new militaries and the lack of adequate training for professionals. This problem became increasingly acute as these new militaries acquired advanced arms, which required professional expertise and maintenance capacities. The challenge was not only the lack of personnel, but also the lack of knowledge and skill pertaining to armaments, maintenance, and engineering, among other matters.

Much like in other post-colonial states, the IDF suffered from a severe shortage of professional personnel at its inception. The Haganah, established in 1920 and growing in its influence among Jewish communities, was the main Jewish paramilitary organization under the British Mandate in Palestine. Being an integral part of the Jewish community, it was known for its cohesion and high levels of motivation, although it lacked military discipline. From Israel's independence in 1948, the organization became a key element in the new IDF. Related to the issue of personnel in Israel was the state of its armaments. On the eve of the UN's 1947 declaration of the partition plan, the Haganah had 10,073 rifles, 186 medium machine guns, 444 light machine guns, 1,900 submachine guns, 96 three-inch mortars, and 672 two-inch mortars (Ostfeld, 1994). At the time, the Jewish forces had no artillery, armor, engineering, supply chains and units, or organized medical services. During the early stages of the War of Independence, the solution for the shortages came from civilian bodies. The air force had around 40 pilots for only nine light aircraft, most of which were civilian craft (Cohen, 2004; Yonay, 1993). Purchasing aircraft, armor,

communication devices, and advanced weaponry required the training of professionals for operations as well as for maintenance. Professionals were scarce in early stages of the IDF, a severe problem quickly felt in armament forces, logistics, and many other professional areas.

The IDF was in fact undergoing two processes that rapidly caused a significant human resources crisis: the IDF's developing technological capacity increased the need for skilled professionals; and the waves of immigration into Israel, which included many from less-developed countries, caused a decline in the level of recruits to the IDF, such that major concerns arose regarding their ability to operate the military technology. In February 1950, six months after the Independence War, a report to the Manpower Directorate estimated that there was a shortage of 5,863 professionals in the military (Israel Defense Forces Archive, February 3, 1950).

The IDF's acute lack of academic professionals was evidenced in a 1951 discussion on the Israeli Academic Reserve, a special program to which the IDF sends selected high school graduates to earn academic degrees before they complete an extended term of military service and which was one of the programs utilized to address the shortage. Representatives of many different military corps presented details of their units' shortages. For example, the Engineering Corps representative reported his unit having only 120 engineers, despite needing 250. He claimed that Israel lacked the capacity to train engineers on the required scale, and noted that there was a shortage of mathematicians and physicists as well (Israel Defense Forces Archive, November 15, 1951). The Medical Corps representative reported a shortage of over 100 military physicians that could not be easily filled due to an already existing shortage of civilian ones. The Ordnance Corps representative estimated that the shortage of mechanical engineers would likely be a long-term one. There were also shortages reported in the basic professions, particularly in technical and mechanical personnel, such as vehicle and weapons mechanics and metalworkers.

The shortages were particularly acute numerically in positions such as food service workers and cooks, print service workers, and lab workers (Manpower Directorate, January 20, 1954). The military suffered from a shortage of hundreds of drivers relative to the official standard requirement: with a shortage of 433 drivers recorded in March

1955 and 385 in September 1956, for example (Manpower Directorate, n.d.). As early as 1950, the Air Force commander reported a shortage of possibly thousands of professionals in mandatory and permanent service, particularly in the technical fields (Israel Defense Forces Archives, February 6, 1950). In June 1955, the shortage in aircraft maintenance and electronics personnel in the Air Force stood at 265 soldiers, roughly 20% of the required standard personnel numbers in these fields at the time (Israel Defense Forces Archives, January 20, 1954). Reserve forces suffered from many shortages as well, in drivers, weapons, various types of mechanics and technicians, electricians, and more (Israel Defense Forces Archives, December 1, 1952).

The Shortage of Commanders in Both Regular and Reserve Service

A severe shortage of command personnel was a result of the high number of casualties during the War of Independence, a considerable percentage of them having been commanders (Sivan, 1991, pp. 48–53, 61). This was exacerbated by the demobilization of many commanders and the enlistment of low-quality recruits. Changes in the IDF's personnel composition only exacerbated the crisis further. In late December 1950, Lieutenant Colonel Tzvi Tzur, head of the IDF General Headquarters Planning Directorate, noted that in 1951–1953, the IDF regular military will experience a shortage of 2,030 officers and 2,180 NCOs (Israel Defense Forces Archive, December 29, 1950). The shortage was not limited to combat forces, but extended to logistics officers and others (Israel Defense Forces Archive, October 28, 1951). In a 1950 Manpower Directorate, Directorate Head Major-General Shimon Mazeh also noted a shortage in command personnel. The same staff shortages affected the reserve units as well: Tzvi Tzur notes in an IDF report a predicted shortage of 2,500 officers and 12,000 NCOs in reserve units for 1951–1952 (Israel Defense Forces Archive, December 29, 1950). In another 1950 report, Tzur states: "The inventory of officers does not meet current IDF needs [...] the shortage in this area is so severe, that even if we prioritize officer training we will still be a long way from meeting the necessary numbers" (Israel Defense Forces Archive, December 29, 1950).

The Challenges of Military Intervention in Early Israeli Statehood

Although Israel has never experienced a military coup, fear of this scenario arising was palpable during its first years. The Irgun (a right-wing pre-state paramilitary organization) prompted early fears about such an event during the June 1948 "Altalena Affair," in which it clashed with the nascent IDF forces over control of a major weapons shipment (Givati, 1994, pp. 147–156; Nakdimon, 1978). These fears abated somewhat once the new state was established (Lebel, 2008). After the Independence War, ideological conflict broke out between Ben-Gurion's statist approach and the partisan approach of the kibbutz movement and its prime political representative, the left-wing HaPoalim HaMeuchedet party (Mapam, "United Workers Party") established in 1948. Mapam became the second-largest parliamentary group following the first Knesset elections, serving as an opposition party and fierce critic of Ben-Gurion's Eretz Yisrael party (Mapai, "Workers Party of the Land of Israel"; Tzahor, 1994; Tzur, 1988). This ongoing ideological divide affected the establishment of the IDF as well. In fact, it had appeared even during the course of the Independence War in the controversial dismantling of the Palmach, the Haganah's elite combat force, and continued thereafter. Mapam leaders demanded that the IDF be a pioneering military "of the people" rather than simply rely on bureaucracy and military discipline in its methods (Azati, 2015, p. 45), which were perceived as possible threats to state and military stability out of concerns that Mapam would seize control of both.

Mapam attempted to establish a military force under the auspices of the Histadrut national labor union at the outbreak of the War of Independence in order to prevent a right-wing coup. This source of concern about Mapam persisted even after the war, given the large quantities of weaponry and ammunition stored in the kibbutzim. In a few instances, the amount of legal and illegal weapons stored in the kibbutzim exceeded the number of weapons held by the IDF (Ben-Gurion Archives, June 21, 1950; Shabtai Teveth Archives, n.d.; Tzahor, 1997, p. 197). The purpose of these armories in the kibbutzim is debated to this day. Ya'akov Hazan, one of the leaders of HaKibbutz HaArtzi movement, claimed that the weapons were meant to prevent the Irgun and Lechi paramilitary groups from seizing control of the state (Azati, 2015, p. 198). Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, one of the leaders of the

HaKibbutz HaMeuchad movement, claimed they were for self-defense in the event that the kibbutzim came under threat. He did not say whether this "threat" was in fact from the state and the IDF. However, he emphasized that, despite its rivalry with Ben-Gurion, Mapam had no intention of taking power by force (Azati, 2015, p. 115). Aharon Cohen, a member of the left-wing branch of HaKibbutz HaArtzi, who was later convicted of spying for the Soviet Union, claimed that the weapons were meant to help the Red Army conquer the Middle East in the event of a war with the West (Tzahor, 1997, p. 199). The degree of Ben-Gurion's concern about this is expressed in the following:

Without preservation, cultivation, and reinforcement of the precious values bequeathed to us by the Haganah, the new [military] will have no great value [...] but it has been necessary to add military training and discipline to these – and total subjugation to the high civil authority of the State. And this has been no easy task [...] with the Haganah's transformation into a military – we could not settle for the fictitious authority of the State. A military that is not wholly subjugated to the democratic rule of the people – is bound to seize control of the nation and lead to military anarchy [...] though I must add: if we were to rely on this heritage alone – we would be lost (Ben-Gurion, 1950, p. 154).

Ethnic and Other Forms of Heterogeneity in Post-Colonial Militaries

Another issue for various post-colonial countries, and the militaries they established, including Israel, was their often-substantial ethnic heterogeneity. Tensions and struggles between ethnic groups often began prior to independence, but tended to intensify in the face of the challenges arising during the first years of statehood. Ethnic heterogeneity in new states creates a tension between aspirations to establish militaries "of the people" that represent broad sections of the population and government concerns over ethnic conflicts infiltrating the military, or the provision of weapons and ammunition to groups perceived as less than loyal to the political elite.

The India-Pakistan experience is a good example, where two independent states were established due to ethnic-religious differences (Barua, 1992). In the colonial era, the British prevented ethnic conflicts from penetrating into the Indian military by selectively appointing members of groups perceived as loyal or lacking in political aspirations to the ranks of commanders and officers, such as the Sikhs, Nepalese, or members of the warrior caste (Barany, 2014). As a result of this policy, Sikh soldiers comprised roughly 11% of the military's combat personnel in the first years of Indian independence while accounting for less than 2% of the general population (Barany, 2014).

Nigeria, which gained independence from Britain in 1960, experienced military coups for the first time on two occasions in 1966. Upon the establishment of the post-independence military, the largely Christian Igbo ethnic group, concentrated primarily in the southeast, accounted for approximately 60% of military officers, although no more than 20% of the population in general (Barany, 2014).

President Nkrumah, Ghana's first independent head of state, took the opposite approach to ethnic heterogeneity. Nkrumah likewise saw pervasive heterogeneity as a potential threat to stability but, rather than apply the "divide and conquer" approach honed by the British, which cultivated a particular minority to the exclusion of other in order to protect military stability, Nkrumah boldly attempted to make the military an instrument of African-Ghanaian cohesion and national identity. He viewed the military as a melting pot that fostered a new nationality that would gradually reduce the political significance of distinct ethnicities and, therefore, their potential threat to the central government (Adekson, 1976). However, recruiting to the army in this way prompted tensions to the point of destabilizing military order and, ultimately, his policy failed.

A more successful example of using the military to promote national cohesion is that of the young Israel, in which ethnic heterogeneity was significant enough to characterize it as a multi-ethnic country. The establishment of the State of Israel enabled mass immigration from many different countries. This had a major impact on the demographic composition of the young state, which became heterogeneous almost overnight. It affected the IDF, which also quickly became ethnically heterogeneous. The 1949 Israeli Defense Service Law mandated the conscription of all 18-year-olds to the IDF, obliging the military to absorb all those who met draft qualifications (Gelber, 1986, p. 506; Hadar, 1979). The

IDF therefore became a "demographic mirror" of Israeli society, half of which was made up of new immigrants. Military and political leaders saw the change in the makeup of draftees as a severe problem with the potential to destabilize the IDF's ability to withstand various threats. Research conducted by the IDF Manpower Directorate in December 1948 shows that natives of Israel made up only 21.4% of the IDF, the rest consisting of a diverse ethnic mix. At this time, the IDF was made up of 27% Polish immigrants, 11% Romanian immigrants, 8% German immigrants, and up to 5% North-African immigrants. It also comprised migrants from North and South America, Yemen, Turkey, Greece, Czechoslovakia, and many other countries (Manpower Directorate, February 13, 1949).

This pattern of ethnic diversification continued after the War of Independence. IDF Chief of Staff Yigael Yadin estimated in 1950 that about half of the new recruits that year would be new immigrants, while the General Commanding Officer (GOC) of the Northern Command estimated that, in some units, the rate of new immigrants would climb to 80% (Israel Defense Forces Archive, February 12, 1950). Yadin claimed that if the military did not act decisively and comprehensively to address the change in the IDF's ethnic composition in culture, education, and other matters, the consequences could be disastrous for its operational ability (Israel Defense Forces Archive, February 12, 1950). The new culturally and linguistically diverse personnel made the execution of complex actions much more difficult. Commanders had to deal with behavioral patterns to which they had never before been exposed and that undermined operational functionality and discipline. Ben-Gurion described this issue with his characteristic acuity in 1953: "Our military does not absorb human material akin to that of the English military – but alas, human material akin to that of the Iraqi military" (Israel Defense Forces Archive, 1953, p. 32).

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the IDF was, indeed, a typical post-colonial military in its early stages, challenged by many of the same issues that affected other post-colonial militaries experienced at their inception. These stemmed primarily from colonial withdrawal taking place without a stable military infrastructure being left behind, something which created

wide-ranging organizational issues that affected daily life as well as military operations in the IDF. At the same time, and this is a matter for another article, the means Israel employed to address these fundamental structural issues were quite unique, which might explain the different outcome achieved by the IDF compared to other post-colonial militaries. From the outset, Israel resolved to establish the IDF as a modern, technological military akin to western ones, reinforcing features of the Zionist enterprise and the Jewish *yishuv* (early settlement in Israel) as characteristics of the modern economy, political organization, culture, and military forces (Eisenstadt, 2004). As a byproduct, Israel developed its military through local resources, and worked consistently to sustain its military needs as independently as possible. These two agendas, of creating a modern military, and drawing on domestic resources, undoubtedly played a central and significant role in transforming the IDF from a post-colonial military in its early stages to a modern, advanced military in later years.

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