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# Is the IDF Becoming Theocratic?

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# Is the IDF Becoming Theocratic?

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In late 2011, a senior officer in the IDF's (Israel Defense Forces) Personnel Directorate noted in an interview with the daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*:

> Jewish identity in the army is undergoing a sharp shift. In the past, the approach was that Orthodox rules were observed in public, and at home every soldier did whatever he wanted. Nowadays, the army is deciding for you what kind of Jew you will be: a national-religious Jew.[1]

In a nutshell, the officer dramatically warned against the theocratization of the IDF. At the center of this process stands the national-religious sector, which has significantly upgraded its presence in the military ranks since the late 1970s.

Theocratization of the military is a process. As the Israeli military operates within the bounds of a constitutional (albeit imperfect) democracy, the term "constitutional theocracy"[2] may usefully capture the process of theocratization of a military in a democracy, especially as Israel can be defined as a constitutional theocracy. Applying this concept to the military, it can be surmised that a "theocratic military" has several features:

(1) Formally, the military is subordinated to elected civilians and governed by a unified hierarchy; (2) a single religion often determines the boundaries of collective identity; (3) rules must conform to principles of religious doctrine which cannot be violated; and (4) religious authorities operate in lieu of, or in tandem with, the civilly-sanctioned military system, whose opinions and jurisprudence carry notable symbolic weight. Theocratization of the military is, therefore, the transition from a purely secular organization towards a theocratic military. It is not just diffusion of religious values into the military ("religionization"), but a process in which codes and sources of the secular authority of the state clash with those of religious authorities.

This paper analyzes this process of theocratization. I argue that four integrated and cumulative processes gradually generated this shift towards the theocratization of the Israeli military: (1)

the crafting of institutional arrangements that enabled the service of religious soldiers; thereby (2) creating a critical mass of religious soldiers in many combat units; consequently (3) restricting the IDF command's intra-organizational autonomy vis-à-vis the religious sector; thereby (4) restricting the IDF's autonomy in deploying forces in politically disputable missions.

Methodologically, this study relies on secondary sources such as research dealing with the relations between the religious community and the IDF, and the writings of prominent religious figures from which the standpoint of this community vis-a-vis the military can be inferred. Some data were supplemented by drawing on media reports usually backed by other sources. The main purpose is to provide a structural analysis of the process of theocratization. Tools drawn from structural analysis are used, leading to the interpretation of behavior in terms of structural constraints on activity, rather than in terms of inner forces within units such as socialization, that impel behavior in a voluntaristic, sometimes teleological, push toward a desired goal.[3] Therefore, explicit aims and interests receive less attention and the rhetoric of major actors is interpreted accordingly. Theoretically, to provide the rationale for the four-stage process towards theocratization, the article relies on existing concepts such as diversity management, theocratization, and social rewards in the military. The aim is to build on existing knowledge to analytically enlighten the process rather than offering a new theoretical model.

After presenting the background for the process in the first section, the second section will present the theoretical framework. The third section presents the four-stage process itself.

## Background

Israel is among very few democracies in which military conscription survives. It does so for a variety of security needs (that of a country involved in a protracted and perceived existential conflict with the Arab world) and due to the centrality of the republican ethos, which views military service as a supreme civic virtue. Naturally, conscription requires the coexistence of groups with different identities within the ranks, so the military must manage this diversity. Indeed, during the last decade, a struggle has emerged between two contradictory trends: liberalization and theocratization.

Like its Western counterparts, the Israeli military has experienced a transition from a modern to a post-modern military.[4] Similar processes as those in other Western countries have accounted for this trend, most important of which is the decline in the motivation to bear military sacrifice. This decline in motivation has been especially prevalent since the 1980s among the secular middle class, once the historical backbone of the IDF. A drop in the military's prestige in light of military deficiencies in the 1973 October War and in the Lebanese arena, political disputes over the use of military force, a decline in the republican ethos with the gradual transformation of Israeli society into a liberal market society, and a perceived drop in the value of protecting a country with a declining level of external threat, especially following the peace treaty with Egypt in1978, all generated this decline.[5]
To adjust itself to this new trend, the IDF gradually changed its organizational culture towards a more liberal format. Several processes are worth mentioning.

First, with the erosion in the legitimacy of sacrifice, especially among the elite groups, casualty-averse policies became an operative consideration during the 1980s. This spirit accounted for the political and military restraint that drove the government to unilaterally withdraw Israel's forces from Lebanon twice, in 1985 and 2000, under massive political pressure from parents and reserve soldiers who felt that the loss of life there was senseless.[6]

Second, the military liberalized military discipline. Parents, who were given unprecedented access to their sons' and daughters' commanders, routinely negotiated for their preferences with regard to their children's assignments and conditions of service. Furthermore, liberalization extended to soldiers themselves being able to negotiate with the military on similar issues. The ability to shorten one's service or to be exempted altogether due to apparent "mental health" issues was a major expression of this bargaining.[7] Consequently, conscription became selective. Indeed, since the beginning of the 2000s, 25 percent of potential Jewish male draftees do not take part in military service. Only about half of this number reflects ultra-Orthodox exemptions, a point on which I will elaborate in a moment.
Third, liberalization gave rise to a growing concern with ethical dilemmas, which evolved during the new pattern of combat within civilian populations, first in Lebanon and then, and more significantly, in Palestinian areas with the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987.[8] Monitored by civil rights NGOs from the outside and by dissident groups of soldiers from within, the IDF restrained the use of force in the Palestinian arena, which eased the road to the 1993 Oslo agreements with the Palestinians. Nothing can better testify to this restraint than

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's famous remark, invoked to justify Oslo, that the Palestinian leadership would better be able to fight local terror "without the High Court of Justice and without [the human rights organization] B'Tselem," entities that had hitherto prevented the use of brute force.

Fourth, liberalization extended to issues of gender. The IDF was among the most liberal militaries with its willingness to lift restrictions on the promotion of homosexuals in the military in 1993. Three years later, the IDF responded to the High Court of Justice's ruling that it could not exclude qualified women from pilot training. In addition to implementing this specific verdict, the IDF expanded women's access to combat roles and opened up roles previously closed to them. Later, in 2000, the *Security Service Law* was amended by stating that gender equality would be maintained throughout the military.[9]

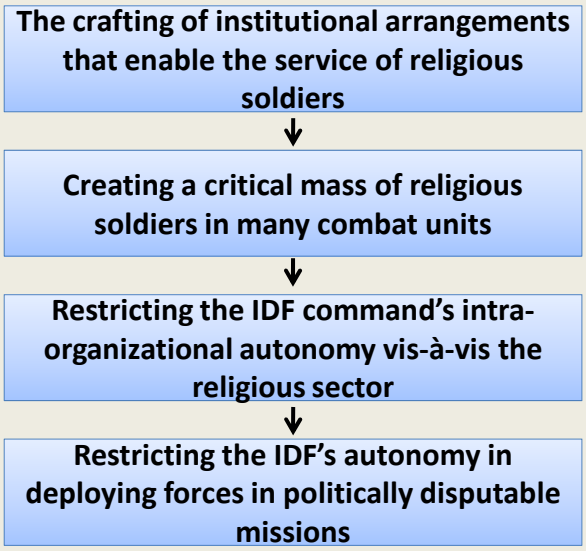
To a large extent, liberalization could have progressed further if it had not provoked a counter-reaction by religious soldiers, and especially their leaders. From this point, the IDF reflected the broader conflict taking place in Israel's Jewish society over Israel's identity, between liberal trends and nationalist ones promoting a collective set of values and sense of sacrifice for the state.[10]

Until the 1970s, religious recruits usually did not seek significant positions within the IDF, particularly in combat, because of fears of coming into close contact with secular conscripts, which might have a negative effect on the religious soldiers' observance and beliefs. This anxiety led many religious soldiers into auxiliary roles and away from the possibility of a military career.[11]

Demographically, about 20% of the Israeli Jewish population is Orthodox. Of these, about 60% define themselves as religious, and 40% define themselves as ultra-orthodox (*haredi*), namely, members of the most theologically conservative wing of Judaism. While the Orthodox serve in the drafted military, the ultra-Orthodox are exempted in accordance with a historical deal between the ruling parties and the ultra-Orthodox leadership. Originally, this deal was aimed at reconstructing the ultra-Orthodox yeshivas following the Holocaust.
Since the late 1970s, an increasing number of Orthodox religious youth, particularly national-religious youth who link religion with national mission, have been joining the combat ranks and gradually increasing their presence in the military.

Two interacting factors account for this change. The first was the gradual recognition among religious Zionist youth that the time had come to challenge the secular middle class (comprised mostly of Ashkenazim, Jews from a European background), the class that was identified with the founding of the state and the dominant Labor movement. The establishment in 1974 of the *Gush Emunim* movement ("Bloc of the Faithful"), the ideological foundation that underpinned the settlement project in the West Bank after the October 1973 War, marked a change within national-religious society. It shifted from an ideology based on a partnership with secular Zionism to an attempt to subject the national project to religious principles and hence challenge the dominant secular paradigm.[12] The upheaval of 1977 that saw the fall of the long-ruling Labor movement and the rise of the right-wing Likud party was instrumental in the legitimization of the new religious agenda and the growing bargaining power of the religious parties. This factor overlapped with the decline in motivation to serve among the secular middle class, as mentioned above, while the liberalization of the IDF provided the context and impetus to present a new conservative agenda. Religious youth, along with groups from the lower class such as immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the Druze, and *Mizrahi* (Jews from Middle Eastern countries) recruits from peripheral neighborhoods took advantage of this drop in motivation to fill the vacuum and upgrade their position. Through its growing presence, the national-religious group took steps to theocratize the military culture. A four-stage, cumulative process gradually created this shift. Figure 1 sums up the process.

**Figure 1: Four-Stage Process of Theocratization**



It is important to note that this process was not a matter of an explicit, intentional agenda guided by a unified leadership and promoted by a homogenous group; rather, it resulted from a sequence of linear actions that gradually shaped a new reality. From the moment one stage ended, the religious leaders moved steadily to the next one, whether intentionally or not.

## A Theoretical Framework: Military and Theocratization

Theocratization of the military can be explained by using various theoretical tools, some of which are drawn from theocratization, or at least religionization of other militaries or secular frameworks.

*Diversity management*, the first tool, relates to rhetorical, institutional arrangements, and formal and informal practices for dealing with the needs and demands of groups that are socially defined as distinct. Since the 1990s in particular, militaries have adapted themselves to function in a multicultural society which is also reflected within the military's own framework. They have responded to the empowerment of identity politics in society to create and preserve sufficient legitimacy with their stakeholders, such as politicians, as well as to address manpower shortfalls by integrating women and ethnic minorities within the ranks.[13] As part of this shift, militaries accommodate religious requests and grant rights such as sending chaplains to the military and respecting dietary rules, religious apparel, and time off.[14]

Diversity management is not necessarily a policy dictated "top-down" as the literature implies. As Lomsky-Feder and Ben-Ari theorized, civil-military relations are affected by several contractual agreements. One of them is what they call *social compact*, a contract negotiated between the military as an agent of the state, and different social groups. Representatives of groups, among them religious minorities, negotiate with the military on the general and local level. Formal policies are adapted differently for different units. Diversity management is carried out through ongoing negotiations.[15] It follows that even if the military intends on managing diversity by shaping formal rules, in reality they are not necessarily governed only by formal policies, but by local arrangements as well. Furthermore, the character and boundaries of diversity are largely determined by the bargaining power of the group.

More importantly, the demands that are made by these groups are largely bound by the nature of their general agenda. Liberal feminism advocates gender diversity, which by implication may lead to more diversity in general, but does not seek to reshape the identity of the military. It generally seeks to modify the military culture by changing attitudes among military members so the best-qualified person is selected for assignments, regardless of race, gender, or sexual orientation, in order to facilitate women's integration into the army.[16] In a different way, religious groups strive to reshape military culture. If we draw an example from the U.S, we can see how they do so by opposing, for religious reasons, the service of homosexuals.[17]

Given the contractual and negotiated cultural (and religious) arrangements, the military's motivation should be factored in as well. As students of diversity management argue, the military is motivated by manpower and legitimation needs. Yet, while a functionalist approach guides this outlook, we may also consider cases where diversity management deviates from merely providing a suitable, tolerant cultural environment for different groups, and extends to privileging one group over another. As Owens argued, many observers of the U.S. military are concerned with evangelist military ministers seeking new converts and their display of religious intolerance, sometimes with the cooperation of high-ranking officers.[18] Even if not a case of formal policy, religious diversity is abused. Therefore, we must look at other theoretical explanations of the military's motivation to move from diversity management to policies or practices privileging certain groups and potentially marginalizing others. Two complementary tools can be used.

*Symbolic rewards*: Armies always reward soldiers in ways that are valuable in civilian life. Soldiers figure in two reward systems simultaneously: (1) *material rewards*, which are essentially monetary and generally immediate, such as salaries, pensions, job training, housing, financial aid for higher education, and other social benefits; and (2) *symbolic rewards*, which stem from the prestige and honor associated with military service. While material rewards with monetary value have a clear worth outside the military, the value of symbolic rewards in civilian society depends on the social context. There is an inverse relationship between material and symbolic rewards. The military’s increased reliance on symbolic rewards reduces the recruits’ expectations of material ones, while the increased reliance on material rewards balances out a decline in symbolic rewards and even devalues the remaining allotted symbolic rewards.[19]

As an employer, the military and its political supervisors may attempt to produce symbolic rewards as a means of reducing the need to dispense greater monetary rewards. Thus, the military may help religious recruits attain symbolic rewards in terms of the theocratization of the military culture and of the military mission. Both symbolically empower the religious recruits in terms of being distinguished bearers of a national mission and by helping them to reshape the military. Furthermore, theocratization of the military mission helps portray the religious groups as vital relative to the "weaker" secular community. As the example of the evangelization of the U.S. military demonstrates, religion has replaced race as apparently a more legitimate social categorization by helping to create an identity of religious white soldiers separate from the general society, which is viewed as weak and corrupt.[20] Religion helps create practices of classification, demarcation and hierarchies within the military (for example, Muslim soldiers are less valued in a conflict where "Jesus Killed Mohammed"), with a manifestation of superiority vis-à-vis the rest of society. Nevertheless, theocratization may go further, producing value for secular enlistees as well, which leads to the second explanation.

*Theocratization enhances patriotism* by combining it with religion. This may have a dual impact:

First, production of more symbolic rewards. Even in a vocational force such as in the U.S., where material rewards are paramount, soldiers are strongly influenced by patriotic motives.[21] Patriotism can be perceived as a sort of symbolic reward. It is predicated on the expectation that military service matters on the community level. By serving in the military, an individual can transform himself or herself from an ordinary citizen into a first-class citizen. Theocratization, or even just religionization, which imbues the military mission with more significance, may thus expand the production of symbolic rewards.

Second, motivation of secular soldiers. Given the growing reluctance in the ambient society to sacrifice, especially to give up one’s life, militaries also seek ways to justify sacrifice. Therefore, theocratization goes beyond cultural arrangements and production of symbolic rewards and is instrumental in the military's efforts to motivate sacrifice among secular and not only religious enlistees. In the U.S. military, evangelists capitalized on the moral crisis experienced by the military during and following the Vietnam War, with evangelist churches increasing their presence, seeing the military as a place congenial to their beliefs.[22] Since the

late 1980s, evangelicals and Pentecostal have taken more than two thirds of the military's chaplaincy posts and recently painted the war in Iraq and Afghanistan as a religious war.[23] Hence, commanders, including the secular, welcome theocratization, or at least do not work hard to contain it. Many of them even link Christianity with the nationalist values of a strong military, advocating the use of force and "peace through strength."[24]

Theocratization, however, may impair the military's autonomy. As the definition of theocratization suggests, it is a process through which codes and sources of authority may clash by involving religious authorities in the operation of the military. As organizational theories suggest, although organizations tend to avoid inter-organizational relations which compromise their autonomy, under several conditions organizations may establish such relationships, even at the cost of relinquishing some measure of their autonomy. Among these conditions are the gain of alternative, offset benefits or an attempt to overcome uncertainties.[25]

In summary, we can now better understand how religious diversity may breed theocratization. At first, the military accommodates the demands of the religious community as an attempt to maintain high rates of enlistment and retain legitimation vis-à-vis civilian society. Later, as diversity management is carried out through ongoing negotiations, religious representatives can bargain for more influence on the military culture and character of a mission. As for the military, beyond direct needs, it accommodates new demands by promoting theocratization as a means for both producing symbolic rewards and motivating sacrifice by linking sacrifice to religiosity. However, this may impair the military's autonomy.

In the case of the Israeli military, one can see how this theorization applies to the four-stage process of theocratization.

## The Four-Stage Process of Theocratization

**The first stage: Crafting institutional arrangements that enable the service of religious soldiers.** This first step had been evolving since the late 1970s. It was originally aimed at creating cultural arrangements that would enable religious youth to serve in the military without compromising their religious beliefs. Imposing Jewish dietary laws and observing the

Jewish Sabbath on military bases were preconditions, but other special arrangements were promoted as well.

More importantly, constrained by growing manpower shortfalls, the IDF promoted special arrangements that encouraged the recruitment of religious youngsters to combat units, much as theories of diversity management predict. One form of such an arrangement was the creation of "arrangement academies" (*yeshivot hesder)*, which combined Torah study in a yeshiva with military service in homogeneously religious frameworks in combat units. While the *yeshivot hesder* had been in place since the 1960s (when the government deviated from the original constitutive principal forbidding the creation of religious sectarian frameworks), they significantly expanded since the late 1970s. Another form was the creation in the 1980s of pre-military Torah academies (*mechinot)*, allowing many of the religious conscripts to defer their enlistment to study for 12-18 months at the academy for "spiritual fortification." These two frameworks, both headed by rabbis, reduced the probability that religious soldiers would be secularized during their military service. [26] Indeed, heads of *yeshivot hesder* and *mechinot*, justified, directly and indirectly, the establishment of these programs by the need to reduce the exposure to secularization.[27]

As part of this process, the rabbis gained the IDF's recognition of their special status. For example, rabbis, mostly from the *yeshivot hesder*, had broad access to the military bases on which their yeshiva students served. The students frequently turned to civilian rabbis for spiritual guidance about the interface between religious and professional issues, such as the military's functioning during the Sabbath.[28] More importantly, the IDF held dialogues with the heads of the yeshivas about the character and terms of military service. This created a "dual hierarchy" involving the simultaneous subordination of many religious enlistees to both their officers and their rabbis, or at least a conflict between sources of authority.[29]

For the national-religious sector, upgrading its position in the IDF meant promoting a new agenda, beyond viewing military service as a religious commandment (*mitzvah*), by: (1) forging an autonomous religious identity in the military that could deal with the secular challenge;[30] (2) challenging the secular hegemony in the military, previously the embodiment of "Israeliness", while depicting the secular group as weakly Jewish, and as liberal, materialistic and militarily defeatist;[31] (3) preserving the settlement project in what is perceived to be the religiously significant West Bank.[32] Later, national-religious groups

alleged that, thanks to what they described as secular middle class incompetence in dealing with the Palestinians, which paved the road to Oslo, this project was put in jeopardy. Oslo signified a disaster for the national-religious groups; and (4) de-secularizing the military culture by instilling principles of religious culture among the units as part of a spiritual mission through which religious youth, as two rabbis said, could bring "the fruits of Torah face to face with Israeli society."[33] Gradually, the national-religious sector was presented in the public discourse as the new service elite, taking the place of the traditional secular elite, particularly the young generation of veteran kibbutzim.

As proposed earlier, religious agenda is not necessarily confined to the application of religious diversity. Indeed, prominent in the national-religious agenda was a feeling of responsibility to the entire nation rather than just to preserving the soldiers' faith and promoting particularistic interests of its own constituency.

Successful bargaining led to the next stage:

**Creating a critical mass of religious soldiers in multiple combat units.** Military service became an important mobility track for religious youth, particularly for those who were promoted to the officer ranks. In 2010, the graduates of the religious *mechinot* and *yeshivot hesder* constituted about 10% of the army's combat force,[34] while the overall proportion of religious soldiers in regular combat units was about 25-30%.[35] Religious soldiers comprised a large percentage of the infantry brigades, with a steep rise in the number of religious graduates of the infantry officers' course from only 2.5% in 1990 to 26% in 2008.[36]

The creation of this critical mass increased the impact of the demands to create a theocratic military culture. As mentioned earlier, the religious agenda also leaned towards de-secularization of military culture and preserving the settlement project in the West Bank.

Two efforts were significant in this regard. The first was the theocratization of the military mission that ascribed a religious meaning to the military deployment in the perceived holy "Greater Land of Israel," namely, the occupied West Bank. However, with the progress of the peace process with the Palestinians after the Oslo Accords of 1993, the theological and cultural design went one step further. Rabbis issued religious decisions (*piskei halacha)* that focused on professional issues and subjected military discipline to theological considerations.

For example, the rabbis established rules banning religious soldiers from participating in the evacuation of settlements in the West Bank that the peace process may have prescribed.[37]

A second effort involved increasing demands to limit the presence of women in combat units. With the significant integration of women conscripts into combat and other roles in the field units, the percentage of jobs open to women rose from 56% in the 1980s to about 90% in 2008; and while in 2001 only 1% of the combat roles were occupied by women, this number rose to 3% in 2008.[38] Nevertheless, this process applied to secular women, as religious women have traditionally been exempted from military service by law (although many of them have voluntarily enlisted). The presence of secular women in these units dominated the rabbis' concerns. Rabbi Eliezer Sadan, the founder of the *mechinot*, communicated his concern through this example:

> To practice rescuing a wounded soldier from a tank, you must put your hands under the soldier's shirt and lift him by the armpits. Can you imagine that a male soldier would practice this on a female?[39]

In response to the rabbis' concerns, the military command formulated the "appropriate integration" guidelines in 2002, which developed rules meant to allow religiously observant Jewish men to serve together with women without excluding the women. Examples of such rules include separate living quarters, a requirement to wear modest clothes, and allowing religious soldiers to serve in all-male units to avoid interaction with women.[40] However, this policy favored the needs of religious soldiers who enjoyed a significant quantitative advantage.

To a large extent, the old political rivalry between national-religious and ultra-Orthodox sectors energized the theocratization of the military. Due to its political power, the ultra-Orthodox sector successfully increased the number of those exempted from military service, rising from about 2.5% of potential male draftees during the 1970s to 11% in 2007,[41] and beyond natural demographic growth. Critical to the religious debate over male military service is the question of whether military service breeds secularization. While the ultra-Orthodox view military life as a threat to their spiritual existence,[42] this dilemma motivated the national-religious wing to firmly harmonize religious life and military service. However, more intense interactions between men and women due to the opening up of combat roles to

women undermined this agenda because of the alleged exposure to immodest conduct and its impact on religious faith.

Given this rivalry, national-religious rabbis were less inclined to compromise on religious issues in light of the possibility that religious draftees or their rabbis might prefer exemption or enlistment into the homogeneously male ultra-Orthodox frameworks, established to encourage the volunteer recruitment of the ultra-Orthodox.[43] As Rabbi Avraham Brun, former director-general of the union of *yeshivot hesder* stated in 2001 in reference to women's service: "If religious soldiers have to start questioning whether the IDF is 'holy,' they would start enrolling in ultra-Orthodox yeshivas."[44] 'Holiness' means restriction of women's service while the inter-camp rivalry motivated, or at least was invoked, to raise this demand for holiness.

With the creation of a critical mass and of those unwilling to compromise on their demands, the next process began:

**Restricting the IDF's intra-organizational autonomy vis-à-vis the religious sector:** The religious establishment exploited (at least implicitly) the sense that the military increased its dependency on the religious sector to provide it with high-quality personnel to fill the combat units, and hence improved its bargaining position.

It was especially so on the eve of, and following, the Disengagement, Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, which involved the evacuation of about 8,000 settlers along with another three settlements in the northern West Bank. The withdrawal's perceived destruction of the settlement enterprise threatened to return religious Zionism to the status of just another sector in society, while also undermining the self-identity of a considerable number of religious conscripts as bearers of a national mission.[45] Hence, the plan led many rabbis to call for disobedience.

It was an issue of authority. As Rabbi Avraham Shapira, the leading rabbi of the Zionist-religious sector argued, Jewish law forbids giving away any part of the Land of Israel to non-Jews and therefore soldiers are prohibited from taking part in evacuation of settlements and must disobey orders. In other words, he and many other rabbis denied any elected government's authority to decide territorial concessions.[46]

Eight heads of about 40 *yeshivot hesder* called for disobedience and four called for compliance, but many others transmitted blurred directions, suggesting "grey" refusal. While *mechinot* publically called to obey orders, some of them objected to the deployment of conscripts and even recommended "grey" refusal.[47] The intra-rabbinic debate could affect units staffed with significant numbers of soldiers from the *yeshivot hesder* and *mechinot*.

Therefore, military commanders strove to minimize the scope of disobedience by enhancing dialogue with the rabbis. Later, the commanders attempted to regain the religious leadership's confidence following the Disengagement, exacerbated by the violent confrontation between police and settlers in the evacuation of the illegal settlement of Amona in the West Bank in 2006. There were significant concerns that religious youth would respond to the blow they had suffered by enrolling in ultra-Orthodox yeshivas to avoid conscription, or would display other forms of reluctance to serve, following signs of rupture between part of the religious-Zionist leadership and the state.[48] Evidently, as content analysis of two weekly religious newsletters shows, the attitude toward the IDF had changed, and while soldiers as individuals continued to be positively viewed, the attitude regarding the army's authority had deteriorated.[49] Thus, the IDF's willingness to accommodate the grievances of the religious leadership grew in three ways.

First, the IDF distanced religious soldiers from the inner circle of the forces deployed to physically evict settlers in an operation the soldiers saw as deportation. In other words, the military command accommodated the rabbis' political concerns and deployed the forces accordingly.[50] Ultimately, only 63 soldiers were placed on trial for refusing orders during the evacuation, 24 of whom served in the framework of the *yeshivot hesder*, while many others came to private understandings with their immediate commanding officers to be released from the mission.[51]

Second, appropriate integration was enforced more stringently. Instead of relying on rules subject to the local command's interpretation, in 2004 the military established a special administration headed by religious officers. In other words, the policy stakeholders were provided with the power to supervise the policy. In practice, this administration functioned as a kind of "modesty guard," inspecting the bases. Women soldiers were presented as a sort of "modesty problem.[52] Thus, the exclusion of women from some roles continued to increase, and not just from combat positions, which in practice became barred to women in units with a

significant percentage of religious soldiers. They were also excluded from training and other auxiliary roles that required interaction with religious soldiers.

Gradually, as the Chief of Staff 's Advisor on Women's Issues stated in 2011 by drawing on research conducted in the units:

> Appropriate integration has, over time, become the main - if not the only - perspective through which joint service by men and women is implemented in practice [and that the interpretation of the rules] mandates religious extremism.[53]

At a later stage, rabbis escalated the anti-feminist rhetoric from regarding women in the military as a modesty problem to delegitimizing women's ability to serve as combatants. This rhetoric became more legitimate after the Second Lebanon War (2006), in which the IDF had been portrayed as having failed to achieve the war goals, mainly the failure to launch a massive division-size ground operation in South Lebanon. A retrospective trend inspired efforts to rehabilitate the IDF after the war. Much of the blame was heaped on reforms embarked upon by the IDF in the years prior to the war, including the acceptance of women as combatants. Returning the organization to its roots meant removing women from combat roles. Proposals for redrawing the traditional and familiar gender boundaries could now get the public ear. Furthermore, new coalitions could be built between both religious and secular, conservative senior officers adhering to restoring the traditional gender division of labor in the military by, inter alia, excluding women from combat.[54]

As for the third mode of accommodating religious demands, the military accepted the expansion of the role of military chaplains from the traditional role of providing religious services, to the religious socialization of secular soldiers, while partly supplanting the relatively liberal Education Corps.[55] The 2006 appointment of Brigadier General Avi Ronsky, a settler from the West Bank, as the IDF's Chief Rabbi, signified the turning point. Ronsky declared that secular Zionism was in crisis and therefore: "Part of my job as the Chief Military Rabbi, perhaps the central part, is to reconnect the soldiers with the values of Judaism."[56]

As the State Comptroller documented, the high command refrained from formally and effectively containing the Military Rabbinate.[57] This command even legitimized this role expansion by claiming that the Military Rabbinate is required to adapt itself to new tasks and

challenges following changes that have occurred in Israeli society. One of its derivatives had been an increase in observant soldiers and officers serving in the IDF. Therefore, the new task became instilling Jewish consciousness to soldiers and commanders to reinforce their fighting spirit. [58]

From the religious elite's perspective, the Chief Rabbi's authority was not necessarily derived from the military hierarchy but was autonomous. As Rabbi Sadan, among the most pragmatic representatives of the national-religious sector, asserted, "the military has only one authority and it is the commander, but the commander, like the parliament, is responsible that his orders will be compatible with the Jewish religious law (*Da'at Torah*), while the authoritative interpreter of this law is the Military Rabbinate." Sadan said that this perception of the rabbinate's authority had been agreed upon in a meeting of heads of *mechinot* and *yeshivot hesder*.[59] In other words, the Military Rabbinate was authorized to monitor the legality of commands and this authority was endorsed by external, civilian rabbis.

A clear manifestation of the new role of the rabbinate appeared during the Gaza operation in 2009, when rabbis joined troops in the field and worked to "spiritually elevate" the soldiers by dispensing theological propaganda. Rabbis steered the appropriate code of conduct in the field by declaring, "When you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral."[60] Far from being an exception, this rhetoric represented other rabbis' opinions and the guidance they gave to their student-soldiers.[61] This activity of the Chief Rabbinate was criticized by the Chief of General Staff, who ordered that such a deviation from the military's policies would not reoccur.[62]

Israel Harel, an intellectual figure among the settlers, described the struggle between the conflicting values by stating after the Gaza operation:

> The struggle is not between the Education Corps and the Chief Military Rabbinate, but between two spiritual streams: one is represented by those attacking the Chief Rabbi, leading the IDF to ambivalence and undermining its full faith in its cause, resulting in impairment of the IDF's operational capabilities. The counter stream, whose roots were discovered in Operation Cast Lead, is based on full identification with the Zionist and national, not necessarily religious, roots of the State of Israel.[63]

It was against the background of this mounting clash between these two spiritual streams that the senior officer released his statement cited above, lamenting that "the army is deciding for you what kind of Jew you will be: a national-religious [Orthodox] Jew."

In summary, the IDF's intra-organizational autonomy vis-à-vis the religious sector was restricted. Without religious pressures, it is safe to assume that deployment of troops for the evacuation could have been less restricted. Yes, in the end the military carried out this mission but compromised the canonic principles of military discipline. Moreover, the extent of disobedience would probably have been higher had the IDF decided to coerce the religious soldiers to participate in the mission without compromises. Possibly, soldiers had released themselves from dependence on rabbinical guidance and many of them were loyal to their commanders,[64] but the IDF's mode of deployment prevented real testing of this hypothesis. Similarly, women's service was limited only following religious pressures. By the same token, had its autonomy not been restricted, the military command could have more effectively contained the expansion of the Military Rabbinate.

We may consider two explanations for this surrender of the IDF command. First, it is safe to conclude that since the 1990s, the senior command had been operating on the assumption that it is dependent on the religious establishment to provide it with high-quality personnel to fill the combat units. As the theory of diversity management expects, the character and bounds of diversity arrangements are largely demarcated by the bargaining power of the group demanding such arrangements. Increased bargaining power thus restricted the autonomy of the military.

This argument largely rests on the interpretation of the IDF's policies and practices. All three forms showing the IDF's willingness to accommodate the grievances of the religious leadership indicate that free will was not necessarily the case. On top of this, the IDF's Personnel Directorate Head, Maj. Gen. Avi Zamir, warned, in a farewell letter, against the erosion at the base of the joint service of religious and secular soldiers and presented it as a threat to the existence of the recruitment model.[65] To some extent, Zamir indicated a loss of control of the supreme command on the way religious diversity is implemented.

One may argue that the increase in the political power of the right-wing explains this orientation. Yet, exogenous political processes have a limited impact on the processes

described here. First, the national-religious parties have significantly lost much of their power (from 10-12 seats in the Israeli parliament up until the 1970s, to only about 6-9 seats during the 1990s-2000s). Paradoxically, this sector's power in the military increased with the decline in its parliamentary power. Second, it was a right-wing government which initiated the Disengagement and still had to overcome intra-military obstacles, while another rightist coalition which governed in the mid-1990s promoted the equal integration of women in the military. In sum, what matters most is the intra-military balance of power.

However, a complementary line of argument, guided by the theoretical framework, suggests that the military acted not only out of direct manpower constraints but also responded to indirect ones. First it did so by producing symbolic rewards for its religious conscripts. Rather than being an explicit agenda, this endeavor reflects the organizational logic of increasing the value of symbolic rewards as a means to decrease the needs to use monetary rewards, especially during the 1990s-2000s when military motivation declined.

In this case, promotion of the religious agenda, in terms of influencing the military (which also extends to the need to minimize women's presence and reduce the level of loss of such rewards by the Disengagement), could have further motivated this group. As Rabbi Sadan simply valued the impact of increased presence of religious soldiers and officers in the IDF, "the Torah…is the spiritual power prompting to take responsibility for the security of the State of Israel over time".[66] Furthermore, with increasing presence as an identity group, the religious were imbued with the pride of being the new service elite, supplanting the old, supposedly shirking secular elites and even "shouldering the state on their back", as drawn from dialogues between religious soldiers and rabbis.[67] Consequently, intra-military hierarchies were built, by which soldiers evoked Judaism as the core element in the construction of solidarity and identity in the IDF and thereby even secular soldier considered their religious peers as the ones who preserve the ideas constitutive of the collective identity within the IDF.[68]

Second, as the theoretical framework suggests, theocratization props up patriotism. Beyond its impact on further production of symbolic rewards, with growing social reluctance to sacrifice, theocratization may help to justify sacrifice. Therefore, rather than only accommodating the demands of religious soldiers, secular commanders promote the effort to confer religious

values to the military mission, similar to efforts identified in the U.S. military, to motivate secular, not necessarily religious conscripts.

Indeed, the infrastructure for the diffusion of religious values into the military culture was laid in 2002, when the Chief of the General Staff recruited *Beit Morasha,* a center for Judaic studies, to assist the IDF Education Corps in strengthening Jewish identity and enhancing the connection of commanders and soldiers to their land, values, heritage and people, thereby filling a vacuum apparently identified in the secular school system.[69] To some extent, the military made some attempts to curb the liberal trends prevalent during the 1990s with their apparent negative impact on military motivation by instilling religious values. The outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000, resulting in a new round of hostilities between Israelis and Palestinians, was instrumental. It not only required new sacrifices, but also legitimized the annulment of the Oslo-generated liberal winds. Containment of liberal trends paved the road to a more active role played by what was perceived to be the authentic representatives of Judaism, namely, the rabbinate.

Therefore, while the three abovementioned forms of yielding to religious demands can be explained in terms of manpower constraints and the need to produce symbolic rewards, the endeavor to theocraticize the military mission offers a supplementary aspect to the understanding of the changing role of military chaplains. Two countervailing streams are thus at work simultaneously, one reluctantly compromising the organizational autonomy while the other is attracted by the benefits of leveraging religious values to reinforce motivation. Weakness of the military command paved the road to the fourth process:

**Restricting the IDF's autonomy in deploying forces in politically disputable missions.** Following the Disengagement in Gaza, the focus has shifted from Gaza to the West Bank as the main arena in which critical decisions must be made to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Clearly, the cost of this resolution will be the withdrawal from most of the territory and the dismantling of many of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. One of the lessons learned from the Gaza pullout was that the greater the critical mass of religious soldiers, the more limited the military is in deploying troops for evacuating settlements.[70]

Some pragmatic rabbis understood this logic on the eve of the Disengagement. They also understood that mass refusal of religious soldiers to take part in the dismantling of the

settlements in Gaza might have endangered the group's presence and achievements in the IDF. For example, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, one of the settlers' rabbis, argued against disobedience through this logic:

> To leave the army is to leave the nation. It is disengagement from the people! ... If you are not inside, you have no influence. You only harm yourself while others take your place — just as with the left-wing refuseniks …[71]

Furthermore, despite the religious leadership's sense of failure to stop the withdrawal, they were energized by the increasing visibility of religious officers. A conspicuous presence could increase the group's influence beyond its small proportion in the population and its limited political representation.[72] Influence could be obtained from increasing the presence of religious soldiers in the military along with in other critical sectors in the civil administration.[73]

This strategy of increasing the presence of religious soldiers in combat units proved effective even before the pullout from Gaza. First and foremost, the critical mass of religious soldiers and settlers helped create informal practices on the ground. The *Sasson Report* of 2005, commissioned by Ariel Sharon's government to investigate the growth in unauthorized outposts in the West Bank, presented a picture of dual networks — formal and informal — with regard to the political-military control of the settlement project. The report implied that without the IDF's both passive and active cooperation, the illegal settlements could not have been expanded.[74] For example, the concept that any Israeli in the territories should be afforded security led the IDF to protect unauthorized outposts. Likewise, IDF soldiers did not enforce the law and had no interest in functioning as policemen, although they were, in fact, in the area, while the police were not. For example, soldiers allowed trailers to be placed in unauthorized locations, thus creating new, improvised settlements. In sum, the report said:

> The "commander spirit"… sees the settlers' acts [of] building outposts as Zionist deeds, although illegal, and asks [the soldiers] not to inspect such acts through the eyes of the law. This "commander spirit" is nourished by the involvement of State authorities and public authorities in establishing unauthorized outposts.[75]

As one example of this "spirit," Sasson cited the fact that some IDF officers are themselves residents of illegal settlements and, as such, convey a clear message to the military forces.[76]

Part of this cooperation is explained by the blurred boundaries between many of the soldiers serving in the West Bank and the ideologically-motivated religious settlers: many soldiers and officers live in the settlements, many others are graduates of *mechinot* and *yeshivot hesder* located in the West Bank, and the social interaction between soldiers and settlers is intensive. State agencies were infiltrated by the settler movement and thereby lost part of their autonomy.[77]

No less important is the fact that protests and disobedience rose from within units deployed in the West Bank, a significant percentage of which were staffed by graduates of yeshivas and *mechino*t or local settlers whose ideological bias was clear. For example, in August 2007, a company composed of yeshiva students was ordered to provide perimeter security for the evacuation of Jewish families from the market in Hebron. Twelve out of forty soldiers refused to comply with the order.[78] In 2009, for the first time in the country's history, soldiers in uniform raised protest signs, in this case against the evacuation of illegal settlements. In late 2009, in an unprecedented move, the Ministry of Defense retracted **Har Bracha** Yeshiva's **status** as a *yeshivat hesder* after its head openly and publicly encouraged soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate Jewish settlements.[79] Other threats to refuse to carry out orders to evacuate settlements have also been clearly heard since then.

There was no better evidence of this undermining of the IDF's control over its forces in the West Bank than the order issued by the commander of the West Bank forces in 2011 to restrict information about the army's plans to impose order on the West Bank settlers. This order was a reaction to a well-founded suspicion that soldiers and officers were leaking information to the settlers in order to confound the orders of the top brass.[80]

Thus, whether the military and its political supervisors admit it or not, it is safe to assume that a central consideration in refraining from dismantling illegal settlements (with some exceptions imposed by the High Court of Justice), despite the Israeli pledge to the United States, is the simple understanding that doing so would open the military to massive refusals from religious soldiers.[81] It is not for nothing that the IDF's formal position is that it prefers the army not be on the front lines of evacuating outposts and that police units should do the job,[82] although the police are incapable of doing the job alone.

Intentionally or not, theocratization serves the political agenda. Deterring the army from evacuating settlements in the future and maintaining an informal cooperation in the field require a critical mass of religious soldiers in the units deployed in the West Bank. Theocratization of the ranks, including the exclusion of women from field units, is an important effort to encourage the service of the religious communities.

It follows that the IDF lost part of its autonomy regarding troop deployment. Stage three followed from stage four: While the military accepted, reluctantly or not, religious intrusion into its ranks in a manner that limited its intra-organizational autonomy, this intrusion extended to restrictions in troop deployment. While one may see the advantages of theocratization as pertinent to the third stage, it is hard to assume that the supreme command explicitly encouraged the fourth stage. Explanations as to this deterioration are, therefore, mixed: either (1) an ideological agenda at part of the low level of command, or (2) the unintentional consequences of theocratization. As the theory implies, the military traded autonomy for manpower and harmonious relations with the settlers,[83] including securing predictable exchanges and reducing uncertainties. For the IDF, the availability of motivated troops was a priority over law enforcement of Jewish settlers.

Nevertheless, liberalization and theocratization dragged the IDF into a cultural struggle. In 2011, for the first time, secular circles showed signs of attempts to contain the theocratization. Senior commanders, most prominent among them Maj. Gen. Avi Zamir, former Personnel Directorate Head, called for a curbing of the IDF's growing religious radicalization.[84] Newspapers published a series of articles exposing the new reality of theocratization. At its height, the secular camp had two successes: it forced the IDF to retain the original wording of the Yizkor – the memorial prayer for fallen soldiers – as "Yizkor Am Yisrael" ("May the People of Israel Remember"), rather than "Yizkor Elohim" ("May God Remember"), the version the rabbis practiced during the recent years.[85]

Second, this camp also forced the IDF to partly contain another phenomenon: the refusal of some religious soldiers, backed by many rabbis, to listen to female soldiers singing solo as part of a military band. As a compromise, the IDF's Chief of Staff decided that religious soldiers would be allowed to opt out of entertainment ceremonies that involved women's singing, but would not be allowed to stay out of formal events such as memorial services.[86]

This decision, however, drew criticism from some rabbis. Particularly extreme was Rabbi Elyakim Levanon, head of one of the *yeshivot hesder*, who said

> [The IDF] is bringing close the day in which rabbis will have to say to soldiers 'you have to leave those events even if there's a firing squad outside, and you'll be shot to death.'[87]

As both cases demonstrate, only when public opinion did not tolerate theocratization, when an extreme degree of religious coercion became more blunt, then the high command imposed policies backed by public opinion and furnished with legitimate tools to contain the religious. Nonetheless, this was not the routine pattern.

## Conclusions

Theocratization has governed cultural processes taking place within the IDF. According to the definition drawn from "theocratic military", the process described here met the criteria set by this definition: Apart from the formal subordination of the military to formal civilian authorities, other characters of theocratization were identified, as follows: (1) a single religion, Judaism, determined the boundaries of collective identity. As the study showed, Jewish identity played an increasing role in the IDF; (2) rules gradually conformed to principles of religious doctrine as can be inferred from the empowerment of the military rabbinate, restrictions imposed on women's service and the manner by which the military deployed its troops to deal with religious commands; and most importantly, (3) religious authorities operated in tandem with the civil-sanctioned military system, whose opinions and jurisprudence carried a notable symbolic weight. Frictions discussed here indicate a clash between codes and sources of authority. What is described here is therefore a fight over control of the military, not just its cultural character.

However, this conflict between those who favor theocratization and those who favor liberalization is an asymmetrical conflict. In terms of the institutional infrastructure, the religious networks of yeshivas and religious mechinot have a clear advantage over the disorganized liberal camp. The religious groups also have the upper hand in terms of agenda. After all, apart from minor attempts to struggle against theocratization, the secular, liberal camp seems to be indifferent to the theocratization trend. Many upper- middle- class men and women opt out of military service by using their individual bargaining power rather than

struggling over the IDF's identity. Indeed, six years passed between the first time the *Knesset Committee on the Status of Women* discussed the exclusionary elements of the "appropriate integration" (in 2005) and the awakening of feminist activists in 2011 to mildly protest the consequences of this policy. Most importantly, the IDF's level of dependency on the religious reservoir, and the growing orientation towards capitalization on religious values, biases it to favor the interests of this group.

To the extent that religious conscripts will increase their presence, middle-class secular conscripts will reduce their share and the interest of their networks in military affairs will decline as well. And as the military enlist more ultra-Orthodox, resulting from pressures to share the burden of service more equally, theocratization will rise.

The theoretical proposition explained the rationale behind the four-stage process: Diversity management guided the IDF's efforts to offer a suitable environment for potential religious conscripts. Yet, the character and bounds of arrangements informed by diversity management were largely demarcated by the bargaining power of the religious group, increasing with its growing critical mass in combat units. Direct arrangements not only respected religious diversity but produced symbolic rewards for the religious conscripts, as part of the organizational logic leaning towards increasing the arsenal of symbolic rewards and thereby decreasing the need to enlarge the deployment of material rewards. The more the religious sectors' power has been translated into demands, the more the military has compromised its freedom of action in order to guarantee uninterrupted flow of manpower from the religious communities. However, rather than just responding to direct manpower constraints, the military's motivation has also been guided by the benefits entailed in leveraging religious values to motivate sacrifice among secular conscripts. A similar scenario is identified in the U.S. military. Against this background, the military's tolerance of its restricted autonomy is better understood. Yet, this tolerance unintentionally extended to further restrict the IDF's autonomy in deploying forces in the West Bank.

To a large extent, theocratization signifies the failure of the secular project of nationalism and state building, which in Hobbes' vision underpinned the state and its military. As Weber warned about a hundred years ago, disenchantment, as a significant outcome of secularization and rationalization, has created a world with no objectively ascertainable grounds for one's convictions. "Scientific pleading is meaningless in principle," he argued, "because the various

value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other."[88] Against this background, Shenhav entertained the hybridization of nationalism and religion in the sense that "sacred religious symbols seep from religion into all forms of political and institutional life. [Hence] the role of religion in national movements in the West has not necessarily diminished".[89] The characterization of the "global war against terror" as a return to postmodern religious wars of martyrdom further boosts this trend.[90] Another sign of the crisis of secular statism is the emergence of a permanent state of emergency such as that enacted by democratic states in the wake of 9/11, which revived the interest in Carl Schmitt's concept of "state of exception" with his theological-political concepts.[91]

It follows that just as re-theocratization of the political sphere serves the cause of new wars, it may also be made part of the military culture and exploited to motivate sacrifice. Thus, theocratization is more likely than secular sentiments to dominate a military, particularly one like the IDF that is involved in a protracted war. But as this article suggests, theocratization not also helps maintain the war spirit but also may entrench the war itself. Therefore, it is not a wild prediction to argue that theocratization may prevail, at least in the short term, and affect the freedom of action of Israeli governments in deploying the military for politically disputed missions.

As this conclusion is deduced from a comparative outlook, on which the theoretical concepts guiding this study were drawn, the process offered in the Israeli case can serve a broader study of process experienced by other militaries as well, especially in fighting democracies in the post-Cold War era.

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