

Observation no: 112 (Sinai War)

Country-year: Israel - 1955

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

The state of Israel was established on May 14, 1948 as a parliamentary democracy after the United Nations recommended the partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, on November 29, 1947.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

Yes.

Although Israel's president in 1955, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, was not a formal former military officer, he had served in the pre-state Israel Jewish Legion. Moreover, the country's *de facto* top political leader (the president having a ceremonial position) was Israel's main funder, David Ben-Gurion who had also served in the Jewish Legion. Ben-Gurion served as prime minister from May 17, 1948 to January 26, 1954 and then again from November 3, 1955 to June 26, 1963, as well as minister of defense for most of 1955. Moshe Sharett assumed the office of prime minister in between Ben-Gurion's two terms from January 1954 until November 1955.³

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

While technically there were no ethnic or social barriers to enter the officer corps among Israeli Jews, most of the career officers were educated sons of early *Yishuv*

¹ Smith, Charles D. *Palestine And The Arab-Israeli Conflict, A history With Documents*, Seventh Edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St Martin's, 2010, p. 200.

² Verified in Luttwak, Edward. *Coup d'État. A practical Handbook*. Table II Basic List of Coups and Attempted Coups, 1945-78. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 205.

³ Smith, Charles D, p. 251.

settlers in pre-state Israel rather than the children of post-independence immigrants.⁴

More importantly, although all Israeli citizens, independently of ethnicity and gender, were by law subject to military conscription, the Israeli Arabs (whether Muslim or Christian) were in practice exempted by order of the defense minister (although accepted on a voluntary basis) from joining the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). By November 1955, the exemption on the Druze was cancelled and Druze recruits could consequently be enlisted along Bedouins in the IDF's Minorities Unit. However, the Druze soldiers and officers continued to be confined to the Minorities Unit and not fully integrated into the IDF until the start of the integration process of the Druze into the IDF following the 1967 war.⁵

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

Yes.

Political membership and commitment among senior army officers was natural, as most of the political elite had participated in the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 as army officers. However, the two main political parties, the Mapai (David Ben-Gurion's social-democrat party) and the labor-Zionist left-wing Mapam, principally disagreed over the role and "pioneering" status of the former pre-state elite brigade Palmach. Under Ben-Gurion's time as prime minister and minister of defense between 1948 and 1963, former Palmach officers were mostly denied access to important military positions that were in general attributed to officers loyal to Ben-Gurion.⁶

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited. See answer to question 5.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

⁴ Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan. *The Israeli Army*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975, pp. 184-185.

⁵ Krebs, Ronald R. One Nation under Arms? Military Participation Policy and the Politics of Identity. *Security Studies*, 2005, pp. 551-553.

⁶ Smith, Charles D, p. 274.

The Israeli army constituted in the people's consciousness the backbone of nation building. Many immigrants to Israel learned Hebrew and their new country's social habits during their military service. This very high militarization of society with the reserve system and mandatory military conscription made possible the gathering of people from very different cultural and social backgrounds with the goal of fomenting unity for the defense of the Israeli state.⁷

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

Because entire Palestinian villages and farmlands had been separated from Israel, recurrent border transgressions from Arabs resulted in automatic retaliation by the Israeli army.⁸

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

Yes.

The period between the establishment of the state of Israel and the outbreak of the Six-Day War in 1966 corresponds to a time of military governments in Israel. During this period, restrictions were imposed on Arabs on the basis of the security situation and the Defense (Emergency) regulations 1945. Army officers banned political organization and activism in order to contain dissidents opposing the military government or state measures such as the confiscation of lands. The state also imposed travel restrictions and permits on Arabs in order to control their movements.⁹

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

Yes.

The *Nahal* was created as a special independent unit formed by youth movements combining military service and agricultural trainings for the establishment of *Nahal* settlements.¹⁰

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

⁷ Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, p. 205.

⁸ Smith, Charles D, p. 230.

⁹ Korn, Alina. The Israeli Arab Population Under the Military Government (1948-1966). *Crime and Legal Control*, The Center for Crime and Justice Studies (ISTD), 2000, pp. 586-588.

¹⁰ Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 421-423.

Yes.

The Military Intelligence Directorate dealt with issues such as military censorship. Its influence came into prominence during the Lavon affair in the summer of 1954 when the defense minister, Moshe Lavon, orchestrated a failed operation designed to maintain Israel's security on the Egyptian front. The operation consisted in pro-Israel agents to bomb the British and American embassies in Cairo, and disguise it as a Muslim Brotherhood attack that would induce the British to maintain their troops in the canal zone, therefore enhancing Israel's security. The plan was discovered and the military intelligence completely censored the affair, in part because it would shock the Israeli public (what it did after the affair was revealed after 1960), and because Moshe Sharett, the prime minister, was not aware of the plot.¹¹

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

Yes.

The civilian and military spheres overlapped from the very creation of the state of Israel and substantially up until June 1963, year during which David Ben-Gurion, then first prime minister of Israel and minister of defense, resigned from office. The Israeli army's role in the creation and defense of the state participated in Israel to be a "nation-in-arms" in which civilian and military leadership closely collaborate.¹²

However, personal loyalties to Ben-Gurion often hindered the exchange of information between civil leaders in office and military leaders during the interim government of Moshe Sharett between January 1954 and November 1955. Indeed, although former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had went into semi-retirement during Sharett's term, the military leadership kept on consulting him without necessarily informing the civilian leaders in office. The Lavon affair exemplifies this. (See answer to question 11).¹³

¹¹ Smith, Charles D, pp. 237-238.

¹² Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 203-205.

¹³ Smith, Charles D, p. 237.