

**Observation no: 143 (War of Attrition)**

**Country-year: Israel – 1968**

**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.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?**

No.

I cannot find evidence of this.<sup>2</sup>

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

Yes.

Israel's *de facto* most powerful political figure was Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who served as prime minister from June 1963 to January 1969.<sup>3</sup> Eshkol had been a member of the high command of the Haganah, the precursor of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in pre-state Israel. In 1968, the president of Israel was politician and author Zalman Shazar, who served two terms from 1963 to 1973, and had a ceremonial role.

**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*

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan. *The Israeli Army*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1975, p. 427.

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

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 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 after the 1967 war.<sup>5</sup>

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

No.

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.<sup>6</sup>

It is only after 1965 with Ben-Gurion's political decline and with Levi Eshkol as prime minister that the senior officer corps opened up to officers with other ideological backgrounds. Under Eshkol, Yitzhak Rabin, a military officer and former member of Palmach, was appointed chief of staff, the highest military position in the army.<sup>7</sup>

**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.

---

<sup>4</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 184-185.

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

<sup>6</sup> Smith, Charles D, p. 274.

<sup>7</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 72 & 177.

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

Yes.

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.<sup>8</sup>

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

Yes.

By the end of the 1950's, al-Fatah was created as a group of young Palestinians who had fled to Gaza during the establishment of Israel. By the mid-1960's, Fatah began to plan terrorist attacks on Israeli installations and population. By 1965, Fatah had carried out 39 operations against Israeli installations, most of them planned and launched from Jordan.<sup>9</sup> This resulted in the IDF to increasingly carry out retaliation raids in the West Bank such as the massive raid in the village of Samu in November 1966.<sup>10</sup> The Israeli operation in the Jordanian town of Karamah in March 1968 against the Palestinian Fatah fighters marked the first large-scale ground operation by the IDF to eradicate Palestinian dissidents after the Six-Day War. The IDF also fought in the occupied territories annexed after the 1967 war to eliminate the presence of Arab fighters from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fatah categorized as "local terrorists and guerillas".<sup>11</sup>

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

Yes.

Military governments ruled from the establishment of the state of Israel to the Six-Day War of 1966. During this period, restrictions were imposed on Arabs on the basis of the security situation and the Defense (Emergency) regulations 1945. At that time, army officers also banned political organization and activism in order to

---

<sup>8</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, p. 205.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, Charles D, pp. 271-272.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, Charles D, p. 276.

<sup>11</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 303-307.

contain political dissidents.<sup>12</sup> After the 1967 Six-Day War, the Israelis ruled militarily in the occupied territories of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza strip, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem respectively annexed from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan after the war.<sup>13</sup>

**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.<sup>14</sup>

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

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.<sup>15</sup>

**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.

However, and in spite of Israel's military victory, a substantial part of the military leaders from the 1967 war were replaced quickly after the war.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, p. 305.

<sup>14</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 421-423.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, Charles D, pp. 237-238.

<sup>16</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, p. 336.

**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 under David Ben-Gurion, first prime minister of Israel and minister of defense. However, the decade preceding the 1967 Six-Day War marked the decline of Ben-Gurion's military activism. Divisions among the government and Ben-Gurion's own Mapai Party over the involvement of the military in politics and foreign policy matters resulted in Ben-Gurion's resignation as prime minister in 1963 and the Mapai in 1965.<sup>17</sup>

However, considering the Israeli army's role in the creation and defense of the state and participation in Israel to be a "nation-in-arms" - in which civilian and military leadership closely collaborate - we can assume that communication between the Israeli civilian leaders and military officers was constant.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Smith, Charles D, pp. 274-275.

<sup>18</sup> Luttwak, Edward & Horowitz, Dan, pp. 203-205.