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AUTHORS: Murat ÜLGÜL

PAGES: 57-80

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/815719>

Soldiers and The Use of Force: Military Activism and Conservatism During The Intifadas

Murat ÜLGÜL*

Abstract

Are soldiers more prone and likely to use force and initiate conflicts than civilians? To bring a new insight to this question, this article compares the main arguments of military activism and military conservatism theories on Israeli policies during the First and Second Intifadas. Military activism argues that soldiers are prone to end political problems with the use of force mainly because of personal and organizational interests as well as the effects of a military-mindset. The proponents of military conservatism, on the other hand, claim that soldiers are conservative on the use of force and it is the civilians most likely offering military measures. Through an analysis of qualitative nature, the article finds that soldiers were more conservative in the use of force during the First Intifada and Oslo Peace Process while they were more hawkish in the Second Intifada. This difference is explained by enemy conceptions and by the politicization of Israeli officers.

Key Words

Military Activism, Military Conservatism, Use of Force, Israeli Politics, Palestinian Intifada, Civil-Military Relations.

* Dr., Karadeniz Technical University, Department of International Relations, Trabzon, Turkey. E-mail: mulgul@ktu.edu.tr

Introduction

Are soldiers more prone to use force and initiate conflicts than civilians? The traditional view in the civil-military relations literature stresses that professional soldiers are conservative in the use of force because soldiers are the ones who mainly suffer in war. Instead, this view says, it is the civilians who initiate wars and conflicts because, without military knowledge, they underestimate the costs of war while overvaluing the benefits of military action.¹ In recent decades, military conservatism has been challenged by a group of scholars who argue that the traditional view is based on a limited number of cases, mainly civil-military relations in the United States. By analyzing several other countries, these scholars have found that soldiers are more war-prone than civilians because of organization/personal interests and a military-mindset. This theory, which is called military activism or militarism, holds that military regimes are more likely to initiate wars than civilian regimes, including dictatorial ones.²

In this article, I will attempt to bring a new insight to the literature by analyzing Israeli soldiers' preferences on the use of force during the First and Second Intifadas. In this comparative-qualitative case study, I will show a complex picture, as the Israeli soldiers were conservative in the use of force during the First Intifada and Oslo peace process while the military was one of the most hawkish institutions after the Second Intifada erupted in 2000. I will explain this complexity with two factors. First, the condition of the enemy plays an important role in what the soldiers see as their organizational and personal interests. During the First Intifada, the Israeli soldiers saw themselves in opposition to a civilian population and using force against them was regarded as a violation of organizational and personal interests. Yet, when the Palestinian Authority (PA) became a state-like entity over time and had an armed presence, using heavy force in the Second Intifada did not contradict with these interests.

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Second, the politicization of the Israeli soldiers is important in explaining the differences in the soldiers' preferences between the First and Second Intifadas. Similar to the Israeli politicians and society, Israeli soldiers were divided on how to establish peace with the Palestinians. During the First Intifada, the top echelon of the military supported the "land for peace" formula of the Labor Party and they were open to dialogue and negotiations with the Palestinians. On the other hand, the generals after 2000 belonged to the other end of the political spectrum and saw the use of force as a most efficient policy; therefore, it was not surprising to see that the generals of the Second Intifada entered politics as members of the right-wing parties. All in all, these factors show that neither military conservatism nor military activism alone can explain the policy preferences of the Israeli soldiers.

Below I will first explain the arguments of military conservatism and activism theories. Then I will analyze the policy preferences of the Israeli soldiers during the First Intifada, Oslo peace

process and Second Intifada, mainly through secondary resources such as newspapers, memoirs and books on the subject. In the conclusion, I will summarize the findings and highlight the theoretical implications of the article.

Military Conservatism and Military Activism

Because soldiers are trained to fight as their profession, it is natural to assume that they are more war-prone than other groups, especially politicians. Nevertheless, the traditional view on this question is exactly the opposite, arguing that international conflicts are mainly the result of ambitious policies of irresponsible civilian politicians. Among political science theories, for example, the diversionary theory of war points out that politicians occasionally provoke external conflicts and initiate wars when they face domestic crises.³ Civil-military relations scholars also give attention to the relationship between wars and political elites and have found that soldiers are more pessimistic on the utility of force than civilian politicians. They argue that because civilians have no experience on the battlefield, they often underestimate the costs and overvalue the benefits of military action. As a result, soldiers are less inclined to use force until the survival of the state is

at stake. As an advocate of this view, Huntington argues that professional soldiers rarely favor war since it means the intensification of threats to national security. As he states in his oft-quoted book, *The Soldier and the State*, a soldier “tends to see himself as the perennial victim of civilian warmongering. It is the people and the politicians, public opinion and governments, who start wars. It is the military who have to fight them.”⁴ Similarly, General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the United States Army in the 1930s, points out that soldiers have no interest in war and “the soldier above all people prays for peace for he must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war.”⁵ In accordance with these observations, Betts found that during the Cold War, American officers did not homogenously advocate use of force when faced with crises; instead, civilians offered more aggressive policies than soldiers.⁶

In recent decades, this theory has been challenged by scholars who argue that the traditional view is based on a limited number of cases. By extending the number of cases and looking at non-professional armies as well, critics found that soldiers are indeed more war-prone than civilians and military regimes are more likely to initiate wars. These scholars explain their findings with two factors. First, they argue that soldiers may advocate for offensive

policies because war provides significant organizational and personal interests. To begin with, combat may bring glory and excitement, and victory in war may open the door to political careers for some generals. Combat may also offer a large share of the budget to the military. During wartime, soldiers can convince the government to buy new weapons much easier than in peacetime, when the money is spent for education, health and other services. Finally, combat may give the military leaders an opportunity to try new strategies, test the soldiers' efficiency and even market the weapons the military industry produced in that country.⁷ According to military activism, all these benefits may increase the belligerency of soldiers and make them more likely to advocate war.⁸

Second, proponents of military activism explain soldiers' war-proneness with their military-mindset. Military-mindset refers to a common set of norms gained by soldiers during their military service; in other words, it is the organizational subculture within the military. As Rosati and Scott argue in their explanation of U.S. Foreign Service officers' subculture, beliefs and norms acquired in an organization "result in certain incentives and disincentives that influence the behavior of individuals within [that] organization."⁹ This organizational behavioral pattern is most striking in the military as military academies and

barracks physically separate soldiers from the civilian world for an extended period while the military in general enlists those who view national security as a main concern. As a result of this specific socialization process, the beliefs and norms gained during military education have a long-lasting effect in soldiers' minds and the militaries became "total institutions that mold the beliefs of their members for life."¹⁰

Military-mindset refers to a common set of norms gained by soldiers during their military service; in other words, it is the organizational subculture within the military.

According to military activists, military-mindset has two main and interconnected characteristics. First, soldiers are trained as realistic, pessimistic and cautious men. Because even a small mistake may have enormous consequences in their profession – such as death and defeat – a soldier has to take all worst-case scenarios into consideration. As Huntington emphasizes, "between the good and evil in man, the military ethic emphasizes the evil."¹¹ Therefore, if a military man wants to survive, protect, and win, he has to be a "man of Hobbes" who trusts no one other than

himself and his companion-in-arms. Second, and related to this pessimism, military activists hold, a soldier prefers for military measures to end security problems. Sechser points out that because they “are socialized to envision national security as a strictly military problem, soldiers may undervalue economic and diplomatic aspects of security problems whereas they exaggerate security threats, highlight the advantages of striking first and generate optimistic evaluations of the results of war.”¹² Soldiers do not believe that diplomacy and negotiations, which are unpredictable and take a long time to apply, can solve security problems. They see diplomatic concessions to the adversary as weakness that can be exploited in the future. As a result, soldiers hold that diplomacy and negotiations only prolong existing problems whereas, with a certain victory on the battlefield, the victor can impose its conditions on the enemy and decisively end the problem.¹³ All in all, military activists argue that based on organizational/personal interests and the military-mindset, soldiers are likely to advocate the use of force against the enemy.

This article will compare military conservatism and military activism theories by analyzing Israeli soldiers’ preferences in solving the Palestinian issue during the First Intifada, Oslo peace process, and the Second Intifada.

This is a comparative case study in two ways. First, I will compare the preferences of the civilians and soldiers in all periods to see the explanatory power of the above-mentioned theories. As will be seen, the article will show that the preferences of civilians and the military are not categorically different, as emphasized by the literature. Instead, what we will see fits with Yoram Peri’s observation that we are looking at “a coalition of officers and politicians versus another coalition of officers and politicians” rather than “politicians versus officers.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, I will also compare soldiers’ preferences between the time periods mentioned above and show significant differences. I will explain these differences with enemy conceptions and the politicization of Israeli officers, which is important to show the changes in organizational/personal interests and the military-mindset.

Military Conservatism and the First Intifada

The First Intifada broke out on 8 December 1987, when an Israeli truck hit a car at the Jabalya refugee camp in Gaza, killing four Palestinian laborers. Frustrated from living under military rule for the last two decades, this ordinary accident became the final straw that broke the camel’s back and triggered major demonstrations against

Israeli rule in the occupied territories. As soon as the intifada broke out, the use of force was heavily adopted by the Israeli coalition government and security establishment in accordance with the Israeli security doctrine in the territories, which had been formulated in 1976 by then-Defense Minister Shimon Peres and Minister of Police Shlomo Hillel. This doctrine highlighted drastic security measures including curfews, mass arrests, demolishing houses, withholding salaries, deportation from the country, etc. and it became the main policy until January 1988.¹⁵ Nevertheless, when it was understood that the demonstrations would not soon die down, major differences emerged among the Israeli political and security actors.

Throughout the First Intifada, there were both hawks and doves- as well as “security doves”- among the civilians. On the one side, there was the right-wing group which included political parties such as Likud, the National Religious Party, Tzomet, Moledet and Tehiya. This group opposed any dialogue and negotiations with the Palestinians and they proposed several radical measures including annexation of the territories. Some of these parties were ruled by former generals. Rafael Eitan, leader of Tzomet and former Chief of General Staff (CGS), was one of them and he opposed any concession

to the Palestinians: “[C]oncessions made to the Arabs are interpreted by them as signs of weakness and weariness from the struggle. Such concessions teach them that their continued intransigence pays off, that they will gain the upper hand in the end. Concessions lead the Arabs to harden their position, and turn them into even more vigorous adversaries.”¹⁶ Instead, his solution to the intifada was simple but brutal: “A bullet in the head of every stone thrower.”¹⁷ Another hawk in the Knesset was Moledet leader Rehavam Zeevi who, even before the breakout of the intifada, recommended the expulsion of the Palestinians from the country in order to compel the neighboring Arab states to make peace with Israel.¹⁸

Although not as radical as this group, the Likud Party, under the leadership of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, was also inclined to support the use of force against the Palestinians and opposed political concessions. Shamir valued military power as he argued that peace was “unattainable if Israel is weak or perceived to be so”¹⁹ and he did not see the intifada as civil disobedience reflecting the Palestinians’ frustration. Instead, he stated, the intifada was “a continuation of the war against Israel’s existence.”²⁰ Throughout his rule, Shamir did not prioritize diplomacy on the Palestinian issue and was not willing to concede even a small piece

of territory for a peace agreement. "You sign a paper and say, 'Here is the peace'," Shamir stated, "[b]ut what if tomorrow you tear up the paper and with one stroke of the pen you abolish the treaty?"²¹ As a result of this belief, Shamir mainly relied on military measures until his rule ended in 1992.

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On the other side of the political spectrum, there were moderate political groups who emphasized that the use of force alone could not bring an end to the intifada and proposed different political solutions. Hadash, the Progressive List for Peace, and the Arab Democratic Party were in this group. These parties criticized the iron-fist policies in the occupied territories and some even supported a Palestinian state there.²² Yet, the main moderate force that was able to influence decision-making was the Zionist Left, especially the Labor Party. Unlike the right-wing parties, the Israeli left was less ideologically attached to the

territories and, to differing degrees, they were ready to negotiate with the Arab states and even the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to put an end to the intifada. In the coalition government, Ezer Weizman, former commander of the Israeli Air Force and Minister of Defense, from Yahad offered one of the strongest oppositions to the security measures and he was even fired from the cabinet on the grounds that he made contact with the Palestinian leader Yaser Arafat. Another influential dovish politician was the Labor leader Shimon Peres who, in the first month of the intifada, proposed the demilitarization of Gaza and dismantling the Jewish settlements there as the first step toward a peace settlement. Despite the opposition from Shamir to this offer,²³ Peres searched for a peaceful way to end the intifada problem and he became the architect of the Oslo peace process initiated in late 1992.

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Nevertheless, the man who realized the peace was not a dovish politician, but a former general with a security mindset: Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin, who served as the CGS in the 1967 Six Day War, was the Defense Minister when the intifada erupted, and his first policy against the demonstrations was the infamous “policy of beating.” Because “[n]obody dies of a beating,” Rabin reportedly ordered the soldiers to give each Palestinian a scar as a continuation of Israel’s traditional deterrence policy.²⁴ During this early period, he supported excessive security measures including assassination of high-level PLO figures such as Khalil al-Wazir not only to show the deterrence power of the state but also to boost the morale of the soldiers who faced a new kind of warfare.

Yet, Rabin was not an ideological hawk, and as early as February 1988 he realized that the use of force alone could not end the intifada: “I’ve learned something in the past [two and a half] months. Among other things is that you can’t rule by force over 1.5-million Palestinians.”²⁵ At the same time, Rabin made it clear that he could negotiate with any PLO member who was ready to stop violence and terror.²⁶ Rabin’s moderation put him into disagreement with Prime Minister Shamir and the Likud Party. After the dissolution of the national unity government in 1990, Rabin challenged

Shamir in the 1992 elections, during which he announced that he wanted to conclude an agreement on Palestinian autonomy within six to nine months of taking office. Shortly after being elected as Prime Minister, Rabin showed his determination to solve the problems through dialogue, by stating in the Knesset, “Peace you don’t make with friends, but very unsympathetic enemies. I won’t try to make the PLO look good. It was an enemy, it remains an enemy, but negotiations must be with enemies.”²⁷ Although his pursuit for peace was related to security concerns, Rabin, together with Peres, initiated the negotiations with the PLO which resulted in the Oslo peace process.

As this comparative analysis shows, there was no one civilian mindset in Israeli politics as Israeli politicians had quite diverse preferences on how to end the intifada, the efficiency of the use of force, and the possibility of negotiations with the Palestinians. In this period, the military leadership’s attitude to the intifada problem was more akin to Rabin’s policy preferences. Although when the intifada started both CGS Dan Shomron and Amram Mitzna, the commander of the Central Command, imposed harsh punishments on Palestinians in accordance with the Israeli security doctrine, they shared the same belief with Rabin that the use of force alone could not solve the intifada problem. Against the wishes of the right-wing

politicians, both generals made it clear to the political echelon that the military would not engage in a “reign of terror” to end the intifada problem, as Mitzna refused the demands to dispatch tanks to Nablus, the largest city in the West Bank, and level Palestinian neighborhoods. In addition, Shomron frequently emphasized that firearms would be used only in life-threatening conditions and Mitzna questioned the efficiency of the large-scale military measures demanded by the right-wing politicians as he stated, “The more violent we get, the more we do not distinguish between the guilty and the innocent. We’ll get into a vicious cycle that we’ll never be able to get out of.”²⁸ As the right-wing pressure on the military continued, Shomron even threatened in March 1988 to resign: “If someone wants to achieve calm at the cost of ordering the Army to go... against the basic norms of the Israeli army, then it will have to be without me.”²⁹

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Similar to Rabin, Shomron was aware of the nationalist dimension of the intifada and believed that the solution was political. He stated that as military officers they “consulted, and decided to tread delicately, not to take irreversible steps and actions” in order to keep the political options open for the politicians.³⁰ As early as March 1988, when Rabin declared that Israelis cannot rule over the Palestinians by force, Shomron started calling on the politicians to reach an accord with the Palestinians. Unlike the Likud leadership, who conditioned the political talks on the end of violence, Shomron asked the peace talks to start even before calm returned because the military “cannot endure [the] situation forever.”³¹ Later, in January 1989, during his briefing to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Shomron made it clear that there was “no such thing as eradicating the intifada because in its essence it expresses the struggle of nationalism.” He also added that the military’s job was not to end the intifada but “to enable the political echelons to operate from a position of strength, so that the violence cannot force the government to take decisions under pressure.”³²

All these statements by the military head created distaste within the Likud Party, the main force in the national unity government, because they were in line with the Labor Party’s preferences.

Shamir called Shomron's remarks at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee "superfluous"³³ while Foreign Minister Moshe Arens accused him of "passing the buck" to the government.³⁴ Yet, this civilian criticism toward the head of the army did not deter the latter from expressing his political thoughts in public, and Shomron reiterated his view that while the army could reduce the violence in the territories, it could not fight the motivation of the population to achieve a Palestinian state because there is "no way for weapons to fight it."³⁵ Upon ending his term as the CGS in 1991, Shomron made his political philosophy more clear when he argued that a peace settlement is "worth much more than territory" and he supported the Labor Party's policy of trading land for peace with the Palestinians.³⁶

All in all, during the most critical years of the First Intifada the military's policy preferences towards the Palestinians were more in line with the moderate Labor Party and the army was more conservative on the use of force than the ruling Likud Party. To understand this conservatism one first needs to analyze the organizational interests and culture of the Israeli military. From the foundation of the state to the first intifada, the Israeli military doctrine focused on the external threats, namely neighboring Arab states and terrorist groups within bordering countries.

Indeed, when the intifada broke out, the military was preoccupied with the growing threat from Iran and Iraq, terrorist infiltration from Jordan, and trouble along the Lebanon border. In this period, the military officers were also interested in revolutionizing the army and preparing it for the "battlefield of the future."³⁷ "Up until December 1987," as Horowitz puts it, "the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was about the last thing on the Israeli defense establishment's mind."³⁸

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From this perspective, the breakout of the intifada created problems for the military because it had neither strategy nor appropriate equipment to face a hostile population. The Israeli soldiers were specialized in fighting enemy forces on the battlefield, where violence and the use of force was totally legitimate; countering a hostile population, mostly women and children,

whose violent acts were restricted to stone-throwing and fire-burning was not something they were trained for. The Israeli generals, including Shomron's successor Ehud Barak, were afraid that broad license to use force and firearms would damage the reputation of the army which had been proud of being a moral and humane army.³⁹ In addition, they believed that if the army decided to quell the uprising it would have undermined itself since the decision would cause a rift in society and subsequently in the military which "encompasses the entire political spectrum in Israel."⁴⁰ Therefore, in this period the intifada was regarded as a burden on the soldiers' shoulders. This can most clearly be seen in the fact that *Maraachot*, the military's flagship publication, did not publish a single article about the intifada from 1988 to 1995, although in those years the army's main activity was to cope with it.⁴¹

Politicization of the Israeli soldiers was also an important variable in explaining the military conservatism in this period. Since the independence of the state, Israeli generals had become active participants in the national security decision-making as a result of the high threat environment the state encountered. While this situation brought about the militarization of Israeli politics and society, it also led to the politicization of the Israeli

generals. Several high-ranking generals such as Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, and Ezer Weizman were politicized during their military service and parachuted into politics right after retirement. This politicization enabled the divisions in Israeli politics to reflect themselves in the soldiers' preferences. Similar to Israeli politics and society, after the occupation of the territories in 1967, the Israeli officers started holding different views on how to reach peace with the Arabs and the Palestinians. In the case of Shomron, his political philosophy was close to that of Yitzhak Rabin, who was not an ideological hawk but not as dove-ish as some leftist politicians. Rabin believed in the "land for peace" formula with necessary security measures and Shomron shared his views. As we will see later, in the following years generals whose political ideologies were different than Shomron's became the heads of the military and their political ideologies changed its institutional preferences.

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Oslo Peace Process, the Rise of Military Activism and the Second Intifada

After Rabin became prime minister in 1992, he allowed the secret negotiations with the Palestinian delegation in Oslo. Despite the military support for the dialogue, Rabin first kept the officers in the dark mainly because of uncertainty about the success of the negotiations but also due to concerns that the soldiers would slow things down with the security details for the implementation process.⁴² Nevertheless, once the Oslo Accords were signed, Rabin involved the military officers in the peace process, as Maj. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Deputy CGS, was appointed to head the Israeli team negotiating with the PLO. Shahak belonged to the dovish axis within the military and supported the negotiations with the PLO. When he stated during the first intifada that the PLO was the only representative of the Palestinians and it led the demonstrations, Shahak was accused by the Likud ministers of interfering in politics and granting legitimacy to the PLO.⁴³ Shahak was one of Rabin's important aides in pursuing the peace process and even after Rabin was assassinated in 1995 the general tried to sustain the negotiations during his tenure as the CGS between 1995 and 1998.

During the Oslo peace process, the military in general backed the negotiations in spite of some disagreements. For example, Ehud Barak, the CGS from 1991 to 1995, believed that there were several security loopholes in the Oslo Accords and he likened it to "Swiss cheese."⁴⁴ According to him, "step-by-step," "salami tactics," or the "death-by-a-thousand-cuts" approach followed in Oslo was detrimental to Israeli security and its negotiating positions, as Israel was gradually relinquishing pieces of territory through interim agreements without accomplishing Israel's main objective, a final peace.⁴⁵ What he preferred was a "package deal" in which both Israelis and Palestinians would make major concessions on all important issues, such as Jerusalem, borders, the return of refugees, etc.⁴⁶—a tactic he tried as prime minister in 2000 but failed. Another related disagreement between the civilians and the soldiers was the latter's obsession with security details during the negotiations, which frustrated the Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who argued that the officers could not see the larger picture and benefits of peace.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, despite these disagreements the military officers supported the peace process during the Rabin government and Barak's tenure as the CGS.

Netanyahu had been one of the staunchest critics of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and he believed that any concession on this issue would endanger Israel's existence because of its already disadvantaged position in terms of territorial size and population compared to the Arabs in the region.

This picture started changing after Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing activist in late-1995. First, following an interim government led by Shimon Peres, Benjamin Netanyahu from the Likud Party was elected as the prime minister and his three-years in power passed with a series of crises with the military over the Palestinian issue. Netanyahu had been one of the staunchest critics of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and he believed that any concession on this issue would endanger Israel's existence because of its already disadvantaged position in terms of territorial size and population compared to the Arabs in the region. According to him, "peace through strength" or "peace of deterrence" was the rule of the game in the Middle East and what was critical for peace was Israel's military power.⁴⁸ With this ideology, Netanyahu was quite

dismissive of the military's opinion on the peace process, since the military and the CGS Shahak were linked with Rabin's framework. As soon as he came to power, Netanyahu pushed the military out of the decision-making structure and kept the soldiers in the dark on critical decisions including the opening of the ancient tunnels running along the Temple Mount in September in 1996, which caused an exchange of fire between the military and the Palestinian police.

Second, in this period, hawkish officers started coming into the high-ranking posts in the military. For example, Moshe Ya'alon, the head of Military Intelligence during the Temple Mount violence, was one of those officers and after this conflict, in which the Israeli military faced an armed Palestinian force, he prepared a military plan to show sudden and massive force in the case of a new intifada and started training snipers to be stationed at the checkpoints. Later in 1998, Shahak was replaced by Shaul Mofaz, another hawkish officer, as his preferences in the Second Intifada will show. Nevertheless, at least until 1998, the military leadership remained committed to the peace process and it was more conservative on the use of force than the Netanyahu government, as the CGS Shahak's critique of the government in October 1997 showed:

Why did [the intifada] end?... [I]n my opinion, it would not have ended had there not been a political agreement reached with the PLO but would, rather, have lengthened the list of graves on our side and theirs, and perhaps would even have worsened. In the case of...intifada, it should be understood that it is the political echelon's responsibility to take the bull by the horns and to deal with the peace process.⁴⁹

With the help of his security credentials, Ehud Barak was elected as the prime minister in 1999 to revive the peace process. However, when he came to power the peace process was significantly damaged after three years of right-wing rule, new settlement expansions, unrealized political agreements, economic deterioration in the territories, as well as political corruption under the PA. With Barak's political mistakes – such as prioritizing peace negotiations with Syria over the Palestinian issue – his “package deal” attempt during the Camp David Summit in July 2000 came too late to prevent the Second Intifada. As in December 1987, growing frustration was waiting for a trigger, which was met by Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount, and the Second Intifada started on September 28, 2000.

During the Second Intifada, the military officers' preferences to deal with the Palestinians were completely different from their predecessors'. Even before the eruption of the intifada, the hawkish generals, including Mofaz, Ya'alon and Amos Gilad, head of Military Intelligence Research Division, developed a view which was known as the “Military Intelligence's concept.” According to this view, PLO leader Yaser Arafat had four basic principles that he had not relinquished since the beginning of the Oslo process in 1993. These principles were: (i) a Palestinian state along the pre-Six Day War lines; (ii) a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem; (iii) sovereignty over the Temple Mount; and (iv) the right of return for the Palestinian refugees. According to the generals, because of these principles, any negotiation with Arafat was destined to fail. Rather than coming to a political agreement, they argued, Arafat was preparing for an inevitable clash with Israel.⁵⁰

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This view was not contained only within the ranks of the military but was

gradually spread among the politicians and Israeli society by the military officers. For example, Amos Malka, the Director of Military Intelligence in 2000, pointed out that Amos Gilad was “a very significant factor in persuading a great many people” to accept the view that there is no Palestinian partner for peace. According to Malka, although there was no official intelligence document proving the argument that Arafat aimed at Israel’s destruction, Gilad was successful in influencing the political leaders with oral presentations expressing that Arafat “never abandoned the dream of realizing a right of return for Palestinian refugees, and that his plan was to eradicate the state of Israel by demographic means.”⁵¹ The CGS Mofaz supported this assessment as he stated in the Knesset that Palestinians were smuggling in anti-tank missiles in preparation for war.⁵² Having already a deep distrust for Arafat, this information undoubtedly affected Barak’s conclusion that Israel had no partner for peace, a rhetoric he constantly voiced after the failure of Camp David.⁵³

The military’s preference for the use of force became indisputably clear as soon as the Second Intifada started. Prepared for a military clash against armed Palestinian forces since 1996, the IDF chose to suppress the intifada in the mud and followed the opposite policies of the Israeli generals from the

First Intifada. For example, when the army tried to decrease the number of Palestinian deaths in the late-1980s by restricting the conditions for open-fire, Mofaz and Ya’alon gave less attention to the Palestinian casualties – using various types of missiles and no less than a million rounds of ammunition. The generals also removed the legal obstacle to Israeli soldiers’ freedom to use force by annulling the directive that provided for investigation into those soldiers who killed Palestinians not involved in terrorist activities.⁵⁴ As a result, in only the first month of the clashes, 130 Palestinians, 40 of them children, were killed while more than 7,000 Palestinians were wounded.

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Although the beginning of the intifada damaged the negotiations, the political process was ongoing. Yet, the military leadership strongly criticized the political efforts. For example, when American President Bill Clinton presented his guidelines for a peaceful

solution to the conflict in December 2000, Mofaz publicly criticized Barak for rushing toward an agreement and warned him that the Clinton parameters constituted an “existential threat to Israel,” a statement which, according to Ben-Ami, was “almost tantamount to a coup d’état.”⁵⁵ Later, at the Taba talks of January 2001, Mofaz pointed out that he saw the negotiations as a capitulation to Palestinian terror even though during the negotiations, some progress was made on many issues unresolved at Camp David.⁵⁶ Mofaz was so adamant in his opposition to the political negotiations that Barak could not resist asking: “Shaul, do you really think that the State of Israel can’t exist without controlling the Palestinian people? It’s the conclusion that comes out of your assessment.”⁵⁷

The military found more chance to put its preferences into motion when the hawkish former general Ariel Sharon became the prime minister in the elections of February 2001. As Condoleezza Rice correctly puts it, Sharon “was elected to defeat the intifada – not to make peace”⁵⁸ as he was known among the Palestinians as the leader of reprisal attacks in the 1950s, the butcher of the Palestinians in the Qibya, Sabra and Shatilla massacres, the father of the settlement policy, and one of the leading opponents to the peace process. Yet, as a ruling politician Sharon was constrained by

some factors. First, he prioritized his relations with the Bush administration in the United States and he did not want to damage mutual relations through massive retaliation against the Palestinians. Second, Sharon needed to include Shimon Peres in his coalition government as the Foreign Minister, and this choice created a balance between the Foreign Ministry’s conservatism and military’s activism on the use of force.

Indeed, in these years the main clash over the Palestinian policy took place between the Foreign Ministry and the military. The crisis between the two institutions escalated in the summer of 2001 when Mofaz described the PA as the “terrorist entity.” In the midst of terrorist bombings, the CGS urged the government to declare the PA as an enemy and expel Arafat from the territories.⁵⁹ Peres objected to these demands, arguing that although there were some elements in the Palestinian movement that adopted terrorism, the PA “does not engage in terrorism, and, in my view, as we’ve seen, at times even fights against terrorism.” Recalling the Oslo process, Peres continued that he and Rabin made peace with “nations and leaders with blood on their hands, who waged war against us, who killed our soldiers and civilians. When you go to make peace, you don’t replace the entire framework of people, you replace the entire framework of relations.”⁶⁰

2002 became the year that the military officers' and the Sharon government's preferences for dealing with the intifada became in sync.

A few days after this controversy, the Foreign Ministry urged the government through a memorandum to avoid any massive retaliation against the PA. The Ministry also called on the government to refrain from capturing PA territory, removing Arafat from power or making any rhetorical provocations. Instead, the memo recommended relieving the economic suffering in the territories, gradual negotiations for a final status agreement, implementation of the interim agreements and establishment of a Palestinian state in all those areas under Palestinian control.⁶¹ These recommendations were in direct contradiction to the military's preferences and at first Sharon refrained from taking sides between the two institutions. However, with the 9/11 attacks against the United States, the Prime Minister saw a chance to equate al-Qaeda terrorism with the Palestinian movement as he developed an "Arafat is bin Laden" formula: "[W]e must remember: It was Arafat who- dozens of years ago- legitimized the hijacking of planes. It was a Palestinian

terrorist organization who began to dispatch suicide terrorists."⁶² While this policy pushed Arafat out of the negotiation process, it strengthened the hands of the military on the Palestinian issue.

2002 became the year that the military officers' and the Sharon government's preferences for dealing with the intifada became in sync. In March of that year, terrorist attacks increased, as 135 Israelis were killed in just one month. After the Passover massacre, which cost 30 lives on March 27, it was decided that a military operation to fully control the PA-controlled areas would be launched. Less militarist options such as the capture of Arafat or a military strike against Hamas were opposed by Mofaz and Yaalon.⁶³ Military officers were optimistic about the result of a military operation and Sharon, who did not see the PA and Arafat as a partner for peace, supported their plan, which would reverse the Oslo system by taking the territories back from the PA. Although Operation Defensive Shield, the largest military operation since the territories were captured in 1967, was a heavy blow against the PA as Arafat lost all his political influence, it did not diminish the Israeli officers' appetite for military measures. A week after the operation ended, Mofaz asked for a military action against Hamas in the Gaza Strip as well. This demand came

when Operation Defensive Shield caused numerous civilian deaths in the Jenin refugee camp. Refugee camps in Gaza were six times bigger than Jenin, and taking the international reaction into consideration, Sharon could not allow a military operation in Gaza, which could cost more civilian deaths.⁶⁴

During the Second Intifada the military was more war-prone and more opposed to any kind of moderate initiatives even than a right-wing government.

Mofaz's retirement in July 2002 did not calm down the military activism as he was replaced by Ya'alon. Similar to the right-wing politicians and other hawkish generals, Ya'alon believed that territorial concessions would not help anything but would encourage Israel's enemies.⁶⁵ According to him, the intifada was not a civilian uprising based on political, economic and social frustration but a terror campaign organized by the PA, Arafat and other extreme Palestinian organizations. When he was the deputy CGS, he even described the intifada as "the continuation of the War of Independence," and objected to territorial and political concessions by stating, "The war is a wall, and it is

impossible to win if holes are made in the wall."⁶⁶ With this activist ideology in the military and the presence of a Sharon government, security policies such as the establishment of military checkpoints, extrajudicial killings, and military operations became the main elements of Israel's Palestinian policy, even after Arafat left his seat to the more moderate Mahmoud Abbas. Yet, even in this period the military leadership had some conflicts with the political echelon. For example, when Sharon initiated the Gaza disengagement plan in 2005, Ya'alon strongly opposed him by arguing that the Palestinian issue could not be solved with short- and medium-term plans. According to him, Israel is "fated to live by the sword for a long time"⁶⁷ and talk of withdrawal was leading to an increase in Palestinian terrorism.⁶⁸ Ya'alon's opposition to the disengagement plan was so severe that Sharon had to arrange early retirement for the general. All in all, during the Second Intifada the military was more war-prone and more opposed to any kind of moderate initiatives even than a right-wing government.

Why were the military officers' preferences strikingly different from those of their predecessors of the First Intifada and Oslo peace process? We need to point out two factors to explain this difference. First, the conditions of the enemy played an important role in the activism of the Israeli soldiers. As

mentioned, at the beginning of the 1990s the Israeli army confronted a civilian population, and they regarded this as a violation of their military ethic. In the 2000s, the picture was entirely different, as the Israeli army was fighting a Palestinian armed force and violent Palestinian groups. With this change in the conception of the enemy, organizational interests and military education did not limit the militarist policies; instead, these factors called for the use of force policy and the soldiers did not face moral restraints. Moreover, when the state faced violent armed groups, militarist policies put the generals into the spotlight and provided them with political careers right away. It is not surprising to see that Mofaz served as Minister of Defense (2002-2006) and Deputy Prime Minister (2006-2009) while Ya'alon became Minister of Strategic Affairs and Minister of Defense in the Netanyahu government after 2009.

The second factor is the difference in the politicization of Israeli soldiers. As

During the First Intifada and Oslo peace process, when the peace movement was popular, the officers were more moderate and they supported the land-for-peace formula in accordance with the Israeli Left.

mentioned, the Israeli army is lacking a single political ideology- such as Kemalism in the Turkish military- and the officers, being highly-integrated into the political decision-making, have the freedom to adopt any political ideology. During the First Intifada and Oslo peace process, when the peace movement was popular, the officers were more moderate and they supported the land-for-peace formula in accordance with the Israeli Left. However, after Rabin was assassinated, the Netanyahu government damaged the Oslo process and Palestinian terrorism increased, and the right-wing officers started dominating the top echelon of the Israeli military. While their hawkishness provided them fame and popularity, they adopted the military ideology in a more radical way than the right-wing politicians. All in all, their political ideology and military-mindset fed each other, unlike their predecessors, whose military-mindset softened as a result of their aim to reach peace with the Palestinians.

Conclusion

This article argues that the theories of military activism and military conservatism alone cannot explain the Israeli officers' preferences on the use of force during the First and Second Intifadas. During the First Intifada, the Israeli officers were less war-prone than

the right-wing civilian government mainly because the army did not want to fight against a civilian population and the officers were willing to make territorial and political concessions to make a final peace with the Palestinians. When Rabin came to power, some, but not ultimate, coordination was observed in terms of Palestinian policy but this coordination was broken during the Netanyahu government. When the Second Intifada erupted, the military was more war-prone as a result of growing armed forces on the Palestinian side as well as the leadership change in the military echelon. In the 2000s, the military officers opposed territorial and political concessions while believing in the efficiency of the use of force policy. In this respect, the Israeli army was more war-prone even than the right-wing Sharon government.

As the Israeli case shows, the soldiers' belligerency depends on some other factors that have not been emphasized in the literature. Specifically, the qualitative analysis above points out that the war-proneness of the Israeli

military officers is influenced by the political ideology they hold and by the conditions of the enemy. While enemy conception affects the organizational interests, the political ideology may diminish or strengthen the war-proneness of the officers. These factors may not be seen in the statistical studies on which the literature has so far relied. Indeed, other case studies may show additional factors that may affect the belligerency of soldiers. Therefore, when we answer the question whether or not soldiers are naturally war-prone because of organizational/personal interests and military-mindset, we should not think of these variables as given and should also analyze what further factors may shape them.

While enemy conception affects the organizational interests, the political ideology may diminish or strengthen the war-proneness of the officers.

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