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Olive green: environment, militarism and the Israel defense forces

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Olive Green: Environment, Militarism and the Israel Defense Forces

Uri Gordon

Militaristic societies are ones in which the armed forces enjoy a privileged material and cultural status, and where military priorities and frames of thinking play a key role in policymaking and political culture (Vagts 1981, Evans and Newnham 1988). Militarism is not limited to direct governance by uniformed personnel (“praetorianism”), but may instead coexist with substantive democratic institutions (Ben Eliezer 1997). Thus, contemporary societies described as militaristic are as politically diverse as Switzerland and Burma, North and South Korea, Jordan and Israel.

This chapter explores the interface between environmental and military issues in Israel, placing it within the context of the changing fortunes of Israeli militarism. In particular, it is argued that growing public willingness to challenge the military’s environmentally destructive behavior in the last decades was linked to wider transformations in Israeli society. The Oslo Accords and the rise of liberal-individualist outlooks associated with globalization and consumer culture weakened the country’s founding collectivist ideology in favor of material values associated with quality of life. In this context, the military lost its previous immunity to public criticism, and environmental concerns, formerly considered luxuries in comparison with security matters, were able to gain ground in the public sphere alongside other civil agendas.

The chapter begins by stating the case for viewing Israel as a militaristic society. It then surveys the military’s environmental activity and the environmental destruction it has wrought, while also noting some early successes in the area of nature conservation. Finally, it discusses how, since the 1990s, the environmental

movement and affected residents, as well as the Ministry of Environment and State Comptroller, have pushed the military to clean up its act.

The IDF and Israeli militarism

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), commonly known in Israel by the Hebrew acronym TZAHAL, is a conscript army. National military service is mandatory for all non-Arab Israel citizens over the age of 18 (including women, as well as Druze men), although exceptions are made on religious, medical and mental health grounds. IDF service ranges from combat roles to logistics and auxiliary support, education and intelligence. After completing regular service of three years (two for women), the IDF may call up men for paid reserve duty of up to 54 days per 3 years (84 days for officers), until the age of 40 (45 for officers).

Between 1950 and 1966, Israel spent on average 9% of its GDP on security. The figure reached a high of about 30% in the 1970s, but has since returned to under 10%. As of 2008, Israel ranked 5th in the world in terms of military expenditure per GDP (7.0%), superseded by Oman (7.7%), Saudi Arabia (8.2%), Georgia (8.5%) and Eritrea (20.9%) and followed by Chad (6.6%), the United Arab Emirates (5.9%), Jordan (5.9%), Iraq (5.4%), Sudan (4.4%) and the United States (4.3%). Israel's expenditure includes military aid from the United States, which in 2008 was \$2.38 billion (SIPRI 2008). In 2008, Israel spent just over \$14 billion on its armed forces (\$1,926 per capita), making it the country with the largest percentage of military spending as part of the national budget among all developed countries. In 2009, this budget was further raised by an extra 1.5 billion NIS to help address perceived threats

from Iran's nuclear program, making it the highest total amount spent on security in Israel's history.

Israel is also among the world's largest arms exporters. According to Israeli Ministry of Security figures, in 2008 Israeli industries signed \$6.3 billion worth of security export contracts, placing the country third in world rankings after the U.S. and Russia (Opall 2009). U.S. government data, on the other hand, places Israel at 10th place with \$400 million of exports (Grimmet 2009). The discrepancy is possibly due to the American report not including services such as training and technical support.

Finally, proportional to its size Israel has the world's most extensive military control of land. Over one third of the 22,072 square kilometers under Israeli civilian law (including the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem) are directly controlled by the IDF – mostly as training grounds. The military also places limitations on planning and construction around its installations, and certain otherwise-civilian areas are designated for emergency use to gather forces and deploy weapons systems, enlarging the area controlled to almost half of the country (Oren and Regev 2008). Add the fact that the IDF is the sovereign in the occupied West Bank, and we find that military control exists over more than three quarters of the territory between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Fig. 1 – Military and civilian land-use (Oren and Regev 2008:11)

[MAP 1 ABOUT HERE]

Map 1 – Training and exclusion zones (Oren and Regev 2008:199)

With regard to construction and planning, the military functions as an all-but autonomous entity. While the law requires security installations to receive building permits, the procedure for acquiring them is much shorter than for civilian projects, and requires only specifying the project's location and boundaries at a Committee for Security Installations (CSI) operating in every district (Baruchin, Oren and Regev 2009). Moreover, Ministry of Security representatives sit on civilian Regional Planning and Building Committees, and may submit objections (whose substance need not be made public) to civilian projects that may conflict with existing or approved security installations.

The realities of role expansion, budget prioritization, control of land and planning autonomy are the hallmarks of militarism. Nevertheless, only over the past decade has a critical discussion of this reality emerged in earnest.

Early Israeli scholarship on military matters took place within the structural-functional paradigm of "civil-military relations" imported from American academia, where it had been developed in the context of the Cold War (cf. Janowitz 1971, Huntington 1981). This framework assumes a functional differentiation in the modern democratic state between the civilian and military spheres, whereby the military is a professional service-provider to the state and does not take political stances as such, acting instead as yet another interest group in the competition over state resources. On this account, military coups in modern states are the result of a pathological "role expansion" of the military, whereby it increasingly encroaches on a weakened civilian domain.

Israeli social commentators, eager to number the country among western democracies, adopted this paradigm by and large (Perlmutter 1966, 1968; Peri 1977, 1981; Lissak 1983, 1984). At the same time, they could not ignore the overwhelming

evidence for the expanded role of the IDF in Israeli society. This includes the regular “parachuting” of recently-retired generals into senior political and managerial positions; the social networks among career officers and reservists that are carried over into civilian life; the promotion of the military by the school system, religious institutions, youth movements, cultural organizations and the media; and the wide range of civilian roles played by the IDF, especially in education and immigrant absorption.

However, since no military coup had ever taken place in Israel, the aforementioned writers took for granted the health of civil-military relations, and proceeded to celebrate the IDF’s role expansion as a functional contribution to democracy. The “civilianization of the military” (Perlmutter 1966:102) and the partial militarization of the civilian sphere were explained as factors which by themselves mitigated the threat of praetorianism inherent to the prolonged Arab-Israeli conflict. All the while, the conflict itself was conceived as an extrinsic factor that places a strain on the social system from without, rather than as constitutive of Israeli society itself (cf. Peled and Shafir 1996).

This outlook has been increasingly undercut in the past two decades, as new scholarship has challenged previously unquestioned assumptions about the Zionist project and the role of the IDF (Ben Ari, Rosenhek and Maman 2001:5-9). In contrast to earlier accounts, current studies tend to emphasize the constitutive role of the Arab-Israeli conflict in shaping Israeli society, and of the military in the construction of collective and individual identities (Ben Ari 1998, Lomsky-Feder and Ben Ari 1999).

Central to the re-evaluation of Israeli militarism have been Uri Ben Eliezer’s studies (Ben Eliezer 1997, 1998, 2001), which explain the blurring of the separation between army and society in Israel by situating it as the latest in a series of “nations in

arms” – along with France after the Revolution and again from 1870; Prussia from its defeat by Napoleon and until the First World War; and Japan in the Meiji period (1868-1912). In common with these countries, there has never been overt military rule. Instead, role expansion “is manifested in the fact that the army is not built as a professional force, separate from the society, but exists as the army of the whole nation, with the idea of participation at its center. ‘Everyone’ is involved, first as conscripts, and afterward in the reserves” (Ben Eliezer 2001:146-7).

Newer scholarship has thus stressed how the IDF functions as a central mechanism in constructing differential levels of inclusion and exclusion in society via recruitment, assignation and retention of personnel (Levy 1996, Rosenhek 1999). The gendered dimensions of Israeli militarism have also come under scrutiny, tying the military’s central social role to the reproduction of masculinist worldviews, and analyzing women’s service in the IDF not as an equalizing factor but rather as a mechanism for reproducing their subordination (Yuval Davis 1985, Jerbi 1997, Izraeli 2001).

Kimmerling (2001:215-6) argues that the ideological dimension of militarism in Israeli society amounts to a “civil religion of security”, whereby

civilian leaders and constituencies regard primary military and strategic considerations as self-evidently the only or the predominant considerations in most of their social and political decision-making...Once militarism penetrates the cognitive dimensions of a culture its suffuses both the structural and cultural state of mind of the collectivity...[the] institutional and cognitive orientation towards

permanent war preparation in order to defend the collectivity's very existence [becomes] part of social routine and [is] no longer considered a matter of public debate or political struggle.

On such a reading, the sense of "existential threat" prevalent in Israeli society – the perception that the only alternative to military victory is the total annihilation of the society – is artificial and functions to maintain the legitimacy of militaristic arrangements and the depoliticization of security (Ezrahi 1997, Pappé 2002).

As a result of these material and ideological dimensions of Israeli militarism, it is unsurprising that military priorities have regularly taken precedence over environmental ones throughout the country's history. We now move to assess the results of this precedence in terms of the military's environmental impacts.

The IDF and the ecology of war

By the time Israel was founded in 1948, a variety of local mammals in Palestine had already been hunted to the verge of extinction due to poor enforcement of the British hunting laws during the mandate period. In view of the situation, a year-long moratorium on all hunting was declared soon after the State's founding. Once it was lifted, however, it became clear that the major threat to wildlife was now IDF soldiers, who freely shot wild animals – especially gazelles – with their rifles. In response, the Joint Nature Protection Committee of the Zoology and Biology Societies (which would later evolve into the Society for Protection of Nature in Israel) wrote an impassioned plea to IDF chiefs. This resulted in a 1951 general order prohibiting all hunting of gazelles (Tal 2002:158).

During the 1960's, an unlikely figure emerged from within the IDF as an early champion of conservation. Avraham Yoffe, an IDF General with a penchant for hunting, was appointed in 1965 as the first director of the Nature Reserves Authority,

after a decade struggle by the SPNI to establish reserves. A larger-than-life figure with a forceful personality, Yoffe permanently gave up hunting, dedicating himself fully to conservation. He set out to maximize the number and size of areas designated as nature reserves, using his “combination of obstinacy, connections and charm” (Tal 2002:170) – connections which were especially important in dealing with military counter-claims to land use. Within a decade of its founding the Authority’s team of inspectors had grown tenfold, and by the end of Yoffe’s tenure close to one hundred reserves had been declared.

Yet these early conservation successes have been an exception that indicates the norm. Overall, the IDF’s environmental record has been negative and severe.

The environmental impacts of military conflict worldwide have been studied extensively, especially since the tactical oil spills of the first Gulf War where wildlife biologists documented high seabird mortality and pollution of tide flats important for migratory shorebirds (Evans et al. 1993; Sadiq 1993, Austin and Bruch 2000, Hulme 2004; Machlis and Hanson 2008). War regularly involves severe disturbances to habitats, uncontrolled extraction of resources, deforestation, and water contamination. Area-impact weapons such as napalm, cluster bombs and fuel-air explosives are intentionally destructive over a wide area. Bombing of urban areas causes heavy smoke and dust pollution, which can be toxic when factories are targeted. Unexploded ordinance (such as landmines and cluster bombs) continues to kill and maim humans and animals long after hostilities have ended.

Such effects have been evident in Israel’s experience of conflict. Since Israel has never carried out an assessment of its military’s environmental impact, quantitative data on most of these aspects is sorely lacking. Evidence from elsewhere, however, indicates the likely impacts of military activities in Israel.

While no systematic information exists regarding the impact of country's major wars, widespread fighting in the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights during the 1967 and 1973 wars could only have damaged the local environment. Meteorological research indicates that fighting in the northern Sahara during World War II, in similar conditions to the Sinai, led to a tenfold increase in dust storms, as fragile desert vegetation and soils were disturbed (Machlis and Hanson 2008). To this day, the Golan Heights are littered with over 2,000 minefields, including anti-personnel landmines which cause frequent animal and occasional human casualties (Heshmonai 2010). On the positive side, demilitarized zones established following the ceasefires in the Jordan River basin and along the Syrian border serve as default nature reserves – although they are always vulnerable to resumed hostilities.

After the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2000, Palestinians alleged that the IDF was deliberately damaging the environment in the West Bank. Such allegations included destroying trees and crops, damaging wells and water infrastructure, and dumping of toxic waste in Palestinian-controlled areas (Twite 2003:567-9). Israel has argued that this damage was a direct result of violence initiated by the Palestinian side, and less serious than the impact of the long-term neglect of the environment by the Palestinian Authority.

During the Second Lebanon War of 2006, Israeli jets bombed a power station south of Beirut, causing an estimated 15,000 tons of oil to spill into the Mediterranean Sea. The oil spread rapidly, covering 150 km of the Lebanese and Syrian coastlines, killing fish and affecting sensitive habitats. The clean-up campaign was delayed five weeks until the ceasefire, making much of the damage irreversible. Meanwhile, Hezbollah rockets caused major fires in Northern Israel, burning a total of 52,000 dunams of forest to the ground (Baror 2006, UNEP 2007).

The 2008 Gaza conflict, for its part, caused damage to wells and sewage systems in the Gaza Strip, further polluting its already hyper-stressed groundwater. According to an Amnesty International report, four water reservoirs, 11 wells, and sewage networks and pumping stations were damaged and 20,000 metres of water mains were damaged or destroyed by Israeli tanks and bulldozers. Sewage treatment plants in north and central Gaza were damaged, resulting in raw sewage flooding more than a square kilometre of agricultural and residential land, destroying crops and causing a health hazard (Amnesty International 2009:10). The Palestinians also accused Israel of using depleted uranium shells and white phosphorus during the operation, a charge that Israel denies. Hamas rockets, for their part, have caused fires in both nature reserves and agricultural fields within Israel – both before and during the Gaza conflict (Bereshkovsky 2006).

A more recent set of major environmental impacts caused by military activity is related to the construction of the Segregation Barrier in the West Bank, which is spread along hundreds of kilometers and incorporates extensive physical infrastructure. Alongside its human cost in terms of Palestinians' freedom of movement, livelihoods and dignity, the barrier also has important environmental impacts. According to the SPNI, this includes the fragmentation of previously continuous animal and plant populations or ecological corridors; direct damage to unique habitats; and damage to aquifers and streams anything on the disruption of migration routes (SPNI 2010).

IDF activities during peacetime also have many direct environmental costs. Modern war preparations include significant resource consumption, stockpiling of strategic materials, weapons testing and training. Active training can lead to residual unexploded ordnance (UXO), chemical contamination, landscape cratering,

vegetation removal and soil erosion. The military's ecological footprint is even larger if we consider the inputs it requires in terms of water, fuels, food and raw materials. Worldwide, war preparations alone utilize up to 15 million square kilometers of land, account for 6% of all raw material consumption, and produce as much as 10% of global carbon emissions annually (Machlis and Hanson 2008).

In Israel, everyday training activities take a serious toll on the landscape. Examples cited in the State Comptroller's report (2004) include the construction of training infrastructures such as mounds and ramparts which alter water courses and wildlife corridors; the movement of heavy vehicles which crush plants and animals and leave deep tracks in the ground; the discarding of waste food, packaging and shells; and brushfires resulting from gunfire. The most recent example of this phenomenon is the 2007 fire which raged in the Lachish region and destroyed 2,500 hectares of land (Oren 2008).

It should be noted that 38% of lands in reserves overlap with military training grounds. In the Negev, half of the areas dedicated to nature reserves are located within training grounds, and a third of training grounds are within nature reserves (Oren 2008:433-7). Under Section 23 of the National Parks and Nature Reserves Law, security forces are freed from complying with its provisions. This may well explain why the military has never been particularly obstinate about the declaration of reserves even when the land is already utilized for training. In practice the Authority tries to reach a consensus with the army on the types of activities that take place, with tank training grounds suffering the most damage while the safety zones around the edges of firing ranges remain mostly unharmed (Tal 2002:197).

It has been argued that the tracts of land that serve as a buffer between training grounds and civilian areas have led to the indirect protection of substantial habitats.

While there is no direct evidence from Israel, studies from Camp Pendleton, California, highlight that the undeveloped shoreline has protected key habitats and now harbor significant biodiversity – 1250 species of plants and animals including 18 threatened or endangered species (Machlis and Hanson 2008). Research from around US military bases in Germany demonstrates that training activities has contributed to high biodiversity by creating disturbance heterogeneity (op.cit.).

The State Comptroller's report (2004) identified a series of "faults, some of them fundamental, which point to a worrying state of affairs" with regard to the environmental oversight and regulation of the IDF's activities (State Comptroller's Office 2004:74). The findings identified seven problematic areas and indicate the degree to which the military had for years successfully dodged any meaningful external supervision of its environmental impacts, while leaving its internal mechanisms for environmental protection on a largely declarative level. These include:

- *Relations with the Ministry of Environmental Protection.* There has been a longstanding dispute over the applicability of environmental laws to the IDF. In practice, almost all military activities involving hazardous materials were carried out without Environment Ministry permits; the Ministry was not receiving necessary information; and its supervision of the IDF was "marginal and rare".
- *The Ministry of Security.* The Ministry's construction department was also responsible for supervising environmental protection, creating a potential conflict of interest. In addition, the Ministry's environmental committee lacked basic information on IDF environmental protection activities, including the findings of

local environmental monitoring systems and any unit or activity classified “Top Secret“. The committee did not follow up on the implementation of many of its own decisions.

- *The IDF's administrative protocol:* While a generic environmental policy for the military was established in 1999, it has not been systematically implemented by High Command by 2004. Potential environmental hazards had not been identified; protocols had not been established for responding to and investigating emergency pollution events and different bodies within the IDF were not sending representatives to the General Staff committee on environmental protection. In addition, the IDF was not required to report pollution events or environmental hazards to the Ministry of Interior Planning Directorate.
- *Fuel and oil pollution.* IDF fuelling stations, most of them in hydrologically sensitive areas, operated in contravention of water regulations, lacking fuelling platforms, fuel separators and means for monitoring leaks. A 2001 inspection by the Water Commission in bases in northern Israel found dozens of cases in which the ground was saturated with fuels and oils, treatment platforms lacked proper funneling and collection, and containers were overflowing. These findings were discovered again in repeat inspections.
- *Sewage treatment.* Many sewage treatment and removal facilities in the IDF are based on absorption pools, and only limited steps had been taken to replace these with sealed septic tanks or connection to the sewage system. The IDF did not adequately address faults found in its own inspections of evaporation pools.

- *Two ongoing large-scale contaminations.* The Ministry of Security's treatment of the contamination of the Hazor aquifer by the local Air Force base, and of the longstanding presence of discarded ammunition on the seabed opposite Tel-Aviv's beaches, was limited to an assessment of the extent and causes of contamination, without pursuing any particular course of action.
- *Investigation and enforcement.* The IDF undertook a very limited number of actions to investigate environmental hazards caused by its units or to enforce environmental protection laws. A protocol approved in 2001 by the Attorney General concerning the enforcement of environmental laws in the IDF was not implemented.

The IDF and Ministry of Security contested many of the report's findings.

Regarding the disputes with the Ministry of Environment, for example, the IDF argued that the applicability of the hazardous materials law to the army should be determined *ad hoc* for any given instance, rather than in advance for a list of various activities. It also argued that a comprehensive survey of environmental hazards in all army units would be too costly and time-consuming, and thus assessments would be only be carried out on a topical basis within certain units. At the same time, other findings were accepted: the IDF promised that fueling stations would in future be built according to legal requirements and existing hazards would be addressed as part of a multi-year plan. Six years after the report, the issue of sewage treatment remains a major bone of contention between the IDF and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, with the Minister promising the IDF's imminent agreement to treat all of its sewage.

Civil Society, the IDF and the environment

By the time that the State Comptroller's report was released, the previously sacrosanct status of the military in Israeli society had already faced a number of important challenges. The growing environmental scrutiny of the Israeli army should be seen in this evolving context.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Israel experienced a certain recoil from the "nation in arms" model, which signaled the beginning of a demarcation between military and society. Indications of this trend include an escalation of public and media criticism of the IDF following the Sabra and Shatila massacre in Lebanon and human rights violations during the first Intifada; a sharp decrease in the motivation of Israeli youth to join the military (Spiegel 2001); cases of entire units going AWOL over mistreatment; and intensified public intervention of soldiers' parents in military affairs, especially following the 1997 helicopter disaster, in which 73 soldiers were killed after two Sikorsky H3s transporting them to Lebanon collided and crashed.

The same period also saw the shrinking of the Israeli military-industrial complex, previously one of the main drivers of economic growth (Mintz 1985; Mintz and Ward 1989). The three government-owned arms manufacturers – the Israel Aircraft Industries, Israel Military Industries (Ta'as) and the Weapons Development Authority (Rafa'el) – all saw layoffs and a shrinking in domestic and foreign purchasing, following the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, the end of the Cold War, and a general trend towards subordinating the military to market considerations (Levi 2009).

Shafir and Peled (2002) explain the decline of militarism as part of a deeper process in Israeli society. Since the Labor Party lost its political hegemony in 1977, a series of economic reforms by Likud and national unity government effectively ended

the state-managed economy and nurtured the rise of an independent business class not beholden to the state. This, along with the Oslo Accords (initially negotiated without military involvement) and processes of economic and cultural globalization, led to a fracturing of Israeli's once-pervasive republican ethos of citizenship, defined by an ideology of national unity and contribution to the "common good" (as defined by the ruling class). Instead, two competing discourses have emerged: a liberal-individualist one, inspired by consumerism and largely identified with the secular, Ashkenazi middle classes, which emphasizes personal rights and quality of life; and an ethno-nationalist one, largely identified with the Mizrahi working classes and the national-religious population, which essentializes inclusion in society in terms of Jewishness and views the Arab minority as an internal enemy.

It is within this process that the rise of mainstream Israeli environmentalism should be understood. Environmental contestation of military activities has primarily been the work of secular middle-class communities campaigning against hazards generated by adjacent military bases, grounded in concerns for health and quality of life. Rather than displaying environmental justice agendas, these campaigns have largely been a matter of Not-In-My-Back-Yard concerns (cf. Lake 1996). The following examples serve to illustrate this trend.

- *Ein Shemer*. In 1998, residents of the Menashe regional council undertook a public and legal campaign against the deployment, without CSI approval, of an Arrow anti-ballistic missile battery in the Ein Shemer base, citing health concerns surrounding the system's radar. After an appeal to the Supreme Court and following the intervention of the Minister of Environment, a compromise was reached in 2003 between the regional council and the security apparatus which

limited the operation of the radar outside emergencies (Oren and Regev 2008:239-40).

- *IMI facilities.* In the 1990s, three munitions factories belonging to the state-owned Israel Military Industries were closed in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Herzeliya, leaving behind soil contaminated with heavy metals, organic pollutants and explosives which also seeped into the water table. Though the IMI dragged its feet, heavy pressure from the public and the Ministry of Environment finally forced it to decontaminate the sites. In 1999, members of the Ramat Hasharon local council filed a class-action lawsuit against the IMI, claiming largest and still-active facility was contaminating the town's drinking water. A subsequent water quality survey led to the closure of all the town's wells, which was connected to Tel Aviv's system. The facility was supposed to close by the end of 2010 as part of IMI's privatization; residents and litigators have meanwhile managed to freeze all plans for high-end housing in that area until it is decontaminated (Tal 2007, Netzer 2010)
- *Kishon River.* In 2000, a newspaper report revealed that over twenty former naval commando soldiers had contracted cancer, linking their illness to regular practice dives in the estuary of the Kishon River, which is highly polluted due to effluents from industries in the Haifa bay. The former elite soldiers drew on powerful social networks to support their public campaign, forcing the military to cease dives in the Kishon and set up a committee of inquiry headed by former Chief Justice Meir Shamgar. While the committee determined that no direct link could be established between the diving and the cancer incidents, the IDF nevertheless recognized the

soldiers who had become ill or died as disabled veterans or casualties, with the concomitant benefits (Nathan 2007).

- *Atlit*. In 2003, a local green NGO appealed to Haifa District Court against a construction project within the designated area of the Atlit naval commando base, located within a nature reserve (which is closed to the public due to the secrecy of the base). Concerned about damage to the marine environment, they initiated a legal process that ultimately saw the discussion returned to the CSI, where it was re-approved (Oren and Regev 2008:240-2).
- *Hoshaya*. In 2003, residents of Hoshaya in the lower Galilee appealed to the Nazareth District Court against the construction of a new base nearby, which had been approved without their knowledge by the CSI in 1996. Citing damage to vistas, air and noise pollution, and harm to their quality of life, they also argued that the planned base contradicted regional development programs and demanded the right to view and comment on the plans. The long legal process finally reached the Supreme Court. While the 2006 verdict did not cancel the construction, the judges did express severe discomfort with the nature of military exemptions in the planning process, emphasizing that the “sanctity” of security concerns was a thing of the past and underscoring the need to balance military needs with civilian and environmental ones (op. cit., 242-8).
- *Dimona*. In 2005, environmental concerns were central to opening up the debate over Israel’s unacknowledged nuclear facility. It was issues of pollution and safety, rather than weapons proliferation, that prompted the first Knesset debate on the

topic (Melman 2005). Meanwhile, the lawsuits of over forty reactor workers who claim to have developed cancer following exposure to radioactive and toxic materials continue to be heard in the various courts (Shapira 2009, cf. Richter et al. 1997). The reactor's potential for decrepitude after four decades of use led to a series of provocative bills for its closure (Khenin et al. 2009).

- *The Segregation Barrier*. In 2006, hundreds of Jewish settlers from the Gush Etzion settlements took direct action to disrupt the clearing of the Abu Suda forest, a nature reserve dating back to the Mandate period, where a section of the barrier was to be constructed. The Kfar Etzion field school then petitioned the Supreme Court, offering an alternative route that would spare both the forest and 50 dunams of Palestinians' vineyards. The Ministry of Security accepted the new route. A year later, the SPNI led a parliamentary campaign against the construction of the 30km section of the barrier in the Judea desert, mostly within natural reserve areas. This led to the only documented case where a contested part of the barrier was actually cancelled, and replaced with a network of electronic surveillance systems (Sharon 2007).
- *Tel Arad*. In 2008, a television report revealed Ministry of Health data according to which, between 1994-2001, 17 soldiers at the Nahal Brigade training base in Tel Arad contracted Hodgkin's lymphoma – more than twice as other infantry brigades. The report noted that the base was adjacent to the city of Arad's evaporation pools, which included waste from its industrial area. In response, parents of soldiers who were about to begin their service in the Nahal brigade launched a campaign of demonstrations and lobbying, demanding that the base be evacuated. Two parallel

examinations by the IDF and the Ministry of Environment found no evidence of excess contamination in the training grounds. The parents rejected these findings, as did the IUED. Citing the precautionary principle as established by the Shamgar committee regarding the Kishon case, they petitioned the Supreme Court for the evacuation of the base. The case is still being heard (IUED 2009).

The most recent and highly publicized case in which military plans have been challenged on environmental grounds is that of Training Base City (“Ir HaBahadim”), a project designed to transfer nine IDF training bases for non-combat units (e.g. the Medical Corps and Military Police) from their current locations in central Israel to a single site near the Negev Junction (op. cit., 181-6, 269-86, Elad 2009). The plan covers 1,600 dunams of land, includes 250 thousand square meters of buildings and is intended to house 11,000 soldiers. The project was promoted with the explicit goal of leveraging economic development in the Negev, creating jobs through auxiliary services and persuading officers’ families to relocate to the south (but see Svirsky 2007). In addition, the relocation would allow the IDF to sell off expensive real-estate in the center of the country, particularly the Tzrifin base near Rishon LeZion, generating high revenues for the state.

The most important consideration for choosing the Negev Junction site was that it had already been designated for a military base in the 1980s. Yet this location is also within 8 km of the Ramat Hovav industrial estate, Israel’s major center for chemical and pharmaceutical industries and the location of its only approved hazardous waste disposal site. Ramat Hovav had been a target of concern among environmentalists for years due to the concentration of polluting industries, a number of accidents involving hazardous waste, and reports of high rates of cancer and lung diseases among Bedouins in adjacent unrecognized villages (Almi 2003). A 2004 epidemiological

study by Ben Gurion University, commissioned by the Ministry of Health, found that residential proximity to the industrial estate was associated with increased rates of mortality, chronic respiratory morbidity and major congenital malformations among the Bedouin population (Bentov et al. 2006, Karakis et al. 2008, Karakis et al. 2009).

Citing the danger to the health of soldiers and the lack of adequate research into the potential hazards of the site, environmental NGOs such as the Israeli Union for Environmental Defense (IUED) initiated a vociferous public campaign against the project. In 2006, after a lengthy mediation process, the Ministry of Environment and representatives of the Ramat Hovav factories signed an agreement determining new measures for protecting air quality and a protocol for on-site treatment of their hazardous waste (Tal, 2006). This paved the way for a government decision approving the construction of Training Base City in April 2007, along with provisions for an epidemiological survey and the rehabilitation of the hazardous waste site – although these were to be completed after the base was already populated.

Environmental groups were, nevertheless, dissatisfied with what they considered superficial measures. And while bulldozers began to prepare the land for construction a number of demonstrations were organized by Green Course, a student environmental group, and parents of future conscripts. A coalition of NGOs appealed to the Be'er Sheva District Court, arguing that a project of such size should have been approved through the regular and not military planning channels, in which case a more comprehensive examination of environmental conditions would have been required. A lengthy legal process ensued, reaching the Supreme Court which required the state to prepare an assessment of the health risks associated with the base's proximity to Ramat Hovav, and to incorporate their conclusions into the plan, which would be returned to the District Planning Committee and open to public scrutiny.

The case of Training Base City, hailed as a victory by environmental NGOs, forms an important precedent in subordinating military planning to the same environmental standards required from civilian projects. Yet paradoxically, the case also indicates the continued force of Israeli militarism. It took a potential risk to soldiers' health to lead to regulation of pollution from Ramat Hovav, whereas the existing risk to residents of Be'er Sheva and the Bedouin population had failed to do so for years. It is also worth noting that due to the prevailing winds, Be'er Sheva residents are more likely to be exposed to pollution than the soldiers who will be living at the training base. The wellbeing of the armed forces still appears to retain more weight in the Israeli public sphere than the wellbeing of civilians, let alone Arab citizens.

In this context, and in closing, I would like to return to the ideological dimensions of Israeli militarism by looking at the IDF's framework for internal environmental education. This framework clearly displays the contingent terms on which environmental concerns have been incorporated into the military agenda, with the effect of defusing their civilian and potentially anti-militarist potential. The framework was issued in mid-2007 by the Education and Youth Corps (Israel Defense Forces 2007). Alongside its relatively banal operational directives (generating of educational materials and lesson plans, clean-up activities, nature hikes), the true interest of the document lies in its construction of a "green militarism" – a seamless mix of environmental and patriotic sentiments which reinforces the hegemonic political culture of Zionist militarism, even as it brings it up to speed with contemporary concerns over pollution and nature protection.

While briefly mentioning "protection of human life", "professionalism" and "compliance with the law" among the values driving the program, the document's detailed rationale explicitly couches environmental protection as a corollary of the

requirement to “strengthen each soldier’s connection to the land and his love of the motherland. Love of the motherland strengthens each soldier’s commitment to protecting the State of Israel and its resources which have been entrusted to the IDF as a deposit” (9). Or, in the words of Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, “our duty [is] to educate for protection of nature, scenery, and antiquities, which are a testimony to the Jewish people’s heritage and its historical right to maintain a sovereign Jewish state in the Land of Israel”. (13)

In summary, it can be said that although environmental agendas have made an important contribution to challenging Israeli militarism, the IDF has also been agile in adapting to these pressures and has by no means lost its privileged material and cultural status. If anything, the last decade has seen a fortification of militarism and nationalism in the wake of major hostilities in the West Bank, Gaza and Lebanon, and a strengthening of the ethno-nationalist discourse of citizenship in Israeli society at the expense of the liberal-individualist one. The third option – a socialist-egalitarian discourse open to the universal claims of environmental justice – is only heard from a small minority on the radical left. Perhaps it is only with a final-status agreement with the Palestinians and the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict as a whole that we may hope for a true normalization of Israeli society; only then might environmental concerns finally receive the paramount place they deserve in public attention and policy.

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