


SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

# The people's army “enemising” the people: The COVID-19 case of Israel

Yagil Levy\* 

Department of Political Science and Communication, The Open University of Israel, Raanana, Israel

\*Corresponding author. Email: yagil.levy@gmail.com

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## Abstract

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were deployed extensively relative to other democracies' militaries to combat the coronavirus during 2020–1. Ostensibly, the military's engagements are instrumental in addressing the pandemic due to its resources and hierarchical discipline, and especially in light of its centrality in Israel. However, problems remain concerning this deployment, the most prominent and relevant to the case of Israel being the high legitimacy that the Israeli public afforded this policy, especially given the alternative options available to the government. Motivated by this conundrum, I present a circular argument: securitisation legitimised the deployment of the military and in turn, this deployment, constitutive of the discourse of securitisation, further legitimised securitisation. Consequently, Israel could legitimately adopt an enemy-oriented approach to deal with the crisis, an approach that 'enemises' the population.

**Keywords:** Discourse; COVID-19; Militarisation; Securitisation; Role Expansion

## Introduction

During 2020, militaries were deployed around the world to engage in the campaign against COVID-19. These engagements took various forms: logistical and medical support for civilian agencies, for example dispatching soldiers to the production line at local mask factories in Taiwan; the assignment of military supplies and equipment to civilian agencies, such as deploying a military hospital ship in US waters; assisting police forces in maintaining order, for example in Spain; assumption of operative responsibility for the management of civilian services, such as the operation of epidemiological investigations by the military Home Front Command in Israel.<sup>1</sup>

From a broader perspective, military deployment can be seen as part of the 'securitisation of COVID-19'. 'Securitisation' was introduced by the IR Copenhagen School in the 1980s. Non-military issues, such as immigration or the environment, are labelled existential security threats. Through speech acts performed in the political community, an intersubjective understanding is constructed among the audience to treat such threats as security-related. Therefore, the construction of threat justifies the use of exceptional measures outside the rules of normal politics.<sup>2</sup> Securitisation is a discursive practice. In this case, securitising the pandemic meant that states adopted a security discourse framing COVID-19 as a high national security threat and therefore, among other means, they deployed their armed forces.

<sup>1</sup>Stuart A. Cohen and Meir Elran, 'Patterns of military activity in the battle against the coronavirus: Lessons for Israel from other nations', Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) *Insight*, 1300 (17 April 2020), available at: {<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/the-army-and-the-fight-against-the-coronavirus/>} accessed 20 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap deWilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

As the comparative analysis of Stuart Cohen and Meir Elran indicated,<sup>3</sup> the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were deployed more extensively relative to other democracies' militaries to address COVID-19. Most significant and unique to the Israeli case, intelligence units were tasked with monitoring medical tests, and the Home Front Command conducted epidemiological investigations (detailed below). Indeed, as can be inferred from the data provided by different sources,<sup>4</sup> in no other democracy have the armed forces been tasked with similar missions.

Ostensibly, the military's engagements are instrumental in addressing the pandemic due to its resources and hierarchical discipline, especially in light of its centrality in Israel. However, problems remain concerning this deployment, of which the most prominent and relevant to Israel is the high legitimacy that the Israeli public afforded this policy, especially given the alternative options available to the government and the exceptional deployment of the military in Israel. Motivated by this conundrum, I present a circular argument: securitisation legitimised the deployment of the military and in turn, this deployment, constitutive of the discourse of securitisation, further legitimised securitisation. Consequently, Israel could legitimately adopt an enemy-oriented approach to dealing with the crisis, an approach that 'enemises' the population.

Methodologically, the article draws on empirical examples, speeches, reports, news, and policy texts from the case of Israel. Although it is not a comparative study, the uniqueness of Israel is highlighted to emphasise the issue of legitimacy to further show the problematics of using the military so extensively.

The next section presents the research gap and it is followed by a brief presentation of the theoretical framework. The article proceeds with three empirical sections: a presentation of the military engagement in managing the crisis, analysis of the legitimisation of that engagement, and of the IDF's role in legitimising securitisation. The next section presents the consequence, that is, legitimisation of the enemy-oriented approach adopted by the government. The concluding section deals with the implications for civil-military relations.

## Research gap

Although the military's engagements are instrumental in dealing with the pandemic, problems remain concerning the high legitimacy that the Israeli public afforded this policy, especially given the alternative options available to the government and the exceptional deployment of the military in Israel.

Deproblematising this issue, Yoram Peri, prominent scholar of civil-military relations in Israel, offered several possible explanations for this preferred and legitimised deployment: (1) the situation of an intractable conflict enhances the status of the IDF, therefore its intervention is tolerated by the public; (2) the IDF, as a citizen army, is deeply intermingled with society; (3) the partnership between generals and civilians in decision-making facilitates the IDF's engagement on the national scene; (4) the historical heritage of role expansion that legitimised fulfilling civilian functions; (5) the high level of public trust in the IDF; and (6) the weakness of civilian bureaucracy.<sup>5</sup>

As persuasive as they sound, these explanations may still leave us unconvinced about their validity, and in need of a more nuanced discussion. First, notwithstanding the centrality of the

<sup>3</sup>Cohen and Elran, 'Patterns of military activity'.

<sup>4</sup>COVID-19 Health System Response Monitor, 'Cross-Country Analysis', available at: <https://analysis.covid19healthsystem.org/index.php/category/all/> accessed 10 February 2021; EUROMIL, 'Armed Forces and COVID-19', available at: <http://euromil.org/armed-forces-and-covid-19/> accessed 9 May 2021.

<sup>5</sup>Yoram Peri, 'Why was the IDF mobilized to fight the coronavirus? A retrospective look at the role expansion of the military in Israel', in Meir Elran, Amichai Cohen, Carmit Padan, and Idit Shafran Gittleman (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the Shadow of Corona: Insights from the First Wave* [in Hebrew] (The Israeli Democracy Institute and The Institute for National Security Studies, 2020), pp. 12–26, available at: <https://www.idi.org.il/media/14981/socio-military-relations-in-israel-in-the-shadow-of-the-corona.pdf> accessed 21 February 2021.

IDF in a situation of protracted conflict, this centrality is in decline, as evidenced by the decline in public trust in the IDF reaching its lowest level since 2008 (when the army was criticised for its poor performance in the Second Lebanon War of 2007).<sup>6</sup>

Second, despite the still high level of public trust in the IDF relative to other state institutions, trust varies across categories. While 73 per cent of Israeli Jews think that the IDF is prepared to deal with major military threats, only 34.5 per cent believe that the IDF operates in an economically efficient manner.<sup>7</sup> There is little wonder, then, that while the Israelis overwhelmingly support raising public spending in every civilian area, they also support leaving defence spending at its current level, despite pressures by the IDF to raise it.<sup>8</sup> As corona-related tasks were carried out by the non-combat IDF organs that are less publicly appreciated, the Israelis should have suspected the extent to which the IDF could successfully perform such roles.

Third, it is puzzling that deployment of the military was privileged over other alternatives. It is worth noting that the military did not take up previously allocated roles; rather, it assumed roles that could have been transferred to other entities. On the surface, it seemed Israel could have followed the same limited pattern of many other democracies that deployed their armies. After all, in 2019, Israel was ranked by Bloomberg among the ten healthiest nations in the world,<sup>9</sup> indicating the strength of the health system in Israel. Moreover, in 2019, national expenditure on health per capita as a percentage of GDP stood at 7.3 per cent. Although lower than the average among OECD countries (8.8 per cent), it is still higher than others<sup>10</sup> that nevertheless deployed their armies on a more limited scale. Furthermore, from a comparative perspective, in terms of infections per capita, in May 2020 Israel's rate was close to the average for Western and Southern European countries; whereas in terms of deaths per capita, mortality in Israel was lower than that of countries such as the US, UK, Sweden, and Germany.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, arguments about the weakness of Israel's civilian systems in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis were voiced to justify the military's intervention.<sup>12</sup> They should have been critically tested to distinguish between real weaknesses and those highlighted in the public discourse to justify calling out the army.

To further validate this problematisation of the preference for deploying the military, nearly a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, vaccination was handed to the Israeli 'sick funds', a unique system of civilian, non-profit, health-maintenance organisations funded largely by mandatory health insurance. Although the IDF offered its assistance,<sup>13</sup> the mission was carried out by civilian agencies, and successfully: as early as the end of 2020, Israel was ranked highest in the

<sup>6</sup>Tamar Hermann, Or Anabi, Ayelet Rubabshi-Shitrit, Avraham Ritov, and Ella Heller, *The Israeli Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2020), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup>Tamar Hermann, Or Anabi, Amichai Cohen, and Idit Shafran Gittleman, *Large Majority Think IDF Should Manage Coronavirus Crisis* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2020), available at: <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/32922> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>8</sup>Tamar Hermann, Or Anabi, William Cubbison, and Ella Heller, *The Israeli Democracy Index* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2019), pp. 79–80.

<sup>9</sup>Lee J. Miller and Wei Lu, 'These are the world's healthiest nations', *Bloomberg* (24 February 2019), available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-02-24/spain-tops-italy-as-world-s-healthiest-nation-while-u-s-slips> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>10</sup>Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, available at: [https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/doclib/2020/255/08\\_20\\_255t6.pdf](https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/doclib/2020/255/08_20_255t6.pdf) accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>11</sup>Alex Weinreb, 'Israel in International Comparison', Taub Center for Social Policy Studies (7 May 2020), available at: <http://taubcenter.org.il/blog/israel-in-international-comparison/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>12</sup>Gil Murciano, 'Covid-19 and the Securitization of National Crises in Israel's Strategic Approach: Reliance on the Security Community as a "Comfortable Necessity"', German Institute for International and Security Affairs (December 2020), available at: [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C63\\_Covid19\\_SecuritizationIsrael.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2020C63_Covid19_SecuritizationIsrael.pdf) accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>13</sup>'IDF petitions health ministry to aid in COVID-19 vaccination roll-out', *I24 News* (6 December 2020), available at: <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/society/1607266343-idf-petitions-health-ministry-to-aid-in-covid-19-vaccination-roll-out> accessed 18 December 2020.

COVID-19 vaccination rate globally.<sup>14</sup> It follows that the state could have relied on this developed civilian infrastructure from the outset. The availability of alternative options throws into question the decision to use the military.

Fourth, the legitimacy of the IDF's role expansion deserves a broader explanation. The conscript military was created with the establishment of the state in 1948. Symbolically, conscription was more than just a recruitment policy. Israelis have long viewed the IDF as 'the people's army', a crucial institution both for the defence of the state and as a nation builder. Therefore, the IDF undertook non-military roles, conceptualised by Moshe Lissak as *role expansion*,<sup>15</sup> that included establishing agricultural settlements along the borders, preparing high school students for military service, educating immigrants and disadvantaged youth, operating a popular radio station, and more.<sup>16</sup> However, since the 1990s, the IDF has gradually changed its approach from 'role expansion' to 'role contraction'. Motivated by enhancing a professional code and by budgetary constraints, the IDF withdrew from many of its social, non-professional roles by limiting the number of conscripts undertaking these activities.<sup>17</sup> Despite this trend, a major shift occurred with the outbreak of the pandemic.

What is puzzling is that in the early 1950s, prominent political leaders opposed the attempt to expand the young IDF's activities to include civilian roles, even under fear of a putsch planned by David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister and founder of the IDF.<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly, a more aggressive military intervention during the COVID-19 crisis, initiated by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – who lost the public's trust because of the criminal indictments against him<sup>19</sup> – did not engender any significant resistance. So, the heritage of role expansion is important, as Peri indicated, but it doesn't tell the whole story.

It is an indication of the level of legitimacy the Israeli public afforded this deployment that, although the level of public trust in the IDF generally dropped, as mentioned above, in November 2020 with the apparent failure to overcome the pandemic, a survey revealed that a large majority, about 65 per cent of the Israeli public, thought the military should manage the crisis. 'Let the IDF triumph' was the call. But in light of the points I have raised, this high legitimacy is not obvious and deserves an explanation. One could expect some public critique combined with pressures to increase the use of civilian organs, especially as armies in other democracies were deployed on a more limited scale. Arguably, securitisation legitimised the deployment of the military and, in turn, this deployment further legitimised securitisation.

## The theoretical framework

In this empirically motivated study, I will theoretically and deductively draw on themes of critical policy studies and integrate them into the theme of securitisation. To clarify: I use 'securitisation' not as an integrative theory but as a discursive concept, that is, to signify the manner in which the state securitised the crisis.

Although this study is about a military's activity, it is not a case of militarisation, but rather of securitisation. To rely on Michael Mann's broad definition,<sup>20</sup> militarisation relates to the process

<sup>14</sup>Bruce Rosen, Ruth Waitzberg, and Avi Israeli, 'Israel's rapid rollout of vaccinations for COVID-19', *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research*, 10:1 (2021), pp. 1–14.

<sup>15</sup>Moshe Lissak, *Military Roles in Modernization: Civil-Military Relations in Thailand and Burma* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup>Stuart A. Cohen, *Israel and Its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 27, 93–6.

<sup>17</sup>Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, pp. 93–6.

<sup>18</sup>Yagil Levy, *Trial and Error: Israel's Route from War to De-Escalation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 50–1.

<sup>19</sup>The Israeli Democracy Institute, 'PM Under Indictment: A Dangerous Precedent' (3 May 2020), available at: {<https://en.idi.org.il/articles/31477>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>20</sup>Michael Mann, 'The roots and contradictions of modern militarism', *New Left Review*, 162:1 (1987), pp. 35–50 (p. 35).

that increases the adoption and enactment of ‘a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity’. Militarisation is about contextualising and leveraging external threats in a way that justifies their removal by using force or the threat of force. In a different manner, securitisation is about transforming non-traditional and non-military issues, such as immigration or, as in this case, public health, into security threats to justify exceptional domestic measures. While militarisation usually breeds externally oriented military measures (deployment, armament, etc.), securitisation breeds internally oriented bureaucratic measures (such as special legislation) and policing, assumed by civilian agencies. Militarisation becomes internally oriented only when the military marks internal enemies against which it aims its weapons, such as in the case of coups. Struggling with a pandemic is a purely civilian issue that was turned into securitisation. Mobilising armies to this end can be part of securitisation and, in extreme cases, may indirectly militarise society by normalising military values.

Securitisation as a discourse is not detached from practice. The scope of this discourse extends from texts and talk and their contexts to social actions and political practices. It follows that ‘all objects and social practices are objects and practices of discourse in that their meaning depends upon their articulation within socially constructed systems of rules and differences’.<sup>21</sup> Policy discourse is not limited to the rhetoric representing it, but includes a diverse array of actions and practices, such as performance measurement, coaching, conventions, and tasks of project management.<sup>22</sup> In this context, the rhetoric of securitisation augments, but is also augmented by, practices and actions executed by state agencies, including the military in this case.

Furthermore, institutions influence the behaviour of actors by supplying them with behavioural rules, standards of assessment, and emotive commitments. Institutions thereby structure or shape the political and social interpretations of the problems actors have to deal with, and limit the choice of policy solutions that might be implemented.<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, as Stefano Guzzini argued, securitisation ‘can be part of self-fulfilling prophecies by becoming shared beliefs – and then affecting pre-existing, routine action-complexes related to them’,<sup>24</sup> thus having a causal power. Drawing on the general arguments of David Howarth and Steven Griggs, securitisation as problem-framing may also generate specific solutions.<sup>25</sup>

In turn, this process of policymaking may increase the shared understandings between statist actors (such as civilian bureaucracies and the military) and the audiences, in this case the general public, about the nature of the problem and the means necessary to address it. In other words, the problem framing – in this case, the pandemic as a security problem – is not limited to the circle of policymakers but extends to dialogue between them and the public. This may have a positive impact on legitimacy as ‘audiences perceive the legitimate organization not only as more worthy, but also as more meaningful, more predictable’.<sup>26</sup> Legitimacy in this context is what Mark Suchman defined as *pragmatic legitimacy*, which includes *exchange legitimacy*, that is, ‘support for an organizational policy based on that policy’s expected value to a particular set of constituents’.<sup>27</sup>

These concepts help us to understand the legitimation of the IDF’s corona-related deployment in Israel.

<sup>21</sup>David Howarth and Steven Griggs, ‘Poststructuralist policy analysis: Discourse, hegemony and critical explanation’, in Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis (eds), *The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice* (Durham, NC and London, UK: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 305–42 (pp. 307–08).

<sup>22</sup>Howarth and Griggs, ‘Poststructuralist policy analysis’.

<sup>23</sup>Frank Fischer and Herbert Gottweis, ‘Introduction: The argumentative turn revisited’, in Fischer and Gottweis (eds), *The Argumentative Turn Revisited*, pp. 1–26 (p. 17).

<sup>24</sup>Stefano Guzzini, ‘Securitization as a causal mechanism’, *Security Dialogue*, 42:4–5 (2011), pp. 329–41 (p. 336).

<sup>25</sup>Howarth and Griggs, ‘Poststructuralist policy analysis’, p. 326.

<sup>26</sup>Mark C. Suchman, ‘Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches’, *Academy of Management Review*, 20:3 (1995), pp. 571–610 (p. 575).

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, p. 578.

## The IDF's engagement in addressing COVID-19

The IDF was deployed from the beginning of the crisis. The first COVID-19 case in Israel was confirmed in February 2020 and, as the pandemic continued to evolve, Israel enforced restrictions from March. On 25 March, the Cabinet approved emergency regulations, including limiting gatherings in public areas, imposing restrictions on public transportation, and more.<sup>28</sup> In April, towards the week of Passover, the regulations were extended to a few days' lockdown, prohibiting people from leaving their homes except to obtain food or essential services.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter, restrictions were gradually eased, with success in blocking the spread of COVID-19, but they were renewed in September 2020 with the outbreak of the second wave. A second lockdown that included school closures was imposed for three weeks, during which people were restricted to within 500 metres of their homes.<sup>30</sup> A similar scenario was repeated when restrictions were eased but renewed again with the spread of the third wave, culminating in a third, month-long lockdown during January and February 2021. Thereafter, with the success of vaccination (as presented above), a gradual exit took place until most of the restrictions were lifted. This policy remained in force even when Israel was hit in summer 2021 by a fourth wave of the COVID-19, during which the government encouraged the population to get a booster shot of the vaccine.

Despite relatively low rates of infection per capita, from the beginning the IDF was deployed more extensively than other democracies' militaries to address COVID-19.<sup>31</sup> Because of Israel's special security situation, when the state was established in 1948 the IDF set up the Home Front Command (then called HAGA) to protect the civilian population against military threats, and with special emergency powers to instruct civilians. Those powers were enacted with the outbreak of the pandemic.<sup>32</sup>

Within this framework, the Home Front Command took charge of coordinating information that local government disseminated to the public,<sup>33</sup> and initiated a 24/7 public call centre. The Home Front Command also managed and facilitated the use of hotels across the country to host COVID-19 patients with mild symptoms, and opened drive-in testing centres. In addition, the IDF established a new COVID-19 hospital on the premises of a civilian hospital.<sup>34</sup> Soldiers delivered food and hygiene kits to families, especially in Arab and ultra-Orthodox communities where municipalities were under lockdown because of high rates of the disease. Troops were also deployed to distribute food and medicine, and provide other assistance to the elderly population. Furthermore, the IDF deployed thousands of soldiers – afforded by a conscript military – to assist the Israel Police implement restrictions in civilian areas by conducting patrols, isolating and

<sup>28</sup>Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Cabinet Approves Additional Emergency Regulations' (25 March 2020), available at: <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/InnovativeIsrael/Economy/Pages/Cabinet-approves-additional-emergency-regulations-25-March-2020.aspx> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>29</sup>Israel Ministry of Health, 'The Government Approved Emergency Regulations Restricting Operations' (7 April 2020), available at: [https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/07042020\\_1](https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/07042020_1) accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>30</sup>Simon Griver, 'Israel's cabinet approves three-week lockdown', *Globes* (13 September 2020), available at: <https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-israels-cabinet-approves-three-week-lockdown-1001342554> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>31</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the information is drawn from the IDF website: <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/idfs-response-to-covid-19/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>32</sup>Ahaz Ben Ari and Meir Elran, 'States of emergency: Legal aspects and implications for the corona crisis in Israel', *INSS Insight*, 1292 (5 April 2020), available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/coronavirus-and-law-2/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>33</sup>Israel Ministry of Health, 'Traffic Light: Guide for the Activities of the Local Authority' (18 December 2020), available at: [https://www.themarket.com/embeds/pdf\\_upload/2020/20200830-160844.pdf](https://www.themarket.com/embeds/pdf_upload/2020/20200830-160844.pdf) accessed 18 December 2020; Israel Defense Forces, 'The IDF's Response to COVID-19', available at: <https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/idf-activity/the-idfs-response-to-covid-19/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>34</sup>Israel Ministry of Health, 'Minister of Health and Minister of Defense Inaugurated Today a New Military Coronavirus Hospital Established Within Rambam Hospital in Haifa' (11 October 2020), available at: <https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/11102020-01> accessed 18 December 2020.

securing areas, and blocking traffic routes. Still, the IDF was careful to be less conspicuous on such missions to avoid friction with civilians.<sup>35</sup>

By fulfilling these tasks, the IDF's involvement did not significantly deviate from activities other democracies had undertaken. Even Sweden's Armed Forces, for example, were tasked with building a field hospital in Uppsala,<sup>36</sup> and the Italian government deployed the army in specific regions to enforce lockdown.<sup>37</sup> However, the IDF's engagement was broader than in other democracies as it undertook more tasks.

Unique to the case of Israel was the use of technological capabilities to find solutions to help address the virus. For example, the military proudly announced that, inter alia, the Naval Commando Unit had 'converted their operational assembly line of pressure cylinders (used during underwater missions) to develop better methods of compressing medical oxygen'. More sensitive was the exposure of Unit 81, one of the IDF's most highly classified units, usually charged with developing technologies to support combat operations. It was called in to help provide special solutions, for example by developing new protective masks and other equipment for medical professionals.<sup>38</sup>

Most significant, unique to Israel was the Home Front Command's establishment of the Epidemiological Investigations Task Force, to which over two thousand soldiers were enlisted and tasked with breaking the chain of COVID-19 infections. This purely civilian task was carried out in other countries by ministries of health while military health services focused on curbing the transmission of the virus within the ranks.<sup>39</sup> In Israel, this civilian task was assigned to the IDF and applied to the entire population. Furthermore, the Task Force had a digital system developed by Unit 8200, the elite intelligence unit responsible for collecting signals intelligence and code decryption, and the Computer Service and Cyber Defense Directorate. Military methods were thus adapted to civilian needs.

No less complicated (with the outbreak of the first wave) was assigning Unit 8200 and the Research Division of Military Intelligence the task of participating in a joint information centre monitoring tens of thousands of medical tests. Intelligence units, including Israel's elite Commando Unit, were mobilised to streamline the testing process, making it faster and more reliable.<sup>40</sup> At a later stage, the elite unit finished its job, but the Military Intelligence Directorate was left to operate the Corona National Information and Knowledge Center under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. Its role is to provide information, such as morbidity data in different regions of Israel, the spread of the pandemic, response in other countries, and advancement in medical research.<sup>41</sup> As mentioned above, the IDF has not undertaken roles previously assumed by civilian entities, but new corona-related roles have been

<sup>35</sup>Meir Elran, Amichai Cohen, Carmit Padan, and Idit Shafran Gittleman, *Limiting IDF Engagement in Civilian Crises*, INSS Special Publication, in conjunction with The Israel Democracy Institute (8 May 2020), available at: {<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/idf-in-civilian-crises/>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>36</sup>Swedish armed forces offers coronavirus support with field hospital', *Swedish Radio*, available at: {<https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7432866>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>37</sup>'Italy to use army to enforce coronavirus lockdown in worst-hit region', *Reuters* (20 March 2020), available at: {<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-italy-army-idUSKBN2171ZA>} accessed 9 May 2022.

<sup>38</sup>Judah Ari Gross, 'Elite IDF tech unit working to develop medical equipment, protective gear', *The Times of Israel* (14 February 2021), available at: {<https://www.timesofisrael.com/elite-idf-tech-unit-working-to-develop-medical-equipment-protective-gear/>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>39</sup>See, for example, the case of France: Leïla Chassery, Gaëtan Texier, Vincent Pommier De Santi, Hervé Chaudet, Nathalie Bonnardel, and Liliane Pellegrin, 'A COVID-19 outbreak onboard ship: Analysis of the sociotechnical system of epidemiological management in the French Navy', *Safety Science*, 140 (August 2021), p. 105296.

<sup>40</sup>Amos Harel, 'Israel's elite commando unit enlisted to aid in coronavirus testing', *Haaretz* (1 April 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-s-elite-commando-unit-enlisted-to-aid-in-coronavirus-testing-1.8730434>} accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>41</sup>David Siman-Tov and Shmuel Even, 'Assistance from the intelligence community in the fight against the corona pandemic', *INSS Insight*, 1313 (7 May 2020), available at: {<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/coronavirus-and-the-intelligence-community/>} accessed 17 December 2020.

assigned to the military rather than to civilian agencies, especially the Corona National Information and Knowledge Center and the Epidemiological Investigations Task Force.

These military activities were accepted among the two most hostile groups to the IDF – the Arabs, who are exempt from conscription and for whom the military represents a hostile entity, and the ultra-Orthodox Jews, also exempt from conscription for religious reasons. Among the Arabs, cooperation was developed between the troops and the local leadership that may increase enlistment into the voluntary Civil Service, which is endeavouring to attract the young Arab generation.<sup>42</sup> Among the ultra-Orthodox, whose communities were under partial lockdown because of high rates of infection, troops were welcomed by local residents.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, the IDF also aroused criticism, even if only moderate, when deviations were publicised. For example, officers participated in a discussion in April 2020 about the possibility of a popular revolt over growing economic, psychological, and health problems caused by the pandemic. This discussion was based on a survey, problematic in itself, conducted by the Home Front Command<sup>44</sup> in November 2020, that measured the public's confidence in how the government was managing the pandemic crisis; the survey also drew criticism.<sup>45</sup> Almost concurrently, additional criticism was levelled against the military's decision to recruit former members of the Israeli Security Agency to gather information about Arab citizens to better address the spread of COVID-19 among Arab communities.<sup>46</sup> This was similar to former patterns of surveillance used in the past against the Arab population.

Criticism mounted in November 2020 when the IDF was criticised, and therefore changed its policies, after it was revealed that soldiers assigned to the Epidemiological Investigations Task Force had taken part in monitoring social media to identify planned gatherings prohibited by the regulations. Similar to the practices used by the intelligence branches, it was a case in which the IDF implemented the same methods it uses to fight Palestinian terror, but this time against Israeli citizens.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, evidence suggests that the IDF's Epidemiological Investigations Task Force was not so effective.<sup>48</sup> Then, in December 2020, the head of the Health Ministry's epidemiological department resigned, criticising the IDF for running an ineffective and unprofessional system.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Ephraim Lavie, Khader Su'ad, and Jony Essa, 'The activity of the security forces in the Arab society during the corona crisis' [in Hebrew], in Elran et al. (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the Shadow of Corona*, pp. 98–107 (p. 106), available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/media/14981/socio-military-relations-in-israel-in-the-shadow-of-the-corona.pdf>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>43</sup>Asaf Malchi, 'The IDF and the ultra-Orthodox in the corona pandemic: From crisis to opportunity' [in Hebrew], in Elran et al. (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the Shadow of Corona*, pp. 108–22 (pp. 117–9), available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/media/14981/socio-military-relations-in-israel-in-the-shadow-of-the-corona.pdf>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>44</sup>Yaniv Kubovich, 'What if people rise up against coronavirus lockdowns? Israel has a plan', *Haaretz* (22 April 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-what-if-people-rise-up-against-coronavirus-lockdowns-israel-has-a-plan-1.8790692>} accessed 24 April 2020.

<sup>45</sup>Amos Harel and Ronny Linder, 'Israeli military survey about trust in pandemic policy angers health ministry', *Haaretz* (1 November 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-military-survey-about-trust-in-pandemic-policy-angers-health-ministry-1.9278024>} accessed 1 November 2020.

<sup>46</sup>Adala Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 'Israeli Military Recruiting Shin Bet Agents to Gather Intelligence on Arab Communities in "Securitized" Effort to Halt COVID-19' (5 October 2020), available at: {<https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/10144>} accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>47</sup>Amos Harel, 'Under COVID, Israeli Army and police monitor social media to prevent gatherings', *Haaretz* (16 November 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-army-police-monitor-social-media-traffic-to-prevent-gatherings-1.9310716>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>48</sup>Yaniv Kubovich and Bar Peleg, 'Israeli reservists say coronavirus crisis commanders fail to wear masks or socially distance', *Haaretz* (29 September 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israeli-reservists-say-coronavirus-crisis-commanders-fail-to-follow-guidelines-1.9192549>} accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>49</sup>Stuart Winer, 'Health Ministry's epidemiological chief resigns, claims IDF tracing a failure', *Times of Israel* (23 December 2020), available at: {<https://www.timesofisrael.com/health-ministrys-epidemiological-chief-resigns-claims-idf-tracing-a-failure/>} accessed 9 May 2021.



Nevertheless, as mentioned above, the level of public trust in the IDF's corona-related activities was high, with the call, 'Let the IDF triumph' over COVID-19.<sup>50</sup> So how can we explain the high legitimacy that the Israeli public afforded this military engagement?

### Explaining the legitimization of the IDF's involvement

Securitisation legitimised the intensive deployment of the military. From the beginning, legitimacy was conferred on the wide militaristic infrastructure in Israeli society, from which derived the status of the IDF as representing the state's (Jewish) identity.<sup>51</sup> Engaging the military to deal with the virus, that is, utilising its technological and logistical capabilities, is likely to elicit public enthusiasm. In particular, the legacy of role expansion of a military tasked with non-military missions is likely to further legitimise the corona-related activities undertaken by the IDF.<sup>52</sup> What is crucial regarding this heritage is that unlike the state's first years, during which role expansion was criticised, two interrelated processes helped calm criticism: (1) civilian control was reinforced, thus dispersing doubts about the IDF's agenda to thwart democratic values; (2) concurrently, militarisation was further developed, so the IDF's engagement in social affairs became less controversial, for example, its involvement in school education.<sup>53</sup> However, this infrastructure alone could not have adequately legitimised the IDF's deployment had the prevailing discourse been more normal and not securitised.

Securitisation then ran its course. Martial terminology was used in the policy response to the pandemic from the beginning. Justifying emergency measures, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that Israel is in 'a war against an invisible enemy'.<sup>54</sup> He echoed a tone similar to that used by other world leaders. A militaristic infrastructure allowed this rhetoric. However, Netanyahu went further as he gradually abandoned the scientific language of uncertainty and shifted to the language of certainty that marks military discourse.<sup>55</sup> As Cynthia Enloe critically put it in relation to the COVID-19 crisis: "Waging a war" is the most deceptively alluring analogy for mobilizing private and public resources to meet a present danger.<sup>56</sup> In Israel, this was only the first move towards framing the pandemic as a security issue.

As discourse reflects the interplay between talk and practice, in this case as well practices reinforced the rhetoric. A crucial move was made from the beginning, from the moment Prime Minister Netanyahu assigned the management of the crisis to the National Security Council without any public discussion. According to the law that established it, the Council is 'to be responsible, on behalf of the Prime Minister, for the inter-organisational and inter-ministerial staff work

<sup>50</sup>Herman et al., *Large Majority Think IDF Should Manage Coronavirus Crisis*.

<sup>51</sup>Baruch Kimmerling, 'Patterns of militarism in Israel', *European Journal of Sociology*, 34:2 (1993), pp. 196–223; Uri Ben-Eliezer, *War over Peace: One Hundred Years of Israel's Militaristic Nationalism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019).

<sup>52</sup>Yoram Peri, 'Why was the IDF mobilized to fight the coronavirus? A retrospective look at the role expansion of the military in Israel' [in Hebrew], in Elran et al. (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the Shadow of Corona*, pp. 17–18, available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/media/14981/socio-military-relations-in-israel-in-the-shadow-of-the-corona.pdf>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>53</sup>Yagil Levy, 'From a nation builds an army to an army builds a nation', in Nir Gazit and Yagil Levy (eds), *An Army Educates a Nation: The Role of the Military in the Israeli School System* [in Hebrew] (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel, 2016), pp. 87–116.

<sup>54</sup>Dina Kraft, 'Israel warns citizens against panic shopping as new coronavirus restrictions set', *Haaretz* (15 March 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-warns-citizens-against-panic-shopping-ahead-of-partial-coronavirus-closure-1.8674643>} accessed 17 May 2020.

<sup>55</sup>Anat Gesser-Edelsburg and Rana Hijazi, 'When politics meets pandemic: How Prime Minister Netanyahu and a small team communicated health and risk information to the Israeli public during the early stages of COVID-19', *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, 13 (2020), pp. 2985–3002.

<sup>56</sup>Cynthia Enloe, 'COVID-19: "Waging War" Against a Virus is NOT What We Need to Be Doing', Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (2020), available at: {[https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-waging-war-against-a-virus-is-not-what-we-need-to-be-doing/?fbclid=IwAR1uSe7SwGV6MfNriXWNwz4mXH7cfEenz9\\_hKVafLLuP7jJaBr2rfvCJI](https://www.wilpf.org/covid-19-waging-war-against-a-virus-is-not-what-we-need-to-be-doing/?fbclid=IwAR1uSe7SwGV6MfNriXWNwz4mXH7cfEenz9_hKVafLLuP7jJaBr2rfvCJI)} accessed 17 December 2020.

on matters relating to foreign affairs and security'.<sup>57</sup> This means that if the Council coordinates an activity, it signifies that the issue is one of security. Indeed, the Council head, Meir Ben Shabbat (a former senior official in the Israeli Security Agency) explained the assignment of the management to his agency as meeting the need for 'quick decisions on the go'.<sup>58</sup> This entails convening a limited circle of decision-makers while bypassing democratic procedures, and favouring speedy decision-making over the slow pace of normal politics, the speediness characterised by securitisation.<sup>59</sup> Since then, the Council has continued to play a dominant role in managing the crisis. Furthermore, as Jef Huysmans asserted, it is not that the problem comes first and the policy is an instrumental reaction to it, but that the agency charged with the policy has a professional disposition that frames the problem.<sup>60</sup>

Legitimising this mode of securitisation, the Knesset Special Committee on Dealing with COVID-19, established in March 2020, discussed the handling of the pandemic. The Committee maintained that the National Security Council is not qualified for this assignment because its organisational capabilities are no better than those of any other administrative organ.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the Committee did not criticise the essence of the idea that the COVID-19 crisis be managed as a security issue. Even if the National Security Council had functioned effectively, there was still plenty of room for substantial criticism. The Committee even contributed to framing the virus as a security issue by calling for a publicity campaign that would mobilise a military cast, including the IDF Spokesperson and the Home Front Command.<sup>62</sup> In so doing, the Committee ignored a significant problem: the issue is not just which source of knowledge is mobilised by the government, but also the source of authority of that knowledge; and if that authority is not formal then it is certainly symbolic. Military authority may promote securitisation.

To set a good example of the invocation of military authority, in February 2021, in the midst of the third lockdown, a daily newspaper published the following: 'The Military Intelligence task-force [the Corona National Information and Knowledge Center] warned Sunday morning of an expected massive rise in infection rates in Israel'.<sup>63</sup> By citing Military Intelligence (AMAN) upfront, to Israeli Hebrew speakers it read very much like an intelligence warning against an external threat. Thus, such a text could further validate the severe measures imposed by the government against the virus threat.

A further seal to securitisation and the attendant alarmism was added by the involvement of the Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel. Mossad agents were dispatched to purchase medical equipment, such as masks, ventilators, and testing kits, apparently from countries with whom Israel does not have diplomatic relations.<sup>64</sup> However, it was revealed that most of the items were purchased officially in Europe and China, where Israel has formal diplomatic relations, thereby depriving the Mossad of any potential advantage in using its informal ties.<sup>65</sup> While

<sup>57</sup>Israel Prime Minister's Office, *The National Security Council Law* (2008), available at: {<https://www.nsc.gov.il/English/About-the-Staff/Pages/nsclaw.aspx>} accessed 18 May 2020.

<sup>58</sup>Knesset Special Committee on Dealing with the Coronavirus, *Interim Conclusions* [in Hebrew] (7 April 2020), pp. 25–6, available at: {<https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/committees/CoronaVirus/Documents/temprepor.pdf>} accessed 17 May 2020.

<sup>59</sup>Jef Huysmans, 'Minding exceptions: The politics of insecurity and liberal democracy', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 3:3 (2004), pp. 321–41.

<sup>60</sup>Jef Huysmans, 'The European Union and the securitization of migration', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 38:5 (2000), pp. 751–77 (p. 757).

<sup>61</sup>Knesset Special Committee, *Interim Conclusions*, p. 26.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup>Adir Yanko and Yaron Druckman, 'Virus claims 57 lives at weekend as experts predict post-lockdown infection spike', *YNet News* (7 February 2021), available at: {<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/rkaQPfT100>} accessed 7 February 2021.

<sup>64</sup>Ephraim Kahana, 'Intelligence against COVID-19: Israeli case study', *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* (August 2020), pp. 5–6, {<https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2020.1783620>}.

<sup>65</sup>Yossi Melman, 'The Mossad is flaunting too much during the coronavirus crisis', *Haaretz* (19 April 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-mossad-is-flaunting-too-much-during-the-coronavirus-crisis-1.8781348>} accessed 20 April 2020.

the actions were covert, thus fuelling the aura of mystery needed to justify this securitised activity, the results were publicised, thus legitimising the whole operation. To emphasise, the pragmatic legitimisation, which is relevant to this case, rests on explicit discussion between organisations and audiences,<sup>66</sup> and therefore publicity matters. The Mossad's unprecedented involvement served the hysterical horror scenarios promoted by the government that inflated the number of estimated deaths (to ten thousand people).<sup>67</sup> Alarmism justified the emergency measures while, in a circular manner, enacting such measures validated the pretext on which they were taken.

An important discursive promotion to securitisation emerged when military journalists began covering the COVID-19 crisis. Most prominent was the role played by Amos Harel, the military correspondent and defence analyst for *Haaretz*, the most liberal newspaper in Israel. The very fact that this section of the media deals with the pandemic gives legitimacy to its framing as a security issue – as if it goes without saying. Later, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), an independent research institute (affiliated to Tel Aviv University), began analysing the crisis, thus reinforcing the perception that the health crisis is a security issue. The institute recruited experts to conduct its analysis, as it has no established expertise in public health. But the tone it took was one of security, using terms such as 'War Game'<sup>68</sup> and 'From Containment to Victory'.<sup>69</sup>

Gradually, the IDF was assigned more and more corona-related tasks. Furthermore, in April 2020, Defence Minister Naftali Bennett – who labelled the crisis 'biological warfare' – even called for transferring the management of the crisis from the Health Ministry to his ministry and the IDF. Even though this call was dismissed, the low-level debate was about professional considerations, not policy principles.<sup>70</sup>

In sum, securitisation legitimised the high-scale engagement of the military. If the problem is a war against a virus, signifying biological warfare, then the military is naturally among the major policy tools. It is not only the resources and logistical capacity of the IDF that encourage its deployment, but also the organisational culture conducive to 'warfare'. The 'threat-defence' logic inherent in the language of securitisation, moreover, allocates an important role in addressing the threat to the state. So this language naturally obviates the need to delegate efforts to address the problem to non-statist organs, including civil society.<sup>71</sup> Deploying the military, as the most organised statist organ, is the ready-made option. Furthermore, the security framing legitimises governmental operation outside the rules of normal politics. Therefore, it is legitimate to deviate from the democratic principle that distances the military from domestic policing, either directly (by putting troops on the streets) or indirectly (by monitoring the population through epidemiological inquiry and the resulting intelligence assigned to the Information and Knowledge Center). However, securitisation not only legitimises the use of the IDF, it was also legitimised by it.

<sup>66</sup>Suchman, 'Managing legitimacy' p. 585.

<sup>67</sup>Melman, 'The Mossad is flaunting too much'.

<sup>68</sup>Itai Brun, Udi Dekel, and Noa Shusterman, *Israel's Policy against the Coronavirus: Findings from a Strategic War Game*, INSS Special Publication (5 April 2020), available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/coronavirus-inss-war-game/> accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>69</sup>Assaf Orion and Ofir Cohen Marom, 'From containment to victory: From lockdown "slavery" to economic freedom', INSS *Insight*, 1299 (14 April 2020), available at: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/from-quarantine-to-freedom/> accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>70</sup>Times of Israel Staff, 'Bennett demands his defense ministry take over virus battle from health ministry', *Times of Israel* (4 April 2020), available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-demands-his-office-take-charge-of-virus-battle-from-health-ministry/> accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>71</sup>Stefan Elbe, 'Should HIV/AIDS be securitized? The ethical dilemmas of linking HIV/AIDS and security', *International Studies Quarterly*, 50:1 (2006), p. 127.

## The military's role in legitimising securitisation

Israeli scholars of civil-military relations warned against the deployment of the military in the COVID-19 crisis as posing the risk of empowering the IDF and of sparking tensions between generals and politicians over how to manage the crisis.<sup>72</sup> Without downplaying these significant concerns, they ignore a major issue, that is, the impact of the IDF's involvement on legitimising securitisation.

To begin: role expansion is instrumental in legitimising violence by obscuring the essence of the military as the organisation tasked with concentrated lethal violence. Drawing on the case of the UK, by deploying veterans to instill military values in children in state schools, military socialisation is presented as a social good, its core violent function is obscured, and militarisation is enhanced.<sup>73</sup> Following this line of thought, visualising soldiers performing social missions diverts public attention away from the army's violent pursuits and the soldiers' activities to the soldiers themselves as those who serve the good of the community. It is a diversion away from an organisation that uses violence to the military as a moral organisation that works for the welfare of society.

Focusing on the soldiers is particularly instrumental as the Israeli public supports the troops. This is a global phenomenon but in Israel, in particular since the 1980s, soldiers have come to be portrayed as 'our children'. Their image has changed from adults who can take on responsibility, to dependent, vulnerable children whom their parents must protect.<sup>74</sup>

In general, 'support of the troops' diverts public opinion away from the policies to the troops themselves, and delegitimises anti-war dissent as an attack on 'our' soldiers.<sup>75</sup> This is particularly true when the troops are deployed for humanitarian missions. In the case of the COVID-19 crisis, they were welcomed even by previously hostile populations, such as Arabs and ultra-Orthodox, as mentioned above. One observer was cited as saying that such reactions are 'quite understandable. Most Israelis do not see these young men as soldiers in the usual sense of the word. They are our children, our father[s], nephews and grandchildren.'<sup>76</sup>

Pushing this argument further, by playing a part in legitimising the securitisation of COVID-19, the military's corona deployment was further legitimised in a circular manner. Policy discourse is not limited to rhetoric, rather it is constituted on the interplay between talk and practice.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, just as media coverage of the crisis by a military correspondent is a practice that supports the discourse of securitisation, visualising soldiers on the streets is another constitutive practice. If the soldiers are on the streets instead of performing their usual tasks, it means that the threat posed by COVID-19 is severe. All the more so given the real security tasks performed by the IDF that are all focused on homeland defence – unlike many other democracies' armies, which are focused on overseas operations. This deployment also strengthens the visual exposure of the soldiers, which is not always possible in normal operational missions. The sight of soldiers is part of the discourse in its broader meaning.

Thus, the activity itself provides a moral envelope for the army, which presents its soldiers as being exposed to the virus and thus risking themselves for society's benefit. It is not only a case of

<sup>72</sup>Kobi Michael, 'IDF involvement in the coronavirus crisis: A slippery slope?', INSS Professional Forum, *Strategic Assessment*, 23:4 (October 2020), available at: <https://strategicassessment.inss.org.il/en/articles/idf-involvement-in-the-coronavirus-crisis-a-slippery-slope/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>73</sup>Victoria M. Basham, 'Raising an army: The geopolitics of militarizing the lives of working-class boys in an age of austerity', *International Political Sociology*, 10:3 (2016), pp. 258–74.

<sup>74</sup>Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Trauma, therapy and responsibility: Psychology and war in contemporary Israel', in Aparna Rao, Michael Bollig, and Monica Boeck (eds), *The Practice of War* (Oxford, UK: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 119–21.

<sup>75</sup>Roger Stahl, 'Why we "Support the Troops": Rhetorical evolutions', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 12:4 (2009), pp. 533–70.

<sup>76</sup>Eetta Prince-Gibson, 'How the IDF is battling the coronavirus', *Moment* (6 April 2020), available at: <https://momentmag.com/how-the-idf-is-battling-the-coronavirus/> accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>77</sup>Howarth and Griggs, 'Poststructuralist policy analysis', pp. 307–08.

legitimising violence but also, in this situation, of securitisation: public interest can be diverted from the securitised mission to the soldiers themselves for whom it is easy to arouse public sympathy. Therefore, even if the deployment of soldiers with police on the streets were to create tensions with the population, such tensions can be mitigated and not descend into physical clashes, since it is difficult to justify harm to 'our children'. Put differently, the very deployment of soldiers adds another layer to the effort to make coercion of corona rules more friendly.

Politics also matter. Since 2016, the IDF has increasingly been attacked by rightist groups for its apparently restrained rules of engagement in the Palestinian arena. In light of this, the centre-left was pushed to protect the military and even, absurdly, to portray it as one of the 'fortresses of democracy' that the right was allegedly threatening to dismantle.<sup>78</sup> There is no better indication for this than the survey, conducted at the height of the IDF's involvement in the pandemic (November 2020), which found that 72.5 per cent of Israelis trust IDF senior commanders' professionalism, but with higher rates among the left (81.5 per cent), relative to 73 per cent among the cent, and 72 per cent among the right.<sup>79</sup> Incongruously, the IDF is trusted most by the political camp that should suspect it most.

Two examples demonstrate opposition to military deployment in other countries to highlight the difference with Israel. First, in post-Franco Spain, the use of a state of emergency, with the military playing a leading role, was criticised by democratic activists.<sup>80</sup> Indicatively, photographs of members of the army's La Legión deployed in the streets awakened memories of this unit murdering civilians under Franco.<sup>81</sup> Second, in the US, with its long history of law and custom against military presence in civilian life,<sup>82</sup> mobilisations of the National Guard prompted conspiracy theories about the propensity to institute martial law.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, with high public trust in the military in Israel together with securitised legitimation of its deployment, it was hard to consolidate opposition to its unprecedented deployments to address the virus. On the contrary, the majority declared, 'Let the IDF triumph'.

Consequently, the IDF remained the most powerful actor on the COVID-19 scene and prevailed over alternative actors. Indeed, following the first wave that lasted until May 2020, increasing pressure was exerted on the government to delegate part of the management of the crisis to local government. Such calls were heeded in part, for example when the government announced the adoption of the 'traffic light model' that classifies cities as red, yellow, or green according to their rates of infection. Such classifications were made jointly with mayors and some powers were delegated to impose policies at the local level.<sup>84</sup> However, the delegated powers were limited, and the mayors were mainly tasked with local coercive missions.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, scepticism about the effectiveness of the mayors prevailed despite evidence of the success of local governments, for

<sup>78</sup>Yagil Levy, 'Israel: Remilitarized threats and military contrarianism', in David Kuehn and Yagil Levy (eds), *Mobilizing Force: Linking Security Threats, Militarization, and Civilian Control* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2021), pp. 17–35.

<sup>79</sup>Hermann, et al., 'Large majority think IDF should manage coronavirus crisis'.

<sup>80</sup>Raphael Minder and Elian Peltier, 'Spain, on lockdown, weighs liberties against containing coronavirus', *New York Times* (15 March 2020), available at: {<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/world/europe/spain-coronavirus.html>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>81</sup>Janice Williams, 'The elite Spanish Army's very revealing uniforms are Twitter's new obsession', *Newsweek* (23 March 2020), available at: {<https://www.newsweek.com/spain-army-uniform-legion-twitter-1493735>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>82</sup>Robert Klein, 'The Posse Comitatus Act: Enduring policy against direct military law enforcement', *NYU Journal of Legislation & Public Policy* (26 October 2020), available at: {<https://nyujlpp.org/quorum/quorum-klein-posse-comitatus-act-enduring-policy/>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>83</sup>Lindsay Cohn and Jim Golby, 'The U.S. military's role in the coronavirus response is likely to grow', *The Washington Post: Monkey Cage* (30 March 2020), available at: {<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/03/30/us-militarys-role-coronavirus-response-is-likely-grow/>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>84</sup>Itai Beer, 'Lack of reform in Israeli local government and its impact on modern developments in public management', *Public Management Review* (21 September 2020), {<https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1823138>}.

<sup>85</sup>Sever Plocker, 'Who governs the local government' [in Hebrew], *Yedioth Aharonot: Mamon* (13 November 2020).

example in cutting the chain of infection at the local level by setting up local tracing systems.<sup>86</sup> Ultimately, the IDF obtained more powers.

These mutually reinforcing relations between military deployment and securitisation were instrumental in legitimising a stringent form of securitisation that ‘enemised’ the population.

### ‘Enemising’ the people

High legitimacy was afforded to the policies adopted by the Israeli government, leading to a stringent form of securitisation whereby the public was ‘enemised’. IR scholar David Chandler succinctly described this securitised approach, although he was referring to less severe means used by Western democracies:

The public are, in fact, the problem: they panic buy, depriving the vulnerable of essentials from toiletries, to food and medicine; they socialise; they party; they travel; they put others and themselves at risk. People are the vector for the spread of the virus when left to their own devices. The policy responses, which go well beyond the provision of emergency medical assistance, suggest that people are understood as both dangerously irrational and as weak, vulnerable and in need of protection, both from others and from themselves.<sup>87</sup>

Therefore, Chandler concluded, the public is the ‘enemy’.<sup>88</sup> The 1990s global response to HIV/AIDS was securitised in a similar manner. The ‘threat-defence’ logic inherent in the securitisation of HIV/AIDS marked the people living with it as a threat to society. This logic predominated over the alternative of normalising societal attitudes towards those living with the syndrome.<sup>89</sup>

As is inherent in securitisation, the first reaction was a global revival of traditional sovereign power: ‘lockdown, curfew, confinement, regulation of movements, border controls and overall restrictions on the mobility of subject peoples’.<sup>90</sup> However, this enactment of power was followed by others, resulting in ‘sensory power’ whereby different technologies detecting, identifying, and making people visible ended up subjectifying them.<sup>91</sup>

Against this background, a distinction is offered between two policy approaches: one being enemy-oriented and the other population-oriented. Chandler describes the enemy-oriented approach, adopted enthusiastically by Israel. In contrast, concern for people is central to the population-oriented approach. It does not see management of the crisis as a battle against the invisible enemy-virus that must be defeated, but rather as a campaign whereby society learns to live with the virus. More weight is given to other considerations, such as the functioning of the economy and social life. As Elena Sondermann and Cornelia Ulbert suggested, rather than blaming others (internally or externally) for transmitting the virus, the logic of solidarity prevails, typified by shared responsibilities and accessibility to universal rights and duties.<sup>92</sup> It is not a case of the government disciplining the citizenry by coercive means, but rather one in which trust and voluntary compliance play a key role. To this end, in many OECD countries, local governments

<sup>86</sup>See, for example, Judy Maltz, ‘COVID cases were skyrocketing in this Israeli desert town: Then the mayor intervened’, *Haaretz* (15 October 2020), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-covid-cases-were-skyrocketing-in-this-israeli-desert-town-then-the-mayor-intervened-1.9234696>} accessed 17 December 2020.

<sup>87</sup>David Chandler, ‘The coronavirus: Biopolitics and the rise of “anthropocene authoritarianism”’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 18:2 (2020), pp. 26–32 (pp. 27–8).

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>89</sup>Elbe, ‘Should HIV/AIDS be securitized?’ p. 130.

<sup>90</sup>Engin Isin and Evelyn Ruppert, ‘The birth of sensory power: How a pandemic made it visible?’, *Big Data & Society*, 7:2 (2020), pp. 4–5, {<https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951720969208>}.

<sup>91</sup>Isin and Ruppert, ‘The birth of sensory power’, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup>Elena Sondermann and Cornelia Ulbert, ‘The threat of thinking in threats: Reframing global health during and after COVID-19’, *Zeitschrift für Friedens-und Konfliktforschung*, 9:2 (2020), pp. 309–20.

have been placed at the frontline in addressing the pandemic,<sup>93</sup> together with civil society organisations, not the armed forces. To better understand the discursive aspect, a comparison between leaders' rhetoric reveals the difference between France, Spain, the US, and Britain, whose leaders used the metaphor of war against the virus, and other countries such as Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, whose leaders narrated the crisis in a more tempered manner. For example, Germany's President Walter Steinmeier declared, 'This pandemic is not a war. It does not pit nations against nations, or soldiers against soldiers. Rather, it is a test of our humanity.'<sup>94</sup>

Israel adopted the enemy-oriented approach, but in a more extreme manner than in other democracies. I will offer three indications of this. First, framing the policy response to COVID-19 as a security issue further legitimised the use of irregular methods. Israel's security expertise in controlling the Palestinian population in the West Bank has thus been transported to address the epidemic. Methods developed by the intelligence agencies to deal with hostile countries and terror organisations were used against Israeli citizens. In this spirit, from the beginning of the crisis the Israeli Security Agency (ISA) was tasked with using digital tracking capabilities to track individuals who had tested positive, and those exposed to them. Digital tracking, originally deployed against suspected terrorists in the West Bank, aroused minor public criticism.<sup>95</sup> Only petitions by human rights organisations led the Supreme Court of Justice to limit the digital tracking from March 2021.<sup>96</sup> No other democracy used its intelligence agencies to cope with COVID-19 to the same extent as Israel.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned above, more methods originally used to control a hostile population were adopted, such as the IDF-led monitoring of the potential for a popular revolt, gathering information about Arab citizens, and monitoring social media.

Apart from the concerns that this deployment raises – for example, the possibility of expanding this practice to other non-security-related issues<sup>98</sup> – the use of these methods signifies the perspective guiding the policy. This policy suggests that any person who carries the virus can potentially be seen as a sort of 'terrorist'. In this spirit, Miki Haimovich, the (liberal) Knesset Internal Affairs and Environment Committee Chairwoman, noted that '[E]ach and every one of us can be a *ticking bomb* of corona, so there is no dispute regarding the importance of the police's work.'<sup>99</sup> Here again, we witness the legitimisation impact of the martial rhetoric that constitutes securitisation.

Second, by framing the crisis as one of security, the government could broadly use the 'state of emergency' to manage it. Unprecedentedly, since 1948, the State of Israel has been under a 'state of emergency' that grants the government legal prerogative to enact regulations at any time for the defence of the state, public security, and the maintenance of supplies and essential services. This legal status allows the government to issue emergency regulations that override parliamentary legislation.<sup>100</sup> The Knesset extends this state of emergency regularly but, until the COVID-19 crisis, the government had made little use of its authority to do so, and there was a broad consensus

<sup>93</sup>OECD, 'Cities Policy Responses', available at: {<http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/cities-policy-responses-fd1053ff/>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>94</sup>Florian Opillard, Angélique Palle, and Léa Michelis, 'Discourse and strategic use of the military in France and Europe in the COVID-19 crisis', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 111:3 (2020), pp. 239–59 (pp. 250–1).

<sup>95</sup>Siman-Tov and Even, 'Assistance from the Intelligence Community'.

<sup>96</sup>High Court of Justice 6732/20 [in Hebrew] (1 March 2021), available at: {[https://www.haaretz.co.il/embeds/pdf\\_upload/2021/20210301-102230.pdf](https://www.haaretz.co.il/embeds/pdf_upload/2021/20210301-102230.pdf)} accessed 9 May 2021.

<sup>97</sup>Kahana, 'Intelligence against COVID-19', p. 2.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>99</sup>The Knesset, 'Internal Affairs Committee discusses police violence during enforcement of emergency corona regulations', *Knesset News* (21 July 2020), available at: {<https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/press21720b.aspx>} accessed 17 December 2020, emphasis added.

<sup>100</sup>The Knesset, 'Knesset Plenum approves Joint Committee's recommendation to extend state of emergency', *Knesset News* (4 June 2020), available at: {<https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/News/PressReleases/Pages/press4620p.aspx>} accessed 18 December 2020.

to terminate this declaration. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, the government exerted its power, and a total of 38 emergency regulations were issued by June 2020, inter alia for the purpose of restricting public gatherings.<sup>101</sup> Typically, securitisation bypasses normal politics. Indeed, a comparison between Israel and other democracies revealed that in no other democracy does the executive rely on an existing general or permanent declaration of a state of emergency to deal with the COVID-19 crisis, and without parliamentary oversight.<sup>102</sup>

The Israeli government, moreover, used some unique, exceptional measures, such as allowing for the transfer of personal data of non-vaccinated individuals from the sick funds to municipal authorities, restricting mass gatherings to limit demonstrations, and imposing travel quotas on the number of Israeli citizens eligible to enter the country. In these cases, the Supreme Court of Justice restricted the government.<sup>103</sup>

Third, at the outbreak of the second wave, a majority of the public distrusted the government (70 per cent) and the Knesset (74 per cent).<sup>104</sup> Legitimacy reinforces voluntary compliance, hence reducing the costs of government coercion; conversely, coercion reinforces mistrust.<sup>105</sup> Against this background, coercion played a key role in imposing restrictions in Israel, resulting in physical clashes between civilians and the police. Police violence allegedly increased after May 2020, when mass rallies and demonstrations started taking place calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Netanyahu because of the criminal indictments against him and his failure to handle the health crisis.<sup>106</sup>

Given the role played by the IDF in addressing the crisis, what are the impacts on civil-military relations?

### Conclusion and impacts on civil-military relations

While studying the military's involvement in managing the COVID-19 crisis in Israel, what stands out is the high legitimacy that the Israeli public afforded its massive deployment, especially given the availability of alternative policy tools and the exceptional engagement of the military. Existing explanations regarding the status of the military versus the weakness of civilian organs do not provide satisfactory answers.

I presented a circular argument: securitisation legitimised the deployment of the military and in turn, this deployment, constitutive of the discourse of securitisation, further legitimised securitisation. Consequently, Israel adopted an approach that 'enemised' the population. Still, this is not a typical feedback loop; poor performance or abuse of power could reverse the cycle, though this is not yet the experience of Israel.

This study is empirically motivated and the case of Israel cannot satisfy each of the rationales for a single-case study.<sup>107</sup> However, what broader theoretical implications can be derived from

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>European Parliament Briefing, 'States of Emergency in Response to the Coronavirus Crisis: Situation in Certain Member States', European Union (2020), available at: {[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)649408\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/649408/EPRS_BRI(2020)649408_EN.pdf)} accessed 9 May 2021; Lila Margalit, 'Emergency Powers and Parliamentary Scrutiny During the Corona Crisis: A Comparative Review' [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute, 2020), available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/articles/31524>} accessed 1 December 2020.

<sup>103</sup>Yuval Shany, 'The Return to Balfour: Israel's Supreme Court Strikes Down Coronavirus Regulations Curbing the Right to Protest' (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 19 April 2021), available at: {<https://en.idi.org.il/articles/34329>} accessed 14 May 2021.

<sup>104</sup>Zipi Israeli and Mora Deitch, *The Israeli Public and the Effects of the Coronavirus: Findings from a Public Opinion Poll in the Second Wave of the Crisis*, INSS Special Publication (29 September 2020), p. 2, available at: {<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/coronavirus-inss-survey/>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>105</sup>Tom R. Tyler, *Why People Obey the Law* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 4, 23–7.

<sup>106</sup>Yuval Shany, 'Protests in exceptional times: Israel's new demonstration prosecution guidelines', *Lawfare* (10 September 2020), available at: {<https://www.lawfareblog.com/protests-exceptional-times-israels-new-demonstration-prosecution-guidelines>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>107</sup>Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), pp. 49–51.



this case? First, it contributes to the study of the relationship between militarism and securitisation. Militarism can be a by-product of securitisation, as when securitisation empowers the executive; this extends to the ability to mobilise military power to address an urgent existential threat, which happened in the recent cases of US warfare.<sup>108</sup> Conversely, the study of Israel reveals that securitisation can be a by-product of militarisation.

A comparative study of the involvement of militaries in the provision of domestic security demonstrates that militarisation of the security discourse by the political elites played an important role. Discourse may essentialise the threat, thus providing legitimacy for the deployment of the military. For example, while Colombia and El Salvador interpreted threats by insurgents and cartels in existential terms, thus justifying military deployment, in Senegal and Spain domestic rebellions were presented as criminal, thereby excluding the military from involvement. In all cases, historical legacies were crucial for the proclivity of civilian politicians to engage in a militarised domestic security discourse. Weaker or obsolete militaristic infrastructure distanced the militaries from such engagement, and vice versa.<sup>109</sup> In Israel, a high level of militarism facilitated securitisation that in turn legitimised the military deployment, and was also legitimised by it.

Second, there are impacts on civil-military relations. It is difficult to predict long-term implications, but we can assess those in the short term. Reliance on the military to deter domestic opposition to an authoritarian regime reinforces the power of the military that may demand influence over policies from the regime in return for its repressive services.<sup>110</sup> This tradeoff can be extended to other forms of domestic interventions, also in democracies (and Israel is considered a democracy in that its community of citizens monitors the armed forces). For example, Chiara Ruffa<sup>111</sup> showed how, since the 1990s, mobilising the French military to address domestic threats increased its bargaining power *vis-à-vis* civilians, especially when the military was reluctant to assume the new roles. A similar conclusion can be inferred from the case of Israel where room for the IDF to bargain increased as it was called to provide 'legitimation services' to politicians against their political rivals; that is, legitimising either moderate or aggressive policies *vis-à-vis* hawkish or dovish rivals, respectively.<sup>112</sup>

We may assume that the same logic of tradeoff can be applied to purely civilian missions carried out by militaries, especially when the military not only offers its logistical or organisational resources (such as involvement in relief operations), but also 'legitimation services' implicit in its very involvement. This was the case with the IDF's corona-related missions as elaborated above. The IDF did not limit its involvement to dispatching medical equipment; it also monitored the population, participated in imposing law and order, and broadly helped to securitise the crisis.

However, we should enquire how willing the military was to undertake these tasks. To this end, let us review the IDF's role conception with regard to its engagement in addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Role conception refers to the military's views about its purpose in International Relations, from which derives its conceptions about the missions with which it is tasked.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>108</sup>Bryan Mabee and Srdjan Vucetic, 'Varieties of militarism: Towards a typology', *Security Dialogue*, 49:1 (2018), pp. 96–108 (p. 101).

<sup>109</sup>David Kuehn and Yagil Levy, 'Theorizing threats, militarization and democratic civilian control', in Kuehn and Yagil Levy (eds), *Mobilizing Force*, pp. 223–43.

<sup>110</sup>Milan W. Svobik, 'Contracting on violence: The moral hazard in authoritarian repression and military intervention in politics', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 57:5 (2013), pp. 765–94.

<sup>111</sup>Chiara Ruffa, 'France: Swinging securitization paths?', in Kuehn and Yagil Levy (eds), *Mobilizing Force*, pp. 139–60.

<sup>112</sup>Yagil Levy, 'Military contrarianism in Israel: Room for opposition by the Chief of Staff to politicians', *Military and Strategic Affairs*, 5:2 (2013), pp. 39–60.

<sup>113</sup>Pascal Vennesson et al., 'Is there a European way of war?: Role conceptions, organizational frames, and the utility of force', *Armed Forces and Society*, 35:4 (2009), pp. 628–45.

As mentioned above, since the 1990s, the IDF has gradually limited its social roles, preferring to enhance its professionalism and limit budgetary loads.<sup>114</sup> It is not that the IDF fully withdrew from such roles, rather that it limited its involvement in them, preferring missions from which it could benefit in terms of legitimacy and increasing human resources.<sup>115</sup> An example that encompasses both benefits is helping young high school students from the periphery to improve their science and mathematics skills so as to be accepted into special programmes that train soldiers for technological and engineering roles.<sup>116</sup> However, in the case of COVID-19, the IDF displayed a willingness to take part from the beginning.

Drawing on texts and rhetoric, the IDF's role conception has four major components. First, underlying this conception is the issue of contract. As IDF Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi announced:

We get a lot from the people; we get an unusual quality of personnel, and that's exactly where you need to give back to the people ... And now we are for you, not just for half the kingdom but all the kingdom. This in my view is the concept of the People's Army.<sup>117</sup>

Kochavi thus invoked, and broadened, the issue of contract constituted between the military and society, as inherited in the concept of a conscript military.

Another key component of role conception are the similarities between the corona-related missions undertaken by the IDF and its emergency roles. To recall: unique to Israel is the Home Front Command as a branch of the IDF, with its powers to manage routine life during an emergency when the population is faced with a security threat. Therefore, the IDF could perceive the COVID-19 crisis as a mode of training and testing its emergency preparedness. IDF Major General Tamir Yadai, Head of the Home Front Command, clearly echoed this conception when he said:

I see corona as a kind of gift. It reflected a summary of achievements of three years of work. For example, the National Assistance Center [which, for example, coordinated the distribution of food packages to the elderly, Y. L.] that was established within the Command is the result of a three-year process. Police officers and officials in various organizations talk about their successful cooperation with the Home Front Command.<sup>118</sup>

It follows that not only has the IDF traditionally been ready to assume expanded civilian roles, but also that in this case the role even accorded with its professional needs.

The third component is prestige. It was the Chief of General Staff who asked the government to hand over responsibility for dealing with the crisis to the IDF. He listed issues in which the IDF has a clear advantage over civilian agencies that should give it the lead.<sup>119</sup> In this spirit, the IDF proudly announced when the crisis was temporarily over: 'The IDF has led the fight against Covid-19 in Israel and has made great strides in recovering and restoring life to what it once

<sup>114</sup>Cohen, *Israel and Its Army*, pp. 93–6.

<sup>115</sup>Yagil Levy, 'The military and the market society: A conceptual framework', in Yagil Levy, Nir Gazit, Rinat Moshe, and Alona Harness (eds), *The Army and the Market Society in Israel* [in Hebrew] (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel Press, 2019), pp. 11–52.

<sup>116</sup>Gil Baram and Isaac Ben-Israel, 'The academic reserve: Israel's fast track to high-tech success', *Israel Studies Review*, 34:2 (2019), pp. 75–91.

<sup>117</sup>Gaby Schneider, 'Kochavi: We are coming out of the corona crisis more humble and more productive', *Hidabroot* [in Hebrew] (27 May 2020), available at: {<https://www.hidabroot.org/article/1139710>} accessed 8 July 2021.

<sup>118</sup>Interview, *Maarachot Oref 1* [in Hebrew] (August 2020), pp. 4–8, available at: {<https://fliphtml5.com/vmkhr/gbuqj>} accessed 8 July 2021.

<sup>119</sup>Yoav Limor, 'Kochavi to the prime minister: "Hand over the corona crisis to the IDF"', *Israel Hayom* [in Hebrew] (6 April 2020), available at: {<https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/749145>} accessed 8 July 2021.

was.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, in terms of symbolic gains, the IDF was able to benefit in two other ways: (1) enhancing its moral legitimacy by undertaking activities that obscure its violent nature, as described above; (2) enhancing its economic legitimacy by exposing the technological effectiveness of its costly intelligence units. Usually, the units' effectiveness is shrouded in secrecy, while drawing criticism about the extent to which it recruits mainly elite groups in an inequitable manner.<sup>121</sup>

The fourth component is risk reduction. A few major risks could have impeded the IDF's involvement: for example, mission failure, friction with citizens, economic costs, and increasing the permeability of the boundaries between the military and society that the IDF had attempted to seal during the 2000s.<sup>122</sup> In fact, the IDF was effectively able to limit its risks by reducing friction with citizens and, more importantly, limit its budgetary risks and even increase its resources. In practice, the IDF conditioned its assistance in addressing the pandemic on receiving extra funds to cover its expenses.<sup>123</sup>

Against this role conception, the IDF's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* civilians was restricted as it was willing to assist. However, it effectively demanded extra funding for purposes unrelated to the pandemic, thus receiving nearly one billion dollars to fund its multiyear plan.<sup>124</sup> So, as the theory predicts,<sup>125</sup> armies can trade their involvement in non-military missions for more resources.

A second implication for civil-military relations relates to the impact of legitimising securitisation. Paradoxically and theoretically, a high level of civilian control of the military promotes militarisation: the institutional arrangements of control cement the universal image of the military. Then, the more the military is portrayed as a universal entity, the greater its ability to influence decision-making. Politicians can even use the advice of the military to legitimate policies. As C. W. Mills explained, making careful use of the military 'makes it possible to lift the policy "above politics", which is to say above political debate and into the realm of administration'.<sup>126</sup> Civilian control thus allows the military to claim neutrality and a depoliticised stance. Militarisation as legitimisation for using force creates barriers to deliberative decision-making.<sup>127</sup> Applying this logic to the concept of securitisation, the IDF helped legitimise it by using its symbolic status and the visual exposure of its troops.

In terms of public control of decision-making, securitisation, as much as militarisation, helps reduce the open space for a deliberation in which '[e]veryone's opinion is in principle equally fallible in the contest of opinion'.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, from the moment the pandemic was framed as a security threat, the agenda was dominated solely by the official approach. Not only did the discourse not encourage other opinions based on public health expertise, it also marginalised them<sup>129</sup> in the style of 'silence, we're shooting' that characterises public behaviour when war

<sup>120</sup>IDF Sites, 'The IDF's 20 Biggest Events of 2020', available at: {<https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/idf-activity/events-of-2020/>} accessed 8 July 2021.

<sup>121</sup>Yagil Levy, 'The People's Army Combating Corona' [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Israeli Democracy Institute, 2020), available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/blogs/security-clearance/coronavirus-and-idf/31265>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>122</sup>Stuart A. Cohen, 'IDF involvement in the coronavirus crisis: Is it really a slippery slope?' [in Hebrew], in Elran et al. (eds), *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in the Shadow of Corona*, pp. 27–41 (pp. 38–41), available at: {<https://www.idi.org.il/media/14981/socio-military-relations-in-israel-in-the-shadow-of-the-corona.pdf>} accessed 21 February 2021.

<sup>123</sup>Yaniv Kubovich, 'Senior officials: The IDF is conducting wastefully and insensitively during the crisis' [in Hebrew], *Haaretz* (7 December 2020), available at: {[https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/premium-1.9352816?\\_ga=2.193233901.1708887743.1608122368-662180099.1520852153](https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/premium-1.9352816?_ga=2.193233901.1708887743.1608122368-662180099.1520852153)} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>See Ruffa, 'France: Swinging securitization paths?'; and Levy, 'Military contrarianism'.

<sup>126</sup>C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 200.

<sup>127</sup>Yagil Levy, 'What is controlled by civilian control of the military? Control of the military vs. control of militarization', *Armed Forces & Society*, 42:1 (2016), pp. 75–98 (pp. 86–8).

<sup>128</sup>Huysmans, 'Minding exceptions', p. 332.

<sup>129</sup>See Amos Harel, 'Israel is a success story with vaccines: On other COVID fronts, it's a fiasco', *Haaretz* (17 January 2021), available at: {<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-is-a-success-story-with-vaccines-on-other-covid-fronts-it-s-a-fiasco-1.9452625>} accessed 20 January 2021.

breaks out. The dominant discourse surrounding securitisation suspends deliberative democracy; that is, it doesn't necessarily suspend democratic procedures, but rather the cultural essence of democracy. Looking through a comparative lens, the expanded role played by national militaries in responding to public health crises since the 1990s raises concerns that involving militaries further reinforces the negative impacts of the securitisation of health issues on human rights.<sup>130</sup> This article echoes such concerns from a different angle.

Not only were alternative approaches not really considered, the policy failed to create a balance between blocking the virus and facilitating the continuation of economic and social life. As the example cited above of the securitisation of HIV/AIDS shows, short-term security measures may eclipse long-term alternative considerations.<sup>131</sup> The 'grammar of the crisis' encourages this eclipsing.<sup>132</sup> Such considerations include, for example, long-term medical damage caused by over-focus on COVID-19, but also the 'ratchet effect' of increased surveillance mechanisms.

It follows that while the IDF acted in a politically controlled manner, the very fact of its performance legitimised securitisation and hence weakened control over policymaking. This can be the main lesson of using the armed forces to handle a pandemic.

**Yagil Levy** is professor of Political Sociology and Public Policy in the Department of Sociology, Political Science, and Communication at the Open University of Israel.

<sup>130</sup>Christopher Watterson and Adam Kamradt-Scott, 'Fighting flu: Securitization and the military role in combating influenza', *Armed Forces & Society*, 42:1 (2016), pp. 145–68.

<sup>131</sup>Stephane Baele, 'On the securitization of COVID-19', *Pandemipolitics* (9 April 2020), available at: {<https://pandemipolitics.net/baele/>} accessed 18 December 2020.

<sup>132</sup>Daniele Lorenzini, 'Biopolitics in the time of coronavirus', *Critical Inquiry* (2 April 2020), available at: {<https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/02/biopolitics-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>} accessed 18 December 2020.