The Israel Defence Forces as an Agent of Socialization and Education: A Research in Role-Expansion in a Democratic Society

Moshe Lissak, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem

INTRODUCTION

On examining the contemporary role of the armed forces both in the developed and the developing world, one cannot but conclude that its classical definition of being exclusively confined to the security-military sphere is rather obsolete. Today, more than ever before, the military — under a variety of circumstances — is fulfilling new functions which often have nothing to do with security in the narrow sense of the word. Not only is there a growing involvement in political affairs — but many armies are also engaged in a variety of projects for the development of their countries' economic infrastructure, physical communications, telecommunications and health services. Some armies are engaged, with varying degrees of intensity, in the operation of education facilities at various levels as well.¹)

The wide spectrum of educational activities can be classified according to two criteria which can in turn be sub-divided into two categories. The main two criteria are:

a. **The identity of the client-consumer:** Generally two distinct categories may be distinguished — the civilian sector on the one hand and the military establishment (or groups of various types of soldiers within it) on the other.

b. **The contents of the educational services provided by the military:** Here again a general distinction may be made between two types of services: professional-military instruction designed to impart to the soldier and the officer in the most direct manner specific knowledge essential for promoting the professional standards of the military system on the one hand and on the other hand educational services of a more diffuse nature.

By combining these criteria four main types are obtained which are, however, not mutually exclusive. One type or several types may predominate or appear simultaneously or else one type may be exclusively represented, all according to the conditions under which the military operates.

¹) This development has elsewhere been defined as "role expansion" of the military establishment. See M. Lissak, "Modernization and Role Expansion of the Military in Developing Countries: A Comparative Analysis". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. IX, No. 3, April 1967, pp. 233-255.
Type A:

The first type consists of limited professional facilities in a strictly military context, whose purpose is to enhance the consumer's mastery of the art of war, the consumer himself constituting an integral part of the military system. Nevertheless some of the knowledge acquired in this way can also be converted and adapted to civilian uses (driving, mechanics, etc.). Many armies of the Western democracies, and their auxiliary forces in their former colonies have been giving decisive if not exclusive priority to projects of this type, which also exist, however, in countries that are not necessarily democratic, such as in part of the Latin American states.

The Identity of the Client

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Limited Professional Services</th>
<th>Comprehensive Educational Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The soldier as individual or The civilian sector
the military establishment as a whole

Type B:

Here direct military, pre- or para-military training is given by the army to certain civilian groups other than army reserves. This may take the form of military training for youngsters prior to their enlistment in a premilitary setting, or of the establishment of various para-military bodies (civil guards and the like).

Type C:

The third type of training and education takes the form of special army programs, in addition to the projects of the first and possibly of the second type, designed to raise the general non-military standard of education or of vocational skill of soldiers and officers.

Type D:

This comprises the same kind of activities as were included in the previous category except that they are not exclusively designed for the military but are, in a fairly regular and institutionalized manner, carried on also in civilian settings and on behalf of the civilian sector. Non-military vocational training given to servicemen prior to their release is also included under this heading.

In the absence of statistical and other data it is, of course, difficult to estimate the
extent of the educational activities carried on by various armies in each of these prototypes. Nevertheless, from the piecemeal information at hand it appears that while in the not too distant past only few armies in the world engaged in extensive educational programs and usually confined themselves almost exclusively to projects of the first type, the situation has changed considerably. Armies are increasingly taking upon themselves a greater variety of educational-socializing tasks. At least part of the civilian sector is becoming a consumer of military services initiated and provided by the army.²)

The case study of the Israel Army presented below is not merely another example of educational programs and projects of this type or the other. It is one of the few armies whose educational-vocational training functions have reached within the framework of all the four prototypes mentioned a considerable degree of institutionalization.³) The main purpose of this paper is to show some typical examples of types of educational services it provides.

a. Technical-vocational training in the army
For most of the trades the Israel Army needs it must train its own manpower. This has led to the institution of pre-military schools for those trades where protracted training is required. Typical examples are:
1. The technical school of the airforce to which pupils are admitted after 10 years of studies for two years specialization in electronics, and after 8 years — for a two years’ course in aircraft maintenance.
2. The technical boarding school of the armoured corps where elementary school graduates are trained for one year in mechanics and motor electricity.
3. The boarding school of the navy, where elementary school graduates specialize for two years in wireless operation, signalling, radar and navigation.⁴)

b. Elementary education
Israeli men are recruited into the army on a compulsory basis, with hardly any selection, the sole criterion being their date of birth. The only exceptions are those who fail to attain a certain physical or psychotechnical standard, criminals or maladjusted personalities, and students of religious seminars (yeshivot). Since Israel is a country of immigration, also youngsters who have not had the compulsory eight years of schooling are inducted, including recent newcomers with a scanty knowledge of Hebrew.

⁴) Graduates from the military boarding high school are not commissioned automatically. The only way to be commissioned is to attend a special officers training school.
Over the years the Hebrew and elementary education program offered by the army passed through several phases. It reached full institutionalization only in 1962 with the issue of a general staff regulation to the effect that “every serviceman on compulsory duty who has not finished elementary school shall, within the period of his service, complete his studies under an elementary education program conferring a recognized diploma upon examination”. 5)

The number of men who attend Hebrew or elementary education courses during their military service is considerable. The Chief Education Officer's staff estimates that some 5,000 soldiers a year learned Hebrew in the period of extensive immigration, nor has the number fallen off appreciably in the past few years. In 1968 there were about 4,000. 6)

Most of the men attending the elementary education courses are the sons of immigrants from Islamic countries — mainly from North Africa — or are themselves natives of these countries. The vast majority live in development towns or immigrant villages. Hence in Israel under-education is not merely an attribute of certain socio-economically backward strata but is directly related to ethnic origin. The army's educational facilities thus offer a singular opportunity to decrease the social disparity between the various ethnic groups.

In parallel with the courses for enlisted men the army also runs similar courses for its regular staff, mainly for the ranks of sergeant and sergeant major. The number of non-commissioned officers participating in such courses is, however, steadily decreasing. By now these are mainly men who joined the regular army before the general staff regulation requiring every soldier on compulsory service without full elementary schooling to participate in the army elementary education program came into force.

Many of the publications of the Chief Education Officer's Department, which we shall examine further on, are designed for the army's education courses, especially the general ones. This special instruction material became necessary because the army embarked on its large scale adult education program quite some time before the Ministry of Education had devised and implemented appropriate techniques for that purpose. Over the years the army's education department has thus developed special syllabi for its elementary education courses and published several textbooks and teaching manuals. Many of the techniques first introduced by the army were later on adopted also by the civilian agencies.

c. High school education

Several years ago the army decided to offer a partial high school program on a voluntary basis. The army's original intention was to raise the standards of its regular staff that had not had the advantages of a full high school education. Since the end of the fifties the army has also provided facilities for enlisted men on compulsory service to study for their matriculation examinations, in evening classes held at a special school.

5) General staff regulation 37.0102.
d. Pre-academic courses

The army also helps interested candidates to be admitted to institutions of higher learning. The army's assistance is two-fold:

1) Special allowances are made for soldiers who take correspondence courses and they receive half of the tuition fees from the army.

2) Courses are held in the army by teachers of the academic reserve corps assigned to this duty as part of their compulsory service.

So much for the programs helping soldiers before their release from compulsory service to gain admittance to institutions of higher learning. Apart from that, the army also has the problem of its own regular officers, whom it is only too willing to allow to attend university, for several reasons:

First, to prevent junior officers from leaving the army in order to pursue their studies.

Second, to raise the standards of professional officers both in specific areas (engineering, chemistry, oriental studies) and in the field of general education.

Third, to equip officers before their retirement with a civilian career.

The following priorities have accordingly been laid down:

1. Young officers up to the age of 30 whom the army is interested to keep on its rosters. They are given fully paid leave for their university studies in practically any field they like, against an undertaking to serve a given number of years for every year they spend at the university.

2. Senior officers from lieutenant-colonel upwards. Here the army pays for their studies which are intended to set them up in a civilian career. A considerable proportion go abroad to study business administration or similar subjects.

e. Pre-release vocational programs

The army is also engaged in vocational training activities of a different nature — programs designed to train ex-soldiers for a useful civilian life. The initiative in this field was taken by the Ministry of Defence which several years ago set up a vocational guidance department for ex-servicemen.

f. Assistance to the civilian education system

During the first few years after the establishment of the State of Israel, the education system expanded to twice its size and the shortage of qualified teaching staff was extremely acute. The army was called upon to fill the gap, among other things by training girl soldiers at its own teachers' college.

After their basic military training the graduates served as teachers in immigrant settlements for the rest of their compulsory service. The rate at which girls are called up to serve as teachers in development settlements depends on the requirements of these settlements. At periods when the number of college graduates was not enough to meet the demand, high school graduates were given a month's crash course after their basic training and so equipped were sent out to the settlements to teach. When conditions changed so that there was a surplus of teachers some of them were taken off their teaching posts to carry out other educational functions, especially
to work in the adult education projects, youth clubs or in the national literacy campaign.

g. The advancement of marginal juvenile groups

The army's approach for many years has been that it is also called upon to fulfill educational functions even if they are clearly extra-military. This attitude found its main expression in the enlistment of sub-standard elements. Several years ago the General Staff decided twice a year to call up groups of youngsters who belong to one or more of these sub-standard categories, in order to look after their personal advancement rather than for regular military duties. The idea was to give them basic training and then sent them for three months to the army school, whereupon they would be attached to Nahal groups in military-agricultural strongholds and kibbutzim where they would benefit from the influence of what is considered to be the élite of the army. This project was considered all the more essential as the majority of army rejects are members of the more backward social strata, composed of various Asian-African origin groups. The project thus has not only a general educational aspect but also serves one of the supreme collective goals of Israeli society — paring down the differences between the various ethnic groups.7)

h. The Gadna (Youth Corps)

The youth corps is another socializing agent of the army operated in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Culture. The scheme functions within two settings, one voluntary and one compulsory. Within the compulsory setting are the various post-elementary schools (high schools, agricultural and various vocational schools). The voluntary setting is designed for youngsters who are not continuing their formal studies, and comprises ordinary and pre-military youth clubs where they are given very rudimentary technical and mostly theoretical military training. Gadna trainees can also choose their own field of specialization: aviation8) in the youth air corps, seamanship in the marine youth corps, etc. It should be stressed that most of the activities bear a social rather than a military character, and are very much like youth movement meetings. The military aspect is largely overlaid by the social aspect. Hence also the stress laid on activities of a general national or educational character: afforestation drives, participation in archaeological digs and work in border settlements.

i. The Nahal — the agricultural-military corps

In this section of the armed forces, particular emphasis is placed on social education and vocational training, since the army regards the period of service of its Nahal soldiers not purely from the military angle but views it as a training period for new core groups that will ultimately found new settlements or join existing kibbutzim so as to supplement their numbers. Accordingly Nahal soldiers spend only part of their service in training and military jobs, while about half their time is devoted, if security conditions permit, to agricultural training in one of the older collective

8) Israel Ministry of Defence, Air Gadna, Tel-Aviv, 1963.
settlements. During this period the entire social group or core, including the girls, remains together. The educational-social element of Nahal service is given prominence right from the start, and already during the basic training period there are special group meetings and other social activities that do not exist in other army corps.

The youth and Nahal division of the Ministry of Defence estimates that the kibbutz movement by now has some 9,000 members who are ex-Nahal people. Most of them received their basic agricultural training in that corps. The contribution of the Nahal to the agricultural sector is seen to be still more striking if one bears in mind that since 1949 it has set up 45 military-agricultural strongholds of which 20 have in the meantime become permanent settlements. In addition the Nahal has directly set up 15 kibbutzim, reestablished some 10 and provided manpower reinforcement to about 50. Altogether about 100 kibbutzim have been put back on their feet through Nahal manpower infusions, many of them in border areas or in remote development districts. Several moshav-type villages were also set up by ex-Nahal members who received their training in this corps.

j. The publishing services of the Chief Education Officer

The educational work of the army finds its reflection in the wide variety of publications issued by the Chief Army Education Officer. In addition to the publications intended exclusively for army personnel, there also are others directed at the public at large and some of them designed exclusively for the civilian population.

The Chief Education Officer together with the Defence Ministry's publications service also issues many books intended mainly for a civilian audience, though dealing mainly with military or allied subjects. Another type of publication consists of a series of pamphlets on local geography, wildlife, flora, fauna and archaeology. The Chief Education Officer also publishes series of pictures to be exhibited in schools and similar settings, as well as posters, films and slides, the latter mainly for youth clubs.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The wide range of educational activities of which we cited only some of the most salient examples — and this too in the briefest of outlines — can be schematically summed up as follows: The Israeli Army as a military organization naturally invests most of its resources in the training of its men, so as to turn them into good and efficient soldiers, and in the improvement of the professional standards of its regular forces. One of the means to this end is a ramified network of army courses. A goodly part of the knowledge and skill acquired in these courses can be put to good use in civilian life. Nevertheless, this type of program comes under the first category of professional facilities provided by the military exclusively for soldiers to enhance their mastery of the art of war.
The preliminary training of the Gadna corps may be classified as belonging to category B which includes military training given by the army to civilian sectors of the population. Some of the samples cited of the army’s elementary, high school and education programs as well as its extensive information and entertainment services belong to the third category — general education projects and teaching programs in non-military disciplines. Most of the activities described, however, belong to the fourth category of purely educational programs which although partly provided within a military setting are primarily designed for the advancement of backward elements within the civilian sector, in aid and support of the civilian education network.

This simultaneous activity in the field of vocational training, education and culture is a specific characteristic of the Israeli Army which distinguishes it from many other military forces both in the developed democracies and in democratic and non-democratic developing societies. This, of course, is not due to sheer accident, but is a direct result of the magnitude and simultaneity of the problems with which the State of Israel has been confronted from its very inception: the intake of hundreds of thousands of immigrants, many of them from backward countries, and their adequate integration; the need for economic development and for the consolidation of the country’s defences against immediate physical threats; and the preservation of the political-cultural values evolved by the Jewish community in mandatory times — democratic fair play, political tolerance and the principles of a modern welfare state. The educational policy-makers of the army, aware of the unusual expansion of the army’s educational activities, have tried to formulate a set of principles and guidelines to provide the necessary legitimation for their programs. Their basic argumentation was that in a highly developed country that has considerable economic and human resources available to it, the civilian agencies are able to cope with any weak spots in its educational and cultural makeup. Not so in developing countries where the army has to assume many non-military tasks. Israel, although already from the beginning it constituted a modern society in most respects, still contained some underdeveloped enclaves, mainly as a result of the large influx of immigrants from Islamic countries. The economic and human resources at the disposal of the civilian authorities were extremely limited so that every extra assistance was welcome. Nevertheless the invasion of the army into the civilian sphere, however vital, was not always welcomed. Indirect evidence of this is furnished by an editorial which appeared in Bamachane, the main army paper, written in response to doubts that had arisen in connection with the army’s activities on behalf of the new immigrant camps. It was suspected that new immigrants, who are not used to democratic procedures come to look upon the army as an all-powerful means for solving all social problems. “The use of the army for executive, not strictly military tasks, is not somebody’s brainwave or the result of any abstract theory. It does not stem from a search for originality but from the hard facts of Israeli life, with all the conditions and circumstances that force us to maintain a pioneering army which is not restricted to routine military functions but also fills additional roles within the state and its undertakings. A country that consists of a hotchpotch of immigrants
from different countries needs an army that can weld these disparate sections together, although the integration of immigrants is not included in the functional definition of any other army in the world. That is why the army has also been charged with providing pioneering and agricultural educational facilities. That is why it virtually acts as a general school of the nation and the state for the masses of new immigrants who acquire their first knowledge of Hebrew as well as their first concepts of Israeli civics." 9) The same idea was restated by the previous Chief Education Officer in saying that there is full justification for the army to go beyond its routine functions insofar as the human factor is concerned. "Since the scatter of the population along the modernization curve is very wide, the army from the human aspect serves as primary developing and promoting agent especially for the more backward sectors of the population." 10) The award of the Israel prize — the most coveted distinction — to the Israeli Army for its educational work may be regarded as the symbolic acknowledgement of the justice of this claim by the country's body politic.

The great potential of the army as "a developing and promoting agency" derives, according to leaders of its educational programs, from several advantages inherent in the Israeli Army. The most important of these are:

1. Its equalitarian elements. The equalitarianism of the army, despite its hierarchic structure, is reflected in a minimum of social distance. "People used to social inferiority as a result of class affiliation soon discover that the army is different in this respect and derive deep satisfaction and new self-confidence from the sense of equality they get in its ranks." 11)

2. The considerable emphasis placed on social mobility. Education encourages the aspiration to mobility and higher achievements. "For young people even the slightest promotion might be a revolutionary factor in their lives in that it breaks up the classical vicious circle of the inability to make progress." 12)

3. The vocational training many soldiers receive in the army which is applicable or convertible to civilian uses. This serves as a sound foundation for social and economic status after their release.

4. For young new immigrants, army service implies acceptance into "the order of the Israelis". 13)

These potential advantages have been utilized by the army for the reinforcement of character traits, the enhancement of social education and the development of the national identity. The army's educational activity has however not been equally successful in all spheres. 14) It is still undergoing considerable modifications. There is much experimentation going on and nothing is static. Thus the fourth category

9) Bamachane, 18.1.1951.
10) Col. M. Bar-On, Processes of Assimilation of Ethnic Groups in the Israel Defence Forces. Published by the Chief Education Officer (n.d.), p. 3.
11) Ibid., p. 6.
12) Ibid.
13) Ibid., p. 16.
14) It is important to emphasize that this paper deals with the description and analysis of the educational activities within the army and not with evaluation of its impact on the civilian sector. The latter issue deserves a detailed study which is still to be made.
of programs and their relative standing compared with the remaining categories has been substantially modified as a result of the following three factors:

Firstly, the shrinkage of the underdeveloped enclaves, the educationally, culturally and socially backward elements having been reduced in size and their standards having been raised.

Secondly, the consolidation and growth of civilian educational agencies which are able to deal more effectively with these enclaves and make longrange educational plans.

Thirdly, the expansion of the army's security functions after the June 1967 war which led to a realignment of the Chief Education Officer's command. Thus in view of the deployment of the army's forces over more extensive territories and of budgetary limitations, entertainment and information services to civilians have been curtailed.

To obtain a proper perspective, it must be mentioned that the military has not expanded its role only in the sphere of education and culture. The army, or more precisely the Ministry of Defence, is also engaged in extensive economic and scientific activities, largely for the same reasons. On the other hand the dominance of the civilian political leadership in all central decision-making processes has been carefully preserved. This was possible first of all because Israel's political leadership has always enjoyed wide legitimation and been founded on basic consensus. Secondly, Israeli society has managed to institutionalize adequate agencies, settings and procedures to deal with the fundamental national issues. Hence the possibilities for manipulation and pressures by administrative and executive agencies which are not under direct parliamentary control are fairly small. Thirdly, retired senior army officers have extensive economic, social and political opportunities open to them in the civilian sector.

In addition to these general attributes of Israeli society some of the characteristics of the Israel Army as a social system also work in this direction. Here mention must be made of the constant periodic rotation of the high command. Secondly, in spite of the constant state of war and siege, there is no disproportionate glorification of the army as an institution and of its commanders as individuals. The fact that the security burden is spread over most of the adult population through the reserve system helps to strike a proper balance in this field. Thirdly, the popular character of the army makes for the optimal dispersion of social allegiances within the officer class which represents a highly varied range of social sub-groups and more or less reflects the pluralistic character of Israeli society.

This social constellation is an essential, if not always a sufficient, condition for preventing the growth of military cliques which claim a monopoly over political power either out of personal interests or out of a desire for political and ideological reform and revision of the civilian leadership policies. The constellation described together with other factors that have not been mentioned, has generally characterized the State of Israel since its establishment.