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Israel's 1948 War of Independence as a Total War

The 1948 Israeli-Arab War is described in most research as a military conflict that began between two national entities in Palestine, and developed into a regular war between armies. This general description of the war presents a periodization with two main stages of fighting.¹ The first stage is described as an inter-communal confrontation, or as a civil war that took place between the Jewish community (Yishuv) and Palestinian society that began at the end of November 1947 and lasted until the close of the British Mandate and the establishment of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948. The second stage of the war relates to the period beginning with the invasion of regular Arab armies on 15 May 1948 and the military confrontation that continued, with various cease-fires, until the signing of the last armistice agreement in July 1949. This description of the primary stages of the war is based first and foremost on a military and political viewpoint of the war. In this article, I have chosen to focus on mobilization of the Jewish populace on behalf of the war effort and the social and civil aspects of the war. This discussion is also based on the conventional paradigm of two primary stages of fighting. At the same time, examination of the mobilization of society for the war effort enables one to present a more extended process that began in October 1947 — some two months prior to the outbreak of the war — and ended, from the standpoint of mobilization of personnel, at the beginning of 1949, when demobilization of the first draftees from the wartime army took place, and from an economic standpoint in April 1949, when an Austerity system was declared in the State of Israel.

The article's underlying thesis is that in light of the characteristics, the course and the results of the war, one can describe the 1948 War as a total war. Despite the lack of clarity in scholarly research as to an accepted definition of the construct 'total war',² from a conceptual standpoint, one can classify the

1 See, for example, Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds), *The War of Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge 2001); Yoav Gelber, *Palestine 1948: War, Escape and the Emergence of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Brighton and Portland 2001); David Tal, *War in Palestine: Strategy and Diplomacy* (London and New York 2004); Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947–1951*, (London 1992).

2 See Ian F. W. Beckett, 'Total War', in: Colin McInnes and G.D. Sheffield (eds), *Warfare in Twentieth Century: Theory and Practice* (London 1988), 1–24; Roger Chickering, 'Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept', in Manfred F. Boemeke, Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds), *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences 1871–1914* (Cambridge 1999), 13–28.

1948 War as part of the 'era of total wars', as the first half of the twentieth century has often been labeled.³ The framework of an article does not enable one to conduct an exhaustive discussion of all the possible spheres of the 1948 War as a total struggle; the objective is to present a general framework that can show the totality of the war as a definitive feature when focusing on the Jewish community in Palestine and the State of Israel. Thus, the following issues are addressed: perception of the war as total in light of definition of its objectives by the leaders of the Yishuv; the character of social mobilization and its hub — mobilization of personnel for military service and performance of essential labor services; the economic mobilization that included accommodating the economy to the needs of the war effort and ensuring supply of essential services, as well as financing of the war; and the manner in which civilians on the home front were subject to military attacks that blurred the distinction between soldier and citizen. The article closes with a summary of the outcome of the war.

In his 1999 discussion of the concept 'total war', Roger Chickering noted the impact of the development of historiography as a field of inquiry that addresses the relationship between war and society.⁴ Beyond his clarification of the term, and besides his presentation of total war as a narrative or developmental model that links the French Revolution wars with the second world war, Chickering also discusses the use and abuse of the concept of total war by politicians. In 1948 the political leaders who served this function were David Ben-Gurion — the head of the Jewish Agency executive, and after May 1948 the first prime minister and minister of defense of the State of Israel — and Eliezer Kaplan — the treasurer of the Jewish Agency and the first finance minister of the State of Israel — who repeatedly used the concept of 'total war' and the perception of the home front as a war front.

Ben-Gurion and Kaplan expressed in the course of the war the importance that they, as the political leadership, ascribed to the mobilization of society and the support of society in the war effort. Ben-Gurion and Kaplan strove to stress as part of their mobilization rhetoric that the home front and the economy were an additional front in the war, and that the home front was no less important than the military front.⁵ Thus, on 13 November 1948, Ben-Gurion explained that:

this year we stood confronted by a total war. Everything was harnessed and mobilized on behalf of the requisites of the war — manpower, arms, capital, knowledge; because everything stood in jeopardy.⁶

3 See, for example, Raymond Aron, *The Century of Total War* (Boston 1955).

4 Chickering, *op. cit.*

5 For more on the linkage between mobilization of human resources and Ben-Gurion's mobilizing rhetoric, see Moshe Naor, 'The Home Front and Mobilization in the 1948 War', *Israel* 4 (November 2003), 37–59 [Hebrew].

6 From Ben-Gurion's words on 13 November 1948, *As Israel Fought* (Tel Aviv 1950), 304–16 [Hebrew].

The use of terms such as 'total war', 'a war of the Nation', and 'the home front', and the use of slogans common in the course of the war, such as 'The Entire Country is a Front' and 'All the Nation are an Army', were all components in managing the mobilization process. Moreover, Ben-Gurion and Kaplan habitually compared the steadfastness of the civilian population and its mobilization in the war effort with that demonstrated by London's citizenry during the German blitz, and the experience of the Russians in the second world war.

In the eyes of the Yishuv's leadership, the war was perceived from the outset as an existential struggle that would determine not only the physical fate of the Jewish community in Palestine and its aspirations for national independence, but also as a decisive factor that was liable to impact on the future of the Jewish people as a whole.⁷ From the beginning, the war was the subject of political and ideological interpretation by the leadership of the Yishuv, who defined the war's objectives as a national and existential struggle. The war objectives derived not only from efforts to ensure realization of the Partition Plan adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in November 1947 by establishing a Jewish state. This meant not only in the struggle to lay the foundations of the State of Israel's sovereignty after its establishment in May 1948; it was also derived from perceptions rooted among other things in the Jewish collective memory and historical consciousness — that failure in the military contest threatened the physical existence of the Jewish community. This interpretation was designed, among other things, to harness the Yishuv to the war effort, but at the same time assisted in defining the war and its perception as total war. Against the backdrop of presentation of ongoing dangers and existential threat facing the Yishuv, and because of the importance of gaining the support of society behind the war effort, a mobilization process was carried out within the framework of Emergency Regulations, and increasing utilization of state authority and centralized power, parallel to demands for national unity and social solidarity.

Mobilization of personnel and mobilization of the Yishuv's economy began on 2 October 1947. In the course of the Yishuv's preparations for the impending closure of the British Mandate, and in light of the danger that war would break out in Palestine, the National Institutions of the Yishuv declared the introduction of a [National] Defense Regimen. In his delivery before the Yishuv's Delegates' Assembly held on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion stressed the importance of mobilizing all components of the Jewish community in the face of the national effort that would be required.⁸ In his speech, Ben-Gurion expressed his perception that a relentless effort must be conducted among the Jewish public at large to make the citizenry cognizant of the existential danger

7 See, for example, the words of Ben-Gurion at the 25 November 1947 meeting of the National Committee, Central Zionist Archive (henceforth CZA), J 1/7241.

8 The words of Ben-Gurion at the fifth meeting of the Delegates' Assembly, 2 October 1947, CZA J 1/7223.

the Yishuv faced, and the necessity of mobilizing all material and spiritual resources for this cause. Similar to the model presented by the historian John Horne regarding mobilization patterns of various nations in Europe during the first world war,⁹ in the 1948 Israeli case one can likewise distinguish a transitional and transformational process in the course of the war. Against the backdrop of the close of the Mandate and establishment of the State of Israel, one witnesses a transition from mobilization based on personal willingness and volunteerism to centralized mobilization by the state, resting on legal components (in parallel with continued recognition of volunteerism as an important value). This change was prominent both in the mobilization of personnel for military service and for the labor service, and mobilization of the economy.

The character of mobilization of the society in the 1948 War was determined by the existing social and political structure of the Yishuv. Until 14 May 1948, the mobilization process was conducted within a voluntary society operating under British Mandatory rule. During this stage, it was expressed in the ability of the Jewish community to organize itself and the authority of its social and voluntary organizations, whose involvement, in essence, enabled the Yishuv to put the mobilization process in motion. These were economic, social and political organizations, such as the General Federation of Labor and the Manufacturers' Association. With intensification of the war, and the need to increase the scope of mobilization, the demand grew for more centralization in the mobilization process and for strengthening the ability to enforce directives using the law and the authority of the state. Against the backdrop of the escalation of warfare into a battle between regular armies, Israel's [Provisional] National Council declared a State of Emergency on 19 May 1948.¹⁰ This declaration made it possible to use Emergency Regulations legislated by the British Mandate in response to the 1936–39 Arab Revolt and still in force, and to increase the central authority of government ministries and institutions. From this point forward, state intervention in the mobilization process intensified.

Mobilization of personnel for military service and essential labor began to operate on 9 December 1947. From this point forward until the beginning of demobilization from the wartime army, in January 1949, there was a gradual increase in the tempo of mobilization, and the number of service personnel. Until May 1948, mobilization of personnel rested primarily on a combination of the ability of society to mobilize individuals into various organizational frameworks, and the willingness of individuals to volunteer. Thus, sanctions were used against slackers who sought to dodge duty, including publication of their names, expulsion from social organizations, and calls to dismiss them from their jobs.¹¹ But it was an enforcement and penalization framework that

⁹ John Horne (ed.), *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge 1997), 1–17.

¹⁰ Protocol of the Provisional State Council, 19 May 1948, Protocol of Discussion — the Provisional State Council, Volume A, Tel Aviv 1948–1950.

¹¹ Pinchas Govrin, *Call-up Order 1948: Mobilization of the Yishuv for Battle* (Tel Aviv 1976) [Hebrew].

lacked any option for legal action. Beginning with the establishment of the State of Israel and the establishment of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the use of oversight and enforcement measures by state institutions — first and foremost the army — increased. Among the measures were public campaigns to locate draft-dodgers in the large cities.¹² Beyond their practical value, these campaigns to nab draft-dodgers served as a vehicle for transmitting an important value-loaded social and national message regarding mobilization of society and support of the home front for the war effort. As part of the orientation towards forging a sense of solidarity in time of war and nurturing a sense of equal sharing of the burden of the war effort, citizens were called upon to volunteer for municipal emergency services, such as the Civil Guard in Tel Aviv, which at its peak mobilized 5600 citizen volunteers.¹³

From the beginning, mobilization of personnel was conducted by the 'Muster Center for Service to the Nation' — an organizational body established in October 1947 by the Jewish Agency and the National Committee of the Yishuv. After establishment of the State of Israel this institution's authority was transferred to the Ministry of Defense's Induction Center.¹⁴ Against the background of organizational changes wrought by the establishment of the State of Israel, the course of the war, and its intensification, the tempo of the military draft grew exponentially. In mid-April 1948 21,000 persons were mobilized; by the end of the year the number of inductees had reached 100,000. All told, from the outset of the war until June 1949, 116,184 served in the IDF.¹⁵ To grasp the sheer scope of the Israeli mobilization, it should be noted that the census of November 1948 put the overall population at 782,000 citizens, 713,000 of them Jewish.¹⁶ At the same time, according to the IDF Manpower Division, the strength of the IDF forces was 94,000 soldiers.¹⁷ By contrast, the total troop strength of all the Arab armies involved that month on the fighting front stood at 68,000 soldiers.¹⁸ The growth in the number of mobilized personnel in the IDF was bolstered by induction of new immigrants, who arrived in the State of Israel in the midst of the fighting, and who by the end of the war constituted 20 percent of the IDF's force strength in personnel.

12 The most prominent was the campaign carried out in August 1948 in Tel Aviv. From the Headquarters of the Kiryati District, Campaign Orders, 18 August 1948, IDF Archive (henceforth IDFA), 6450/49/218.

13 Avram Aचितov, Commander of the Civil Guard, to the Tel Aviv Mayor, Summary August 1948 Monthly Report, 6 October 1948, Tel Aviv Municipality Archive 4/418.

14 Zahava Ostfeld, *An Army is Born: Primary Stages in the Building of the Army and the Ministry of Defense under the Leadership of David Ben-Gurion* (Tel-Aviv 1994), 579–80 [Hebrew].

15 Moshe Tzadok, IDF Manpower Division, to the Minister of Defense, Distribution of the Draft and Report for Duty in the Year 1948, July 1949, IDFA 852/51/570.

16 Protocol of the Meeting of the Provisional Government, 17 November 1948, State Archive.

17 Moshe Tzadok, Manpower Division, to the Minister of Defense, Distribution of the Draft and Report for Duty in the Year 1948, IDFA 852/51/570.

18 Amitzur Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race: Arms, Embargo, Military Power and Decision in the 1948 Palestine War* (New York 1996), 67.

In addition, some 4500 volunteers from abroad (*MACHAL*) joined the war effort — most of them from the United States, Canada, Europe and South Africa.¹⁹

Besides military service, induction of personnel included mobilization for essential work. Of those receiving call-up orders to serve during the war, 60 percent were drafted into military service. The rest were called up and exempted from service on personal grounds, or medical discharges, or economic considerations. What stands out in particular is that in the course of the war, some 14 percent of those called up received exemptions on economic grounds.²⁰ This figure reflects the importance assigned not only to the need for an all-out mobilization but also to gaining the support of the home front behind the war effort, as well as maintaining a balance between the need to keep civic society functioning and the need to manage the war effort. Those of draft age released on economic grounds were employed in industries and other branches of the economy considered essential occupations. This included jobs that directly contributed to the war effort, and work that was essential to keep civic society running — including agricultural workers, industrial laborers, transport workers and some clerical staff. At the same time there was a clear differentiation in exemption between workers in the agricultural and settlement sector and those in the industrial and urban sector. While exemptions on economic grounds for the agricultural–settlement sector were based on quotas, exemptions from the draft in the industrial, clerical and commercial sectors were determined by special appeals committees.²¹ This system, where the involvement of civilian social organizations and economic entities was considerable — the most prominent being the General Federation of Labor and the Manufacturers' Association — underscores just how important support by civil organizations for the war effort generally was; for organization of personnel mobilization in particular.

Mobilization of personnel was carried out within a larger civic 'superstructure' context, because success at the battlefield hinged to a large extent on the steadfastness of the home front, and the proper functioning of social and civil institutions. Minister of Labor Mordechai Bentov, from MAPAM (United Workers Party), who was responsible for handling mobilization of personnel needed by the economy, explained this in September 1948, in the midst of the Second Truce:

It is no secret, that success in war hinges not only on success at the front, but also success at the home front; and mobilization under modern wartime conditions must approach total mobilization . . . and the job, in practice, is to maintain a balance between strength allotted

¹⁹ Regarding mobilization of foreign volunteers, see Yaakov Marcovitzky, *A Fighting Ember: Mobilization Abroad in the War of Independence* (Tel Aviv 1995) [Hebrew].

²⁰ From a study conducted by the IDF History Division on mobilization of personnel in the War of Independence, conducted by Moshe Sikron, IDFA 1046/70/159.

²¹ Protocol of the Plenum of the Muster Center for Service to the Nation, 29 March 1948, IDFA 679/56/21.

to fighting and strength allotted to economic efforts on behalf of the war and on behalf of [the] orderly existence of society during the war.²²

In the framework of attempts to maintain a balance between the needs of the war effort and keeping the Israeli economy running, not only were certain draftees given exemptions on economic grounds; at the same time, British-vintage Emergency Regulations were employed to mobilize the labor of thousands of citizens. This encompassed men aged 16 to 55 and women aged 17 to 50 who had not been drafted into the IDF; they were sent instead to carry out essential tasks in the agricultural sector, and the fortification of large cities and frontier settlements.²³

In the course of the Government of Israel's efforts to optimize the mobilization system and to enhance control over human resources, an attempt, which sparked harsh public controversy, was made to militarize essential manpower by establishing a Military Labor Battalion (CHA'ATZ).²⁴ In addition, the feasibility of changing the occupational structure of the economy by women replacing men in essential occupations was considered.²⁵ The employment of women in essential occupations and their integration into occupations primarily performed by men required suitable planning of the economy and increased intervention by the state. Moreover, broad-scale occupational retraining in the midst of the war would require appropriate instruction and the adoption of a welfare policy that would assist women to join the workforce. The objective of the Ministry of Labor was to integrate hundreds of women into essential occupations, such as metalwork, drivers, postal delivery and telegraphic services. The Ministry's directives instructed labor exchanges to give preference to mobilizing women without children, particularly the wives of new immigrants who had been drafted. Many plants sought to avert training new personnel, under the assumption that the war would be short.²⁶

Mobilization of personnel reached its peak in December 1948. This point signaled a reversal of trends, towards dismantling the wartime army and discharging the first wartime draftees. The change in orientation in mobilization of personnel was sparked primarily by the economic burden that prolonged warfare brought. There was concern that, as the war dragged on, the economy and society were liable to collapse. The direct and indirect impact of the war on society and the growth in the cost of the war were the subject of cabinet meetings at the close of 1948. The financial burden is reflected in the spiraling of the defense budget. In October 1947 it stood at 180,000 Eretz-Israel Pounds

22 Meeting of the Preliminary State Council, 9 September 1948.

23 *Government Yearbook 1950* (Tel Aviv), 150–2; Emergency Regulation for Mobilization of Manpower, 15 June 1948, Office State Gazette, Number 5, Appendix 2.

24 Yitzhak Greenberg, 'A Military Work Battalion: The attempt to Militarize a Labor Force in the War of Independence', *Iyunim ba-T'kumat Yisrael* 8 (1998), 375–97 [Hebrew].

25 *Ibid.*

26 The Israeli Minister of Labor and Construction, Mordechai Bentov, in a meeting of the State Council on 16 September 1948.

per month; by December 1948 it had grown to 5.5 million Eretz-Israel Pounds per month.²⁷ Exact figures for the growth in the Israeli defense budget during the war are not available; one of the reasons is that the war came during the same year the State of Israel was established, and no annual state budget had been prepared. The sum arrived at and accepted by scholars of the period is derived from local expenditures on the war (expenditures that were divided between local outlay and outlay for materials from abroad), which were between 67 and 73 million Eretz-Israel Pounds, at a time when the exchange rate stood at 0.333 Eretz-Israel Pounds to the US dollar.²⁸ It is estimated that the total cost of local defense needs was 33 percent of the GNP.²⁹

Ben-Gurion's position, which he expressed in the course of the Second Truce, was that economic exigencies required Israel quickly to take actions that could decide the war.³⁰ In mid-October 1948 the Israeli army launched a series of military campaigns that were designed to settle the war. The first and principal campaign was the 'Yoav' Campaign, in which the IDF gathered a force on the southern front against the Egyptian Army in the northern Negev. On the northern front, at the close of the same month, the 'Hiram' Campaign was launched against the Arab Liberation Army (ALA), bringing Upper Galilee under Israeli control. Between 22 December and 7 January 1949, the IDF directed most of its forces to the southern front; in the course of the 'Horev' Campaign, Egyptian forces were repelled from the Western Negev. The last military campaign of the war was the 'Uvdah' Campaign, between 5 and 10 March 1949, in which Israeli forces completed their takeover of the southern Negev. In the course of these decisive campaigns, the IDF began gradually to demobilize soldiers and dismantle the wartime army.

Mobilization of the economy, like the mobilization of human resources, also began on 2 October 1947, with the declaration of the Defense Regime, and continued until the Government of Israel presented its program for an austerity system on 26 April 1949. In practice, the rationing system as an emergency economic measure emanated from the way the Israeli economic system was organized during the war. There was a strong linkage between the way the economic system was handled during the war and the continuation of this condition even after the close of the military campaign. The components of economic mobilization prior to and during the war included accommodating the economy to the needs of the war effort and providing essential services, and public participation in financing the war.

27 Protocols of a Meeting of the Government of Israel, 20 September 1948, State Archive.

28 Yitzhak Greenberg, 'Financing the War of Independence', *Studies in Zionism* 9 (1988), 63–80; Haim Barkai, 'The Real Cost of the War of Independence', in Alon Kadish (ed.), *The War of Independence 1948–1949: A Renewed Discussion* (Ministry of Defense Publishers 2004), 759–91 [Hebrew].

29 Barkai, *ibid.*, 778–9.

30 See Yitzhak Greenberg, 'The Impact of Economic Straits on the Deciding Campaigns of the War of Independence: A Second Look', in Alon Kadish (ed.), *The War of Independence 1948–1949: A Renewed Discussion* (Tel Aviv 2004), 793–800 [Hebrew].

From the start, the economic sphere was viewed, by both the State of Israel and the Yishuv's leadership under Eliezer Kaplan, as a crucial factor that might be decisive in the outcome on the military front — due to the character of the conflict as a total war.³¹ Kaplan, who co-ordinated and handled the host of issues tied to economic mobilization, repeatedly warned over most of the course of the war that 'the economic and fiscal front is no less sensitive than the military front, and there as well it is possible to break us without sending soldiers to Eretz-Israel.'³² On the other hand, Mordechai Settner, chairperson of the Economic Department of the National Committee executive, explained in a speech on the state of the Yishuv's economy under emergency conditions, broadcast on the radio on 10 January 1948, that:

The Yishuv is entering a struggle of its existence and future. This is a clear, as well as a cruel reality for the present. In this struggle there is an important economic front, and only to the extent that we shall be successful in holding the line [economically], will we be able to hold firm in the overall struggle.³³

This perspective was at the center of David Ben-Gurion's and Eliezer Kaplan's strivings to bring about the establishment of an 'economic command for duration of the emergency'.

Treatment of organization in the economic sphere — both in anticipation of the end of British administration and establishment of state institutions, and as part of the war struggle — was placed in the hands of the Emergency [Situation] Committee, a body that was, in essence, a 'coordinating committee' that the National Institutions of the Yishuv had appointed in October 1947.³⁴ Despite the co-ordination function of this committee, Ben-Gurion and Kaplan believed that success in economic mobilization hinged on broad co-operation of all the economic parties and organizations in the economy. Their object was to create a system of arrangements and collaboration among the Yishuv's National Institutions, and the General Federation of Labor (which politically was identified with the Labor Movement), and middle-class economic organizations in the private sector (which were politically identified with non-Socialist rival 'civilian political factions', as they were labeled at the time).³⁵

31 See, for instance, Kaplan in Protocol of the MAPAI Executive Meeting, 11 May 1948, Labor Party Archive 2-022-1948-70.

32 Protocol of the MAPAI Executive, 11 May 1948, Labor Party Archive 2-023-1948-49.

33 Mordechai Settner, 'The Yishuv's Economy in Emergency Times', 10 January 1948, State Archive: Division 41, Container 117 Gimel, Portfolio 24.

34 Report on the Operations of the Emergency Committee, 22 February 1948, State Archive: Division 41, Container 110 Gimel, Portfolio 14. For more on the Emergency Committee, see: Yonatan Fien, 'The Organization of the Jewish Home Front towards the War of Independence', in *The War of Independence 1948-1949*, 679-710; Paul Alsberg, 'The "Emergency Committee (Vaadat ha-Matzav)"'. October 1942-May 1948: Preparing for Statehood', *Studies in Zionism* 10 (1989), 49-64.

35 Eliezer Kaplan at the MAPAI executive meeting of 20 January 1948 at the MAPAI secretariat on February 19, 1948, Labor Party Archive.

Despite the national consensus underlying conduct of the war effort, economic and political conflicts of interest between Left and Right and within the Socialist camp, and the inability to enforce economic regulations while the country was still under Mandate rule, prevented the establishment of an 'economic command'. This failure underscores the limitations of mobilization within a voluntary society. Only with the close of British Mandate rule and the establishment of the State of Israel did it become possible to base economic mobilization not only on the willingness of economic and social organization to co-operate with local authority and the Yishuv's National Institutions, but also on the use of Emergency Regulations, application of the centralized powers of a sovereign government, and measures the regime could take to control the economy. Despite the centralized power of the state, co-operative agreements vis-à-vis the Israeli economy continued: for example, the policy of the General Federation of Labor regarding use of the right to strike in wartime.

The demand that an 'economic command' be established stemmed from the need to organize the economy and accommodate it to the war effort. In terms of immediate goals in the first stage of the war, and in light of the impending close of the British Mandate administration, ensuring supply of essential services was of paramount concern. Particular stress was put on the issue of food supply.³⁶ In the course of the war, the Israeli leadership succeeded, on the whole, in preventing food shortages; food supply remained orderly throughout most of the war, except for difficulties in supplying kosher meat. At the same time, the reduction in food production and imports, parallel with the increase in food consumption during the war because of the needs of the army — as well as the tremendous demographic growth in the Jewish population by the influx of mass immigration — were among the factors behind a 35.5 percent rise in consumer prices between the outset of 1948 and April 1949.³⁷ In response, the Yishuv's National Institutions and the State of Israel initiated the establishment of a rationing system for essential food products and imposed price controls. This mechanism was first established by the National Committee in Tel Aviv, which was the first area evacuated by British forces, on 15 December 1947.³⁸ Towards the close of the Mandate in mid-May 1948, the control of the Yishuv's National Institutions over rationing and price control on a national level was strengthened, parallel to other economic measures. At the same time, even at this stage, the government was assisted by civil social organizations such as women's organizations, and economic entities, in order to put the rationing system on an operational plane, and to monitor the overall struggle against black-marketeering in particular.³⁹

36 The data is based on the comments of Eliezer Kaplan, treasurer of the Jewish Agency, at the meeting of the Zionist executive (Vaad Hapoel) on 6 April 1948, CZA S 25/1808.

37 *Israel Statistics Monthly*, vol. 1, 1949 (Tel Aviv 1949).

38 Summary of the Meeting of the National Committee of Management, 19 February 1948, CZA J 1/7269.

39 See: Moshe Naor, 'Supply Regulation and Control: The Austerity Policy', in Mordechai Bar-On and Meir Chazan (eds), *Citizens at War: Studies on the Civilian Society during the Israeli War of Independence* (Jerusalem 2006), 189–213 [Hebrew].

As in the struggle against individuals trying to evade mobilization for the war effort, in reining in black-marketeering the Yishuv's leadership employed two primary messages: ethical and national. Profiteers were presented as persons who sabotaged the public's sense of social solidarity and undermined morals and public order. From a national standpoint, they were accused of eroding the economic front and undermining the national war effort. In the framework of the struggle against profiteering, the public at large and the consumer public — and particularly women's organizations such as WIZO, Working Women, Hadassah Women and HaMizrachi Women — were urged to report any cases of overcharging or stock-hoarding, as a national and civic duty. Women were often presented as the ones who paid the price of increases in the tempo of call-ups, the rise in the CoL, and food shortages. But despite public appeals by the leadership of the Yishuv, and publicity campaigns including a local 'rally' devoted to the war on profiteering that took place in Tel Aviv on 18 February 1948, in which the war on profiteers was presented as no less important than the Yishuv's military struggle,⁴⁰ public response was not sweeping. This is reflected in the closure of stations in Tel Aviv where citizens could report offences, and the small number of individuals brought into court on the basis of citizen complaints. In October 1948, the State Council approved the Prevention of Price Inflation and Profiteering Ordinance.⁴¹ The new law required establishment of municipal courts to prevent price-jacking and black-marketeering. All told, between October 1948 and January 1949, 278 suits were filed, but only 165 were brought before the courts.⁴² Most of the indictments involved selling of goods without a permit, slaughtering of meat without a permit, price-jacking and hoarding of stock.⁴³

In late 1948, the Israeli economy was an economy operating under wartime conditions: almost full employment, limited imports, increased cost of living and rapid growth of state intervention in the economy.⁴⁴ Besides demands that the IDF's expenditures be curtailed, the Ministry of Finance called for increasing production and decreasing consumption by stabilizing prices in the first stage, and reducing prices in the second. In its efforts to check the rising cost of living, the Government established at the beginning of November 1948 a Center for Economic Co-ordination to formulate a rationing program that focused on extending price controls policy and quotas on key food products.⁴⁵ The rationing concept was based on British experience in the second world war and was interlaced with promoting economic and social regulation, based on an adoption of the European ideal of the welfare state. This strategy also expressed the socialist ideological philosophy of the Labor Movement, whose

40 See, for example, 'Profiteering Sabotages Our War Effort', *Davar*, 19 February 1948.

41 Protocol of the Preliminary State Council, 5 August 1948; Prevention of Price Inflation and Profiteering Ordinance, Official Gazette, Number 14, 11 August 1948.

42 *Israel Statistical Monthly*, 1949, op. cit., 100.

43 The Minister of Justice in a meeting of the State Council, 20 January 1949.

44 See Protocol of the Meeting of the Government of Israel, 30 September 1948, State Archive.

45 Protocol of a Meeting of the Preliminary State Council, 9 December 1948.

leaders were in charge of the Israeli war effort. At the same time, according to the Minister of Finance, the primary impetus behind adoption of a rationing system was economic necessity.⁴⁶ The declaration of an austerity system (*Tzena*) was the product of the difficult economic straits that the war had brought about, and the need to prepare to absorb mass immigration, which had already begun during the war and grew in the aftermath. Harnessing the economy underscored the tie between economics and society, between the military front and the home front, as well as the totality of the war.

One facet that particularly illuminates this linkage, and that impacted profoundly on the state of the Israeli economy, was the financing of the war effort. Public participation in the mobilization of capital to finance the war also reflects the way society was mobilized on behalf of the Israeli war effort. Approximately two-thirds of the direct local costs of the war were financed by the Jewish community in Palestine on its own.⁴⁷ Mobilization of local financial assets included the use of taxes, issue of promissory notes by the Ministry of Finance, and collection of money from the public through popular donor appeals and national war loans.⁴⁸

The first appeal was the 'For the Sake of the Nation's Security' (*LeBitachon HaAm*) Campaign, declared on 25 November 1947.⁴⁹ The appeal — which succeeded in mobilizing 600,000 Eretz-Israel Pounds from the public and according to schedule — marked the beginning of public participation in efforts to finance the war effort.⁵⁰ The second appeal, 'Tax for Our Defense' (*Mas LeHaganateinu*), was designed to mobilize a sum of 2 million Eretz-Israel Pounds from the public by June 1948; however, in practice it continued until September of that year.⁵¹ Prominent in both appeals was their foundation on assistance from the private sector. Besides popular programs that appealed to the public at large, economic entities in the Yishuv established 'performance committees' that set quotas for persons of means. Thus, the role of the organizational structure of the Yishuv was again expressed, demonstrating the importance of the voluntary element and of assistance given by social organizations in mobilization on behalf of the war effort. At the same time, this method exposes the weaknesses of mobilizing necessary capital to conduct the war solely on the basis of voluntary participation by the public.

In May 1948, financing the war entered a new stage with the inauguration of the National Loan. The May 1948 drive was designed to raise a sum of 5

46 See the explanation of the Israeli Minister of Finance in a meeting of the MAPAI Council, 12 January 1949, CZA 2-022-2949-75.

47 See note 29 above.

48 For more on public participation in the mobilization of funding, see: Moshe Naor, 'From Voluntary Funds to National Loans: The Financing of Israel's 1948 War Effort', *Israel Studies* 11 (Fall 2006), 62-82.

49 Plenum Meeting of the National Committee, 25 November 1947, CZA J 1/7241.

50 Protocol of a Meeting of the National Committee Management, 15 December 1947, CZA J 1/7268.

51 Protocol of the Meeting of the National Implementation Committee of the Special 'Tax for Our Defense', 5 September 1948, CZA J 8/321.

million Eretz-Israel Pounds from the public by voluntary subscription. Although it progressed more slowly than expected, mobilization was successfully completed in July 1948.⁵² The government chose to keep the second bonds drive too (announced in December 1948 and designed to collect 13.5 million Eretz-Israel Pounds in war bonds) on a voluntary rather than a compulsory footing.⁵³ This again reflected a conscious decision to strive to cement a collaborative working relationship between the ruling MAPAI (Workers' Party of the Land of Israel) and the private sector within the economy, and to interlace government authority and voluntary organization as one of the features of economic mobilization. The MAPAM Party objected to this arrangement.

MAPAM, which had been established at the outset of 1948, demanded that the central power of the state be exercised instead, using mechanisms such as property tax to finance the war.⁵⁴ MAPAM's criticism of MAPAI and its demands that the central authority of the state be exercised more vigorously were also evidenced during the war in relation to the treatment of the families of soldiers. During most of the war, payments to families of personnel in uniform were in the hands of the Yishuv's Committee for the Mobilized [Soldier] and his Family. Only in October 1948 was responsibility transferred from this voluntary civilian body to the government. MAPAM deemed that the government should take care of the families of uniformed personnel, and in this way carry and fulfill the demand for equal sharing of the war effort in the name of equalizing the sacrifice.

MAPAM's critical stance was applied also to the way Ben-Gurion conducted the war effort, which MAPAM took to task in the latter half of 1948, following the dismissal of Israel Galili, head of the Haganah's National Headquarters, in the course of dismantling all pre-state political military frameworks, including the Haganah's fighting arm — the Palmach — and establishing a national army. The public and political clash that ensued between the two labor parties focused on the shape of the nation's armed forces — whether the IDF should be a 'popular', ideologically driven army or a professional one — including differences as to politicization in the military. The clash also exposed tensions between military echelons and civilian echelons; this included the resignations of divisional heads of the general staff and appointment of a ministerial committee that dealt, among other things, with Ben-Gurion's conduct as Minister of Defense and his intervention in military decisions.

In addition to the political rivalry between MAPAI and MAPAM that surfaced during the war, there was also a clash with the political Right. Thus, for instance, a violent clash took place in February 1948 between members of the Haganah and members of the ETZEL (National Military Organization), against the backdrop of the establishment of the Iron Fund (*Keren HaBarzel*)

52 Kaplan, 'We've Completed the National Loan, We'll prepare for the State Loan', *Davar*, 1 August 1948.

53 *Government Yearbook*, 1949, 35–40.

54 See, for instance, Berl Repetur in the meeting of the Preliminary State Council, 3 June 1948.

— a drive inaugurated by the ETZEL and designed to mobilize donations from the public to finance its own operations.⁵⁵ The supremacy of the sovereign state under a provisional Labor government and its authority and control over the pre-state rival Revisionist militias were challenged by the arrival of the *Altalena* arms ship, sent by the Revisionist faction, on the shores of the State of Israel on 19 June 1948. A comprehensive discussion of these events is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say, in the context of the present subject, that conduct of the war in general and organization of mobilization in particular were accompanied by political controversy on a host of fronts.

Beyond the definition of the war's goals and the scope and character of social and economic mobilization, the actual military damage inflicted on the Israeli home front reflected the total character of the 1948 war. The huge body of literature of remembrance and commemoration that Israeli society has dedicated to the 1948 War reflects the sheer scope of the losses. The war claimed the lives of 5682 men and women, constituting 1 percent of the Jewish population of Palestine. The number of civilians killed in the course of the war bears witness to the magnitude of the damage inflicted on the civilian population: 1162 of the fatalities were civilians, including 362 women.⁵⁶ Most of the citizens were killed in the first stages of the fighting. The injury to citizens was primarily the product of the fighting which took place in cities with mixed Jewish-Arab populations, such as Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem. Beyond fighting in the cities, there were civilian casualties on the roads, and in fighting for control of frontier settlements.

While until May 1948 most citizen casualties in the cities were from sniper fire and mortar fire, from 15 May 1948 citizens were also killed in air raids. Most air raids were directed towards Tel Aviv. From the beginning of all-out war on 15 May 1948 until the first Truce came into effect on 11 June, the Egyptian air force attacked Tel Aviv and Jewish targets in its vicinity almost daily. In most cases, the city was targeted by several sorties a day.⁵⁷ The second wave of air attacks in the course of the war was during the Ten Days Battle (*Aseret HaYamim*) that broke out on 9 July 1948, at the close of the First Truce. In Tel Aviv, 172 people — most of them civilians — were killed as a result of the air raids, and 321 were injured.⁵⁸ Not only that, but in the course of the bombing some 245 buildings were damaged, giving some indication of the damage to property wrought by the war. The scope of property damage is also reflected in data from the War Casualties Office, which dealt with 11,450 civilian claims to repair damage — without counting the agricultural sector.⁵⁹

55 'ETZEL Drive — Sabotage of the Yishuv's War Effort', *Davar*, 1 March 1948.

56 On commemorative literature, as well as data on war casualties, see Emanuel Sivan, *The 1948 Generation: Myth, Profile and Memory* (Tel Aviv 1991).

57 War Log, Operations Division/Operations, Survey of Air Raids from 15 May to 21 June 1948, CZA 721/72/1384.

58 The Civil Guard, Account of the Bombings in Tel Aviv, Comprehensive Summary, Tel Aviv Municipality Archive 4/408.

59 The War Casualties Office, A Short Survey of the Work of the Office in Handling War Casualties, 9 May 1949, State Archive, Division 157, 40400, Portfolio 11.

Another facet of the war's impact on civilians was the creation of Jewish war refugees — some 72,000 people who were evacuated, including inhabitants of Jaffa, Haifa, Jerusalem and frontier settlements.⁶⁰

The attacks of the Egyptian air force on Tel Aviv underscored the status of the city as the heart of the Israeli home front and the importance that was assigned to the steadfastness of the home front and its support for the war effort. The city was home to a third of the inhabitants of the State of Israel. It was the economic and political center from which Israeli mobilization was managed. Tel Aviv was presented in public discourse of the time as emblematic of the Israeli home front in the war, whose wartime experience and steadfastness in the face of adversity were living proof that damage to the home front was akin to damage at the military front. For instance, in a 14 July 1948 letter from Tel Aviv Mayor Israel Rokach to David Ben-Gurion — sent in the midst of the Egyptian bombing of Tel Aviv — Rokach requested that anti-aircraft batteries be positioned to defend the city. In his letter Rokach wrote:

I am well aware how much the war equipment is needed at the front lines, but I believe that the question of Tel Aviv's active resistance serves as an important support-from-the-home front for the army as well, and this is of great value, too. The attacks and firing on Tel Aviv are increasing and the number of casualties is growing, and particularly among women and children, and we don't possess any way of demonstrating that steps and measures [are being taken], if not to prevent this thing entirely then at least in part.⁶¹

The direct and indirect impact of the war on civilian life was visible in almost every sphere. In particular, there were families of soldiers who suffered economic distress. Although a comprehensive discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to note that parallel to economic distress and physical injury, psychological stress is also evident among the civilian population. From February 1948 in particular, increasing reportage is encountered in the newspapers regarding distress among families. They reflect the emotional difficulties on the home front, compared with the physical difficulties at the front. In an article entitled 'The Mothers on the Home Front', published in *Davar HaPoelet* — the house organ of the Tel Aviv Working Women's Council of the General Federation of Labor — the author Devorah Nosovitsky (Netzer) wrote:

We are living a kind of life we have not known before — a grief regime. Day by day another comrade loses her son. And our women feel that they are part, responsible for the fate of their sons, because they educated them this way.⁶²

The families of personnel-in-uniform, and particularly the mothers, were presented as living not only in the shadow of their loss, but also in a milieu shadowed by lack of contact and constant worry as to the fate of their loved

60 Arnon Golan, *Spatial Change — Results of War: The Former Arab Territories in the State of Israel 1948–1950* (Sdeh Boker: Ben-Gurion Heritage Center and Ben-Gurion University, 2001).

61 From Rokach to Ben-Gurion, 14 July 1948, Tel Aviv Municipality Archive 4/408.

62 Devorah Nosovitsky, 'Mothers at the Home Front', *Davar HaPoelet* 1, 5 February 1948, 12.

ones in the fighting forces. Thus, for example, families went to Beit Hadar (the office building housing military offices in Tel Aviv) to request assistance in locating soldiers who had not been heard from and in transmitting mail to the front. The 'grief regime' had a national, not just a personal face in the war experience. The families' distress and the mothers' anxieties, reflected in the newspapers, underscored the willingness of individuals to make sacrifices for the greater good of society as a whole — a motif of 'choosing to take action' despite the perils and the sacrifices demanded, upholding the obligation of society as a whole and mothers in particular in the success of the war effort.

The war's power as a definitive and founding experience, made an impact on the Israeli collective consciousness, its character and its goals, becoming a cornerstone and benchmark by which all subsequent wars were judged. This became central in later rhetoric, where there has been a tendency to justify subsequent wars in a similar manner and to view the role of the home front in a similar fashion. In the course of the war — but even more so in the latter half of 1949, after the war ended — the impact locally and regionally was significant. The impact of the war was felt in every sphere: cultural, political and economic. The 1948 War, in which British Mandatory rule came to an end and the State of Israel was declared, ensured the independence of Israel and served as a the foundation for its sovereignty as a polity. In the course of the war, the transition from Yishuv to statehood began, as the central authority of the state grew in strength and the power of civic voluntary society diminished. The war and the establishment of the State of Israel wrought a change on a regional level, in addition to the war's local impact; it had regional ramifications, manifested not only in shaking the political regimes in the Arab countries who had taken part in the war. It also had a far-reaching effect on the future of Jewish communities in these countries.

One of the areas in which the war's impact was particularly prominent was the social sphere. According to Israel Central Bureau of Statistics data, in the course of the war the Jewish population underwent changes in marriage and divorce, birth and infant death rate.⁶³ Yet the influence of these changes in the long term was minor. The most decisive demographic changes in the year 1948 were the product of the war and the establishment of the State of Israel: the influx of 118,993 Jewish immigrants, a phenomenon that increased in 1949, when between January and May 124,500 new immigrants were absorbed by Israel.⁶⁴ On the other hand, there were cataclysmic demographic changes among the Arab population — the *Nakba* (Arabic, 'catastrophe'), which climaxed in the unconditional surrender of the Palestinian community and creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. By the close of the war, 700,000 Palestinian residents of Palestine (out of 1.3 million) had become refugees.⁶⁵

63 *Israel Statistic Monthly*, 1. vol. 1, 1949.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Rashid Khalidi, 'The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure', in Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim (eds), *The War of Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge 2001), 12–36.

The wartime period culminated in the creation of a new Israeli society comprised of various different refugee populations, and a population struggling to deal with the significance of the victorious outcome of the war that had begun as a clash between two national-ethnic communities and closed with the combination of a victorious population alongside a vanquished society under the same political framework. Since then, the outcome of the 1948 war and the changes it wrought have continued to impact on the Israeli-Arab conflict and the development of Israeli society, as well as the Palestinian one. Parallel to its goals, its military aspects, scope and length, the mobilization of society and civilian society's role in the war effort, the magnitude of casualties and destruction the 1948 War rendered including among the civilian population at the home front, as well as the war's position as a enduring focal point that throws into conflict the collective memories and historic narratives that shape national identity, serve to explain the total nature of the 1948 War.

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