

*Conclusions  
on military  
responsibilities  
devastating*

name, his judicial colleague Judge Moshe Landau, Dr. Yitzhak Nebenzahl, the State Comptroller, and two former Army Chiefs of Staff, Lieutenant-General Haim Laskov, who is now the Military Ombudsman, and Lieutenant-General Yigal Yadin, the world-renowned biblical archaeologist and professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

On April 1, 1974, they issued their first partial report, which confined itself to military responsibilities and refused to enter the area of political responsibility for the *mechdal*. The conclusions that concern this section of our discussion — namely, the prestige of some of the senior officers then in command — were devastating. For example, the commission concluded that the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General David Elazar, bore personal responsibility for the evaluation of the situation and for Zahal's state of readiness and recommended his termination as Chief of the General Staff. While not presenting a final recommendation on the fitness of Major-General Shmuel Gonen (the Officer Commanding Southern Command) to fulfil tasks in Zahal, the commission recommended that he not fulfil any active role until they completed their investigation. "In view of his grave failure" Major-General Ze'ira could no longer continue as Chief of Military Intelligence. Brigadier-General Arye Shalev (Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence in charge of research and evaluation), was found to carry "the heaviest burden for the gravest error of the Department which he headed," and could not continue his service in Military Intelligence. Colonel Yonah Bendman (head of the Egyptian Branch of the Research Department of Military Intelligence) should no longer be employed in any role connected with intelligence evaluation. Similarly, the commission found that Lieutenant-Colonel David Gedalia (Chief of Intelligence of the Southern Command) did not fulfil his special obligation "on the key front in the days when it was especially vital to be aware of the intentions of the Egyptian enemy", and recommended that he no longer be engaged in any intelligence tasks.

These recommendations calling for the removal of some of Israel's most senior and respected officers, the war's outbreak and outcome, the once-and-for-all shattering of the twin myths of the *Super Sabra* and of the infallibility of Israeli intelligence and the public bickering and involvement in politics by top Israeli military figures (which will be discussed later) have all combined to diminish and devalue the prestige of Zahal's leaders. This devalua-

tion shows itself in certain forms of public criticism — some never expressed before — and in difficulties encountered by Zahal (which in Israel includes the land, sea and air forces) in recruiting and retaining men for career service in the regular army.

There is strong evidence of this erosion of the prestige of the Zahal's leadership ever since the war. When, for example, the Minister of Commerce, Haim Bar-Lev who was Chief of Staff during the building of the ill-fated line that bears his name and who was recalled from the Cabinet in October 1973 to serve in the Southern Sinai, addressed the memorial ceremonies at a military cemetery in Beersheba in April 1974, he was "verbally attacked by bereaved families". Some of the parents crowded him, screaming: "You sent our sons to be slaughtered." Earlier that month he was jeered by a hostile crowd of 700 Hebrew University students. Like many other Israelis, they were, and still are, angry at the Agranat Commission's self-imposed decision to limit itself to military failures and not to criticize the politicians for government failures. When Bar-Lev refused to answer the questions "Do you think Defence Minister Dayan should resign?" and "Do you think Dayan is just as guilty as Elazar?", the students booed him with a deafening roar. By doing so they showed their displeasure not only at the Agranat Commission but also at former generals like Bar-Lev and Moshe Dayan who entered politics after their military retirement and were refusing to resign their Cabinet posts or in other ways to accept any personal or ministerial responsibility for the *mechdal*.

#### **Mistrust created**

Just a few days before the first anniversary of the October War, the new Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Mordechai Gur, admitted that "it was true that a measure of mistrust among the senior command staff was created after the war began". Then, while speaking of the Army's "current training program", he said it would "serve to restore any *trust which may be lacking* [author's italics]". A year after the war, two sergeants were court-martialled, demoted and given seven years for refusing to obey orders during the war. While they took their sentences "impassively", many of their families did not, crying out that "the people really responsible for the (Yom Kippur) blunder should be on trial". According to the press, the police had to be summoned to quiet the courtroom.

In November 1974, Henry Kamm of the *New York Times* reported: