

Part V

CRITICISM AND PEACE PROSPECTS

"The unscathing fire and the ease of peace"

"The Phoenix Answered" by Anne Ridler

The Army and Criticism

A campaign has begun to encourage more men to join the permanent army. The Chief of Staff believes that the current wave of criticism of the army could deter good men from joining.

The Chief of Staff, Rav Aluf Mordechai Gur, has attacked a trend he sees since the Yom Kippur War of exposing the army to what he believes is too much outside criticism. This could undermine the decision-making capability of field officers, he says, *"and we will be in the position reached by the Americans in Vietnam."*

R/A Gur's warning came when he told editors and military correspondents that the army was launching a drive to get more men to volunteer for the regular force. He implied that the lack of public support could deter good officers from staying in or rejoining the army.

He made it clear that he did not want army operations to be free of control and criticism, but this should be largely internal. External, irrelevant factors were likely to distort criticism coming from the outside.

Broader aspects of defence policy should be open to public discussion, including concepts and methods of warfare, the structure and organization of the army, the integration of the army and the national security system.

"I don't know if this will help, but it cannot do harm," the C-o-S said.

"If the army is as exposed to criticism of every move as it has been since the Yom Kippur War, it will be very difficult to build a military system with the proper balance between careful consideration and the will and daring to take decisions. An army afraid of taking decisions - even at the lowest level - will neither win wars nor protect the state. It is impossible to give day-to-day commands while taking thousands of pieces of advice into account."

Since the war, officers no longer felt confident that their authority and sense of responsibility were being weighed on the correct scales, R/A Gur

said. Field commanders taking decisions under battle conditions should not be exposed to public investigation of every least move without some backing.

A whole generation of generals, many of whom ended their careers in the last war, built up their knowledge on the basis of trial and error. There had been actions in which heavy losses were suffered, but many officers grew to maturity on the lessons necessarily learned from the mistakes made in these operations.

"I fought in many actions after which there was very strict, and just, criticism. But the framework as a whole gave us its backing. Some of the mistakes were put right. Others could not be, because of objective conditions. But never were officers who conducted a battle in the field exposed afterwards with almost no backing."

There are some mistakes which are a part of life, and even when a squad commander is given responsibility for the lives of his men, it is assumed that he may make some mistakes. If the army is open to public scrutiny at all levels, it would make the job very difficult, *"and we will reach the position of the Americans in Vietnam."*

R/A Gur said that before the October War there was a proper balance in relations between the public and the army. Military actions were judged in the correct light. Officers who made too many mistakes were not promoted, *"but if the errors were within certain limits, we had backing."*

Calling for a return to the system which encouraged field commanders to make courageous decisions and take responsibility for them, the C-o-S said this was essential if we wanted to have a good officer corps. It was important to strike a balance between responsibility, authority and freedom of action *"which would prevent any running wild and actions which are unacceptable in our society."*

R/A Gur said that in visiting field units after the October war he had received the impression that most of the complaints were not about the internal working of the units themselves, but were directed at broader aspects

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of the war - defence policy and strategy. This led him to believe it was possible to rebuild the army and repair the damage done during the war, and had been one of his reasons for accepting the post of Chief of Staff. *(R/A Gur was in the U.S. serving as military attaché during the war. After returning he was O.C. Northern Command until he was appointed C-7-S.)*

But it was necessary to examine "various phenomena" which had occurred during the war and afterwards within the units as well. *"We must build up a comprehensive foundation of confidence,"* he said.

Apart from authority, responsibility and confidence, it was essential to provide the officers with the means to justify the trust of their men and the public. *"They must have the best rifles, the anti-tank missiles, equipment for communication with aircraft - the best possible weapons. There is no doubt that one of the critical problems faced by field units in the war was that the Arab armies had better and more weapons."*

One of the lessons of the war was that it was now necessary to build up the size of the Defence Forces. To do so many more officers were needed, both to staff the new units and to fill the gaps left by the 200 regular army officers lost in the war.

It takes 10 or 12 years to make a man into a top-class field officer, and to promote juniors too rapidly would cause long-term harm. *"If we take a good company commander today and make him a battalion commander before he is ready, not only have we lost a company commander but we have not gained a battalion commander,"* said R/A Gur.

It was therefore necessary to call up battle-seasoned reserve officers to bridge the time-gap needed to build up an officer corps at the lower levels.

The IDF would ask reserve commanders of companies, battalions and brigades to sign up for the regular army for at least two or three years to allow a younger generation of officers to develop and eventually to fill their places. But the army was prepared to take officers for even shorter periods, even six months, during which they could conduct courses for new

company commanders. *"The veteran officers all inspire confidence and the young officers will not only learn from them but also will acquire confidence again in the whole system," R/A Gur said.*

To attract good men to the permanent army and keep them there they must have the proper financial reward. The army would never be able to match the salaries paid in civilian life, but there were other rewards to compensate for this - the interesting work, the respect enjoyed by members of the regular army and the responsibility involved.

But the financial aspects could not be ignored. *"We feel that if we don't improve conditions we'll find ourselves in trouble", he said.*

"Our slogan used to be guns instead of socks. I don't think we can keep up with this. We can't keep up our technical power without the men to do so. And we can't keep the men without giving them the remuneration. We can't ask regular army officers to go on serving for the seventh or eighth year without suitable financial compensation. I believe this financial expression is also the expression of the appreciation of the nation."

(Article by Ronnie Hope which appeared in JERUSALEM POST)