

# WEEKEND

## 'Half-educated Arabs are not a cause for worry'

Extraordinary declassified documents reveal the reasons cited by Israel's top security officials for repressing the country's Arab minority

Adam Raz

When it comes to the state's attitude toward its Palestinian citizens, the policy of making available historical documents from the archives is made on the basis of several criteria. One of them starts with the assumption that declassifying documentation that reveals a policy of inequality is liable to harm the country's image and generate a possible reaction from Israel's Arab population.

Because the state's approach to the Arab public has long been essentially repressive, it's not surprising that the documentation available for perusal is very limited. It follows, then, that any attempt to present an ongoing description of the positions taken by senior figures in the security establishment over the years is almost doomed to fail. Nonetheless, two files that recently became available for perusal in the Israel State Archives offer an exceptional look at the bedrock views of the country's top security officials toward the country's Palestinian citizens during its early decades, and reveal their guiding principles.

The two documents in question were declassified following a request submitted by the Akevot Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research. The first, titled "Summary of a Meeting about the Arab Minority in Israel," relates to a meeting held in February 1960, at the request of Uri Lubrani, the Arab affairs adviser to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. Lubrani convened the heads of the security units that dealt with the "Arab issue," a term used frequently in discussions during that period.

The second document, "Basic Policy Guidelines Regarding the Arab Minority in Israel," from July 1965, contains dozens of pages of remarks made during another meeting by senior government officials and the ranking security authorities. Its goal was to sum up the results of 17 years of policy, since 1948, in regard to Israel's Palestinian citizens and to recommend both short- and long-term policy on that subject.

In both cases, a clear picture arises. The security authorities were a tool in the hands of those in the government who espoused a policy of segregation



IDF Spokesperson's Unit

'The existing social frameworks' within Arab society should be preserved... as a convenient governing tool,' said Shin Bet head Amos Manor (above), one that would 'slow the pace of progress and development.'

and of subordinating Arab society to Jewish society. In both cases, the security officials argued that in the years since the 1948 war the government had not taken sufficient actions to suppress the development of Arab society. Some thought that it would be useful to exploit a future war to expel the Palestinian citizens.

In the 1960 discussion, for example, the police commissioner, Yosef Nachmias, stated, "The Arab sector must be kept as low as possible, so that nothing will happen," meaning, the status quo would be maintained there. He added that Israel had not yet reached the "limits of exploitation" of the Palestinian

citizens, and care must be taken not to arouse the Arab "appetite." Similarly, Amos Manor, the head of the Shin Bet security service, viewed the traditional clan-based hierarchy among the Palestinian citizenry as providing an advantage for the Jewish authorities. "We must not expedite processes with our own hands. The existing social frameworks should be preserved... as a convenient governing tool," Manor warned that educated Arabs could constitute a "problem" and added, "As long as they're half-educated, I'm not worried." Israel, he stated, must preserve the Palestinian citizens' "traditional social regime," because it "slows the pace of progress and development."

The Shin Bet director had a sociological justification for why Palestinian citizens should be prevented from acquiring education. "Revolutions are fomented not by the proletariat, but by a fattered intelligentsia," he explained. His next remarks are noteworthy: "All the laws must be applied, even if they are not pleasant. Illegal means should be considered [by the authorities] only when there is no choice, and even then — only on condition that there are good results... Aggressive governance must be maintained, without taking public opinion into account." Aharon Chelouche, the head of the special ops unit in the Israel Police, stated in the 1965 meeting that it might be "reactionary" to strengthen the Arabs' conservative social structure, "but... by means of these frameworks, we control the Arab territory better."

Outwardly, the "Arab issue" was always presented as a security matter, but in the closed meeting in 1965 the participants allowed themselves to comment on the subject with exceptional openness. Yosef Harmelin, who succeeded Manor as Shin Bet chief, laid things on the line: "Our interest is to preserve Israel as a Jewish state. That is the central problem. When we say 'Security,' that is what's meant. Not necessarily a revolution by the Arabs." Yehoshua Verbin, the commander of the military government that Arab citizens were subject to between 1948 and 1966, made it clear to the participants that "there is no public problem that is not a security problem."

Continued on page 12

## 'WORRY'

Continued from page 5

Pinhas Kopel, the police commissioner, seconded them and added, "Every social action must be seen not in terms of what's good for the Arabs, but what's good for the Jews." Moshe Kasbi, the director general of the Defense Ministry, an example of a local "liberal" type, said, "I am in favor of liberalization of the economy. I am somehow against liberalization among the Arabs." Self-criticism was voiced by Shmuel Toledano, the prime minister's adviser on Arab affairs. He noted the existence of two schools of thought on the so-called Arab issue and was critical of the leading one, which saw every social problem through a security prism. He was in the minority.

Throughout the 1965 discussion, the question of the possibility of expelling Palestinian citizens from the country kept surfacing. Scholarly research, drawing on historical documentation, previously found that among some decision-makers, a policy and even concrete plans to deport Arab citizens were dominant until the 1956 Sinai War. The newly declassified minutes show that similar ideas continued to exist into the 1960s as well. Reuven Aloni, deputy director general of the Israel Lands Administration, a body that to this day continues (as the Israel Land Authority) to play a major role in the discriminatory distribution of land in Israel, spoke frankly and asked rhetorically, what, "theoretically," if Israel could act as it wished, "would we want to do?" He also answered his question: "Population exchange." He said he was "quite optimistic that a day will come, in another 10, 15 or 20 years, when there will be a situation of a certain kind, with a war or something resembling a war, when the basic solution will be a matter of transferring the Arabs. I think that we should think about this as a final goal."

The representative of the police, Aharon Chelouche, also spoke about "emigration" and immediately explicated, "In this business, we have a Jew who succeeded and expelled an entire city [after the end of the 1948 war]—Majdal [now Ashkelon], in 1949-1950." He said he had tried to create "an atmosphere of emigration in Jaffa," but that it was not possible to rely on such plans today. Harmelin, the Shin Bet director, agreed with others that the "Arab minority" would never be loyal to the state. In his view, "the solution then was to expel the Arabs," but today that is "a solution that we are all familiar with, [but] which is not practical." He added, "I have a number of thoughts" — without elaborating — about how "to prevent



Bedouin Arabs outside the military governor's office in Be'er Sheva in 1950. The clan-based hierarchy worked to the benefit of Jewish authorities.

GPO

an increase in the Arabs' share" of the country.

Ezra Danin, an Arab affairs adviser in the Foreign Ministry who had dealt with this subject for decades, was concerned not only with the impractical nature of various "emigration" plans, but also their moral implications. "How will we solicit the help of the world, which we need, while we implement actions that the fascists or the Iranians carry out?" He wondered how the government could accept a "satanic proposal" of a "population exchange" and noted, "One doesn't arrive at a population exchange from a position of comfort. One arrives at population exchange by bringing things to that pass."

From 1948 to 1966, the military government was the principal instrument for oppressing the country's Palestinian citizens. Meir Amit, the head of the Mossad between 1963 and 1968, thought that the policy in practice was too polite. He urged a "hard hand, not halfway." Amit's view was that "we have a whip, we use it to make a loud noise," but "we lash the air, and below the surface everything grows." He concluded, "Please, if [we have] a whip — strike."

Verbin, the commander of the military government and one of the country's "experts" on the "Arab problem," wasn't someone who beat around the bush. He explained the problem facing the Jewish authorities: "Today's Arabs are not the Arabs of 17 years ago. The generation of the desert is dying out. Those we harassed, those from whom we took their homes, are the good ones, with them we get along." The worst of the lot, he said, were those who were born around the mid-1940s. He didn't mince words: "We expelled around half a million Arabs, we burnt homes, we looted their land — from their point of view — we didn't give it back, we took land... We want to say to ourselves, 'You, the Arabs, should be happy about what we are doing' [but] we stole the land and we will continue to steal, and from our viewpoint that is 'redemption of the Galilee.'" He added that "to generate a war catastrophe" in the shadow

of which the Arabs will be expelled "is out of the question," and there was no knowing what the future would bring. Not all the participants espoused identical views, but it's clear that the majority agreed that "we're not talking equality." Danin, for example, was critical of the isolationist stance that was taken in the discussion. While Shmuel Ben-Dor, the deputy director general of the Prime Minister's Office, wondered, "How can we talk about all the means that have been raised here and at the same time talk about means that display a just approach to the citizen?"

Verbin rebuffed the criticism of the military government's toughness and broadened the scope of the discussion: "If someone is harassing the Arabs, it is the State of Israel... The Yishuv [i.e., the state] and the [national] institutions are the biggest anti-Semites regarding the Arab problem... If there is anyone that is being cruel when it comes to the Arab subject, it is the whole Yishuv... The Yishuv is harassing them and will continue to harass them for many years to come."

In December 1966, a year and a half after the 1965 meeting, the military government was abolished. The result was the lifting of some of the restrictions and of the supervision that had been imposed on these Israeli citizens, and a shortening of their equality with the country's Jewish citizens. But that wasn't enough. It's clear that many among the Jewish public thought that with the justified abolition of the military government, the segregationist policy toward the Arab citizens had also been terminated. That was not the case then and it is not the case today.

In practice, the viewpoint expressed by the ranking security officials in the 1960s continues to define the state's attitude toward its Palestinian citizens. We will need to wait a few more decades to find out what the top security officials of today think about the country's Palestinian citizens.

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