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CULTURAL CHALLENGES FOR ISRAELI SEA POWER IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Samuel Helfont

Israel traditionally has been reluctant to build a large navy or to become a sea power. Nevertheless, the discovery of extensive natural gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean over the past decade has transformed the region further into a strategic powder keg that is drawing Israel out to sea. Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Lebanon disagree about the borders of their maritime exclusive economic zones (EEZs), and they have attempted to impose their overlapping claims by force. The simmering conflicts have drawn in an array of regional powers. More recently, the United States has waded into the dispute; Russia is not far behind.

Israel's discovery of large gas fields in its own offshore EEZ has brought it into geostrategic alignment with Cyprus and Greece. From a regional security standpoint, it is one of the most interesting actors. In some circles, Israel has

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been touted as a type of silver bullet that will solve the imbalance between the Hellenic states and Turkey. Israel's new interest in the eastern Mediterranean has produced a small but quickly growing literature on Israel's "turn to the sea."¹ The rapidly changing strategic situation has spurred the creation of research centers and high-profile working groups asking whether Israel can become a sea power. The answer to this question mostly has been an enthusiastic yes.²

Yet, historically, *sea power*—the ability to employ the sea in achieving national interests—has required

more than a shift in operational focus toward the maritime domain; it involves adopting a much broader national and strategic culture that is able to channel significant resources away from the land and toward the sea. Israel has begun to take the sea more seriously and it has developed its offshore operational capabilities significantly over the past few decades; yet, for several reasons that this article will discuss, Israeli culture remains tied to the land rather than the sea. Using cultural and constructivist approaches to security that have emerged over the past few decades, this article will show why that fact will continue to create challenges for the development of Israeli sea power.³ Israel and its allies need to consider these cultural constraints when developing naval strategy, and they should factor them into discussions about how much they can expect Israel to contribute to resolving potential maritime conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean.

Much of the growing literature on Israel's turn to the sea highlights Israel's offshore interests. However, Israeli interests at sea are not new. Because the country lacks close relations with its neighbors—indeed, they often boycott it—99 percent of Israeli trade by volume travels by sea. Thus, geostrategically, Israel is equivalent to an island, and it always has been extremely vulnerable to maritime threats.⁴ As David Ben-Gurion himself stated, “There is no Land of Israel without the sea of Israel.”⁵ These threats are not hypothetical; Israel fought two wars (in 1956 and 1967) largely over access to the sea.

Additionally, the recent focus on Israeli maritime affairs is not the first time that political leaders and strategic analysts have proclaimed a turn to the sea by Israel. On multiple occasions over several decades, Zionist leaders who recognized Israel's vital interests at sea announced that they finally had overcome the Jewish state's “sea blindness.” Yet the need to make such claims repeatedly demonstrates that the transition has never quite occurred. Throughout its history, Israel's navalists have had to fight a culture deeply rooted in the land, one that was not willing to make the necessary terrestrial sacrifices to build sea power. Assessing the viability of Israel's current turn to the sea requires examining the cultural impediments that Israel has faced in the past and that it will need to overcome in the future. In doing so, culturist and constructivist approaches to security in the eastern Mediterranean provide much-needed insight on a topic that has been dominated by materialist approaches.

This article first will lay out the rising tensions in the eastern Mediterranean and, by extension, the stakes for Israel's development of sea power. Next it will turn to a discussion of cultural approaches to the theory and history of sea power. This theoretical analysis of sea power largely is missing from the literature on Israel's turn to the sea, but, as this article will argue, grappling with the concept is critically important if one wishes to discuss Israel's attempt to play a larger role offshore. Then the article will discuss the tensions between the foundations of

Israeli national culture and the requirements of sea power. Finally the article will outline the cultural challenges that Israel has faced in obtaining sea power, and why many of those challenges likely will persist in the future.

THE STAKES

Before discussing cultural impediments to Israeli sea power, this article first must discuss the forces that currently are pulling Israel offshore and are making Israel's ability to operate at sea increasingly relevant. Over the past decade, Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt have located and begun to exploit massive natural gas fields in their maritime EEZs. Until recently, most estimates have valued these discoveries in the hundreds of billions of dollars, if not more;⁶ the economic downturn caused by the coronavirus has reduced the projected value of the gas in the short term and, in some circles, has led to questions about the viability of some plans to exploit it. However, over the medium to long term, the gas still has the potential to transform energy markets, and it has reconfigured strategic alliances.⁷ It also has kindled instability and conflict; several confrontations at sea already have occurred, and a naval arms race has kicked off among several eastern Mediterranean states. The United States and Russia increasingly are taking sides.

The contentions mainly stem from Turkey's interpretations of international law, which put it at odds with other states in the region as well as with the international community more generally. Since 1982, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has formed the basis for international maritime law.⁸ UNCLOS designates territorial waters and maritime EEZs that govern resource exploitation at sea. However, because UNCLOS grants small islands the same rights as continental states, Turkey's EEZ is limited by the presence of Greek islands around its coast. Therefore, Turkey rejects UNCLOS and claims an EEZ without consideration for islands.⁹

This problem is compounded by the Cyprus dispute. Turkey is the only state in the world that recognizes the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, located in the northeast part of the island, and the Turks have anointed themselves the guardians of the rights of Turkish Cypriots. As a result of these disputes, Turkey asserts a claim to offshore gas fields that the rest of the world recognizes as belonging to the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey has turned to the use of force to defend its claims on Cypriot and Greek waters; Ankara repeatedly has sent its navy to prevent Nicosia and Athens, and international oil companies, from drilling for gas there. Meanwhile, Turkish warships are protecting Turkish oil companies as they illegally explore and drill in Cypriot waters.¹⁰

The Turkish navy traditionally has been the most powerful in the region. However, Cypriot interests in confronting Turkey over access to offshore gas have aligned Cyprus with powerful regional and international actors. Israel and Egypt

currently are exploiting large offshore gas fields in their EEZs. Like Turkey, Israel is not a signatory to UNCLOS, but, unlike Turkey, Israel abides by UNCLOS definitions of territorial seas and EEZs. The UNCLOS interpretation of these matters is the basis for agreements that Israel has signed with its maritime neighbors over the past decade. Offshore gas could prove transformative to the Israeli and Egyptian economies if the countries can export it to European markets. The most obvious, and cost-effective, way to do so is through a pipeline that runs through Turkey. However, both countries have rocky relationships with Ankara and do not feel comfortable tying their economic interests to a Turkish pipeline. As an alternative, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece want to establish an undersea pipeline that would run from the gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean through Crete and up through Italy to supply the European continent.

The combination of shared energy interests and animosity toward Turkey has pulled Israel, Cyprus, and Greece into a close political alliance over the past decade.¹¹ From the beginning, this alliance, sometimes termed the “Energy Triangle,” has had a military component. In 2011 and 2012, Israel sent its air force to Cyprus in a show of force meant to support its new ally. Israeli jets buzzed Turkish ships and entered what the Turks claim to be Northern Cyprus’s airspace. This caused Turkey to scramble its own air force to interdict Israeli aircraft.¹² Israel and Greece also have begun to hold high-profile naval exercises in the region—a clear warning to the Turks.¹³ Increasingly, Turkish actions have pushed Egypt and Italy into the alliance with Israel, Cyprus, and Greece. Newly discovered Egyptian gas fields are adjacent to Cypriot and Israeli fields, so the three states have been cooperating closely, and together they formed a high-profile East Mediterranean Gas Forum in Cairo in January 2020.¹⁴ Turkish interference in the area has disrupted Egyptian gas operations and pushed Egypt even closer to Cyprus and Israel. In response to negotiations between Cairo and Nicosia on using liquefied natural gas (LNG) to avoid the Turkish pipeline in February 2018, the Turkish navy blockaded ships from the Italian energy company ENI from reaching their drilling site in Cypriot waters. The effect of the Turkish action was the opposite of what Ankara had hoped for—it actually drove Cyprus and Egypt closer together. They rushed to sign an agreement on sending Cypriot gas to Egypt for conversion to LNG so it could be exported to Europe by ship rather than through a Turkish pipeline. Shortly afterward, Israel followed Cyprus’s lead and penned a deal with Egypt to do the same with its gas.¹⁵

Along with Israel, other regional actors have lined up against Turkey, especially after Ankara signed a deal with a semi-Islamist faction in the Libyan civil war in November 2019 to divide the central and eastern Mediterranean between them. In that deal, Turkey made a claim to seas that disregarded Greek islands and Cyprus. In defense of its European Union allies and international law, France

deployed its aircraft carrier, *Charles de Gaulle*, “to defensively stalk Turkish frigates sailing near to the contested gas fields close to Cyprus” in February 2020.¹⁶ The United Arab Emirates, which opposes Turkish regional policies, particularly its actions in Libya, has become a strong supporter of Greece and Cyprus. Since 2018, it has participated in the annual Greek-led military exercise INIOCHOS, along with the United States, Israel, Cyprus, Italy, and Egypt.¹⁷

As these tensions mount in the region, Israel is being drawn into a setting in which several states are expanding their navies. Turkey has embarked on what it describes as a transformative expansion of its fleet—already the most powerful in the region, as noted. By 2023, Turkey will put twenty-four new ships to sea, including four frigates and its first aircraft carrier, *Anadolu*. Turkey also is developing its domestic submarine program, and it is retrofitting its existing ships and submarines with new navigation, weapons, and propulsion systems. In an attempt to transform itself into a true sea power, Turkey has emphasized that this naval construction is being accomplished by domestic Turkish industries. And, as other sea powers have done, Turkey is developing educational, cultural, and media institutions to drive public support for its anticipated emergence as a great power on the sea.¹⁸

The Turks will not be the first state in the region to acquire an aircraft carrier; that honor goes to Egypt. The Egyptian navy also has expanded its fleet considerably over the past decade, including by acquiring several German-built submarines. France had built two *Mistral*-class helicopter carriers for Russia but canceled their delivery in response to Russia’s 2014 seizure of Crimea. Egypt stepped in to buy the two ships, which it now operates as *Gamal Abdel Nasser* and *Anwar el-Sadat*.¹⁹

Israel also is in the process of updating its fleet, as part of its turn to the sea. Most importantly, it is acquiring a new class of German-built corvette, the Sa’ar 6, which will be the most advanced surface vessel in the Israeli fleet. Israel also is updating its older Sa’ar 4.5 and Sa’ar 5 corvettes, and it has acquired very capable *Dolphin 2*-class submarines from Germany as well.²⁰

On top of these local developments, several outside powers have become increasingly involved in the eastern Mediterranean region. The European Union and the United States have criticized Turkish actions harshly and have come down strongly in support of the Israeli-Cypriot-Greek energy triangle as well as the Egyptian-led East Mediterranean Gas Forum. In the summer of 2019, an influential, bipartisan group of U.S. senators and representatives introduced the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019, which codifies American support for Greece and Cyprus at the expense of Turkey. It also offers military aid to both Cyprus and Greece. Then, in October 2019, Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo flew to Greece to announce plans to expand

the U.S. naval presence there and to turn Greek bases into an alternative to Turkish bases for American operations. He also announced a deal to develop supply channels to NATO allies in eastern Europe that run through Greece rather than along the historical routes through Turkey. Pompeo made clear “that operations in international waters are governed by a set of rules” and that “[w]e’ve told the Turks that illegal drilling is unacceptable.”²¹ This language, along with the expanding American military presence in the region, can only be read in Ankara as a tacit threat.

On the other side, Turkey is not the only country that is being cut out of the new gas deals. Russia has its own pipelines, through which it supplies over 50 percent of most European Union states’ gas needs. Thereby Russia can hold European energy markets hostage, and in the past Moscow has used these pipelines to exert political influence on the continent.²² Any eastern Mediterranean gas deals that cut out Turkey and Russia not only would hurt those two countries financially but would threaten their geopolitical positions. Unsurprisingly, the gas deals have pushed the two countries closer together and facilitated already-budding defense cooperation between them. Some analysts have begun to speculate that Russia might back Turkey not only politically but militarily in the growing regional disputes, including over gas in the eastern Mediterranean.²³

Finally, Iran has sought to establish a corridor to the Mediterranean to support its allies and proxies in Syria and Lebanon. The most important Iranian asset in the Levant is Lebanese Hezbollah, which looks to Tehran for both religious and political guidance. Lebanon, which is increasingly dominated by Hezbollah, hopes to discover its own gas fields in its EEZ. Lebanon has an unresolved maritime border dispute with Israel; although this does not affect Israel’s proven gas fields, it would affect future exploration. Hezbollah, for which Iran is helping to build irregular naval capabilities in the eastern Mediterranean, rejects Israel’s existence and has threatened Israel’s offshore gas infrastructure.²⁴ As the civil war in Syria winds down, both Iran and Russia are likely to use their gains in Syria to play a larger role at sea in the eastern Mediterranean. This almost certainly will raise regional tensions.

In sum, the stakes for Israel in the eastern Mediterranean are high. The discovery of gas has reconfigured geopolitical alignments, pitting Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, the European Union, and the United States against Turkey, Russia, Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah. The rising tensions already have been militarized, and unresolved disputes over waters with billions of dollars of gas under them easily could turn into open conflict.²⁵ Israel possesses one of the most powerful militaries in the region, but traditionally it has not been a sea power. Whether it can and will turn to the sea will have important implications for this highly volatile region. Yet, if history is a judge, Israel will need to do more than buy new naval

platforms; a true turn to the sea will require a major shift in Israel's national and strategic culture.

SEA POWER AND CULTURE

The relationship between culture and sea power is not new, and it is not limited to Israel. Over a century ago, the American strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan famously laid out six elements of sea power. Most of those elements dealt with ports, population size, geography (Switzerland will never be a sea power), and the willingness of the government to support a navy. However, one of Mahan's elements (number five on his list) dealt with a more amorphous subject: "national character." As Mahan argued, a state can have all the attributes of a sea power, but if its people lack a certain national character that pushes them toward the sea, that state will have difficulty achieving its interests in that domain.²⁶ It would be easy to dismiss this aspect of Mahanian sea power as rooted in racial and racist ideas of the later nineteenth century; indeed, Mahan's contemporaries openly discussed certain races as being inherently better suited for the sea.²⁷ It is unclear to what extent these racial notions influenced Mahan, but even if they did they are not the only way to interpret his concept of national character.

National character just as easily can be viewed through the lens of culture, and more-recent sea-power theorists have done just that. Geoffrey Till points out that, since ancient times, seafaring communities have developed a distinctive culture—one that can be found across both time and space all over the world. He gives an example of the Vikings having it in their "spirit of adventure, enterprise, curiosity, and greed."²⁸ Likewise, the retired USN admiral turned sea-power intellectual James G. Stavridis describes the "uncertainty and sense of adventure" that "sailors have felt going back two thousand years or more."²⁹ These sentiments are remarkably similar to the "healthy excitement of exploration and adventure" that Mahan argued is an important element of the national character needed for sea power.³⁰ Andrew Lambert, one of the most accomplished naval historians currently active, goes even further; in fact, he criticizes Mahan for not putting enough emphasis on the cultural aspects of sea power. He argues that sea power requires "actively constructing a cultural identity focused on the sea." Historically, sea powers not only built ships and ports but infused their cultures with nautical themes. Their art, architecture, and public spaces highlighted the role of the sea in the national character, and, as Lambert shows, eventually "this consciously crafted identity spread beyond elites and interested parties: it flowed into popular culture, pottery, coins, graffiti, books, printed images, and, by the 1930s, cinema."³¹

In some sense, sea-power culture is a necessary but artificial social construct for states that want to dominate the water. It is necessary because most people

are not naturally inclined to focus on the sea; after all, they live on the land, and their most immediate interests—and their military objectives in times of war—most often are on land rather than at sea.³² Moreover, navies are expensive and take considerable time to build. Sea powers require not only ships and sailors but shipyards, ports, and skilled engineers. At best, these requirements take decades to produce. Navies also require manpower that is more technically skilled than what armies require, which means it is more difficult for a navy to rely on reserve forces or a draft to fill its ranks. As a result, it is much more difficult to create and maintain navies than ground forces.

Leaders promoting sea power, therefore, need to spend considerable effort to convince their people that they should invest limited resources in a sea service. For example, when Theodore Roosevelt, who was heavily influenced by Mahan, wanted to build American sea power, he spent considerable time and effort raising public support for the U.S. Navy—for instance, by sending the Great White Fleet to circumnavigate the globe in 1907–1909.³³

Roosevelt also created naval heroes onto whom the public could latch.³⁴ In 1905, Roosevelt had the body of the Revolutionary War sea captain John Paul Jones exhumed from a long-forgotten grave in Paris. Jones's body was returned to the United States, where it was reinterred, with great public fanfare, in a massive tomb on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Academy.³⁵ Jones was a genuine war hero, but after the Revolutionary War he left the United States to serve in the Russian navy and died in obscurity in France. As a recent biographer of Jones has argued, one of the reasons he was “resurrected” was that “Teddy Roosevelt needed a hero.”³⁶ Roosevelt understood that creating such heroes was essential for building among the masses a culture of sea power that would support his naval ambitions. He was right; throughout history, people lacking admiration for the sea have resisted government efforts to build sea power. Therefore strategies to build sea power often are controversial; at times they can rip apart a state's political leadership, sometimes literally—in the seventeenth century, the Dutch sea-power enthusiast Johan de Witt was “torn to pieces in the streets of the Hague” by those who were tired of his focus on the sea and wanted to return to their land-based interests.³⁷

The difficulties in building sea power for a country such as Israel are compounded by the distinction between large and small navies. If a state cannot or will not invest enough to become a full-fledged sea power, its navy almost immediately faces several problems. Seafaring requires numerous, technical skill sets, but if a navy has only a few ships it often is difficult for sailors to get enough time at sea. Even for those who do, the opportunities for career progression and senior leadership are limited. Thus, it becomes difficult to retain the most talented sailors. Moreover, because there are only a few senior positions in small navies, the departure of leaders has an outsize effect.³⁸

Relatedly, as Till points out, “[n]avies survive and prosper partly through their ability to have an appreciable impact on the defence decision-making processes which define a country’s maritime policy.” But with few senior officers, “there are fewer people with the necessary professional experience to influence, even help shape, policy at the national level.” As a result, national policy “becomes less likely to serve naval purposes. Instead, the navy simply gets told what its policy is.”³⁹ Such a situation clearly is not ideal for addressing predominantly maritime problems.

Finally, navies in non-sea-power states face problems with economies of scale. The fewer ships a state has, the costlier each individual ship is to produce, maintain, and refit and the more expensive it is to train and equip the sailors who man them. As a result, such states often are forced to outsource production and professional military education. In many cases, this reliance on other states can limit the strategies and policies of non-sea powers severely because their allies hold significant leverage over them. Moreover, non-sea powers with small navies often need to choose between spreading their limited resources thinly over a wide range of capabilities and building real competency in a limited number of areas while hoping that their allies will fill in the gaps. Neither approach is ideal, and the latter choice likewise exposes small navies to strategic constraints imposed by their partners.⁴⁰

Almost all the problems associated with small navies and a lack of sea-power culture have hindered the development of the Israeli navy. These obstacles likely will persist in the future.

THE SEA, THE LAND, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF ZIONIST IMAGINATION

In contrast to the culture of sea power, the Zionist ideology on which the modern state of Israel was founded is rooted deeply in interests on the land. Zionists traditionally have read Jewish history through the relationship between the Jewish people and Eretz Yisrael (the biblical Land of Israel). Such a reading of history aligns with a general perception that Jews are not a seafaring people.⁴¹

Of course, such reductive narratives are not as straightforward as their proponents suggest. Over the past few decades, a stream of revisionist scholarship has uncovered or given new emphasis to Jewish experiences related to the sea. Jews have traveled, explored, and made their living on the sea from ancient times until the present.⁴² In contrast to popular perceptions of Jews as meek, city-dwelling scholars and merchants, there were even some swashbuckling Jewish pirates in the Caribbean.⁴³

Therefore the Zionist focus on land represents a constructed identity rather than the articulation of an innate characteristic of the Jewish people. This does

not make Zionist narratives any less powerful in shaping the national ethos of modern Israel. To understand that ethos, and the obstacles it presents to creating sea power, it is necessary to detail how and why Zionist narratives about the connection between Jews and the land were created.

Throughout Jewish history, one finds a longing for a return to Eretz Yisrael, and across the centuries numerous Jews acted on that impulse. However, modern forms of political and cultural Zionism have their roots in nineteenth-century Europe, where the place of Jews, never completely secure, became increasingly dire. The rise of European nationalism and Romantic ideas about a *Volk* rooted in the land threw into sharp contrast stereotypical depictions of “the wandering Jew,” who spoke a different language (predominantly Yiddish), ate different (kosher) food, adhered to peculiar customs, and claimed roots in the Middle East. Some Jews sought a solution to their predicament by creating a nation-state of their own in what they considered to be their ancient homeland. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this movement became known as Zionism.

In addition to the political goal of creating a Jewish state in Jews’ perceived homeland, Zionism also developed a cultural component. Zionists attempted to fashion what they called the “new Jew,” who contrasted sharply with the stereotypical Diaspora Jew. Once Jews returned to their homeland, Zionists would work in industries such as agriculture. Toiling in the fields would develop physically strong bodies and root these new Jews in their land. This rootedness, according to Zionist ideology, would solve many of the problems Jews had faced as perennial outsiders in every land they had inhabited since the Roman Empire exiled them from Judea.⁴⁴ Yet this desire for rootedness was in direct conflict with the veneration of wanderlust, exploration, and adventure that normally accompanies sea power.

Zionists’ desire to be rooted in a homeland dovetailed with their reading of biblical history. The heartlands of ancient Jewish kingdoms were located among the inland mountains and valleys of ancient Judea, Samaria, and the Galilee; the coastal areas largely were controlled by Philistines, Greeks, and Phoenicians. Thus, as one might assume, the ancient Israelites were concerned far more with the land than the sea.

The Bible discusses land and agriculture extensively; it is far less concerned with nautical matters. This focus on the land is reflected not only in biblical narratives but in the content of the ancient Hebrew language itself. Although the Hebrew Bible discusses warfare at length, it does not even provide a word for *navy*. When modern Zionists turned to ancient Jewish texts for other nautical terms, they struggled to find them. They had to invent terms such as *ma’agan* (anchorage), *hashaka* (launching a ship), *saver* (dock worker), and *shayit* (sailing).⁴⁵ By

contrast, biblical Hebrew is infused with vocabulary linking the ancient Israelites to the land. At the most basic level, the Hebrew words for land/soil (*adama*) and man (*adam*) are closely related. In root-based Semitic languages such as Hebrew, this relationship is much more meaningful than it would be in English—it suggests a common essence.

Modern Zionist culture did not grow organically from a deterministic biblical past. However, when Zionists wanted to tie themselves to a land, it was not difficult for them to find justifications in biblical history, and as Zionism developed, politically and culturally, its proponents increasingly emphasized the links between Jews and the land—between *adam* and *adama*. Thus, writing in 1919, the influential Zionist intellectual Harry Sacher wrote, “The idea of Judaism is inseparable from the idea of the Jewish people, and the idea of the Jewish people is inseparable from the idea of the Jewish land.” He tied together religious, political, cultural, and linguistic themes, referencing Jewish sages, and arguing, “The cultivation of the Hebrew tongue is as natural as the cultivation of the land.”⁴⁶ The *kibbutzim* (plural of *kibbutz*, a collective agricultural settlement), in which the Zionist “new Jews” tilled the soil, featured heavily in the early Zionist literature.⁴⁷ Hebrew writers wrestled with overcoming the image of the diasporic wandering Jew and putting down roots in the land.⁴⁸ Early Zionist art and photography dealt with similar themes. In 1935, the first Hebrew-language movie, *Zot Hi HaAretz* (*This Is the Land*), explored images of *adam* and *adama*.⁴⁹ The celebration of the new Jew, who developed his mind and body by pouring blood and sweat into the soil of his homeland—making the “desert bloom”—permeated popular culture. A line from a folk song that later became a type of national slogan proclaimed “Anu banu artzah livnot ve-lehibanot bah” (We came to the Land to build and be built by it).⁵⁰ Similarly, a 1937 poem that, when put to music, became an “unofficial anthem” for Zionists’ agricultural settlements captures the emotions tied up in the return both to an ancient homeland and to working the land.⁵¹

Watch, look, and see
How great this day is
Fire glowing in the chest
And the plow
Again tilling the field.⁵²

Of course, Zionist thought could not ignore the sea completely. Most Jews had to travel by sea to reach Eretz Yisrael, and a subset of Hebrew literature emerged representing that experience.⁵³ However, as often as not the sea was simply “a barrier that had to be crossed before arriving at the shores of the new country”; it was not essential for building a new national identity.⁵⁴ There were no portrayals of the sea

in early Zionist culture that could compete with the place of the land in the emerging national consciousness.⁵⁵ As one scholar of Zionist culture put it, “The history of Zionist efforts to elaborate the dialectical relation between Jew and land in no small measure defines the entire history of the movement between 1881 and 1938.”⁵⁶

ISRAEL’S REPEATED TURNS TO THE SEA

The overwhelming focus of early Zionist culture on the land rather than the sea did not align with the geographic realities of Jewish settlement. In the biblical period, to which Zionists looked for inspiration, Jewish populations, as noted, were concentrated in the interior mountains, while non-Jewish populations were concentrated along the coast. By contrast, while some modern Zionist Jews settled in and around the Jerusalem highlands, most settlement occurred in an N-shaped pattern up the coast, diagonally southeast through the Galilee, and then north around the Sea of Galilee into the Hula Valley. The main Jewish population centers, such as Tel Aviv (founded in 1909), were on the Mediterranean coast.⁵⁷ The gap between the imagined geography of Eretz Yisrael and the geographic reality of Zionist settlement created a type of cognitive dissonance. For example, a 1939 short story written in simple Hebrew for new immigrants depicts the surprise of a Jewish refugee from Europe when he arrives in Tel Aviv. He was in “the land of the Patriarchs, the revived homeland,” but “[h]ere, on the beach . . . everything was so ordinary, just like in Europe.” The idea of the ancient land that he expected contrasted sharply with the Mediterranean reality of his new life.⁵⁸

These geographic realities gradually began to impose the sea on the Zionist movement, and in the 1930s one finds the first claims that Zionists had turned to the sea. During this period, Zionists opened a Jewish-run port in Tel Aviv, developed fisheries, formed maritime leagues, inaugurated a nautical school in Haifa, and established private shipping companies.⁵⁹ In 1938, Raphael Patai added intellectual weight to this project when he published a book in Hebrew on ancient Jewish seafaring. The book was based on a doctoral dissertation that completed the first PhD that the Hebrew University of Jerusalem had awarded.⁶⁰ David Ben-Gurion, who emerged as the most important Zionist political leader at this time, realized that the Zionists’ almost-exclusive focus on the land was misaligned with the strategic imperatives of the developing Jewish state. Not only was the sea a geographic reality that forced itself on the Jewish settlements clustered along the coast, but as the surrounding Arab states emerged from colonial empires Israel became a geostrategic island. Thus, the sea became the only outlet Zionists had to the rest of the world. Ben-Gurion therefore argued, “The conquest of the soil by city people was the great, first adventure of our movement, of our endeavour in the country. A second adventure, great also, and perhaps harder than the first, still awaits us—the conquest of the sea.” For Ben-Gurion, the Mediterranean was

“the natural bridge that connects our small country with the wide world. The sea is an organic, economic, and political part of our country.” This being the case, “[t]he road to the sea is a way to expand our country, to augment our economic base, to strengthen our national health, to enforce our political position, to dominate the elements.”⁶¹ At the time, Zionist leaders presented the “conquest of the sea” as the third pillar of Zionism, along with “redemption of the land” and “revival of the soul.”⁶² By 1945, in recognition of their geographic situation, the Zionists overcame considerable political challenges to establish the shipping company ZIM. This commercial shipping capability would prove crucial in safeguarding Israel’s trade in the decades ahead, and ZIM eventually developed into one of the world’s leading shipping lines.⁶³ As a result of these developments, a historian of modern Israel has argued recently that the prestate Jewish movement went through a “maritime revolution” during the 1930s and 1940s.⁶⁴

Yet despite this supposed turn to the sea, in 1948 a newly independent Israel found itself completely unprepared in terms of resources, training, equipment, and—just as importantly—mentality to confront the challenges it faced at sea during its war of independence. Following World War II, Jewish communities in Israel developed a naval militia called the Palyam, and Zionists—with a great deal of help from both Jewish and non-Jewish sympathizers abroad—smuggled Holocaust survivors past a British blockade in a program known as Aliyah Bet. The most famous of these Aliyah Bet ships was *Exodus*, which the British boarded. They killed and injured several passengers and sent the Holocaust survivors back to Europe.⁶⁵

As independence neared, Zionist leaders attempted to turn these initiatives into a national navy. As one member of the Palyam later recalled, the leadership brought him and other members into a meeting and “informed us that we were no longer the Palyam; we were now the Israeli Navy.”⁶⁶ The Jews had a hundred miles of coast to protect, in addition to their shipping. Yet while Palyam members were dedicated and daring, they were trained and equipped only to carry out small commando raids; they did not possess the technical knowledge to run a navy. In addition to their lack of ship-handling experience on large vessels, they had no experience in the command and control that is essential for naval operations.⁶⁷ In a sign of how desperate the Israelis were for competent naval leadership, Ben-Gurion cabled a Zionist office in New York, asking it to send a twenty-six-year-old Jewish American named Paul N. Shulman. Shulman had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and had fought on a destroyer in the Pacific during World War II. Despite his age, Ben-Gurion wanted him to command HaSherut HaYami (the Sea Service), which is what the Israelis called it at the time, because they had not settled on a Hebrew word for *navy* yet. Shulman recruited several other American Jews with naval experience to take key jobs that

the Israelis could not fill. Jonathan Leff, who was one of Shulman's classmates at Annapolis, became head of the Department of Ordnance and Gunnery of the Sea Service; Harold Gershenow, who had served as a ship-repair officer in the U.S. Navy during World War II, was brought to Israel to rebuild and operate the Bat Galim port at Haifa; Harold Shugar, who had served as a gunnery officer in the American navy and happened to be studying abroad at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem when the war broke out, was recruited to be the gunnery officer on the Israeli flagship.⁶⁸ The head of the Palyam became Shulman's deputy, and together they opened a training program at Haifa.

Yet despite the turn to the sea that supposedly had occurred over the preceding decade, the land-focused leadership of the Israel Defense Forces did not prioritize the sea and did not attempt to use it strategically. Its members derided Shulman's force as "the bathtub corps." The navy had only three real ships: two former Canadian corvettes and a former U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker. The icebreaker, renamed *Eilat*, became Shulman's flagship. None of these ships was armed, so the Israelis mounted a 1906 French army field-artillery piece on the deck of *Eilat*.⁶⁹

The fledgling Israeli navy had difficulty convincing the national leadership to provide it with resources. Of course, the new state had limited assets it could offer the navy, especially in wartime, but the lack of available funds only partly explains the failure to support the navy. Money was available, but the civilian leadership saw no use in spending it on the sea service. The official responsible for the navy at the Ministry of Defense, Gershon Zak, had a background in education administration. Zak rejected Shulman's repeated requests for funds to build a communications station, so Shulman asked for money for a cultural center. This request was more aligned with Zak's interests, and it was approved. Shulman then "misappropriated" the funds to build the communications station.⁷⁰ This would not be the last time that Israeli naval leaders misled or ignored their superiors outside the sea service to accomplish their missions and protect the vital interests of the state.⁷¹

The Israeli navy did achieve a few important successes during the war. Most importantly, a commando raid carried out via a small boat launched from Shulman's flagship sank the Egyptian flagship, *Emir Farouk*.⁷² Yet the Israeli navy never was used to its full potential. Many Israelis saw Shulman, who was the most competent naval officer, as a typical Diaspora Jew rather than the "new Jew" of the Zionist project. He was forced to step down following the war and largely was written out of Israeli history.⁷³

Following Israeli independence, the national ethos remained firmly rooted in the land. In a major cultural landmark, the first play performed in the new state was Moshe Shamir's highly acclaimed *Hu Halakh ba-Sadot* (*He Walked through the Fields*). It later was transformed into a successful Hebrew movie. As the title

indicates, the plot revolves around life on a kibbutz, with all the resulting imagery of *adam* and *adama*.⁷⁴ Probably the most important influence on postindependence Israeli culture has been the writings of Amos Oz, who burst onto the Hebrew literary scene in the 1960s with a collection of short stories describing life on a kibbutz.⁷⁵ The relationship between Zionist Jews and the land permeated his career.⁷⁶ In recent decades, agriculture and kibbutzim have lost their central role in Israel, but they remain an important part of the state's founding myth, as well as a cultural force. For example, Oz ultimately cemented his place in Israeli literary history with a 2002 memoir about his own journey as a boy from the life of a city Jew in Jerusalem to a truly Zionist life on an agricultural collective. Notably, when he left the city and rooted himself in the land he changed his surname from the Yiddish Klausner to the Hebrew Oz, thus completing the Zionist transformation. The book made a tremendous impact, and in 2015 the Israeli American actress Natalie Portman transformed it into a Hebrew-language movie in which she played a central role, that of young Amos's mother.⁷⁷

As one might expect, this continued cultural affinity for the land affected the resources and attention that the young Israeli navy received from the state. As one prominent Israeli defense analyst has noted, in the first few decades of Israel's statehood "[t]he [Israel Defense Forces] headquarters had little understanding of naval needs and was not inclined to divert scarce funds to a service considered to be of secondary importance."⁷⁸ In the 1950s, the Israelis attempted to build a navy around capital ships (mostly British destroyers) and they purchased WWII-era British submarines. However, the destroyers proved too expensive to man and run. Moreover, they failed to achieve Israeli objectives at sea. Following the 1948 war, Egypt closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping, which blocked passage from Israel's southern port of Elat to the Red Sea. Egypt also prevented Israel from using the Suez Canal. These actions cut Israeli ties with Asia and hindered the development of its southern Negev region, which was a priority for Ben-Gurion.

Reopening the strait and Israel's access to the Red Sea became one of the country's main objectives when it joined Britain and France in the 1956 war against Egypt. Israeli forces raced down the Sinai Peninsula and captured Sharm al-Sheikh, which overlooks the strait. Israel then made opening of the waterway a key provision for handing the territory back to Egypt, and it took the opportunity to send a few Israeli navy ships through the straits to Elat. Under intense American and international pressure, Israel withdrew from the Sinai without clear Egyptian acquiescence to Israel's right of passage by sea. Subsequently, only foreign ships were allowed through the straits; if an Israeli ship wished to pass, it needed to fly a false flag. The Israeli warships that transited to Elat during the crisis remained bottled up there until the 1967 war. Therefore the Israeli navy was not able to secure sea lines of communication for vital Israeli shipping (which by

the 1960s included much-needed oil shipments from Iran). When Egypt decided to close the straits completely in 1967, Israel had no naval option to open them.⁷⁹ In such situations, states with small navies often rely on alliances with sea powers, and the Israelis turned to the United States. However, while the Americans were supportive, they were tied down in Vietnam, and they could not muster international support to force the issue.⁸⁰ To regain access to the sea, Israel was forced into a general war rather than a more limited naval action.

The year 1967 was a low point for the Israeli navy, for several reasons. It largely missed out on the celebrated actions of what Israelis call the Six-Day War in June. Other than some small commando raids, the only major action the Israeli navy took was to attack USS *Liberty*, an American signals-intelligence-collection platform. Several dozen Americans were killed or injured in the attack. The Israelis insist the attack was a mistake, but it remains a contentious topic for some in the U.S. Navy today.⁸¹ Later in the year, the Israeli destroyer *Eilat* was sunk by a Soviet Styx missile fired from an Egyptian missile boat. Then, right after the New Year, an Israeli submarine on its maiden voyage from England to Israel disappeared along the way.⁸²

Fortunately for the Israeli navy, brighter days were on the horizon. Israeli navalists understood the critical national interests Israel had at sea, yet the state provided them relatively few resources. Yet as the adage states, necessity is the mother of invention, and in the mid-1960s Israeli naval officers developed a bold plan to scrap Israel's destroyers and replace them with heavily armed missile boats. No Western navy relied on missile boats at the time, so this was a fairly radical plan—even more so because when the Israeli navy decided on this course, it had yet to develop a surface-to-surface missile and it had no platform on which to put it.⁸³

Eventually, the Israelis developed the Gabriel missile and the Germans agreed to build them a modified version of their *Jaguar*-class fast-attack craft. As theorists of small navies have argued, reliance on foreign procurement can be problematic because it ties strategic assets to the whims of international politics, and that proved to be the case for Israel and its missile boats. The Germans worried that the Arabs would boycott them if it became public that they were building missile boats for Israel; however, the Israelis were able to convince Germany to allow the French to build the German boats in the port of Cherbourg. Because of the war in Algeria, the French were out of favor with the Arabs anyway, so they did not face a diplomatic threat.⁸⁴

But before the boats were completed, the international political winds shifted. Following the French withdrawal from Algeria, President Charles de Gaulle attempted to mend ties with the Arab states, and Israel was left in the lurch. The French imposed an embargo on arms to Israel, which meant they would not

permit Israel to take possession of the new missile boats on which its entire naval strategy depended. In a major scandal at the time, the Israelis tricked the French into thinking they had sold their rights to the boats to a Norwegian shipping company. Then, on Christmas Eve 1969, the Israelis escaped with the boats into a storm in the English Channel. Israeli officers and crew, many of whom had been hiding belowdecks in the French harbor, piloted the boats back to Haifa, refueling at sea from modified Israeli merchant ships and dodging the French, Soviet, and Egyptian navies along the way.⁸⁵

Once in Israel, the boats were fitted with the Gabriel missile system. The Gabriel's range was far shorter than that of the Soviet Styx missile, which the Egyptian and Syrian navies used. This meant that the Israeli boats would be shot out of the water before they fired their own missiles at their adversaries. Again, necessity bred innovation, and Israeli engineers developed a revolutionary electronic-warfare system, mostly using chaff, that was able to spoof the Styx missiles and allow Israeli ships to operate within their range.⁸⁶

During the 1973 war with Syria and Egypt, the Israeli missile boats performed beyond all expectations. In the battle of Latakia, Israeli and Syrian boats engaged in history's first missile battle at sea. The Israeli boats were able to operate safely within the range of the Soviet missiles and they sank all five of the Syrian boats that took part in the battle. Later in the war, the Israelis repeated their successes against Egyptian missile boats in the battle of Baltim. Over the course of the war, the Egyptians and Syrians fired over fifty missiles at the Israeli boats, but none hit their targets; by contrast, the Israelis were able to sink any Syrian or Egyptian vessel that ventured out of port. The Israelis used this command of the sea to bombard strategic targets on the Egyptian and Syrian coasts as well as to ensure the vital resupply of weapons by sea from the United States.⁸⁷ In addition to these victories in the Mediterranean, Israeli naval commandos achieved important victories around the Sinai and the Red Sea.⁸⁸ As a result, some have heralded the acquisition of these missile boats as a turning point for the Israeli navy.⁸⁹

However, this turning point should not be misconstrued as signifying a new age for the Israeli defense establishment's relationship with the sea. While the Israeli navy did achieve a number of stunning successes in the war, those successes came *despite* the fact that Israel's political and military leadership was inept at using the sea service. David Elazar, the chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces, planned to use the navy in the war simply to "defend essential targets along the length of the state's coast and to be on alert to transition quickly to attack the enemy on the sea and in the ports."⁹⁰ Basically, all he wanted the navy to do was prevent Egyptian or Syrian boats from coming close enough to launch their missiles at the Israeli coast. On the first night of the war, he ordered Benjamin Telem, the commander of the navy, to recall a naval force that was heading north toward

Syria; he did not want the navy to get into a situation that would have required the diversion of land or air forces. Telem, in a daring—and potentially career-ending—move, chose to ignore the order. The force in question won the battle of Latakia and shaped the war at sea—but it did so *in defiance of Israeli military leadership, not because of it*. Elazar later admitted, “I underestimated the navy.”⁹¹

While the more than doubling of Israel’s coastline resulting from the 1967 war forced the state to provide the navy with more assets, even this did not occur without a fight. The government rejected the navy’s additional request to build a fleet of landing craft following the 1967 war. Israeli navalists regarded this decision as “a grave blunder,” and because of it the army faced significant difficulties crossing the Suez Canal during the 1973 war. As Efraim Inbar has stated, “The government was still ground-oriented and not inclined, either by doctrine or budget, to approve large amphibious operations.”⁹² The war exposed other problems with the navy as well. Although the Israelis controlled the Strait of Tiran, the Israeli navy could not prevent the Egyptians from blockading the Bab el Mandeb choke point at the southern end of the Red Sea, essentially cutting off Israel’s connections with Asia and Africa. The Egyptians also successfully mined the Strait of Jubal in the Gulf of Suez. By doing so, they cut off Israeli oil supplies from Abu Rudeis. This highlighted the Israeli navy’s inability to minesweep.⁹³ Moreover, it should not be forgotten just how close Israel was to not having its missile boats because of its diplomatic situation; although the Israelis managed to smuggle the boats out of France in the middle of the night, it was a close-run thing, and the operation could have been upended in numerous ways. It certainly is not a model to be replicated.

Nevertheless, the war did demonstrate, even to those who did not understand the service fully, that the Israeli navy could play a constructive role. Although Israeli political and military leaders have remained wary about pulling resources from land and air forces over the years, several optimistic navalists have argued repeatedly that Israel finally is turning to the sea. Such claims have come every decade since the 1970s. In the 1980s, Efraim Inbar argued that Israel reached a new phase in its relationship with the sea after the navy won a hard-fought, multiyear battle to enact a reform and modernization program, which included the purchase of American-built Sa’ar 5 corvettes, which were considerably larger than the missile boats on which Israel had relied since the 1960s.⁹⁴ Other scholars argue that, although for “most of Israel’s seven-decades-long history the sea did not play a significant role in Israeli security, energy market, or development policies, . . . beginning in the 1990s, Israeli decision makers turned their attention to the sea.” These scholars state that this turn to the sea was tied to an accumulation of issues such as fisheries, environmental concerns, desalination, offshore energy, and the development of seaports; together, these and other interests created a

critical mass that finally pushed Israel to the sea.⁹⁵ Another analyst claims that Israel finally began to take the sea seriously in 2006, when Hezbollah hit the Israeli corvette *Hanit* with an Iranian-supplied cruise missile.⁹⁶ And finally, there are the claims that, after decades of neglect, signs of Israel finally turning to the sea include the discovery of offshore gas fields; the new alliances with Greece and Cyprus; and the purchase of a new, larger class of Sa'ar 6 corvettes from Germany.

Arguments supporting Israel's various supposed turns to the sea have highlighted the very real progress the Israeli navy has made over the past few decades. However, each step forward has been a struggle, and despite some advances Israel has not resolved its strategic maritime issues. A 2018 report on the Israeli navy argues that "[t]he Israeli Navy currently has far fewer corvettes and fast attack craft than it requires, and almost all of these have never been fully outfitted with their designed number of fire-control systems." In addition, limited missile reloads for Israel's otherwise very capable submarines limit their ability to act as a deterrent.⁹⁷

Moreover, while Israel has developed its naval shipbuilding industry, the Israeli navy continues to rely on foreign sources for its capital ships and submarines, which means its future fleet relies on a favorable diplomatic landscape.⁹⁸ Support for Israel remains controversial in many states. Recently, even in the United States—which traditionally has been Israel's greatest supporter—some political factions have questioned the American relationship with the Jewish state. Until Israel resolves the Palestinian issue, it likely will face continued international political opposition that easily could hinder its procurement of future platforms or limit its strategic options at critical times. Until Israel develops the capability to produce, maintain, and man a large fleet independently, these strategic constraints will continue to hinder its attempts to become a sea power.

Then there is the fact that the Israeli defense establishment, as well as its political leadership, still is dominated by officials who have limited knowledge of the sea or naval operations. In October 2019, this land-focused defense establishment proposed canceling part of Israel's naval buildup and reallocating the funds to ground forces and air defense.⁹⁹ As these examples show, planned expansions to, or even maintenance of, the existing Israeli navy will continue to be a struggle.

As a high-profile 2016 report states, "It is . . . impossible to overstate Israel's interests in maritime security. Yet, surprisingly, the maritime domain is almost absent from public discourse in Israel, a nation not known for its maritime culture or history."¹⁰⁰ Classic sea-power theory would argue that it will be difficult for Israel to provide the sustained resources necessary to secure its maritime interests under those circumstances. If Israeli leaders are serious about building sea power, they probably need more than a few new ships. To build the national

expertise and devote the resources required for creating sea power, Israel will need to develop popular support for such projects. To do so, it will need to infuse Israeli society with maritime culture. Considering Israel's history, that will not be an easy task.

If history is a judge, the Israeli navy will have difficulty meeting the challenges it faces. While Israel may be devoting more resources to its navy, others are too—the eastern Mediterranean currently is in the midst of a naval arms race. The Egyptian and Turkish navies already dwarf Israel's in terms of size. Not only are they both rapidly expanding quantitatively, but they are moving toward aircraft carrier-based fleets. The Russian navy also has shown an increasing interest in the area.

Additionally, if Israel weds its energy interests to an undersea pipeline running to Italy and beyond or to LNG shipments from Egypt to Europe, Israel's critical maritime interests will extend hundreds of miles from its shore; this will be a major change for a navy that so far has been concerned with defense of Israel's two-hundred-mile EEZ.

Thus, even an Israeli navy that can meet today's challenges likely will be inadequate in the near future. Israel will need to devote even more resources to its fleet.

NOTES

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 54. Azaryahu, "The Formation of the 'Hebrew Sea,'" p. 253.
 55. On the place of the sea in Hebrew literary culture, see Hannan Hever, *El HaHof HaMequveh* [Toward the longed-for shore] (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2007).
 56. Zakim, *To Build and Be Built*, p. 4.
 57. S. Ilan Troen, "Zionist Settlement in the Land of Israel/Palestine," in *Essential Israel: Essays for the 21st Century*, ed. S. Ilan Troen and Rachel Fish (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2016), pp. 69–70.
 58. Azaryahu, "The Formation of the 'Hebrew Sea,'" p. 254.
 59. Kobi Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution: The Yishuv's Hold on the Land of Israel's Sea and Shores, 1917–1948* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), chap. 3; Azaryahu, "The Formation of the 'Hebrew Sea.'"
 60. Patai, *The Children of Noah*, pp. x, xv.
 61. Quoted in Azaryahu, "The Formation of the 'Hebrew Sea,'" p. 259.
 62. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
 63. Kobi Cohen-Hattab, "The Test of Maritime Sovereignty: The Establishment of the Zim National Shipping Company and the Purchase of the *Kedmah*, 1945–1952," *Israel Studies* 20, no. 2 (Summer 2015), pp. 110–34.
 64. Cohen-Hattab, *Zionism's Maritime Revolution*.
 65. Aviva Halamish, *The Exodus Affair: Holocaust Survivors and the Struggle for Palestine* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 75–102, 112–39.
 66. "Veterans' Stories—Abramov, Zalman," *Palyam & Aliya Bet*, www.palyam.org/.
 67. J. Wandres, *The Ablest Navigator: Lieutenant Paul N. Shulman, USN; Israel's Volunteer Admiral* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), pp. 58–59.
 68. J. Wandres, "Ben-Gurion's Bathtub Corps," *Military History* 32, no. 6 (March 2016), pp. 69–70. For many more similar stories, see the Palyam–Aliyah Bet oral history project at www.palyam.org/.
 69. Wandres, "Ben-Gurion's Bathtub Corps," p. 70.
 70. Wandres, *The Ablest Navigator*, p. 64.
 71. Another important example of this occurred during the 1973 war and will be discussed later in the article.
 72. Abraham Rabinovich, *The Boats of Cherbourg: The Secret Israeli Operation That Revolutionized Naval Warfare* (New York: Seaver Books, 1988), pp. 24–25; Wandres, *The Ablest Navigator*, p. 3.
 73. Wandres, *The Ablest Navigator*, p. 67.
 74. Moshe Shamir, *He Walked through the Fields* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1959).
 75. Amos Oz, *Where the Jackals Howl* (London: Vintage Books, 1992).
 76. On his career, its place in the canon of modern Hebrew literature, and its emphasis on the land, see Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 26–75.
 77. Natalie Portman, dir., *Sipour al ahava va'khoshekh* [A tale of love and darkness] (2015; Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures Home Entertainment, 2017), DVD.
 78. Efraim Inbar, "The Israeli Navy," *Naval War College Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter 1990), p. 103.
 79. On the issue of the Strait of Tiran, see Eitan Barak, "Between Reality and Secrecy: Israel's

- Freedom of Navigation through the Straits of Tiran, 1956–1967,” *Middle East Journal* 61, no. 4 (Autumn 2007), pp. 657–79. Also see introduction to “Freedom of Navigation,” sec. 8 of 1947–1974, vols. 1–2 of *Israel’s Foreign Relations: Selected Documents*, ed. Meron Medzini (Jerusalem: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 1976), available as “Freedom of Navigation—Introduction,” *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 5 July 1998, mfa.gov.il/
80. Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 105–106, 133–43, 164.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 263–71.
82. The missing submarine was found in 1999 on the seabed between Crete and Cyprus. Deborah Sontag, “The Lost Sub Is Found, and Israelis Can Grieve,” *New York Times*, 31 May 1999, nytimes.com/.
83. Rabinovich, *The Boats of Cherbourg*, pp. 22–33.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 117–76.
85. *Ibid.*
86. *Ibid.*, pp. 211–23, 256–62.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Zēv Almog [Rear Adm., Israeli Navy], *Flotilla 13: Israeli Naval Commandos in the Red Sea, 1967–1973* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).
89. Inbar, “The Israeli Navy,” p. 100. This is also one of the main overarching points of Rabinovich, *The Boats of Cherbourg*.
90. This was the standing order for war with Syria or Egypt. It was part of “Tokhnit Se’la.” See the short documentary the Israeli navy created (in Hebrew) about the battle of Latakia. “Krav Latakia—Krav HaTilim HaYamim HaRishon” [The battle of Latakia—the first naval missile battle], YouTube video, www.youtube.com/.
91. Rabinovich, *The Boats of Cherbourg*, pp. 281–82.
92. Inbar, “The Israeli Navy,” pp. 106, 108.
93. *Ibid.*
94. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
95. Teff-Seker, Rubin, and Eiran, “Israel’s ‘Turn to the Sea,’” p. 235.
96. “Israel’s Navy Is Preparing for ‘Any Kind of Threat.’”
97. Kenneth S. Brower, *The Israel Defense Forces, 1948–2017*, *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* 150 (Ramat Gan, Isr.: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan Univ., May 2018), p. 51.
98. Arkin, “HaDor HaBa shel Clay HaShayit Cahol-Lavan.”
99. Yossi Yahoshua, “Tzahal Mukhan Levater ‘al Tzolelet Shishit” [IDF ready to give up on the sixth submarine], *Yediot Ahronot*, 26 October 2019, www.yediot.co.il/.
100. Chorev et al., “Report of the Commission on the Eastern Mediterranean.”