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By Ze'ev Drory

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Following Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and 1949, the anticipated peace did not materialize and the new nation soon found itself embroiled in protracted military conflict with neighbouring Arab states. Demobilization of its armed forces led to the formation of special elite unit under the command of Ariel Sharon to cope with cross-border infiltration, pillage and murder. A policy of deterrence was governed by the tactic of retaliation, which contained the seeds of escalation. At the same time, a military dynamic unfolded in which the logic of field unit response dictated both military and political policy and caught the imagination of a demoralized and war-weary Israeli society.

The myth of the Israeli paratroopers at the beginning of the 1950s, and their heroic deeds in the reprisal raids, embodied the new Zionist ethos for which the current Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, claims much of the credit. The book thus provides historical insight into some of the most intractable developments of the current Arab-Israeli conflict.

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*By Ze'ev Drory*

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**Israel's Reprisal Policy, 1953-1956: The Dynamics of Military Retaliation (Cass Military Studies) By Ze'ev Drory Bibliography**

- Rank: #2839222 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-12-06
- Released on: 2012-12-06
- Format: Kindle eBook

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