Article review:

The article deals, primarily, with Menachem Begin's activities leading up to the Six Day War and during the war itself. In its conclusion it points to how the occupation of the territories captured in the war legitimized the Zionist cause and the integration of the Revisionist narrative into that of official state Zionism.

Despite the fact that the right-wing has governed Israel for the past four decades, and that it is certainly the most important political phenomenon in the study of Israel and Zionism, scholarship on the subject is still relatively sparse. For that reason I think articles in this area should be encouraged, including this article on Begin, who is the key figure in this context

It can be said, to the author’s credit, that the article is well written. It relies on a variety of sources and adds new sources from minutes of meetings that have now received permission to be published, though they do not fundamentally change what had been published before. The article underlines Begin’s moderate line at the beginning of the war, while emphasizing the fact that he was not a central decision-maker in the government. In my opinion, the author gives Begin too much weight in the discussions surrounding the forming of a national unity government. In fact, Begin was a tool in the hands of Peres and the Rafi Party. He was unaware, for instance, of the compromise position of asking Ben-Gurion to return to serve as Prime Minister. He was similarly unaware of the disagreement between Moshe Dayan and Ben-Gurion on the necessity of Israel making a first strike. The author is correct in emphasizing Begin’s comparison between the Six Day War and the Lebanon War as “wars of choice.” However, perhaps it is necessary to add that at the beginning of the Lebanon War, when Begin informed the Labor Party ministers of the expected military developments, he pointed to the differences between the wars. He emphasized the fact that the operation in Lebanon was carefully planned, while the in the Six Day War events “unfolded on their own accord.” (See Aryeh Naor’s book *Kabinet ba-Milḥama* [*The Cabinet at War*], as well as Shilon’s work). Aside from this, the descriptions of Begin’s actions and statements in this period are correct, to the best of my knowledge.

At the same time, there are two problems that impede my ability to support the publication of the article. The first is that most of the details presented here have already been published in books by Tom Segev and Zachi Shalom on the events of 1967, in the biography of Begin written by Shilon, and in articles by Goldstein on Begin’s activity before and during the Six Day War. The new quotations that the author adds do not change the picture painted by earlier studies. Similarly well-known is the author’s conclusion regarding the influence of the war and the occupation of the territories on Begin’s increasing strength and that of the Gahal Party. A book by Odi Lebel deals with the assimilation of the Revisionist narrative into the official state narrative in the wake of the war. Of course, it is clear that published sources can be used in new contexts in order to emphasize Begin’s particular actions and to cast him in a new light.

However, there is a second and more important problem. The article does not offer a clear thesis derived from the description of Begin’s moves. The fact that Begin displayed moderation and later pushed for and agreed to the occupation of the territories, and the fact that Israel’s victory in the war had a positive influence on his political power because his Greater Israel ideology became a mainstream opinion, is not itself a thesis

For this reason I would propose to the author to use the materials cited — as well as other materials —to shed new light on Begin. Here are a few suggestions of interesting questions that I thought of while reading the article which the author may address: Does Begin’s moderation before and at the beginning of the war indicate that there was a gap between his rhetoric and his true position? Was Begin himself trapped by a fear of events to come? Did Begin display a special “historical sense” regarding the occupation of Jerusalem? Or was he only one of many in the government who did? Can one point to a consistent pattern of moderation in his proposals during emergency periods? Recently, the minutes of the meetings of the Foreign Affairs and Security Committee during the Yom Kippur War were published and can be used for comparison.

What was Begin’s contribution to the decisions made by the government according to the testimony of other figures who were involved? How did senior military officials and government ministers relate to his proposals? What were the differences between Begin’s proposals and the positions of other leaders of the Herut movement, such as Badar, Meridor, and others? What were the differences between his approach to the territories captured in the war and that of members of the Greater Israel movement? After all, arguments from the religious tradition are not the same as historical arguments.

In conclusion, I think that, in its current configuration, the article is interesting, but it does not provide new information and does not offer a clear thesis. Sharpening the article in the ways that I proposed, or others, will make it more worthy of publication.