Article review:

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

Despite the fact that the right 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, and 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, 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), in order to underline 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, and he was unaware, for instance, of the compromise position of asking Ben-Gurion to return to serve as Prime Minister and of the differences between Moshe Dayan and Ben-Gurion on the necessity of 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,” but 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, and emphasized the fact that the operation in Lebanon was carefully planned while the in the Six Day War things “unfolded on their own accord” (See Aryeh Naor’s book *Kabinet ba-Milḥama* [The cabinet at war], as well as Shilon’s work). But aside from this, the descriptions of his 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 here have already been published in books by Tom Segev and Zachi Shalom on 1967, as well as in Begin’s biography by Shilon and in articles by Goldstein on Begin’s activity before and during the war. The new quotations that the author adds do not change the picture painted by earlier studies. Similarly, the author’s conclusion regarding the influence of the war — that is, the occupation of the territories — on Begin’s increasing strength and that of the Gahal party is well known (there is a book by Odi Lebel that 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 the 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, this is the 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, as well as the fact that the victory in the war had a positive influence on his political power because his Greater Israel ideology became a sort of mainstream opinion, is not itself a thesis

For this reason I would propose to the author to use the materials at his disposal — as well as other materials — in order to attempt to offer an answer to interesting questions that can shed a new light on Begin. Here are a few suggestions that I thought of while reading: 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, or perhaps 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 his contribution to the decisions taken by the government according to the testimony of other figures who were involved, and how did senior military officials and government ministers relate to his proposals? Perhaps it is also worthwhile to address the differences between Begin’s proposals and the positions of other leaders of the Herut movement, such as Badar, Meridor, and others? One can also consider the differences between his approach to the territories captured in the war and that of members of the Greater Israel movement, for after all, arguments from the religious tradition are not the same as historical argument?

In conclusion, I think that, in its current configuration, the article is interesting, but 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.