



The Systemic Failure of Israeli Public Diplomacy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Israel has not yet internalized the full value of either dynamic public diplomacy or sophisticated psychological warfare. Because revitalization of the country's public diplomacy bodies is highly unlikely in a system in which those bodies are dispersed among multiple ministerial and security frameworks, the public diplomacy system should be privatized.

The recent military campaign in the Gaza Strip was the primary action taken by the State of Israel in the face of rocket terrorism by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The same kind of asymmetrical confrontation is also the recipe for a potential confrontation with Hezbollah, should one break out.

Israel's accumulated experience in times of war shows a disturbing pattern that has become a ritual: a serious gap always emerges between the achievements of the military and the failure of national public diplomacy.

It appears that Israel has still not internalized the full value of either dynamic public diplomacy or sophisticated psychological warfare, despite the fact that from ancient times, military thinkers have classified warfare practices from these disciplines as power multipliers. The Chinese thinker and military strategist Sun Tzu, for example, stated more than 2,000 years ago that "we must subdue the enemy without fighting."

The fact that Israel, a democratic state, is forced to contend with terrorist and jihadist organizations that have been outlawed in many Western countries is an ideal starting point from which to make the country's diplomatic case.

Targeted public messages toward specific audiences in the international arena should focus on the jihadist characteristics of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in a

way that connects those organizations to significant terrorist elements, such as al-Qaida and ISIS, against which the legitimacy of fighting is undisputed.

This should be a winning card for Israel in its messaging toward the West. It goes unplayed, however, because Israeli diplomacy fails to adequately address the torrents of international anger that are always directed at Israel over specious claims of indiscriminate killing by the IDF of women and children. This claim is directly contrary to the facts, as Israel's air strikes—far from indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians—are meticulous surgical strikes designed specifically to target terrorists only and cause minimum harm to the uninvolved. The fact that this is the Israeli military's operational guideline when focusing on terrorist targets has not been effectively conveyed by Israel's diplomatic corps.

With regard to the most recent clash, Israeli diplomacy also failed to highlight that US government spokesmen, as well as other Western European governments, undermined the legitimacy of Israel's *casus belli* by ignoring Hamas's responsibility for initiating the campaign.

Israel consistently fails at the second most important element in the battle against Hamas and Islamic Jihad and thus finds itself, time and time again, under extreme international pressure to stop fighting before the goals of its operations are achieved. This pattern, which is repeated every time Israel is forced to defend its citizens against terrorist attack, illustrates the systemic incompetence of Israeli public diplomacy.

Israel is also failing on the operational propaganda side. In the absence of available broadcasting means in Arabic, Israel is not able to deliver real-time messages to the civilian population of the Gaza Strip. Israel's abandonment of the Arabic-language media spectrum results in the residents of the Gaza Strip being exposed exclusively to Aljazeera and Hamas propaganda. Rather than driving a wedge between Hamas and Gaza's civilian population, Israel allows the masses to identify themselves with the terrorist organizations. This in turn enables the terrorists' cynical exploitation of civilians as human shields to protect their hideouts and provide seemingly innocent camouflage for their personnel and weapons.

The systemic failure of Israeli public diplomacy is a longstanding open secret. Because the country's diplomatic bodies are dispersed among an assortment of ministerial and security frameworks, it is highly unlikely that the system as a whole will ever be strengthened and revitalized. The State Comptroller has tried to address Israel's diplomatic failures, but a formula to establish a central and synchronized public diplomacy body has not yet been found.

This systemic failure is unacceptable, and probably not fixable within the status quo. The inevitable solution is to privatize Israel's public diplomacy system and create a professional independent diplomatic body that will coordinate with official governmental bodies. It is essential that focused attention be paid to the need to solve Israel's public diplomacy problem.

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