



## Israel's PR Crisis and Policy Challenges

by Malka Daniels

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The continuing Gaza War has ignited global outrage, fueled not only by Hamas' attacks but also by the broader ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This situation evokes strong reactions due to historical parallels drawn by people worldwide. Protests and governmental pressures have reached unprecedented levels, overshadowing other humanitarian crises. Influenced by these analogies, media focus shapes foreign policies in ways that may not fully address the conflict's complexities. This has led to a PR crisis for Israel, marked by widespread negative perception and scrutiny, complicating efforts toward peaceful resolutions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for creating informed and effective policies that balance Israeli security with Palestinian aspirations.

The ongoing Israel-Hamas war has sparked global outrage, not merely due to Hamas' invasion and violence against Israelis on October 7th but because of the broader context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This conflict goes beyond borders and land rights, leading people to draw parallels with their own histories. The current wave of protests and the pressure on governments worldwide is unprecedented, extending across campuses and into political spheres. Understanding why the situation in Gaza elicits such strong reactions, even when other global conflicts result in similar or worse humanitarian crises, is crucial to creating tangible solutions. These responses shape foreign policies, often in ways that may not be fully informed

or appropriate. For these reasons, Israel is caught in a PR battle evident by widespread negative public perception and intense scrutiny that is proving difficult to manage and overcome.

The focus on Israel in global media, despite allegations of corruption and influence by Qatar and Iran proxies, as reported by the Times of Israel, can be explained through Yuen Khong's "Analogies at War." This theory suggests schema is the natural response to using their experiences to understand new and complex issues. This, in turn, influences foreign policy, especially during wartime. Incorrect analogical connections often lead to improper foreign policies, such as during the Vietnam War, when political leaders would draw on experiences from the Second World War. Analogically influenced policy decisions inevitably led to a prolonged and divisive battle. It is directly related to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war and how, despite Israel's public relations and diplomacy attempts, media focus often remains skewed, influencing international perceptions and complicating efforts toward peaceful resolutions.

The analogy theory applies broadly to any community or entity trying to understand an issue, highlighting the complexity due to each country's unique experiences and resulting in varied analogies for the same scenario. These inconsistencies emphasise the challenge of establishing consistent policies that would provide appropriate support that aid in the greater Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many of Israel's allies are struggling to find a balanced approach to policy reform, particularly as they address and attribute current challenges to past issues they wish to avoid repeating.

In North America, the education system emphasises the persecution of Indigenous communities, promoting education and empathy towards Indigenous peoples. The schema is applied to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, shaping public opinion and framing Israeli policies in terms of colonialism and apartheid. This portrays Israel as an oppressor parallel to European settlers in North America. These analogies, while resonant, can be overly simplistic. They ignore the unique historical, cultural, and political contexts of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, reducing a complex situation to a familiar narrative of colonial oppression.

Consequently, North American politicians have faced pressure to reassess arms sales to Israel, resulting in an embargo on future sales or a delay in such transactions. This

reaction highlights how analogical reasoning, though emotionally compelling, can lead to policy decisions that fail to address the nuanced realities of the Middle East conflict.

On the contrary, Germany's perception of Israel is heavily influenced by guilt and remembrance of the Holocaust. The Palestinian cause's historical associations with Nazism, including the Grand Mufti's meeting with Hitler, underscore Germany's support for Israel as an effort to reconcile Holocaust atrocities. The new citizenship law requiring applicants to accept Israel's right to exist demonstrates Germany's focus on the importance of a Jewish homeland and the need for its security especially through this war. Additionally, placing focus on a vital historical event, such as the Holocaust, provides an understanding of Israel's establishments, its relationship with its citizens, and the importance of its existence. Conversely, while positive reforms towards Israel are beneficial, a comprehensive understanding requires collective education on significant events like the Farhud, Ethiopian Aliyah, and the Spanish Inquisition. These events provide valuable insights into regional disputes and patterns of mass immigration, which can motivate other governments to implement similar beneficial reforms.

Foreign policy decisions by countries such as Ireland, Spain, and Norway advocating for the recognition of a Palestinian state reflect their respective historical and geopolitical contexts. These nations often perceive the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through lenses shaped by their experiences and priorities. Ireland, for instance, draws parallels with its own struggle for independence, viewing Palestinian aspirations through a similar lens of national self-determination. Ultimately, this historical connection leads nations to find novel policy recommendations, such as granting Palestinians their own statehood, without addressing the underlying issues that would ensure future security in the region. Israel views Hamas as analogous to ISIS controlling parts of Syria and Iraq and establishes that not well-informed policy reforms will lead to Hamas remaining in power, something Israel and allied countries wish to avoid. Using personal historical analogies as opposed to more nuanced and relevant regional experiences is ill-informed, yet recognizing and addressing such differences could lead to more sovereign and stable governance.

Meanwhile, South Africa's stance, exemplified by its International Court of Justice case accusing Israel of genocide, is informed by its own history of apartheid and

struggles against racial discrimination. This action underscores South Africa's solidarity with Palestinian rights and its advocacy for international legal scrutiny of Israeli policies. As the case is ongoing, it fuels Israel's PR crisis by underlining a double standard that does not permit Israel's right to defend itself, making it more difficult to come to terms with policies that would best put an end to the war. With an open case of alleged genocide, global governments are more pressured to account for these claims when shaping policies.

Israel has made significant efforts to shape international understanding of its position through diplomatic engagements, media campaigns, educational initiatives, and especially by showcasing their own analogies. Israel attempts to emphasize Holocaust education, fostering a deeper understanding of Israel's historical context and drawing similarities in the rise of anti-Semitism globally. Yet, this alone is insufficient to bridge the empathy gap with audiences who do not share this historical connection, while a large amount of misinformation circulating through media channels shapes public opinion. While these analogies resonate strongly through Jewish communities worldwide, it has sparked a conflict, resulting in efforts that attempt to undermine Israel's and Jewish people's experiences and perspectives. Israel continues to highlight hostages' stories, survivors' experiences, and tragedies, which have grown largely on social media but often become ineffective as people view Israeli suffering as parallel or justified to Palestinian suffering.

Misleading analogies have pushed an empathy gap, causing Israel's public diplomacy and relations crisis, making substantial foreign policies more difficult to achieve. A comprehensive understanding of the conflict is necessary for effective policy, and to achieve that, policy leaders must consider various contexts rather than relying on a single analogy. A nuanced understanding will promote productive policies that recognize Israel's right to exist while supporting long-term reforms for Palestinians.

Overall, addressing the reasons behind Israel's PR crisis provides a vital context for understanding why various leaders adopt different perspectives and policies regarding Israeli and Palestinian relations. Amid ongoing conflict and the imminent threat of further escalation, particularly with Hezbollah and Iran, security measures, public diplomacy, and enhanced military coordination among allied forces are needed to establish peace in the Middle East. This would counteract reforms that

would only prolong the war with Hamas and initiate further Middle Eastern conflict. To be informed of the past, although complex and difficult to place personal experience in, is the only way global governments can utilize the schema in a proactive manner.

*Malka Daniels, B. Comm, is a recent graduate of Toronto Metropolitan University, where she majored in Law and Business. She will soon begin her Policy Studies at Queen's University, focusing on competition, labor, and foreign policy. Malka has advocated for Jewish students and Holocaust education, with features on TV Ontario, CBC News, the Globe and Mail, and in university publications.*