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# Winning the Battle of the Narrative

## Herzliya Report

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This paper reflects the opinion of its authors only

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## Executive Summary

Israel's international standing is in dire straits, as the legitimacy of its policies, positions, military operations, and even its very existence as a Jewish-Democratic state, are constantly contested and, as some claim, its legitimacy abroad is being eroded. Clearly, Israel's national interests are severely constrained by its incapability to create, mobilize and sustain international support. Israel has a good story, but it must better engage itself in the "battle of the narrative" in order to be able to push its national interests and attain its operational objectives.

The purpose of this paper is therefore to address Israel's possible communication strategy, irrespective of other instruments that should be developed focusing on the sources of the soft war currently waged against Israel.

Israel first needs to formulate the message it wants to convey. A narrative needs to bring benefit and value, whereby benefit is more rational, and value more emotional. In order to elaborate a new narrative, Israel needs to define its character, what it wants to be about. Therefore, "branding Israel", i.e. defining its character, is the first step in building a communications strategy.

The main problem lies in the fact that Israel does not know what it wants to communicate and is therefore unable to formulate a message, let alone a strategy. Israel does not control its narrative, because not only it does not have one that is relevant today, but because Israel is still struggling to define and understand its identity.

The battle against Israel is multidimensional: Online, offline, in the Middle East, Europe, North America and beyond. It should be fought accordingly and Israel should therefore develop a multidimensional plan taking into account the recipient audiences, the Israeli leadership and the material it delivers. In order to then effectively execute its communication strategy, Israel needs to understand the recipient of the message it wants to deliver. It should be fought accordingly and Israel therefore needs to first acknowledge its own reality, irrelevant of the battle waged against it. This acknowledgment needs to be translated into a multidimensional plan taking into account the recipient audiences, the Israeli leadership and the material it delivers. In order to then effectively execute its communication strategy, Israel needs to understand the recipient of the message it wants to deliver.

A global communication campaign is tough and expensive and it requires discipline and a leadership capable of making decisions. Israel thus needs a change of paradigm in the decision makers' minds. It is crucial to force the system to tackle that issue. The leadership needs to be more decisive and more cohesive.

Finally, Israel should rely on new media as a case study for effectively communicating its strategic communication. New media diplomacy should be discussed both as a legitimate tool for influence and also as a somewhat menacing practice if used improperly. Web 2.0 internet environments such as

creation and distribution of user-generated content (UGC) in addition to spreading their own content by viral means, while creating long lasting relationships with the relevant audiences through social networks. The audience, serving as both the target and the channel for the distribution of messages, helps to raise the visibility of desired content on the Web through the use of social bookmarking sites, as well as applications and games that shown to be highly effective and engaging.

## **The Battle of the Narrative**

### **Background**

Israel's international standing is in dire straits, as the legitimacy of its policies, positions, military operations, and even its very existence as a Jewish-Democratic state, are constantly contested and, as some claim, its legitimacy abroad is being eroded. Clearly, Israel's national interests are severely constrained by its incapability to create, mobilize and sustain international support. Israel has a good story, but it must better engage itself in the "battle of the narrative" in order to be able to push its national interests and attain its operational objectives.

This paper reflects varying points of view raised before and during the 2010 Herzliya Conference and as such is a collection of various opinions and schools of thought. The purpose of this paper is therefore to address Israel's possible communication strategy, irrespective of other instruments that should be developed focusing on the sources of the soft war currently waged against Israel.

Two schools of thought exist when coming to explain criticism directed at Israel. The first refers to "soft critics" of Israel's policies, who are not opposed to Israel's right to exist and are primarily concerned with its policies. In that view, Israel's troubled international position is a direct result of the conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab world. Israel's questionable human rights record undermines its attempts in drawing support from Western Europe and from some audience in the US. The logic follows that once Israel reaches a political agreement with the Palestinians, the assault on Israel within the international arena will cease.

The second approach can be seen as a radicalized version of the "soft critics". It views the Arab-Israeli Conflict as only one dimension in multifaceted and well-coordinated attacks launched by anti-Israeli elements. Those critics will most certainly remain as vocal and obstructive as they are today, regardless of any changes in Israel's policies. Anti-Israeli feelings have become epidemic and cannot be changed by language or behavior. Indeed, Israel is now engaged in a battle that goes far beyond improving its image; it has become a battle for Israel's legitimacy as a state. There is today a direct, systematic, orchestrated attack on Israel's policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians that seem to be effective and might turn into an existential threat if not dealt with; Israel is too often compared to an "apartheid state" as the country is associated with warfare and occupation, and calls to take example of South Africa and to impose sanctions against Israel are becoming more and more common.

In the Western world, Israel went from being identified with the kibbutz to "*kibush*" (occupation in Hebrew). Western media and public opinion often tends to underestimate the military challenges Israel is facing. Commonly, Israel is challenged by international media, public opinion and decision-makers in three main aspects: 1. The asymmetric warfare Israel is waging against the Palestinians; 2. The attempts to delegitimize the existence of the state – Israel as "born in sin" at the expense of the

Palestinian state; 3. Calls for a one-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians in which the Palestinian population will outnumber the Jewish one, leading Israel to choose between its Jewish and democratic identities. Israel's detractors talk in terms of the collapse and breakdown of the country as a consequence of its policies. This mode of discourse is also used by Iran, Hizballah and Hamas.

Military operations are an important factor in creating discrepancies within Western public opinion. There is a well-known scenario that is displayed in every war – most recently in the Second Lebanon War and the Operation Cast Lead in Gaza - with the following pattern: Arab provocation, massive Israeli response, combat taking place in densely populated areas, the broadcast of images of Israeli "atrocities" by Hamas or Hizballah. This pattern may be defined as a "win-win game": Hamas or Hizballah win whether their own combatants and civilians get killed or whether Israelis get killed, usually because of what is commonly called Israel's disproportionate use of force. As a direct consequence, there arises a two-way feedback loop: Not only do wars affect public opinion; public opinion also influences the battlefield. This situation is affecting Israel's diplomatic credibility as well as its operational room to maneuver. It is also potentially damaging Israel's ability to defend itself when needed.

There is no surprise element involved in this war of communication: Israel is fully aware of this second battlefield, yet its reaction is far from being satisfactory. [In fact, Israel does not seem capable of coming up with a quick and effective response, even though it is crucial that it adapt its discourse to the communication "battlefield". Israel's strategic approach should be focused both on immediate and on long-term responses, both as diplomatic offensives as well as addresses to the broader public. Israel's predicament needs to be elaborated-upon and explained not only as a local issue, but as a predicament that concerns the West as a whole. Indeed, Israel needs to be able to communicate that it is facing terrorism, which is a global challenge, not one that Israel is alone in confronting.

### **Strategic Communication: Crafting the Message**

Israel first needs to formulate the message it wants to convey. A narrative needs to bring benefit and value, whereby benefit is more rational, and value more emotional. In order to develop a new narrative, Israel needs to define its character, what it wants to be about. Therefore, "branding Israel", i.e. defining its character, is the first step in building a communications strategy. Before Israel communicates its essence, it needs to understand what its "brand" is and then build a platform. Finally, a basic rule of communication stipulates that the message must be about oneself and not about the recipient, since messages crafted only to create an impression with their recipients only convey information about the message itself, rather than about oneself.

The main problem lies in the fact that Israel does not know what it wants to communicate and is therefore unable to formulate a message, let alone a strategy. Israel does not control its narrative, because not only it does not have one that is of current relevance, but because Israel is still struggling to define and understand its identity.

Israel's messages, often contradictory, that it does communicate are not well distributed in online media, including social networks and blogs that are increasingly relevant in shaping messages and

influencing public opinion today. Perhaps it is well that this is so, at least until Israel is able to determine and focus its message.

When referring to the content of the message, opinions differ on whether the focus should be on current reality, explaining the policies of the democratically elected government, or whether the message should be focused on audience and determining the best methods of influencing public opinion. Some argue that Israel is much more preoccupied with the way the world perceives it and the way it should respond than with formulating its narrative. Israel is not engaged in communicating its essence, in expressing the nature of the Israeli people or what its reality is about. Its current message is that it is not a Levantine conflict-ridden country - it is just like the rest of the world. This message is not sustainable and neither media nor public opinion can adhere to it. Israel is unique in own combination of features and therefore needs its own platform.

Moreover, in the domain of public opinion facts are less important than perception. For example, under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu there is less settlement activity and more freedom of movement in the West Bank, yet most people still perceive him as more rightist than his predecessor. Therefore it is important to deliver a message that is perhaps more simple and therefore easier to integrate. For instance, during Operation Cast Lead it was impossible to explain that Israel was fighting against a government that was launching rockets at innocent Israeli civilians, because the casualties and accordingly, the images, did not sustain the narrative, i.e. the low number of casualties and relatively small damage to the Israeli side during the operation, led international public opinion to reject the Israeli military response. Israel's narrative was far more complex than that of the Hamas-led Gaza and accordingly was not absorbed by the public. In contrast, an example of a message that is effective and easy to absorb is that Israel, having made peace with Egypt and Jordan, now seeks peace with the Palestinians. This is a very simple yet powerful message that gives Israel credibility, if accompanied by concrete steps on the ground. Finally, Israel's communication tools and its framing of content also need to be adjusted: Israel's emphasis has to become more visual. "Hasbarah's" text-based attempts at explanation of the conflict are sorely deficient. Israel needs to project far more pictorial imagery and indeed to develop a visual language as a substitute to meeting visual challenges with text-only replies. Battlefield images to date have been overwhelmingly to Israel's detriment. The concrete, repetitive and deadly imagery being used to prove Israeli brutality is a problem that Israel has to confront on a daily basis. The military should be made a partner in this campaign and deliver true pictures of war, showing the reality of urban warfare - with its enemies purposely fighting from within densely populated areas.

Multiple approaches exist regarding the strategy that Israel should adopt. The first approach argues that in order to effectively brand itself, Israel should include the conflict - simply because Israel beyond the conflict is a fiction both to the world and to itself. Conflict is the strongest narrative vehicle in all communication and is the only narrative Israel truly has, given that all attempts from 1967 to date to ignore the conflict in communication have been regarded as disingenuous at best. If a study were to be made on the perceived characterization of Israeli reality, the notions of conflict and war would be the first to appear. In that sense, the gap between the way the world perceives Israelis and the opinion they have of themselves is narrower than one would presume. For that reason, Israel's communication needs to embody the conflict. A country is not only a product, it is a living organism. Branding principles can apply as long as all the characteristics of the organism are taken into account; nothing

can be left out. The branding should be based on the true nature of Israel, rather than denying it. Israel's branding lies in its difficulties and challenges, and when trying to communicate itself to the world Israel should incorporate every relevant element of its existence into this brand. It is important to add that countries, unlike products, do great harm to their brands with any attempt at "spin". The positive message about the advantages of Israel should be delivered truthfully and in context, and that context is the conflict. In fact, Israel's technological, scientific and cultural achievements are conducted in a style that is typical of its conflicting nature. The Haiti crisis, and the stepping up of Israel (with its military hospital), is the latest clear example of this. Once the Israeli message is honest and integrates the conflict into its communication platform, Israel can slowly regain a full partnership in the region's narrative.

A second approach stresses the importance of Israeli policy and diplomacy standing for something more than the conflict alone, principles and actions more universal than the national interest. Israel has managed to transform an East European-style socialist economy into a thriving, modern global economy. It is also, alongside the US, Australia and Canada, the most successful country in absorption of immigration in the Western world. Transforming an economy and a society is a great achievement and it delivers a very positive message, one that is universal - not only Jewish or Israeli. Israel should tell its true story, one that is about both unique and universal. Israel is in large measure responsible for its own negative international perception. When it has to speak to the world, it communicates its position exclusively vis-à-vis the conflict. This approach, namely the Hasbarah paradigm, which explains or, perhaps more accurately, attempts to explain the conflict - embodies the view that it can build a relation between Israel and the rest of the world by making cold clinical, historical, factual statements. This paradigm has largely failed. In most countries, the majority of public opinion is not interested in what Israel has to say about the conflict. Israel needs to restore – rather than create – its relevance in the world, and it should do so by communicating its successes and advantages. Israel is a great "product" in a variety of ways: Art, culture, people, international aid programs, etc. – but that message has yet to be delivered. It is crucial to improve Israel's performance around the world, by creating something that is both authentic and attractive. Studies have shown that Israelis see themselves as modern, creative, friendly and they do not place the conflict as a primary characteristic. Israel needs to be branded according to its self-perception. Instead of emphasizing its disadvantages, Israel should project its relative advantages.

A third – perhaps middle ground approach - argues that Israel cannot shift the world's perception away from the conflict but should communicate only its specific advantages. Universally, Israel's core existence and therefore image, is about the conflict and its complex geopolitical situation – and whether one agrees with Israeli policy or not is irrelevant. Narratives of victimization and survival, adopted by Israel over the years, are no longer material to its diplomatic efforts and its dialogue with the West. In any event, Israel's current detractors capitalize on the very same narratives to achieve and mobilize support to their own ends. Moreover, there is a need for a new narrative as an alternative for the old Zionist narrative. Until the 1960s, the story of Israel was a powerful and emotional one wherein Israel was a messenger of hope. As in the old narrative, the new one should also encompass hope; aspects can include renewable energy, creativity and growth, unprecedented research in fields in which there Israel has clear advantage, including growth technologies adapted to the desert and renewable energy. In that communication strategy, ignoring the conflict is not an option, but today,

Israel deals exclusively with crisis management and that alone is no solution. It certainly has to have a rapid response team to manage the conflict, but it also needs to find niche markets and use the internet to push its products – whether it is a place, a concept or a person. By doing so, it will create a holistic personality for itself. By making it more viable, this will not only improve Israel's image but also its economy.

The battle against Israel is multidimensional: Online, offline, in the Middle East, Europe, North America and beyond. It should be fought accordingly, as a global phenomenon, and Israel should therefore develop a multidimensional plan taking into account the recipient audiences, the Israeli leadership and the message it delivers.

### **Target audiences**

In order to elaborate its communication strategy, Israel needs to understand the recipient of the message it seeks to deliver. It needs to have a more coherent approach with clearly defined targeted audiences and focused objectives.

It is a crucial mistake for Israeli politicians to distinguish between home and global audiences in their modes of address. The relevant world-wide audiences such as university campuses, administrative elites and decision makers are all of equal importance. In addition, Israel needs to address not only passive Western for whom the conflict is not directly relevant, but also in the Arab world, to include both decision-makers and the Arab street at large.

Views may differ as to what the priority target audience is. Some believe in the potential positive effect of engaging parts of Western societies currently apathetic to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, while others strongly underline the need to target specific audiences abroad, with political elites being first and foremost. Where most agree is on the fact that different messages should be tailored to different audiences.

Apart from the influential role of leaders who dominate the centers of cultural influence, there is the another element of the global public who are largely indifferent to Israel. Estimates are that around 70 to 75 percent of the public in Europe and the US is indifferent to the conflict and does not have a clear understanding of its complexity. Policy is not determined by the public at large but rather by the 20 to 25 percent of the population with the power of public influence. While it is important to communicate with both influencers and the public at large, these two segments require different approaches. Contrary to previous official assumption, most Londoners have no interest in the subject, and only a very small group of “de-legitimizers” are active on the subject. Nonetheless, this small group can in fact influence what are called “soft opinionizers”. Research has shown that this indifferent majority associates Israel with two principal aspects: The ultra-orthodox community and the military. There is generally no conception of Israel’s majority secular population or of the diversity of the Israeli society in general.

Understanding the context in which the public receives information creates opportunities to leverage it to Israel’s advantage. In approaching the Western world Israel needs to adjust its message to suit existing forums of cultural hegemony or to create new networks to communicate its message. If these centers of cultural hegemony cannot be addressed, battlefields need to be chosen where positive

results can be achieved. New platforms can be created in the media, research institutes, newspapers, online publications and the like. As an example, if departments of Middle Eastern Studies in Western universities are dominated by far left ideology, Middle Eastern Studies can also be taught in departments of Counter-Terrorism Studies, in which Israeli think-tanks, universities and scholars have a distinct and recognized advantage. Efforts should also be made to engage friendly individuals or groups such as pro-Israeli international figures and celebrities who can help in the battle. Moreover, there is enormous potential within Jewish communities abroad whose members are involved in politics and public service, business, universities etc.

However, before launching any campaign there needs to be extensive research on the networks and the hubs of the relevant target audiences. Only through such preparation can a campaign be effective. There are active hubs worldwide working on the issue and can influence public opinion in a manner far beyond their numbers. Networks that operate within and between the hubs make a powerful link between Islamic groups and the organized left and parallel action is possible in the pro-Israel camp. It is of some importance to identify the actors in these hubs, the catalysts that collect information, distribute it and organize actions; an inventory of involved organizations should be made.

London is an example of a hub with a disproportionate influence on the rest of the world. This influence expresses itself first and foremost through the British media, which has a great impact beyond its own borders, for reasons beyond its use of the English language, the lingua franca of global communications.

- The various universities that attract students and academics from all over the world constitute another hub that should be targeted. These students enter an arena that is dominated by the liberal left and under the title of academic freedom allow themselves to distribute a narrative that includes the de-legitimization of Israel.
- NGOs – mainly those active in human rights, are almost by definition opposed to Israeli policies - are a very important hub that is gaining influence, through lobbying and media coverage.
- The last hub of influence is the legal one, in which the international law is used in a negative way to further question the legitimacy of the Israeli political establishment, thereby reflecting on the legitimacy of the state these functionaries represent. Furthermore, legislation prohibiting incitement should be encouraged on the juridical front, and international anti-terror laws should be updated and adjusted to enable Western countries, including Israel, greater freedom in their war on terror.

### **Strategy in Israeli Leadership**

A global communication campaign is complex and expensive, requiring discipline and a leadership capable of making decisions. Israel thus needs a change of paradigm in the decision makers' minds. Nothing will change until the leaders of the nation decide that the image of Israel is a strategic issue. There can be private, semi-private or even governmental initiatives taken by well-wishing citizens or friends of Israel, but until this change is made, it will never succeed in developing a meaningful

campaign. It is crucial, therefore, to force the system to tackle the issue. In other words, Israeli leadership needs to be more decisive and more cohesive.

Currently, interdepartmental or interagency conflicts tend to hijack all efforts to lead a campaign. There are currently some 120 organizations that are involved in pro-Israel campaigning, not to mention the efforts of Israel's embassies and diplomatic missions. Each of these organizations focuses on its own self-defined target groups. Each also has its own "proprietary" narrative. That said, these organizations have a good understanding of the reality on the ground, but are prone to pitfalls.

A typical example is the response of a number of these groups to the boycott on Israeli academics. Instead of arguing that it would be morally wrong to hinder academics, they maintained that Israeli academics are the most liberal element within Israeli society and because of this the boycott would be counterproductive. In addition, they conceded the point that if the political orientation of Israeli academics had been further to the right wing, the boycott would have been justified. Adding to this difficult situation, the fact that the disengagement from Gaza had been described by some as a step to peace has ultimately, though unintentionally, proved to be misleading as reality has developed otherwise.

The ability of the Israeli establishment to effectively coordinate between public advocacy organizations is often lacking. One proposed solution to coordinate the totality of Israel's public advocacy is to create a national organization. Just like there is Mossad for intelligence and special operations abroad, there needs to be a special agency for public advocacy. Such an agency would handle the various aspects involved: Religion, international law, politics, incitement, curricula, etc. It would have to coordinate with other relevant government agencies and to collaborate with organizations and persons abroad that will be identified as relevant to this effort. The options discussed so far are: (a) the establishment of a special unit under Israel's National Security Council, which would methodically analyze Arab propaganda and initiate messages which will be systematically disseminated by Israeli spokespersons and by pro-Israeli organizations and activists abroad; or (b) the establishment of an entity within the Israeli intelligence community that would collect, analyze and disseminate information, initiate "operations" in areas relevant to Israel's public relations campaigns, and direct the intelligence agencies toward thwarting anti-Israeli public relations campaigns. An attempt to coordinate such an effort was pursued during the Second Lebanon War. The government then proved unable to effectively distribute information and to deliver a unified message. As a result of the war, the "National Public Advocacy Agency" (Hasbarah Leumit) was created with the aim of distributing information to the Israeli public, to the international public and within diplomatic circles. Despite its small size and a lack of government funding, this agency has been able to carry out a focused and concentrated effort, bringing together the Army Spokesperson, the public relations sector of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Security Service and the police to coordinate national advocacy.

Coordination and resources are still lacking, however. The government also needs to make greater efforts in communicating with the many foreign journalists who are present in Israel and who generate the picture that is distributed to the global community. Moreover, the abilities to communicate with the Arabic media are limited and should be expanded further.

## **New Media as a case study: How to use New Media in Israel's Public Advocacy**

There is no doubt that "new media" forums are very quickly gaining increasing influence. New media, which includes internet based news-outlets, social networks, blogging and mini-blogging communities, has become increasingly important for channeling messages and mobilizing public opinion. Its penetration is reflected in the attention it receives from political and commercial actors. New media networks have been expanding rapidly in the past months: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and their new media cousins have, with lightning speed, become the most utilized and popular media forums worldwide.

There is, however, disagreement about whether new media should be the focus of Israel advocacy efforts. Those in favor point to its increasing impact and its potential for mobilizing masses of adherents to the cause. To this camp, new media is a must, as Web 2.0 advocacy is seen to be playing an increasingly meaningful role in diplomacy, directly affecting a state's "smart power". Nonetheless, new media should be used as a tool in the larger context of a strategic communication and not as a strategy in itself. On the other side of the spectrum, there are those who argue that one should not overestimate the importance of the new media since most people still rely more on conventional, non-interactive forms of media. Indeed, although the trajectory of media developments points toward the internet and new media, polls show that most people still receive news from conventional news outlets: BBC, CNN, Fox News and leading local newspapers. In order to impact today's opinion makers, they maintain, working through conventional media is still the chief objective.

New media diplomacy should be viewed both as a legitimate tool for influence and also as a somewhat menacing practice if used improperly. The "smart power" concept proposed by international relations scholar Joseph Nye states that governments should use not only their "hard power" (i.e. forceful methods such as combat or economic pressure) but also their "soft power" (i.e. the cultural values associated with it) to influence others. "Smart power" is the combination of both. One aspect of smart power that government could and should use is the internet. Web 2.0 internet environments allow for the creation and distribution of user-generated content (UGC) in addition to being useful in spreading sovereign content by viral means while creating long lasting relationships with the relevant audiences through social networks. The audience, serving as both the target and the channel for the distribution of messages, can help to raise the visibility of desired content on the Web through the use of social bookmarking sites, as well as applications and games that shown to be highly effective and engaging.

On the other side of the coin, new media forums create situations wherein messages are not unified. Therefore, it is desirable to have them coordinated by the government should it desire to send a coherent and unified message. Furthermore, to the degree that government can be present and control outgoing messages, it should try to unify these messages and make them coherent. The government should get engaged in the platforms of the new media – for if it does not, it will lose its legitimacy. That said, it should not do this alone as this will undoubtedly be perceived as propaganda. It should rather mobilize large numbers of users to create the needed large streams of information.

It is also argued that the former approach of branding through one voice is not relevant for the situation today. Attempts at bringing one unified message to the world will fail. What is needed is the "wisdom of the crowds" and "new generation content". Therefore, the government needs independent mediators to distribute the message, which can include, among others, NGOs and

academic institutions. Different bodies need to be given the opportunity to broadcast the unified message in their own distinct ways. The government can recruit professionals and efforts can also be made to locate and contact journalists who write both for both new and traditional media. On the web, small groups of people who are often marginal, i.e. ideological hubs, can generate political support through networks that serve as multipliers for these messages.

Try as one might, government and official publications on the web are generally disregarded as propaganda. Yet successful web-based political campaigns demonstrate that new media has great advantages, such as creating positive resonance and reaching wide audiences while using few resources. A government agency could monitor what the positive messages are and these can be distributed further and search engines can be controlled through "search engine optimization" (SEO).

### **Government and New Media**

Government should maintain a web presence on three interlinked levels: Content, identity and interaction. Interaction is the delivery mechanism of the first two concepts, which can be summarized by three goals: Distribution of content, development of a lasting relationship with a wide audience and creation of a community of citizens who express their commitment to the state by being a part of the state's network. The state should offer help and support to local and world citizens who want to use their skills to benefit it.

The state must understand and deploy a wide range of new media techniques in order to create an efficient network of online influence. One example can be based on a model of a new media operation center operated by an NGO / research institute to mediate between the state and the networks. The center would operate continually and reach full potential in times of crises, activating the temporarily-dormant networks it created. The center's goal would be multiple: It would establish a system of monitoring and distribution of information; identify and promote user generated content in real time; implement a new approach toward crisis management with new media technologies; develop cooperation with social networks; develop new online tools for approaching foreign journalists; and present a system that makes possible effective interaction and cooperation between various platforms and dimensions of the information ecosystem. This center should be constructed from four small target-oriented units: A content monitoring unit, the goal of which would be to develop data mining methods to find correlations in an information-overloaded reality through various data mining techniques and a distribution unit that would promote content on multiple platforms using SEO techniques. It would also have a social networks unit that would develop a lasting relationship with key social networks in various locations and facilitate collaboration within these networks. Finally, it would have a journalism unit that would be in charge of online interaction with a social network of professional journalists.

New media networks present the opportunity to mobilize large numbers of people to fight the information threats that Israel is facing. Research shows that people find information credible when it is passed on by people within their networks, since users of the new platforms rely on information distributed by friends. The advantage of new media in this instance, is that it eliminates the need for government approval and large numbers of people can be mobilized. Worldwide, there are many Israelis who have solidarity and a national connection with Israel who would be able to distribute a

pro-Israel message. This potential should be utilized by bringing them to the battlefield. The fact that people distribute different messages in this case should be seen as an advantage. In fact, differences evaporate while responding to groups that try to delegitimize Israel; the message in these instances distances itself from rightist or leftist political orientations and becomes focused on the basic right of the Jewish people to a national homeland. Moreover, media forums should be controlled and activated at all times, both during crises and during times of relative quiet.

On the other hand, new media poses a series of challenges to official Israeli communications planners. Widely used by pro-Palestinian organizations, and a vehicle for informal communication, it is not the easiest fit for the Israeli government. Non-governmental, radical and anti-Israeli organizations acting as middlemen for the Palestinian cause use the internet to spread political messages and to recruit support. The Israeli government, according to the proponents of the new media, will have to adapt to new rules – generating and distributing content, but not having full control over it. But in reality, in order to succeed online one has to detach oneself from strictly official messages and to develop an online “personality”. Furthermore, one also cannot expect to control the content of all outgoing messages. Since the new media is a free enterprise, it can only be used through outsourcing. The Israeli government cannot do this alone; the use of NGOs and academic institutions is critical to Israel’s online success.