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Israel's military public diplomacy evolution: Historical and conceptual dimensions

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ABSTRACT

This study provides an historical overview of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit (ISU) from the early years of the State of Israel until 2009. Analyzing five periods during which the ISU played a key role in Israel's public diplomacy, this research sheds light on the challenges the ISU faced in different periods and circumstances and examines how the ISU tried to modify its methods and actions in response to geopolitical changes and media development, albeit not always successfully. The study suggests better understanding the adaptation process by applying a three-layer framework for analysis: the tactical layer, the strategic layer and the perceptional layer. The findings of this work demonstrate that in adapting to new circumstances, the ISU focused mainly on the tactical response level, with the result that it did not undertake any review or debate over the need for deeper perceptional changes in ISU policies.

1. Introduction

For many years, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Spokesperson's Unit (ISU) has served as an integral factor in Israel's public diplomacy (Limor & Nossek, 2006; Yehezkeli, 2009). Public diplomacy is defined as "direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments" (Malone, 1985, p. 199). Since Israel's inception as a state, influencing Israeli and international public opinion was and remains an integral and key factor in the state's war management. These military efforts to influence public opinion are also known as Military Public Diplomacy (Tal-Saranga, 2012). This study examines different eras in the ISU's history, covering over 60 years of its existence. The ISU has frequently coped with complicated situations arising from the geopolitical reality of the Middle East. Since its first days, the ISU has always operated in an environment of permanent military conflict (Alovich, 2013; Catignani, 2009; Limor, Leshem, & Mandelzis, 2014). Former IDF Spokesperson Nahman Shai depicted the complexity of the position of the unit. "In times of crises he/she is sent by the military and the government to meet the media on the public relations battlefield and ends up standing in the middle ground, caught in the crossfire" (Shai, 1998, p. 3). The constant conflicts in this region create intense interest among the foreign media, resulting in approximately 350 foreign reporters being permanently situated in Israel. During periods when tensions escalate, it is estimated that over 1000 foreign journalists arrive in Israel to cover events (Katz, 2012). This research examines the ISU's evolution within the context of Cutlip and Center's "Adjustment and Adaptation Model" while seeking to clarify both the main challenges the ISU faced throughout the years and how it responded to them.

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2. The military-media relationship

In the modern era, military leaders have always sought to influence public opinion (Hallin, 1986; Morrison & Tumber, 1988; Tumber & Palmer, 2004). The factor of public relations was a key component in war efforts long before President Dwight D. Eisenhower acknowledged that "public opinion wins wars" (Parry, 2014, p. 23). Numerous studies have analyzed different zones of war and conflict, frequently addressing similar dilemmas, such as credibility, ethics, patriotism, morale issues, freedom of press vs. national security, professionalism, objectivity, military media strategies, manipulations, spins and their implications on democratic societies, etc. (Adams, 1986; Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Andersen, 2006; Hiebert, 2003; Kamalipour & Snow, 2004; Maltby, 2013; Segal, 2009; Taylor, 2003; Wyatt, 1995). The extensive research on the military-media relationship consistently indicates that military forces are not eager to adopt two-way communications and dialogue, especially during wartime (Miller, 2004; Rid, 2007; Solomon, 2005).

Several important studies have provided overviews of the military-media relationship within the context of an historical timeline (Carruthers, 2000; Hudson & Stanier, 1998; McLaughlin, 2002; Young & Jesser, 1997). Knightley (2001) demonstrates how easily the propaganda machines of wars kept on running for decades due to the sensitivities of citizens and the media correspondents among them about wartime. The comprehensive perspective of a long historical period reveals patterns that may otherwise be missed. Consequently, this research is premised on the assumption that examining a longer historical period can provide greater insights into the complex relationships between the media and the military.

3. Israeli media-military relationship

Existing research regarding the IDF Spokesperson's Unit offers models and theories for understanding the complexities of the mutual relationship between the IDF and the media both in Israel and abroad (Cohen, 2009; Doron, 2006; Lebel, 2008; Shai, 2013; Tal-Saranga, 2012). Limor & Nossek (2006) contend that the ISU is continually fluctuating between openness and opaqueness because its activities are affected by so many internal and external factors. Some studies offer operative recommendations for improving the ISU, while others claim that there is a need for an in-depth change in its overall policy rather than merely in its public relations (Balint, 2000; Bart, 2009). Several studies focus on specific incidents and the IDF's responses to them (Katz, 2012; Limor & Leshem, 2015; Rapaport, 2010). More recent studies focus on contemporary issues of the scope and nature of the new media and the utilization of social networks (Caldwell, Menning, & Murphy, 2009; Heemsbergen & Lindgren, 2014).

A critical view of the ISU can be found in the work of Toledano (Toledano, 2010; Toledano & McKie, 2013), who claims that due to the cultural and social climate in Israel, in which the IDF is highly trusted by a society that deeply values the defense system, it is very difficult to criticize its deficiencies. This is despite the fact that the IDF and its ISU branch were exposed as being evasive and incorrect on several occasions (Toledano & McKie, 2013). Caspi and Limor argued that "the defense system institutionalized control over information gathering by establishing a procedure wherein appointment of military correspondents is subject to approval by the IDF authorities." According to them, the 'fear of losing accreditation undoubtedly persuaded many military correspondents to toe the line' (Caspi & Limor, 1999, p. 264). Caspi and Limor also criticized the "filtering" procedure used by the ISU. "Filtering" is considered a unique method applied in the ISU, by which items are published in the media only after receiving the approval of the IDF spokesperson, "with no changes, abridgment or commentary liable to be perceived as contrary to the official line" (Caspi & Limor, 1999). This filtering tool actually served the ISU for many years as an indirect censorship platform.

4. Theoretical framework

Despite the obvious relevance of public relations theory, it is the basis of only a few studies analyzing the ISU (Limor & Leshem, 2015; Toledano, 2010; Toledano & McKie, 2013). This study proposes discussing the evolution of the ISU in light of Cutlip and Center's "Adjustment and Adaptation Model." In the early 1950s, Cutlip and Center suggested that a key component in public relations is the ability to mediate between the organization and its environment and introduced the "Adjustment and Adaptation Model" (Cutlip & Center, 1952). The model emphasized the importance of continually monitoring the organization's social environment and adjusting to it accordingly (Cutlip, 1991). This led to a wider conceptual debate among scholars regarding the centrality of adaptation as a key component in public relations (Hannan & Freeman, 1989; Long & Hazelton, 1987; Everett, 2001) and its strong ties to organizational change, strategic management, strategic control, and organizational legitimacy (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2007; Grunig & Repper, 1992; Patel, Xavier, & Broom, 2005; Verhoeven, Zerfass, & Tench, 2011). The importance for organizations of staying informed, scanning the environment, and adjusting to unknown conditions, new circumstances, and changing social and cultural values, continues to occupy scholars in contemporary studies (Broom, 2009; Dougall, 2005; Nothhaft & Wehmeier, 2007; Ristino, 2008; Strandholm & Kumar, 2003). Even in the field of national security, which is commonly considered more sensitive to sharing information and communicating with audiences, the need to adapt to new circumstances is broadly discussed (Cunningham, 2010; Gilmore & Osial, 2012; Pötzsch, 2015; Stavridis, 2007; Ward, 2011).

Despite the rich literature that supports the importance of adaptation, certain barriers and complexities were addressed by several scholars. Hannan and Freeman (1989) identified the force of inertia as a barrier to organizational changes, which could be created by internal and external factors, and Scott (2003) emphasized that organizations perceive their environment in a selective and subjective manner. Ristino claimed that adaptation always occurs within a specific set of norms (Ristino, 2008). The important discussion regarding the need to adjust on the one hand, and external limitations and cultural barriers on the other hand, may prove useful in arriving at a better understanding of the ISU's evolution. Within this theoretical context, we seek to determine whether the ISU

succeeded in adapting txo new realities and dynamic environments over the course of five wars.

5. Methodology

The study offers an analysis of five periods during which the ISU played an essential role in Israel's public diplomacy. The five cases are the War of Independence (1948), the Six Day War (1967), the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Gaza War/Operation Cast Lead (2009). While two major events in the 1980s, the First Lebanon War and the First Intifada (Palestinian uprising), are considered key milestones in the ISU's evolution, they could not be included with the other cases, because these events took place over several years. The inability to clearly determine their time frames obviously differentiates them from the cases chosen. However, in order to better understand later events, the challenges faced during the relevant years will be briefly reviewed.

Triangulation was applied both by using multiple methods for collecting data and by relying on multiple sources of data (Merriam, 2009; Richards, 2011), including national security journals, annual journalists' publications, academic journals, official reports and more. Additionally, this research relies on semi-structured interviews with three former IDF spokespersons: Aryeh Shalev, the spokesperson during the 1967 Six Day War; Miri Regev, the spokesperson during the Second Lebanon War; and Avi Benayahu, the spokesperson during the Gaza War. The latter two were interviewed twice: Regev on July 29, 2008 and January 9, 2011; and Benayahu on November 26, 2009 and January 5, 2011. The interviews lasted 90–120 min.

6. The ISU in five wars

6.1. The war of independence (1948): struggling for existence

The War of Independence began directly after the UN partition resolution of November 1947. The young state confronted the armies of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq immediately after declaring its independence (Lorch, 1961). During the war there was an urgent need to reorganize the military's public relations mechanism which at the time barely existed (Grevitzki, 1949; Ostfeld, 1994; Yagar, 1986). Tight control over information, which was exercised during the British Mandate which lasted until 1948, was adopted by Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who claimed that the young state could not allow itself to leave the media unsupervised (Caspi & Limor, 1999; Goren, 1975). Following a meeting between the media and the government's representatives, fifteen "don'ts" regarding military matters were formulated and adopted as guidelines by newspapers editors (Mann, 2012). The Israeli journalist was required not only to keep silent about military information, but also not to harm citizens' morale (Mann, 2012, 2015).

At that time, a major governmental and military challenge was to unify the different Jewish movements, which had frequently clashed during the pre-state period, under the united Israeli military organ of the IDF (Gelber, 1987). Israel Galili, a close advisor to PM Ben-Gurion, suggested setting up a public relations staff within the IDF's General Staff to ensure that the military would speak in one voice (Gelber, 2000).

In February of 1948, an information function was integrated into the military censorship system. This move appears somewhat questionable and riddled with internal contradictions, as it represents an odd combination of the very conflicting functions of controlling information on the one hand and of generating publicity on the other. This information function was eliminated after the establishment of Israel's Military Intelligence Service, and the responsibility for censorship was assigned to an independent department detached from the Spokesperson's Unit (Gelber, 2000).

When the battles of the War of Independence started, tight supervision was exercised over the movement of reporters. The head of the Intelligence Operations Department (IOD) clearly instructed that reporters could visit the units only under the tight supervision and escort of intelligence officers (Gelber, 2000). Reporters were dependent on the good will of the IOD, which held two press briefings a day to disseminate information (Ostfeld, 1994). The censorship system, although rather tight during the early years of the state, was not capable of hermetically preventing sensitive information from being publicized in the international media (Mann, 2012). In response, it was decided to embed a squad of two Israeli reporters and a photographer into every IDF division to document the division's activities and to provide material to refute the opponents' statements (Gelber, 2000). The division was ordered to quickly deliver all the material to the intelligence headquarters so it could be released immediately after classification.

Between March and April of 1948, a military press unit was established with the mission of gathering information on the progress of the war and transferring it to the media (Ibid). The unit was also responsible for briefing local and foreign correspondents. At the same time, Israeli military correspondents, embedded in different divisions' headquarters and subordinate to the brigade intelligence officers, were asked to swiftly provide information on the progress of the war. The press unit became the main point of contact between the media and the military, subject to the Operations Department (Ostfeld, 1994).

Moshe (Moish) Pearlman, the man who led the ISU in its early years, was considered by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion a perfect fit for the position. Born in London in 1911, he had fought as an artillery officer in North Africa and Greece during World War II and had been honored for his bravery. He had written for major newspapers around the world. After immigrating to Palestine in 1947, Pearlman was appointed the IDF's spokesperson following the declaration of the State of Israel, in effect, laying the foundations for the ISU. Under his leadership, public relations were characterized by a very centralized and individualistic style of management. The lack of budget and qualified people at the time also contributed to this organizational approach. Pearlman's main worries were justifying Israel's existence as an independent state on the basis of the UN resolution and attaining support and legitimacy from the international community (Ben-Shlush & Idan, 2013). Due to his background, Pearlman paid greater attention to the foreign media, understanding that effective military public diplomacy was essential for gaining international backing for the new state.

The lack of resources resulted in clear priority being given to important foreign journalists who favored Israel, leading Israeli reporters to protest that they were discriminated against (Mann, 2015). Foreign correspondents complained that they were frequently fed by official announcements and were constrained from freely reporting from the battle zone (Ibid). These issues will surface again many times as points of tension between the foreign correspondents and the ISU. The war in 1948 demonstrates a relatively simple public relations challenge that the ISU had to address. Israel was seen as defending itself, the Israeli media were supportive, and the foreign media were not harsh on Israel, even if they were not pleased with censorship actions and limitations applied on journalists.

6.2. Six day war (1967): when the story itself is the best PR

The Six Day War took place from June 5-June 10, 1967 between Israel and Egypt, Jordan and Syria, aided by other Arab countries. Israel captured territories three times its pre-war size (Parker, 1996; Yorman, 1983) and the international media was fascinated by the swift victory of the young state. Israel was already nearly twenty years old and the ISU, too, was more mature and organized. On May 15, 1967, large numbers of Egyptian forces entered the Sinai, blocking the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping (Amikam, 1979). The Egyptian move was followed by three weeks of tense waiting by Israel (Golan & Shai, 2007; Yorman, 1983). The IDF was preparing itself for the option of war, and invested enormous efforts in all possible areas of activity, including diplomacy and propaganda.

The IDF Spokesman at the time, Aryeh Shalev, had been appointed in September 1963. Before that, he had filled senior positions in the military intelligence (Lapid, 2007), like the majority of the twenty-six ISU spokespeople who had come from intelligence units. This may reflect the understanding at the time that in a state such as Israel, in which national security is a continuous central issue, a person who deeply understands the complex challenge of managing information has an advantage. During Shalev's term, the organizational structure of the IDF's public relations unit was changed. A unified unit consisting of two contradictory disciplines, information and field security, was established under his command. This initiative was ultimately deemed a failure and was cancelled following the Six Day War. This unit included several branches: media relations; public relations; field security; psychological warfare; and liaison to military attachés (Lapid, 2007). Combining public relations with the fields of security and psychological warfare demonstrates once again the problematic blurring of boundaries between such contrasting fields, which indicate the attitude towards information management and military transparency in the Israeli military. Shalev recalled how his major challenge during the Six Day War, in which he did not usually succeed, was to stay ahead of the Syrian military spokesperson. Shalev claimed that “The ISU was determined to carefully check any information before it was released in order to preserve credibility” and that this process wasted precious time (Shalev, personal communication, May 8, 2007).

Then Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, ordered that a “fog of war” be maintained and only after achieving successful results from fighting on the three fronts of Egypt, Jordan and Syria did he approve the release of information (Taub, 2007). During the waiting period, statements and speeches of Arab leaders were covered by the Israeli media, with the material accompanied by photographs of the Arab armies (Peri, 1983). The Israeli government's strict orders were to lower its profile and remain silent. Ministers did not speak, and no statements were provided. Due to the tense waiting situation, it was clear to the decision makers at the time that silence would best serve the state (Gluska, 2004). This approach was reflected in the ISU’s strategic policy as well (Shalev, personal communication, May 8, 2007). Although the Unit possessed photos and information regarding the Israeli soldiers waiting near the borders for further instructions from the higher command, these materials were not distributed to the reporters (Ibid). This created the impression that only the Arab side was active. Just a few days before the war broke out, this impression was suddenly altered by a brief statement from the Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin, who said that if war broke out the IDF would take the war into enemy territory (Amikam, 1979; Gluska, 2004). Toledano notes that in a democracy, it is the responsibility of military intelligence, and not of the military spokesperson, to “take charge of conducting psychological warfare against the enemy” (Toledano, 2010, p. 587). At this phase in the conflict, the boundaries discussed by Toledano were clearly vague.

Israeli reporters stated that they operated according to the demands of the political arena and understood that silence was needed at the time (Ben-Gur, 1967). On the one hand, they reported on enemy actions and statements, and on the other hand, they chose not to write about the military preparedness of the Israeli side. The emphasis at that time was on psychological warfare and not on public relations (Susser, 1999). The main ISU policy was embedding Israeli reporters on the ground on the one hand, and allowing foreign correspondents access to the battlefield accompanied by soldiers from the ISU, on the other hand (Lapid, 2007). A pool of military correspondents in the battle zones prepared available information for other reporters (Ben-Gur, 1990).

The social context in Israel was similar to the one in 1948, as was the geopolitical context. It was still a challenge of several sovereign states fighting Israel in a relatively primitive media environment. Israel and the IDF were depicted in a positive light and the swift victory was described in legendary terms (Medzini, 2007). The story of the war was “easy to sell." However, in the post-war era Israel gradually became less popular, more criticized in the international media and depicted as arrogant and militaristic (Liebes & Kampf, 2012).

6.3. The Yom Kippur war (1973): coping with a bitter surprise

On October 6, 1973, Yom Kippur, which is considered the holiest day in the Jewish year, the Egyptian and Syrian armies initiated a coordinated surprise attack on Israel (Shlaim, 1976). The State of Israel, the IDF and the Israeli intelligence were caught fully surprised and unprepared (Bar-Joseph, 2012; Vanetik & Shalom, 2012). Over the years, the Yom Kippur War has come to represent one of the most crucial milestones in the relationship between the IDF and the Israeli media (Ben-Zedeff, 1996; Schiff, 1996). It was claimed that if the Israeli reporters had been less mobilized in support of the government, they could have minimized the surprise

effect of the attack (Negbi, 1985; Goren, 1975). Throughout the days of fighting, all radio broadcasts were supervised by the IDF Spokesperson. This way, the military was able to speak with one voice, leaving less room for speculations (Limor, 1974). 'Officially, the Censor was responsible for military affairs, whereas the Spokesman's 'filterers' assessed aspects concerning public morale, especially that of the fighting forces," noted Caspi and Limor, "In practice, however, the latter, too, functioned as censors' (Caspi & Limor, 1999, pp. 265).

While foreign reporters were able to access information, they frequently faced high barriers of censorship and classification. Clearly, they were not pleased with these limitations, but the ISU insisted on embracing an extremely closed approach to the media. Their refusal to be more transparent was justified by their reluctance to endanger national security (Bar-On, 1981; Ben-Haim, 1974; Goren, Cohen, & Caspi, 1975). When the IDF began its active attack, the ISU organized tours for foreign correspondents, allowing them to get closer to the battlefield (Levitan, 1974). Before long, many foreign reporters covered the Israeli side and the IDF soldiers in a more positive light. It was clear that assisting the reporters in doing their job created a supportive atmosphere, and turned Israel into a favorable base for the reporters in the Middle East (Lahav, 1974; Levitan, 1974). Compared to correspondents in Arab countries, Israeli-based foreign correspondents enjoyed relatively free movement and action (Ben-Haim, 1974).

The IDF Spokesperson during the Yom Kippur War was Brigadier General Pinchas Lahav. Lahav was determined to receive updates about what was happening on the front, visit the different battle zones, and trace stories that could serve as important sources of information for correspondents (Levitan, 1974). The Spokesperson announced the outbreak of war, and soon crews of IDF writers and photographers were sent to the battlefield to cover the war and report from the front (Levitan, 1974).

During the war, the ISU distributed more than 500 stories and 600 movies from the front. Military photographers took 40,000 images of fighters at the front. Correspondents were allowed to enter the battlefield through a pool system. Approximately one thousand journalists went back and forth to the front 24 h a day on what amounted to a conveyor belt process (Karni, Yovel, & Pedatzur, 1974). In light of the pressure to provide timely information, the ISU established a makeshift advocacy team, which included representatives of the press and the IDF, in order to disseminate the reports from the IDF and to clarify the uncertain situation (Levitan, 1974).

Despite the statements and actions which aimed to create an impression of an open approach to the media, the Unit in the Yom Kippur War operated more as a one-way propaganda mechanism than as a two-way communication body. In retrospect, it is clear that the IDF was not as transparent as it appeared to be. Foreign correspondents were limited in their access. Israeli reporters were recruited and served within the ISU. This created a complex situation in which they found themselves playing the dual contradictory roles of Israeli citizens and reporters. The military correspondents who remained in the independent press editorials quoted the IDF's statements without cross-checking, even when those statements were not correct or accurate (Sagi, 1975).

Patterson argues that the IDF's attempt to manipulate public opinion in 1973 'poisoned the IDF's relationship with the press and weakened its standing with the Israeli people (Patterson in Shai, 1998). It was claimed that if the ISU had adequately understood its role, it would have refused to serve as a blocker of "information flow and a silencer" (Shagrir, 1974, p. 19).

Following the war, dramatic changes were made in the organizational structure of the ISU. Primarily, it moved from being subordinate to the military intelligence to being directly subordinate to Chief of Staff. The name was changed from the Unit of Information to the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, a title which gave the Unit a more professional character. After the war, which had proven traumatic for the Israeli public, a commission of inquiry, led by a former IDF Spokesperson and two journalists, examined the conduct of the activities of the ISU during the war (Karni, Yovel & Pedatzur, 1974). The commission determined that the IDF should have put greater emphasis on its information management during wartime. While acknowledging that "hasbara" [2]; is not directly part of the fighting, the commission recommended that it should be included as an integral part of the overall war effort. The commission also raised the fact that at the beginning of the war, the IDF itself lacked a clear, defined policy that would have helped clarify the strategic communication of the military. The commission recommended that the Unit clearly outline its policies and ensure that all of the influential figures and subordinates act in accordance with the guidelines (Ibid).

In an internal IDF meeting on "Public Relations is a Profession," after the war, three major conclusions were drawn. First, it was decided that the ISU should recruit public relations practitioners to deal with foreign correspondents, since no ordinary soldier could quickly become sufficiently adept in understanding and utilizing the field of public relations effectively. Second, they determined that it was essential to first shape a clear strategy before addressing foreign correspondents. Finally, they agreed that anyone in the ISU dealing with foreign correspondents should be qualified for the position and equipped with the knowledge and sometimes the foreign language needed for the work (The Statements of the Spokespersons, 2013).

These lessons, which arose from the understanding that the officer accompanying the foreign correspondent could serve as a mediator for opening a window about Israel to the world (Ben-Haim, 1974), may be considered the first steps towards the professionalism of the ISU. The understanding that there was a need for more professional training within the ISU came very late. For many years, it was mostly 'on-the-job' training. Only in the mid-1980s were training tracks for regular staff and reservists established, as well as courses and simulation exercises for officers and NCOs. Since the late 1980s, ISU soldiers became an integral part of military exercises, learning firsthand about the extremely complex challenges they had to address in the wake of Israel's diverse conflicts with its Arab neighbors and with the Palestinians.

Because of the significant time gap between the Yom Kippur War (1973) and the Second Lebanon War (2006), it is important to review the main challenges the ISU experienced during this long period. These years can be considered a critical transitional period in

[2] *Hasbara* is "a Hebrew noun form which means 'to explain' or 'to account for'" (Toledano & Mckie, 2013, p.2). It is a unique term used to describe Israel's public diplomacy efforts.

the ISU's evolution. The new political reality following the 1967 Six Day War, with Israel occupying territories inhabited by Palestinian civilians, created a new set of unfamiliar challenges for the ISU. Organizations of stateless Palestinians and terror organizations, sometimes borderless, operated around the world, significantly transforming the demands placed upon the ISU that now had to relate to guerrilla and civil movements rather than states as enemies (Yaron, 2009). The Arab-Israeli conflict became an ongoing "low-intensity conflict" (Kober, 2013, p. 1), as witnessed in the First Lebanon War in 1982 and especially during the first Palestinian uprising ("Intifada") in 1987. The ISU, trained to justify the military's moves as defensive actions, found it harder to do so in asymmetric situations (Yaron, 2009). Moreover, following the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli and the international media took a far more critical stance towards the IDF's functioning and were not willing to accept the ISU's statements at face value (Goren, 1975; Negbi, 1995; Schiff, 1996).

The ISU was caught unprepared to meet this new set of political and international challenges (Shai, 1998). One crucial difference between conventional and non-conventional wars or asymmetrical warfare, notes former spokesperson Ruth Yaron, is that the latter takes place in urban and rural areas, which greatly increases media access to information and photos and decreases the authorities' ability to control information (Yaron, 2009).

Another important factor presenting a new challenge for the ISU were the innocent civilians caught in the conflict and the military's efforts to avoid harming them. Until the 1980s, most of the conflict zones in which Israel was involved were remote from civilian populations. However, the new, "low-level" conflict no longer took place on the traditional battlefield with soldiers, tanks, and cannons; rather, the confrontation with Israel's opponents frequently occurred in civilian environments characterized by the presence of non-combatants (Kober, 2013, p.4).

The changes during this period were not merely political. These years, especially the 1990s and the 2000s, witnessed dramatic innovations in media technologies which changed the battlefield significantly. News networks such as CNN and BBC began providing international news 24/7, and more and more people increasingly used the internet (Gilboa, 2005; Robinson, 2005). Time and deadlines became critical factors and the flow of information from the battlefield to information consumers all over the world became immediate (Shai, 2013). The competition among media outlets and among journalists increased significantly (Waters, Tindall, & Morton, 2010). The era of information warfare combined with the politics of asymmetrical wars demanded major changes in the ISU's policies, strategies and tactics.

6.4. Second Lebanon war (2006): adjusting to forced transparency

Following the capture of two Israeli soldiers by the Iranian-backed organization Hezbollah in July of 2006, the Israeli government decided to confront and weaken the organization in South Lebanon (Caldwell et al., 2009). The confrontation lasted 34 days, during which time thousands of missiles rained down on the Israeli population in northern Israel (Ehrlich, 2007; Elran & Brom, 2007). The conflict in 2006 between Hezbollah and Israel was, in effect, a continuation of the striking change in the nature of Israel's non-state opponents (Kober, 2008) and the dramatic changes in media technology created a situation in which in an asymmetric war both sides can easily disseminate their messages to the international community (Lapid, 2011).

The media coverage of the war in Lebanon was unprecedented. Israeli citizens and the world were fully exposed to the scenes of the battles, to the debate on the war's justification and to criticisms of the operation (Guy, 2006; Lapid, 2011). Numerous media outlets were positioned throughout the conflict area, and new updates were constantly made available to the public.

Hezbollah sought to receive legitimacy from the international community (Lapid, 2011). The organization "maintained absolute control over where journalists went and what they saw, thus framing the story on Hezbollah's terms and affecting agendas for the international media" (Caldwell et al. 2009, p. 5). Hezbollah was extremely active in its efforts to influence the foreign correspondents, especially by using the new media to disseminate pictures portraying the IDF operating unethically towards the Lebanese population (Harel & Issacharoff, 2008). This is also evident in the spokesperson's later statement: "Hezbollah reported on events in real time, transmitted five photographs of the events to the media, and thus embarrassed the IDF" (Regev, personal communication, January 9, 2011). The ISU also faced a serious new challenge which was created by the access of the Israeli soldiers to their mobile phones which were connected to the internet. Many IDF soldiers violated military discipline and transferred information to their families in real time via cell phones (Ibid.).

The spokesperson during the Second Lebanon War, Brigadier General Miri Regev, was unique in having been the only ISU spokesperson to have served within the ISU from the position of Lieutenant to that of Brigadier General, her only absences being when she served for a period of time as the head of the media center of the National *Hasbara* Headquarters and when she served as the Chief Military Censor. These roles endowed her with a wide range of experience in working with the media and the public. In one of her former positions, she had frequent interface with the American government and military (Regev, 2003). Regev adopted two main principles from the American advocacy mechanism: "K.I.S.S." (Keep It Simple, Stupid); and 'Be Ready: Don't Be Afraid' (Regev, 2003).

On the strategic level, the ISU put extensive efforts into updating its public relations mechanism to meet changing contexts and circumstances. The ISU's formal policy in the Second Lebanon War was to enable transparent communications (Goodman, 2008), while mapping the reality for which there is a huge competition among the media. Regev depicted it as a constant balance between "allowing access to as much information as possible and, on the other hand, not endangering human life for a picture or a title" (Regev, personal communication, July 29, 2008). Moreover, Regev claimed that "You cannot wrap failures with cellophane paper," arguing that she understood that the credibility of the ISU and the IDF was at stake and that she, as a spokesperson, was not going to conceal the shortcomings that had surfaced during the war (Regev, personal communication, January 9, 2011).

In order to apply such an active approach, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) were attached to each military unit in order to transmit the information in real time (Canetti, 2006). In retrospect, the Chief of Staff conceded that this concept was inadequate, to

the point that he felt he had neglected the field, leaving it exposed to unrestrained, irresponsible actors who caused damage to the IDF and to Israel (Halutz, 2010). Regev recalled that she had to confront commanders in order to provide correspondents access to the war zones (Regev, personal communication, January 9, 2011). Some commanders were worried that the correspondents would interfere with or undermine the battle efforts, while others implied that they were worried about "unflattering things that will come out" (Canetti, 2006). One of the main arguments levelled against the ISU during the war was that sacred codes regarding sensitive security information were violated within the framework of transparency and the strategy of openness (Alovich, 2013). The Israeli public was harshly critical, claiming over and over again that the coverage of the war was too open, to the point of risking lives (Vaknin-Gil, 2009; Weimann, 2007). On the other hand, in the post-war period many reporters, on their part, were angry with themselves for their self-censorship (Shelach & Limor, 2007). The international media, on its side, still felt the ISU was creating barriers and difficulties in order to maintain control over information.

During the fighting, the ISU conducted 58 daily briefings and published 448 press releases (Lapid, 2011). Forty-nine reporters were granted access to the war zones, mostly through a pool system in order to protect reporters from enemy fire (Canetti, 2006). Five hundred twenty-five interviews were given by senior commanders and field officers and 476 background interviews were conducted with senior officers off the record (Regev, 2006). As part of the operational documentation, photographers were attached to combat forces by the ISU. Three hundred ninety photographs and 150 videos were distributed. During the war, 150 web articles initiated by the ISU were written and translated into English and 200 million hits were recorded on the IDF Spokesman's website. In a report after the war, the IDF admitted that in the first phase of the war there was a delay of 12–24 h in providing the necessary information to the correspondents (Lapid, 2011).

While allowing reporters to enter combat areas frequently created tension between the military and the media, a limited number of correspondents were permitted to enter. Efforts were made to counter Hezbollah's psychological warfare by publishing information in the foreign press, distributing leaflets to the civilian population in Lebanon and broadcasting targeted messages in Arabic to the local Arab population (Regev, personal communication, January 9, 2011).

Despite the fact that, in the Israeli context, Regev was considered rather open in her approach towards the media, Toledano (2010) argues that Regev was actually focusing on controlling the media rather than on making the IDF transparent to the public. “Regev's declared liberal approach to open to the army to the media, which underpinned the embedding strategy, was actually a tool for controlling and censoring communication about the army and not for letting other voices be heard” (Toledano, 2010, p. 592).

6.5. Gaza war (2009): new media − new arena

The Gaza war was conducted from December 2008 through January 2009 as a limited operation against the infrastructure of the Hamas movement (Asher, 2009). Following the Second Lebanon War, an investigative inquiry commission, the Winograd Commission, was established (Commission for the Investigation of the Lebanon War-Winograd Committee, 2008). A set of its recommendations was dedicated to organizing “an information and propaganda unit to coordinate public relations across a wide spectrum of activities, including traditional media, new media, and diplomacy” (Caldwell et al., 2009p. 6). The result was the creation of the National Information Directorate.

On the strategic level the public debate following the Second Lebanon War led the ISU into adopting a much tighter policy, including limiting access to war zones. Some images from the war that were broadcast around the world were not broadcast in Israel. The rationale for this behavior was fear of public backlash: editors were concerned that they would anger Israeli audiences if they undermined the nation's solidarity (Weimann, 2007). Allegations were made that the Israeli media was basically repeating the IDF spokesperson's statements, and that information that contradicted the IDF's formal statements was shelved and not published as it should have been (Persico, 2009).

Due to the fact that the Gaza War was planned and was not a surprise, the ISU was prepared. It took part in military exercises and defined the objectives before the operation began in order to distribute information to the media in real time. The ISU had four major objectives: a) to strengthen and maintain the public's trust; b) to preserve the legitimacy of the operation in the eyes of the international community; c) to represent the face of the IDF to the public as a military organization that aims to learn from its mistakes; and d) to prevent political involvement of the IDF and its commanders in the public debate during the election period (Lapid, 2011). However, it seems that there was a gap between the ISU’s objectives and the decisions it actually made when confronted by the complicated reality of clashes between the armed forces and the Palestinian civilians.

The IDF spokesperson at the time was Brigadier General Avi Benayahu, a speaker with rich media experience. Benayahu was formerly a military correspondent, a media adviser to the Defense Minister and the Commander of the Military Radio. His motto was that, “the IDF Spokesperson's role is to help the military to succeed and not, as in the Second Lebanon War, to help the media to succeed” (Alovich, 2013, p. 42). It was clear that this motto was dominant in the ISU's strategic communication in Gaza War. A “one voice, one speaker” approach was adopted. Benayahu chose to appear frequently in the media and briefed the correspondents about the different phases of the military operation (Ibid). He gave approximately thirty briefings to reporters and military analysts and sixty-five interviews (Lapid, 2011). “In addition to my interviews in the media, senior commanders took part behind the scenes, each in his expertise," Benayahu reported. ‘Every day there were several background briefings for local and international media to expand knowledge and understanding of the situation’ (Benayahu, personal communication, January 5, 2011).

Although before the Gaza War Israel’s High Court had ruled that the border should be open to the international press, in practice, the IDF kept the Gaza Strip closed on the grounds of security reasons (Goodman, 2009). Reporters were allowed to enter only four days after the operation began (Lapid, 2011). “We let the press in only after the forces had settled in the field and a logistical route was opened for the safe entrance and exit of correspondents," explained Benayahu (personal communication, November 26, 2009).

Despite Benayahu's position, it is clear that denying access to the correspondents created a sense of propaganda and not of public relations or public diplomacy. This damaged the ability to gain empathy for the Israeli narrative, which was already a difficult case to advocate due to the conditions in the Palestinian war zones (Persico, 2009).

Israel attempted to limit the images of civilian casualties, but this effort backfired. 'Without an independent foreign media presence," note Caldwell et al., "Hamas' claims of atrocities against civilians and exorbitant death tolls went unchallenged' (Caldwell et al., 2009, p. 8). The IDF preferred to receive harsh criticism from the international media rather than to risk uncontrolled coverage of the battlefield (Limor et al., 2014). It was a very tough choice arising from what could be considered a 'lose-lose' situation. The foreign correspondents' frustrations created a boomerang effect against the Israelis, with the Palestinian side being covered much more broadly and with empathy (Persico, 2009).

A base for foreign correspondents was established on the front in Sderot, a southern Israeli city which was subject to intensive rocket attacks by Hamas. Spokespeople who spoke different languages were sent there to serve the needs of the foreign media. However, in practice, foreign correspondents preferred to be close to the fighting areas and did not stay for long at the Sderot base. As in the past, in several cases, foreign journalists were given priority over Israeli correspondents, with the rationale of giving clear priority to global military public diplomacy (Lapid, 2011). The IDF claimed that it closed areas if there was clear danger to lives or disruption to military operations (Alovich, 2013). Despite the general approach of limiting access, during the operation six pools of correspondents entered the field, and foreign correspondents were embedded in the forces in Gaza sixteen times (Lapid, 2011).

The 2009 Gaza War may be considered an important milestone in the ISU's adjustment to the new media environment. Two days after the Israeli airstrikes began, the Unit established a YouTube channel and uploaded 45 films, which received seven million hits worldwide (Benayahu, 2012; Bigman, 2012; Caldwell et al., 2009). These films showed air strikes of Hamas targets, as well as Hamas firing from populated areas such as schools and hospitals. Various films with subtitles in Arabic were produced (Lapid, 2011). Photos and videos of good quality were distributed to multiple recipients quickly, based on teams of tactical visual coverage from within the ISU (Ibid). These images were then issued to the international media. Since access to certain war zones was limited, the materials produced by the IDF were virtually exclusive and, to some degree, created an advantage for the IDF. The photographic materials served the ISU's purpose of illustrating Hamas' tactics of using the Palestinian population as human shields on the one hand, and of presenting the efforts of the IDF to prevent harm to the population as much as possible on the other. The disadvantage was that the materials were perceived as Israeli one-way propaganda. One hundred twenty videos and 209 photos were distributed to the media. Updated newsletters with vital information were disseminated to opinion leaders in Israel and abroad. During the operation, ten newsletters were distributed to thousands of recipients (Lapid, 2011). An ISU blog was created. Cable subscribers were given the opportunity to watch films released by the IDF on demand (Hopstein, 2009). Caldwell et al. (2009, p. 6) claim that "Israel, determined to avoid mistakes from the Second Lebanon War, embarked on a massive public relations campaign that employed new media extensively." The question that inevitably needs to be raised is what took the ISU so long? It is expected that a military which faces constant publicized crises and worldwide intense coverage would be more prepared and provide timely response to the developing new media challenges.

7. Discussion

Studying the relationship between the ISU and the media on a historical timeline, within the theoretical context of the need to adapt to new challenges and unknown environments provides several interesting insights. The research indicates that one of the key components of the ISU's adjustment to new challenges was the spokesperson's personal approach. Indeed, to a large extent, the spokesperson's role determines whether an adaptation process takes place at all, and, if so, its scope and depth. The balance between propaganda and public relations, the strategies chosen and the techniques utilized were mainly determined by the Chief Spokesperson. Nonetheless, the spokesperson is not the sole determinant of the approach taken during his or her term. In the political arena, both the Israeli Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense wield great influence, as does the Chief of Staff. However, the personal attitude of the spokespersons and their individual attitudes towards journalists have had a significant impact on the ISU's adaptation to new realities.

The history reviewed in this study reveals many changes that were made in the ISU in light of altering circumstances, including important structural and organizational changes, revisions in military media strategies, increased professionalism and tactical improvements, among others. The question is whether these changes correspond with the substance of Cutlip and Center's concept of adjustment and adaptation?

To answer this question we suggest referring to three different layers in the adaptation process: the tactical layer, the strategic layer and the perceptional layer (see Fig. 1). The first layer, the *tactical layer*, refers to the changes that are made in the public relations techniques and methods utilized by the organization. This is the most visible and simple change an organization can implement. The second *strategic layer*, refers to deeper changes in the key messages and approach of the organization towards the media. The third layer, the *perceptional layer*, actually lies at the core of the two external layers. It refers to the most basic philosophy, set of norms and perceptions of the roles of public relations in an organization, or, in Ristino's words, the 'cultural values and beliefs' (2008, p. 68), which determine the nature, extent and implementation of the adjustment process.

The ISU dealt with two key factors that demanded dramatic adaptation from the ISU: changes in the nature of the opponents and changes in the media environment. Examining the ISU's response to these challenges by using the three-layer model helps clarify the nature and scope of the changes.

Historically, until 1973, Israel's confrontations were with sovereign states, such as Egypt or Syria. The image of a young state, many of whose residents were survivors of the Holocaust, fighting against armies of states, aroused sympathy around the world,

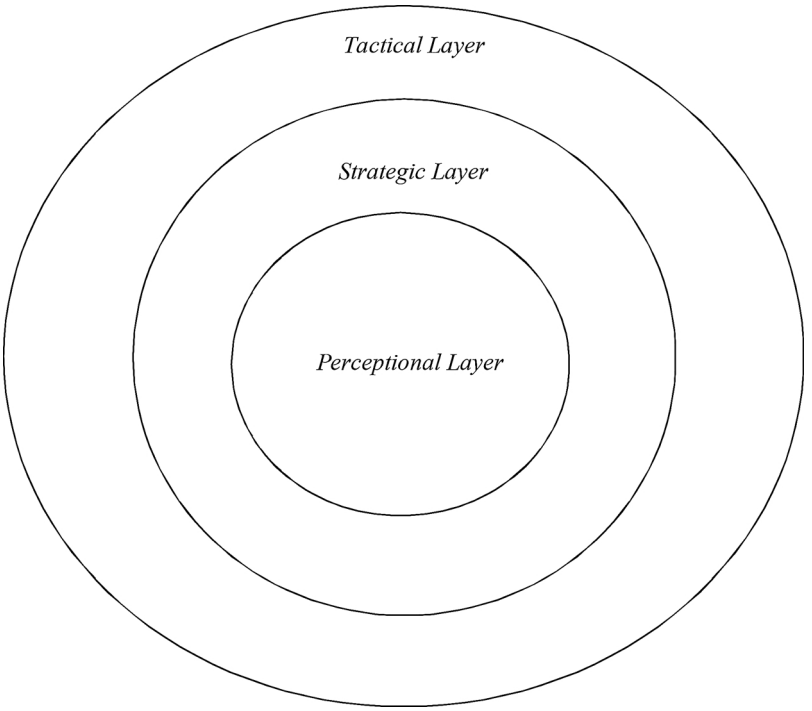

Fig. 1. Three-layer Model of Adjustment & Adaptation.

which was reflected in the media. As a result, the ISU's task was relatively easy during this period. However, during the 1980s, a gradual change occurred in world and media perceptions, as contending with non-state organizations, such as Palestinian terror organizations, Hezbollah, and later Hamas became a central mission of the IDF. The international media as well as Israeli and global activists responded to changes in the nature of Israel's opponents by undermining previously held perceptions of the IDF as a young, threatened state's defensive military force, which demanded that the ISU make dramatic adjustments. The once relatively simple task of telling Israel's side of the story became very difficult to accomplish in the context of an asymmetrical confrontation in which armed soldiers inevitably came into conflict with unarmed civilians. Not only did the core perceptions of the ISU's role within Israel's public diplomacy mechanism need to be reconsidered, but the nature of the ISU's various audiences, some new and confrontational, had to be more deeply understood. The ISU addressed these challenges by using tactics tailored for the new situation, including increasing visual documentation by soldiers during clashes with civilians and embedding correspondents, among others. The ISU also tried to deal with civilian war zones strategically, applying either a closed or open approach towards the media depending on the situation. While the ISU did adapt its tactical and strategic measures, it engaged in very little discussion regarding its overall policy, areas of responsibilities and the need for perceptional changes.

Another key factor which dramatically altered the ISU's environment and demanded adaptation was the profound transformation in the nature of the media. Global media, including that of Israel, changed immensely, becoming more investigative, competitive and demanding of real time responses. Technology also underwent a dramatic revolution, mainly with the birth of social media. As a result, the ISU has had to keep constant track of media changes and to develop appropriate new methods of disseminating messages, paying careful attention to their timing as well as understanding the importance of the visual aspect of the ISU's communication. While the ISU has made adaptations to meet the swift changes in the media, it nonetheless has lagged behind, struggling to keep up with the pace of technological development. The ISU's adjustments to the new media environment, like its reactions to changes in the nature of Israel's opponents, were made mainly on the tactical level. The ISU exhibited little understanding or even willingness to try to understand the deeper implications for the ISU's relationship with its complex environment presented by modern, advanced media.

Examining ISU responses during different historical periods indicates that ISU adaptations were implemented mainly within the zones of the tactical and strategic layers. Tactical adaptation was broadly discussed and spokespersons often referred to this aspect in media interviews, public statements and official committees. Debates over the need to tailor media strategies, either open or opaque depending on the situation, also received attention throughout the ISU's history. The positive aspect of the ISU's focus on tactical and strategic adjustments is that it does reflect an ISU acknowledgment of the need to adapt to constant changes. However, the most profound layer of adaptation, the perceptional layer, has been rather neglected by the ISU. Debates over the need for *deep perceptional changes*, whereby the ISU would aim to better understand its role in creating genuine dialogue with different public constituencies, were clearly missing. The ISU underwent no systematic analysis of the serious implications on Israel's public diplomacy that one-way or two-way communication could pose. Dividing Cutlip and Center's "Adjustment and Adaptation Model" into the three levels of tactical, strategic and deep perceptional changes enables us to achieve a better understanding of how deep and profound the process of change actually was.

8. Conclusions

This research examined the history of the ISU over the course of five wars, studying how the unit adjusted to ever-changing challenges. The research revealed that the ISU indeed adapted itself to changes, but at a slow pace and usually only at the tactical and strategic layers rather than at the perceptional layer. The perceptional layer is becoming increasingly crucial in today's global political environment which demands and encourages two-way communications as well as heightened engagement and dialogue with various publics (Cunningham, 2010; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Men & Tsai, 2015; Paquette, Sommerfeldt, & Kent, 2015). Israel is not unique in facing these new challenges. The abundant military-media literature indeed demonstrates that while adaptation was carried out throughout the history of western military public relations systems, it was made primarily on the tactical and the strategic levels, while broad discussions on the need to change core perceptions about dialogue and engagement received limited attention. Learning from the ISU's long experience, it appears that in the future, military spokespersons may play a key role in facing the necessity to adapt to a reality in which there is increasing demand for interactivity on the tactical level and dialogue on the perceptional level.

Scott's observation that "to survive is to adapt; and to adapt is to change" (Scott in Everett, 1993, p. 181) is relevant now more than ever. This research suggests that the process of adaptation in military public diplomacy can be better understood by analyzing in what layers significant changes occur and which layer suffers from weaknesses. It is imperative to continue examining whether the military public relations systems are providing timely and updated responses in all three layers. Such an analysis will inevitably occupy any military actor seeking to effectively address the international community in future battles over public opinion.

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