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From 'Rambo' to 'sitting ducks' and back again: the Israeli soldier in the media

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The image of the Israeli soldier has transmuted over time. This is particularly true when examining this image in Israeli media. As media reflects social changes, understanding the development of the image of the Israeli soldier in Israeli media may be indicative of wider transformations. During the 1982 Lebanon War the Israeli soldier was identified chiefly as a tough, masculine figure; a warrior. In the 1990s, there was a gradual transformation into a more vulnerable image: a scared, fragile survivor, who wants to return home in one piece. Conversely, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, the framing of the Israeli soldier becomes more complex, with both images present in the media. However, despite the fact both images appear, during this final period the 'warrior' image receives more visibility. Using theoretical literature from the fields of communications and civil–military–media relations, and covering two major Israeli news publications – *Yediot Aharonot* and *Haaretz* – this article traces the image of the Israeli soldier from the 1982 Lebanon War (1982) to Operation Cast Lead (2008–9).

Keywords: Israel Defence Forces; media image; framing; warrior; survivor; HIC; LIC

The story of the Israeli soldier, as told by the Israeli media, is, in a sense, the story of Israeli society as a whole and the changes it has gone through over the years. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) in general, and its soldiers in particular, enjoy a high status in Israeli society. They are a source of national pride, and the IDF remains one of the main carriers of national identity. However, this identity has changed since the founding of the state, and there have been corresponding changes in the ways in which the IDF and its soldiers are perceived. These changes have already been examined in various contexts – political science, cinema, sociology, to name but a few fields.¹ The present article will focus on the changes the image of the Israeli soldier has undergone in the media over time.²

The ever-growing presence of the media in the public sphere, together with the fact that the media is the public's main source of information,³ have served as an impetus for scholars to examine the role played by the media in society. The framing theory in communications studies posits that the media organizes and

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classifies social knowledge and the world of social images for its audience and thus determines what does and does not appear on the public agenda. This organization and classification is done selectively and in accordance with society's prevailing norms and values.⁴ Put differently, the media reinforces the status quo. It takes part in formulating society's beliefs, in framing its hopes, in consolidating its vocabulary and its collective memory, but it is society which allocates the channels through which the media can operate and sets down rules. In other words, the media is part of the system of social, cultural and political modes of expression and works within it.⁵

While it does play these central roles, the media is incapable of reflecting reality perfectly, since every event can be seen from more than one perspective and has more than one interpretation. As a result, while describing an event, the media is actually redefining and reshaping it, creating images and meanings. While doing so it classifies subjects into different categories, determines which details should be emphasized and which point of view should be presented. During this process, society's central values become set and their significance sealed by the media. Change in those values are both reflected in and promoted by media coverage. Thus an examination of the image of the Israeli soldier in the media in Israel can shed light on processes that Israeli society has undergone in the last decades.

In this study, we will focus on the question of how the Israeli media framed and constructed the image of the combat soldier⁶ in the IDF over the last three decades, starting from the first Lebanon war (1982) until Operation Cast Lead (December 2008–January 2009). In order to examine the changes in the image of the Israeli soldier in the press, we focus on combat events, involving the presence of a defined external enemy,⁷ as presented in two newspapers: the tabloid *Yediot Aharonot*, and the broadsheet *Haaretz*. Our findings show that in the period under examination, the image of the Israeli soldier underwent changes and that these reflect changes in society at large.

Civil–military–communications relations and society in Israel

This article attempts to combine theory and methodology from various disciplines – political science and security studies, civil–military relations, and communication and media studies. Few studies attempt to combine these fields,⁸ though a combination between them is obviously in order, especially in the Israeli context.

Israel's unique security situation of ongoing military conflict offers fertile ground for various tensions and has a noticeable impact upon the nature of society. The vast literature which addresses this aspect of Israeli society describes it as a 'society under siege' or 'a nation in arms', militaristic at times.⁹ One of the main ramifications of this reality is that the security establishment plays a central role in Israel. Opinion polls indicate that the IDF is accorded the highest degree of confidence by the majority of Israeli Jews from among a string of central public institutions.¹⁰ In fact, the IDF and service in the IDF remains one of the more

important – if not the most important – symbols of Israeli nationality.¹¹ The IDF is also considered a source of ethos and social and cultural concepts in Israel: from here stem ideas regarding the boundaries of the collective; what the correct forms of ‘masculinity’ and ‘Israeliness’ are; who is a ‘good’ citizen; and so on.¹²

It is no surprise, then, that until the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Israeli media conformed to this trend. Israel’s military achievements, mainly those during and following the Six Day War (1967), reinforced the public’s blind faith in the abilities of the political and military leadership. Accordingly, this weakened critical voices and created a mobilized media. During this period, journalists did not perceive themselves as the government’s critics and were thus willing to voluntarily sanction themselves in order to, as they saw it, protect state security.¹³ Addressing issues concerning the military and security amounted to nothing more than reporting events, while neglecting any kind of commentary or criticism. As a result, a tradition developed – one which went on for many years – according to which security and foreign policy issues were ‘sacred cows’ and not to be included in the public debate. The media cultivated the myth of the IDF, particularly after the achievements of the 1967 war, consequently reinforcing the IDF’s public standing. The fact that both these establishments – security and the media – maintained personnel continuity of the key figures from the time of the pre-state period onwards also facilitated the ongoing connections between the two.¹⁴ It seems that the initial patterns formed during the first few decades of state-building concerning the relations between the media, society and the military in Israel had a long-term impact.

However, cracks in the preferred status of the IDF and the security establishment began to appear following the 1973 war. As described at length in previous studies, after the war, public faith in the security establishment eroded and a gradual process of ‘slaughtering sacred cows’ began, making criticism of the security establishment acceptable in society in general.¹⁵

These changes could also be seen in the media’s attitude and 1973 was a watershed in the transition from a mobilized media to a critical one. Before the war, the media refrained from publicizing evidence of preparations for war on the part of Arab countries, assuming that refraining from criticism about a possible lack of Israeli preparedness would assist national security. After the war, the media held a harsh self-reckoning, following which it began to openly – and sometimes critically – discuss issues of security.¹⁶

This trend continued into the 1980s and reached a peak during the 1990s. During this period the peace process gained ground and reinforced the perception that Israel no longer faced an existential threat. As a result, the importance of issues of national security also declined.¹⁷ This public mood also manifested itself in a reluctance to engage in armed conflict or to accept a high number of casualties. All of these processes made it difficult to reach a public consensus about possible future wars.¹⁸

In addition, events such as the First Lebanon War (1982); the First Intifada (1987); the monotony of routine security activities such as the ongoing presence

of the IDF in the Security Zone in Lebanon (1985–2000); the many accidents which took place during active duty and training drills,¹⁹ all contributed to the decline of public faith in the security establishment, bringing about a growing intensity of criticism against the IDF, the status of which continued to decline. This tendency reached a high point in the 1990s, when most of the media coverage of security affairs was critical.

In spite of this, the traditional media pattern of cooperation and voluntary co-optation and mobilization did not disappear entirely. It was noticeable mainly in times of crises (the Gulf War in 1991, for example). In such situations, the media felt that it should contribute towards the national closing of ranks, the consolidation of the consensus and keeping up morale – and towards these ends, it should refrain from criticism. However, the general tone of the media at the end of the twentieth century was usually critical towards the security establishment.²⁰

This critical tendency changed yet again during the first decade of the twenty-first century, when several events affected the relations between the media, the military and Israeli society. The failure of the negotiations at Camp David in 2000 and the outbreak of the Second Intifada brought about the collapse of the euphoric expectations of a ‘New Middle East’ and returned the issue of security to the public agenda. The concept that Israel was destined to be a ‘society at war’ resurfaced. Unlike during the preceding decade, peace was now viewed as a false hope. According to this new outlook, Israel was condemned to live by the sword for the foreseeable future, and the challenge was how to contain the conflict and learn to live with it.²¹ This way of thinking was reinforced after Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the ongoing missile attacks on the area surrounding Gaza, the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Cast Lead (2008–9).

Media coverage also became more complex during this decade. On one hand, conflict inspired mobilized coverage that voluntarily took the side of the military (or the government) and cooperated with the establishment; on the other hand, criticism did not disappear.²² Most scholars claim that at least during the first stages of the Second Intifada (2000), the media took the side of the political and security establishments, and made an effort to support the narrative that this was a fight for the very existence of the State of Israel. Accordingly, the media gave little space to Palestinian suffering.²³ However, as the Intifada went on while the absolute number of terrorist attacks declined, the media also voiced criticism of the military (and published reports, for instance, of the many cases in which Palestinian children were killed) and of the government’s policy.²⁴

A similar state of affairs appeared in relation to the Second Lebanon War (2006). When the war broke out, the media closed ranks behind the Israeli leadership and supported the war. However, as the war went on, the number of casualties rose, and more and more missiles were fired on civilian populations in the Galilee and the north of the country, and the media’s criticism increased accordingly. But in this case, it must be noted that the criticism was levelled against tactics and the way the forces were deployed, rather than against the war itself.²⁵ Following the lesson learnt from the media’s conduct during the Second

Lebanon War, during Operation Cast Lead (2008–9) the entire area in which military operations were taking place was closed off and coverage of the operation was strictly censored. In fact, this period saw a return to the old pattern of relations between the military, the media and society, one of a mobilized media.²⁶

Yet despite all of the above and the changes in the attitude towards the military, Israeli society remains a patriotic society. Motivation to serve in combat units – even in the 1990s – still remains stable,²⁷ and the level of the public's trust in the military is high.²⁸

It seems, therefore, that the change in the relations between the military, the media and society since the 1973 war was gradual and reached a peak in the 1990s, reverting somewhat to traditional patterns in the 2000s. Are these changes with respect to relations with and attitudes towards the IDF as an institution reflected in the way the Israeli soldier is portrayed in Israeli media? In order to discuss this question, we will examine how the Israeli media framed the image of the Israeli soldier between 1982 and 2009, and inquire as to whether any trends in this framing can be recognized.

Our findings reveal that during crises, when there is a perceived threat and war seems justified, the media tends to fall into familiar patterns, and frames the image of the IDF soldier according to traditional models. When there is no perceived existential threat, and more so when the conflict is not part of the national consensus, the media moves to newer patterns, recognizable from the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century, and frames the image of the IDF soldier accordingly. This is not a one-way trend, but a process which illustrates how sometimes traditional aspects of the soldier's image overpower newer ones, and sometimes vice versa. While our findings are local, they may be indicative of wider, Western, trends.

Research framework

Demographics

The present study is based on an analysis of two newspapers: *Haaretz* (a broadsheet) and *Yediot Aharonot* (a tabloid). Ten daily national papers exist in Israel in the twenty-first century: *Calalist*, *Haaretz*, *Hamevaser*, *Hamodia*, *Ma'ariv*, *Makor Rishon*, *Yated Neeman*, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Yisrael Hayom*; most of these existed during the time of our study. Due to Israel's small geographical size, local daily papers do not exist and the aforementioned papers are national. That said, most of these newspapers are sectarian, targeting a very specific reader population (for example, *Makor Rishon* has a religious, politically right-wing readership, *Hamodia* targets the ultra-orthodox population, and so on), and therefore have low circulation. For these reasons, when studying national trends, media studies in Israel focus on two main newspapers: *Haaretz* and *Yediot Aharonot*. These papers boast a stable readership and have substantial influence on public opinion, as established in earlier studies.²⁹

Haaretz has an elitist image, due, among other things, to the fact that it is the favoured platform for the elites' discourses and the paper plays an important part in shaping their outlook.³⁰ Various studies have shown that coverage in *Haaretz* refrains from emotional and sensational descriptions.³¹

Beginning in the 1970s, and including the period under review, *Yediot Aharonot* was the most widely distributed newspaper in Israel. In the electronic age, *Yediot* became a 'television newspaper' in the sense that the changes made by the paper included a condensation of the text, an expansion of the percentage of images and a colourful layout, all of which appeal to a diverse audience.³² Being profit-oriented, the owners and editors of the paper promoted a prototype of a popular newspaper, appealing to a wide demographic.³³ Using both papers allowed us to examine the change in the framing of the soldier over time and validate our findings.³⁴

Chronological scope

This study commences with the 1980s, when the relations between the media, the military and society began to change, and concludes with the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Since this period spans three decades, we first organized and characterized the security-related events which took place during this time. Since the focus here is on the image of combat soldiers, as described earlier, the events examined are of a clear combat nature in which there is a well-defined external enemy.³⁵ However, beyond this common factor, events chosen were of varying levels of intensity, duration and number of casualties. Thus there are 'large' events with many casualties and/or substantial combat, alongside 'small' events, with fewer casualties and limited combat. In keeping with this definition, we arrived at two main categories of events examined here:

- *High intensity conflict (HIC)*: These are usually concentrated and of short duration: the First Lebanon War (during June–September 1982); Operation Electric Lead (*Tzinor Hashmal*, 1986); Operation Law and Order (*Hok vaSeder*, 1988); Operation Blue-Brown (*Kahol-Hum*, 1988); Operation Reckoning (*Din veHeshbon*, 1993); Operation Grapes of Wrath (*Invei Za'am*, 1996); Operation Burning Torch (*Lapid Eitan*) (1999); the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Cast Lead (*Oferet Yetzuka*, 2008–9). The reports on these events were examined in their entirety.
- *Low intensity conflict (LIC)*: These were usually of some duration. For instance: the First Lebanon War (during October 1982–June 1985), and Israel's ongoing presence in the Security Zone in Lebanon (1985–2000). These events were usually characterized by routine combat situations which included lulls in the fighting. These were examined intermittently: twice a week (Sundays and Fridays)³⁶ throughout the entire events.

As part of this study, we examined informative media coverage (news reports and feature articles, not editorials or op-ed pieces) including photos and captions.³⁷

The corpus of material examined included the news pages, the daily supplement and the weekend supplement. Over 1800 relevant items were collected (see Table 1).

Our findings are based on content analysis of both text and images. Significance was also accorded to headlines and captions due to the nature of the case study. Headlines are especially important for newspaper readers who are considered 'headline consumers'. In addition, the headlines are usually composed by the editor, and can therefore be viewed as the paper's opinion.³⁸ Qualitative findings were corroborated by limited scope quantitative data. As can be seen by Table 1 and Figure 1, the qualitative findings can be misleading as they are unable to stress mixed images and framing. However, while unable to stand on their own, these findings are able to support the qualitative findings, as described in our discussion.

Qualitative content analysis was based on the theory of framing from the field of media studies. This theory focuses on the content of the coverage. According to this theory, events are made up of numerous details and have many points of view, all of which cannot be presented simultaneously. An event is rendered comprehensible only if placed within a range of familiar cultural and social codes. In describing an event, the media defines and reshapes it, thus creating images and meanings.³⁹ As part of this process, the media classifies the issues into various categories, deciding which details to emphasize and which angles to present. Preferring one point of view over another is, in fact, a function of a particular framing. Thus certain meanings are framed in relation to issues pertaining to society's basic values.⁴⁰

This study examines the framing chosen by the media when using the image of the Israeli soldier to see if it changed during the period under review. As part of this analysis, we examined metaphors, the use of previous events, slogans, and adjectives as well as angles, size and focus of photos.

A pilot study was conducted in order to identify dominant interpretive framings. The findings of the pilot study allowed us to compile a list of criteria to use for sorting

Table 1. Quantitative data: items by event.

Event	Duration (Weeks ~)	Number of items (Total = 1800)	Items per week
First Lebanon War, HIC	12	203	17
First Lebanon War, LIC	130	207	1.59
Security Zone, LIC	780	542	0.69
Security Zone operations, HIC	10	304	30
Second Lebanon War, HIC	5	375	75
Operation Cast Lead, HIC	3	169	56

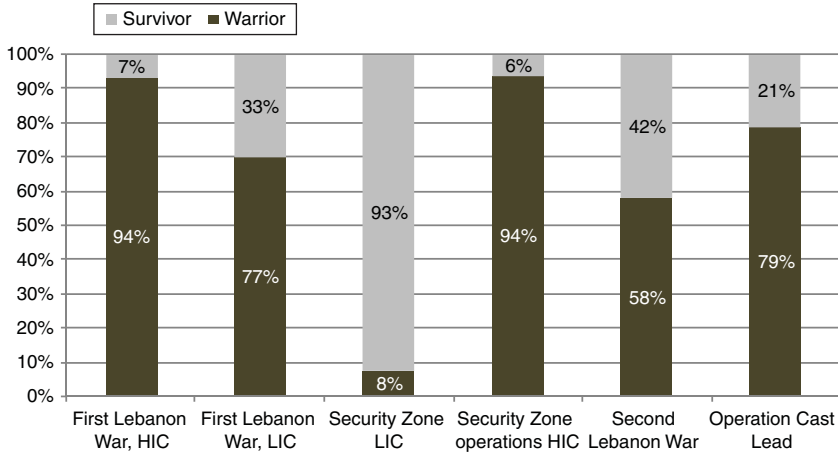


Figure 1. Items by event (HIC/LIC) according to dominant framing.

and classifying items. Most of the criteria formulated are beyond the scope of this article.⁴¹ Here, our focus is on one of the most prominent points found: the image of the soldier as a 'warrior' versus the framing of the soldier as a 'survivor'.

When examining each item from each paper (photo, captions, headline, news article, feature piece), we classified it and placed it on a continuum ranging from portraying the soldier as an active, fighting, combat and heroic figure, a sort of 'Rambo', whose motivation to fight is derived from his sense of being on a mission, to framing the soldier as a tired, passive, exhausted 'survivor', even as a 'sitting duck'; a frightened figure (at times crying or even weeping), a soldier who is not motivated, does not understand why he is where he is, and whose impetus is his desire to survive and return home alive. Accordingly, each item was examined using these points and the image of the soldier was then identified along this continuum. In such a way we could determine where on the continuum most of the items during a certain time-frame were placed, what sort of image was more or less dominant and whether there were changes over time.

It should be noted that our analysis is based on the local Israeli cultural context. It is possible that scholars from other cultures might identify different framings and different messages. However, since the newspapers in this study are part of that same Israeli cultural context, it is reasonable to assume that our analysis is in line with the original framing of the items and how they were expected to be perceived by Israeli media consumers.

Findings

Our findings indicate a change spanning the three decades which make up the period of the study: the 1980s, 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. As a result, our findings are divided chronologically.

The 1980s: the warrior

This decade began with the First Lebanon War, which was initially a military operation – Operation Peace for the Galilee – that escalated into war (June–September 1982). After the tragic events of Sabra and Shatila (September 1982), the war became a low intensity conflict (LIC).

During this time, gradual changes in the framing of the image of the soldier can be identified. At the beginning of the 1980s, when events were primarily of a high intensity conflict (HIC) nature, soldiers were framed as strong fighting figures. However, over the following years this image underwent a slow change and by the late 1980s soldiers were, for the most part, still typified as warriors but at times portrayed as scared, sensitive ‘survivors’.

During the first half of the 1980s, IDF soldiers were framed as active, even heroic, agents. Thus, for instance, we found long and detailed quotes from commanders such as: ‘the soldiers had to cover untrodden paths, in the dark, knowing that they still had to face hard and cruel battle during which they would have to vanquish [the enemy]’.⁴² In other words, the media framed the soldiers as brave, trained for combat and ready to face the enemy. Photos were given a high profile during this period and sometimes took up entire pages. The focus of the photos was usually military machinery (mainly tanks), but soldiers near the vehicles were framed as warriors, in full combat gear, giving the impression of being combat-ready and invincible. A typical example was a large photo of a group of combat soldiers with the caption ‘they advanced while fighting until [they reached] the area under Christian control, east of Beirut, resting after battle’.⁴³ However, as the war progressed and turned into LIC, the image of the Israeli soldier changed.

Between the mid-1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, as the level of conflict decreased, most actual fighting was carried out by the Air Force and not ground forces. Consequently, there was a sharp decline in the amount of references in the media to the images of the soldier. When the soldier’s image surfaced, a change in the framing of this image is discernible. The soldier was sometimes framed as a capable warrior; but at other times the framing moved towards the image of a young man just trying to survive and return home in one piece.

During coverage of HIC events, such as a specific military operation, the image of the soldier as a warrior came to the fore. Frequently the soldiers in photos were wearing helmets or pictured against a backdrop of tanks and came across as motivated fighters, as opposed to worn-out soldiers on the defensive. A telling example is the following headline: ‘The soldiers have gone back to routine duties ... when we see the lights of the towns [across the border in Israel], we know that we have a mission – to keep the peace in the north [of Israel]. We catch up on missing sleep on the Sabbath’.⁴⁴ In other words, these are not soldiers who are just trying to survive and to get back home safely, but rather active combat soldiers who are guarding the home front and it is clear to them that their mission is an important and meaningful one. Naturally, HIC events

emphasize the active aspect of the soldiers' operations and therefore the dominant pattern in the media's coverage during this time is that of a warrior.

On the other hand, during routine missions, when the activity is of a LIC nature, and especially in cases of guerrilla attacks in which soldiers were wounded, the beginnings of new patterns can be found. In these cases, the soldier is no longer heroic and mission-oriented and gradually becomes a defensive survivor. This new pattern can be seen in both close-up shots of the wounded, which were absent from coverage in the past, and in striking descriptions of the experiences of the wounded and their comrades, such as: 'it could have been a black Tisha' beAv [day of mourning]; let us hope those who were severely wounded will survive',⁴⁵ or a soldier referring to casualties saying: 'it could happen to me too'.⁴⁶ The emphasis was not on the operational capabilities of the soldiers, but rather on luck and on the reality within which the soldiers had no control over what happened to them. They gradually became passive survivors rather than active fighters who can determine the outcome of the situation.

The change in the image of the soldier towards a survivor figure is even more noticeable when the framing is examined in regard to military funerals. Beginning in 1988, the media publicized images of soldiers crying during military funerals. The captions accompanying such images are highly significant: 'only someone who knows how to cry, knows how to fight. To shed a tear over a comrade who has fallen in battle is not a weakness, but rather a sign that even though we are soldiers in battle, we remain human'.⁴⁷ Or: 'The soldiers fought well and after the battle, wept for their fallen comrades'.⁴⁸ This trend intensified during the following years. As we shall see in the next part of this study, weeping became the norm rather than an exception. While in the past such an image was considered embarrassing for both the soldier himself and the IDF as an armed force, close-up images of soldiers crying at funerals began to appear prominently on the front pages of the newspapers. In 1989, *Yediot Aharonot* had the following: 'soldiers stood grieving. There were some who did not control their feelings, wept out loud and were supported by their friends'.⁴⁹

To sum up this decade, it seems that while at the beginning of the 1980s the image of the Israeli soldier was clearly one of a heroic individual, fighting with conviction, as the Lebanon War dragged on and became more of a LIC, the soldier's image evolved. From the middle of the 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s, the framing of the Israeli soldier moved slowly along the continuum from the image of a warrior to that of a survivor, although the new image is still far less prominent than the traditional one – as can be expected during a transitional period. This discourse will intensify and reach its peak later on, in the 1990s.

The 1990s: panicked 'sitting ducks'

The peak of the change in the image of the Israeli soldier in the media appeared in the 1990s, a period characterized mainly by LIC. As in the preceding period, here

too one can see a change in the soldier's image according to the intensity of the events. Our findings demonstrate how processes which began hesitantly in the mid-1980s became more noticeable in the 1990s.⁵⁰

During the 1990s, 'surviving' soldiers feature more prominently. Photos show wounded soldiers evacuated on stretchers or soldiers weeping at their comrades' funerals. The soldiers' weeping was emphasized and accompanied by huge headlines and close-up photos of soldiers crying and embracing. These are no longer warriors, but frightened youngsters who feel like 'sitting ducks'. Their mission in South Lebanon was unclear to them; they did not feel that they were fighting for a defined goal and only wanted to return home safely. In detailed interviews with soldiers during this period, quotes underlining fears were emphasized such as: 'Get us out of Lebanon', 'I am scared of going back to Lebanon',⁵¹ 'no one wants to be the last casualty in Lebanon',⁵² 'we all understand that each one of us might be killed at any moment', 'we feel like sitting ducks',⁵³ to note only a few prominent examples.⁵⁴

In the early stages of our research, we assumed that we would be able to discern a clear and consistent transformation of the soldiers' framing in the media, from fighting men in the 1980s, to survivors and even 'sitting ducks' at the beginning of the twenty-first century. And indeed, the findings presented up until now reflect such a trend. The Israeli soldier at the end of the 1990s is no longer an inspiring, active warrior, but a frightened, conflicted survivor. This figure is very different from the active combat figure of the 1980s. However, to our surprise, the next decade brought about a further change in the framing of the Israeli soldier and this image became more complex, as will be shown below.

The first decade of the twenty-first century: Rambo – new and improved

Two HIC events from our sample dominated this decade, influencing the soldier's image: the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Cast Lead (2008–9).⁵⁵ Contrary to our original predictions, during this period, the image of an active hero protecting the homeland was reinforced anew.

Continuing the trend of the 1990s, before actual combat, soldiers were usually portrayed as less heroic, and even scared and helpless. For instance, in depicting and citing soldiers who served in the region adjacent to the Gaza Strip, quotes told of nightmares caused by the missile attacks, and of their fears in general. One article from this time presented them as supposed to assist the local inhabitants, but in fact they themselves did not really know what to do.⁵⁶ This framing is similar to that of the scared survivors in the 1990s.

However, as the situation escalated into HIC events, the image of the warrior became dominant, especially in photos,⁵⁷ as well as descriptions of the soldiers' combat capabilities,⁵⁸ and their understanding and acceptance of their presence in the battlefield, such as: 'we are here so that Gilad Shalit will be able to come home';⁵⁹ 'to all the citizens at home: we are here looking out for you'.⁶⁰ The most striking image portrayed in the majority of items during this period was of active

and highly motivated combat soldiers, closer to the image of the warrior than to that of the survivor.

A trend reinforcing this image was the framing of soldiers as wanting and able to restrain fear and emotions in contrast to the frightened, weeping soldiers of the 1990s.⁶¹ Contrary to the 1980s, it is not that these men are heroic and unafraid, but rather that they are able to overcome their emotions and anxieties in order to carry out their mission or so as not worry their families at home. For example, a reserve soldier was quoted saying:

I knew that I would end up crying, so I deliberated a lot before calling my wife. During the conversation, I noticed some emotion in my voice, so I stopped for a moment and said: 'there is a problem with the cell-phone reception here'.⁶²

The weeping soldier is no longer centre stage, and in his place we see a restrained, strong combat soldier.

It seems, therefore, that the beginning of the twenty-first century comes full circle and the image of the soldier in the media returns, to a large degree, to the framing of the 1980s: a motivated warrior set out to give up his life for the greater good and make great sacrifices. However, this is a more complex image than that we find in the 1980s: at times the soldier of the twenty-first century is vulnerable, human and wounded, and is sometimes worried and afraid. He has emotions, but is able to control them. Although the media image does return to that of a determined warrior, this is a more complex and multi-faceted figure than that encountered in the 1980s: not an invincible 'Rambo'-type figure, but a capable fighter who has weaker sides that he does not ignore, but can keep in check.

Discussion and summary

Beginning with the mid 1980s, the traditional image of the soldier which is clearly on one side of the scale – a determined, capable warrior – began moving towards the other end of the continuum – a frightened, conflicted survivor. This process intensified in the 1990s. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we identify a change and a certain return to the traditional image. That said, this image is more complex than that of the 1980s. Traditional characteristics intensified in this period but they did not completely overpower the newer characteristics of the 1990s: even though they displayed control over their feelings and this was emphasized, soldiers were still presented at times as afraid, anxious and conflicted.

Viewing the quantitative data clarifies a number of points. [Figure 1](#) illustrates that during HIC events, we can detect an increase in the framing of the soldier as a warrior, while during LIC events there is a noticeable increase in the framing of the soldier as a survivor. These findings highlight that the main variables influencing the framing of the image of the soldier are the nature of the event (HIC/LIC) and the perception of the threat. It is important to note, that while the data seems to show that the image of the warrior is more dominant over the entire period studied, this is a result of disproportionate coverage during HIC events in

comparison to LIC events (see [Table 1](#)), and is not a true representation of the findings, as explained above. That said, the quantitative data corroborates our qualitative findings illustrating the link between HIC events and the framing of the warrior, the link between LIC events and the framing of the survivor, as well as the gradual transition over time from a clear warrior framing in the 1980s to a more complex image in the twenty-first century.

A number of factors possibly influenced the change in the soldier's image in the media.⁶³ Among these, one is the most dominant – the type of combat and the perception of the threat posed to society. When examining the transformation in the media image of the Israeli soldier in light of the type of conflict at the time, we can detect the following pattern: the higher the perception of threat to society, and the more events are of a HIC nature, the more the soldier is likely to be framed as a capable warrior rather than as a confused survivor. Conversely, the smaller the threat, involving fewer ground troops, and the more events are of a LIC nature, the more likely we are to see soldiers framed as survivors.

As discussed above, Israel underwent fundamental changes regarding the perception of conflict and security in the 1990s. The First Lebanon War was a watershed in the relationship between civilians, the IDF and the decision makers in Israel. This was the first war to be classified as 'a war of choice' in Israel, rather than a just and unavoidable war, and it challenged the traditional relationship between society and the IDF. For the first time voices supporting conscientious objection were heard, as well as female anti-war sentiments (as opposed to the traditional militaristic male voices).⁶⁴

Additionally, the 1990s brought about a significant diminishing in the perception of the acute physical threat to Israeli society and a general feeling of normalization. The peace process seemed to indicate that Israel was finally entering a new phase in its history where it no longer needed to fear for its very existence and could finally become a nation similar to all other Western democracies. Such feelings also made the public less willing to fight and to pay the price of armed conflict. As noted earlier, this influenced society's perception of the security establishment in general and the IDF in particular. Together with the fact that the 1990s were characterized by LIC, as well as training accidents, friendly fire and terrorist attacks, this new reality brought about changes in the role of the media,⁶⁵ making it more critical towards the security establishment. It is therefore not surprising to find the image of the Israeli soldier framed as more conflicted than in the past: this image mirrors the feeling of society itself towards its conscripted sons. It does not feel the loss of life is justified, does not trust the decision makers when they send soldiers to battle and sees itself as responsible for bringing these confused young men home safe and sound and not expecting them to protect society.

However, Israeli society underwent further transformation in September 2000. The failure of the peace talks at Camp David and the subsequent Second Intifada led Israelis to believe that the conflict in the region is insoluble.⁶⁶ Such feelings are a stark contrast to those prevalent in Israeli society during the

1990s,⁶⁷ and returned Israelis to the state of mind that prevailed in the 1980s as a 'nation in arms'. This affected the media coverage of security issues accordingly and is reflected in the framing of the Israeli soldier as a strong figure once more, expected to protect society from the enemy at the gates, as illustrated above. In other words, HIC events are more likely to amplify the framing of soldiers as warriors, while LIC events are more conducive to framing them as survivors.

Still, the transformation the Israeli public underwent during the previous decades could not be ignored. Framing soldiers as human, vulnerable, finding it difficult to cope with the loss of comrades, as described above, could not just disappear after being the dominant narrative during the 1990s. It seems that these points influenced the image of the Israeli soldier during the beginning of the twenty-first century and caused him to be framed using both characteristics in a more complex manner.

In conclusion, the image of the Israeli soldier as framed in the media shifts according to perceptions in Israeli society. It appears that the image of the soldier is a marker for the public's views concerning relations between the military and society and is evidence of the way society perceives the security situation. The more a conflict is perceived the result of an imminent threat, 'a war for our home' – especially in the case of a HIC event – the closer the image of the soldier will be to that of a warrior. And vice versa: the more a conflict is perceived by the public as the result of a less prominent threat, the more the soldier would be framed as a survivor. However, one cannot ignore ongoing social changes, and accordingly the image is no longer one-dimensional but more multifaceted. It is quite possible that in the future we shall see further changes in the image of the soldier – a return to the image of the survivor, an additional reinforcement of the warrior or perhaps something new. In light of our findings here, it is clear that any change or continuity in the image of the soldier the media promulgates will be a reflection of changes in Israeli society.

While the findings presented here have a local side to them, they may also represent Western trends. Our research points to the possibility that similar studies in other Western armed forces might reach comparable conclusions regarding the relationship between threat perception, the intensity of combat and the media framing of combat soldiers. We hope the present study presents a basis for such research in the future.

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Notes

1. See, for instance, S. Almog, *Law and Cinema* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Srigim-Lion, 2012); E. Ben Ari and E. Lomsky-Feder, "From 'a Nation in Uniform' to 'Different

- Uniforms for the Nation', Managing Cultural and Social Diversity in the IDF" [in Hebrew], in *In the Name of Security*, ed. M. al-Hajj and U. Ben Eliezer (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2003), 255–86; C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1995); R. Morag, *Defeated Masculinity. Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Koebner, 2011); A. Mendelson-Maoz, *Literature as a Moral Laboratory – Reading Selected 20th Century Hebrew Prose* [in Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2009); O. Sasson-Levy, *Identities in Uniform. Masculinity and Femininity in the Israeli Army* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006).
2. This aspect has yet to be examined in depth, especially over time. An exception in this respect is D. Lemish, "You're Either There or You're Not: The Advertisement as a Glimpse into Israeli Society" [in Hebrew], in *Society in the Looking Glass, in Memory of Yonatan Shapira*, ed. H. Herzog (Tel Aviv: Ramot, 2000), 539–59. However, Lemish examines advertisements only and her emphases differ from those of the present study.
 3. R. Cohen-Almagor, *The Boundaries of Tolerance and Liberty* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Nevo, 1994); R. Cohen-Almagor and Y. Novitzky, "The Conduct of the Media in the Eye of the Jewish Public in Israel: 'Is' versus 'Ought'" [in Hebrew], *Megamot* 39, no. 4 (1999): 400–19.
 4. G. Almond, "Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics," in *The Politics of Developing Areas*, ed. G. Almond and J. Coleman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960), 3–64.
 5. Y. Roeh, *Looking at the Media Differently: Seven Angles for Looking at the Media and in the Press* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Reches, 1994).
 6. This article does not examine soldiers in combat support roles, female soldiers, auxiliary roles, etc. For the purposes of the present study, we use Harel and Cohen's definition of the combat soldier as one who: 'is in mortal peril in the course of duty'. See A. Harel and G. Cohen, "The IDF's Deliberation: Who is a Combat Soldier?," *Haaretz*, August 24, 2012, 7.
 7. The selection of events will be described below.
 8. Since the 1990s, and in light of the growing recognition of the role of the media and its influence, Israeli scholars who dealt with issues concerning civil–military relations also began to address the relations between the media and the military (the army, war and security). See for instance U. Lebel, ed., *Security and the Media, Dynamics of a Relationship* [in Hebrew] (Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2005); Y. Peri, "Cosmetic or Essential Changes? Relations Between the Media and the Security Apparatus at the Beginning of the 21st Century" [in Hebrew], *Misgerot Media* 1 (2007): 143–58.
 9. See, for example, U. Ben Eliezer, "From a Nation in Uniform to a Post-modern Military" [in Hebrew], *Tarbut Demokratit* 4–5 (2001): 55–97; D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia, Israel: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1990); B. Kimmerling, "Militarism in Israeli Society" [in Hebrew], *Teoria u-Bikoret* 4 (1993): 123–40.
 10. See, for example, G. Barzilai, *Democracy in Wartime, Controversy and Consensus in Israel* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1992); M. Sherman and S. Shavit, "Media and National Security: The Functioning of the Israeli Media in the Eyes of the Israeli Public" [in Hebrew], in *Security and Media, Dynamics of a Relationship*, ed. U. Lebel (Beersheba: Ben-Gurion University, 2005), 239–60.
 11. O. Mayzels, "Military Service as a Central Element of the Israeli Experience" [in Hebrew], *Skira Hodshit* 9, no. 8 (1993): 3–20; E. Ben Ari and A. Levy-Shreiber, "Body-building, Character Building and Nation Building: Gender and Military

- Service in the Eyes of the Israeli Public” [in Hebrew], *Tarbut Demokratit* 4, no. 5 (2001): 99–130.
12. On masculinity in Israeli society in light of military ethos and on changes in the accepted image created by the military brought about by ethnic, cultural and social minorities, see, for example, Ben Ari and Lomsky-Feder, “From ‘A Nation in Uniform’.”
 13. Y. Limor, “Mass Media in Israel” [in Hebrew], in *Trends in Israeli Society*, ed. E. Yuchtman-Ya’ar and Z. Shavit (Tel Aviv: Open University, 2003), 1017–101; G. Barzilai, “Mass Media and War” [in Hebrew], *Kesher* 10 (1991): 25–35; Y. Limor and R. Mann, *Journalism: Collecting Information, Writing and Editing* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1997).
 14. D. Caspi and L. Yehiel, *The Mediators: Media in Israel 1948–1990* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992).
 15. Y. Peri, “Social–Military Relations in Israel in Crisis” [in Hebrew], *Megamot* 39, no. 4 (1999): 375–99; D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, “Democracy and National Security in Ongoing Conflict” [in Hebrew], in *Democracy and National Security in Israel: A Reader*, ed. B. Neuberger and A. Ben-Ami (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1994), 362–91; A. Yaniv, *Politics and Strategy in Israel* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1994); Z. Rosenheck, D. Mamman, and E. Ben Ari, “The Sociology of the Study of the Military, Militarism and War in Israel: Local Centrality and Global Marginality” [in Hebrew], in *In the Name of Security* (see note 1), 185–214.
 16. See, for example, H. Nossek and Y. Limor, “Military Censorship in Israel: An Ongoing Temporary Compromise,” in *Mass Communication in Israel – a Reader*, ed. D. Caspi and Y. Limor (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1998), 362–91; Y. Peri, “Changes in the Security Discourse in the Civil Perception in Israel” [in Hebrew], *Tarbut Demokratit* 4–5 (2001): 233–65; Barzilai, *Democracy in Wartime*.
 17. Y. Peri, “‘The Democratic Putsch’ in the 1999 Elections,” in *In the Name of Security* (see note 1), 125–44.
 18. Barzilai, *Democracy in Wartime*.
 19. Examples include the first Ze’elim disaster (July 17, 1990), the Second Ze’elim disaster (November 5, 1992), an initiation rite in the Air Force in which one soldier was badly wounded and another killed (July 21, 1992), an Air Force training exercise in which two soldiers were killed (August 10, 1992), the helicopter disaster (February 4, 1997), the Shayetet 13 (an elite naval commando unit) disaster (September 5, 1997), as well as others.
 20. Nossek and Limor, “Military Censorship”; Peri, “Changes in the Security Discourse.”
 21. Peri, “Cosmetic or Essential Changes?”
 22. H. Nossek and Y. Limor, “The Military and the Media in the 21st Century: Towards a New Model of Relationships,” in *Security and the Media* (see note 10), 69–100.
 23. D. Dor, *Media under the Influence* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2001); Nossek and Limor, “The Military and the Media.”
 24. T. Liebes and Z. Kampf, “Black, White and Shades of Grey: Palestinians in the Media in the Second Intifada” [in Hebrew], *Misgerot Media* 1 (2007): 1–26; Peri “Changes in the Security Discourse.”
 25. Peri, “Cosmetic or Essential Changes?”; Keshev – The Centre for the Protection of Democracy in Israel *War until the Very Last Minute – Israeli Media in the Second Lebanon War* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Keshev, 2007).
 26. H. Nossek and Y. Limor, “Military Censorship in Israel: The State of Affairs During The Second Decade of the 21st Century” [in Hebrew], in *Dynamics of Change: Israeli Politics in a Transitional Period*, ed. H. Zubeida and D. Mekelberg (Tel Aviv: Israeli Association of Political Science, 2011), 223–54.

27. Y. Shor and B. Nevo, *The Contract between the IDF and Israeli Society: Mandatory Service* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Israeli Institute for Democracy, 2002). See especially tables and data on pp. 58–76.
28. In spite of slight fluctuations in its status over the years, the IDF is the most trusted public institution according to the Jewish public in Israel. It has held this position consistently for decades, according to data of the Israeli Institute for Democracy. For a representative example see T. Herman et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2011* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Democracy Library, 2012), <http://www.idi.org.il/media/518016/democracy%20ivrit.pdf> (accessed February 2013); see especially the diagrams on p. 63.
29. See for example, Y. Limor, B. Leshem, and L. Mandelzis, *Public Relations – Strategy and Tactics* [in Hebrew] (Raanana: Open University, 2014); D. Caspi and Y. Limor, *The In/Outsiders: Mass Media in Israel* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 1999).
30. D. Caspi and Y. Limor, *The Mediators: Media in Israel 1948–1990* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992).
31. R. Nir and Y. Roeh, “Forms of Quotation in News Reports in Israeli Media” [in Hebrew], in *Hebrew is a Living Language: Articles About Language in its Social-Cultural Contexts* A. Ornan et al (eds.), (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1992), 189–210; Y. Roeh, *A Different Look at the Media: Seven Approaches to Examining Media and Journalism* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Reches, 1994).
32. Caspi and Limor, *The Mediators*; O. Almog, *Goodbye to Srulik: Israel’s Elite’s Changing Values* [in Hebrew] (Haifa: University of Haifa and Zmora Bitan, 2004).
33. Caspi and Limor, *The Mediators*.
34. The scope of this article precludes delving into the differences between the papers, which will be explored in forthcoming studies.
35. As opposed to events characterized more as police activity and contact with civilians, such as those during the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, or actions in the West Bank during the intifadas.
36. Sunday being the beginning of the work week in Israel and Friday being the day weekend newspapers are distributed. Friday papers include supplements, magazine additions and a generally expanded edition.
37. The study focuses on the news coverage of these events and includes: the news pages (reports and commentary); the daily supplement (24 hours in *Yediot Aharonot* and Part B in *Haaretz*) containing feature articles and background coverage; the weekend supplement containing articles, feature pieces, interviews and commentary summing up the events of the week.
38. Nir and Roeh, “Forms of Quotation.”
39. D. Caspi, *Pictures in the Mind, Public Opinion and Democracy* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Open University, 2001).
40. R. Entman, “Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communications* 43, no. 4 (1993): 51–8; T. Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); S. Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); D.A. Scheufele, “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103–22; D.A. Scheufele, “Agenda-Setting, Priming and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication,” *Mass Communication and Society* 3, no. 2–3 (2000): 297–316.
41. Two additional criteria are explored in another article (under review): the framing of the soldier as part of the collective versus framing him as an individual; the framing of the soldier as a competent adult versus framing him as a helpless child (Z. Israeli and E. Rosman-Stollman, “Men and Boys: Media Representations of Israeli Combat Soldiers,” *Israel Studies Review* (forthcoming)). Additional criteria in our research

- include the framing of wounded soldiers and casualties, soldiers from cultural and national minorities, female soldiers, gay soldiers, as well as other categories.
42. *Yediot Aharonot*, June 8, 1982, 2.
 43. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1982, 4.
 44. *Ibid.*, February 7, 1988, 8.
 45. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1989, 2.
 46. *Ibid.*, October 10, 1989, 2.
 47. *Ibid.*, February 5, 1988, 1.
 48. *Ibid.*, 2.
 49. *Ibid.*, September 11, 1989, 3. Coverage of weeping soldiers was less noticeable in *Haaretz* during this time. These initial patterns would become dominant in the 1990s, and weeping soldiers would appear in *Haaretz* as well.
 50. The slight differences between the newspapers in the previous decades became more marked. There was a clear change in the image framing in *Yediot Aharonot*, and the soldier was usually framed as a survivor rather than a warrior. These changes were not as clear in *Haaretz* and became more noticeable only in the 2000s.
 51. *Yediot Aharonot*, February 7, 2000, 2.
 52. *Ibid.*, February 10, 2000, 2–3.
 53. *Ibid.*
 54. It should be noted that the soldiers' weeping was, at this time, the focus of the security discourse and criticized by the political-security establishment. See for example the quote by Uri Lubrani, IDF coordinator in Lebanon: 'the photos of weeping IDF soldiers are a cause for celebration in Teheran and Damascus'; 'harm our national strength, and in Iran and Syria, they want more attacks (*Yediot Aharonot*, October 20, 1995, 1). In 1998 a Golani commander sent out a directive to his soldiers permitting them to cry at funerals, but stating that they must: 'try not to weep aloud, to stand up straight and not to fall upon each other's shoulders'. *Yediot Aharonot*, June 11, 1998, 6.
 55. To be fair, the change depicted here can be noted during events of the Second Intifada (2000) and Operation Defensive Shield ('Homat Magen', 2002) as well. However, since these events do not fit within our choice of events (which exclude conflict involving civilians and police-related activities), we did not include them here. That said, the framing of the soldier during the Second Intifada and related events concur with our findings. See D. Dor, *Behind Defensive Shield* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2003).
 56. *Yediot Aharonot*, December 29, 2008, 24 Hours supplement, 4.
 57. See, for example, the photo on the front page of *Haaretz* of a combat soldier with the caption: "Thousands of soldiers are fighting inside Gaza," *Haaretz*, January 4, 2009, 1.
 58. See, for instance, the description of the Golani brigade during combat: 'the former brigade commander used to compare it to a Rottweiler which is kept on a leash during times of peace, but that you would want it next to you in times of war.' *Haaretz*, January 6, 2009: 3.
 59. *Yediot Aharonot*, January 15, 2009, 1.
 60. *Ibid.*, January 7, 2009, 14–15.
 61. *Ibid.*, August 11, 2006, Weekend supplement, 20–21.
 62. *Ibid.*, August 13, 2006, 24 Hours supplement, 6–8.
 63. In understanding changes in the other criteria explored in our broader study, other factors come into play. In the case of the shift from warrior to survivor and back again, the explanation offered here is the most dominant factor.
 64. This includes the protest against military burials. See U. Ben Eliezer, *Israel's New Wars: A Sociological-Historical Explanation* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2012).

65. Naturally one may ask the chicken and egg question: does the media reflect these changes? Exacerbate them? Cause them? It seems to us that there is a process of mutual influence here, and, at the very least, a certain reflection of social processes in the media.
66. It is important to note that the feeling of peace being a pipe dream was not a uniquely Israeli one in the post-9/11 world.
67. This change has been noted and discussed extensively. See for example the comprehensive study of Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, *Barriers for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Centre for Israel Studies, 2010), <http://www.jiis.org.il/upload/barriers-heb.pdf> (accessed February 2013); H. Kelman, "The Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process and its Vicissitudes: Insights from Attitude Theory," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 4 (May–June 2007): 287–303