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A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME? STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN ISRAEL

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Abstract

The term strategic communications is missing from the Israeli academic and professional discourse. Instead, there are three different conceptual approaches to state communication in Israel—*hasbara,* public diplomacy, and cognitive campaign. Analysing the history of the development and employment of these three concepts, this article makes two contributions important for the field of strategic communications. First, it analyses how Israel has found itself with various approaches; why it does not have one comprehensive framework; and whether any of the three approaches can be considered the equivalent of 'Israeli strategic communications'. Second, based on the case of Israel, it establishes the need for states to have an exhaustive conceptual framework to conduct strategic communications and the consequences of the absence of such a framework.

Keywords—*strategic communications, strategic communication, Israel, Hasbara, public diplomacy, cognitive campaign*

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Introduction[1]

In the Western academic and professional communities, the term 'strategic communications' (SC) has long been conceptualised as an operational art conducted by states and governments in pursuit of their national interests. However, regardless of the extensive literature in the field and the worldwide practice of SC, there is neither a unified definition, nor agreed understanding of what SC entails.

On the scholarly front, Christopher Paul defines SC as 'coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signalling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives'.[2] According to James Farwell, SC includes 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to influence the attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives'.[3] A more specific definition is offered by Neville Bolt, who argues that SC entails 'the projection of foreign and security policies aimed at changing the attitudes and behaviour of targeted audiences to achieve strategic effects, using words, images, actions and non-actions in the national interest'.[4]

On the institutional front, the number of the definitions for SC is as large as the number of institutions active in this field. The US government (USG) defines SC as:

> The focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, and preserve conditions for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.[5]

1 The authors would like to thank Amos Hervitz and Roy Shulman from the INSS for assistance with material collection and writing of the study.
2 Christopher Paul, *Strategic Communication*, (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), p. 17.
3 James Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2012), pp. xvii–xix.
4 Neville Bolt, 'Foreword', *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 6, Spring 2019, p. 4.
5 *United States Government Compendium of Interagency and Associated Terms*, (Washington DC, November 2019), p. 925.

Other examples of different definitions can be seen across military organisations that consider themselves as conducting SC on their own. The UK Ministry of Defence defines SC as efforts to advance 'national interests by using Defence as a means of communication to influence the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of audiences',[6] and NATO defines SC as 'the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims'.[7]

While these definitions offer slightly different understandings of the nature and character of SC, it seems right to argue that they all comprise several major elements: a **coordinated/coherent** use of **all means of communication** (words, images, actions) to **influence targeted audiences** in pursuit of **political interests.** Following this understanding, this article adopts the definition offered by the StratCom Terminology Project. There are two reasons that justify this choice. First, the aim of this project is to clarify terms and make them accessible to the wider community of strategic communicators. Second, and more important, it offers the most comprehensive and thought-through rationale behind the proposed definitions.[8] According to the StratCom Terminology Project, SC represents 'a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment'.[9]

Keeping this definition in mind, this article aims to answer an important question regarding the discourse on the nature and character of SC—Does a state need an exhaustive and coherent conceptual framework to conduct strategic communications?

In analysing Russian conceptual discourse on the role of words, images, and actions deployed by the Russian government, Ofer Fridman argues that the Kremlin conducts successful SC, even if it does not define its actions as such.[10] Yet, the Russian conceptualisation of 'information war' [*informatzionnaya voyna*] seems to be comprehensive enough to offer a requisite theoretical framework

6 *Joint Doctrine Note 2/19. Defence Strategic Communication: an Approach to Formulating and Executing Strategy*, (London: Ministry of Defence, 2019), p. 4.
7 'About Strategic Communications', NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, (accessed 25 January 2020).
8 Neville Bolt and Leonie Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, June 2019).
9 Ibid, p. 46.
10 Ofer Fridman, '"Information War" as the Russian Conceptualisation of Strategic Communications', *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 165, N° 1, 2020.

for SC in the historical, cultural, and socio-political context of Russia.[11]

Israel, like Russia, does not conceptualise its activities in terms of SC. However, unlike Russia, it does not have any other comprehensive concept that unifies Israel's use of words, images, and actions to influence the political behaviour of targeted audiences in order to advance national interests. Israeli strategic culture, dominated by creative doers, rather than creative thinkers, is predisposed towards finding ingenious solutions to individual problems, rather than developing holistic concepts that would address a series of similar problems as a whole. Therefore, instead of having one comprehensive approach towards its communications, Israel simultaneously employs a range of different terms, concepts, and approaches.

One of the oldest terms in the Israeli discourse is *hasbara*. While in its literal translation *hasbara* means 'explaining', its exact meaning can also be interpreted as 'advocacy'[12] or even as Israel's propaganda, as Giora Goodman put it:

> The term 'propaganda' acquired a pejorative sense during the first half of the twentieth century. Accordingly, British and American propagandists used 'information' to describe their work and the positive-sounding word *hasbara* has generally been preferred in Hebrew.[13]

In the last two decades, Israel has been trying to replace the conceptual framework of *hasbara* with *medini'ut tziburit* [public diplomacy].[14] This implies that *hasbara* is different from public diplomacy, creating a need to understand the differences between the two concepts.

While the concepts of *hasbara* and public diplomacy have been shaping the theoretical debates and practical experience in Israel for several decades, another concept—cognitive campaign [*hama'araha al hatoda'a*]—has recently joined the discourse. Conceptualised in the context of military activities, the aim of a cognitive campaign, according to Israeli experts, is 'to cause target audiences

11 Ofer Fridman, 'The Russian Perspective on Information Warfare: Conceptual Roots and Politicisation in Russian Academic, Political, and Public Discourse', *Defence Strategic Communications*, Vol. 2, Spring 2017, pp. 61–86; Fridman, 'Information War'.
12 Gary Rosenblatt, "'Hasbara" Goes Prime Time', *The Jewish Week*, 12 March 2003, (accessed 26 January 2020).
13 Giora Goodman, '"Palestine's Best": The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946–1947', *Israel Studies*, Vol. 16, Nº 3, 2011, p. 22.
14 See: *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012* (Jerusalem: Molad-The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012).

to adopt the perception of reality held by the side wielding the effort, so that it can more easily advance the strategic and/or operational objectives that it sees as critical'.[15]

This article explores the three concepts used in Israel to describe the deployment of deeds, words, and images to influence the political behaviour of targeted audiences in order to advance national interests—*hasbara*, public diplomacy, and cognitive campaign. Analysing Israel's approaches to communication, this article aims to examine how Israel has found itself with various approaches and why it does not have a single comprehensive framework for its SC.

Part One: Hasbara

The term *hasbara* is unique to Israel and stems from the country's perceived status and effort to convince the world of its historical justice.[16] The main aim of *hasbara* is to convey a specific narrative to the desired audience in an attempt to sway public opinion on a particular political issue related to Israel. *Hasbara* is responsive and not proactive in nature, aiming to explain political-security actions in an attempt to gain support and legitimacy. Its activities can be carried out by state agencies (various government ministries), the military, and state-affiliated NGOs.[17]

Immediately after the establishment of Israel, Moshe Sharett, the first Minister of Foreign Affairs, planned to set up a Bureau of Hasbara. This plan, however, never materialised, as the majority of decision-makers in Israel at this time disregarded the importance of information interaction with international institutions, placing a greater emphasis on actions rather than words. Established with the support of all major powers and a deep internal sense of justice, Israel did not feel the need to explain itself to the world, or to justify its actions. Israel's victory in the 1948 War of Independence was seen by the world as a stand of 'few against many', and Israel was endorsed by the majority of countries. Moreover, the successful absorption of immigrants from around

15 Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, 'Preface', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), The Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence (IRMI), 2019), p. 7.
16 Ron Schleifer, 'Jewish and Contemporary Origins of Israeli Hasbara', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 15, 2003, p. 123.
17 *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012*, (Jerusalem: Molad—The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012); Yegar Moshe, 'He'arot al sherut ha-huts shel Yisrael' [Remarks on the Foreign Service of Israel], Opinion Paper N° 160, (Sha'arei Tikva: The Ariel Centre for Policy Research (ACPR), 2005); *Diplomatya Tziburit be'Israel* [The Public Diplomacy of Israel], Samuel Neaman Institute, Technion University, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2009.

the world, the establishment of kibbutz communities, the development of the Negev desert, and the creation of an independent military complex—all these actions aggregated international support with no need for further explanation or justification.[18]

The first attempt to conduct *hasbara* activities took place in the early 1960s, when the IDF (Israel Defence Forces) Intelligence Corps established the Department for Security and Hasbara. The department's aim was to control and coordinate the release of information to journalists and to the general public. However, the department was disbanded in the late 1960s, when the responsibility for *hasbara* was transferred from the Intelligence Corps to the newly established IDF Spokesman's Unit.[19]

Israel's military victories in the Six-Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973 completely changed the way Israel was perceived by the international community. From the small 'David', which barely won its independence in 1948, Israel twice defeated significantly superior Arab militaries, emerging as a regional 'Goliath' occupying newly conquered territories. Moreover, the decolonisation process added many new sovereign Arab and Muslim states to the international community, who subsequently intensified international criticism of Israel's policies. Facing the rise of international criticism, Israel found itself in a new situation, trying to explain and justify its actions.

The overwhelming success in the Six Day War and increasing international criticism forced the Israeli leadership to rethink its whole approach to *hasbara* activities. This led to the establishment of the Ministry of Hasbara in 1974. While the main aim of the ministry was to coordinate the activities of all actors involved in the *hasbara* effort, it did not survive long enough to achieve any real progress. Approximately one year after its establishment, the ministry was closed due to inter-ministerial competition and bureaucratic rivalries.[20]

18 See Jonatan Manor, 'Kishalon ha'asbara or kishalon ha'mediniyut?' [A Failure of the Hasbara or a Failure of the Policy?], in Benjamin Gronik and Arie Noiberger (eds), *Mediniut Hutz Bein imut le'esderim—Israel 1948–2008* [The Foreign Policy between Conflict and Agreement—Israel 1948-2008], Vol. B, (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel, 2008); Sharon Pedro, *Utzma raka ke'nehes leumi* [Soft Power as a National Asset], (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2004).
19 Ephrayim Lapid, 'Dover tzal modiya: mi'mlhemet atzmaut ve'ad edan hatwitter' [IDF Spokesperson Announces: From the War of Independence to the Age of Twitter], *IsraelDefense*, 17 September 2019 (accessed 7 April 2020).
20 Nachman Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2013), p. 116.

The peak of the Arab states' efforts to delegitimise Israel came in 1975 when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution that determined that 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.'[21] The response of Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was simple:

> The U.N. lost its ethical and political validity and became a battlefield for wrangling and harassment that have no connection, what so ever, with the principles and ideals for which it was established.[22]

This was a turning point in Israel's approach to addressing the problem of its negative image. The uncoordinated and ineffective *hasbara* activities intended to explain and justify its policies were replaced by a general disdain for international criticism that it saw as biased against Israel.[23]

This approach started to change during the First Intifada (1987–93). This was a new type of conflict for Israel, which was used to engaging in wars against conventional armies or terrorist organisations. For the first time, Israel's control over the message was undermined by the Palestinians, who maintained close relations with foreign journalists. This situation created a great challenge to the *hasbara* activities Israel engaged in to justify its actions against the Palestinians.[24]

At the end of the 1990s, following the report of the State Comptroller about the failure to address international criticism of Israel's actions during the 1996 Operation Grapes of Wrath in Lebanon, Israel's government decided to establish the National Hasbara Forum with the aim of coordinating Israel's *hasbara* abroad. The Forum, however, similar to previous attempts to coordinate *hasbara* activities across different agencies and institutions, ran into the difficulties of inter-ministerial competition.[25]

21 *Resolution 3379: Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, UN General Assembly, New York, 10 November 1975; Efraim Inbar, *Israel eina mevudedet* [Israel Is not Isolated] (Tel-Aviv: Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies, 2013); Manor, 'Kishalon ha'asbara or kishalon ha'mediniyut?' [A Failure of the Hasbara or a Failure of the Policy?], p. 65–68.
22 Yitzhak Rabin, *Speech in the Knesset Regarding the U.N. General Assembly Resolution from 10 November 1975 about Zionism*, 11 November 1975 (Hebrew), published in Inbal Telem, Shmuel Tzvaog, and Benjamin Noiberger (eds), *Mediniyut ha'hutz shel Israel—kovetz mismachim* [The Foreign Policy of Israel—Documents Collection], Vol. A., (Ra'anana: The Open University of Israel, 2004), p. 352.
23 Ofer Fridman, *Enemy Civilian Casualties: Politics, Culture and Technology*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 122–32.
24 Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], p. 129.
25 Ibid., p. 130–31.

The Second Intifada (2000–05) was another milestone where Israel's *hasbara* failed to perform. This Intifada was perceived by the international community as a legitimate resistance and the Israelis were seen as oppressors. Any deployment of force by the IDF was criticised as disproportionate, and the number of Palestinian civilian casualties, which included many children, made Israel's attempts to explain and justify its actions far more difficult. In addition, the dynamics of the interaction with foreign media had changed. In the past, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other governmental agencies explained the policy, and the IDF Spokesman's Unit explained military activities on the ground. However, during the Intifada, the foreign media grew tired of laconic explanations provided by Israeli officials and went straight to military commanders on the ground. Since the commanders were not trained to deal with media, their interaction with journalists was incoherent, inconsistent, and frequently contradicted the general direction set up by Israel's *hasbara*.[26]

The next challenge faced by the Israeli *hasbara* was the 2006 Second Lebanon War. Aggressive and well polished speeches by Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah before, during, and after the war, and the evident failure of Israeli *hasbara* to leverage military success on the battlefield into diplomatic achievements, shaped the perception of Israel's defeat in this war.[27] As a result, the State Comptroller devoted a special report to Israel's *hasbara* efforts, recommending that a National Information Directorate under the Prime Minister's Office be established. In its report, the State Comptroller stated:

> The absence of an overarching state *Hasbara* concept and the lack of proper coordination between institutions responsible for *Hasbara*, which resulted from the absence of government's guidance through a permanent supervisor that provides instruction and coordination, have caused an inherent *Hasbara* failure of Israeli governments.

Furthermore, the report argued that:

> The Prime Minister's Office is the only body that has the overall vision of Israel's *Hasbara* needs vis-a-vis both internal messaging

26 Giora Eiland, 'The IDF in the Second Intifada', *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 13, N° 3, 2010, p. 27–37.
27 Yarden Vatikai, 'Tifkud hadiplomatiya hatziburit ha'israelit' [The Performance of Israel's Public Diplomacy], at the conference *Tikshoret beinleumit bmivtza tzik eitan* [International Communications during the Operation Protective Edge], Bal-Ilan University, 23 November 2014, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020); Shai, *Milkhamedia* [Media War], p. 10.

> aimed at the Israeli public and external messaging. Therefore, it is imperative that it coordinates the national *Hasbara* apparatus in times of emergency and prepares it in times of respite.[28]

In line with these recommendations, the National Hasbara Commission was established in the Prime Minister's Office. The Commission oversaw the National Information Directorate and the Government Press Office, aiming to 'coordinate all *Hasbara* bodies of the State of Israel in order to present a credible, uniform and consistent *Hasbara* policy'.[29] In order to fulfil its role, the head of the National Information Directorate was invited to participate as a permanent member at meetings of the Cabinet, the Ministerial Committee on National Security, and other high-level sessions relevant for the field of *hasbara*.

In addition, it was decided to re-establish the National Hasbara Forum responsible for determining Israeli *hasbara* policy. In an attempt to avoid previous mistakes, the Forum included the Head of the National Information Directorate and his deputy, the Deputy Director of Hasbara and Communications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, communications advisers to the Minister of Defence, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Interior Affairs, the spokespersons for these ministries, the IDF Spokesperson, the Spokesperson of the Israel Police, and a representative of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet).[30]

According to Yarden Vatikai, the former head of the National Information Directorate, the field of *hasbara* has been fully coordinated with decision-making, as the National Information Directorate is integrated into both the formal and informal decision-making processes, influencing policy and not just explaining it *post factum*. The Directorate presents *hasbara* implications for policy, and the Cabinet takes these considerations into account when making decisions.[31]

However, regardless of this evident success in integrating *hasbara* within the decision-making process, the concept continued to be a target of extensive criticism in Israel for its failure to systematically address the problem of negative international opinion. In addition to more repetitive criticism expressed by the State Comptroller, scholars and professionals alike have criticised the

28 *Aspects of Preparedness of Hasbara Bodies and Their Functioning in the Second Lebanon War* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: State Comptroller of Israel, January 2007).
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Yarden Vatikai, 'The State's Strategic Effort', at the conference *The Cognitive Campaign: Gaza as a Case Study*, INSS, 25 June 2018, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

government for its failure to create unified and effective *hasbara* activities.[32]

According to former IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General (Ret.) Avi Benayahu, the concept of *hasbara* lacked the sophistication to change and shape the perception of reality. It offered a one-dimensional solution to a multi-dimensional problem. Since *hasbara* is conducted *post factum*, the speed of information distribution in the contemporary digital age rendered any *post factum* explanations useless.[33] Another former IDF Spokesperson, recently retired Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis, simply stated that 'The time of *Hasbara* is over.'[34] According to him, contemporary challenges require information activities that constitute a complex complementary effort for political or military activities, and not *hasbara* that simply focuses on explanation and justification.[35] Alongside the criticism of *hasbara* in Israel, it has also been constantly criticised internationally, leading to a search for an alternative concept in the IDF, as well as in the civil service.

Part Two: Cognitive Campaign

Until the beginning of the 2000s, two concepts were prevalent in the IDF: *hasbara* and psychological warfare. Similar to other militaries in the world, the IDF considered psychological warfare as a way to influence perceptions held by enemy soldiers and commanders, mostly through the use of deception and disinformation.[36] Since the 1950s, psychological warfare in the IDF has been divided into two levels—strategic and tactical. While, in theory, the strategic level was aimed at 'the enemy in his entirety, on the front and in the rear', in practice, the IDF never employed strategic psychological warfare, but has focused on the tactical level only. [37]

Tactical psychological warfare was defined as an operation 'directed against enemy units on the battlefield, in combination with clearly defined combat

32 Melaie Phillips in an interview on 'Roim Ulam' [See the World], *Channel 1*, 10 January 2011, (Video), (accessed: 8 April 2020); Yair Lapid quoted in 'Lapid: yesh lanu koah, mamash lo zkukim le'Olmert' [Lapid: We have the power, there is no need for Olmert], *Makor Rishon*, 18 July 2012, (accessed 8 April 2020).
33 Avi Benayahu, 'Milkhemet ha'asbara be'idan hadigitali' [The Hasbara War in the Digital Age], *Ma'archot*, N° 445, 2012, p. 4–9.
34 Ron Ben Yishai, 'Milkhemet hatoda'a shel dover tzal' [The Cognitive War of the IDF Spokesperson], *Ynet*, 13 September 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020).
35 Ibid.
36 Rave Galili, 'Ha'Ma'araha she'bein milkhamot ve'ha'ma'amatz ha'ne'elam' [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort], *Bein Haktavim*, 22–23, 2019, p. 75–91.
37 David Siman-Tov and Shay Hershkovitz, Aman yotze le'or, [Military Intelligence Comes to the Light], (Tel-Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2013).

operations'.[38] In many cases, IDF psychological warfare targeted an adversary's intelligence agencies—those tasked with interpreting reality for their decision makers. Therefore, in the IDF, psychological warfare has sometimes been referred to as intelligence warfare.[39] Due to the differing natures of *hasbara* and psychological warfare, the two approaches were organised separately (through the IDF Spokesperson's Unit for *hasbara* and through the Military Intelligence Corps for psychological warfare) without any conceptual coordination or agency cooperation.

In the early 2000s, the IDF started to focus on the cognitive component of military actions. This focus was driven by a number of interconnected developments. First, the IDF began to realise that its opponents (the weaker sides in asymmetric conflicts) were trying to achieve their goals through a 'massive use of psychological warfare'.[40] Second, the IDF Central Command responsible for the Judea and Samaria Area also realised that the opinions of the Palestinian and Israeli publics constituted a critical element in its success.[41]

According to the former Chief of Staff Lieutenant General (Ret.) Moshe Ya'alon, this focus on the cognitive dimension led to a number of transformations. First, it led to changes in operational decision-making seeking to deprive the Palestinian side of achievements in the cognitive domain (for example, by conducting aerial attacks at night and keeping them brief to make them difficult to film).[42] Second, it increased the IDF's awareness of the importance of original footage from the field, leading to the training of military documentarists and their deployment within the armed forces. Third, it prompted a comprehensive transformation within the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, forcing it to develop methods for consistently sharing information with other government agencies.[43]

Finally, 2005, brought about the establishment of the Centre of Cognitive Operations (CCO) responsible for the implementation of the required changes within the IDF. The first task of the newly established centre was a comprehensive

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Shmuel Nir, 'Teva ha'imut hamugbal' [The Nature of Limited Conflict], in Shaul Shai and Hagai Golan, (eds), *Haimut hamugbal* [The Limited Conflict], (Tel-Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2004), p. 19–44.
41 Saar Raveh, 'Sipur hakamat ha'malat' [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations], (Ramat Hasharon: The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre (ITIC), March 2019).
42 Moshe Ya'alon, 'The Cognitive War as an Element of National Security: Based on Personal Experience', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, The Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence (IRMI), 2019).
43 Ibid.

undertaking aimed at developing the doctrinal-conceptual understanding of a cognitive campaign as a series of 'cognitive operations' intended to create a desired change in the perception of the reality, feelings, political position, and/or behaviour of a target audience.[44] A large part of the IDF's terms, methods, and procedures still used today were developed by the CCO, such as: the process of defining and understanding target audiences; methods for influencing target audiences' interests and positions; tools for measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of cognitive operations; and ways of integrating covert and overt activities.[45]

While initially, the actions conducted by the CCO were limited and their character was reminiscent of the tactical psychological warfare conducted in the past,[46] a significant change occurred during the Second Lebanon War in 2006. Professor Yoram Peri, a leading communications expert in Israel, called this war 'the first media war'.[47] On the one side, Hezbollah employed a strict communications management regime, including polished performances and the widespread use of its Al-Manar television channel. On the other side, the IDF 'developed an obsession with everything relating to the cognition' of both Israeli and Lebanese audiences.[48] For example, one of the reasons the town of Bint Jbeil was chosen for the IDF's large-scale military operation was because Nasrallah had held his famous 'Spider Web' victory speech there after the Israelis had been forced to withdraw in 2000.[49] The IDF's victory march across the town and the speech that followed by Colonel Hagai Mordechai, commander of the Paratroopers Brigade, were planned down to the finest detail as a coordinated cognitive operation. Soldiers were equipped with both photo and video cameras to document the hoisting of an Israeli flag over Hezbollah's base in the town.[50]

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit, however, did not publish the material shot by the soldiers, claiming that the material was not professional enough. Moreover, it turned all its attention to the domestic rather than the foreign media, leaving international journalists no choice but to focus on the Lebanese interpretation

44 David Siman-Tov and David Sternberg, 'The Missing Effort—Integrating the "Non-lethal" Dimension in the Israeli Military Lines of Operation', *Cyber, Intelligence and Security*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2017, p. 65–81.
45 Raveh, 'Sipur hakamat ha'malat' [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations].
46 Ibid.
47 Yoram Peri, *Milkhamot munkhot tekshoret: paradox ha'utzma vehadilema ha'astrategit shel tzal* [Mediatized Wars: The Power Paradox and the IDF's Strategic Dilemma], (Tel-Aviv: INSS, 2017), p. 43–48.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.

of events, which suited Nasrallah's plans. Hence, despite awareness of the importance of that cognitive campaign, it was not conducted effectively. The Winograd Commission report on the Second Lebanon War, stated that:

> The cognitive dimension is of the utmost importance in any war, and may be especially important in a conflict that does not have a decisive and unequivocal military victory. However, dealing effectively with this dimension requires us to be deeply aware of the components and processes of the enemy's thinking, whose consciousness we wish to 'sear'. We did not find any systematic discussions dealing with the basic assumptions of this complex and important topic.[51]

In other words, despite the CCO's attempt to revolutionise the field of cognitive operations, the implementation of the idea of cognitive campaign was not as successful as expected. The CCO's request to expand its operations to other areas was denied, and its capabilities and responsibilities were restricted.[52] The attempt of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit to open the IDF to the media was seen as a principal failure, mainly from the perspective of information security. As a result, the IDF tightened its control over information flowing from the battlefield, almost completely eliminating the deployment of journalists, especially international ones, together with soldiers.[53]

During the 2009 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, in the absence of access to the IDF, foreign journalists were forced to rely on local sources from Gaza, many of whom operated under the threats or orders of Hamas. As a result, the international media was flooded with images of the horrors of war from the Palestinian side, while Israeli efforts to minimise the number of civilian casualties received no coverage. Moreover, due to domestic political demand to showcase a resolute response, the Israeli media published mostly images of IDF firepower, indirectly contributing to the message of the IDF's massive use of force.[54] This message made an even deeper imprint with the publication of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict—the Goldstone Report—in September 2009.

51 *The Full Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of Military Engagement in Lebanon 2006* (Hebrew),The State of Israel, January 2008.
52 Raveh, 'Sipur hakamat ha'malat' [The Story of the Establishment of the Centre for Consciousness Operations].
53 Peri, *Milkhamot munkhot teksboret* [Mediatized Wars], p. 48–52.
54 Ibid.

Both the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead showed that the IDF was aware of the importance of a cognitive campaign, but found it difficult to operate accordingly.

By the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, however, the idea of cognitive campaign was in fashion again due to several independent factors. The first was the development of the concept of 'The Campaign between Wars' in 2011.[55] This concept is based on an offensive, proactive, and persistent approach that holistically integrates all possible dimensions of warfare—kinetic, legal, cognitive, technological, electronic, cyber, military, and diplomatic.[56] Therefore, the idea of cognitive campaign was seen as an operational effort within the framework of 'The Campaign between Wars'.

The second process was an effort to address the issue of delegitimisation that limited the IDF's freedom of action in the wake of the Goldstone Report. To this end, an attempt was made by the IDF to synchronise activities with relevant institutions in Israel, such as the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office.

In addition to these two internal processes, technological progress in the second part of the 2000s created favourable conditions for the comeback of the concept of cognitive campaign. The rise of digital platforms and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, allowed broad and direct access to a wide audience, as well as the ability to communicate messages directly to targeted audiences. In 2009, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit set up Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube accounts, and the Intelligence Corps devoted efforts to gathering information from these platforms.[57]

These developments were reflected during the 2012 Operation Pillar of Defence in Gaza. This was the first operation that was accompanied by the IDF's cognitive operations on social networks. The IDF Spokesperson's Unit published videos of terrorists launching missiles from civilian areas in Gaza

55 Shay Shabtai, 'T'fisat ha'ma'arakha she'bein hamilkhamot' [The Concept of the War Between Wars], *Ma'arachot*, N° 445, 2012, p. 24–27; Nizan Alon and Dana Preisler-Swery, '"Ritzat hamaraton ve'tki'yat maklot be'galgalei oyev" hama'arakhot she'bein milkhamot shel tza'l' ["Running a Marathon and Sticking Sticks in the Enemy's Wheels" The Campaigns between the Wars of the IDF], *Bein Haktavim*, 22–23, 2019, p. 13–31.
56 *IDF Strategy* (Hebrew), Office of the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces, April 2018, (accessed 8 April 2020).
57 Ronen Menalis, 'Ma'apekha hadigitalit shel tzal', [The Digital Revolution of the IDF], at conference *Dgit-Kenes itonut digitalit* [Digi—Conference of Digital Journalism], Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya (IDC), 9 April 2018, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

that fell in highly populated territories in Israel. It promoted reports exposing Hamas conducting executions of 'collaborators' and distributed messages regarding the IDF's efforts to avoid civilian casualties in Gaza.[58] These reports and messages were released in large quantities and in a timely manner, including in several live broadcasts. In addition, civilians were called in to assist by sharing posts to increase their visibility on social platforms.[59] Immediately after the operation, the concept of cognitive campaign was back in favour and the IDF Spokesperson's Unit re-established the Combat Documentary Unit intended to transmit professional photos directly from the field.[60]

Several years later, the IDF Planning Division created a designated department responsible for cognitive operations targeting international audiences before, during, and after military operations against Hamas and Hezbollah.[61] In 2018, the department was moved to the IDF Operations Directorate. Initially titled the Cognition Department, it was later renamed the Influence Department.[62] The transfer of the Influence Department from the Planning Division (responsible for the development of force) to the Operations Directorate (responsible for its deployment) signalled the IDF's desire to integrate the cognitive effort into its actual military operations.

The IDF General Staff formulated a doctrine for cognitive campaign and conducted several training exercises. However, despite this attempt to create a unified conceptual approach, different units within the IDF, other institutions of the Israeli Defence establishment, and other government institutions continued to interpret the idea of cognitive campaign differently.[63]

The IDF Strategy published in April 2018 sought to provide a unified definition, calling to create:

> The ability to influence and design cognition, including the development of tools for either wide or focused influence, and

58 Sasha Dratwa at conference *Pituakh ve'new media takhat esh* [Development and New Media Under Fire], The Israeli Internet Association (ISOC-IL), 15 February 2013, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).
59 Peri, *Milkhamot munkhot tekshoret* [Mediatized Wars], p. 57–62.
60 Shai Gal, 'Yehidat hatiud hamivtzai' [The Combat Documentation Unit], *Channel 2 News*, 26 June 2015, (Video), (accessed: 8 April 2020).
61 Amos Harel, '"Mahleket toda'a": tzal hikim guf she'ifa'al mul medinot zarot le'hashpa'a al de'at haka'al' ["Department of Cognition": The IDF Established a Unit that will Act against Foreign States to Influence Public Opinion], *Haaretz*, 4 December 2018, (accessed: 8 April 2020).
62 Ibid.
63 Gabi Siboni and Gal Perl Finkel, 'The IDF's Cognitive Effort: Supplementing the Kinetic Effort', *INSS Insight*, N° 1028, 1 March 2018.

> the integration of the cognitive effort as an independent effort that accompanies and compliments other various efforts.[64]

The changes suggested by the IDF Strategy had immediate impact on the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, which had been leading overt cognitive operations in the IDF. When Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis, the former IDF spokesperson, was asked about the difference between himself and previous IDF spokespersons, he replied:

> I brought an understanding that information, and the way it is used, have an influence on the enemy's consciousness [...] cognitive operations have the ability to influence the battlefield and how it is perceived by the enemy [...] I used the IDF's digital platforms to create legitimation for its operations and to delegitimise and hurt the enemy.[65]

In the past, the role of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit was to communicate with the Israeli public and with foreign journalists based in Israel. The idea that the Unit should also influence the enemy—even if only in the overt spectrum of cognitive operations—indicated a significant shift in IDF thinking.[66]

This transition from the concept of *hasbara* to the framework of cognitive campaign has not been limited to the IDF. Cooperation between different security agencies and governmental institutions created collaboration that has led to a systemic change in Israel's approach towards information and how it can be used.

The first government office to integrate the concept of cognitive campaign outside the IDF was the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. After the 2010 Gaza Flotilla incident, the ministry was tasked with addressing international delegitimisation as a major strategic challenge to Israel. The decision was made following the understanding that there is an ongoing coordinated campaign to delegitimise the State of Israel in the eyes of the international community. According to the Ministry:

64 *IDF Strategy*, Office of the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces.
65 Ronen Manelis in 'Conversation between Noam Manella and IDF Spokesman Brigadier General Ronen Manelis', INSS, 29 January 2019, (Video),(accessed 8 April 2020).
66 'Ha'ium hakharig shel dover tzal be'aravit—al sar hatayarut shel levanon' [The Unusual Threat by the IDF Arabic Language Spokesman against Lebanon's Minister of Tourism], *Channel 12 News*, 28 August 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020); Nir Dvori, 'Dover tzal be'aravit mitgare be'haniya: "haya shave lirot le'ever Israel?' [The IDF Arabic Language Spokesman Teases Ismail Haniyeh: "Was it Worth Shooting at Israel?], *Channel 12 News*, 26 March 2019, (accessed 8 April 2020).

> This campaign includes operations against Israel in the fields of economics, academia, culture, and in the field of cognitive perception of Israel's legitimacy as a national homeland for the Jewish people. The Ministry operates as the leading government institution for all other ministries and relevant government institutions, and maintains relations with other organisations fighting for Israel in this campaign.[67]

In March 2016, the Ministry developed a concept titled 'Perception Shapes Reality' intended to fight the delegitimisation. Accordingly, the Ministry acknowledged that Israel sometimes conducts operations in the Territories that are difficult to explain to international audiences unfamiliar with the context. Hence, different groups and organisations hostile to Israel disseminate partial, biased, or even fabricated information about these events, using concepts and associations familiar to the targeted audiences to shape their reality in a way that delegitimises Israel. Consequently, the Ministry decided to address the problem by shifting the centre of gravity of this struggle from the physical space of college and university campuses (the comfort zone of anti-Israel actors) to the virtual space of information (the comfort zone of Israel where it can maximise its cyber and intelligence capabilities).[68]

In the Ministry's view, the tools of public diplomacy and *hasbara* are insufficient on their own, and there is a need to combine them with offensive intelligence tools able to seed doubt regarding information distributed by anti-Israel actors, and to divide their organisations and force them to cease their operations. Thus, in the short term, the operations conducted by the Ministry are intended to undermine trust in the content distributed by these actors. In the long term, they aim to undermine their whole institutional infrastructure.[69]

This combination of public diplomacy and intelligence tools is one of the foundations of the Ministry's operations. According to its former Director-General Sima Vaknin-Gil 'We brought in a military concept [...] the concept of

67 The Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, Prime Minister's Office, (accessed 8 April 2020).
68 Tal Shalev, 'Da'aga be'yerushalaim: hanotzrim ha'evangelistiim be'hartzot habrit mitrakhekim ni'israel' [Jerusalem is Worried: Evangelical Christians Distance Themselves from Israel], *WallaNews*, 7 August 2016, (accessed 8 April 2020).
69 Sima Vaknin-Gil, 'Hakrav al hatoda'a vemilkhamot ha'atid' [The Battle for Perception and Future Wars], at conference *Kenes Meir Dagan lebitakhon ve'astrategiya* [The Meir Dagan Security and Strategy Conference], Netanya Academic College, 21 March 2017, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).

the cognitive campaign.'[70] Moreover, the Israeli government decided that the Freedom of Information Act would not apply to the Ministry, because:

> [It] operates under four complementary ways of action: warning, deterrence, offense, explanation. Each one is translated into required objectives, sub-efforts, mechanisms and tools. The successful management of the campaign requires that all its elements would be kept under maximum ambiguity.[71]

It is noteworthy that the ministry also works with civilian organisations as contractors, both to maintain ambiguity and to compensate for the Ministry's lack of capacity.[72]

The transition from the concept of *hasbara* to the concept of the cognitive campaign was also reflected in a political move led by Prime Minister Benjamin Natanyahu, whose main aim was to use intelligence as an information weapon. This usage is defined as 'coercive disclosure'—when Israel exposes classified intelligence about its adversaries in order to simultaneously achieve diplomatic and military goals.[73] One of the most notable examples took place in 2018, when Netanyahu exposed, via live broadcast and in front of dozens of journalists, the Iranian nuclear archive, including materials obtained through a wide-scale intelligence operation. His performance was polished for over two months in an attempt to perfect the presentation in a way that would simultaneously produce different impacts on different targeted audiences.[74]

70 Sima Vaknin-Gil, 'Etgarim lebitakhon leumi' [Challenges to National Security], at conference *Bitakhon leumi, faik news ve'hakrav al hatoda'a be'idan hadigitali* [National Security, Fake News, and the Battle for Perception in the Digital Age], Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 11 November 2019, (Video), (accessed 8 April 2020).
71 The State of Israel, *Law Memorandum: Freedom of Information Law (Amendment No. 16) (Exception of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Hasbara in regards to its activities within the responsibility given to it by the Government to lead the campaign against the delegitimisation and boycotting of Israel)*, 2017, reference: 803-99-2017-025616.
72 Colonel D and Major J, 'Toda'a be'am' – irgunim meshutafim ezrahiim-tzvaiim' ["Cognition Ltd." – Joint Military-Civil Organizations], in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *Hama'araha al hatoda'a: hebetim hastrategiim vemodeiniim* [The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives], (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019).
73 Ofek Riemer and Daniel Sobelman, 'Coercive Disclosure: Israel's Weaponization of Intelligence', *War on the Rocks*, 30 August 2019, (accessed: 8 April 2020).
74 Yarden Vatikai and Colonel O, 'When the Intelligence Officer and the Public Diplomat Meet', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019).

Part Three: Public Diplomacy

While the concept of public diplomacy has a very long history,[75] different organisations in Israel interpret the concept differently. On the one hand, there are those who define public diplomacy as an aggregation of actions that promote the political interests of a state through developing mutual understanding by the dissemination of information intended to influence audiences abroad.[76] Equally, there are those who see it as a supplementary effort that assists the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in achieving its goals by seeking the support of carefully selected audiences.[77]

The use of the term 'public diplomacy' in Israel began in the mid-2000s, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced it as a replacement for the outdated *hasbara*. According to the Ministry, 'New Public Diplomacy' entails the 'promotion of a nexus of interests of one country in another country, by creating an attractive image of the former based on a dialogue with the public of the latter, through the use of culture, mutual aid, exchange of delegations and other relevant activities'.[78]

This shift from *hasbara* to public diplomacy was based on the understanding of the changes that technology brought to the information environment, facilitating simultaneous multi-channel communication with different target audiences. In 2008, an internal document circulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs emphasised that the basic assumptions regarding the process of persuasion had changed, creating difficulties in transmitting a unified message and exercising control over it.[79] While *hasbara* had goals that were usually short term and *post factum*, the new public diplomacy was required to achieve long-term, multi-dimensional goals, addressing a variety of political aspects by facilitating a transition from the one-sided communication of persuasion to a dialogue.[80]

This change is reflected in the remarks made by Ron Prosor, former Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2006, he claimed that the

75 Nicholas Cull, 'Public Diplomacy before Gullion', in Nancy Snow and Nicolas Cull (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2020).
76 *Diplomatya Tziburit be'Israel* [The Public Diplomacy of Israel], Samuel Neaman Institute, Technion University, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2009.
77 *Israeli Hasbara: Myths and Facts: A Report on the Israeli Hasbara Apparatus 2012*, (Jerusalem: Molad – The Centre for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2012).
78 *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change—Assessing the Political-Security Situation*, (Hebrew), Internal Document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, 2008, (Classified).
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.

Ministry was changing its strategy from a defensive explanation-based one to a strategy aimed at advancing Israel's soft power.[81] Remarks made by Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the same period, indicate the reasons behind the replacement of *hasbara* with public diplomacy:

> In my view, I live in a state that has its values. [It is] a developed state with a stable economy, part of the free world [and is] a democratic country. On the other hand, when we look at the pictures that are supposedly coming out of here, the reflected image looks like it was taken from some sort of distorted lens. There are two options. The first is to continue saying that the entire world is against us …The second option is to make a change. This is not some kind of instant spin, it's a long and arduous process.[82]

This change occurred due to three main developments**.** The first was the increasing criticism of the term *hasbara* that reflected an apologetic and self-righteous position. Moreover, the usage of the Hebrew term attracted too much international criticism, as a type of propaganda specifically designed and exclusively deployed by Israel. Its replacement with public diplomacy, which is a standard term commonly used around the world, meant they could address this criticism.

The second development was the increasing understanding that it is simply impossible to justify and explain every action. Public diplomacy, unlike *hasbara*, offered a broader set of communications methods.

Finally, there was an increasing understanding that the socio-political and technological changes of the late 20th century had changed the ways of diplomacy. *Hasbara*, conducted exclusively by the state, was replaced by public diplomacy, which enabled the mobilisation of civilian entities and public opinion leaders who did not have a clearly defined affiliation with Israel.[83]

81 Ron Prosor, 'Hadiplomatiya haisraelit be'ulam meshtane: mimegnana le'yozma' [Israeli Diplomacy in the Changing World: From Defence to Initiative], at Herzliya Conference, 22 January 2006, (accessed 8 April 2020).
82 Tzipi Livni quoted in *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change*.
83 Haim Waxman and Daniel Cohen, 'Beyond the Web: Diplomacy, Cognition, and Influence', in Yossi Kuperwasser and David Siman-Tov, (eds), *The Cognitive Campaign: Strategic and Intelligence Perspectives*, (Tel-Aviv: INSS, IRMI, 2019), p. 51–60.

In 2012, following the adaptation of the new conceptual framework, the Division for Hasbara in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Division of Public Policy.[84] With the new name came also new responsibilities. While the previous goal of the Division had been to explain and justify the policy of Israel to the international community, its new goal was to present the Israeli narrative in all its diversity.[85] As part of this transformation, a Department of Digital Diplomacy was established within the Division of Public Policy to promote the Israeli narrative on various digital media platforms in a number of different languages (Hebrew, English, Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and Persian), leveraging digital tools to influence diverse audiences.[86] According to Noam Katz, Head of the Division of Public Policy, the shift towards public diplomacy signified an adaptation of a more balanced approach to diplomatic affairs, integrating military-political and social issues.[87]

Interestingly enough, following this transformation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the IDF decided that it also needed to be involved in the field of public diplomacy, regardless of the fact that it is considered the preserve of civilians. Following the IDF's interpretation of public diplomacy, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit began to initiate different activities intended to present 'different' depictions of the IDF, exposing international audiences to IDF daily life—sports, cultural activities, and education.[88]

While Israel's understanding of public diplomacy is rooted in the concept of *hasbara,* it has introduced an evolutionary change in the context of *hasbara's* past failures and of the new digital age that transformed information communication technologies in the last 20 years. The main changes from *hasbara* to public Diplomacy can be summarised as follows:[89]

1. From an approach that tries to explain and justify Israel's policies by targeting domestic and international audiences, to an approach that aims to establish a multilevel dialogue with target audiences at home, abroad, and in the adversary's camp.

84 Interview with Yiftah Coriel, Director of the Department of Digital Diplomacy at the Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, conducted by the authors on 9 March 2020.
85 The Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, (Hebrew), (accessed 8 April 2020).
86 Interview with Yiftah Coriel.
87 Interview with Noam Katz, The Division of Public Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Israel, conducted by the authors on 5 April 2020.
88 Israel Tal-Saranga, 'Diplomatiya Tziburit Tzvait' [Military Public Diplomacy], *Ma'arachot*, N° 446, 2012, p. 11–19. See also Clila Magen and Ephraim Lapid, 'Israel's Military Public Diplomacy Evolution: Historical and Conceptual Dimensions', *Public Relations Review*, Issue 44, 2018, p. 287–98.
89 *Public Diplomacy in a World of Rapid Change.*

2. From an approach that tries to secure legitimisation of Israel's actions, to an approach that aims to elevate Israel's achievements not only in the field of policy, but also in culture, economics, and technology.

3. From activities conducted exclusively by the state, to the integration and mobilisation of civil organisations.

4. From an approach that targets decision-makers, to an approach that targets various audiences—decision-makers, civilian influencers, and the general public.

5. From an approach based on formal monologue, to an approach that integrates formal monologue with informal dialogue.

Conclusion: Israel's SC—A Rose by Any Other Name?

When the Israeli government appointed in 1968 the freshly retired Lieutenant General Yitzhak Rabin as Israel's ambassador to the United States, Rabin asked: 'What does the government expect Israel's Ambassador to the United States to achieve?' He was then told: 'Diplomatic Objectives? We have no idea.'[90] This anecdote provides an insight into the Israeli approach to its communications with the rest of the world, suggesting that either Israel's communication aims have been so definitive that they are obvious, or its communications have been in such disarray that no one exactly understands their aims. The analysis of three different Israeli approaches to communications, presented in this paper, reveals that the latter is probably closer to the truth.

To understand why and how Israel has found itself operating according to three different concepts simultaneously, it is important to place the stories of *hasbara*, cognitive campaign, and public diplomacy into the Israeli cultural context. While analysing the full scope of Israeli political culture is beyond the remit of this paper, three points relevant to the way Israel conducts its communications deserve attention.

90 Sasson Sofer, 'Towards Distant Frontiers: The Course of Israeli Diplomacy', *Israel Affairs,* Vol. 10, N° 1–2, 2004, p. 1.

Legitimacy

The first is the question of legitimacy. From its very establishment, Israel has had to address not only the legitimacy of its military activities, but also its legitimacy as a Jewish state.[91] In the Israeli mind, these two different types of legitimacy are interconnected. According to many Israeli scholars and politicians 'after more than 60 years of the independence of the State of Israel, there are still many question marks regarding its sovereignty and its right to be an equal member of the international community'.[92]

This article shows that Israel's approach to addressing this issue has changed over time. From the approach of disregarding information activities on the supposition that actions should speak for themselves, to the naïve approach of *hasbara*, which assumed that all of Israel's actions could be explained to and accepted by the international community. From an attempt to borrow military practices and civilianise cognitive campaign, to an Israelification of public diplomacy in an attempt to contextualise Israel's activities within internationally accepted practices. On the one hand, Israel has faced delegitimisation campaigns throughout its history on an unprecedented scale. On the other hand, Israel is not and has never been as isolated as it perceives itself.[93] According to many Israeli scholars, a defining characteristic of Israel's political behaviour is existential anxiety.[94] The inherent assumption that 'all the world is against us'[95] explains Israel's inability to separate international criticism of its policies from attempts to delegitimise Israel as an accepted member of the international community. It also explains Israel's recurring failure to create a coherent approach to its communications—while Israel addresses the legitimacy of its military activities and the legitimacy of its statehood as an interconnected whole, it has consistently failed to understand that international audiences perceive them as two separate issues.

91 Aaron Klieman, *Israel & the World after 40 Years*, (McLean, VA: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1990).
92 Dov Ben-Meir, *Mediniyut Hutz [Foreign Policy]* (Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth and Chemed Books, 2011), p. 25.
93 Efraim Inbar, *Israel eina mevudedet [Israel Is not Isolated]* (Tel-Aviv: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2013).
94 For example: Yair Gad and Sharona Odom-Weiss, 'Israeli Diplomacy: The Effects of Cultural Trauma', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, N° 9, 2014, p. 1–23; Yair Gad, *Tzofen ha'israeliyut: aseret ha'dibrot shel' shnot he'al'paiim* [The Code of Israeliness: The Ten Commandments for the 21st century], (Jerusalem: Keter Books, 2011).
95 Yair Gad, 'Israeli Existential Anxiety: Cultural Trauma and the Constitution of National Character', *Social Identities: Journal of the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol. 20, No. 4–5, 2014, p. 355.

Militarised communications

The second important point is the role that the IDF plays in political decision making. According to many Israeli experts, the IDF has historically constituted 'the dominant influence over policy-making and policy execution'.[96] This article shows that the IDF has been exercising its influence not only on the political decision-making process, but also on how that process is communicated to the rest of the world. This influence *has* two main aspects. The first is that the majority of Israel's communication activities have traditionally addressed the work of the IDF and other security related issues. Therefore, the IDF has naturally found itself in the position of shaping Israel's communications approach.

Second, this experience has forced the IDF to develop one of the most sophisticated military communications apparatus in the world, capable of simultaneously targeting a range of different audiences. However, the over-militarisation of Israel's communications has its price. As this article shows, the IDF's inability to read political competitions between decision-makers and inter-ministerial rivalries within the civil service has consistently prevented the development of a coherent and systematic approach to communications in Israel. Paraphrasing Georges Clemenceau, Israel has been constantly failing to understand that—*state's communications is too serious a matter to leave to soldiers*.

Creative improvisation without comprehensive theory

This leads to the third point—the Israeli culture of *iltur* [creative improvisation].[97] Traditionally, the IDF's culture cultivated doers, rather than thinkers. The lack of intellectual vigour, however, has always been compensated by the Israeli cultural emphasis on improvisation, where officers' ability 'to orient, to think, and to bounce ideas quickly,' finding a better, 'not-by-the-book' solution, is considered a hallmark of military performance.[98] This cultivation of improvisation in the IDF has often been connected to the IDF's culture of 'anti-intellectualism', or

96 Stuart Cohen, 'Changing Civil—Military Relations in Israel: Towards an Over-subordinate IDF?', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 12, N° 4, 2006, p. 769; see also: Yehudah Ben-Meir, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Eva Etzioni-Halevy, 'Civil-Military Relations and Democracy: The Case of the Military-Political Elites' Connection in Israel', *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 22, 1996, p. 401–417.
97 See Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US and Israel* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), Chapter 4.
98 Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation*, p. 117–19.

even 'false intellectualism'.[99] A recent criticism from the Winograd Commission of inquiry into the events of the Second Lebanon War highlighted 'the connection between cultural organisation of improvisation and the lack of professionalism at the level of soldiers, as well as commanders'.[100] That said, creative improvisation has frequently compensated for anti-intellectualism and a deficit of professionalism, as 'improvisers' are also 'problem solvers' and, as the military is constantly busy with fighting, there is never time to 'sit and study'.[101]

This emphasis on improvisation at the expense of systematic thinking is not limited to the IDF.[102] Israel has traditionally avoided developing comprehensive conceptual frameworks, fearing they might limit its ability to improvise the best solution. Israel's first Security Doctrine, written by the first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, was also its last. Since then, the Israeli Cabinet has acted according to 'de facto doctrine based on meetings and assessments with the security establishment or without it'.[103] In the absence of a systematic approach to security, it is not surprising that Israel has never developed a comprehensive conceptual framework for its communications. Instead it has consistently improvised conceptual transformations to address immediate communications needs, introducing new procedures, departments, and forums, only to abandon them when the need recedes and reinvent them a few years later when communications fail again. As Moshe Ya'alon, former Chief of Staff of the IDF, stated:

> Despite the increasing recognition in the State of Israel of the importance of the cognitive campaign, the steps taken so far display a lack of consistency and systematic activity, and they range between improvisation stemming from necessity and ad hoc planning of individual cases.[104]

99 See Avi Kober, 'The Rise and Fall of Israeli Operational Art, 1948–2008,' in John Olsen and Martin Creveld Van (eds), *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Avi Kober, 'What Happened to Israeli Military Thought?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 34, N° 5, 2011, p. 707–32.
100 The State of Israel, *The Full Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Events of Military Engagement in Lebanon 2006* (Hebrew), January 2008, p. 425.
101 Amihud Shachar, 'Ha'baya eina be'tzal' [The Problem is not in the IDF], *Ma'arachot*, N° 380–381, 2001, p. 88–89.
102 Gad, *Tzofen ha'isareliyut* [The Code of Israeliness].
103 Moshe Ya'alon, 'Ptah Davar' [Foreword], in Meir Elran, Gabi Siboni and Kobi Michael, (eds), *'Astrategiyat Tzal' b'rei habitahon haleumi* ['The IDF Strategy' in the Perspective of National Security], (Tel Aviv: INSS, 2016), p. 7.
104 Ya'alon, 'The Cognitive War as an Element of National Security', p. 21–22.

These three characteristics of the Israeli cultural context explain why Israel has been jumping through various conceptual hoops in an attempt to communicate its messages to the world. There is a traceable decline of *hasbara* as the driving communication concept in Israel, with cognitive campaign and public diplomacy taking the lead in the IDF and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs respectively. However, there is a difference between strategic behaviour, which suggests a comprehensive conceptual framework and plan, and acting strategically, which suggests a flexible and improvised response to every event in an attempt to maximise possible results.[105] Israel's approach to communications is of the latter sort. In other words, Israel does not conduct *strategic communications*, which requires strategic behaviour in order to create 'a holistic approach to communication'.[106] Instead, it *communicates strategically*, employing various institutions and different approaches in an attempt to find the best possible response to every challenge it faces. The title of this article asks whether Israel's approach to communication is *de facto* SC (a rose by any other name). Unfortunately, neither *hasbara*, nor cognitive campaign, nor public diplomacy answers the requirements of this rose (SC). Instead of a universal rose, Israel has a bouquet of different flowers, each of which is grown by a different institution, fitting for only a limited number of occasions and directed to separate and specific audiences.

This conclusion leads to two important insights. The first addresses the main theoretical question of this article about the consequences of the absence of an exhaustive conceptual framework to conduct SC. By analysing the case of Israel, this paper shows that without such a theoretical framework and one institution responsible for coordinating the words, images, and actions produced by all relevant actors with the intention of influencing targeted audiences in pursuit of national interests, any attempt at SC is destined to run into difficulties. The inherent competition between different institutions produces too much friction and disarray, amplified by differences in approaches based on different ways, means, and methods.

The second insight is about the general direction of Israel's approach to communications. In the last decade, Israel has developed, for the first time, a systematic conceptual framework for its security-military activities short of war—'The Campaign between Wars'.[107] The revival of the concept of cognitive

105 Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
106 Bolt and Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, p. 46.
107 Shabtai, 'T'fisat ha'ma'arakha she'bein hamilkhamot' [The Concept of the War Between Wars].

campaign within this framework offers an interesting insight into the future of Israel's communications. Both concepts have been developed and promoted by figures connected to the IDF Intelligence Corps[108] as 'the IDF's approach to prevention and influence'[109] based on 'accurate intelligence that enables precise operational action'.[110] The IDF Intelligence Corps, due to the very nature of intelligence gathering and analysis, is an oasis of systematic conceptual thinking in the IDF's desert of improvising 'doers'. Therefore, the concept of cognitive campaign seems to be the best candidate to grow and become the 'rose' of strategic communications in Israel. The IDF has the requisite influence in the corridors of power to promote its conceptual thinking. The Ministry of Strategic Affairs already operates within the framework of cognitive campaign. However, only time will tell whether Israel will be able to elevate the concept of cognitive campaign out of its military niche, turning it into 'a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests'[111] that encompasses everything Israel does to achieve its objectives.

108 Including the last IDF Spokesperson Brigadier General (Res.) Ronen Manelis. See Gili Kohen and Amos Harel, 'Dover Tzal Haba: Ozro ak Ha'ramatkal Izenkot, Aluf Mishne Ronen Manelis' [The Next IDF Spokesperson: The Assistant of the Chief of General Staff Eizenkot, Col. Ronen Manelis], *Ha'aretz*, 07 February 2017, (accessed 9 April 2020). For the role of the IDF Intelligence Corps in the development of the concept of 'The Campaign between the Wars' see Galili, 'Ha'Ma'araha she'bein milkhamot ve'ha'ma'amatz ha'ne'elam' [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort]; Yosi Melamed and Dan Raviv, *Milhamot ha'tzlalim, hamosad ikehilat hamodi'in* [The Shadow Wars, the Mossad, and the Intelligence Community], (Tel-Aviv: Yadiot Hasfarim, 2012).

109 Alon and Preisler-Swery, ' "Ritzat hamaraton ve'tki'yat maklot be'galgalei oyev" hama'arakhot she'bein milkhamot shel tza'l' [' "Running a Marathon and Sticking Sticks in the Enemy's Wheels The Campaigns between the Wars of the IDF"], p. 14.

110 Galili, 'Ha'Ma'araha she'bein milkhamot ve'ha'ma'amatz ha'ne'elam' [The Campaign between the Wars and the Invisible Effort], p. 81.

111 Bolt and Haiden, *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*, p. 46.

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