



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE GAZA WAR 2014: THE ISRAELI TWITTER PSYOPS  
WAR

by  
RUWAIDA HUSSEIN ABOU EID

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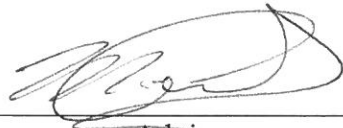
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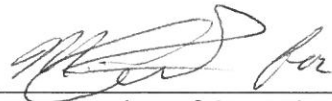
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# AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Ruwaida Hussein Abou Eid for Master of Arts  
Major: Media Studies

Title: The Gaza War 2014: The Israeli Twitter PSYOPs War

As the Gaza War erupted in July 2014, another war of words images and videos was taking place on social media platforms. Dubbed “The Twitter War,” this war of words pitted the Israeli Military (IM) and their social media campaign against Hamas. Both sides have grown increasingly more aware of the advantages of cyberspace to manage their images. Scholars have demonstrated how non-state actors have been using social media as an important alternative medium to mobilize social and political movements, and also to disseminate propaganda and conduct psychological operations (PSYOPs) in order to influence a target audience. Considering the new context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict social media has created, the present research examined how Israel used social media, in particular Twitter, to conduct PSYOPs, promote its image, and garner international support at a time of war. The study employed qualitative content analysis to explore and assess the main themes, persuasion appeals, techniques and tactics used by the IM to conduct their Twitter PSYOPs during the Gaza War 2014.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On August 26, 2014 a 50-day war, known internationally as “Operation Protective Edge,” and in the Arab World as “Empty Field of Stalks” or “Solid Structure,”<sup>1</sup> between Israel on one side and Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups<sup>2</sup> on the other, ended. Yet, the historic battle of winning hearts and minds has certainly not ceased as both sides, because of their mutual claim of victory, have been promoting the victimization narrative of the war. Fighting the war of numbers, the official Israeli narrative has relentlessly bombarded the international media outlets and social media platforms with the massive number of rockets fired at Israel throughout the war. On the other side, the Hamas media campaign has focused on grieving the death of more than 2000 Gazans, of which an estimated 501 were children(OCHA oPt, 2014), along with extensive destruction of the strip and its infrastructure that will require years and billions of dollars to be rebuilt.

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<sup>1</sup> The Israeli Military called it “Operation protective Edge”. The English translated name of the operation used by Hamas is “Empty Field of Stalks” or “Eaten Straw” referring to the last verse of the Quran’s *Sura, Al Fil*, “and He made them like eaten straw.” In other translated versions “and made them like an empty field of stalks.” The Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, PIJ, called it “The Solid Structure” referring to the Quran’s *Sura, As-Saff*, “verily, God loves those who fight in His cause in rows as if they were a solid structure.” This paper does not adopt any of these names; instead, it refers to the conflict as the Gaza War 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Hamas is the largest of many Palestinian militant groups who were fighting the Gaza War 2014 against Israel. The other groups are: The Palestinian Islam Jihad (PIJ), The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), The Popular Resistance Committees, The al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, and The Abdullah Azzam Brigades. The war was propagated by International, Israeli and even Arab media as if it were a war between Israel and Hamas. The other militant groups, except for PIJ, were barely mentioned. Later, in the results and discussion section, this paper touches on the possible reasons behind reducing the conflict to one between only Israel and Hamas.



The present research examines how social media was extensively used during the Gaza War 2014 as an important venue to fight a new propaganda cyberwar. Both Israel and Hamas, despite the limitations the latter was facing, were using social media to challenge each other's narratives and conduct psychological operations (PSYOPs) [a detailed definition of PSYOPs, its types, strategies and objectives is provided in the following sections] to convince the world of their stand in the conflict as a whole. However, this paper only analyzes the IM's Twitter campaign not only because Hamas/*Al Qassam* Brigades<sup>3</sup> official Twitter and Facebook accounts were cancelled during the war<sup>4</sup>, but also because *Al Qassam* Brigades and the IM could not be treated as two equal entities as one is working on behalf of a political party while the other is working on behalf of the state. This study is more interested in exploring the official state use of social media at times of war; how Israel, a state, officially relied on social media, in particular Twitter, to market its military and political goals during wartime, conducting planned and executed PSYOPs during the Gaza War 2014.

### **Background of the Gaza War 2014**

Although the Israeli Military (IM<sup>5</sup>) and Hamas had both occasionally violated the ceasefire agreement that ended previous wars, the "Operation Pillar of Defense"<sup>6</sup> or

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<sup>3</sup> Hamas military wing

<sup>4</sup>At different times of the Gaza War 2014, Twitter suspended two of Al Qassam Brigades accounts: @qassamfeed, @Qassam\_Arabic. After one week of the suspension, a new account, @Qassam\_English, was opened. Although the new account has the group's name and logo, it says that it is an "unofficial English Account of Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas. [It is] Formed as protest against suspension of @qassamfeed & @Qassam\_Arabic." Since Al Qassam Brigades joined Twitter in November 2009, it has opened many English, Arabic, and Hebrew accounts which Twitter has suspended, including @alqassambrigade, @qassamarabic, @qassamhebrew and others.

<sup>5</sup>This paper refers to the "Israeli Defense Forces (IDF)" - which includes: ground, air and navy forces- as the Israeli Military (IM). The word "Defense" is omitted because of its controversial reference in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Israel considers such forces defending its right to exist, Palestinians and their supporters refer to them as occupation forces which secure Israel's occupation of Palestine, and which were formed out of the guerilla group, Haganah, who fought in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 (The war of independence for Israelis and *AlNakba*, the catastrophe, for Arabs and Palestinians), depopulating and destroying Palestinian villages and forcing more than 700,000

“Operation Stones of Baked Clay,” there were immediate events that sparked the fire of this most recent battle. On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenage settlers were kidnapped in the West Bank. Immediately, Israel blamed Hamas, which denied any involvement in the incident. Yet, Israel launched an intensive search operation to secure the release of the three Israeli teenagers. That operation killed at least 5 Palestinians (Beaumont, 2014) and more than 350 people, including almost all Hamas’ West Bank leaders-many of whom were freed under the terms of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange<sup>7</sup>-were arrested again (c.f. Crowcroft, 2014; Ahren, 2014). On June 29, an Israeli airstrike killed a Hamas operative to which Hamas responded by launching at least 18 rockets at Israel; the IM, in retaliation, struck 34 targets in Gaza, and the cycle of violence continued (Goldberg, 2014). On June 30, the dead bodies of the three teenagers were found near Hebron. Their death ignited an anti-Arab riot, and as a result a Palestinian teenager was tortured and burnt to death in revenge. In the meantime, Israel’s airstrikes and Hamas rockets were already dominating the war scene. Israel issued a warning that if Hamas did not stop its rocket attacks within a maximum of 48 hours, the IM would start a major military operation (Weiss, 2014). However, on the night of July 6, Israel targeted a Hamas operative’s house, which resulted in the death of seven people. Hamas

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Palestinian to leave their homes. Displaced Palestinians were prevented by Israel to return to their homes. They and many of their descendants have remained refugees until this day.

<sup>6</sup> This was an eight-day war in Gaza launched by the IM on 14 November 2012 with the assassination of Ahmed Jabari, the chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas. The IM announced that the main goal of its operation was to stop the rocket fire attacks against Israeli civilians and destroy the capabilities of the Palestinian military organizations. Hamas and other Palestinians groups responded by firing hundreds of rockets at Israel. According to Amnesty International, more than 160 Palestinians and six Israelis were killed. A ceasefire was announced on November 21 after indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas through American and Egyptian mediators. Hamas and other Palestinian groups called the war “Operation Stones of Baked Clay” referring to a Quranic verse. This paper refers to that conflict as the Gaza War 2012.

<sup>7</sup> The Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange is an agreement between Israel and Hamas to release the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was captured by Hamas for over five years, in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian and Arab-Israeli prisoners. The agreement was executed in two phases, the first in October 2011 and the second in December 2011.

considered the incident a “massacre against women and children,” increased its rockets attacks, and declared that “all Israelis have now become legitimate targets” (Abu Toameh, 2014). On July 7 the IM announced on its Twitter page, @IDFSpokesperson, that the “#IDF has commenced Operation Protective Edge in #Gaza against #Hammas, in order to stop the terror #Israel's citizens face on a daily basis.” The operation started officially on July 8. Unlike the previous operations in Gaza, this one involved ground invasion of Israeli troops that started on July 16 and ended on August 3. The IM constantly reaffirmed that the main focus of the ground offensive was to destroy Hamas’ tunnels.

Throughout the Gaza War 2014, the two sides announced multiple ceasefires which either fell apart or expired. The first ceasefire proposal announced by the Egyptian government on July 14 was accepted by the Israeli government and rejected by Hamas. Hamas’ main objection was that the proposal did not deal with the group’s major demand: “a conclusive end of Israel and Egypt's blockade on Gaza, and the release of certain prisoners from Israeli jails” (Kingsley, 2014). Then on August 1, the US and UN announced that Israel and Hamas had agreed to a 72-hour ceasefire that broke immediately after it started because the terms were not clear. The US stated that they would allow Israel to continue with its tunnel destruction operation as long as those tunnels were on the Israeli side of the border (Blumenthal & Deger, 2014). Hamas rejected such a condition, and both sides exchanged accusations of ceasefire violations. On August 10, another Egyptian ceasefire proposal was negotiated and agreed upon by both sides in Cairo. This ceasefire was extended multiple times until it fell apart on August 19, and the Israeli delegation was ordered back home. On August 25, Cairo proposed a new ceasefire initiative that was accepted by both sides and marked the end of a 50-day bloody war.

The war ended with neither side able to claim clear victory. The number of casualties and losses on the Palestinian side was substantial, yet Hamas and their supporters were assessing victory on the level of resistance they showed throughout the 50 days against the region's leading military power. Like Hezbollah in its 2006 war with Israel<sup>8</sup>, Hamas congratulated itself for enduring the Israeli offensive. Although the war killed more than 2000 Palestinian, wounded more than 11,000 and left around 100,000 homeless (OCHA oPt, 2014), and caused massive destruction which will require an estimated \$7.8 billion dollars to be rebuilt (Reuters, 2014), Hamas remained in control of Gaza with part of its military arsenal intact. Rockets were still attacking Israel up until the open-ended ceasefire was announced. Additionally, Hamas was able to force Ben Gurion Airport to close, and managed to kill 66 IM soldiers. On the other side, Israel claimed that it had destroyed most of Hamas' network of tunnels, and left Hamas with just one-third of its initial rocket arsenal (Daraghmeh & Laub, 2014). Israel's Iron Dome performance was exceptional, there were minimal Israeli civilian casualties and economic losses, and most importantly Israel was able to maintain a strong supporting home front throughout the operation (Mitnick & Fitch, 2014).

### **The Battle of Hearts and Minds**

However, determining winners and losers in the battle of hearts and minds in this war might be an easier task. Israel's international image suffered a severe setback (cf. Glick, 2014; Goldberg, 2014; Iftikhar, 2014; Khader, 2014). As the Gaza War 2014

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<sup>8</sup> In Lebanon it is known as the "July War", and in Israel as the "Second Lebanon War", a 34 day military conflict between the IM and Hezbollah, which started on July 12, 2006 and ended with a ceasefire agreement on August 14. The war started when Hezbollah fighters conducted a guerrilla operation on the Lebanese-Israeli border that killed four Israeli soldiers, and allowed the fighters to kidnap two soldiers. Israel responded by starting a military offensive on Lebanon, especially on Hezbollah's strongholds in South Lebanon and the southern suburbs in Beirut. The war damaged infrastructure across the Lebanese territory, including bridges, ports and the international airport. After several days of war, Israel started a ground offensive. Hezbollah responded by bombarding North Israel with rockets. The 34 day war ended in a ceasefire brokered by the US and UN. Israel withdrew its troops from southern Lebanon and Lebanese and multinational forces were brought to the area. According to Amnesty International, the war killed some 1,000 Lebanese civilians, and some 40 Israeli civilians.

erupted, another war was taking place on the internet. This virtual war of words pitted the IM and their social media campaign against that of the Palestinians and their international supporters; both sides were documenting the war in real time on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other social media channels. As many scholars have demonstrated, the internet has increasingly become the tool employed to challenge each other's narrative of the war and garner international support (c.f. Aouragh, 2008; Al Zobaidi, 2009; Marmura, 2008). Today with the advent of social media "computers and keyboards are the weapons, Facebook and Twitter are the battlefields," as Sacha Dratwa, the IM Spokesperson for interactive media, said, highlighting a significant new element of warfare (Urich, 2011).

New media have afforded the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a new context where both sides are able to reach international audiences, present their own perspective and challenge the mainstream narrative of the conflict. However, it would be erroneous to assume that Palestinians and Israelis are afforded the same media realities. During the Gaza War 2014, Hamas was not equally active on social media. On July 16, Twitter suspended *Al Qassam* Brigade's English account, @qassamfeed, and Facebook also deleted dozens of Hamas accounts due to American government restrictions (Schindler, 2014). Yet Israel was confronted by a worldwide online pro-Palestinian front, where activists flooded the cyberspace with statuses, videos, photos, infographics and all possible communicative content to document Israel's destruction of the strip and civilian casualties among Palestinians. Despite the absence of a clear official Palestinian PR campaign, Israel was forced to exert substantiated effort to counter the massive anti-Israel online media content that was extensively produced and propagated. Unsurprisingly, the Israeli PR machine is more sophisticated, multilingual, and consistent. The IM has a strong website, blog and social media presence, especially on

Twitter, in different languages to target a wider range of people. The IM has multiple official online platforms: The IM blog, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube channel, Instagram, Tumblr, and Pinterest pages. Thus, the major strength of the Israeli media content is that all these different platforms are managed by one unit, The “IDF Spokesperson Unit”, conducting a consistent online campaign that shares strategies, tools and objectives. The unit, which is responsible for media and public relations, produces all media content published on all online platforms including text, visual, and audiovisual materials, and has an international media branch mainly responsible for the IM’s image abroad, developing relationships with international media outlets, and disseminating military related information to the foreign press. The desk has worked to expand the IM online presence, through different venues to be more accessible and open to international audiences (Ahren, 2010).

On the other side, despite the fact that Hamas is considered one of the first groups to effectively use the internet<sup>9</sup> (Weimann, 2006), Tawil-Souri (2011) explained that Hamas exists in a different ‘media and technology’ landscape than Israel. She noted that Gaza suffers from a media siege posed by Israel, which spatially controls its technological infrastructure and accordingly the Palestinian communication with the external world since all telephone and internet connections must go through the “Israeli backbone.” After its disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, according to Tawil-Souri, the IM destroyed the entire telecommunications infrastructure it built in the settlements. Also, she noted that a massive destruction of the hi-tech infrastructure was waged during the Gaza War 2008<sup>10</sup> and that the Global Telecoms Business, in 2009,

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<sup>9</sup>Hamas has different official websites in many different languages including Arabic, English, French, Russian and Hebrew (such as [www.hamainfo.net](http://www.hamainfo.net) & [www.palinfo.com](http://www.palinfo.com)), semi-official websites affiliated to it, and multiple social media accounts that have been regularly suspended.

<sup>10</sup>Known as Operation Cast Lead by the IM, and Al Furqan Battle by Hamas, the war between the IM against Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, started on the 27th of December 2008 and ended

estimated that it would cost \$10 million dollars to rebuild the destroyed PaleTel's Gaza network. As Tawil-Souri indicated, Israel impedes Palestinian hi-tech advances, limiting their abilities to produce and progress; Israel controls all the "switching routers for internet traffic," and has power over the access, speed and flow of the connection. Although Palestinians challenge these limitations, as she stated, they shift but never disappear.

These limitations are not only posed by Israel; during the previous Gaza Wars, the *Al Qassam* Brigades website ([www.qassam.ps](http://www.qassam.ps)) was shut down multiple times. Twitter and Facebook also suspended many of the organization's accounts. Thus during the Gaza War 2014, Hamas, unlike the IM, could not have a clear and consistent official voice on social media. These limitations are considered as part of the social media war between Hamas and Israel, two asymmetrical adversaries.

This battle of winning the hearts and minds of an international public audience is not new. Although the social media war raged during the Gaza Wars 2012 and 2014, its initial spark was ignited during the Gaza War 2008 when Israel found itself running what Urich (2011), an IM Spokesperson until May 2013, called its "first civilian room" where a media campaign was simultaneously taking place to justify the IM's activities. Subsequently, in December 2009, the IM started its first interactive media branch to manage the IM's presence online (Kerr, 2014). Aliza Landes, the Head of the New Media Desk at the IM Spokesperson's Unit from August 2009 until May 2011, said that the Gaza Flotilla incident<sup>11</sup>, when nine Turkish activists were killed, demonstrated the

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on the 18th of January 2009 in a unilateral ceasefire. Israel announced that its offensive, which included ground invasion of Gaza, aimed at stopping rocket fire by the Palestinian groups. Amnesty International estimated that the war killed some 1,400 Palestinian civilians, and three Israeli civilians.

<sup>11</sup> On May 31, 2010 in the international waters of the Mediterranean Sea, the Israeli military raided six ships carrying humanitarian aid and construction material to the Gaza Strip. The flotilla, organized by the

importance of the IM's PR machine, as it took the Army's Spokesperson hours to release Israel's version of the story with visual evidence of soldiers being attacked; this delay, according to Landes, caused considerable damage to Israel's image worldwide (Ahren, 2010).

The Israeli new media reality is definitely “another instance of Israeli regional exceptionalism,” as Israeli officials explained to Stein (2012) in her study about anthropological reflections on social media and the Israeli state. Stein indicated that Israel has dramatically increased budgets for social media work that have been employed as a tool of the state over the past few years by many Israeli institutions. As practiced in the United States, Stein noted, the concept of “digital diplomacy” is borrowed by the Israeli government, and social media is now employed for everything especially for public relations during times of military conflicts. Israeli state officials “proudly” explained to Stein the uniqueness of their social media policy compared to other Arab states pointing to their “creative engagement.” Stein quoted Danny Danon, the Israeli Member of Parliament saying that “Facebook pages... have as much impact as a tank- and sometimes even more (p.893)”. In her visit to the IM new media headquarters in March 2011, Stein explained how the place felt like “a social media battlefield” where the head of the new media desk was receiving, throughout the course of the interview, calls and SMS updates from IM personnel in the field. All the field information gathered were posted on the @IDFSpokesperson Twitter page. Most of those of working at the new media headquarters, as Stein noticed, were young, in their early twenties, who despite their military uniforms project a “posture of informality,” yet demonstrate digital expertise. Senior representatives from the IM spokesman's

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“Free Gaza Movement” and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), was intending to break the Israeli-Egyptian blockade of the Gaza Strip.



office explained to Stein the challenges they face while dealing with social media, as it contradicts the nature of military institutions which are closed organizations and use strict language; new media is about sharing a lot of emotions, information, news, and a lot of questions. Yet, she explains, the new media representatives are aware of the fact that information through new media can reach wider audiences not targeted by traditional media. Surprisingly, Stein noted, the military's engagement with social media began almost accidentally during the early days of the Gaza War 2008, after the success of an experimental YouTube project started by two young soldiers. The videos, of aerial footage and video blogs by the IM spokespersons, received more than two million viewers, thereby resulting in the official launch of the military's New Media desk. However, earlier, according to Stein, the Israeli government ministries felt the necessity of embracing social media after the failure of its military campaign in Lebanon in 2006 (see the 2006 War section of the literature review for further elaboration). In January 2010, as Stein indicated, an "Internet and New Media" department was launched within the Prime Minister's office to improve public relations advocacy.

Thus, the IM Spokesperson team members, in November 2012, were ready on their computers to fight the new social media war. Shortly after killing Ahmad Al Ja'bari, a senior Hamas military leader, the IM uploaded a black and white video of the airstrike to YouTube. The IM then regularly and consistently continued updating its Twitter and Facebook accounts. The conflict was live-tweeted. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, the @IDFSpokesperson tweeted: "We recommend that no Hamas operatives, whether low level or senior leaders, show their faces above ground in the days ahead." *Al Qassam* Brigades promptly replied: "Our blessed hands will reach your leaders and soldiers wherever they are (You Opened Hell Gates On Yourselves)" (sic).

With these Tweet attacks and counterattacks, the two foes started what different media outlets called the Twitter war (c.f., Spillius, 2012; Giglio, 2012; & Gordts, 2012). Both sides, along with their supporters, were fighting the propaganda war via social media by live-tweeting videos and uploading images of rubble fields and dead bodies; one of the most prominent pictures retweeted around the world was the picture of a weeping BBC journalist, Jihad Misharawi, holding the wrapped dead body of his eleven-month-old son in his arms (Balousha & Conrad, 2012).

The heavy reliance on social media clearly demonstrates the significant impact both sides believe it has on international public opinion. The IM's Dratwa said he was trained to use new media at times of crises to conduct a real time public relations campaign, promote the country, justify the IM's activities, "bypass the traditional media and speak to people eye-to eye" (Urich, 2011). Avital Leibovich, the Former Spokesperson and social media expert at the IM, was in charge during the Gaza War 2012 of running a 35-person team updating social media on behalf of the Israeli military in order, as she stated, to explain to the world the security challenges Israel faces (Kerr, 2014). Social media are the latest tools Israel has been using in order to win the world's sympathy. According to a poll conducted by CNN/ORC on November 16-18, 2012 (during Operation Pillar of Defense) Israel won US public opinion, as 57% of Americans believed that Israel was justified in "taking military action against Hamas and the Palestinians in the area known as Gaza," while only 25% felt it was unjustified (CNN/ORC, 2012).

This Western identification with Israel is not new; numerous studies have documented how Western mainstream media coverage has been largely sympathetic to Israeli and pro-Israeli groups (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006; Philo & Berry, 2004; Piner, 2007; Thomas, 2011). For example, the Australian media, during its coverage of the

Gaza War 2008, portrayed Gazans as ultimately responsible for the violence (Bassil, 2009). The Israeli perspective has dominated media coverage of the long-term conflicts in the West, where Western audiences know very little about the background and roots of the situation. In a study conducted by Philo and Berry (2004) on British mainstream news channels' (BBC1 and ITV) coverage of the *AlAqsaIntifada*<sup>12</sup>, the researchers found that only 8 % of a diverse group of people interviewed for the study knew that Palestinian refugees were displaced from their homes by Israel in the 1948 war. *Peace, Propaganda, and the Promised Land*, a 2004 documentary, argues that the American mainstream media is embroiled with an Israeli "propaganda machine" that seeks to mislead the American public by distorting the stories covered by American journalists in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The documentary film by Jhally & Ratzkoff (2004) exposes how the news reporting of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been largely controlled by the American political elite whose interests are shared by the Israeli public relations strategies. Powerful international oil companies, according to the film, consider Israel a "launching pad" for the United States to take over the region, and hence control its oil markets. This Israeli "propaganda machine" muted the Palestinian narrative in western media for a long time, where Palestinians were usually depicted in two stereotypical ways: either as "terrorists"<sup>13</sup> or victims (Jhally & Ratzkoff, 2004).

Aouragh (2008) has noted that international mainstream media outlets incorporate cultural differences in their coverage of the conflict, where Western audiences tend to sympathize with a group that is more similar to them pertaining to their physical traits, while rejecting the views of a dissimilar group. The IM, via its YouTube channel, has uploaded numerous videos in an effort to nurture just such

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<sup>12</sup> A Palestinian uprising that took place in 2000 against the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip

<sup>13</sup> There is no international definition of terrorism. Terrorists for some people are considered freedom fighters for others. Accordingly, this paper does not adopt any of the terms used by other studies.

sympathies among international audiences (Najjar, 2010). One of its videos showed New York, London, and Paris being targeted by rockets with the following question, “How about rockets hitting your cities day and night?” (Najjar, 2010, p. 4).

As mentioned earlier, with the introduction of social media, all Israeli PR campaigns were updated, new departments were introduced, and new media strategies were set that considerably employ the new tools of media to supplement the traditional tools Israel previously used. Even the IM body in charge of conducting PSYOPs, the Center for Consciousness Operations (in Hebrew *Mercaz L’Mitzaei Toda’a*, abbreviated MALAT), was reformed and reestablished in 2005; it employed intelligence officers and psychologists into its ranks to explore new ways of conducting PSYOPs in wartime. The MALAT, like the IM Spokesperson, is one of the units of the Israeli Operations Directorate, a branch of the IM responsible for planning the military forces’ operations.

This study is important because it explains how social media has become an integral part of psychological warfare. While much literature has been conducted on propaganda/PSYOPs, its historical global implementation during peace and wartimes, the area of PSYOPs and social media is still nascent. Also, most of the literature on social media has focused on its increasing role as tools for social and political mobilization, rather than the power it holds in military conflicts. Research on sovereign states’ use of social media at wartimes is still growing (c.f. Banham, 2013; Ward 2009) as most of the current body of literature mainly focuses on how non-state actors approach social media to project and resist violence (c.f. Conway, 2008; Maharaj & Van Niekerk, 2013; O’Hagan, 2013). While conducting this research, only one study published by Heemsbergen & Lindgren in June 2014- tackled the increasing role of social media as tools for mobilizing military campaigns and analyzed the IM’s online campaign during the Gaza War 2012 (a review of the study is provided in the literature

review section). Yet, this research, as will be explained, did not fully comprehend the potential of social media as new technological venue for propaganda/PSYOPs. Hence, this current research attempts to fill the lacuna, and expand the study on how social media has become an integral part of psychological warfare, and demonstrate how its use by a state actor during a military conflict to achieve its political and military goals. By qualitatively analysing the Israeli Twitter content, this paper explores the main themes of the IM's PSYOPs campaign, and what persuasion techniques and tactics it used. The study also assesses the Israeli social media campaign during the Gaza War 2014 as its success or failure has significant regional and global implications. Israel's history shows the state's tendency to extensively engage in multiple military conflicts, thus the results of this study can aid in assessing the power of social media in conducting effective PSYOPs in any future clash.

PSYOPs seek to market the main objectives of a war by using specific persuading appeals, techniques and tactics to influence three key audiences: home, enemy and neutrals to behave in a desired manner (Schleifer, 2009). Addressing the home audience is very important for any country at time of war as a "government will often find itself having to mobilize all the state's resources. This demands a huge sacrifice on the part of the population, one, which the government must convince its citizen's is worth making" (Schleifer, 2006b, p. 2). The government needs to assure its citizens that the war is inevitable, and that the price they are paying is vital. Schleifer noted that "a state that fails to do so will have very little chance of winning its war" (p.2). Similarly, the IM needs a resilient home front that will stay strong and supportive throughout the operation. The IM crafted different types of messages to target the home front during this operation that involved a ground invasion, and resulted in high loses in soldier deaths. Justifying a war to the home audience is not new; the IM has always

done this, especially in 2006 when it worked exhaustively to justify the war on Lebanon, diminishing its implications and transforming it into a “reasonable action” (Gavriely-Nuri, 2008).

Targeting the enemy audience is also important in waging a psychological warfare. Both military and civilian values, beliefs, emotions, and motives are targeted. The enemy audience needs to be convinced that there is no way they can win the war, and that the fighting will not do any good, but rather increase their suffering (Schleifer, 2006b). Throughout this war, it was clear that Israel was not addressing a unified enemy audience. As will be demonstrated, its PSYOPs messages clearly distinguished between Hamas militants and Gazan civilians. It addressed them separately, trying continuously to encourage civilians to rebel against Hamas. Yet, this reflects a misinterpretation of the Palestinian audience. Although Hamas does not represent all Palestinians, as many criticize the organization for its “fundamentalist ideology, political oppression or other aspects of its rule,” when a war erupts between Israel and Hamas all ideological and political differences among Palestinians seem to blur (Sheizaf, 2014). Fighting against Israel, Hamas becomes the legitimate faction against the siege that struggles for independence on behalf of the Palestinians. Yet, the IM throughout the war still worked to divide Palestinians, especially Gazans, and turning them against Hamas by projecting the group as solely responsible for all Gazan sufferings.

A PSYOPs campaign also targets neutral audiences who are not directly involved in the fighting, but “considered worth appealing to in order to, at best, win their support, and at the least, prevent them from backing the enemy” (Schleifer, 2006b, p. 3). The IM works hard on winning international public opinion in support of its cause and methods. Yegar (1985) noted that Israel believes that its image problems over the years are due to the little data the country provided on its history and right to exist, for

such data provides justification to its military actions carried out to “defend” itself (as cited in Schleifer, 2014). However, Israel has always benefited from western (particularly US) economic and political support. The US, for example, gives Israel “\$3.1 billion annually including a congressional vote for \$225 million to fund the Iron Dome missile defense system” (Goodman, 2014). To maintain this support, Goodman explained how Israel strives to win public support especially among young people who will become future policy makers and voting constituencies. So Israel works on winning the hearts and minds of those undecided audiences or at least preventing them from backing the Palestinian narrative of the conflict.

This paper demonstrates how Israel has been taking great advantage of new media to conduct its PSYOPs campaigns to influence target audiences (TAs), and persuade them to support the Israeli policies and course of action. In worst cases, the IM attempted to prevent them from backing Hamas, or adopting the anti-Israeli narrative that was propagated by pro-Palestinian activists, who tried to fill the official Palestinian online void. In order to do so, this paper examines the IM Twitter feed, @IDFSpokesperson, as it reveals real-time updates by the IM, including the latest news, articles, photos, infographics, videos, and other interactive content. Thus, the IM Twitter content is inclusive of all the Israeli media productions during the war, and is able to clearly explain how Israel used social media to conduct operational and tactical PSYOPs during this war. Moreover, although the IM has other Hebrew, Arabic, French, Spanish, and Russian Twitter accounts, the English version remains the most reachable with 400K followers (@IDFSpokesperson, until Nov. 6, 2014) compared to the French account, the second most reachable, with 24.1 K followers (@Tshal\_IDF, until Nov. 6, 2014). Also, the English language described as “the lingua franca of the global information society” (Smith, 2005, p. 56) mostly serves the purpose of this paper, as it

is the international language of communication, and technically a language spoken, at different levels, by the three TAs targeted by the Israeli PSYOPs. Most importantly, the @IDFSpokesperson account highlights how Israel is addressing international audiences and marketing its war narrative and image globally. On a smaller scale, this account also includes messages that are directed towards the home and enemy audiences. The present research is based on an extensive qualitative content analysis of these Twitter messages, as part of Israel's PSYOPs campaign throughout the Gaza War 2014 including all written, visual, and audio-visual material.

In the following section, I present the theoretical framework informing this study, which is grounded in the role of propaganda. The section defines the concept, provides a brief history, discusses the most significant theories, and explains how the concept has developed and been linked to media, public opinion, and public relations. Different terms and types of Propaganda are also defined and explained.



## CHAPTER II

### THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

During war each side seeks all possible tools to achieve victory, in other words to force its adversary to comply and behave in a desired manner. Military excellence is undeniably one way; yet psychological manipulation has also proven to be an essential weapon in the course of any conflict. Various techniques have been used to influence audiences' value systems, emotions, motives, reasons and ultimately behavior. The target audience could be the enemy, the home audience or simply a seemingly neutral third party. This form of indirect control in place of military power relies in the realm of persuasion (Ellul, 1965). Historically, persuasion has been referred to in different ways, including propaganda, psychological warfare, political warfare, and recently PSYOPs. The numerous attempts made by scholars to define these terms clarifies that there is no fundamental difference among them; they are all strategies that replace or complement conventional warfare to reach political and military goals. Schleifer (2014) noted that in order to understand the entire realm of persuasion, the "artificial and misleading distinctions" between these terms should be abolished. Thus, this paper is not concerned with debating different technical definitions of these terms, but rather with the fact that they are all commonly considered as planned actions to influence the beliefs, thoughts and actions of specific groups.

#### **Propaganda**

Propaganda has existed as long as warfare. It went hand in hand with armed combat, and has been used throughout history by many successful armies. Smyczek

(2005) discussed examples of early records of propaganda, such as the story of Gideon in the Book of Judges in the Bible, when he used lamps and jars against the Midianites in 1245 B.C. to create the illusion that his men numbered 30,000 while in fact they were 300. The spread of the printing press during the reformation period proliferated propaganda, which extended throughout Europe, especially in Germany to address the public with new ideas and thoughts that they had never encountered before (Edwards, 2004). The fear of true democracy, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on, initiated a massive social project that sought control to protect elite interests and power. Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon were among the first theorists to codify propaganda and discuss its techniques. Tarde (1969) considered the cohesion of the public as entirely mental, and accordingly he explained that the growth of the printing press and mass communications have the power of shaping the public; the newspaper he explained facilitated “the fusion of personal opinions into local opinions, and this into national and world opinion, the grandiose unification of the public mind” (p.318). Le Bon (1896) suggested that “the opinion of the masses” is the most important in popular democracies, and thus “the destinies of nations are elaborated at present in the heart of the masses, and no longer in the councils of princes” (p.8). However, Le Bon explained that the public is driven by emotion and passion, and they are incapable of making their own decisions. Hence, comes the power of persuasion.

How to create behavioural changes among the public has been the subject of study of communication researchers since the early 1920s. Since then, multiple attempts have been made to define propaganda, its techniques, and implementations. Daugherty and Janowitz (1958) provided a very specific definition of propaganda as “the planned dissemination of news, information, special arguments and appeals, designed to influence the beliefs, thoughts and actions of a specific group (p.2).” Pratkanis and

Aronson (1992) considered the fundamental goal of propaganda was to convince people that they voluntarily adopted new opinions and behavioural changes. Early Propaganda theorists differentiated between three types of propaganda: white, grey, and black (Zeman, 1978). White propaganda is used to fight “bad” propaganda and promote the “good” objectives of the propagandist. Messages of a white propaganda acknowledge their source and they are truthful in nature. Black Propaganda is the strategic transmission of lies from an unknown source while grey propaganda transmits information that might or might not be true, as it serves the interest of the propagandist who made no effort to check its validity.

Stanely J. Baran & Dennis K. Davis, in their book “Mass Communication Theory” (2006) conducted a historical trajectory of propaganda and how its theories have developed. They showed how early propaganda theorists “held elitist and propagandist views about their audiences”; they considered people to be “so irrational, so illiterate, or so inattentive that it was necessary to coerce, seduce or trick them into learning bits of misinformation” (p.76). They noted that most of the propaganda theories developed in the 1930s were influenced by two major theories: behaviourism and Freudianism. Behaviourism, a theory developed by John B. Watson, argues that human actions are a “conditioned response to external environmental stimuli” (p. 80). Many theorists who adopted behaviourist notions considered media as external stimuli that trigger immediate responses. Although Sigmund Freud also believed that people don’t have full conscious control over their actions, he explained that human behaviour is a result of a conflict between an individual’s Id, Ego, and Superego. The Ego is the individual’s rational mind, the Id is the individual’s pleasure seeking side, and the Super Ego is the “internalized set of cultural rules” (p. 81). Propaganda theorists who applied

Freudian theory noted that propaganda would be most effective when it appeals to the Id (seeking pleasures) and stimulate it to overwhelm the ego (rational mind).

Baran & Davis (2006) documented that Freudianism and Behaviourism were combined to show that individuals are incapable of rational self-control and could be manipulated by media. The combination of these two theories gave rise to the magic bullet theory, which suggested that propaganda could enter peoples' minds like magic bullets and automatically create effect. Harold Lasswell, referred to as the father of communication, rejected the "simplistic" magic bullet theory as he noted that people could not be that easily controlled. By combining both behaviourism and Freudianism, Lasswell (1935) indicated that propaganda slowly influenced people by creating symbols and introducing new ideas and images. He considered that when people gradually associate emotions to these symbols, they can create "collective symbols". Such symbols are able to stimulate mass action if they are cleverly used over a long period of time and propagated through different media. Thus, comes the power of media in a democracy, as Lasswell believed that the public's decisions and views are affected by the information presented to them by their government. Hence, he examined the effects of media in creating public opinion by conducting quantitative and qualitative analysis to understand its content, and explore its effects on the audience. Lasswell established the mass communication procedure of content analysis (Rogers, 1994), and built his basic communication model: "Who says what in which channel to whom and with what effects" (Lasswell, 1948, p. 216) to understand "the stream of influence that runs from control to content and from content to audience" (Lasswell, 1946, p.74). Propagandists usually work on "intensify[ing] the attitudes favourable to [their] purpose, reverse the attitudes hostile to it, and to attract the in-different, or at the worst, to prevent them from assuming a hostile bent" (Lasswell, 1927a, p. 629).

Believing in the ability of media as external stimuli that manipulate the masses, Lasswell suggested that the best solution is to place the power of propaganda in the hands of an elite, a “scientific technocracy”, that would use scientific methods to gather and evaluate information to protect people from themselves; in other words to decide which information the people should know so it gets covered in media, and which they should not know so it is better censored. These scientific elite, Lasswell noted, could use propaganda for good rather than evil purposes.

Lasswell’s views were shared by Lippmann, another early prominent theorist on propaganda and communication. He also believed that people were not able to make rational decisions on their own. In his book “Public Opinion” (1922), he described the public as a “bewildered herd” that cannot on its own understand the complex environment of public affairs. Lippmann’s work focused on human perception and reality. He believed that “whatever we believe to be a true picture, we treat as if it were the environment itself” (p. 4). This definition of perception was the basis of his future work on propaganda which stimulates the public by changing these mental pictures or perceptions, and providing a simplified imagery of the world in order to motivate the public to take action. People use stereotypes to simplify reality and create what Lippmann called a “pseudo-environment” that is inserted between the public and the environment, and to which the public usually responds. Lippmann outlined the main factors that limit the public’s access to the facts: Censorship which builds a barrier between the public and the event; a person’s social income which determines the limitations of his/her physical and social contact; insufficient time to pay attention to public affairs; distortion of messages by brevity and poverty and of language; and the fear of facts that might change our life routines. “These limitations... thwart clearness and justice of perception, to substitute misleading fictions for workable ideas, and to

deprive us of adequate checks upon those who consciously strive to mislead” (p.76). Thus, similar to Lasswell, in considering the power of propaganda to manipulate the masses which threatens democracy, Lippmann also believed that educated elite should think and analyze on the public’s behalf, present their conclusions to those in power, who should then use the art of persuasion to inform the public about decisions that affect them.

Ellul (1965), as well, indicated that media and society’s elite, the creators of propaganda, shape public opinion as the public could not otherwise form educated opinions. However, Ellul noted that individuals are not just innocent victims of propaganda; they need it to fulfil their desire to contribute to the state. Thus, he believed that successful propaganda is that gives the public the involvement they crave. Since individuals cannot accept the fact that they cannot form opinions on their own and cannot understand the complexity of their world, they need propaganda to hide their incompetence, and give them the illusion that they have an opinion, they can decide, and contribute to their public affairs.

John Dewey (1927) was one of the earliest critics of these early propaganda theories. He strongly refuted Lasswell’s and Lippmann’s ideas of a technocracy, and advocated for public education as the only way to defend democracy in the face of dictatorship. Dewey believed that people can learn to defend themselves, and noted that the “scientific elite”, Lippmann was advocating, would turn into defending its private interests rather than the public’s common interests. The media’s job, for Dewey, was to “interest the public in the public interest” (Alterman, 1998, p. 10). His idea of a newspaper, for example, was more than a bulletin that describes current happenings. He believed a newspaper should teach critical thinking skills, focus on philosophy and ideas, and encourage public debate. Dewey believed that these early propaganda media

theories overestimated media effects, and underestimated the ability of the public to evaluate messages.

Nonetheless, modern critical theorists still believe that the old characterization of effective propaganda-as simplifying complex issues, repeating simplification by using undercover communication and using tricky language that prevents reflective thought- is still alive today (Baran & Davis, 2006). Modern propaganda theories are based on the idea that powerful elite shape the public discourse by controlling the mass media and using it as a tool to serve their interests. All contemporary effective propaganda efforts emphasize the concepts of consumption and capitalism; the connection between prosperity in terms of consumption and success in terms of acceptance.

In order to understand the content of mass media, Herman & Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model explains how propaganda is used to manufacture consent for economic, social and political policies in the public mind. Media, according to the model, are businesses interested in the sale of a product (readers and audiences) to other businesses (advertisers). The model identifies five filters (concentration of ownership, advertising, government sourcing, flak, and fear) that ensure the business and government entities' power to control the flow of information. These filters, the model argues, create confusion among the general public, and result in biased media content that serves the interests of the elite.

Another critical view of contemporary propaganda is offered by Laitinen and Rakos (1997) who define propaganda as "the control of behaviour by media manipulation" (p. 237). Three factors, they argued, increase the power of business and governmental elites: the less knowledgeable and politically engaged audience, the

increased propagandists' use of polling and survey procedures to make an impact, and the mega-conglomerates that integrate media companies.

### **Propaganda at War**

The term propaganda became popular during World War I, as its techniques were used to mobilize populations for war. The Committee on Public Information (CPI), a large propaganda ministry, promoted the US's objective to enter the war as a means "to make a world that is safe for democracy" (Marshall, 2013). The theme was developed by Lippmann, Bernays and other intellectuals of the era.

In his book "Propaganda Technique in the World War", Lasswell (1927b) attributed four strategic aims to propaganda at war times: "To mobilize hatred against the enemy; to preserve the friendship of allies; to preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the cooperation of neutrals; [and finally] to demoralize the enemy" (Lasswell, 1927b, p.195). To mobilize hatred against the enemy, Lasswell suggested that the opposing nation should be put in a negative light as dangerous, aggressive murderous, and should be represented as satanic that "violates all the moral standards of the group". In order to preserve the friendship of an ally, the nation should frame its war as defending the aims of the ally. To win the friendship of a neutral, Lasswell explained that this audience should be convinced that its own interests lie in the defeat of the enemy. In order to do this, Lasswell suggested engaging the neutral audience in some non-military functions. Reinforcing pacifism, portraying the horrors of war, and "the unwillingness of the enemy to make peace", and stirring up trouble between two neutrals are also ways to win the friendship of a neutral audience (p. 196).

Propaganda has been used to attack the enemy's confidence in its own cause, and ignite feelings of guilt among soldiers to weaken their ability and desire to fight



(Ellul, 1965). Propaganda, Keen (1991) later explained, comes before technology, as people tend to “create the enemy [in the beginning]. Before the weapon comes the image. We think others to death and then invent the battle-axe or the ballistic missiles with which to actually kill them” (p. 10). It is, then, the process of constructing an image that reflects the idea of what we wish to destroy; accordingly Keen elaborated on how the enemy is constructed into certain “archetypes” as an “aggressor,” “barbarian,” “criminal,” “tortured,” “enemy of God,” “rapist,” and so on; such images convey that it is not the people that are killed, but the ideas they represent. Also, Keen indicated that the logic of paranoia explains how images of the enemy recur regardless of the historical circumstances. Paranoia is the process of attributing to the enemy all the characteristics one rejects. It starts by splitting the “good self” glorified by myth and media from the “bad self” projected onto the enemy. For Keen, this “us” versus “them” framework can be used to dehumanize the enemy by portraying him as the “other,” and thus justify an attack against him. This framework was used heavily during World War II propaganda by disseminating messages such as “Nazi swine” and “Dog of Capitalism” (Keen, 1991, p.86). Propaganda creates a faceless enemy; thus, according to Keen, many front-line soldiers reported that when they got close to the dead enemy and examined their personal belongings, such as letters or family pictures, “the propaganda image fades and it becomes difficult or impossible to kill again” (p. 26). Understanding the process of creating propaganda is inevitable to succeed in controlling warfare. Keen clarifies the notion that propaganda is a manufactured consumer product by those who are sophisticated in the technique of psychological warfare.

### **Propaganda, Political Warfare, Psychological Warfare, or PSYOPs?**

After the Nazi success in using propaganda, the British Army came up with a different name of the process: political warfare (Schleifer, 2006a). The Americans then chose to use the term “psychological warfare,” while preparing for the allied invasion of Europe. Since the end of the Korean War, psychological operations (PSYOPs) has been the term in use until today (Taylor, 1998). The US Army ignores “propaganda” and replaces it with “PSYOPs”. Although the US Army defines both terms as strategies that “influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes, or behavior of any group” (Headquarters, Joint Publication, 2010, GL-7), the Army associates propaganda with the enemy to convey “biased and misleading information” while PSYOPs convey “selected information and indicators... to influence ... emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately behavior...” (GL-8). PSYOPs are defined in a positive light that influence objective reasoning while propaganda is associated with lies and distortions. Schleifer (2014) also mentioned new terms, such as “strategic information” used by NATO, and the latest development by the US Army “military information support operations” (MISO). He explained that this abundance of terminology reflects “western ideological confusion regarding the entire realm of political and military persuasion” (p.153).

Israelis as well associate propaganda with manipulation attempts by the enemy; they have totally ignored the term and have replaced it with *hasbara*, a Hebrew term that means to explain (Fisher, 1988).

### ***Psychological Warfare***

Schleifer (2006b) defined psychological warfare as a non-violent communication of messages with domestic, neutral, and enemy audiences. According to Narula (2004), the terms psychological warfare and PSYOPs are often used

interchangeably; the term psychological warfare was first used by the British military analyst and historian, J.F.C. Fuller in 1920, wherein psychological techniques were used to demoralize, mislead and influence the opponent. For Daughtery and Janowitz (1958) psychological warfare is “the planned use of propaganda and other actions designed to influence the options, attitudes, and behavior of enemy, neutral, and friendly foreign groups in such a way as to support the accomplishments of national aims and objectives (p.2)”.

### ***PSYOPs***

As noted earlier, PSYOPs is defined according to the US Army field manual (2003) as:

*planned operations that convey selected information and indicators to foreign target audiences (TAs) to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of all PSYOP[s] is to create in neutral, friendly, or hostile foreign groups the emotions, attitudes, or desired behavior that support the achievement of U.S. national objectives and the military mission (p.1).*

PSYOPs are conducted during both war and peacetime. According to the US Army manual, the principle missions of PSYOPs are to facilitate military operations and support the objectives of the US and its allies by providing information to influence attitudes and behaviors of the TAs. The manual also discussed how PSYOPs work towards establishing credibility and restoring or reinforcing legitimacy. They are the voice of the commanders to the foreign audiences; PSYOPs counter the enemy propaganda by providing intent and actions “correctly and positively,” thus depriving the enemy from winning public opinion. The application of PSYOPs throughout history

has been shown to be “as essential to the successful waging of war as the use of manpower and weaponry” (Narula, 2004, p. 179).

Scholars (c.f. Brazzoli 2007; Smyczek 2005) have considered propaganda/PSYOPs a subclass of information warfare, which includes “all actions taken to defend the military’s information-based processes, information systems and communications networks and to destroy, neutralize or exploit the enemy’s similar capabilities within the physical, information and cognitive domains” (Brazzoli, 2007, p. 219).

Brazzoli tackled the future aspects of PSYOPs application by the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) in 2020. He noted that information and information technology are the main weapons in achieving any military objectives. According to Brazzoli, there are three battle space domains: physical, informational and cognitive. For the military, he explained, the physical domain is where the real firepower takes place; the information domain is where facts/knowledge are communicated among defense personnel, while the cognitive is the domain of the perception, the values, the beliefs and understanding. Brazzoli explained that information which comes from the physical domain passes through human perception to reach the cognitive domain where decisions are made. He adopted the definition of PSYOPs in the SANDF as “planned and coordinated activities, including political, economic, and military actions, in peace, military operations other than war and war, in order to influence... emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately attitudes and behavior to secure the achievement of national and military objectives” (p. 222-223). PSYOPs have been attributed so far to the ability of influencing/changing the perception of a target audience, which Brazzoli considered “the fourth instrument of power available to a state,” in addition to diplomatic, economic, and military powers. Thus, states which are unable to manage the

perception of other states, groups, organizations... are more exposed to national security threats, and become more vulnerable to external forces. Therefore, PSYOPs, Brazzoli explained, are the techniques used to unconsciously encourage the audience to think/act as desired.

PSYOPs are executed at the tactical, operational and strategic levels. The US Joint Publication 3-53 (2003) defines them in the following manner:

- Strategic: activities mostly conducted outside the military arena by the US government agencies during both war and peacetime. Such operations are designed for long term objectives, and the measurable effects of strategic PSYOPs are not expected in the near future.
- Operational: “conducted across the range of military operations, including during peacetime, in a defined operational area to promote the effectiveness of the joint force commander’s (JFC’s) campaigns and strategies” (p.x). The effects of these operations are expected more rapidly than strategic ones.
- Tactical: conducted in a specific geographical area under the control of a tactical commander to support the tactical mission of a military operation against opposing forces.

Smyczek (2005) referred to the current uses of PSYOPs by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan, he discussed how the US conducted PSYOPs created fear among the Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters, worked on spoiling the relationship between the Taliban and Afghan people, and conveyed a positive image of the US and its allies among the Afghani population. This was done through radio broadcasts by the US Air Forces that repeated the US objectives of the war that it wanted the best for the Afghani people. Leaflets were also dropped in the country where

messages “sought to intimidate, frighten, coerce, or win hearts and minds” (p. 222). PSYOPs were conducted during the Iraqi war in 2003 as well. Smyczek discussed how journalists were embedded to portray the war in a positive light to the American public. Loudspeakers and leaflets were used, and several radio stations, such as Information Radio, were created.

Accordingly, the following sections demonstrate how PSYOPs have been conducted in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how new media, social media in particular, have been employed to conduct such operations to influence TAs during the Gaza War 2014. Before the analysis section, however, I review the literature on which the present study builds. The following section is divided into two parts. The first reviews literature on the increasing use of the internet to conduct information warfare and disseminate propaganda/PSYOPs. This part explores studies on how the internet in general, and social media in particular, has been employed by state and non-state actors as a means to reach certain social, political or military goals. The second part reviews literature on how media affected the conduct of information warfare (including propaganda/PSYOPs) during most recent military conflicts waged by the IM, including the 2006 war on Lebanon, the Gaza War 2008 and the Gaza War 2012. This part explains how the Israeli information warfare strategies have evolved during and as a result of previous military conflicts. It clarifies how the new era of warfare and the increased visibility of war- through international television news networks and various internet platforms- have forced Israel to update its media strategies and embrace the use of new media in war.

## CHAPTER III

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Information Warfare- Propaganda/PSYOPs- and New Media**

Baran & Davis (2006) noted that media have become the focus of propaganda theorists as they analysed its content and explored its influences. Theorists, such as Lasswell, Lippmann and Bernays emphasized that all forms of media have been the voice of propaganda throughout history. Before the printing press, Johnston (2013) noted that propaganda was disseminated through monuments, public speeches, and coins. Then the printing press allowed propaganda to spread throughout Europe. Then, the rapid technological advancement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century amplified the voice of propaganda which attributed great power to those who control the media in forming public opinion. Back then, the new media of radio, movies and TV worked on transforming people's beliefs of themselves and their social world (cite studies here). For Lasswell (1927b), to be more effective, propaganda should reach more people and should transform "the war into a march toward whatever sort of promised land happens to appeal to the group concerned" (p.76). In other words, the more people reached by propaganda, the more effective a war would be. Today, the power of propaganda has increased with the growth of the internet and social media through which the ability to communicate ideas and influence more people has been magnified. A number of studies help demonstrate these points.

For example, Crilley (2001) examined how the internet has been used as a new arena for "terroristic" propaganda that allowed "terrorists," "extremists" and "activists" to spread their ideas throughout the world at very little cost, bypassing the limitations of

traditional media. Her study concentrated on the term “information warfare”, as it is “the use of smart technology in a traditional war or the use of IT systems attacking part of a country’s infrastructure” (p. 250). The networking web technology, where geographical location is no longer relevant and as such the ability to bypass national laws, are all advantages of the internet listed by Crilley and, as demonstrated by her, used by terrorist and extremist groups to disseminate propaganda and misinformation. Crilley’s study was published a few years before the arrival of social media. Thus, as communication becomes more powerful and sophisticated, propaganda can be transmitted and distributed more easily (Johnston, 2013).

Minei and Matusitz (2012) also analyzed the media content of many cyber “terrorist organizations,” such as articles, events, videos, and other media content posted by Hezbollah, and Al-Qaeda related groups. Their analysis demonstrated how cyber “terrorists” take advantage of various semiotic gestures to communicate themes that range from hate to anger. According to the authors, the internet, as a globally accessible medium, has provided “terrorists” with endless opportunities to spread their ideologies and generate feelings of panic among their target audience.

In another study, Ismail (2009) examined how the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Lebanese group Hezbollah have employed the internet to counter their negative portrayals as terrorists by examining the two groups’ websites. Ismail’s study emphasized the role of cyberspace as an alternative medium that challenges dominant narratives in mainstream media and amplifies the voice of marginal groups. Her textual analysis of the websites content demonstrated that Hezbollah and the PIJ were very similar in the way they constructed their ideologies online. Both groups “fostered, celebrated, and encouraged” a culture of resistance (p. 4) by emphasizing their struggles to liberate the occupied land. The study highlighted how both groups have emphasized



the concept of martyrdom, and not terrorism; they made it clear on their websites that they were fighting Zionism/the Israeli occupation of the Arab land and not Judaism. The internet, the study established, enabled these groups to represent their own stories, ideas and values in the face of the mainstream narrative.

Conway (2008) also conducted a preliminary empirical analysis of how Hezbollah has employed the internet as a weapon to conduct “cybercortical warfare,” a concept Conway based on Szafranski’s (1997) neocortical warfare which “attaches more importance to communicating with other minds than to targeting objects” (p.2). Neocortical warfare includes fields of perception management, such as public affairs, public diplomacy and PSYOPs. Conway explained that neocortical warfare is “the conduct of public diplomacy in an explicit conflict situation,” and, accordingly, she defined cybercortical warfare as the conduct of neocortical warfare via the internet. Conway’s case study of Hezbollah was to highlight the “uncivil society” and “terrorist” presence online. She explained that new communication technologies, particularly the internet, have afforded “terrorists” new opportunities to convey their messages and market their image. Her analysis of Hezbollah’s collection of websites demonstrated that the group has an effective web presence addressing Israeli and global audiences more than the Lebanese or Palestinian audiences. Conway confirmed that Hezbollah was able to target the Israeli public via the internet and create “an important psychological breakthrough”, yet she stated that Hezbollah achieved little success in gaining access to the American public as the US is exposed to “terrorist” uses of media.

To explain this new relationship between new media and world politics, O’Hagan (2013) identified four dimensions of this relationship: “The constitution of power, the configuration of agency, the nature and politics of representation, and the constitution of legitimacy” (p. 557). These dimensions provided a methodological

conceptual lens through which the analysis was conducted. O'Hagan argued that new media have contested the concentration of power in the hands of states and big corporations, as it has become more flexible, convenient, less expensive, and available to different actors. The power of new media, her analysis noted, has shifted rapidly and at multiple levels, thus becoming an element of any conflict. O'Hagan also indicated that new media have challenged the structures that defined traditional media agency making it more fragmented and less hierarchal allowing non-state groups and individuals to contribute their perspectives on any conflict. As for representation, the analysis explained how new digital media have introduced new representational forms to the politics of conflict. O'Hagan used Der Derian's (2001) "virtuous war" to explain how the world has moved from "the spectacle of war to a war of spectacles" where the image became the "dominant currency of global politics" (p. 564). Although O'Hagan mentioned that new media afforded liberal democracies new fields to fight the battle of hearts and minds in order to sustain the legitimacy of wars, her work focused more on the impact of new media on the role played by non-state actors.

The power of new media, particularly social media, was also analyzed by Maharaj and Van Niekerk (2013) who argued that it played an effective role in "information conflict". Since information warfare is known as a military concept, Maharaj and Van Niekerk replaced it with the term "information conflict" to include both military and non-military actions. They focused on the role of social media in four aspects of information conflict: "network warfare [cyber warfare], command and control, intelligence-based warfare, and psychological operations [PSYOPs]" (p. 1164). The authors highlighted the significant role social media played in a number of civil disturbances, such as the aftermath of Iranian elections in 2009, and the Arab uprisings in 2011, among other global incidents. These social disturbances facilitated by social

media, they suggested, are forms of PSYOPs, “where the instigators attempt to sway the perception of the general population into taking physical protest action against the government” (p. 1164). For example, Maharaj and Van Niekerk mentioned the role social media played in Greece in December 2008 to organize demonstrations and gain international public support against a police shooting and the economic crisis the country was facing. The authors discussed how social media amplify the voice of small and marginalized groups, promote positive public relations, and change the dynamics of protest online by being able to reach a global audience. Also, considering the speed via which information spreads on social media and the difficulties to retreat released information, they noted that social media platforms might be used in “reputation warfare” to damage or improve the reputation of organizations or individuals. Most importantly, Maharaj and Van Niekerk’s research discussed the implications of social media on military operations. Social media, they argued, can be used as intelligence tools, to “propagate malicious code” and also in perception management or influence operations. For example, Maharaj and Van Niekerk discussed the “Persona software” used by the US military for the purpose of creating favorable consent on controversial issues. Through this software, they explained, each operator is able to manage 10 fake social media accounts, and accordingly has much more influence than a single person. The authors also discussed how the IM, since 2008, has been using social media for perception management.

Despite that some literature acknowledged the use of social media by “democratic” states in military conflicts (Banham 2013; O’Hagan 2013; Ward 2013); the subject is still under-researched (except for Heemsbergen & Lindgren, 2014 reviewed in the following section). In much of the literature there is an ongoing debate of the power of social media as a democratizing force in social and political conflicts.

Due to its decentralized nature, scholarship is more focused on how non-state actors have been using new media to challenge authoritarian/centralized narratives, or conduct propaganda/PSYOPs during information conflict or what Conway (2008) called, “cybercortical warfare.” Little scholarly work has been done on the increasing use of social media by state actors. Hence, this empirical study does not only attempt to fill this lacuna and expand the literature on the use of social media by a “democratic” state in a military conflict, but it also claims that social media has been the new venue for the conduct of PSYOPs in order to reach certain political and military goals. To do so, the study examines how Israel has been clearly and controversially approaching social media during wartime by analyzing its Twitter campaign during the Gaza War 2014.

Before the analysis of Israel’s Twitter campaign during the Gaza War 2014, the second part of this literature review examines studies that have explored the role of media in previous Arab-Israeli conflicts, and how Israel conducted information warfare, including PSYOPs in the 2006 war on Lebanon, and the Gaza Wars 2008 and 2012. This review explains why Israel may have engaged new media in subsequent military conflicts.

### **The 2006 War on Lebanon<sup>14</sup>**

In a study of the summer 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel, Kalb & Saivetz’s (2007) demonstrated that Israel lost the war of information and propaganda.

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<sup>14</sup> The Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 has been perceived to be the main reason behind the evolvement of the new media strategies. The Israeli government itself assigned the Winograd Commission of inquiry --not only to investigate and draw lessons from the 2006 war on Lebanon, but mainly “to respond to the bad feelings of the Israeli public of a crisis and disappointment” (Winograd, 2008, parag. 6). The government-appointed commission of inquiry investigated the failings of the war and recommended requirements for a quick and determined repair. The press release presenting the main highlights of the Winograd Commission’s Final Report, described the war as a missed opportunity that ended without Israel’s victory as “a semi-military organization of a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest Army in the Middle East, which enjoyed full air superiority and size and technology advances” (parag. 11). The report also discussed Israel’s failure to build an effective relationship between military and diplomacy as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not establish the vital need to build such an effective relationship between them.

The authors conducted content analysis of global media and interviews with diplomats and journalists to demonstrate that the internet, “the most revolutionary and powerful technology in modern communications,” made it the first “live” war in history, emphasizing the significance of the “information battlefield,” especially in such an asymmetrical war between Israel, a state, and Hezbollah, a political party with a military wing. A closed organization like Hezbollah, the study claimed, is more able to control its image, unlike Israel, which “became a victim of its own openness,” as the state could not control leaked secrets and rumors (p.44). Hezbollah “controlled media access with a book-keeper’s rigidity” (p.53) allowing no journalists to have free access to the destructed areas; journalists were warned that any violations would be harshly treated. Hezbollah projected itself as a self-sacrificing group determined to resist the enemy no matter the costs. Through an analysis of Arab and international media content of the war, Kalb & Saivetz concluded that Israel was mostly portrayed as the aggressor. Hezbollah focused on Lebanese victims and the massive destruction. However, Kalb & Saivetz demonstrated that Israel failed to control the coverage in order to preserve its own reputation and image, as journalists found many ways to overcome Israeli censorship. Despite continuous complaints about access, reporters were able to use their skills and modern technology to cover the war. Journalists were live reporting action from the Israeli-Lebanese borders, and many were able to interview Israeli soldiers who sometimes conveyed impressions of vulnerability; for example “they [Hezbollah fighters] kick us from behind” (p.54). Also, “broadcast via broadband” allowed millions of bloggers to largely engage in the war coverage by being able to offer their opinions and criticisms that were aimed at influencing public opinion.

Schleifer (2009) also conducted a study that similarly demonstrated that the Israeli PSYOPs campaign against Hezbollah during the 2006 war was less than

satisfactory. Schleifer analyzed the Israeli PSYOPs messages sent through leaflets, radio stations, mobile phones (SMS), satellite technology and the internet. He explained that the Israeli PSYOPs campaign was for the first time in its history “an inseparable part of its military operations” (p.221). His analysis demonstrated that its PSYOPs campaign did not only concentrate on Hezbollah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah; it also targeted the supporting, opposing, average, and indifferent Lebanese citizens. The campaign’s objectives, Schleifer appointed, were first a military goal to stop the rockets fired at northern Israel, and second, a political goal to challenge Hezbollah’s position in Lebanon by trying to alienate Hezbollah and its internal and external supporters from the rest of the non-Shi’ite population of the country. Schleifer explained that Israel was trying to convince the Lebanese population that their quarrel should be against Hezbollah who was solely responsible for their suffering. The MALAT (the IM body in charge of conducting PSYOPs) tried to cross the cultural borders and target Nasrallah’s dignity and credibility by mocking him. This, Schleifer considered, allowed Israel to personalize its PSYOPs campaign by presenting Hezbollah and Nasrallah as one entity. In order to make fun of him, the MALAT used global themes, such as “picturing enemy leaders as puppets manipulated by external forces...” Schleifer analyzed three main themes of the Israeli PSYOPs campaign: Targeting the enemy’s key levers, driving a wedge, and undermining credibility. To target Hezbollah’s levers, Israel conducted a close analysis of the enemy’s messages and showered Lebanon with leaflets that projected a powerful image of Israel. Other Israeli messages accused Hezbollah of using the Lebanese people as human shields and that they were paying the price for Hezbollah’s wars. Also, in order to destroy Nasrallah’s regional and religious authority, the Israeli PSYOPs referred to him using his given name, Hassan, denying him the pride of a surname.

Israel was trying to drive a wedge targeting the enemy's social cohesion by trying to alienate the different Lebanese sects from Hezbollah and its Shi'ite supporters. The MALAT did so, using leaflets and air-fresheners, to stress the idea that Hezbollah was using the Lebanese people to execute a foreign Syrian and Iranian agenda. The study showed that the Israeli campaign was building on the anti-Syrian/Iranian public wave that followed the assassination of Prime Minister Rafeek Al Hariri on February, 14, 2005. Also, Schleifer (2009) emphasized how the Israeli PSYOPs messages tried to convince the Lebanese people that Hezbollah was using them as a legitimate military targets, and that the only way they could be safe is by getting rid of the organization. Israel even tried to drive a wedge among the organization itself. The analysis illustrated that the Israeli messages stressed on how soldiers were putting their lives in danger while their leaders were safely hiding.

Schleifer's analysis emphasized how the MALAT tended to undermine the organization's credibility. For example, while Hezbollah was trying to deny casualties among its fighters, the PSYOPs campaign immediately published the names of Hezbollah's fighters who were killed in action. Also, Nasrallah was depicted as a leader who lacks military or political judgment because he was unable to anticipate the harshness of the Israeli response for killing and kidnapping its soldiers.

After analyzing the PSYOPs campaign messages, Schleifer concluded that it was less than satisfactory. On the persuasion level, he argued, the Israeli PSYOPs campaign failed to achieve its goals as Hezbollah's rockets continued to attack Israel until the last day of the war; Hezbollah's ranks remained strong and supportive; no rebellions or internal unrest were noted. Moreover, Schleifer explained that the Syrian/Iranian contribution in the reconstruction process of Lebanon's devastated infrastructure increased their power in the country. However, Schleifer noted that the

Israeli campaign was at least able to accentuate the existing political disagreements among the Lebanese population, and by mocking Nasrallah, Israel was able to break through the psychological barrier that Hezbollah has surrounded its leader with.

On the tactical level, Schleifer argued that the PSYOPs campaign was able to convince civilians to evacuate certain zones. However, he indicated that the IM lost the opportunity to address serious post-war political issues, such as who won the war, and Hezbollah's use of child labor and of civilians as human shields. The Israeli internal criticism that was increasing throughout the war also played a role in the PSYOPs campaign's failure, and neutralized "many of the MALAT's upbeat messages." Besides Israel having gone to war unprepared and without a preconceived PSYOPs plan, Schleifer considered the main reason for the failure of the Israeli PSYOPs campaign was because Israel, as a state depended on its military capabilities, and allocated minimum facilities to the MALAT, which found it difficult to liaise with the Army's field proceedings. The MALAT as a part of a conventional Army "operating in the context of democracy, was unable to respond quickly, creatively to events" (p. 235). Another interesting point raised by Schleifer explained that one of the main failures of the Israeli PSYOPs campaign was being unable to give the war a name that defined its nature and goals in order to garner support militarily and publicly, and also to force the enemy to reconsider its evaluation of the war. In contrast to Hezbollah who promptly named the war as "Divine Victory", Israel chose "The Second Lebanon war" that Schleifer considered a very "anemic title" that carries with it all the failures of the first Lebanon war (p. 235).

In order to justify this new war, diminish its implications and transform it into a "reasonable action" that most Israelis could justify, Gavriely-Nuri (2008) demonstrated that Israel, targeting its home audience, used "war-normalizing metaphors" in its public



discourse to frame the war as a normal event. Four types of “metaphorical annihilation,” the study showed, were used to break down the implications of the military conflict: “War is women’s work, war is medicine, war is business, and war is sport.” The study surveyed the pages of the most popular sources for news in Hebrew during the 33 days of war, and identified how metaphors were embedded in the Israeli political discourse and the swiftness of its dissemination in the media. The first metaphor, “war is women’s work,” employed terms that traditionally used to describe ‘women’s activities’, such as “take care of Hezbollah,” and “cleanse the south.” The second metaphor, “war is medicine,” referred to Hezbollah as a malady which implied the inevitability of the war in order to preserve Israeli life. Media expressions like “key players” and “rules of the game” were claimed by Gavriely-Nuri as metaphors used to depict the war as a sporting event, the third group of metaphors. The fourth metaphor used was “the business metaphor” to give the war an economic dimension. For example, the study explained, that the Israeli government referred to the war as “Operation Just Reward,” to imply that the reward of eliminating Hezbollah is equivalent to the price of the war. Other economic terms were used, such as “price tag” and “bank of targets.” Gavriely-Nuri argued that the metaphorical annihilation of the Israeli war on Lebanon in 2006 applied in Israeli political discourse and reflected in the media were meant to garner high public support for the war.

However, Cordesman (2006) argued that Israel made little effort to justify the war to the outside world. Based on an analysis of media reporting of the war, and interviews with Israeli officers and experts, he concluded the preliminary lessons that the US military should learn from the Israeli Hezbollah war. Cordesman criticized Israel for dealing simply with Hezbollah and assuming that by its defeat it could counter Arab and Islamic anger. On the contrary, as Cordesman demonstrated, the Lebanese

government turned to the international community to wage political attacks on Israel. Cordesman argued that Israel failed to gain Arab countries' support against Hezbollah, as those governments already fear Hezbollah and Iran, the group's main backer. Israeli complaints that "the enemy fights in civilian areas, uses terror tactics, does not wear uniforms and engages in direct combat (p.13)" were considered insignificant. Accordingly, and in order to guarantee military victories, Cordesman emphasized that modern nations should learn to fight wars within political, ideological, and media dimensions that other nations can understand. Moreover, he criticized Israel for its disproportionate attacks against civilians, and invited the US to learn from the Israeli experience and keep its attacks within the limits of proportionality. Cordesman made it clear that the US military, unlike the IM, should work on explaining and justifying its actions and efforts to respect laws of war, limit civilian casualties and avoid collateral damage.

There were as well a number of scholarly studies that demonstrated how Hezbollah was more successful in fighting the information warfare against Israel and conducting PSYOPs. According to Acosta (2007), in fighting an asymmetric war, Hezbollah used information, a "critical element of warfare," decisively against Israel. The study claimed that Hezbollah's effective use of information technologies allowed them to competently use deception to balance Israel's military superiority. One of the classic examples of military deception mentioned by the study was Hezbollah's use of bunkers. The real bunkers were built in secret locations, yet Hezbollah "lured observers into believing that the openly visible bunkers should be targeted if conflict occurred" (p.43). During the 2006 war, Israel was deceived to target the fake bunkers while Hezbollah operated from the secret real ones. Hezbollah's "electronic warfare bluff" was another example of information deception mentioned by the study. By spreading

false and planted information through its media, like the *Al Manar* TV station, Hezbollah intentionally wanted to appear capable of securing Israel communications, like “hopping” radio transmission which requires sophisticated technology that the group didn’t have. However, Hezbollah was successful in instilling doubt and conducting effective psychological operations by convincing Israel of its alleged electronic warfare capabilities. Acosta noted that Hezbollah was able to listen to cell phones, but not to secure radio transmissions as it claimed for PSYOPs purposes. The group was successful in using this “deception tactic” to project a strong image, and force the enemy to reconsider its actions. The study discussed how Hezbollah used the media as a deception tool. Again, because Hezbollah tightly controlled the environment, it was able to supervise the information that was released by different media outlets. This process lies, according to Acosta, “in the realm of false and planted information.” Reporters broadcast the information provided by Hezbollah as it was the only facts they had. Hezbollah’s media plan convinced Arab audiences of its actions, which affected how their governments dealt with the conflict. Acosta also addressed Hezbollah’s use of cyberspace as a “new non-traditional area of deception.” The group “successfully hijacked unknowing IP addresses in cyberspace for its *Al Manar* websites” (p.61). The study established all traditional and untraditional deception tactics successfully used by Hezbollah which allowed the group to unexpectedly dominate Israel.

Schleifer (2006b) also conducted a study on Hezbollah’s PSYOPs and explained how the group adopted guerrilla and psychological warfare, and subjected all its military action to propaganda. Schleifer claimed that Hezbollah was aware of the significance of timing and presentation factors in their PSYOPs, such as screening its videotaped operations on the frontline directly after each operation. Through journals, radio stations, and a TV channel, Hezbollah was conducting PSYOPs aimed at different

audiences. Schleifer claimed that the internet was “extremely successful” as Hezbollah established its websites as “extremely credible channel[s] of communication.” The organization produced programs in Hebrew, and “*Al Manar* invested in hi-end antennas, which allowed it to extend its broadcasts into Israel”. Two popular PSYOPs themes were used by Hezbollah to reach their goal: “from asset to liability” and “winning hearts and minds” (p. 6). Under the first theme, Hezbollah sought to convince Israel that it would pay a very high cost in both military and security terms if it kept its forces on Lebanese land. Also, Hezbollah’s messages under the “winning hearts and minds” theme addressed multiple TAs. Targeting the home audience, Hezbollah held “numerous triumphal, historic parades” to project power and send messages about the significance of unity, the justice of its path under God’s will, the long struggle towards Jerusalem, and other messages demonizing the enemy. Moreover, Hezbollah, the study showed, familiarized itself with Israeli culture and psyche in an attempt to appeal to the enemy audience. In order to achieve this, Hezbollah divided the Israeli audience into groups and subgroups of military and civilians. It worked on sending many messages stressing its determination to fight the long struggle until its land is freed. Schleifer claimed that other messages, such as images of dead and wounded Lebanese civilians, induced guilt feelings among the Israeli audience. However, although Hezbollah tried appealing to western liberal values by sending messages about Israel’s “alleged violation of human rights,” Schleifer found that the group devoted the least amount of attention to neutral audiences who were not directly involved in the conflict.

As for the use of new media during the 2006 war, Caldwell, Murphy & Menning (2009) credited Hezbollah with being “the master of the new media message.” The authors conducted a case study of the war to recount the role of new media in conflicts waged by Israel. Their study addressed the significant impact of new media on

populations and military operations during recent conflicts. The authors aimed to “suggest best practices that the US military could adopt when dealing with new media and its role on the battlefield” (p. 4), as learning to leverage new media in order to justify war has been one of the main concerns of the US military after assessing the 2006 war on Lebanon. They argued that because of the new media’s ubiquity, “enormous reach”, “user-friendliness” and many other powerful and influential characteristics, it is able to garner public support, and supersede traditional media’s gatekeeping and agenda setting roles. In an “information war,” the new media has set new challenges for the struggle to win public opinion; thus, armies were forced to include new media in their updated media strategies. During the war on Lebanon, the authors indicated, Israel did not neglect the use of new media, yet was more focused on using traditional ways to conduct PSYOP against the enemy (dropping leaflets, jamming *Al Manar* broadcasts, text messaging). However, Hezbollah, they demonstrated, by controlling information and manipulating new media to its advantage, worked on framing the story in the best way to allow it to win worldwide support. New media was a strategic weapon used by Hezbollah to justify its actions, regulate information, claim victory, and blame the enemy for “its disproportionate use of force against the Lebanese civilian population” (p.6).

### **The Gaza War 2008**

Two years after the Lebanon war, Israel and Hamas engaged in a three week armed conflict in the Gaza strip. Based on a number of studies comparing the two wars, it is clear that Israel made drastic changes in its information warfare strategies, and the way it dealt with media to justify its operation and reach its political and military goals.

For example, Caldwell, Murphy & Menning (2009) conducted a case study on the Gaza War 2008 to assess the significance of new media in military conflicts. They argued that two years after the 2006 war, Israel proved it had observed the importance of new media and introduced new media strategies. The study mentioned that a massive public relations campaign was held to avoid the mistakes of the previous war. Both Hamas and Israel employed various web 2.0 applications to challenge each other's version of the war. The authors discussed many steps taken by Israel to counter its failure in 2006, such as creating the National Information Directorate to manage public relations, diplomacy and media activities. They argued that the main role of this directorate, according to a press release from the Israeli Prime Minister's office, is to present information that places government bodies in a unified and consistent strategy. During January 2009, the IM YouTube channel became "the second most subscribed channel and ninth most watched worldwide" (p.7). Its videos depicting specific military details of the war attracted millions of viewers. The authors noted that as long as the war was framed in positive light, the IM was able to continue its actions without worrying about international opinion. Also, unlike the 2006 war on Lebanon, Israel denied international media access to the battlefield in order to control the flow of information and images of civilian casualties.

Blondheim & Shifman (2009) explain how Israel and Hamas addressed their own media, the opponent's media, and the media of the rest of the world during the Gaza War in 2008. After analyzing newspaper and TV content, the study showed how Hamas emphasized the organization's power while addressing its home front in order to boost the morale of both its fighters and the Gazans who were suffering from the war. On the other side, although Israeli spokesmen were determined to mobilize support for the decision to attack Gaza when addressing their home front, they were trying to

prevent overconfidence in the military based on their “bitter” experience in the 2006 war with Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, when addressing Palestinians, the study showed how Israeli spokesmen tried to emphasize Israel’s military power in order to instill fear in Gazans through recorded messages, phone calls, and leaflets. Similarly, Hamas officials warned Israelis of the high consequences they would pay if they invaded Gaza. For example, “on 10 January Al-Aqsa TV provided a checklist of Israeli cities already hit, and indicated that before long Tel Aviv would be added to the list” (p. 210). The third arena of war news included how both sides addressed the media of the rest of the world. According to Blondheim & Shifman, Israel tried to stress its vulnerability by including stories of fear, and maps of civilian towns that were the target of Hamas rockets during the previous six years. Likewise Hamas communicated, in English, the disaster script to the world media by focusing on human suffering, casualties, and physical destruction. International media, the study stated, did not adopt the vulnerable image of Israel its spokesmen were trying to propagate, but rather presented the excessive power Israel used against civilians. It supported Hamas’ disaster script of the war because, Blondheim & Shifman explained, it “show(ed) the agonies of real people ... not the abstract and obscure entity of the vulnerable state” (p. 213).

Fitsanakis and Allen (2009) called the Gaza War 2008 the “cell war” between the IM and Hamas, a hi-tech war between asymmetrical insurgents that included “surveillance satellites, voice scramblers, encryption software and mobile phone cameras, among other technologies” (p. 5). Although it was not the first time Israel targeted the enemy’s telephone network during an armed conflict, Fitsanakis and Allen indicated that the 2008-2009 Israel Gaza conflict introduced “innovative approaches to communication intelligence.” During the Gaza War 2008, the IM placed thousands of phone calls to the residents of the Gaza Strip with a prerecorded warning in Arabic that

civilians' lives are in danger if they keep ammunition and weapons in their homes. It is a strategy that was used by Israel in Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza for tactical and psychological objectives. The authors considered that these telephone operations respond to a number of communication challenges in asymmetrical warfare, which includes the rising mobility of increasingly networked asymmetrical actors, and at the same time the growth of cellular telecommunications networks. In Gaza, Fitsanakis and Allen explained that Hamas did not passively react to Israel's communication intelligence, yet the group targeted Israeli mobile phone subscribers warning them that the continuation of the offensive in Gaza would result in massive rocket fire on Israel. Such PSYOPs made a young Israeli feel s/he was invaded by Hamas (Michaels, 2009). Also, unlike the 2006 war on Lebanon, Israeli soldiers were forbidden from keeping their personal cellular phones with them in the field so that Hezbollah intelligence officers would not be able to spy on their conversation.

Finally, Schleifer (2014) analyzed Hamas' PSYOPs during and after the Gaza War 2008, and demonstrated that it was successful in changing its image from a "terrorist" to a legitimate political organization. Schleifer explained how Hamas embedded psychological and organizational persuasion techniques into its PSYOP campaign. Hamas' PSYOPs, he argued, aimed to provoke emotions by using images of dead bodies removed from the ruins in their visual campaign. Besides provoking emotions, personally attacking Israeli officials by describing them "as being motivated by feelings of hate towards Arabs and not by rational political consideration" (p. 158), and inducing feelings of guilt among Israeli soldiers for killing civilians, Hamas, Schleifer noted, encouraged opposition and pacifism among Israeli society by propagating the massive destruction and human suffering the war caused. Schleifer (2014) explained that Hamas used a lot of "buzzwords" and catchy phrases to garner



public support, such as “Nazi Israeli” and “apartheid.” Also Hamas’ PSYOPs, the study indicated, disseminated messages that used “legal jargon,” which was a powerful tool accusing Israel of committing war crimes during its operation in Gaza in 2008. Schleifer also noted that Hamas’ messages intensively disseminated “atrocious propaganda” by demonizing Israel and portraying it like Nazis cruelly killing innocent civilians. He also explained that Hamas used a lot of “weakness messages (underdog)” in order to emphasize “its weakness in the face of Israel’s might” (p. 167). To deliver its PSYOPs that Hamas used similar strategies of political marketing in wars and conflicts, such as the means of delivery ranging from old to new media; it used leaflets, hijacked local radio stations of the IM; sent phone messages, interfered into the IM radio communication system, and also used the internet (Schleifer, 2014).

### **The Gaza War 2012**

In the most recent examination of Israel’s media use during war, Heemsbergen & Lindgren (2014) conducted content, discourse and concept analysis to analyze “the construction of meaning in social media texts” shared by the IM during the Gaza War 2012<sup>15</sup>. It is considered the first and only empirical study of how a “democratic” state actor used social media during war for public diplomacy, propaganda, and transparency. For the authors, this latest Israeli media war marks a new era of war reporting and “transparency” in democracies. Transparency is afforded as sources of information and who is promoting it are revealed on social media. Also, the spread of real-time facts and the ability for massive and rapid spread of information through the new network of communications, the study found, give Israel a “rhetorical power” to shape perceptions. Heemsbergen & Lindgren noted that the IM’s use of social media was “to build

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<sup>15</sup> The study was published in June 2014 as the analysis for this present research was being conducted.

legitimacy for its actions rather than fight a war of words with its enemy” (p. 588).

Therefore, they argued that the IM focused on informing far-reaching TAs who might become sympathetic to its goals, and might help in spreading its messages.

The authors’ analysis of Facebook content revealed that more than half of the shared images by the IM stimulated an imminent or historical threat to Israel and Israelis everywhere. These threat images, the study argued, were directed to the international TAs to win their sympathy, and also add legitimacy to the IM’s actions. Heemsbergen & Lindgren coded the most shared infographic during the “Operation Pillar of Defense” as “WWUD”. The infographic displayed rockets falling on major western cities, such as New York, London, Paris and Sydney, with a phrase that asks, “What Would You Do?” The authors explained that the phrase was inspired from the “What Would Jesus Do?” a popular and widely used phrase in the North American culture. Consequently, the study concluded that the IM was targeting a popular Judeo-Christian population who were invited to take the place of Jesus; in other words place them in “the middle of syllogism that implicitly assumes what Jesus would do by referencing what Israel is doing” (p. 582). This syllogism, Heemsbergen & Lindgren explained, citing Rose(1993), is a “powerful form of rhetorical persuasion that has proven its use from Plato to modern advertising.” (p. 582). The authors explained that by asking readers to share the infographic that displayed a threat to key cities in the political “West”, the IM was not only inviting them to agree on Israel’s right to defend itself, but also demonstrating that its war decision, compared to what Jesus would have done, is an ethical response. The study also analyzed the @IDFSpokesperson tweets during the War in 2012, and showed that the IM’s tweets tackled military and documentation issues, while most of the other tweets that mentioned the @IDFSpokesperson (usually responding to the IM Twitter account) were either

criticism of the IM or about humanitarian topics. The main themes that pervaded twitter posted by @IDFSpokesperson or by others who mentioned the @IDFSpokesperson, were “military strategy, newsflash-type updates, body counts, propaganda, and calls for help, compassion and peace” (p. 585). Heemsbergen and Lindgren (2014) discussed the connection between twitter accounts based on retweets that mentioned the @IDFSpokesperson by users who are geographically far from the events. This formed six clusters: the first around *Al Qassam* Brigades, which established a counter-discourse to the IM. The second, third, and fourth clusters were centered around voices who were pro the Israeli military and amplified its official discourse, such as “a pro-IDF American journalist, the Israel General Consulate of Los Angeles, and the Embassy of Israel in London.” The fifth and sixth clusters were formed through retweets from groups of a woman living in Gaza, pro-Palestinian activists, and a group of journalists and scholars; the majority of them supported Palestine. These last two clusters, the study suggested, offered a more complex representation of the war, and challenged the legitimacy claims of Israel in a way that the broadcast media could not do. However, according to the authors, “the conversations on Twitter show[ed] a cloudy transparency of what is public diplomacy, what is propaganda and what shared meanings account for” (p. 587). They concluded that social media “dissolve borders between the uses of propaganda and public information to forward political-strategic goals.”

Although it was the first empirical study on the Israeli use of social media in military conflict, it did not fully acknowledge the PSYOPs aspect of the IM campaign. The authors did not investigate or attempt to detect the Israeli operational, tactical and strategic objectives while using social media in a military conflict. Their analysis did not go in depth to investigate how the IM designed and executed its social media

campaign, nor how social media was used by a “democratic” state to conduct PSYOPs to reach certain political and military goals.

The present research has attempted to fill in those gaps; it is, as such, the only empirical study of the use of social media by a state actor to disseminate PSYOPs during wartime. As mentioned earlier, previous research has focused on the role social media played as a mobilization tool by non-state actors for social, political, military objectives, and even to disseminate propaganda. There has been little work done on the use of social media by a state in political conflicts and during wartime (c.f. El-Khalili, 2013; Banham, 2013; O’Hagan 2013; Ward, 2012); yet this previous scholarly work did not fully adhere to how social media has become another technological advancement systematically used to disseminate propaganda/PSYOPs. Conway (2008) called it cybercortical warfare, “the conduct of public diplomacy in an explicit conflict situation” via the internet, and Heemsbergen & Lindgren (2014) concluded that social media gave Israel a “rhetorical power” to shape perception. However, this study explores how social media was used by a “democratic” state as the new media venue to conduct its PSYOPs. It is the first study to conduct systematic qualitative social media content analysis grounded in propaganda theory. Also, as it is the first study on social media use during the Gaza war 2014, this paper will add to literature on Israel’s information warfare that has been growing since the 2006 war on Lebanon. It helps to elaborate how the Israeli media plan has evolved, and what lessons and experience Israel has accumulated from its previous military conflicts. Also, it explains how the persuasion techniques and tactics used by Israel on social media to influence the emotions, attitudes and behaviors of the home, enemy, and neutral target audiences support its objectives and military mission.

The paper's analysis of the IM social media campaign during the last Gaza War 2014 is based on the following research questions:

**RQ1: How are the main themes of the IM Twitter campaign during the Gaza 2014 War? Why did Israel choose these themes? How did Israel structure the messages of these themes? And to which TAs are these themes targeted?**

**RQ2: Why are the Israeli Twitter messages, during the Gaza War 2014, considered propaganda/PSYOPs?**

## CHAPTER IV

### METHOD

#### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

In order to answer the above research questions, analyze the IM social media content, detect how PSYOPs was conducted in terms of Lasswell's (1948) communication model "Who says what? Through which channel? To whom? With what effect?" (p.216), I employed qualitative content analysis, as it is the most appropriate method to analyze the content of texts including written, verbal and visual and audio visual messages (Cole, 1988; Neuman 2006). Qualitative Content Analysis has been used extensively to analyze media content and determine its effects. This method of analysis became increasingly popular during the 1920s to study the communication content of movies; since the 1950s with the arrival of television, it has become a primary research method to study its content (Macnamara, 2005). Content analysis tests theoretical issues and enhances understanding of the data (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). It is a technique used to objectively, precisely and generally describe "what is said on a given subject, in a given place at a given time" (Lasswell, Lerner & Pool, 1952, p.34). Berelson (1952) suggested five main purposes of content analysis: To describe substance characteristics of message content; to describe form characteristics of message content; to make inferences to producers of content; to make inferences to audiences of content; and to predict the effects of content on audiences.

Thus, in order to comprehend the Israeli PSYOPs campaign during the Gaza War 2014, content analysis was used to describe the messages of the campaign, make inferences on the objectives of the IM of conducting this campaign, and on the

audiences targeted by these messages. Finally, this paper, through a thorough analysis of the content of messages, predicted the potential effects such a campaign had on TAs.

Content analysis includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The early focus on the method was on its quantitative aspect, and it was defined as a “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). Many scholars, like Neuendorf (2002), argue that content analysis is a quantitative, not a qualitative method. Macnamara (2005) summarized the debate over quantitative vs. qualitative content analysis. He explained that Neuendorf, for example, strongly supports the use of scientific methods in content analysis “including attention to objectivity-intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing” (p. 10). On the other hand, Macnamara mentioned scholars who are proponents of the qualitative text analysis, like Newbold et al. (2002), who noted that quantitative content analysis is not able on its own to capture the full meaning of a media text and comprehend the complexity between texts and their impact. Macnamara explained that since media texts are “polysemic”, that is, open to multiple meanings, qualitative analysis tries to determine the expected meaning of each text to audiences. The method depends on the researcher’s interpretation of the text, which has been criticized by scholars since the analyst is able to inject his/her bias. Moreover, qualitative content analysis is a process that requires intensive focus and time, thus the samples are usually small which is also a point of criticism as the sample is then unscientific and unreliable.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, the present research adopted a qualitative approach of content analysis. A qualitative approach here was more useful because, as Downe-Wamboldt (1992) emphasized, it is a method more concerned with meanings of

texts, intentions of producers, context of production, and the impact it has on certain audiences. For Downe-Wamboldt, quantifying the occurrence of certain words is inadequate to understand the inferential quality of the results.

This study aims to make sense of how the IM structured their media campaign online, the techniques and appeals it used to structure its messages, and how/why they are considered PSYOPs. Also, the focus of the research is to compare how the IM addressed different TAs, and how its messages were tailored accordingly. More than quantifying the data, the present research is interested in the quality of the IM media texts, and with the effects these texts have had.

However, although content analysis helps reveal the multiple levels of meaning of a media text, and make inferences on the intentions of producers and the impact it aims to leave on certain audiences, it cannot on its own give unchallenged results of this impact. Such an understanding would require audience research, which was outside the scope of this study. Moreover, qualitative content analysis is a flexible subjective method which might allow the analyst to inject his/her bias. As a Palestinian refugee, objectively analyzing an Israeli propaganda campaign during a war that killed more than 2000 civilian Palestinian casualties was a personal challenge. Accordingly, the analysis was checked and rechecked based on multiple propaganda theories to make sure the findings did not reflect any biases.

### **PSYOPs Process: From Planning to Evaluation**

This paper also adopts the model of the US Army manual (2007) dealing with the application of PSYOPs. The US Army manual (2007) is the most updated framework of PSYOP. It usually undergoes constant changes as the successful implementation of PSYOP depends on the clear understanding of different cultures and



political situations. It is a highly detailed document on how a PSYOP campaign should be executed, and its components apply to the case of the Israeli social media campaign during the Gaza War 2014. The US Army manuals use Laswell's basic communication model as a theoretical foundation of their PSYOPs campaigns: "Who" says "What" to "Whom", in "Which channel" and to "What effect"? After planning and deciding on the objectives of the PSYOPs campaign: a) TAs are detected and analyzed, b) PSYOPs arguments/messages/themes are determined along with the chosen persuasion appeals, techniques and tactics, and then c) the best media patterns/means of delivery/channels of communications are selected.

Before addressing the details of the Israeli campaign, the next section provides an explanation of each phase throughout the production of PSYOPs, followed by the application of each phase to the IM PSYOPs campaign on social media to understand who was targeted, what type of messages/themes were disseminated, and through which channels, in order to support Israeli objectives throughout the operation.

### ***1. Target Audiences***

Schleifer (2006b) divided TAs into three groups: the home audience, the enemy audience, and neutrals. The government during times of war works on convincing its home audience that its decisions are wise, and that the sacrifices on the part of the population are worth making. Persuading the audience that war is an unescapable fact, according to Schleifer, is inevitable for a state to have a chance to win its war. The second target audience is the enemy, including both soldiers and civilians, who must be convinced that it is certainly losing the war and the sooner it stops fighting the better. The third target audience consists of neutral countries, organizations, and individuals. Although they are not directly involved in the fighting, it is very important to win their support, or at least prevent them from backing the enemy. This paper uses Luntz's

(2009) term for neutral TAs: the persuadables, in other words, those who do not have prejudices about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Luntz divides TAs into three groups: those who support Israel and always will and who don't require any persuasion efforts to support the Israeli objectives, those who oppose Israel and always will, and the persuadables who, Luntz stressed, require all Israeli officials' communication efforts to win their support.

## ***2. Messages***

To guarantee the success of any PSYOPs, messages of the campaign should be carried forward at all levels (Brazzoli, 2007). The messages sent during PSYOPs vary according to the audience it is targeting. The home audience overwhelmed with messages demonizing the enemy, while the messages targeting the enemy audience (soldiers and citizens) always emphasize the inevitable defeat theme (Schleifer, 2006b). However, according to Schleifer, the neutral audience is generally bombarded with themes of justice and morality.

After deciding on the potential TAs, the next phase is about deciding on the best ways to influence their behavior. In order to do that, PSYOPs soldiers should have enough knowledge about the audiences they are targeting to effectively urge them to behave favorably to their objectives. TAs are divided into two categories: primary (the doers) and secondary actors. The primary actors are those who are engaging or likely to engage in the behavior PSYOPs are targeting. Secondary actors, on the other hand, are individuals or groups that have the ability to influence the primary actors, such as leaders and key communicators (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2007).

### ***a. Vulnerabilities***

One of the major steps of analyzing a target audience (TA) is determining its vulnerabilities: motives, psychographics, demographics, and symbols. Target

audiences' (TAs') motives could be primary motives, which include physiological needs, such as safety, security, shelter, and the secondary, which include motives such as education, infrastructure, and governmental representation. Psychographics are also considered vulnerabilities as they provoke an emotional response, and they include psychological characteristics of TAs, such as cultural norms and values. Symbols also invoke emotions and represent cultural or contextual significance to the TAs. In other words, knowing TAs' vulnerabilities helps PSYOPs conductors prepare more powerful persuasive messages.

b. Appeals

An appeal is the overall approach used in a PSYOPs message; it is the tone of the argument presented to the TAs responsible for captivating their attention and maintaining their interests. Knowing the TAs and determining their vulnerabilities are important factors to select an appeal. The US Army manual outlines a list of general persuasive appeals. This section defines the most relevant appeals that were used by the IM during the Gaza War 2014. The application of each appeal used by the IM to build their social media campaign is discussed in the analysis section:

- Legitimacy: an appeal to laws, regulations, traditions, international figures. The Types of legitimacy appeals are:
  - "Authority: an appeal to laws or regulations, or to people in superior positions such as the UN, government officials....
  - Reverence: an appeal to a belief teaching institution or individual that is revered or worshiped; for example, the Dalai Lama...
  - Loyalty: an appeal to groups to which the TA belongs. Examples are military units, family, or friends" (p. 2-26).
- Inevitability: an appeal that relies on the emotions of fear. For example, if the enemy won't surrender, it will be destroyed.
- In group-out group: this appeal divides TAs. It encourages one group to rebel or discriminate against the other.

c. Persuasion Techniques and Tactics

This paper also uses persuasion techniques and tactics listed in the US Army field manual to study how the IM structured its messages using the most persuasive tools possible to achieve its political and military objectives. The chosen techniques are:

- Glittering generalities: using intense, emotional words loaded with vital social beliefs and values that are convincing without being supported by facts, such as, the love of country, and the desire for peace and freedom.
- Transference: Projecting positive qualities of a person/entity in contrast to negative values of the other. This technique is used “to transfer blame from one party in a conflict to another” (p. 2-27).
- Least of evils: Emphasizing that even though certain actions are undesirable, they are the only way to avoid worse outcomes.
- Name-calling: labelling the enemy something the target audience fears/hates, such as a “terrorist”.
- Plain folks or common man: convincing the target audience that the PSYOPs argument is built on a shared understanding of a certain concept, such as democracy.
- Testimonials: using quotations of leaders/officials/ famous scholars/writers/ popular heroes to support or reject certain arguments, such a quote by the Mahatma Gandhi.
- Presenting the other side: agreeing with minor aspects of the enemy’s point of view in order to overcome any doubts of the target audience.
- Simplification: reducing facts to right, wrong, good, or evil.
- Illustrations and narratives: using stories and narratives to clarify ideas.
- Statistics: using statistics to demonstrate authority.
- Rewards and punishments: framing the PSYOPs argument in a way that explains how certain actions by the TA will be either rewarded or punished.
- Expertise: addressing the target audience from a status of authority on the subject matter by quoting experts/leaders...
- Aversive stimulation: punishment will continue as long as the enemy does not comply. For example, the IM announced multiple times that it will proceed with its operation in Gaza until Hamas stops firing rockets at Israel.
- Moral appeal: using common moral commitments to ask for the TA’s support
- Positive and negative alter-casting: framing PSYOPs arguments in a way that decides what “good” people do in contrast to “bad people.” For example: “As Hamas continues to fire rockets at Israel’s civilians, the IDF continues to transfer tons of goods into Gaza (@IDFpokesperson, 2014).”

d. Product Development and Design

The US Army manual also highlights the importance of effectively developing and designing PSYOPs products which can be visual, audio, and audiovisual. It

recommends grasping all technological updates which includes knowing a variety of formats on computer systems and other electronic devices to avoid any technological obstacles that might hinder the process of communication. Visual products, which are a combination of text, symbols, and pictures, have proved to be a very effective tool to send persuasive messages. The IM PSYOPs campaign widely used the technique of infographics to package its messages. Visual products also include posters, handbills, leaflets, periodicals, and websites. The priority is always given for more sophisticated forms of media; thus, for example, the manual recommends the use of leaflets should diminish when more appropriate media are available. Also, it discusses in detail the process of visuals production including messages, layout, the artwork required and other production considerations. For example, newspapers and magazines should provide “timely, truthful news and entertainment in a format familiar to the TA” (p. 4-6), in addition to professionally producing “unbiased as possible” and credible news stories. Ironically, the manual recommends carrying stories that might be damaging to the PSYOPs producers in order to establish credibility and positive public opinion, such as coverage of “accidental mistargeting of munitions.” Although visuals are considered very effective, audiovisual material remains the most powerful communication system as it combines the impact of both visual and audio. The manual hints to the power of internet videos in invoking deep emotional responses. Like infographics, videos were a main communication tool widely used by the IM to disseminate its PSYOPs messages during the Gaza War 2014.

### ***Channels of Communication***

For Schleifer (2006b), channels of communicating PSYOPs depend on the target audience. In order to reach neutral audiences/persuadables, PSYOP campaigns adopt

techniques taken from the world of public relations. While the home audience is the most accessible, the enemy audience remains the hardest to reach. As such, PSYOPs work by either “instigating events” or “exploiting existing events”, and since engineering an event from scratch, such as a massacre or an attack requires “a great deal of time, effort, and resources”, therefore, PSYOPs work best by manipulating existing events (Schleifer, 2006b).

After deciding on the TAs, the US Army manual also explains the importance of determining their accessibility to media; in other words, determining which media can reach them and to what degree they can be influenced by that media channel. Although the manual still considers TV as the most effective medium for persuasion, it recognizes that the internet has become a preferred source of information, especially since audiovisual materials can be rapidly and immediately produced and transmitted to multiple TAs. The manual also highlights the importance of interactivity over the internet. It suggests that when TA members are active users’ not just passive receivers of media, it is easier to grab their attention and they are more likely to absorb the PSYOPs messages propagated. This explains why social media, as interactive platforms where TAs are actively engaged, were extensively employed during the last three Gaza Wars, especially during the Gaza War 2014, the focus of this paper.

### **Sampling and Unit of Analysis**

To conduct the qualitative content analysis, the present research was informed by the work of Mayring (2000), who described an inductive category development in order to build the features of interpretation and categories as near as possible to the content. Through the inductive category approach, categories are deduced, revised, and analysed. As mentioned in the introduction, this paper analyzes the IM English Twitter

account, @IDFSpokesperson, as it is inclusive of all the Israeli media productions during the war, and since the “IDF Spokesperson” is the unit responsible for producing all the media content related to the IM. The @IDFSpokesperson is the largest of IM’s presence online, with 400K followers as of Nov. 6, 2014. It reveals real-time updates by the IM, including the latest news, articles, photos, infographics, videos, and other interactive content.

First, to include all the tweets published by the IM during the Gaza War 2014, I used an application called “All My Tweets.” After a user signs in using his/her own Twitter account, this application allows users to enter the name of any valid Twitter account and press a “get tweets” key to display all the tweets of that feed. As one scrolls down on the retrieved page of the chosen Twitter feed, older tweets are loaded. Thus, I was able to retrieve all the Tweets published by the @IDFSpokesperson account during the 50 days of the Gaza War 2014. The application displays the retrieved tweets as follows: The written text of the tweet, an external link that leads to the audio-visual material published on the @IDFSpokesperson account and the date on which the tweet was published. I copied all the tweets published by the IM throughout the war (from July 8 until August 26, 2014) to a Microsoft word page. The total number of retrieved IM Tweets throughout the war was 1,180. Given a large sample, systematic random sampling is the best technique to extract a representative sample “in which a list of the population is used as a sampling frame and cases are selected by skipping through the list at regular intervals” (Crossman, n.d.). Accordingly, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of the first five tweets of each day from July 8 until the ceasefire announcement on August 26. The sampled tweets were numbered in descending order (newest to oldest) starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> tweet on August 26 to the first tweet on July 8.

This systematic sampling design in which regular intervals are used to select cases among a selected population reduces “the potential for human bias in the selection of cases to be included in the sample,” and allows the researcher to make valid statistical conclusions from the collected data (Laerd, n.d.).

After collecting the sample of tweets, I analysed each tweet on its own addressing the basic questions of Lasswell’s communication model to detect the following: The main theme of the tweet; the TAs it was targeting; and the structure of the tweet in light of the US Army manual PSYOPs theoretical model: vulnerabilities, persuasion appeals, techniques and tactics, and the Tweet’s design and significance (picture, infographic, video...). I listed the main themes recurring in all the tweets, and grouped the tweets according to the theme they shared.

Another analysis was then conducted on each theme as follows: Description of the theme; the diverse representations of the theme in different tweets/messages; the TA’s targeted; the main persuasion techniques used to structure its messages. Later, in light of the US Army theoretical model, the individual thematic analysis was closely reviewed to deduce the main operational objectives of the Israeli PSYOPs campaign, and assess the IM’s PSYOPs performance throughout the war, and how far it was affected by the course of the battle.



## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Israeli 2014 PSYOPs campaign was a well-planned consistent operation that developed coherently throughout the war. The campaign worked on marketing the Israeli narrative of the war, and assisting the Army in defeating Hamas by fighting the online battle. Clearly evident was the effort the IM exercised on the online battlefield. Schleifer (2009) explained that this transformation in Israeli military thinking concerning psychological warfare is not new, and that it began in the late 1990s with the significance the consecutive chiefs of staff, Generals Shaul Mofaz, Moshe Ya'alon and Dan Scultz, had given to targeting the enemy's mind and "burn[ing] into the [enemy's] consciousness", which became a vital strategy for the IM.

#### **Objectives of the IM PSYOPs Campaign:**

Throughout the war, Israel repeated on Twitter the objectives of the operation: "to defend Israel and restore security to Israel's civilian population under constant rocket fire from the Gaza Strip;" in other words, to stop Hamas' "terrorism", and "incessant rocket attacks" against Israeli civilians. During the first week, before the ground operation, the Hamas tunnels which infiltrate into Israel were rarely mentioned. In the beginning of the operation, many of the IM tweets were immediate news about rockets fired from Gaza that hit different locations in Israel. Israel's actions were tweeted in the form of reactions to Hamas' "relentless" rocket fire. At the end of the first week, destroying the "terror" tunnels was introduced as an integral objective of the operation. The IM employed its online media platforms to achieve such operational and

tactical objectives. Israel has yet to reveal the specific objectives of its PSYOPs campaign; however, a review of major events of the war together with a close analysis of the PSYOPs messages suggest a set of themes Israel repeated throughout its PSYOPs campaign. Also, analysing the Twitter messages reveals how the objectives of the PSYOPs campaign were affected by the changing military, political, and psychological circumstances throughout the operation. The online operations started as a PSYOPs campaign marketing the IM objectives, and soon stumbled upon major events that forced it to change its objectives, and take a defensive instead of an offensive approach.

### **The Gaza War 2014: Is it a War on Hamas not Gaza?**

Although Hamas is the largest Palestinian militant group, it was not alone fighting Israel during the Gaza War 2014, yet Israel reduced all the “enemy” groups into Hamas, which made it easier for its PSYOPs campaign to attack and demonize it.

Nassar (2014) explained that by framing the conflict as a war against Hamas, Israel gave the impression that it was also targeting part of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has become opposed to both the Arab official and popular level after the so-called “Arab Spring”. By projecting Hamas as the only antagonist, Israel was looking for justification for its war on a group whose ideology is contested regionally and globally. The international, Israeli and even Arab media barely highlighted the role secular groups played in the war, such as that of The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) which are Marxist–Leninist secular groups, and The *AlAqsa* Martyrs’ Brigades the military wing of Fatah, also a leading secular Palestinian political party. The “war on Hamas” narrative made it easier for Israel to invite those who oppose Hamas to “justify [Israel’s] actions and even infer that Palestinians are “victims” of the organization”

(Nassar, 2014). Hamas has been linked recently to major political crises in the region on which governments and people are separated: the crisis in Syria and the Muslim Brotherhood conflict in Egypt. Making it a “war on Hamas” instead of a “war on Gaza”, Israel attempted to highlight the political aspect of the war at the expense of the humanitarian crisis that the Gazans suffered. In addition, the absence of the “war on resistance” narrative increased the gap and weakened the liaison among Palestinian militant groups. Israel benefited from such absence as, Nassar explained, introducing “resistance” into the political discourse makes Palestine again a major part of the regional game.

The IM’s PSYOPs campaign worked more effectively by dealing with one “enemy” to mobilize hatred against it, demonize it, and attack its propaganda campaign as well.

### **The Israeli PSYOPs Campaign Themes**

The following section groups different messages into themes. Each theme is divided into two main parts; the first part describes and analyzes the content of the messages- including visual and audiovisual material- while the second part discusses the persuasion appeals, techniques and tactics chosen to structure the messages of each theme to successfully reach, persuade, and influence the intended target audience (TA).

#### ***Theme 1: The Operation is Inevitable***

##### Messages

Israel repeatedly emphasized that the Operation was the only way to defend and restore its security. The messages repeated that Israel won’t accept leaving the country exposed to “terrorism”, and that the operation will continue as long as Hamas rockets continue to hit Israel. However, by the second week of the operation, Hamas rockets were still hitting Israel at an increased number, so the social campaign shifted to

discussing a new objective, destroying Hamas tunnels. The messages propagated that the mission would not end until the Army destroys the “terrorist” infrastructure used by Hamas to attack Israelis: “We're operating in Gaza to seek & destroy tunnels used by Hamas” (Tweet 169, July 20). The tunnel network was introduced as another emergent threat that the Army was working on eradicating. It was presented as the reason “terrorists” were able to infiltrate Israel and carry out attacks. Until the open-ended ceasefire on August 26, the IM updated the objectives of the operation. To emphasize the inevitability of the operation, the IM highlighted the threats that endanger Israel’s security, yet at the same time preserving the image of the strong capable Army protecting its own country. The daily recaps perfectly reflected this difficult equation. Infographics posted by the IM updated the following data per day: the number of rockets fired at Israel, the number of rockets intercepted by the Iron Dome, the number of rockets that were able to reach Israel, and the number of “terror” targets that were struck. Later, when the ground invasion started, the recaps also included the number of uncovered tunnels per day. The titles of all these recaps emphasized the inevitability of the operation, such as “we will continue to do whatever is necessary to protect our country.” Besides emphasizing the threats, these recaps also communicated more messages to the TAs. First, by specifying the number of rockets, the recap stressed that not all Hamas rockets fired from Gaza reach Israel, which means Hamas could be responsible for targeting civilian populated areas in Gaza as well, and the IM could easily accuse Hamas of civilian casualties among Gazans. Second, although the Iron Dome can intercept rockets, the majority of rockets usually hit Israel. At the same time the recap accentuated that the IM was strong enough to hit terror targets and destroy tunnels to defend Israel. Remarkably, these daily recaps did not mention any reference to the number of casualties, not even on the Israeli side. One of the reasons could be that

despite the very high number of rockets hitting Israel daily, they caused very few casualties.

Other videos showed field visits by the IM chief Benny Gantz to extend words of encouragement to the soldiers in Gaza, and stress that their mission was inevitable to protect Israeli civilians. “All their attempts to attack Israel have failed, even if it hurt us... There are difficulties, there are problems sometimes... every tunnel we take, everything we do here is necessary for the state of Israel...” said Gantz. The IM chief in another video thanked the “strong” home front which enabled the soldiers on the front lines to continue their mission.

#### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

This theme was targeting the home, enemy, and persuadable audiences as well. To frame the operation as an inevitable fact for the home audience, the entire conflict was framed as an existential war, which Israel had to fight to protect its right to exist. This theme was highlighted after the second week of the operation, when the IM decided to launch a ground invasion. Israel already had a bitter experience during the war on Lebanon in 2006. The Israelis most probably still remember the high costs they had to pay, and the high death toll among their soldiers. Therefore, in order to guarantee support for the ground invasion in this war on Gaza and avoid national criticism, the IM social media campaign connected the ground operation with defending Israel’s right to exist to protect its people and their right to live freely in their own country. For example, many videos showed commanders lecturing soldiers about their duties, their beliefs, and their objectives. Such videos were meant to mobilize the home audience, and guarantee their support for the military actions. Many persuasion appeals, techniques and tactics were used to address the people of Israel. The “loyalty” and “self-

interest” appeals recurred in almost all of the messages. The messages appealed to the people’s loyalty to Israel, and their national interest to defend its right to exist.

At the same time, the Army needed to set up new objectives to continue demonstrating to the home audience that the operation was an unavoidable reality. The messages used the “inevitability” appeal that focused on the emotions of fear. In other words, the operation was framed as the only way to stop Hamas rockets and destroy their infrastructure. Also the “least of evils” technique was widely used to structure the messages of this theme, acknowledging the losses and difficulties of the operation, yet emphasizing that it was the only way to avoid a worst outcome, which was leaving the Israelis vulnerable to “terror” attacks.

The “expertise” tactic of official leaders, such as Gantz, was used to guarantee national endorsement. Gantz’s speeches were loaded with intense emotionally appealing words associated with shared moral values and beliefs among Israelis, such as “I am proud to lead this Army, an Army with great determination, leadership...”, “our mission is to protect the citizens of Israel”.

The messages of the “operation is inevitable” theme also targeted the enemy audience, including militants and civilians. By using the “fear” tactic, Israel repeated that it would continue its operation until the objectives were achieved. Most of the IM PSYOPs campaign messages communicated this determinacy to put psychological pressure on both Palestinian militants and civilians. This pressure was meant to affect the militants’ abilities to endure the battle, and weaken their public support.

By using messages like the daily recaps, the IM was trying to explain to the persuadables why the operation was inevitable. By underlining the countless threats the Israelis were facing, the IM intended to justify the continuation of the operation. The IM used the “statistics” technique, for example, to project itself as an advanced institution

that built its strategies, objectives and decisions on scientific and precise research. Israel had always used numbers, such as the number of rockets fired at Israel, to justify its military reactions. The messages used intense and emotional language to convince the persuadables that the only reason Israel went to war was because it could not accept leaving its people vulnerable to acts of terrorism.

### *Theme 2: Israelis are Victims of Terror*

#### Messages

The IM messages projected the Israeli citizens as victims of terror. Many of the tweets stated that more than 40 percent of the Israeli civilians were in danger, which meant that Israel had the right to respond forcefully to protect its citizens. One video showed Israelis on the beach running for shelter after hearing rocket sirens. The video was intended to provoke emotional response by showing how Israeli citizens, including families and children, could not enjoy their summer vacation. Other pictures and videos showed Israelis frightened, hiding, running for a safe place after a rocket attack. Many infographics illustrated that Israelis who live near Gaza have only 15 seconds to reach a bomb shelter, while others in non-combatant zones use these 15 seconds to do normal activities, “such as drink water, tie shoes, or send a text message.”

Victimizing the Israelis was also clear in the repetitive messages summing up the number of rockets that hit Israel in a certain period of time. For example, “ Hamas has fired 2,670 rockets at Israeli civilians since July 8” (Tweet 115, July 30), or “15,200: the number of rockets fired at Israel from Gaza since 2001”. By increasing the number of rockets, in other words summing up the number of rockets fired at Israel over a long period of time, Israel emphasized the theme of victimization.

The IM PSYOPs campaign also produced many messages that emphasized the family and childhood concepts. One of the tweets stated, “Tonight Israeli families huddle in their shelters as rockets fall across the country.” The tweet led to an infographic that showed bomb shelters in Israel protecting families, in contrast to those in Gaza protecting weapons and bombs. This process of humanizing and victimizing home civilians while demonizing the enemy was used to justify bombing homes in Gaza. No Palestinian civilians were shown in this message, as if they did not exist. Also, the concept of childhood was massively employed as an effective emotion-invoking technique. Much visual and audiovisual material portrayed the children of Israel as victims of terror. The IM messages did not only mention the number of civilian casualties; they mentioned names and stories. This technique was used to humanize the victims, and invite TAs to sympathize with real people whose names and stories as victims of terror they can remember.





### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

This theme mainly targeted the persuadables as the enemy audience was busy with their own sufferings, which the IM PSYOPs campaign portrayed as a result of Hamas “terror.” Thus, addressing the persuadables, Israel wanted to highlight through visual and audio-visual material the Israeli citizens’ sufferings as a result of Hamas “terrorism.” The messages concentrated on how the people were deprived of safety, security and normal lives. In order to communicate this theme to the neutrals, the IM used many persuasion techniques and tactics. “Glittering generalities” was one heavily used technique, where the IM associated its messages with valued concepts and beliefs,

such as the need for safety, security, and the desire for peace and to live a normal life, where 15 seconds can be used to drink water or tie a shoelace instead of running for shelter. “Plain folks or common man” technique was also used to support this theme through employing common language and mannerisms shared with the persuadables, such as the importance of enjoying the summer vacation. The “simplification” technique, reducing facts into simple right, wrong, good or evil, was also used to structure the messages of infographics. It was used, for example, to justify bombing homes in Gaza, which were portrayed not as protecting Palestinian families, but for sheltering “terrorists” and bombs.

***Theme 3: Israel is a Western Democracy: “We” are Together Fighting a War on Terrorism***

Messages

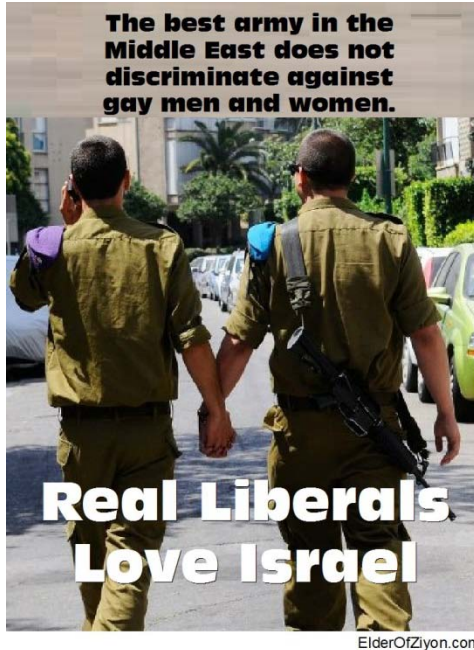
Many of the IM PSYOPs campaign messages emphasized that Israel and western countries are together as “one” union in their war against “them” the “terrorists.” Thus, the IM stressed that Hamas is a “terrorist” group. For example, one tweet discussed how Hamas “terror” cells received advanced training in Malaysia “to parachute into Israel to kidnap and murder civilians” (Tweet 113, July 31). The tweet that led to a piece published on the idfblog was titled “training to be a terrorist,” where Hamas’ militants were reported as having undergone weapons trainings, and learning methods for kidnapping soldiers, and operating inside the extensive tunnel network. The Israeli campaign relentlessly repeated that Hamas was a terrorist organization, barbaric and murderous. One message revealed how Israeli soldiers found training manuals in Gaza that give instructions on how to make homemade bombs. “The manual amounts to a terrorism 101 handbook on concealing and detonating all kinds of explosives” (Tweet 118, July 30). The tweet that led to an article posted on the idfblog gave a historical

background of Hamas and noted that since the 1990s suicide bombers of the group blew themselves up in cafes, restaurants, hotels, shopping malls and buses, and that they still use suicide belts today. Another message asked “would you support an organization that fires rockets from your child's school in order to kill children in another?” (Tweet 62, August 10). The message showed how Hamas fired mortars near a UN elementary school. All these messages focused on exposing the “terrorist” aspect of Hamas to project it as a violent, barbaric, extremist and radical organization that is threatening Israel. The “what would you do campaign” was also an Israeli attempt to justify its operation. Targeting a western audience, the IM PSYOPs campaign kept asking “What would you do if your neighbour was launching rockets at your cities?” The chosen cities for the pseudo war were New York, London, Washington DC and many other large western cities. These cities were chosen in particular as the PSYOPs campaign targeted their residents to convince them of the Israeli point of view. Israel wanted residents of these cities to put themselves in Israelis shoes, and feel their suffering. Another tweet stated, “these North American immigrants just landed in Israel and will soon be joining the IDF. Welcome Home and Shabbat Shalom” (Tweet 49, August 15). The tweet was accompanied by a picture of young men and women in the military salute. The message: Israelis and North Americans together are fighting the same war on terror.

In addition, the Israeli PSYOPs campaign frequently mentioned that Israel is a western democracy that is neither sexist nor racist. Women were engaged in almost all of the visual and audio visual material conducted for the PSYOPs campaign. Also, as Israel has been accused of being a racist state, the social media campaign took great effort to show its in-discriminatory aspect, such as highlighting personal stories of soldiers with African roots (Tweet 55, August 13).



The PSYOPs messages stressed more cultural similarities between Israel and western countries. One message showed Israel's respect and acceptance of homosexuality. The message stated, "Find the difference" between two photos: the first photo showed two men executed by hanging; the message claimed they were two gay Palestinians executed by Hamas; in contrast, a second photo showed two Israeli male soldiers holding hands. One reason the IM might chose to embed such a message in a PSYOPs war campaign was that it was looking to promote common ground with its TAs. The image Israel wanted to propagate was clear: a western, democratic, developed and civilized state.



### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

This theme was mainly targeting the western persuadables. Israel wanted to convince this target audience that it is a western democracy whose citizens were suffering from terrorist acts. The IM bombarded its Twitter platform with pictures, videos and infographics of Hamas as “terrorists,” “kidnappers,” and “suicide bombers.” This “name calling” technique is usually used to arouse prejudices in the TA by labelling the enemy as something the TA fears. The PSYOPs campaign invited the persuadables to put themselves in the shoes of the Israelis. The “plain folks or common

man technique” was widely used to support the messages of this theme by concentrating on the common traits between Israel and the west as an advanced progressive, sophisticated and democratic country. Thus the “positive and negative alter casting” technique was used to contrast Israeli values with Hamas, which was portrayed as a radical, extremist backward militia. The campaign also used the technique of “compar[ing] for similarities” in the “what would you do” campaign by comparing Israeli cities to other western cities. This technique tried to show that Israel responded in the same way any western country would have responded if it were exposed to similar circumstances.

***Theme 4: Hamas is Part of an International Axis of Terror***

Messages

Many messages of the PSYOPs campaign emphasized that Hamas is a part of an international axis by focusing on its relationship with Iran. Hamas does not deny that Iran sponsors the organization and provides it with the weapons it uses against Israel. Emphasizing such connection places Hamas on the international axis of Iran, and guarantees the support of all those who oppose/fight this axis.

However, ironically, towards the end of the war, the IM PSYOPs campaign shifted its connection of Hamas as a radical terrorist organization with the same jihadist ideology as ISIS, an extremist Sunni organization. The PSYOPs campaign quoted a tweet from *Al Qassam* Brigades that stated: “We are continuing our struggle. Allah is our goal, the prophet is our leader, jihad is our way and death for Allah is our most exalted wish” (Tweet 14, August 24). This tweet came a few days after the beheading of the American journalist James Foley, which sparked an international protest. The IM tried to take advantage of the international condemnation of ISIS in its war by associating it to Hamas.

### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

The IM PSYOPs campaign used the “compare for similarities” and “fear” techniques to target the persuadables. The messages were trying to point out similarities between Hamas and entities fought and feared internationally to guarantee the persuadables support of Israel.

### ***Theme 5: Israel Wants Peace/Hamas Wants War***

#### Messages

Many messages emphasized that Israel does not want war, and the only reason it was fighting was because Hamas rejected all ceasefire proposals. The campaign stated multiple times that “instead of building themselves up, they are concentrated on tearing Israel down.” One of the infographics explained that Hamas rejected three ceasefire proposals while Israel accepted them. Not only did Israel highlight its longing for peace, it also made sure to recognize Palestinian rights to live in peace as well. In other tweets, the IM constantly mentioned that it held its fire for hours to open a humanitarian window in Gaza; for example, an infographic indicated “We [IM] cease, Hamas fires” (Tweet 53, August 13). Other messages explained how Hamas violated the first 72-hour ceasefire that started on August 1, 2014, which served to project Hamas as responsible for Palestinians sufferings. One of the infographics explained how Hamas launched, one hour- and a- half after the ceasefire started, a massive attack near the Kerem Shalom border crossing preventing the entry of 91 trucks carrying food, gas, fuel and other humanitarian supplies to the Gazans. The infographic concluded: “Hamas deprived Palestinian civilians of vital humanitarian aid” (Tweet 102, August 2). Another tweet said: “If Hamas doesn't fire rockets at the Gaza border crossing, we will keep it open. Here's what passed through today: 248 trucks of food, medicine and general supplies,



173 tons of gas, 571300 litres of fuel. The IDF is working to keep the Gaza border crossing open for business.” This message did not only emphasize the ethics of the IM, but also explained that Hamas rockets were the only reason the border crossing was closed and Gazans were deprived of all these goods.



**ON AUGUST 1, THE IDF SCHEDULED  
A SHIPMENT OF GOODS INTO GAZA.**

*At 8:00 am:*  
The US and UN-backed ceasefire started.

*At 9:30 am:*  
Hamas launched a massive attack near the  
Kerem Shalom border crossing, preventing  
the entry of 91 trucks carrying:

- FOOD
- GAS
- FUEL
- WATER
- MEDICAL EQUIPMENT
- MEDICINE
- MATTRESSES

**HAMAS DEPRIVED PALESTINIAN  
CIVILIANS OF VITAL HUMANITARIAN AID.**

ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES



The IM also propagated how Hamas works on brainwashing Gazans and raising an entire generation “on the values of hatred and violence,” said the Israeli soldier Sgt. O. (Tweet 84, August 6). In an interview, Sgt. O. discussed his experience in Gaza and recalled that in every house the IM found magazines, newspapers and other media containing anti-Israeli propaganda, and documents with “plans to conquer Israel to build a Palestinian state over all the land of Israel.” The Israeli soldier noted that Hamas converted the neighbourhood’s civilian buildings into a terrorist infrastructure: “We even found explosives in nurseries. The whole neighbourhood was practically a terrorist base.”

#### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

Israel wants peace while Hamas wants war; a theme directly targeted the persuadables. Thus, the IM PSYOPs messages extensively employed the “positive and negative alter casting” tactic by comparing the good qualities of Israel to the bad qualities of Hamas who thrives on war. The IM also used the “glittering generalities” technique to express its desire for peace by using intense emotional appealing words. The campaign used statistics and numbers to add authority to the messages on goods that the Gazans were deprived of because of Hamas. Despite Israel’s closure of the Kerem Shalom border, the messages used the “rewards and punishment” tactic to say that because of Hamas rockets, the Gazans were punished, the border was closed and they were deprived of essential supplies.

#### ***Theme 6: Hamas Uses Civilians as Human Shields***

##### Messages

As the civilian death toll increased, Israel faced an international outcry, and was eager to prove that Hamas was solely to blame. Throughout the war, Israel tweeted

pictures, videos, and infographics about Hamas using civilians as human shields. The IM insisted that Hamas fired rockets from civilian areas, and that the group hid its weapons in schools, hospitals, houses, mosques. One infographic showed how Israel used the Iron Dome to protect its citizens, while Hamas used Palestinians as human domes to protect its weapons(Tweet 128, July 28).



In order to prove its point, the IM used excerpts from Hamas leaders' speeches, such as Ismail Haniya saying, "this is a nation of martyrs who sacrifice their children, their sons, for the sake of Palestine"; in another example the IM showed a video of Hamas Spokesperson Sami Abou Zihre saying, "the fact that people are willing to sacrifice themselves against Israeli warplanes in order to protect their homes, I believe

this strategy is proving itself, and we, Hamas, call on our people to adopt this practice.” To understand such statements requires context. Such words are totally understandable and acceptable in the Muslim Arab-Palestinian context, which figuratively believes in the value of martyrdom to protect the nation including the family, the home, and the country. Yet celebrating death and talking openly about the subject might feel perplexing for audiences who do not understand the context of the conflict, or who have not suffered the long history of the Arab-Israeli war. Thus, the IM PSYOPs campaign was heavily built on the shared understanding of certain concepts with the persuadable audience. One infographic asked “why this (illustration of Palestinian home used by Hamas to launch rockets) turns into this (illustration of destroyed Palestinian home)?” The infographic answered: “Because Hamas use civilian homes for military purposes.” Another tweet led to a piece published on the idfblog about a manual captured by the IM on how Hamas recommends storing explosives in Gaza’s civilian homes and calls for bringing the battle into populated areas (Tweet 7, August 25). The piece was supported by a picture of one page of the manual, a picture of “explosives in a Gazan home placed next to a child’s bed,” and two videos of soldiers showing explosives detected inside civilian houses. The blog highlighted the manual’s sections on how “to transfer combat from open areas to built-up urban areas,” “how civilians can be used to hide explosives,” and the “hiding and camouflage of explosives.”

The IM also accused Hamas of reporting its militant deaths as civilian casualties. This tactic, the IM claimed, “has an obvious purpose: to attract international sympathy for Hamas, while intensifying condemnation of Israel.” The IM’s claim was based on the death of Mahmoud Osama Abbas, a field commander in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The IM published a screenshot of Hamas’ interior ministry Facebook page announcing the death of Abbas as a civilian. The IM also

claimed that Hamas militants dress as civilians during combat, which makes it hard to differentiate between civilian and “terrorists” targets. The piece quoted the head of statistics for the BBC saying “[i]t is hard to say with certainty at this stage how many of the dead in Gaza were civilians and how many were fighters... Some of the conclusions being drawn from [the data Hamas publishes] may be premature.” (Tweet 1, August 26).

### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

Neither the home audience nor the enemy audiences were the main targets of these messages. Most of the Israelis supported the operation, and even though many may have felt sorry for the high civilian casualties among Palestinians, they agreed on blaming Hamas for using them as human shields. On the other hand, it was very difficult, especially starting the second week of the war, to communicate any idea to the enemy audience in Gaza who was overwhelmed with the enormous number of deaths and the destruction.

The messages of this theme were mainly directed at the worldwide persuadables. In order to support its accusations of Hamas, the IM used “testimonials,” such as the video of the France 24 news reporter in Gaza showing a rocket launching site in a residential area and next to a UN facility (Tweet 81, Aug 6). The persuadables are usually more likely to accept a third party journalistic narrative on a foreign news channel. The IM widely used the persuasion techniques of “transference” and “positive/negative alter-casting” to communicate messages of this theme, by projecting the positive qualities of Israel which employed advanced technology and precision strikes in order to minimize harm to Palestinian civilians, in contrast to the “negative” qualities of Hamas who put Israelis and Palestinians in the line of fire. By framing the narrative in this way, the IM attempted to transfer the blame to Hamas. Another very

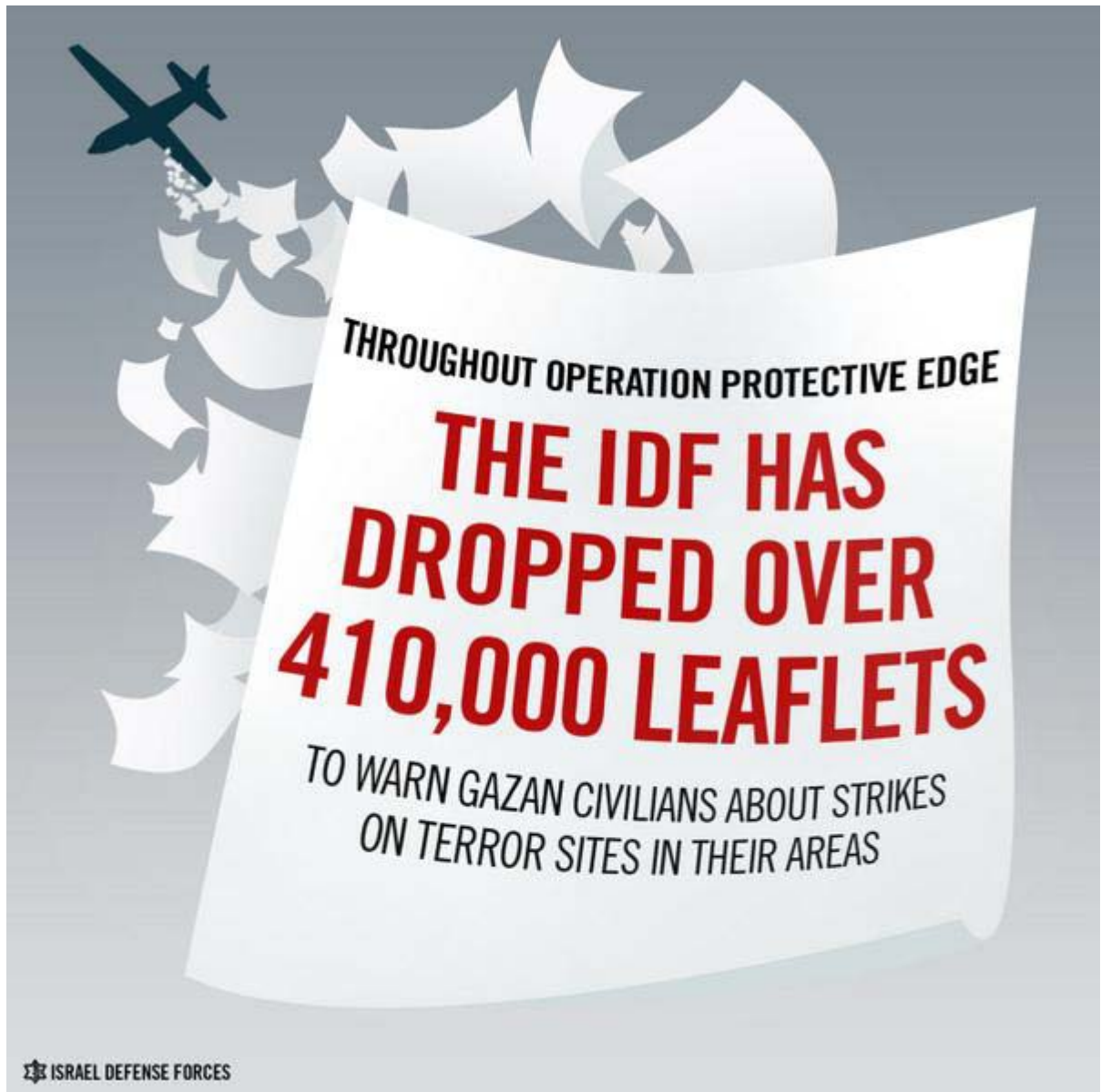
important persuasion technique employed throughout the campaign was the “least of evils”; in other words Israel admitted several times that the danger of harming innocent bystanders is always high during combat in urban territories, and emphasized the undesirability of this action, yet the messages were constructed as Israel’s only way to avoid worse outcomes upon its citizens. The messages condemned the civilian deaths and blamed the “terrorists,” accusing them of using Palestinians as human shields. This theme was Israel’s main narrative to justify the extremely high civilian casualties during the war.

### ***Theme 7: The Israeli Operation is Legal***

#### Messages

Israel was under increasing international condemnation for striking civilian targets, such as houses, schools, hospitals and mosques. It repeated messages that Hamas used all of these places to hide its weapons and use civilians as human shields. The IM employed much of its media content to prove that such places appear civilian in nature, yet they were used for military purposes to justify targeting them. The IM PSYOPs campaign repeated that “when houses are used for military purposes, they may become legitimate military targets under international law.” According to the IM, bedrooms were used as operation rooms, living rooms as weapons storage areas, and offices as command centers. After showing that these civilian places were used for military purposes, the IM’s strategy was to highlight its ethical ideology. Many messages emphasized that the IM after using advanced methods to determine “lawful” military targets in Gaza, still took great effort to minimize harm to civilian population. The IM social media campaign mentioned that Israel used text messages, phone calls, and leaflets to warn civilians before airstrikes. One of the infographics indicated that

throughout the operation the IM “dropped over 410,000 leaflets to warn civilians about strikes on terror sites in their areas” (Tweet 56, Aug 12).



### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

This theme was also mainly targeting the persuadable audience especially with the growing international accusations that the IM was committing violations of international human law. Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that there was “a strong possibility that international law has been violated, in a manner that could amount to war crimes” (Black, 2012).Amnesty International (2014)

claimed that “even if officials or fighters from Hamas or Palestinian armed groups associated with other factions did in fact direct civilians to remain in a specific location in order to shield military objectives from attacks, all of Israel's obligations to protect these civilians would still apply.” The international organisation criticized the IM for not giving civilians enough time to evacuate; the warnings sometime came less than one minute before the bombing. Amnesty International did not consider them “effective warnings” under international humanitarian law. Other human rights organization, such as OCHA and Human Rights Watch condemned roof knocking as unlawful, and considered that even if the IM warned civilians to evacuate their homes, there was literally no safe places for civilians in Gaza (OCHA & Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Thus the IM had to engage properly in the international debate on the legality of the operation, and thus extensively used the “legitimacy appeal” to market the lawfulness of the operation to the persuadable audience. The appeal to international law has been one of the most important PSYOPs technique used to justify the Israeli attacks against Gaza homes. Israel combined this legitimacy appeal with the “least of evils” persuasion technique to say that although its attacks were lawful, Israel still hated to target civilian areas, but it was the only way to eradicate terrorism and protect Israeli civilians. The IM flooded the PSYOPs campaign with graphics, pictures and videos on the multiple precautions it took to avoid civilian deaths, using the “transference” technique to transfer the blame to Hamas.

### ***Theme 8: The ethics of the IM: Saving Civilians is a priority***

#### Messages

The IM PSYOPs campaign could not stress enough that the Israeli Army is an ethical institution that denounces attacking civilians. After returning from combat in

Gaza, an IM soldier, Sgt. O. said that they were briefed that their mission in Gaza was exclusively to find tunnels, and they were commanded not to fight or open fire on anyone who does not present an “imminent threat” to them, “even Hamas Operatives”. Sgt. O. said that his commander repeated, “we do not fight indiscriminately. We are an Army, not a terrorist organization.” The interview with this Israeli soldier who was wounded in Gaza was published on the idfblog, and the link was posted on IM social media platforms (Tweet 84, August 6).

Throughout the operation, the IM was keen on differentiating between Hamas as a “terrorist” organization, which kills civilians on purpose, and the IM, who was forced by Hamas into war “by refusing to cease its indiscriminate rocket fire on Israelis.” The IM relentlessly repeated, in most of its social media messages, that it had taken all effort to minimize civilian casualties by sending messages to residents that being near Hamas was not safe. This not only added to the “legality” of its attacks, it also showed the set of ethics and values that formulates the IM’s fighting ideology: that preserving the lives of civilians is a priority. The IM bragged about taking all possible efforts to warn civilians before airstrikes, and asked “How many countries do that” (Tweet 56, Aug 12) in an attempt to show Israel’s uniqueness, and its “ethical” Army, which is concerned with saving civilians lives. One of the tweeted videos explained the extensive process the IM goes through every time it decides to strike a “terrorist” target. The video (Tweet 163, July 21) showed the process, which starts by collecting intelligence via advanced means through the analysis of flying camera squadrons and aerial reconnaissance pilots who fly over the region on a regular basis. The information collected is passed to the IM coordination center. This center is under the control of managing forces in the area who are supervising an operational plan to target “terrorists” sights. The video also mentioned that legal advisors are involved to advise “the Army on the targeting process



and help commanders understand their legal obligations under international law.” Also, the process, the video stated, continues with the collection of information regarding the living conditions in Gaza, liaising with international organizations, and compiling reports of where people are grouping together and where humanitarian activity is taking place. The video described the IM’s “meticulous” research to determine the type of targets, conditions in the area, and proximity of targets to the population and civilian buildings, in addition to calculating the impact of the explosion based on the type and weight of explosive materials. The video revealed the details of a long exhaustive process and featured a signified number of IM soldiers, in action, using different advanced technological devices, analysing aerial footage, and conducting extensive analysis. The video projected the IM in the light of a very advanced progressive institution that builds its activities on scientific bases. All the technical terms used in the video and the scientific description of the process were intended to demonstrate a credible institution whose decisions are the result of professional research and analysis in order to increase the precision of strikes and reduce collateral damage. The video’s credibility is built on the fact that IM used unclassified aerial live footage of the strike to prove that it cares to avoid civilian deaths.

To emphasize that the IM is an ethical institution, many tweets showed Palestinians being treated at Israeli hospitals to refute the image of the immoral criminal forces propagated by the enemy and its audiences. “Our field hospital outside the Erez Crossing continues to treat Palestinian civilians” (Tweet 152, July 23). In another tweet, the IM posted a video of the field hospital set up for Palestinians. The video featured construction workers working on building the hospital, two sound bites from the hospital coordinator and director, who both were dressed in military uniforms, discussing the services the hospital provides and promising that medical treatment is

given to every human being as a human being. One of the video shots showed a soldier serving at the hospital chatting and laughing with a veiled woman.



TAs and Persuasion Techniques

Such messages were directed at both the non-combatant enemy audience and the persuadables. To target the enemy audience the IM used the “in-group-out group” appeal by seeking to divide the Palestinians among themselves. Showing Palestinians who are dealing with the IM and accepting its services tended to encourage other Palestinians to realize that the IM cares for their lives and is willing to provide them services in contrast to Hamas who was using them as human shields. Many pictures and videos were produced with the slogan: “For Gaza.”

The IM also wanted to project a positive image to the persuadable audience. It attempted to avoid the image of barbaric brutal Army who kills in cold blood by demonstrating an advanced, concerned and friendly Army with a set of moral values. Many PSYOPs messages also widely used the “positive/negative alter-casting” technique to show how ethical the IM was, such as “even as Hamas fires rockets at the Kerem Shalom crossing, the IDF continued to transfer goods into Gaza.” The IM wanted to tell the persuadables that as rockets fall, Israel still thought of helping the Gazans by letting food, supplies, gas, and fuel cross the borders. Infographics on this matter gave exact numbers and types of food that Israel allowed into Gaza. Using numbers added credibility to the story and strengthened the Israeli narrative. Israel tried to highlight its positive values of appreciating and caring for the Gazans’ lives even as it was being attacked by “terrorists” from Gaza.

Israel used the “expertise” persuasion technique by mentioning that its soldiers have gone through special training that focuses on how to fight efficiently in urban areas in order to avoid civilian casualties. The IM repeatedly tried presenting itself as a progressive professional civilized Army in contrast to a terrorist backward barbarian enemy. To prove their “civilized” aspect, the IM admitted they do mistakes: “We always aspire to improve. We learn from our mistakes and work on being as efficient as

possible on the battlefield,” said Colonel Odi Ben-Moha, the former commander of the Kfir Brigade. “Testimonials” is another persuasion technique used by the IM to confirm that the soldiers were doing all they could to minimize death among residents of Gaza. These testimonials came in the form of exclusive interviews with pilots, such as Lt. Or, who said that although he personally saw rockets fired at Israel from schools and hospitals, he couldn’t strike back because of civilians nearby (Tweet 163, July 21).

### ***Theme 9: Humanizing the IM***

#### Messages

The IM worked hard on humanizing its soldiers, by highlighting their names, achievements, personal stories, what they study, their family members and other personal information. It always emphasized that they were killed as they defended Israel’s right to exist. Humanizing soldiers who were involved in a war that killed more than 2200 people, the vast majority of them Palestinian civilians, was not an easy job since that the IM was losing control over some of the aggressive tweets sent by some of its soldiers, like daviddovadia who tweeted @sherrii\_elkaderi “I killed 13 children today and your next fucking Muslims go to hell bitches.” (sic)

Messages of respect for the soldiers’ heroism and sacrifices were propagated throughout the war. One tweet discussed the story of the soldier Daniel, whose wife and daughter immigrated to Israel to greet him after his return from Gaza (Tweet 55, Aug 13). A picture of Daniel, his wife and daughter accompanied the tweet. The soldier’s family was posing for the camera in front of a tank on which stood 26 of his Army friends dressed in their military fatigues. The IM was aware of the importance of softening the harsh face of war by embedding values of family and love. The IM Twitter campaign posted many testimonies of soldiers to make their stories real, and shed light

on their sacrifices and suffering, such as the testimony of Lt. Eitan who “put his life in danger to rescue a soldier kidnapped by Hamas.” (Tweet 50, August 15). The tweet was linked to a published piece on the idfblog through which Eitan gives details of the operation. The title of the link was a direct quote from the Israeli Lt. : “If I’m not back in 5 minutes, I’m dead”.

Israeli soldiers were allowed through official channels to talk and express their feelings throughout the war. Another video featured a soldier discussing how he saw Hamas terrorists using children to escape the IM forces (Tweet 25, August 22). The soldier spoke calmly on the difficult situations the IM had to face in order to protect Palestinian civilians. He said it was very hard to shoot at a house where civilian clothes are hanging and “girls’ dresses are waving in the wind,” or even shoot at a mosque which is “an important place for a lot of people; it’s like a synagogue.” In other words, the soldier was admitting that the IM shot at civilian homes and mosques, yet he was blaming Hamas for making the IM take such undesirable actions by exploiting such facilities from which to attack the IM.

Other IM tweets included messages from commanders in the air support to paratroopers engaged in the ground operation (e.g. “You can relax, we’re above you” Tweet 146, July 24). The video featured a live communication in Hebrew between air and ground forces about “terrorists” in the combat area. The air force commander said they targeted them, so the paratrooper answered “If you have targeted them then I can calm down.” This message indicated that the urban battle with Hamas was a very tough task that required courage, yet at the same time it projected an image of an organized Army where all units were collaborating to achieve the operation’s objectives.

#### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

The Army's sacrifices projected soldiers as heroes in messages targeting the home audience. However, these sacrifices in messages directed towards persuadables projected soldiers as victims of terror. Addressing the home audience, the IM PSYOPs campaign used the "testimonials" technique to guarantee the people's support for the operation and the Army. The messages used the "loyalty" appeal to reinforce the people's endorsement of the war, and the "self-interest" appeal to always remind the home front that soldiers were sacrificing to preserve Israel's right to exist and live in peace.

The soldiers announced their desire for peace and freedom and their respect of different cultures and religions. In other words, they used the "transference" technique to transfer the blame to Hamas who was forcing these soldiers to act against their will.

### ***Theme 10: Hamas Exploits the People of Gaza***

#### Messages

The IM loaded its social media campaign with messages accusing Hamas of exploiting the people of Gaza. The effort to differentiate between non-combatants (people of Gaza) and combatants (Hamas) was made clear throughout the operation. One of the videos (Tweet 134, July 27) explained with details and numbers that Hamas used the money of Gazans to build their tunnels. The video listed statistics on the amount of construction materials that routinely enter Gaza from Israel during peace time. The video claimed that Hamas exploits these supplies and invests significant efforts in building tunnels that "allow terrorists to smuggle weapons and equipment...to operate underground and infiltrate Israel in order to kidnap and kill civilians." To support the claim, the video used a sound bite from a Hamas leader saying they are building tunnels, and it used another sound bite from a face-covered resident of Gaza

accusing Hamas of robbery. The video commented that Hamas could have used the resources to build hundreds of homes and civilian institutions for the people of Gaza. The same message was summarized in an infographic which said that one tunnel = 350 truckloads of building supplies, which Hamas could have used to build “86 homes, 7 mosques, 6 schools, 19 medical clinics”. The infographic suggested that each tunnel costs \$3 million, and stated that Hamas constructed 30 tunnels so far which means “that’s \$90 million that Hamas could have invested in the welfare of its people.” Another infographic stated that “every Hamas tunnel is a school, hospital, a library that will never be built” (Tweet 89, August 5).

#### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

Although this theme targets the Gazans, it might not have had any impact as it is no surprise to them, for example, that Hamas builds tunnels. Not only do they acknowledge this fact, but the majority of Gazans express their support for the tunnels, which they consider a very effective warfare technique (Verini, 2014). These tunnels are built underneath the dense cities of Gaza, and they probably received the blessings of Gazans. Yet regardless of whether this video had an impact on Palestinian citizens, the IM used persuasion appeals and techniques to address them. The video used the “in group-out group” appeal to divide the enemy audience by portraying the “in group” (Hamas) in a very negative manner, as manipulators, abusers and thieves. This was aimed at encouraging Palestinians to rebel against them, and an example of a rebel who accuses Hamas of robbery was included in one of the videos. The IM PSYOPs campaign used the “insinuation” technique to divide the adversary audience and increase their suspicions about Hamas. It also used the “positive and negative self-feeling” technique to convince Gazans that using their money to build Gaza is much better than using it to build tunnels that would eventually lead to Gaza’s destruction.

This theme also targeted the persuadables to show Hamas in a very negative light as a group exploiting its own people. To support the messages of this theme the IM used statistics, and the “positive and negative alter casting” tactic to show the “corruption” of Hamas policy in Gaza as compared to how much good they could do for their own people if they wanted. The IM concluded that the only reason for Gazans suffering is the existence of Hamas, not the war, occupation, or blockade.

### ***Theme 11: Israel’s Accomplishments***

#### Messages

The IM bombarded social media platforms with messages that demonstrated its military accomplishments in Gaza. The daily recaps explained earlier were samples of the messages the IM posted to establish its success. Other messages indicated that “Hamas is now weaker, Israel is now safer” (Tweet 75, August 7). Infographics presented the number of demolished tunnels, destroyed rocket arsenals, and eliminated “terrorists” up to the day on which the message was posted. Considering the home audience, the IM PSYOPs campaign was aware of rarely mentioning any military failures, or casualties among its members. Some of the messages would discuss injuries, such as “4 soldiers were slightly injured & all returned home safely.” Despite the repetitive messages of portraying Israelis as victims of terror, soldiers were kept out of this equation. They were always portrayed as strong, in control, and the only way to defend Israelis and restore security. After the ground operation started, the IM social media messages showed soldiers halting a “terrorist” trap in Gaza, the number of targets they struck including rocket launchers, command centers and weapons manufacturing plants.



The IM regularly tweeted about the ability of the Iron Dome to intercept rockets. Many of these PSYOPs messages used statistics to demonstrate the strength of the Iron Dome and its ability to protect Israeli civilians; for example, “Iron Dome has intercepted 191 rockets. Imagine what would have happened if it didn't exist.”

### TAs and Persuasion Techniques

Such messages were mainly targeting the home and enemy audiences. To the home audience, the IM wanted to prove that the operation met its objectives in order to insure their continued support. The military wanted to ensure the home front that the high costs they had to pay throughout war were not in vain. Many persuasion techniques were used to communicate the messages of this theme: “Simplification”, “illustrations and narratives”, “statistics”, and “expertise”. By reducing the conflict into an infographic, the IM simplified the facts into illustrations and numbers to make the conflict more understandable. The use of numbers made the information look more scientific, and gave it credibility.

The “aversive stimulation” technique was used to address the enemy audience. This technique is about a continuous punishment that won't end unless the enemy complied with certain conditions. So the IM was trying to boast about its achievements, insisting that the operation would continue until Hamas stopped threatening Israel's security.

### **The Israeli Twitter Campaign Development and Design**

The Israeli Twitter PSYOPs campaign constituted messages in the form of texts, pictures, videos and infographics. Infographics were one of the most important means of communicating messages. They were easy, simple, perfectly summarizing information and simplifying the conflict. They were creative and sophisticated. The campaign also

produced high end video clips professionally filmed and edited. The information embedded in each video was framed as a story. In order to show high levels of professionalism and make sure to attract western audiences, Americans in particular, English native speakers did the voice over in all the videos. The music was carefully chosen to increase the video's persuasive potential. The filming process, such as conducting close-ups of soldiers' eyes and faces, were meant to humanize them, make them believable, and more persuasive. Also filming them in the field added credibility to their narratives.

### **An Assessment of the Israeli PSYOP Campaign**

To assess any PSYOP campaign means to measure to what extent objectives of the campaign were met. Influencing and persuading the TAs are the primary goals of any PSYOP campaign (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2003). Given the short time period since the end of the fighting, a final assessment of the war is not yet possible. However, enough is known about the course of the conflict and its aftermath to claim that the IM most likely failed to achieve its PSYOPs goals. Hamas rockets continued to rain down on Israel until the very end of the war. The war ended with Hamas still in control of Gaza. Like in 2006, again Israel fell into the trap of a long battle that weakened its PSYOPs campaign, and made it more difficult to address its TAs, including the home audience. After one week of the war Israel found itself on the defensive rather than promoting its actions.

The major obstacles that the Israeli PSYOPs campaign faced(which are detailed below) were:

1. The growing number of Hamas rockets fired at Israel throughout the operation. In other words, the failure of the military objectives
2. The high death toll and large number of Palestinian civilian casualties in Gaza. This point was mainly demonstrated in three major incidents:
  - a. The killing of four boys, aged between 9 and 11, from the Bakr family on the Gaza beach
  - b. The *Al Shuja'ya* battle
  - c. The shelling of UN schools
3. The increasing number of dead Israeli soldiers during the ground operation

At the beginning of the war, the main objective of the operation announced by the IM was to stop Hamas' rockets. The online campaign instantly marketed this objective with different visual and audio-visual messages that were closely analysed in the previous section. However, as the operation endured, the number of Hamas rockets shelling Israel continued to increase; hence the IM started bombarding its social media platforms with a new military objective: to destroy Hamas tunnels. The Hamas tunnel network was presented as the reason "terrorists" were able to infiltrate Israel and carry out attacks. New infographics, videos, and pictures framing the tunnel narrative as an indispensable threat were introduced by the end of the first week of the operation. Later, towards the end of the operation Israel started propagating its third objective of targeting Hamas leaders. The PSYOPs campaign objectives were constantly shifting throughout the operation to cope with the changing conditions.

As mentioned, the IM's online messages during the first week of the operation were mostly marketing Israel's right to defend its citizens as victims of terror, the inevitability of the operation, the operation's objectives, and Israel's determination to accomplish them. However, the high death toll among Palestinian civilians sparked an

international outcry. After the first week of the war the Israeli PSYOP campaign posted mostly defensive rather than offensive messages. Instead of marketing its military operation, Israel found itself busy defending and clarifying its image, especially in the face of international condemnation, which included criticism by foreign officials, public figures, and celebrities, such as the American political satirist John Stewart, the British MP David Ward, and a statement published in the Guardian newspaper that was signed by 64 public figures, including seven noble laureates, who called for an arms embargo on Israel for war crimes (Haaretz, 2014). The international condemnation was clearly demonstrated during the UN Human Rights Council vote on July 22, 2014 when 29 nations out of 47 voted to set up a commission to launch an independent inquiry to investigate the violation of international law and human rights in the Occupied Territory. Unsurprisingly, the US was the only country to vote against the resolution while others abstained from voting (UNHRC, 2014). The council accused the IM of “gross violations of international human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN, 2014). Because of the spiralling civilian death toll, Israel was internationally embarrassed, and this vote clarified that Israel faced an important international challenge.

One of the main obstacles that the IM PSYOPs campaign had to overcome was the killing by Israeli shelling of four Palestinian children playing on the Gaza beach on July 16. Dozens of foreign journalists were staying at a nearby hotel. The incident was internationally condemned, videos and pictures of the boys’ grieving families and relatives went viral, and the story was internationally covered, even in the mainstream American media. The IM did not mention the incident; instead, it flooded its online platforms with media content on the multiple precautions the IM takes to avoid civilian deaths.

The second incident that caused international controversy because of the high civilian death was the *Al Shuja'ya* battle, on July 20, 2014, between the IM and the *AlQassam Brigades*. Israeli bombs and artillery shells killed at least 65 Palestinians, including 17 children, 14 women, and 4 elderly civilians (Reuters, 2014). The Israeli social media campaign produced a plethora of content to defend its position on the incident by blaming Hamas for using citizens as human shields. Hamas was also accused of urging citizens not to leave the area despite the dropping of leaflets by Israel and the warnings by phone and text to the residents of Zeitoun and *Al Shuja'yato* evacuate ahead of planned strikes. Afterwards, Yedioth Ahronoth<sup>16</sup>'s military analyst, Alex Fishman, stated that the Israeli soldiers were ordered to "open fire at anything that moved" (Sherwood, Beaumont & Black, 2014). Yet, the incident again triggered international criticism including from the UN's secretary general, Ban Ki Moon, who called it "an atrocious action," (Aljazeera, 2014) and the European Union which announced that it is "particularly appalled by the human cost of the Israeli military operation in *Al Shuja'ya*" (i24news, 2014). Israel lost 13 soldiers in this battle which even made its case more difficult, as Hamas killed armed soldiers while Israel attacked citizens.

The shelling of the UN schools was a third incident that complicated the Israeli online PSYOPs campaign. The IM dedicated considerable media content to defend itself against the growing accusations of seven bombings of UN schools, which took place between July 21 and August 3 2014. During that period, the schools were used as shelters for Palestinians. Three of the bombings resulted in high civilian losses: at least 46 civilians including 10 UN staff (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Israel and Hamas exchanged accusations, and the IM insisted on publishing media content that

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<sup>16</sup>A leading Israeli newspaper

demonstrated Hamas' footprints on the attacks. Israel's position was weak not only because UNRWA's preliminary investigations indicated that Beit Hanoun School was shelled by the IM (UN, 2014), but also because Israel already had a history of bombing UN schools, including several schools during the Gaza War 2008, such as Al Fakhura School incident that resulted in the death of more than 40 people (BBC, 2009). Israel stated at that time that it fired on the school in response to militant gunfire, which a UN inquiry eventually denied. The IM online campaign was employed to deny its responsibility of the bombing, which was internationally denounced on both official and public levels.

Besides the difficulty of achieving military objectives and the high civilian death toll, the ground invasion phase was a third reason that hindered the success of the IM PSYOPs campaign. This time the IM was facing trouble influencing the home audience as the bitter memories of the 2006 war on Lebanon were brought up again by analysts.

Despite Israel's rhetoric about precision attacks, its "attacks with no military targets and many civilian deaths can hardly be considered precise," said Sarah Leah Whitson, the executive director of Human Rights Watch's Middle East and North Africa Division (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Israel's inability to reach its military objectives, the extremely high civilian death toll, along with the events explained above complicated its online PSYOPs campaign. Persuasion had become an extremely difficult mission challenged by uncontrollable facts on the ground.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present research analyzed the Israeli Twitter Campaign during the Gaza War 2014 and showed how it was used as an important venue to fight a new propaganda cyberwar. This study is important because it demonstrated how social media has become an integral part of psychological warfare. As discussed, PSYOPs is a battle of winning the hearts and minds; it is a subclass of information warfare and has been used as an interchangeable word for propaganda and political marketing in that they are all forms of mass persuasion methods that share similar techniques and procedures to achieve political goals through psychological persuasion (Schleifer, 2006b). Thus, persuasion is PSYOPs ultimate goal.

Unlike the 2006 war, Israel went to the Gaza War 2014 with a preconceived PSYOPs plan. During its military engagement in Lebanon in 2006, Israel's public diplomacy was often exposed to criticism and was described as unorganized and uncoordinated. After this massive criticism of its media plan during the 2006 war, Israel updated its strategy, introduced new departments, and engaged new media. Also, the global coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the global free flow of information through the internet, satellite transmissions and cellular communications have forced Israel to change the way it acts and looks at the world. The IM believes that social media has allowed the country to conduct a real time public relations campaign and market the country's objectives to win the world's sympathy (Urich, 2011).

Employing Twitter at the very beginning of the most recent battle, the IM announced the objective of “Operation Protective Edge” on July 7, 2014: “#IDF has commenced Operation Protective Edge in #Gaza against #Hammas, in order to stop the terror #Israel's citizens face on a daily basis” (@IDFSpokesperson, 2014).

As the literature on a state’s use of social media at war is still nascent, this study attempted to begin to fill that lacuna; it demonstrated that Israel used Twitter, its largest social media platform, during the Gaza War 2014 to conduct PSYOPs. This paper studied and analyzed the Israeli Twitter campaign in an attempt to understand how Israel, a sovereign state, used social media to market its military and political goals during wartime.

The paper first provided a brief historical overview of propaganda, and how the term’s meaning has changed multiple times, especially after the Nazi application of propaganda. Currently, propaganda is attributed with enemy lies and falsifications, while PSYOPs are positively defined as the strategies used to influence/change the perception and behavior of certain target audiences, as an important subclass of information warfare. This study adopted the US army field manual (2007) as it is the most updated framework of PSYOPs, and included a detailed document on how PSYOPs are executed. The manual is based on Lasswell’s basic communication model: Who says what to whom, in which channel and to what effect (Schleifer, 2009).

A qualitative content analysis of the Israeli English Twitter account messages, including all written, visual and audiovisual material, was conducted. The analysis demonstrated that Israel used multiple persuasion appeals, techniques, and tactics to target the home, enemy, and neutral audiences via its Twitter PSYOPs messages. The analysis found evidence of Lasswell’s (1927b) strategic aims of propaganda at war as Israel: mobilized hatred against Hamas by projecting it as a “terrorist,” “barbaric”



organization; aligned itself with the west by framing its war against Hamas as an inevitable part of the international war against terrorism; strived to preserve the friendship and cooperation of neutrals by emphasizing that Hamas is an international threat that strives for war and is unwilling to make peace; and, worked hard on demoralizing the enemy by disseminating messages on how Hamas targets innocent Israeli civilians and uses Palestinian civilians as human shields to achieve its goals.

As Keen (1991) explained, Israel constructed Hamas in the image that reflects the idea of what it wishes to destroy, such as “terrorist,” “barbaric,” “backward,” and “aggressor.” Based on Keen’s theory, Israel emphasized that it is not the Gazans who are targeted by its military operation, it is Hamas and the ideas it represents.

The analysis addressed the research questions by highlighting the main themes of the Israeli Twitter campaign and explaining why Israel would have chosen these themes. In employing the US army PSYOPs manual, the analysis demonstrated how the Israeli messages were considered PSYOPs following the same procedure and using persuasion strategies and techniques proposed by the document to construct its messages.

In order to win the persuadables, the IM campaign showed empathy for both sides. It stressed the importance of differentiating between the Palestinian people and Hamas, as the international public might not accept punishing people for their organization’s actions. Israel’s online public discourse has projected its desire and commitment to peace. It shed light on its positive values by showing its cooperative efforts with Arab communities to improve their living standards.

The IM never justified attacking innocent women and children; instead they blamed Hamas for using them as human shields. To legitimize its actions and create

more empathy for Israel, the IM repeated the jihadist goals of the Iran-backed “terroristic” organizations.

Throughout the Twitter campaign, Israel stressed that it is a western ‘democracy’, a US ally, a modern state that promotes education, minorities and women’s rights, and cultural advancements. It emphasized its commitment to freedoms, human rights, the environment, technology, science and research to prove that Israel and the “West” share the same global values, concerns and commitments, and they are fighting on the same front.

After analyzing the Israeli PSYOPs campaign during the 2006 war on Lebanon, Schleifer (2009) noted that “it is impossible to separate the Israeli [PSYOPs] debacle from its less than happy, overall military performance. [PSYOPs do] not operate in a vacuum” (p. 233). Hence, he explained that military and PSYOPs objectives are very connected and reciprocally affect each other. Similar to the 2006 war, the IM’s failure to stop Hamas’ rockets during the Gaza war 2014 deprived Israel the privilege of claiming victory. Hamas continued to fire rockets into Israel up until the last hours of war, forced Ben Gurion airport to close, killed an estimated 66 Israeli soldiers and remained in control of Gaza. Also, the international widespread criticism over the death of more than 2000 Gazan and the massive destruction of the strip played a significant role in the likely failure of the Israeli PSYOPs’ campaign.

Although the Israeli PSYOPs plan was consistently well planned and executed while the *Al Qassam* Brigades’ Twitter and Facebook accounts were suspended, a worldwide pro-Palestinian online presence by activists, especially social media pages run by pro-Palestinian Jews, faced off against the Jewish state in cyberspace.

This international grassroots online pro-Palestinian effort to challenge the official Israeli PSYOPs campaign was beyond the scope of this research; indeed, it is worthy of

a separate study, as, according to Stein (2011), anti-occupation activists are more technologically advanced and they challenge what she called the “digital vernacularization of Israel,” the state’s move to social media to open new informal PR channels. She described Israel’s turn to the digital field as “awkward, filled with errors and miscalculations,” and many times demonstrated a “basic lack of digital proficiency” (p. 911). Stein described this “digital vernacularization,” as “not always well executed, believable, or impervious to politically-minded attack” (p. 912). For example, Kuntsman & Stein (2011), in a separate study, explored what they called the “narratives of suspicion” within the Israeli digital context, especially during the cyber-debate that erupted following the IM attack on the Freedom Flotilla in May-June 2010. The IM used new media tools to justify its actions. Yet, the YouTube videos issued by the IM caused suspicion among anti-occupation activists, who argued that the time stamp of the visual catalogue released by the Israeli Foreign Ministry of weapons discovered onboard was prior to the navy raid. This online war between state and non-state actors, and the role of new media in these modern military conflicts, would make for interesting future research.

The present research focused on analyzing the content of the Israeli Twitter campaign targeting home, enemy and neutral audiences, but further research is needed to assess the actual impact of the PSYOPs campaign on TAs. Although qualitative content analysis allowed for inferences to be made on the intention of the IM’s PSYOPs, it cannot give uncontested results on the impact these had on receivers of these messages. Finally, this study only analyzed the IM’s English Twitter account to explore how Israel used social media to target TAs; exploring other accounts, such as the Arabic and Hebrew accounts would provide a fuller picture of how Israel targeted the enemy and home audiences in particular.

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