

# The IDF's PR Tactics for Arab Television Channels

Yonatan Gonen

This essay examines the tactics used by IDF representatives in their interviews with Arab television channels to maintain the legitimacy of the struggle against the Palestinians and justify the use of force in that struggle. The essay, based on research analyzing dozens of interviews held by the *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* networks with IDF spokespeople, shows that the IDF uses three primary tactics to achieve that goal: denial, avoidance of responsibility, and attempts to downplay the perceived measure of aggression of the event in question. In order to transmit their contents persuasively, those interviewed used several methods of rhetoric, such as posing rhetorical questions to the interviewers and posing direct questions to the enemy. The essay presents and provides examples of the tactics used and discusses their implications.

**Key words:** propaganda, Arab media, war, Palestinians, IDF spokesperson, rhetoric tactics and contents tactics

## Introduction

IDF representatives are often called upon to present Israel's position when it comes to the death of innocent Palestinians and the use of banned weapons in the international and Arab media. In recent years, these media appearances, also called "accountability interviews," have become very common. Television networks such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya* are eager to interview IDF representatives in the course of military events, as demonstrated during Operation Cast Lead, Operation Pillar of Defense, and the raid on the Turkish ship SS *Mavi Marmara* in May 2010.

Yonatan Gonen is a doctoral candidate in the Communications Department of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He would like to thank Dr. Zohar Kampf, senior lecturer in the Communications Department for his major contribution to this study.

How do the IDF's representatives conduct themselves in interviews dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? What tactics of rhetoric and content do they use in interviews with the Arab media in order to justify the use of force and maintain the legitimacy of the Israeli struggle? This essay seeks to answer these and similar questions, since to date, there is no in-depth analysis of Israeli interviews to Arab media. The essay is based on research involving the analysis of dozens of interviews granted by IDF representatives to Arab television networks both in Arabic and English, providing information about the interviewees' propaganda and justifications methods, shedding light on the Israeli-Arab conflict and the ways in which the media frames it from a slightly different angle than usual.

First, the essay presents the theoretical literature dealing with the topic under discussion, including findings by major studies on the comportment of interview subjects in accountability interviews and the development of the genre of interviews with the other side to a conflict. Next, the essay breaks down the research method selected for the purpose of analyzing the comportment of the Israeli interviewees. The central part of the essay includes the findings of the research arranged by major themes; this is followed by a discussion of these themes and their resulting conclusions as well as a summary.

### **Tactics of Contents versus Tactics of Rhetoric: Interviewees' Performance in Accountability Interviews**

News channels often hold accountability interviews during crises and conflicts.<sup>1</sup> In such interviews, there is an on-air confrontation with a public figure that is required to respond to an event or action generally attributed to that figure or the institutions with which s/he is identified. While the interviewer seeks to examine the background to the event or action, at times while promoting a predetermined agenda, the interviewee seeks to justify the event or action. In accountability interviews, the public often identifies with the interviewer as if s/he were the public's spokesperson. The interviewer is ostensibly asking his or her questions in the name of certain segments of the public, thereby playing the role sometimes called "the court of public opinion." The interviewee, by contrast, is presented as being alien to the viewing public.<sup>2</sup>

In such interviews, the image of the interview subject is placed at significant risk.<sup>3</sup> Preserving a positive image, then, becomes a key goal of interviewees representing a particular institution, such as an army or

government, and it is therefore important that their statements not be criticized or interrupted by the interviewer. Various scholars, including Benoit,<sup>4</sup> have tried to present models for “image repair” in crises, including a variety of possible manifestations, from denial to apology. In order to grant legitimacy to events in question, the interviewees use what research calls “a defensive style of speech.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, there is little use of emotion and only a limited degree of justification of the violence.

Interview subjects must use various tactics of rhetoric to transmit, clearly and persuasively, messages linked to image and legitimacy. Media researchers who analyze tactics of rhetoric have found that interviewees mostly engage in evasive maneuvers to avoid saying things clearly, attack the interviewer over the question asked, and repeat certain expressions while turning the question back on the interviewer.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Enemy Interview: Small Scale Political Drama**

An enemy interview used to be a very rare phenomenon until the establishment of international news networks. The regimes controlling local television channels made any sort of media access to anyone declared an enemy very difficult. The development of new media technologies in the mid-1990s and the expansion of the broadcast range beyond national borders changed the rules of national journalism. The channels began broadcasting around the clock and competing for viewership, and government control was dramatically reduced. To provide viewers with alternate points of view, the news channels provided a platform for the enemy, until such presentations became common practice.<sup>7</sup> Examples are the interview with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein on *CBS* shortly before the U.S. invasion in 2003 and the interview with then-Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat on Israel's *Channel 1* during the Second Intifada. As the Arabic-language global television networks grew in importance, a similar phenomenon began to occur in those media as well.

Studies analyzing interviews with the enemy focus on the nature of the interview, the professional conduct of the interviewers, and the dynamics created between these journalists and their interview subjects.<sup>8</sup> Studies show that enemy interviews often include exaggerated antagonism and contrariness. Professional antagonism manifested in challenging questions being posed to the interview subject often turns into direct attacks on the subject and everything s/he represents. The enemy interview, then, turns into a subgenre with its own unique characteristics – a small scale political

drama – and stops being something newsworthy. The enemy interview often develops into fierce, even scandalous debate in a public forum. Local publics and their regimes see such interviews as problematic, even perverse.<sup>9</sup>

One may assume that the main newsworthiness in enemy interviews is the simple fact that they are taking place and providing the opportunity for communicating with the other side. In fact, when there are no diplomatic negotiations, journalists doing interviews play the politicians' part. Speaking with the enemy then has the potential of calming tension between the warring sides. While such interviews may certainly serve to highlight hostile positions on the roots of the conflict, they can sometimes also sketch out a potential resolution to the conflict and serve as a simulation of the possible ways of starting and handling negotiations. Nonetheless, the unusual backdrops in which such interviews are held weaken the interviewing journalist's ability to bridge the gap between the sides. Moreover, the pressure brought to bear on the interviewers results in using a significantly different tone from the one they would assume in normal newscast interviews. In enemy interviews, journalists tend to allow themselves to get dragged into the radical fringes – either hyper-hostility or hyper-respect – giving the interview subject a great deal of power.<sup>10</sup> Generally speaking, enemy interviews tend to become emotional confrontations in which each side tries to emerge victorious rather than to listen to one another.

### **“Our Israeli Army Correspondent”: Israelis in the Arab Broadcast Media**

Israel's image in the Arab television networks is highly negative. At times, depiction of Israelis resembles that of Jews by the German press in the 1930s. *Al-Jazeera*, for example, accuses Israel of causing many of the ills of the Arab world, which is one of the reasons it is interested in events in Israel and hosts interviews with Israelis. Although Arab networks had already broadcast interviews with Israelis, *al-Jazeera* was the first Arab network to hold interviews with Israelis of the highest government echelons, such as Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak. Many in the Arab world were surprised by these *al-Jazeera* interviews.<sup>11</sup> Some criticized them fiercely, with certain sources going so far as to accuse the network of being “an extension of the Israeli intelligence service.”<sup>12</sup>

The Arab broadcast networks increase their coverage during escalations of the Israeli-Arab conflict and present a clear and consistent anti-Israeli line. The IDF, the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry therefore

decided to make certain spokespeople available to them to explain Israel's policy to more than 100 million viewers and readers in the Arab world in fluent Arabic (as well as English). These Arabic-speaking Israelis hold interviews with about a dozen Arab networks, including *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya*.<sup>13</sup>

One of the Arabic-speaking Israeli spokespeople who makes many appearances on Arab television broadcasts is Avihai Edrey, a representative of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, who on *al-Jazeera* has earned the ironic moniker of "our Israeli army correspondent."<sup>14</sup> In the seven years between the Second Lebanon War and 2013, Edrey gave close to 2,000 interviews with Arab media, some 1,000 of which took place during the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead. At least one-quarter were given to *al-Jazeera* and *al-Arabiya*.<sup>15</sup> Avital Leibowitz, also a spokesperson with the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, was interviewed for Arab television networks in English. Edrey and Leibowitz are not invited to do long interviews in the television studios and do not engage in dialogue with the interviewers, but are grilled long-distance for an average of about three and a half minutes.<sup>16</sup>

## Research Methodology

The research on which this essay is based conducted a qualitative analysis of contents of the interviews given by IDF representatives to Arab television networks. For the purpose of the study, interviews with IDF representatives given to three major Arab television networks were selected – *al-Arabiya*, *al-Jazeera* and *al-Jazeera's* English-language channel – at times of violent outbursts in the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The overwhelming majority of the interviews analyzed were given during escalation or fighting phases, such as Operation Cast Lead, the Turkish flotilla to the Gaza Strip, the events of the 2011 Naksa Day, and others. The interviews were always held remotely, with a split screen showing the network's studio on one side and the Jerusalem or Tel Aviv studio where the interview subject was seated on the other. The interviews were collected through video interfaces on the Internet, primarily *YouTube*, where the Arab television networks, the Israeli speakers or other entities had uploaded them. Some of the uploading of the clips undoubtedly stems from the particular bias of the uploading source, a factor liable to impact the validity of the study's findings. Nonetheless, the fact that these interviews were uploaded by several different sources with different or even contradictory stances may to some degree offset and balance this problem.

The interviews were transcribed and translated from Arabic into Hebrew, with emphasis given to the media discourse and characteristics of discourse in Arab culture. After the transcription, we identified the major recurrent contents and discourse themes. Two key questions underlying this analysis were: what content and reference methods do the interviewees use to justify Israel's use of force, and what methods of rhetoric do they employ to communicate their message to the enemy public. The answers to both questions are presented according to two major meta-categories: content tactics and rhetoric tactics. The content tactics focus on the contents that serve the speakers to communicate their message, i.e., what the message contains. The rhetoric tactics focus on the speakers' methods or rhetoric and comportment to communicate their messages (repeating the message, using terminology from Arab culture, asking their own questions, and so on), i.e., how the message is conveyed.

### The Content Tactics

In many interviews, the interviewees denied that Israel had carried out the actions that the Palestinian enemy or interviewer were attributing to it.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for example, Avihai Edrey, from the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, denied that during Operation Pillar of Defense Israel had sworn to the Palestinians that it would "exterminate them," as in the course of that operation the Israeli Air Force had bombed a school in the Gaza Strip and the IDF attacked the area during a visit to the site by the Egyptian Prime Minister.<sup>18</sup> In some of the interviews, the Israeli speakers expressed their denial by pointing the finger at someone else as responsible for the outcome. At times, they also hinted that the reason for civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip was the decision by the enemy (Hamas) to use civilians as "human shields" or fire rockets from populated areas. So, for example, Avital Leibowitz, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit's English-speaker, emphasized that Hamas stores its military supplies in mosques.<sup>19</sup>

In an interview given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera* during Operation Cast Lead, it was possible to discern two types of denial: simple denial and a transfer of responsibility to the other side. Thus, for example, when asked by the IDF attacks aid and medical workers in the Gaza Strip, he categorically denied it and hinted that any attack may have been the result of stray Palestinian fire.<sup>20</sup>

In most interviews, the interviewees justified Israel's use of power by saying that the enemy was the one that started the fighting and that

Israel was simply responding to provocations against it. When the Arabic-speaking representative of the IDF Spokesperson's Unit was asked by the interviewer about the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the activists on the Turkish flotilla to the Gaza Strip, he said: "The people onboard [the *SS Mavi Marmara*] were planning to confront our soldiers, attack them barbarically, grab their weapons, and shoot them. They are the ones who bear full responsibility."<sup>21</sup> At times, the Israeli speakers threatened that a future provocation by the enemy would result in a response from Israel: "Attacks will be answered by attacks" and "Calm will be answered by calm." In a similar context, Avihai Edrey, during Operation Pillar of Defense, told *al-Jazeera* that " Hamas has absorbed a very powerful blow because of our operation and will receive further blows if it continues its rocket attacks."<sup>22</sup>

The Israeli interviewees tended not to justify military actions that had gone wrong by insisting that the intention had been good. Nonetheless, in various interviews they hinted that IDF actions serve the enemy's people, i.e., the Palestinians. As part of this assertion they also added in some interviews that the Palestinian people are not Israel's enemy, but rather that "the terrorists" were Israel's enemy.

In many interviews, the Israeli speakers stressed the positive measures taken by the State of Israel, in order to strengthen the spectators' positive feelings about the country and reduce their negative perceptions of the action being debated. In some interviews, the interviewees stressed that Israel first and foremost tries to prevent harm to civilians while using the phrase "surgical strike." In one interview, Avital Leibowitz said, "when Israel attacks terrorist organizations within Gaza, it does not target civilians."<sup>23</sup>

The Israeli speakers also stressed Israel's good features, such as it being a democratic, moral state operating on the basis of international law. In several interviews, they even cited some specific good deeds, such as the disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and the opening of the border crossings to Gaza.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Israel operates on the basis of international law was noted, with emphasis placed on the fact that the same law is not applied by the enemy or enemy states. When Avital Leibowitz was asked if Israel uses white phosphorous in its bombings of Gaza, she answered that "Israel uses ammunition according to international law."<sup>25</sup>

In one interview, Avihai Edrey was asked why Israel did not allow the foreign press to freely cover Operation Cast Lead. He answered that it was precisely thanks to the freedom of the press in Israel that the interviewing network, *al-Jazeera* in this case, could cover the events of the operation.

"The foreign press in Israel can cover the war, this military operation, freely. Your own journalist is at the Israeli border next to Gaza. How does this live broadcast take place every single day if Israel prohibits it from happening?"<sup>26</sup>

Another tactic used to reduce the perceived level of aggression of the fighting was asserting that the military action was not as severe as it was being presented. The interviewees presented Israel as a state that strives to and succeeds in causing as little damage as possible to the lives of the enemy side. Thus, the IDF's Spokesperson's Unit's English-language representative made it clear that Israel attacked hundreds of targets in the Gaza Strip during Operation Pillar of Defense yet the number of dead was relatively small.<sup>27</sup>

In about one-third of the interviews, the Israeli spokespeople explained that no nation in the world would sit idly by were it in Israel's position. In about one-half of the interviews, they justified Israel's actions by claiming it was protecting its citizens. Time after time, the interviewees explained that Israel could not refrain from responding, given the enemy's attacks and its citizen's precarious security. In one of the interviews he granted during Operation Cast Lead, Avihai Edrey wondered: "In only the last few days, hundreds of rockets have fallen around the heads of our children, women, old people and men. Is it conceivable we wouldn't protect our citizens? Is it conceivable that the situation in Gaza continues as usual while the south of Israel is getting hurt?"<sup>28</sup> The speakers sometimes presented the importance of protecting Israel's citizens while noting the difficult conditions in the country's south given the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. They thus tried to show that not only Gaza Strip residents were suffering because of the fighting. During Operation Pillar of Defense, Avital Leibowitz explained that many Israeli citizens "are, night after night, forced to sleep in bomb shelters" as a result of the rockets fired by Hamas.<sup>29</sup> "We embarked on the operation to defend the citizens of Israel," she said in one interview.<sup>30</sup>

In many interviews, the Israeli speakers attacked whoever was accusing Israel, whether it was a Palestinian or a member of the international corps of journalists, and regardless of whether the accuser was the interviewer. Many times the interviewees accused the enemy of using falsehoods as propaganda and of disseminating lies. For example, after Hamas claimed to have downed an Israeli fighter jet during Operation Pillar of Defense, Avihai Edrey said the following: "Its propaganda terrorism, part of the recurring lies repeated by Hamas, which we've become used to hearing

day and night.”<sup>31</sup> Avital Leibowitz, who was asked about supposed “Israeli war crimes” in the Gaza Strip, responded by speaking of “manipulations” by Hamas.<sup>32</sup> The Israeli speakers also explained to their interlocutors, while demonstrating knowledge of power relationships within the Arab world, that Hamas was not getting any support in its battle against Israel, neither from the international community, nor from Arab and Islamic elements and not even from elements within the Palestinian arena itself. Avihai Edrey also noted that the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip were endangering countries other than Israel.<sup>33</sup>

The Israeli interviewees sometimes accused the interviewers and their networks of lacking neutrality and presenting inaccurate information. So, for example, in response to an *al-Jazeera* interviewer’s claim that Israel was not apologizing for civilian deaths in the Gaza Strip, Edrey attacked her by saying, “Iman, it seems that you’re not following the news. Every time there’s an error and every time someone who is not involved in hostile activity against Israel is hurt, we at the IDF and I personally at the head, in the name of the IDF, always say in the Arab press that Israel regrets the death of each and every Palestinian civilian not belonging to a terrorist organization.”<sup>34</sup>

Edrey’s intimate use of the interviewer’s given name could be seen as bearing a message of friendship or, alternately, being a way of communicating condescension, part of the “attacker’s attack.” In that same interview, the interviewer asked Edrey if Israel’s strategy involved killing children, whereupon Edrey counterattacked: “It’s really funny, Iman, that you should say that the objective of this operation is to kill children. A small number of children have been killed, and we deeply regret it. But the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip fire rockets to kill any Israeli.”<sup>35</sup> Only rarely did the interviewees apologize for actions attributed to the State of Israel in which children were killed, as Avihai Edrey did this time.

### **The Interviewees’ Rhetoric Tactics<sup>36</sup>**

In many interviews, the Israeli interview subject corrected information cited by the interviewers or asked them to prove their assertions. One may think of this type of move as being part of the “attack the attacker” category of rhetorical devices mentioned above. Sometimes the interviewees disagreed with definitions used by the interviewers for a particular term. For example, in an interview dealing with the IDF raid on the *SS Mavi Marmara*, the IDF

Spokesman's Unit representative in Arabic and the *al-Jazeera* interviewer used different definitions for the term "self-defense":

*Avihai Edrey:* The people onboard [the *SS Mavi Marmara*] were planning to confront our soldiers, attack them barbarically, grab their weapons, and shoot them.

*Interviewer:* What Israel defines as self-defense requires – as leaked by medical reports – the shooting of 30 bullets at a single person? Is that what you call self-defense?

*Avihai Edrey:* First of all, self-defense, in all military words and terms, means that when a soldier feels real danger to his life, he has a right to harm the source of the threat. And that's precisely what happened.

In this case, the interviewer disagreed with Edrey over calling what happened on the ship self-defense, while he defined the meaning of the phrase using the global military lexicon.

In about half of the interviews, the Israeli interview subjects asked the interviewers questions in a kind of role reversal as the interviewee appropriated the role of ceding the floor to the other. The questions the Israeli interviewees posed to the interviewers in these cases assumed two different forms – simple and rhetorical – and at times the interviewees provided the answers to their own questions. In several cases, the interviewees asked the interviewers to pose a similar question to the enemy or directly addressed the enemy, asking them to answer the same or a similar question. Avihai Edrey, for example, asked his interviewer: "In your opinion, why do all the leaders of Hamas hide in mosques or hospitals? Why? Because they know that Israel will not attack these locations."<sup>37</sup>

In some of the interviews, the interviewees expressed their anger that the interviewers denied them the opportunity to complete their statements: "If you only allowed me to finish the sentence, I'd give you the whole story," said Edrey to one interviewer after she cut him off when discussing the targeted assassination of a senior Palestinian activist in the Gaza Strip. The same interviewer continued to cut Edrey off during the interview, until he said: "I would again ask you to give me the right to respond to the questions posed to me. I'm not going anywhere and I'm not going to ignore any question."<sup>38</sup>

An interesting tactic used by interview subjects to corroborate what they were saying was to use contents broadcast by the interviewers' own network. That source would be considered more credible than any other,

making it difficult for the interviewers to attack their subjects. In one of the interviews he gave, Avihai Edrey tried to demonstrate – using contents broadcast by his interviewer's network – that Hamas operatives hide among civilians and use innocent residents as human shields: "Did you see the picture broadcast by *al-Jazeera* a few days ago showing children surrounding a so-called resistance fighter as he was firing an anti-tank missile?"<sup>39</sup> In this example, Edrey tried to suggest that perhaps it was Hamas's fault that medical workers were getting hurt in the Gaza Strip. By saying "so-called," he also sought to make it clear that he was disagreeing with the definition of a Hamas operative as a "resistance fighter." In the same interview, Edrey also used some of the tactics cited above, such as turning the question on the interviewer and pointing an accusatory finger at the enemy.

In some 29 percent of interviews, the Israeli interviewees used expressions, sayings and collocations common in Arab culture. Two expressions were particularly striking: *ahalan wa sahalan* (an effusive greeting that comes from an old saying accentuating Arab hospitality to strangers; "ahalan" means "family," as in "you've come to stay with family," and "sahalan" means a flat land or plain where grass/food is abundant and to be shared with visitors), and an Arabic phrase meaning "he hit me and cried, he got ahead of me and complained." Avihai Edrey used the latter proverb in an interview he gave during Operation Pillar of Defense: "Israel embarked on Operation Pillar of Defense after terrorist factions, headed by Hamas, fired 130 rockets at Israeli areas in the country's south. Therefore, the Israel Defense Force was drawn into [this conflict] and was forced to begin this military operation. Now that the fire and aerial attacks are directed at Hamas [...] some in Hamas have started saying, 'We didn't start the operation. Israel started.' Hamas behaves like the one in the story, 'he hit me and cried, he got ahead of me and complained,' but bears no responsibility for the ramifications of its own acts of terrorism."<sup>40</sup>

The Israeli interview subjects sometimes tried to stress their message via the use of emphatic words. During an interview with *al-Jazeera*, Avihai Edrey said: "We say: we don't want any more escalation."<sup>41</sup> The use of the words "we say" is, in this case, meant to draw the viewers' attention to the next thing the speaker is going to say, i.e., that Israel is not interested in escalation. Avital Leibowitz, the IDF Spokespersons Unit's English-language representative, used a similar technique in an interview she gave during Operation Pillar of Defense: "I only know one thing: we are here to cause serious damage to the terrorist capabilities of as many terrorist

organizations as possible in the Gaza Strip, including Hamas, so that we can live in peace in our homes."<sup>42</sup>

In various interviews, the Israeli speakers repeated the same message several times to demonstrate rhetorical presence and convey their desired message as profoundly as possible. Sometimes the interviewees also reiterated what they had said, using expressions of repetition, as Avihai Edrey did during the Turkish flotilla incident: "As I've already said, and I'll repeat it again: there is a government in Israel. There is a prime minister and there is a decision making echelon that decided to prevent these ships from breaking through the naval embargo on the Gaza Strip."<sup>43</sup>

In some of the interviews, the speakers used visual evidence to support their assertions. The most prominent case was an interview with Avihai Edrey for *al-Jazeera* during which he pulled out a series of photographs proving that Hamas was firing rockets from within densely populated areas. Edrey was asked if, in Israel's opinion, it was permissible to kill civilians in the Gaza Strip, and in responding he, using his pictures, tried to show the interviewer that Hamas was the immoral party to the conflict: "If you want, there are thousands of pictures of mosques, cemeteries, being used to launch rockets [...] If you want, we can dedicate an entire broadcast to show all of the IDF's photos, all of which I gathered from Palestinian sources and news agencies. I'll present [them] to you and we can see who is more moral, the IDF or Hamas."<sup>44</sup>

The overwhelming majority of interviews included the use of first person plural, especially words such as "ours" and "we." Words like that refer not only to the government or the army represented by the speakers, but also to the entire Israeli public in whose name those institutions act. In some of the interviews the interviewees also used the word "you" (plural; Arabic, like Hebrew, distinguishes between the second person singular and the second person plural) when referring to the interviewer's network or the Arab media in general, and "they" when referring to the enemy.

In some 23 percent of the interviews, the interviewees sought to directly address the enemy and/or the enemy people. In an interview given by Avihai Edrey during Operation Cast Lead, he addressed the enemy, saying, "You've just woken up from your illusions. Take the Israeli response and rethink [the question]: what's the future? Do you want bloodshed? Do you want a cycle of war and violence? Why don't you stop these actions, which are useless? Ahalan wa sahalan!"<sup>45</sup>

Alongside the verbal communications, including the meaning of the contents and the semantics of the messages, television appearances also communicate non-verbally in a very profound way. Body language is an inseparable part of the various interviews granted by the Israeli speakers, and in some cases the use of body language helped them communicate their messages. The interviewees' verbal messages, which tried to undermine the enemy's position, were often enhanced by non-verbal messages, such as accusatory and harsh slicing motions with the hands and piercing glares. However, at times, the interviewees' body language communicated messages that were inconsistent with the verbal messages they were trying to get across.

In many interviews, the interviewees gave off an aura of self-control and ease; in some interviews, the interview subjects even smiled. One should note that both IDF speakers, Leibowitz and Edrey, appeared formally in all their interviews, i.e., in uniform, as part of their own military service, and as official IDF representatives. When the interviewees sensed that their answers might arouse some difficulty for them and damage their own and/or Israel's image, they sometimes tried to evade the question, provide ambiguous or partial answers, or change the subject under discussion. A particularly interesting example of such an evasion was an interview given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English during Operation Cast Lead.<sup>46</sup> Leibowitz was asked, over and over again, if Israel uses phosphorous; she tried to avoid giving a direct answer at least six times, stressing that the IDF does not give out detailed information about the types of weapons it uses and that Israel acts on the basis of international law.

In order to avoid a situation in which the interviewer and the spectators notice the evasion, the interviewees often tried to give the impression they had no intention of evading questions. So, for example, Avital Leibowitz, made it clear that the IDF does not hide information and that it operates with transparency. Avihai Edrey even used the phrase "I will tell you honestly....," perhaps out of concern that his answer would be seen as an evasion or lie.

## Summary and Conclusions

This essay provided a first glimpse at a study of the interviews granted by IDF spokespeople to the Arab media. The essay analyzes their interviews with Arab television networks in order to examine the way in which the interviewees acted to justify Israel's military operations to the Palestinians

and their supporters. The essay presented several tactics of rhetoric and contents used by the interview subjects in order to justify the use of force by Israel in its conflict with the Palestinians.

The Israeli interviews were broadcast mainly during crises when Israel's image is especially at risk. These spokespeople tried to fix that image or at least prevent the negative image from becoming further entrenched. To achieve this end, they used three key content tactics: denial of the actions attributed to Israel and/or casting the blame on the hostile entity; avoiding responsibility while stressing the enemy's provocations and Israel's good facets and actions; and reducing the extent of the event's perceived aggression while stressing the suffering of the Israeli citizens and the enemy's dishonest propaganda.

The interview subjects used several key rhetoric tactics to communicate their forceful messages clearly and convincingly without having to become confrontational. One of the more interesting rhetoric tactics was an attempt at role reversal in which the interviewees turned the questions on the interviewers, thus appropriating the interviewers' role and ceding the floor to the interviewers. They did so even though the interviewee is obligated to answer the questions and is not expected to ask his or her own questions or raise other issues. The questions posed by the Israeli interviewees to their interviewers assumed two forms: simple questions and rhetorical questions.

Another interesting rhetoric tactic used by the interviewees to back up their statements was referring to contents broadcast by the interviewers' own network. The Israeli interviewees demonstrated familiarity with the contents shown by the Arab networks, using the words of the network's journalist or interviewers containing information likely to present Israel in a positive light. Such use of the networks' contents was considered more reliable as the interviewers were hard put denying it on the one hand and using it to attack the interviewees' statements on the other.

A third interesting tactic revealed by the study was the use of phrases, expressions or collocations common in Arab culture, such as *ahalan wa sahalan*. By using them, the Israeli speaker was trying to address the target audience in its own language and cultural rhetoric. In addition, the Israeli interviewees sometimes tried to stress their messages using phrases of emphasis such as "let's clarify the matter..." or by repeating themselves.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the Israelis interviewed used the first person plural, especially the words "our" and "we," referring not

only to the government or the army they represent but also the entire Israeli public. In some of the interviews, the interviewees used the word “you” (plural) in referring to the interviewer’s network or the Arab media in general, or the word “they” to refer to the enemy. This served to strengthen the dichotomy between the sides, which only perpetuates the hostility between them. In other interviews, the interviewees tried to address the enemy directly, the enemy nation and the television viewers, thus taking advantage of the opportunity to speak to the enemy, as the political world lacks any channel of communication or the opportunity to negotiate.

When the interviewees sensed that their answers were liable to arouse some difficulty or damage their own and/or Israel’s image, they often tried to evade the questions, provide partial answers or answers that were open to interpretation, or steer the discussions in a different direction altogether. In a significant number of interviews, the Israeli speakers evaded at least one question posed to them. In order to prevent the interviewers and the audience from noticing the evasions, they often declared they had no intention of evading questions and that they were answering sincerely and honestly. To bring this home, they addressed the interviewers with respect (e.g., “my dear sir”) or tried to create an aura of intimacy by moving the conversation to a first-name basis (“Iman”).

The Israeli interviewees succeeded in communicating forceful messages to the Palestinian enemy, stress Israel’s rock-solid position, deny information, avoid taking responsibility, and try to reduce the perceived level of aggression of the event under discussion, and to do all this without the occasion turning into a bitter confrontation with the interviewers. They almost never expressed regret or an apology for Israel’s actions.

The success of the Israeli speakers may be attributed mostly to the tactics of rhetoric they used freely and fluently: posing many confounding questions to the interviewers, using Arabic language expressions, using the contents of the interviewers’ own network to back up their assertions, and, on one occasion, pulling out incriminating photographs. These tactics allowed the interviewees to handle the interviews, which in fact resembled interrogations rather than normal television interviews.

One should note that the study on which this essay is based lacks some essential features: one, as noted above, the interviews analyzed were taken from the Internet where they were uploaded by parties that may have their own agendas; representatives of the Israeli establishment, on the one hand, and the broadcasting networks, on the other. The use of this material is

the result of the absence of an Internet interview archive and the refusal of the Arab television networks to provide data, despite repeated requests. Future research will have to analyze more extensive interviews; second, this study focused primarily on the conduct of the interview subject and less so on that of the interviewers (such as types of question, addresses and interruptions) and the deeper dynamic of the interviews; third, the study does not provide an in-depth analysis of the reasons that lead both the Israeli and Arab sides to hold these interviews in the first place. Therefore, future research will have to include in-depth interviews both with the interviewers and the interviewees; four, the findings must be somewhat delimited as it is important to remember that most societies in the Arab world are not democracies and therefore one mustn't expect the interviewer to take a neutral approach in an interview with the Israeli enemy. This needs to be said even though *al-Jazeera* has made its slogan "The opinion and the other opinion"; and last, it is important to remember that this essay refers to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict only and that the only interviews analyzed took place during violent confrontations in the Israeli-Palestinian context alone. Future research should examine the interviewees' tactics during other events, such as the Palestinians' bid for U.N. membership, the Second Lebanon War, and the Arab Spring.

## Notes

- 1 M. Montgomery, "The News Broadcast Interview," in *Communications and Discourse – Studies in Language and Media: A Festschrift in Honor of Shoshana Blum-Kulka*, S. Blum-Kulka, M. Hamo, M. Blondheim and T. Liebes, eds. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2012), pp. 271-302.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Andreas H. Jucker, *News Interviews: A Pragmalinguistic Analysis* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1986).
- 4 William L. Benoit, "Image Repair Discourse and Crisis Communication," *Public Relations Review* 23 (1997): 177-86.
- 5 Gadi Wolfsfeld, Paul Frosh and Maurice T. Awabdy, "Palestinian Television. Covering Death in Conflicts: Coverage of the Second Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian Television," *Journal of Peace Research* 45 (2008): 401-17.
- 6 John Heritage and David Greatbatch, "On the Institutional Character of Institutional Talk: The Case of News Interviews," in *Talk and Social Structure: Studies in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis*, D. Boden and D. Zimmerman, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 93-137.

- 7 Tamar Liebes, Zohar Kampf and Shoshana Blum-Kulka, "Saddam on CBS and Arafat on IBA: Addressing the Enemy on Television," *Political Communication* 25 (2008): 311-29.
- 8 Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Zohar Kampf and Tamar Liebes, "Speaking with the Enemy? Interviews with Palestinians During the Second Intifada," in *30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue Commemorating the Founding of the Israel Association of Applied Linguistics*, Y. Schlesinger and M. Muchnik, eds. (Jerusalem: Tzivonim Press, 2003), pp. 61-77.
- 9 Liebes, Kampf and Blum-Kulka, "Saddam on CBS and Arafat on IBA."
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Oren Kessler, "The Two Faces of Al Jazeera," *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2012): 47-56.
- 12 Jeremy M. Sharp, *The Al-Jazeera News Network: Opportunity or Challenge for U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East?* (CRS Report for Congress, 2003).
- 13 Ofir Gendelman, *New Media and National Security*, speech given at a seminar commemorating the late Zeev Schiff, Tel Aviv, the Institute for National Security Studies, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehXpK2hGGWc>.
- 14 Yoram Binor, interview with Avihai Edrey about Israeli public relations in Arabic, *Channel 2 TV*, October 13, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBW3vM79udA>.
- 15 Interview with IDF Spokesperson's Unit representative in Arabic, Avihai Edrey, June-July 2013.
- 16 Kessler, "The Two Faces of Al Jazeera."
- 17 The transcription in this study uses punctuation as follows: an utterance with a descending intonation is indicated by a dash (-); an utterance with an ascending intonation and having continuation is indicated by a comma and dash (, -); an utterance with an ascending intonation indicating a question is indicated by a question mark (?).
- 18 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, November 17, 2012.
- 19 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, January 11, 2009.
- 20 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 21 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 22 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, November 17, 2012.
- 23 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, November 14, 2012.
- 24 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 25 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, January 11, 2009.

- 26 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, January 6, 2009.
- 27 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, November 17, 2012.
- 28 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, December 27, 2008.
- 29 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, November 17, 2012.
- 30 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, November 14, 2012.
- 31 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, November 17, 2012.
- 32 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, January 11, 2009.
- 33 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, August 8, 2012.
- 34 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, February 29, 2008.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Unlike the content tactics, the rhetoric tactics are not organized on the basis of an existing research model.
- 37 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 38 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, March 13, 2012.
- 39 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 40 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, November 17, 2012.
- 41 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, March 13, 2012.
- 42 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* in English, November 14, 2012.
- 43 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 44 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*.
- 45 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in Arabic given by Avihai Edrey to *al-Jazeera*, December 27, 2012.
- 46 IDF Spokesperson's Unit interview in English given by Avital Leibowitz to *al-Jazeera* English, January 11, 2009.