

The Battle over Consciousness

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The international public media campaign against Israel has negative implications for the interests of the state. This is because these are not sporadic displays of hostility but rather the deliberate activation of a subversive campaign waged on the level of consciousness that aims to harm the country's image and international standing and undermine its national security. This campaign therefore constitutes a strategic challenge for Israel's existence and requires appropriate responses and defensive measures.

Throughout history, war has comprised far more than just clashes between opposing parties. One of the oldest forms of warfare is subversion, today also called the "battle over consciousness" or the "image-directed campaign." If the primary effort in every war is directed at the enemy's consciousness for the sake of their ultimate surrender, the battle over consciousness, which incorporates a variety of pressure levers, aims to reinforce this effect without the use of violence. Image-directed techniques are operated against different targets: countries, peoples, non-state organizations, and ideological, religious, and political groups. This is, on the whole, an effective means for creating the conditions necessary to destabilize and endanger the national security of the opponent, regardless of the latter's overall military and economic strength.

The Objectives of the Battle over Consciousness

The battle over consciousness can be waged to cause harm to the opponent by interested countries as well as by various local and international organizations with different agendas. In many cases, this method, which can be categorized as one of the asymmetrical methods of warfare, is an

alternative to the inability to deal with an opponent that is far stronger, and it is thus a good solution for military disadvantage. It embodies a range of elements, among them political and economic, and is designed to influence the public in the target state or community and in the international arena. Unlike violent struggle that is characterized by an organized and extensive concentration of state efforts subject to legal and diplomatic restrictions, the advantages of the war on consciousness are availability, unrestricted geographical deployment, and relatively low economic and political costs. For these reasons, and particularly because it involves little risk of an aggressive response, it is regarded as highly effective in many cases.

The anticipated achievements of image-directed warfare include damaging the systems of the opposing country in order to promote policy change; weakening the stability and governance of the opposing country and harming the functioning of its systems of governance, sometimes in a deliberate effort to change the internal power balance and the relationship between the elites; instigating processes of civil disobedience and encouraging the protests of different population groups, while exploiting the accumulation of negative energy (such as protests and public criticism of the government); provoking the demonization of elites or ethnic and religious sectors in the opposing country; and encouraging the delegitimization of the country or other entities in order to mobilize international pressure. Recent relevant examples include Russian activity against opponents in the post-Soviet sphere, particularly in connection with the crisis in Ukraine and in the Middle East and, on the opposing side, the activity of NATO member states against Russia, which aim to undermine political stability in Russia. These efforts have recently become very extensive, including, for example, direct attacks on the Russian president. The cyber realm has become a very useful and effective weapon in the information war, as illustrated in the accusation that Russia used this measure during the 2016 US presidential elections.

Conducting the Battle over Consciousness

Most countries have an interest in promoting their objectives in foreign countries and in the international system. No country has, it seems, ever confessed to subversive activities, either directly or indirectly, in support of non-state opposition entities in the territory of another state. Nonetheless, it is likely that behind any image-directed campaign there are usually state entities, operating for the most part covertly.

The main activity in executing a battle over consciousness focuses on building varied levers of influence among the target audience, which can be operated either as an open or clandestine campaign. The open campaign is carried out mostly in the public domain, both local and global, by visible influential leaders or by various pawns who act unwittingly. It is generally implemented through the media and with advanced technological systems that are readily available and efficient. The open campaign's image-directed activity can be accompanied by direct political and economic pressures. Past examples of such campaigns include the Arab oil embargo, and more recently, the ever-growing boycott of Israeli products and the damage caused to various aspects of Israel's international economic relations with different countries, and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the West in order to pressure Russia to withdraw from Crimea and end its Ukrainian involvement.

Clandestine campaigns implement a variety of methods, ranging from tools of propaganda that aim to incite the public to targeted attacks on persons, institutions, and organizations that include the use of violence (so-called "active measures"). The implementation of clandestine campaigns involves dedicated state agents – secret service and state systems – as well as plenty of recruited agents and pawns. Among the methods used in the war on consciousness are also "soft" propaganda, psychological warfare, manipulative tools for deceiving the public, and tendentious use of the media and the public domain, alongside influential individuals in the media, academia, and politics who are either willingly recruited or pressured to join the effort. All of these methods and, in particular, the availability of global media currently provide the consciousness warfare with more effectiveness and influence than in the past.

The organizations specializing in subversive activity are well known by all the superpowers and many other countries. In some countries the battle over consciousness is run by various secret organizations that are part of the national security system and usually operate according to instructions from the political leadership. Likewise, the non-state entities do not engage sporadically in this activity but are managed by designated professional organizations, also controlled by the leadership. In some countries, including superpowers and Middle East countries, various kinds of organizations and public and private reserves are used to fund non-state activities. Russia claims, for example, that the United States conducts extensive covert operations

via a range of models and methods within Russia and areas under Russian influence in order to destabilize Russia and encourage anti-Russian policies in the Former Soviet Union states. The European Union is also known to provide support and assistance to various influential factors in different countries (through entities like the European Endowment for Democracy [EED], an organization that provides financial assistance in different countries, especially to opposition elements, that the European Union is interested in promoting). Many of the NGOs are, consequently, suspected of taking part in hostile consciousness-raising activities, their representatives are often persecuted by the authorities in the host countries, and legislation is passed in order to restrict their ability to act. The most obvious example of such events is in Russia, but occurs in other countries as well. In the past, Israel used consciousness-raising activities in order to curtail the persecution suffered by Jews in the Soviet Union and the Soviet restrictions on their emigration to Israel.

The Consciousness Campaign against Israel

In the ongoing fight against Israel and the Jewish people by hostile countries and other interested parties around the world, all known concepts and methods of consciousness warfare are implemented. The principles of image-directed combat have, in fact, been applied within the framework of anti-Semitic persecution at various times and various places in the past, aimed at the overall demonization of the Jews and the distribution of collective blame against them for all of society's ills. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, anti-Semitic activity has gradually been disguised using semantics: persecution of the Jews is no longer motivated by anti-Semitism but by the desire to fight Zionism. Thus, for example, while the Soviet authorities claimed measures they took were no more than a struggle against Zionism, these actions were accompanied by blatant and aggressive expressions of anti-Semitism. Today too, non-state organized consciousness warfare against Israel and the Jewish people is conducted under a guise of innocence and the claim to be no more than opposition to Israel's ongoing occupation of the territory conquered in the Six Day War. This activity is directed and backed by certain Western countries that aspire to harm Israeli interests and receives active support from countries in the Islamic world in general and the Middle East in particular.

The objective of the consciousness warfare against Israel is to bring about Israel's downfall. It comprises a number of elements all working together: internal subversion within relevant target groups in Israel, aimed at destabilizing the country and its governance; the raising of international pressure against Israel by using image-directed techniques among the public and the establishment in various countries; and image-directed activities against the Jewish people in the Diaspora, activity that in many cases is driven by anti-Semitism. Among the initiators and organizers of these activities are countries and non-state entities that are in conflict with Israel both in the West and in the Arab world and are often directed by hostile states.

The BDS phenomenon is a striking example of the model of a non-state organization, guided and backed by different countries in the context of their battle over consciousness against Israel. The BDS entities are, ultimately, operating only partially as independent bodies; they are mostly associations that are directly or indirectly backed by interested parties such as enemy countries and organizations in the Middle East and ideological anti-Israeli parties in the West from both the extreme left and the extreme right of the political map.

Conclusions

The tools of the battle over consciousness are effective in causing damage to countries and non-state targets without the risk of getting entangled in a violent war. Consequently, this type of warfare, also termed image-directed warfare, poses a threat to the national security interests of any country under attack including, of course, Israel, which is currently in the midst of such an attack. This fighting method has become more effective and intensive than ever due to the development of global media, in particular the meteoric rise of social media. The State of Israel thus faces a real challenge, namely, how to deal with warfare that has the power to promote various negative goals: to destabilize the country, to mobilize international pressure against the country and its interests around the world, and, ultimately, to cause harm to the country's national security.

This challenge requires proper organization of the state's institutions in order to contain it. In addition to the formulation and implementation of a solution within the country's borders, the international public arena – the battleground in the image-directed campaign and the battle over consciousness – must not be neglected and left in the hands of the adversary. In this domain,

it would be appropriate to mobilize, alongside the relevant Israeli parties, Diaspora Jews to assist in campaigning efforts among the local public, in the media and particularly the various social networks, and in organized public activity, both open and covert. All this would be done under the guidance and in full coordination with the relevant state institutions.

In addition to reaching out to the Israeli public consciousness and managing an international public media campaign, management of this issue should involve extensive intelligence work in order to find the players in the field and their puppet masters and to develop tools and methods to neutralize them. This is a complex, arduous, and ongoing task that in order to succeed must be led by a designated command center serving as both a professional body for formulating the tools and methods of operation and an operational headquarters for coordinating and controlling the delegitimization activities around the world. It is therefore recommended that existing infrastructure of public and academic institutions be used and placed at the forefront of Israel's struggle against the ongoing war on consciousness, as public and not state bodies, so that Israel could not be accused of chasing after "innocent" organizations.