# Exposure Under Fire: Public Use of Intelligence in the Gaza War

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**Even during the war in the Gaza Strip, Israel uses public disclosure of intelligence as a tool for shaping the behavior of both sympathetic and hostile actors and audiences. These intelligence disclosures are usually reactive, intended to defend Israel and the legitimacy of its military actions and to protect sensitive sources. Given the centrality of intelligence-driven military operations for conveying messages and shaping reality in wartime, as well as the fact that this war began with Israel being in a disadvantageous position in terms of intelligence, maintaining a modest "intelligence economy" and severely judging public use of secret information are extremely important.**

The primary aim of intelligence is to assist political and military leadership in making the best decisions and gaining an advantage over the adversary in diplomacy and war. Specifically in times of war, intelligence information is critical, first and foremost in supporting the operational effort. The more intimate and accurate the information, the greater its contribution in directing military defense and offense. To ensure that the information collected is as complete and accurate as possible, the intelligence process must be kept confidential until it is used.

The war in the Gaza Strip and on the secondary front in Lebanon is no different. Whether the intelligence comes from sources in which Israel has invested immense resources in their development or is obtained in the field, and whether it deals with the adversary's strategy or tactics, the intelligence will be covertly collected and processed in order to help direct diplomatic and military efforts at gaining an advantage over the adversary on the battlefield; in the current war, this also includes efforts to return the hostages.

However, this does not mean that the government and the defense establishment will not make public use of intelligence during the war. Over the past decade,

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Israel's government and its intelligence and security agencies have systematically initiated and disclosed intelligence to [shape the behavior](#) of adversaries below the threshold of war and to prevent war; [mobilize the international community](#) to deal with threats to regional and national security; and [gain legitimacy](#) for military actions. But what are the political and operational objectives of disclosing intelligence in time of war? What price is involved in obtaining these objectives? And how effective is it?

In over the four months that have passed since the Hamas attack, the public use of intelligence has been fairly common, especially when compared to what we might expect during wartime. However, unlike in times of peace (or between wars), in the current war, Israel primarily uses intelligence reactively, to defend the legitimacy of the state and its military actions, both internally and internationally, while attempting to refrain from disclosing sensitive information obtained from highly valuable sources.

**Preserving International Legitimacy**

*The explosion at al-Ahli Hospital.* Only ten days into the IDF air campaign in the Gaza Strip, the media shared reports of an air strike on al-Ahli Hospital (also known as al-Ma'amadani). Hamas sources providing the information claimed that Israel was responsible for the direct hit, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of people. Given Hamas's cynical and effective exploitation of the incident, the IDF was urged to publish sensitive information that would refute or at least weaken the claim. Some 12 hours later, during which reports had already spread globally and had even led to canceling a summit meeting in Amman with the participation of the US president, the IDF spokesperson held a [press conference](#) and disclosed a recording of a conversation between two Islamic Jihad operatives who attributed the attack to the organization's failed launch. A few days later, the governments of [France](#), the [United Kingdom,](#) [and the United States](#) and their intelligence agencies publicly backed the claims of the IDF spokesperson, following their own independent review, and exonerated Israel of the offense. This will not be the last expression of "diplomacy by intelligence disclosure" during the Gaza war, but certainly it has been the most effective so far. As a result, leading [media outlets](#) retracted their false reports and a grave impact on the war's international legitimacy at an early stage was averted.

*The raid on al-Shifa Hospital.* On the eve of the IDF's ground entry into the Gaza Strip, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit released a [" special statement"](#) for the media, designed to prepare the international public for the intended raid on the hospital compound. Spokesperson Brig. Gen. Daniel Hagari began by stating that he would

reveal "intelligence information proving that Hamas uses hospitals as terrorist infrastructures." However, the IDF did not sufficiently present convincing evidence to back up their claims of a strategic network of tunnels and control and command centers located underneath the hospital. Their information was based on a conversation between two residents of Gaza, but its credibility was questionable. Hagari also presented a simulation video of the alleged tunnel network and emphasized that "this is for illustrative purposes . . . we will not share the real information here."

In actuality, the IDF entered the al-Shifa Hospital compound three weeks later. During this time, international attention was already focused on the hospital and on the IDF's preparations to enter the compound. Palestinians fueled fears of international law violations by spreading false reports that the IDF had already blockaded the compound and were bombing sections of it. When the IDF did enter al-Shifa and scanned the compound, it shared findings with the public that did not correlate with what the IDF spokesperson had presented earlier when describing the compound before the IDF had entered it. Indeed, Israeli and foreign audiences were [unmoved and somewhat suspicious](#) of the findings. It was only some six weeks after the operation that [American intelligence](#) confirmed some of Israel's claims.

**Responding to Domestic Criticism and Maintaining Internal Legitimacy**

*The fate of the Bibas family*. Kfir Bibas, abducted from his home at the age of only nine months along with his mother Shiri and four-year-old brother Ariel, became a symbol of Hamas's cruelty. When the first hostage exchange began, the Israeli public hoped for the release of the mother and her toddlers. But as the deal progressed and their release did not occur, the public's questioning and frustration grew. In response, IDF spokesperson in Arabic revealed that the family members were being held by a Palestinian faction and placed full responsibility for their release on Hamas. Hamas countered two days later by stating that the family had been killed by IDF bombings. The IDF spokesperson assured the public that the report's reliability would be reviewed. Since then, no additional information has been shared, and the family's fate is still unknown.

**Deterrence**

*"Imam Hussein's Division."* As the war in Gaza progresses, Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies in the region have expressed solidarity with Hamas through limited attacks against Israel. Israel, on its part, has sought to prevent expanding the war to other fronts. In this context, in early November, IDF spokesperson in Arabic [tweeted](#) that the Imam Hussein Division had joined the fighting alongside

Hezbollah against Israel. Established by Iran, the Imam Hussein Division is a militia in Syria that relies on Lebanese operatives. The tweet also contained a portrait of Dhu al-Faqar, commander of the militia. This disclosure about was intended to convey the message that Israeli intelligence is monitoring the militia and its commander, and they were in Israel's crosshairs. A mere week later, the IDF blamed the organization for a UAV hit on a school in Eilat and simultaneously eliminated several of its people in an attack in Syria. Even though the information and intelligence assessment were accurate, their disclosure did not deter the organization.

In addition to the aforementioned objectives, some public intelligence disclosures are intended to delegitimize Hamas, such as by sharing its financial reports that attest to the investment in the construction of tunnels, and also for the sake of "trolling," which according to the IDF spokesperson, is designed to embarrass the opponent and temporarily distract public discourse, such as by disclosing the identity of the spokesperson of Hamas's military wing. These disclosures are usually based on information collected in the field, which the adversary can confidently assess that it is in the possession of the IDF and the General Security Services (Shin Bet) or based on dated information.

**Conclusion**

Intelligence is designed to improve decision-making and direct actions, and in wartime, these actions are primarily military operations. Moreover, intelligence in war in the current era also plays an important role in public diplomacy. Even while fighting in Gaza and Lebanon, Israel continues to publicly disclose intelligence to shape the attitudes of both sympathetic and hostile audiences. However, it does so in a slightly different way than usual, primarily in response to pressures and narratives that endanger its legitimacy, while trying to avoid disclosing high-quality information that might risk vital intelligence assets.

Disclosing intelligence to the public during the war has the same challenges and obstacles as in normal times; however, war increases the costs and heightens the risks to some extent, while it may also facilitate the ability to judge successes, failures, and costs. This is due to the close proximity of intelligence, action, and counteraction; the attentiveness and heightened sensitivity in terms of public opinion; and, of course, the visible tension between intelligence for action and intelligence for disclosure. Thus, partial and superficial disclosure of information, which prioritizes the protection of sources, such as in the case of al-Shifa Hospital, is not always convincing, is liable to raise doubts regarding the reliability of the information and the credibility of the disclosing party. Instead, sensitive yet

comprehensive information can be privately shared with foreign governments and intelligence agencies, as Israel effectively did regarding [UNRWA employees](#) who actively participated in the October 7 attack. Partial disclosure, based on incomplete or inadequate intelligence, as in the case of the Bibas family, risks exposing the weaknesses of Israel's intelligence and providing an advantage to the adversary on the battlefield and in the information environment. Conversely, disclosing accurate and high-quality intelligence involves the risk of "burning" such sources, but when there is little choice in the face of clear and imminent danger, as in the case of al-Ahli Hospital, its advantages outweigh the disadvantages; and when there is a choice, as in the case of the Imam Hussein Division, the risk may be for naught.

It is important to remember that for Israel, the war in the Gaza Strip began from a significant intelligence disadvantage, which cost many lives. Especially because the reasons behind the intelligence failure have not yet been investigated, including the possible connection between the lack of early warning and the routine "squander" of intelligence—whether by public disclosure or clandestine military attacks—Israel should place greater importance on managing a modest "intelligence economy" and on employing discretion and control mechanisms that can quickly and efficiently determine the reliability of the information and any benefits it would provide if publicly exposed, when weighed against other alternatives and potential operational and political risks.

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