

The Importance of a Communication Strategy—The IDF During Operation Rising Lion

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Upon assuming office, Chief of Staff Eyal Zamir declared that restoring public trust in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is a “binding mission.” However, an analysis of the IDF’s communication strategy during Operation Rising Lion reveals that both the IDF and the political echelon sought to restore public trust in the IDF’s superiority. This effort aimed to reinforce the same sense of absolute advantage and false immunity that had permeated the public, the political echelon, and the military echelon before October 7, 2023. This article examines the communication strategy employed by the IDF during the campaign against Iran and its possible implications for long-term public trust, and offers recommendations for optimal conduct in this context.

During the campaign against Iran, the relevant IDF bodies appeared to adhere to clear and assertive communication messages. These repeatedly emphasized messages were part of a strategy aimed at projecting strength, preparedness, and control, and reinforced the public’s confidence in the IDF’s military capabilities. In the short term, this line of communication served as a calming mechanism, rallied trust, and framed the military operation as necessary and effective. However, the assertive and firm tone carried potential costs: it could harm the military’s credibility in the long term, undermine the sense of transparency regarding the IDF’s activities, and hinder the restoration of trust—especially if gaps emerge between the messages transmitted and the reality on the ground.

The following aspects of the adopted communication strategy provide insight into its possible connections to the process of rebuilding public trust in the IDF:

626 Days / 12 Days

The campaign against Iran was, at various points, framed as a separate war from the one Israel has been fighting for over 600 days in the Gaza Strip. The IDF spokesperson’s announcements opened with a tally of the operation’s days, placing almost exclusive emphasis on developments on this front. Additionally, for the first time, a dedicated logo was designed for the campaign to distinguish it from the Swords of Iron war, Operation Gideon’s Chariot, and other ongoing operations. This effort to differentiate between wars was also reflected in statements by the chief of staff. For instance, about a week after the campaign against Iran began, Chief of Staff Lieut. Gen. Eyal Zamir stated in an official announcement that “readiness for prolonged fighting is required.” However, the Israeli public—the target audience for this message—was already engaged in a long and bloody war. As a result, many, including bereaved families and families of hostages, perceived such statements as reflecting the state and military’s lack of recognition of the heavy costs already incurred. Additionally, this

message may be interpreted as disregarding the public sentiment: According to a June 2025 INSS survey, most of Israelis had grown weary of a prolonged campaign, with 60.5% of respondents believing it was time to end the war in the Gaza Strip.

Home Front Command Protection Guidelines—“We Did Not Commit”

On June 14, the day after the operation began, the Home Front Command launched its “Defense Readiness Scale,” campaign which its spokespeople confidently promoted in broadcasting studios. This campaign, featuring a four-stage readiness scale, was designed to help the public prepare for Iranian missile fire and was intended to rely on early warnings that the Home Front Command unequivocally promised to provide. However, this campaign in its original form was shelved on June 17, after one of the Iranian missile barrages failed to trigger a “readiness” alert warning the public that the missiles were already enroute to Israel, and that they should prepare to enter their safe rooms or shelters. The incident sparked widespread public criticism over the confusing nature of the instructions, which many saw as endangering lives. This criticism intensified after the Home Front Command, despite the public’s compliance and trust in the IDF’s professionalism, distanced itself from responsibility by clarifying: “We aim to provide 15-to-30-minute warnings—but we never committed to it.” Furthermore, the proliferation of alerts and frequent changes to defense guidelines fueled a sense of confusion among the public, which was widely reflected in discussions on social media platforms.

However, in contrast to these cases—where responsibility was deflected and public criticism surged—the public appeared to accept a different pattern reflecting clarity, accountability, and lessons learned. On the second day of the campaign, before the readiness scale was introduced, the Home Front Command’s personal messaging platform failed to issue a pre-alert about a morning salvo from Iran. In response, the IDF acknowledged the failure, explained that it was caused by a technical error, and stated that the problem had been investigated and resolved. A similar example occurred on June 25, a day after the ceasefire took effect, when alerts labeled “severe” were mistakenly sent to many civilians due to a technical malfunction. In this case too, the IDF quickly took responsibility, openly acknowledged the error, explained its sequence of events, and clarified that no security incident had occurred.

“Air Superiority”

With the launch of the campaign against Iran, the IDF and other security actors emphasized Israel’s “air superiority” as a central pillar of both combat and deterrence, presenting it as an achievement of utmost importance. The IDF spokesperson quickly framed air superiority as a leading message, supported by a tightly orchestrated communication campaign—featuring footage of precision strikes, interviews with air force pilots, and press briefings. Together, these efforts conveyed an image of one-sided victory, intended not only to restore public confidence but also to strengthen belief in the IDF’s unquestionable superiority.

Nonetheless, this repeated and firm emphasis provoked astonishment, given the clear gap between media portrayals and the complex operational reality. While the scale of the military achievement should not be underestimated and indeed deserves public acknowledgment, the arrogance embedded in the “air superiority” discourse—characterized by boastful slogans shared by Air Force and IDF social media posts—undermined the message’s credibility. For some, this rhetoric appeared as an attempt to revive the collective hubris that characterized the military ethos before October 7. The attempt to rebuild confidence and rebrand the Air Force’s image also came across as out-of-touch bravado. Beyond its negative moral impact on the exhausted ground forces—who have been serving on multiple fronts for over two years and feel that their ongoing sacrifice along with heavy physical, economic, psychological, and familial costs have gone unrecognized—this messaging risks renewing the cycle of disjointed public-military expectations. This cycle typically begins with a display of systemic arrogance, already cited as a key factor in the October 7 disaster, followed by public internalization of this hubris and underestimation of the enemy. Such attitudes then seep into the defense system itself, eventually leading to systemic complacency and vulnerability to strategic surprises that exact painful consequences.

Investigation

The ballistic missile strike on Haifa on June 22, which occurred without a siren warning, highlighted the tension between the need to provide an accurate situational picture and the desire to control the narrative and convey a reassuring message. Following the direct hit, IDF officials quickly announced that an interceptor had landed in the city—implying there had been no direct missile strike on Haifa, and therefore, no need for a warning siren. This message was disseminated swiftly and assertively, but soon afterward, it became clear that the incident had involved a ballistic missile launched by Iran. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

The gap between the initial report and the subsequent facts reflects a recurring media dilemma the IDF faced throughout the Swords of Iron war: the tradeoff between the speed of information release versus its accuracy. In this case, the dilemma was resolved in favor of rapid publication to control the narrative. This approach not only weakened the sense of reassurance but also damaged the IDF’s credibility.

Censorship

In an era where footage from strike sites spreads within seconds on social media—and is sometimes reported first by foreign outlets—the question is no longer solely about the relevance and effectiveness of military censorship but also about its underlying motives. Is censorship truly a matter of security necessity, or does it sometimes serve primarily to control public perception and shape the media reality?

During the campaign against Iran, many strike incidents were recorded by individuals and rapidly disseminated to the public via social media. In contrast, Israeli journalists were silenced until censorship approval was granted—even when the sensitive information had already become public knowledge. For example, the strike on the Bazan complex in Haifa was made public shortly after it occurred and was covered by foreign media, yet censorship regarding the matter was lifted only two days later. In such a reality, censorship is not perceived as a

tool for protecting sensitive information but rather as concealment—suggesting that the situation may be more severe than officially reported, and this perception of concealment risks eroding public trust.

Recommendations

Modesty and Avoiding Decisive Declarations

Given the profound crisis of trust facing the IDF following October 7, it is essential to avoid absolute, definitive, or exaggerated framing—no matter how important it is to highlight operational achievements. Communication marked with a tone of arrogance or sweeping declarations of “superiority,” “complete control,” or framing the conflict as “a separate campaign” may appear disconnected from the complex reality and risk damaging not only public trust but also internal cohesion and identification with the messages being communicated. These can fracture if the public perceives inconsistencies between an adrenaline-driven, contented military and an exhausted public, anxious about what lies ahead. A more moderate, calculated, and cautious approach conveys responsibility, sensitivity, and awareness of having learned from past crises. In proactive media items, press briefings, spokesperson statements, background talks, and official documents, cautionary language and acknowledgment of limitations should be encouraged—without neglecting clear messaging and the legitimate highlighting of field achievements in all operational arenas. Special emphasis should be placed on recognizing the contributions of all active forces, particularly the worn-out ground troops.

Honesty and Transparency as Strategic Components of Trust Restoration

Honesty and transparency must be adopted to build long-term trust. Even in situations of partial or complete uncertainty, the public appreciates full disclosure of gaps and limitations. Often, a careful and honest statement such as, “we are still investigating” or “the defense readiness scale cannot be relied on 100%; we are doing our best to improve it” conveys more confidence and responsibility than a rushed declaration that later proves inaccurate. In an era of instant and unofficial information dissemination, official bodies tend to react quickly. However, a hasty, unfounded response may cause long-term damage. If the IDF seeks to reinforce a stable, trusting relationship with the public, it must prioritize accuracy, responsibility, and caution over dominating the media narrative at all costs.

Update of Military Censorship Policy—Adapting to a Global Era

Israel’s military censorship policy must be revised to align with an era where information flows rapidly and freely through social networks and foreign media outlets. The current practice—where openly available information is banned from publication only in Israeli media—damages the IDF’s relationship with journalists and creates a sense of disconnect and eroded credibility. The Israeli public, receiving real-time updates from unofficial sources, may interpret censorship as deliberate concealment—especially in cases of dramatic events, such as a direct hit on critical infrastructure. Therefore, it is recommended to shorten the time frame for lifting censorship, particularly when the information is already public knowledge. In addition, consideration should be given to integrating civilian or journalist representatives in

the censorship oversight mechanism to enhance transparency and better align with public expectations. Such a policy update would signal to citizens that the IDF acknowledges the profound shifts that the public is undergoing and seeks to act responsibly—rather than out of a desire to exclusively control the information.

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