

## Israel's Deteriorating Image as a Threat to National Security: A Plan to Rehabilitate Israel's Public Diplomacy

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## Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	4
Preface.....	6
<b>Chapter One: The Image Crisis.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Causes of the Public Diplomacy Failure During <i>Swords of Iron</i> .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Required Urgent Measures .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Work Plan for the Repair of Israel’s Public Diplomacy.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Appendix: Terms and Definitions .....	43

# Executive Summary

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## Israel's Image: Situation Assessment

Two years after a terrorist attack of unprecedented scope on its citizens, Israel finds itself isolated in a manner which threatens its international standing, national security, fundamental legitimacy and the security of Jewish communities around the world. Despite major strategic achievements in Israel's multi-front conflict in Gaza, Iran, Lebanon and Syria, the failure of Israel's strategic communications threatens these gains. Israel is perceived in many quarters of Western opinion as an aggressive country acting contrary to international law, and by some even as a pariah state.

Israel's isolation is reflected in a profound decline in US and European public opinion and erosion of its standing within the American political system. Israel faces overt and covert boycott processes in academia, the cultural sphere and the economy and confronts an aggressive legal attack culminating in the charge of genocide before the International Court of Justice and the issuance of arrest warrants against its senior officials. All these are marked by a sharp rise in antisemitism, physical attacks against Jewish communities worldwide and the undermining of their security.

The purpose of this policy paper is to analyze the policy failures and systemic shortcomings during the Gaza war (*Swords of Iron*) which contributed to this deterioration and continue even at present to harm Israel's image.

The primary policy failure stemmed from the prolongation of the war without a clearly stated political objective. In the absence of clarity regarding the goals of the fighting and explanation of the destruction and loss of life in the Gaza Strip resultant from IDF operations, the international community interpreted the government's intentions through the extreme statements of some ministers—as a campaign of revenge against all Palestinians.

The main operational and organizational failure stemmed from the lack of unified management of Israel's public diplomacy effort, primarily due to non-appointment of a head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate and the deep politicization of wartime messaging, which was often subordinated to Israel's internal politics. This politicization prevented a proactive narrative that could have helped Israel in the international arena. These collective failures led to the severe neglect of the international media, poor handling and defeat on social media, and flawed management and communication of the humanitarian aid effort.

## Immediate Required Steps

The Israeli government must take immediate steps to stop the hemorrhaging of international support and confront Israel's image crisis:

- **Appoint Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate**—to rebuild the national public diplomacy system as an authoritative body capable of managing the effort to restore Israel's image. An apolitical senior professional with strong media presence in English and Hebrew needs

to take up the budgetary and leadership reins of Israel's public diplomacy apparatus, to design and implement a national recovery plan which will guide all government bodies and ministries.

- **Initiate public diplomacy campaign to combat the genocide charge** — The decision of the International Court of Justice will impact Israel's image for the coming decade and hence Israel's defense must be seen as a national project. A ruling against Israel will negatively impact Jewish communities worldwide and damage Israel's ability to function internationally. Alongside the work of an expert and charismatic legal team, Israel's defense effort must include a strong public relations campaign and robust research staff using all available resources to prove Israel's innocence before the ICJ and in the court of world opinion. The genocide charge is weak and specious, but Israel may lose its case if the hostile political agenda attempting to influence the court is not adequately countered.
- **Gather the leadership of the Jewish People and Israel's allies to meet the legitimacy crisis** — Israel and its allies need each other in the current threat environment. The President of Israel should convene an emergency summit at the President's Residence, inviting senior Jewish and Christian, cultural, intellectual and business leadership and talents to establish a joint framework and formulate a comprehensive plan to repel the attack on Israel's fundamental legitimacy.

### **Comprehensive Work Plan to Reinvigorate Israel's Public Diplomacy**

The Israeli government needs to adopt and fund a comprehensive, integrative work plan to repair its strategic communications and address the legitimacy crisis in all critical areas. The concluding section of this policy paper presents a detailed roadmap and in-depth recommendations for:

- Essential Israel public diplomacy structural reform
- Renewed proactive engagement with international media
- Enhanced civil society cooperation and use of innovative technology to create an effective social media strategy
- Steps to overcome Israel's isolation at elite universities and in the academy
- Establishment of a dedicated broadcast authority for Arabic and Persian language outreach
- Program to deepen solidarity with the American Jewish community and Jewish communities worldwide
- Joint initiative of the Jewish people and pro-Israel Christians to defend Israel's international standing and the legitimacy of the Zionist idea.

Note: This document was written prior to the outbreak of Operation Roaring Lion. The image challenges facing Israel in the context of the current conflict with Iran differ in type from those manifested during the Gaza war. While Israel was accused of deliberately starving Gaza's population and committing genocide during the war against Hamas, it is now accused of dragging the United States into a costly and dangerous war that does not align with American national interests and of exerting excessive influence on the US administration.

The difficulties Israel confronts in addressing these new image challenges – despite extraordinary military achievement and the close battlefield alliance with the United States -underscore the deficiencies in Israel's public diplomacy and reinforce the analysis presented in this paper and the urgent need to realize the policy recommendations herein.

# Preface

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Israel's international standing has suffered severe damage in the wake of the Gaza war. This decline is evident across most areas of national life—the economy, academia, culture, the security of Jewish communities in the diaspora, and most essentially - the basic legitimacy of the State of Israel and its right to defend itself.

Attempts to isolate Israel are not new. They are rooted in disagreements over the appropriate resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, ideological opposition to Israel's existence, and internal demographic and societal trends in various countries unrelated to Israel. However, the Gaza war has been marked by an unprecedented peak in the intensity of the cognitive campaign and efforts to isolate Israel, a challenge for which Israel was insufficiently prepared.

The purpose of this policy paper is to identify the range of failures with the aim of correction and to present decision-makers with a series of practical steps required for improvement. We wish to emphasize, this document focuses primarily on the conduct of Israel's wartime public diplomacy, rather than on the operational aspects of conducting war, while recognizing that the two are closely intertwined.

During the preparation of this document, we conducted in-depth interviews with approximately 50 senior officials and subject-matter experts between August and October 2025, some prior to the ceasefire and some afterward. Interviewees included key figures in Israel's public diplomacy system: former directors general of government ministries; former senior figures in the legal system; chief editors, commentators, and journalists from across the political spectrum; experts in social media and influence operations; specialists on the Arab and Muslim worlds; senior figures in Jewish leadership in the diaspora and the philanthropic community; university leadership, researchers, and academics; and leading figures in the business sector.

This policy paper reached its completed form prior to the outbreak of Operation Roaring Lion. The image challenges facing Israel in the context of the current conflict with Iran differ substantively from those it faced—and continues to face—as a result of the extensive warfare in Gaza. While during the war against Hamas Israel was accused of deliberately starving Gaza's population and committing genocide, it is now accused of dragging the United States into a costly and dangerous war that does not align with American national interests, and of exerting excessive influence over the US administration.

The difficulty Israel encounters in addressing these new image challenges only serves to emphasize the deficiencies in Israel's public diplomacy system and the ongoing failure to communicate Israel's narrative effectively. Israel's deteriorated standing in global public opinion—despite extraordinary battlefield achievements and a close wartime alliance with the United States—reinforces the analysis presented in this paper, and the required subsequent policy recommendations.

The analysis and conclusions of this document are based on the insights and recommendations gathered from the experts interviewed. Throughout the interview process, we encountered deep concern regarding Israel's image and international standing, and the implications of this decline for the resilience of Israeli society and Israel's national security. A successful and prosperous state, which has thrived despite a hostile strategic environment and with decades-long experience in credible management of its international relations and strategic communications, now finds itself branded as a pariah state.

What does this say about the international system? What does it say about us? These questions guided this work, along with a deep concern for the State of Israel and a desire to identify means for repair.

Concern for Israel's image is not the exclusive domain of the right, center, or left of Israeli politics. Israeli governments from every part of the political spectrum have faced difficult public diplomacy challenges in the past. Each of these governments acted out of a commitment to Israel's vital national interests while maintaining a sense of belonging to the international community—in particular to the liberal West—and a desire to engage with it, even when such engagement did not always yield receptivity or understanding, and Israel encountered at times indifference to its essential security needs.

The policy paper begins with an analysis of the current situation and the proximate causes of the public diplomacy failure—both in terms of policy adopted during the Gaza conflict and in terms of the operational and organizational function of the public diplomacy system. In Chapter Three we propose critical emergency measures that must be implemented immediately in order to halt the further deterioration of Israel's international standing. In Chapter Four we present guidelines for a comprehensive public diplomacy work plan. Part of this plan requires reactivation of existing tools and capabilities already available to Israel, while other elements require the acquisition of new skills, the creation of novel organizational structures, and the advancement of cooperation with the Jewish world and partners in the international community at much greater scale and in innovative formats.

Methodological Note: In the Hebrew version of this paper, we use the term *hasbara* (literally – “explanation”) to describe Israel's public diplomacy and strategic communications. Despite well-known criticisms of this terminology, *hasbara* remains the most widely used term among the Israeli public and the most commonly employed by decision-makers. The term has advantages and disadvantages, which we will present—alongside an analysis of other relevant professional terminology—in the appendix “Terminology and Definitions” at the end of this policy paper.

# Chapter One: The Image Crisis

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Two years after a brutal terrorist attack on a scale never previously experienced, Israel is politically and publicly isolated at a level unprecedented since its establishment. Despite remarkable military achievements on the fronts where Israel fought since October 7, 2023, it has suffered a dramatic deterioration of its international image. The ongoing failures in the diplomatic and public diplomacy arenas are eroding these strategic military gains, inflicting economic and cultural costs, and constituting a severe blow to Israel's national security.

Israel has succeeded in reshaping the Middle East by inflicting significant damage on the “Axis of Resistance” and on actors widely perceived by the West and much of the international community as hostile:

- Significant damage to Hezbollah in Lebanon;
- Regime change in Syria;
- Substantial damage to Iran's nuclear program, in military cooperation with the United States;
- Capture of large parts of the Gaza Strip and severe damage to Hamas's military and governing capabilities.

How, then, is it possible that Israel's international image has reached an unprecedented low, threatening both its national security and the safety of Jewish communities in the diaspora? It is essential to achieve understanding how a state that suffered immense attack by a recognized terrorist organization, and that has decades of diplomatic and strategic communications experience, has experienced such rapid and severe image depreciation. Having managed to recover and shift the strategic military balance in its favor, Israel now finds itself vilified and hauled before international courts as a symbol of evil. Without a deep analysis of the failure of Israeli public diplomacy, no meaningful correction can be achieved.

**Legal Offensive:** In an unprecedented manner, international arrest warrants have been issued against members of Israel's democratic government (the Prime Minister and the former Minister of Defense), preventing them from visiting most countries worldwide, and additional warrants may exist that have not been made public. In addition, a case has been filed against Israel at the International Court of Justice alleging violations of the Genocide Convention—the most heinous of crimes—compelling Israel to defend itself as if it were one of the world's darkest regimes.

**United States:** Less than half of the American public now view Israel positively, and bipartisan support in Congress is no longer guaranteed.<sup>1</sup> Israel faced unprecedented protest on campuses across North America

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1. [Gallup poll, March 6, 2025](#). Only 46% of US citizens view Israel positively compared to 62% a decade ago. Among Democrats, a clear majority supports the Palestinian side by a ratio of 3:1 (59% vs. 21%). In [a Gallup poll from July 29, 2025](#), Prime Minister Netanyahu was viewed negatively by 52% of the American public, while 29% viewed him positively. Similar trends appear in [a Pew survey from April 6, 2025](#). According to a [Quinnipiac poll on August 27, 2025](#), half of Americans believe Israel committed genocide during the Gaza fighting, compared to 35% who believe it did not. Among Democrats, 77% believe Israel committed genocide, while 11% do not. Among Republicans, the reverse holds (64% believe it did not, 20% believe it did). In the most recent [NYT/Siena poll \(September 29, 2025\)](#), for the first time, a plurality of Americans (35% vs. 34%) sympathize with the Palestinian side over the Israeli side. Among ages 18–29, the gap is much wider: 61% sympathize with the Palestinian side versus 19% with Israel. Among all US voters, 62% believe Israel has not taken sufficient care to avoid harming civilians, compared to 25% who believe it has.



**Boycott Processes:** Israel is experiencing a wave of boycotts across multiple domains.<sup>8</sup>

*Academic Sphere:* Israel is subject to both overt and covert academic boycotts that have persisted despite the declared ceasefire. Articles by Israeli researchers are being rejected by academic journals; exchanges between higher education institutions are declining; and there are indications of a significant drop in the number of Israelis receiving Horizon grants.

If large-scale fighting in Gaza resumes—accompanied by images of severe civilian suffering and in the absence of a framework proposed by Israel for resolving the crisis—there is little doubt that boycott trends in culture, academia, and sports will expand and become institutionalized as formal sanctions.

*Economic Sphere:* Despite positive indicators in currency strength, capital markets, government tax revenues, continued investment in high-tech, and low unemployment, there are clear signs of a creeping economic boycott, mostly below surface and unofficial. Exporting and marketing products associated with an Israeli brand has become increasingly difficult and complex. The business community reports unsigned contracts, unexpected difficulties in securing lines of credit, muted announcements of capital raising for Israeli companies, canceled executive visits, avoidance of engagement with Israeli partners, and even refusals to export goods to Israel. These phenomena reflect a broader atmosphere of rejection and distancing.<sup>9</sup>

**Obstacles in the Supply of Military Equipment:** Aside from the United States, nearly all countries capable of supplying weapons and defense systems to Israel have refrained from doing so—some due to policies against selling to countries engaged in conflict, while others oppose Israel’s conduct of the war. A prominent example is Germany’s refusal to supply tank engines to the IDF—an issue that amounted to a partial arms embargo, which has since been resolved.<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that this trend is mixed. On one hand, there is strong global demand for Israeli defense industry products; on the other hand, political pressures have led to the cancellation of several international deals, some in a public manner causing reputational damage to Israel.

**The Genocide Accusation and the Branding of Israel as a Pariah State:** The Palestinian national movement has sought to advance the genocide accusation against Israel since the 2001 Durban Conference. The prolonged war in Gaza—accompanied by extensive images of destruction and loss of life—created an opportunity for proponents of this accusation to advance an indictment against Israel in a manner that had not succeeded in the past. The genocide accusation against Israel is specious and has no factual or legal basis. However, the campaign is gaining momentum among broad progressive audiences and through active lobbying in international institutions. Israel is facing a dangerous cognitive campaign.

Accusing Israel of genocide is an attempt to undermine the Jewish story and to deny the Holocaust as one of the justifications for the establishment of the State of Israel. It represents a sophisticated messaging campaign by Hamas and its supporters. By accusing Israel of the ultimate crime against humanity, its critics seek to portray the Jewish state as a Nazi state,<sup>11</sup> and perhaps even worse, as the aspiration to commit genocide is

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[“Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Europe Since Oct 7.”](#)

8. For further discussion of boycotts, particularly the legal dimension, see Pnina Sharvit Baruch, [“Israel on the Path to Diplomatic Isolation,”](#) INSS Special Publication, July 4, 2024.

9. [“Delayed Contracts, Postponed Visits: A Quiet Embargo against Israel is Already Here,”](#) [Hebrew] Calcalist, August 24, 2025.

10. [“Some Tanks Already Disabled: Germany’s Embargo May Harm Maneuvering in Gaza City,”](#) [Hebrew] Haaretz, August 24, 2025.

11. On the concept of Holocaust inversion, see Manfred Gerstenfeld, [“Holocaust Inversion: The Portraying of Israel and Jews as](#)

portrayed as inherent in Zionism itself.

If the unthinkable occurs and the International Court of Justice determines that Israel committed genocide, it would become the first state in history to bear this stigma. This would constitute an unprecedented delegitimization of the Zionist enterprise.

**Damage to Israeli Morale and Self-Perception:** According to a survey published in September 2025, a majority of Israelis (58%) believe that Israel is not respected in the world today, and an overwhelming majority (83%) consider such respect to be very important for Israel.<sup>12</sup> Israel's ongoing isolation—as reflected, for example, in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's September 2025 address to an empty hall at the UN General Assembly, and in growing support for the establishment of a Palestinian state—may over time erode the resilience of Israeli society and its belief in itself and in the justice of its cause.

There is concern that Israel may normalize its poor international standing and its branding as a pariah state as an unavoidable reality to be accepted—an attitude reflected in Prime Minister Netanyahu's "Sparta speech."<sup>13</sup> Such a pessimistic approach might lead to the abandonment of public diplomacy efforts and to a process of self-fulfilling isolation.<sup>14</sup> If Israel comes to believe that the world is inherently hostile and discriminatory toward it, it may lose the ability to respond rationally even to justified criticism. Instead of analyzing the image crisis realistically and investigating its underlying causes, Israel may interpret all criticism as inherently antisemitic and beyond repair.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the greatest danger to Israel would be if significant parts of the Israeli public internalize the exaggerated criticism of Israel and come to terms with it, along the lines of - if we are destined to be falsely accused of apartheid and committing genocide, then why avoid it? Such a conclusion, even if only partially realized, would be the most severe damage that the enemies of Israel could inflict upon us.

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[Nazis](#)," Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, April 2007.

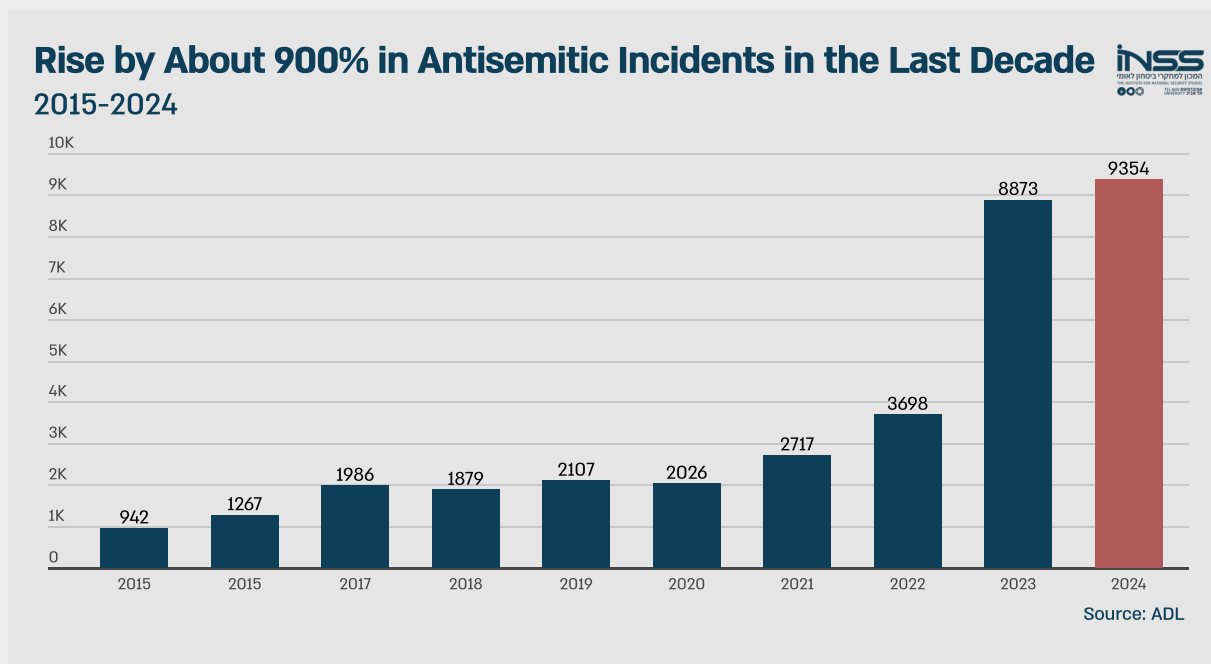
12. A [survey by the Israel Democracy Institute survey, September 20, 2025](#), indicates that 73% of Israelis think that Israel's international position has worsened since the beginning of the war. [Pew surveys](#) consistently show that 58% of Israelis believe that Israel is not respected in the world, and [83% think that such respect](#) is very important to the country.

13. Netanyahu's speech at the Conference of the Accountant General, September 15, 2025.

14. Charlie Kirk, letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu, May 2, 2025: "Sometimes the impression is given that Israel thinks everyone hates them, so why care about winning over hearts and minds?... A pro-Israel friend recently asked me, 'Do Israelis even care how the world perceives their country?'"

15. In response to the new antisemitism (anti-Zionism), Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote the following, which is relevant for Israel's situation today: "If Jews distrust the world, they will not seek to understand it and learn how to make their case and win allies in the world. They will see antisemitism where other factors are at work. They will lend Jewish identity a negativity that will encourage many young Jews to leave rather than stay. They will fall into the trap of moral solipsism, of talking to themselves in terms only intelligible to themselves. The phrase 'a people that dwells alone' will become a self-fulfilling prophecy that will not augur well for the future of Jews, Judaism or Israel." See Jonathan Sacks, [Future Tense: A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture](#), 129.

**Impact on the Jewish People in the Diaspora:** Since the October 7 attack, Jewish communities worldwide have experienced a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents and harassment. Among progressive circles on the left and within the populist right in the United States, overt antisemitism that previously existed beneath the surface has now become normalized and exposed in its full severity. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported an approximately 900% increase in antisemitic incidents across the United States in 2024 compared to 2015. In total, nearly 10,000 incidents of assault, property damage, or harassment motivated by antisemitism were recorded during 2024, with close to 60% of these incidents occurring in connection with anti-Israel contexts.<sup>16</sup>



A separate ADL survey found that 24% of US citizens—the highest figure ever recorded—hold entrenched antisemitic attitudes, while 46% of the global population holds such views, roughly double the rate measured in a similar survey a decade earlier.<sup>17</sup> The regions with the highest levels of antisemitism are the Middle East and North Africa (76%) and the Palestinian territories (97%). Only 16% of the Arab world recognizes the historical reality of the Holocaust. At the same time, 71% of the global population believe their country should maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, 75% support accepting Israeli tourists, and 67% oppose boycott measures.<sup>18</sup>

16. ADL, “[Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2024](#)”; Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, “[Report on Antisemitism for 2024](#) [Hebrew]”; World Zionist Organization, “[Antisemitism: Current Situation 2024](#).” Although these reports all claim that antisemitism has sharply increased worldwide since October 7, the data and the methods used differ. From the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs report: “A central component of the efforts to delegitimize the State of Israel and its right to defend itself was directed at Jewish communities worldwide, which were perceived by pro-Palestinian supporters as existing along a single continuum with the State of Israel, simply by virtue of their members’ identification as Jews. These efforts targeted not only those who expressed explicit support for Israel but also those who openly expressed their Jewish identity in public spaces, regardless of their political views. Accordingly, pro-Palestinian marches and demonstrations were held not only in neutral public spaces and outside Israeli embassies but also on campuses, in Jewish neighborhoods, and outside synagogues and Jewish communal events. Many public spaces became unsafe for those identified as Jewish or pro-Israel. In this sense, the October 7 attack was not only an attack on the State of Israel but also sparked acts of violence, hostility, and a broader assault on the Jewish people and on the legitimacy of the connection and support of Jewish communities for Israel.

17. “This is the worst period of antisemitism in the United States covered in ADL’s longitudinal studies since the 1960s. For many decades, 8-12% of the population held intense antisemitic attitudes; today, we are at 24%.” Statement by ADL CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, October 23, 2025.

18. [The ADL Global 100: Index of Antisemitism](#).

Israel's isolation and the severe damage to its image after nearly two years of war have created fertile ground for antisemitic currents within both the progressive left and the populist right. The elected mayor of New York is an outspoken supporter of boycotting Israel, while prominent right-wing American commentators promote antisemitic conspiracy theories without significant opposition.<sup>19</sup> In France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, the war has led to a sharp deterioration in the situation of Jewish communities, with approximately half of Jews considering emigration.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Joseph Strauss, "[Ted Cruz to Jewish Republicans: Antisemitism is 'an existential crisis in our party'](#)," Times of Israel, November 1, 2025.

20. Jewish People Policy Institute, "[Annual Assessment of the Jewish People 2025 | 5785](#)."

# Chapter Two: Causes of the Public Diplomacy Failure During *Swords of Iron*

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The public diplomacy challenges which faced Israel in all its wars throughout history are not new. From a narrative standpoint, the Gaza war began under seemingly “ideal” conditions for Israel’s messaging, following a widely documented brutal assault by Hamas against innocent civilians. This advantage did not last long. Within a short period, Western perceptions and global public opinion shifted focus toward the images of destruction and suffering in Gaza and the Palestinian victimhood narrative. This is a familiar and recurring dynamic for Israel, which it must take into account and with which it must achieve the capacity to contend.

## 1. Failures Related to the Conduct of the War

The war in Gaza posed a unique challenge to Israel’s image due to its prolonged duration, the massive scale of infrastructure destruction and civilian casualties, and the fact that all of this occurred within a constricted, densely populated and highly documented geographic space.

**A Prolonged War Without a Clear Political Objective:** Israel cannot afford to conduct such prolonged high intensity warfare given its need to maintain international legitimacy and support. Since the First Lebanon War, Israeli governments have avoided extended military campaigns lasting more than a few months, largely for this very reason. Many in the international system were willing to accept a defined period of intense fighting in Gaza—even if it involved significant bloodshed and destruction—so long as it was time-limited, and certainly not beyond four to six months. But it does not appear that the time dimension played a significant role in government decision-making or in shaping the conduct of the war.

**Lack of Clarity in Linking War Objectives to Military Actions:** The challenging conditions of fighting in a densely populated environment, combined with unavoidable images of human suffering, should have compelled the government to present a clear message regarding the objectives of the war; the meaning of “total victory”; a coherent plan to achieve these objectives; and a practical vision for Gaza “the day after” However, the government consistently refrained from doing so—presumably due to the need to preserve coalition cohesion and the desire to align with a perceived public sentiment.

In the absence of a clear articulation of its objectives beyond vague and general statements, the international community and global public opinion interpreted the war as a prolonged punitive campaign driven by revenge. At best, the IDF’s campaign in Gaza was perceived as incoherent or as reflecting a loss of judgment and control.<sup>21</sup> At worst, it was interpreted as an attempt to destroy Palestinian society in Gaza entirely.<sup>22</sup> In the absence of official messaging, the government’s intentions were interpreted based on statements made by its most extreme ministers, who repeatedly called for the destruction of Gaza, the expulsion of its population, and its resettlement by Jews.<sup>23</sup>

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21. “What the Israeli Army is doing in the Gaza Strip right now—I honestly don’t understand what the goal is in causing such suffering to the civilian population,” Statement by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, May 26, 2025.

22. “We cannot accept that a society is being destroyed the way it is being destroyed,” Statement by Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, November 24, 2023.

23. “Gaza will be totally destroyed, its residents will be concentrated south of the Morag Axis, and they will begin to leave for other

It should be noted that the response to specific incidents was also deficient. Even in cases where investigations were conducted, their findings were not made public—contrary to the practice in previous Israeli conflicts. This created a severe information gap, leading the media to assume the worst and rely almost exclusively on Palestinian sources. Even when Israeli spokespersons sought to refute false allegations, they lacked the relevant information and facts to do so effectively.

**The Vietnam Trap:** There are notable parallels between the circumstances that led to the collapse of American public support for the war effort in Vietnam and the international opposition to Israel during the Gaza war. In both cases, a sense of futility emerged, along with a perceived inability of military force to defeat a guerrilla force operating within a civilian population without causing unacceptable destruction and loss of life. Political and military commentators—both during the Vietnam War and today—have identified the absence of coherent strategic thinking and clearly defined, attainable objectives as key stumbling blocks in these conflicts. The media then, and social networks today, amplified and entrenched iconic symbols of civilian suffering. Vietnam was marked by images of children burned by napalm and forests destroyed by Agent Orange; the fighting in Gaza has been characterized by images of collapsing buildings, flattened cities, and children killed, wounded, and starving. Both wars inflamed campuses across the West, gave rise to a persistent and organized protest movement, and became emblematic of a broader cultural-progressive discourse within the context of intergenerational strife.

There are obvious fundamental differences between the two cases. The Vietnam War took place 14,000 kilometers across an ocean from the American mainland, whereas the Gaza conflict continues to take place on Israel's border and directly threatens its citizens. Another key difference is that opposition to the Vietnam War was an internal phenomenon within American society, with direct impact on the political system. In contrast, opposition to the Gaza war developed largely outside Israel. While it significantly harms Israel, it does not generate direct domestic pressure on the political system. The government does not “feel” the protest internally and firsthand and hence it does not respond appropriately - and the damage to Israel increases and grows.

Prominent opinion leaders—loyal supporters among Israel's strongest friends within the pro-Zionist conservative camp in the United States—urged Israel to bring the fighting to an end due to the deepening isolation and the erosion of Israel's moral standing.<sup>24</sup> Commentators generally friendly accused Israel of causing humanitarian crisis and severe suffering to uninvolved civilians beyond any military necessity,<sup>25</sup> and of lacking a practical strategy for victory and establishment of a stable peace that could justify the scale of destruction and loss of life.<sup>26</sup>

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countries, they will despair. See statement by Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich, in “[Smotrich: ‘In Half a Year, There Won’t Be Hamas in Gaza,’](#)” May 6, 2025.

24. [Megyn Kelly, July 28, 2025](#): “Whether it realizes it or not, Israel has made itself the villain of the world in letting this war go on so long. They have lost support among their dearest friends, the entire Democrat party here in the United States, and they’re losing Republicans by the day. I have no problem with disproportionate and overwhelming force when your citizens are attacked, but what Israel is doing now is losing its standing with the rest of the world, and its moral reputation with its closest friends.”

25. David French “[Israel Must Open Its Eyes,](#)” New York Times, August 3, 2025: “The Israeli government has gone too far. It has engineered a staggering humanitarian crisis, and that crisis is both a moral atrocity and a long-term threat to Israel itself. Civilian casualties were inevitable when Israel responded to Hamas, but the suffering of Palestinian civilians is far beyond the bounds of military necessity.”

26. Ross Douthat, “[How Israel’s War Became Unjust,](#)” New York Times, July 26, 2025.

## 2. Functional Failures in Israel's Public Diplomacy System

One can wonder whether Israel has a public diplomacy policy at all. Israel's public diplomacy efforts are not currently managed or directed, and there is no single authority responsible for formulating and leading the Israeli public diplomacy effort.

**Failure to Fill Key Positions and Lack of a Formal Structure:** The key position of Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate has not been filled since May 2024,<sup>27</sup> and the deputy position (head of the Directorate's staff) has been vacant since early 2023. The National Public Diplomacy Directorate is responsible for setting public diplomacy policy and coordinating all government messaging and communications efforts with the Israeli and international media.

Since the outbreak of the Gaza war, Israel has had three different foreign ministers, each appointing a director general from outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, unfamiliar with the system and lacking professional experience in public diplomacy. The IDF spokesperson - widely regarded as effective and popular - was replaced mid-campaign, as was the head of the international communications branch. The Minister of Public Diplomacy resigned five days after the war began, claiming that her authority had been transferred to the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs. The Minister of Diaspora Affairs, instead of mobilizing Jewish communities for the public diplomacy effort, entered into direct and prolonged conflict with them over his insistence on inviting far-right European representatives to an antisemitism conference in Israel,<sup>28</sup> which effectively paralyzed cooperation between his ministry and major Jewish organizations. In October 2025, the Diaspora Minister further escalated tensions with leading Jewish organizations in the United Kingdom over a similar issue.<sup>29</sup>

There is currently no minister or senior official responsible for coordinating Israel's public diplomacy and its strategic communications effort. This situation stands in stark contradiction to the conclusions of the State Comptroller's report following the Second Lebanon War, which called for the appointment of a head of national public diplomacy responsible for coordinating all communication efforts. The head of this directorate is also meant to participate in security cabinet discussions in order to align policy with Israel's essential public diplomacy needs.<sup>30</sup>

The lack of a high ranking public diplomacy official contributed to the non-discussion of Israel's catastrophic image crisis in the security cabinet and in the relevant Knesset committees. No serious deliberation took place

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27. [Moshe Aviv, was appointed at the start of the war, and resigned after seven months.](#)

28. Michael Starr, "[Stabbing Jews in the Back: Diaspora Heads Warn Against Chikli's Antisemitism Conference,](#)" Jerusalem Post, March 23, 2025.

29. Itamar Eichner, "[Anger Among British Jews at Minister Chikli: He Invited a Leader from the Extreme Right to Israel,](#)" [Hebrew] Ynet, October 5, 2025.

30. "The absence of a comprehensive state-level public diplomacy doctrine, along with insufficient coordination among the various public diplomacy bodies—stemming from the lack of government guidance through a permanent overarching authority that directs and coordinates—has led to a persistent public diplomacy failure on the part of Israeli governments. . . . The State Comptroller's Office believes that just as there is a clear need to concentrate efforts to achieve optimal results on the battlefield, a parallel effort is required as a complementary dimension on the public diplomacy front. In the view of the State Comptroller's Office, since the Prime Minister's Office is the only body with a comprehensive perspective on public diplomacy needs vis-à-vis both the Israeli public and external audiences, it is essential that it centralize the activity of the national public diplomacy apparatus during emergencies and prepare it for this role during periods of routine." From the [State Comptroller Report on Public Diplomacy during the Second Lebanon War](#) [Hebrew].

on means of ameliorating the crisis - neither in addressing the destructive impact of ministers' statements, nor regarding necessary adaptations in wartime policy, nor in the required streamlining of humanitarian aid, and above all - not in formulating a comprehensive, consistent, determined, and sophisticated public diplomacy effort effectively integrating and directing the varied public diplomacy branches within the Israeli governmental system.

In the absence of a designated authority responsible for Israel's communications and public diplomacy, these efforts effectively went unmanaged. Official Israeli spokespersons were, and continue to be, largely absent from foreign media outlets. In the social media realm, the Israeli system has been completely outmatched. There is no discernible proactive Israeli communications strategy regarding international legal institutions, nor is there a coherent overarching plan for addressing the challenges of public diplomacy and the deepening isolation of Israel within academic institutions and in the cultural and public spheres throughout the West.

**Abandonment of the International Media Arena:** Lacking a functioning national public diplomacy directorate, the international media arena was largely neglected. Aside from isolated efforts, the war in Gaza was barely communicated proactively to the international press. There were no regular or frequent briefings for foreign media by any Israeli body, and inquiries from journalists often went unanswered by the IDF Spokesperson, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>31</sup> Israel's communications effort toward international media was unmanaged, and there was no adequate response to the massive volume of negative coverage. Israeli spokespersons operated with insufficient access to critical information, without backing from senior leadership, and with low morale. The result was institutional paralysis, lack of systematic engagement with major media outlets, and failure to respond—or even acknowledge—media inquiries, including from leading international outlets. A vacuum of silence emerged, characterized by a lack of engagement with criticism and lack of proactive response to skewed coverage.

Official responses to grave incidents—such as the strikes on the ambulance convoy<sup>32</sup> and on Nasser Hospital, which resulted in the deaths of journalists and rescue personnel—were unconvincing, lacking supporting intelligence or visual documentation, and were at times internally inconsistent.<sup>33</sup>

Little use was made of incriminating intelligence held by the IDF that could justify strikes on civilian-designated targets, such as high-rise buildings or extended urban areas, even when reliable information was available and could be shared without compromising intelligence sources.

Israeli spokespersons failed to provide data on key issues such as the number of Palestinian fatalities during the campaign, the extent of destruction in Gaza's cities, the humanitarian situation in the various districts of Gaza, and other essential data required to counter the starvation narrative. In practice, Israeli spokespersons relied on data provided by Hamas. The argument that such figures are inherently difficult to assess and know only highlights the absence of a command decision to obtain the information required

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31. Interview with David Horowitz, founding editor of Times of Israel, October 25, 2025: "You have no effective civilian public diplomacy operation in Israel. More to the point for journalists trying to get the story right, or at least to show Israel's side of story, there's often little or no real-time official Israeli response to unfolding events. That's notably been the case throughout the war in Gaza."

32. Farnaz Fassihi and Christoph Koetti, "[Video Shows Aid Workers Killed in Gaza Under Gunfire Barrage, With Ambulance Lights On](#)," New York Times, April 4, 2025; Dan Johnson, "[Israel Changes Account of Gaza Medic Killings After Video Showed Deadly Attack](#)," BBC, April 6, 2025.

33. AP and TOI Staff, "[Analysis of Footage from Nasser Hospital Strike Calls Israel's Account Into Question](#)," Times of Israel, September 6, 2025.

for the public diplomacy effort through dedicated monitoring and fact collection.

There was a need for regular press briefings to present Israel's position, respond to criticism and address the harsh images emerging from Gaza. In the absence of official Israeli responses in English or Hebrew, international media sought out statements by Israeli ministers made in Hebrew for sectoral audiences.<sup>34</sup> The failure to issue official clarifications of ministerial statements or provide context and explanations, led the international media to interpret the widespread destruction in Gaza through the harshest possible narrative lens: as a deliberate attempt to force evacuation not only from combat zones, but to permanently displace the Palestinian population from all of Gaza by way of wholesale destruction of homes and neighborhoods - in other words, as actions intended to achieve ethnic cleansing.

Official Israeli spokespersons rarely appeared—and continue to be absent—on major international television panels and talk shows. Official Israel effectively abandoned these platforms, leaving the field to non-official voices.<sup>35</sup> When ministers did appear in international media, such as the Piers Morgan interviews with Amichai Chikli and May Golan, they did so without coordination with official Israeli messaging and generally undermined Israel's public diplomacy effort.<sup>36</sup>

Little attempt was made within Israeli governance to balance between contrasting strategic communications concerns - the need to undermine the enemy's morale on the one hand, and the need to protect Israel's image and preserve international support. This lack of balance was evident in the repeated release to Israeli and international media of footage depicting strikes on civilian structures and the collapse of high-rise buildings,<sup>37</sup> and in boastful posts by Defense Minister Israel Katz during Operation Gideon's Chariots II<sup>38</sup> which were interpreted as an explicit prior intention by the IDF to devastate Gaza City.

### 3. Politicization of Public Diplomacy

The depth of Israel's isolation and its inability to present its case effectively over prolonged periods indicate a severe dysfunction in the Israeli system that extends beyond the realm of public diplomacy and image alone. It is impossible to explain the persistent dysfunction plaguing Israel's public diplomacy and the prolonged non-appointment of key senior personnel without addressing the deep politicization that gravely harmed Israel's information effort during the war - most likely due to the conflicting and contradictory positions within the coalition.

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34. Charlie Summers, "[Ben Gvir Calls for 'Luxury Neighborhood' for Police to Be Built Over Gaza's Ruins](#)," Times of Israel, September 15, 2025; "[Israel's Far-Right Finance Minister Suggests a Real Estate 'Bonanza' in Gaza Will Follow the War](#)," CNN, September 18, 2025.

35. From a [letter by Charlie Kirk to Prime Minister Netanyahu](#), May 2, 2025, "Where are all the Israeli surrogates? I can't remember the last time I saw an Israeli spokesperson on one of the evening Fox shows other than yourself."

36. Amit Slonim, "[Amichai Chikli Claimed that Piers Morgan Is Antisemitic. It Ended in an On-Air Crucifixion](#)," [Hebrew] *Walla*, June 2025; Miki Levin, "[Embarrassment on the Air: The Minister Golan Lost Control in an Interview in Britain](#)," [Hebrew] *Maariv*, July 2025.

37. Chris Panella, "[Trump Criticizes Israel for Releasing Photos and Videos of Its Devastating War in Gaza](#)," Business Insider, March 26, 2024.

38. Israel Katz, @Israel\_katz, "[Another tower of terror collapses in Gaza and joins the hundreds of others that have collapsed before it...](#)" X, September 8, 2025; Yinon Shalom Yatach, "[Gaza City Will Look like Beit Hanun: Katz's Promise](#)," [Hebrew] *i24 news*, August 21, 2025.

Israel refrained from publishing detailed information regarding the extensive humanitarian aid effort carried out by the IDF throughout the war in Gaza, apparently due to domestic political considerations.<sup>39</sup> The state was required to conduct public diplomacy simultaneously vis-à-vis domestic Israeli and international audiences, and it appears that almost complete priority was given to the former. Official Israel avoided publicizing the frequent meetings between COGAT and aid organizations, including UN agencies, aimed at coping with the challenges of delivering food to Gaza's residents. Israeli spokespersons refrained from providing information regarding the nutrition situation within Gaza's population—perhaps out of concern that rebutting the starvation claims would provoke some government ministers.<sup>40</sup>

Israeli spokespersons did not present the judicial oversight surrounding decisions on the detention conditions of Palestinian prisoners and avoided highlighting the close legal counsel that accompanied the fighting in Gaza with the aim of adhering to the laws of war—even though these facts could have eased Israel's image crisis and undermined the genocide charge.<sup>41</sup>

The Israeli government entered a state of message paralysis and ceased defending itself against false accusations of war crimes, deliberate starvation, and genocide out of fear of harming coalition stability and offending its more extreme elements. The lack of motivation on the part of official Israel to explain itself and defend against international accusations—despite extensive available exculpatory information—reflects a unique and ongoing dysfunction of exceptional severity.

In practice, the government adopted an “anti-public diplomacy” approach. This was particularly evident in the unrestrained statements by some ministers regarding the destruction of Gaza and the expulsion of its population,<sup>42</sup> as well as in a confrontational and undiplomatic approach toward world leaders.<sup>43</sup> Personal attacks against foreign leaders create an image of imbalance and impaired judgment, and certainly do not help persuade of the justice of Israel's cause. Extreme examples included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' decision

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39. Nadav Eyal, “[Bound in the Strip](#),” [Hebrew] Ynet, July 4, 2025; Professor Daniel Orbach in an interview with Nadav Eyal: “For reasons of appeasing the far-right base, we did not detail Israel's humanitarian measures. For example, that we allowed in more aid and more food than entered before the war.”

40. “[The IDF tried to rebut slander about ‘starvation’ in Gaza and was rebuked by Netanyahu](#),” [Hebrew] Ynet, June 16, 2024.

41. Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Tammy Caner, “[The arrest warrants from the International Criminal Court in the Hague: A Serious and Dangerous Decision—What Now?](#)” [Hebrew] *INSS Insight* No. 1921, November 26, 2024. According to Sharvit Baruch and Caner, “No clear public demand was voiced by the country's leadership or by senior officials in the defense establishment and the IDF calling on the security forces to act with restraint and to respect the needs of the population. As a result, the impression was created that Israel does not see itself as committed to upholding the laws of war. This, despite the fact that the orders issued to forces operating on the ground included restrictions consistent with these rules, and many actions were accompanied by close legal oversight. This gave rise to an absurd situation in which Israel imposes limitations on itself in practice but externally projects an image of lawlessness. A similar dynamic emerged regarding humanitarian assistance. On the ground, Israel worked to expand aid and maintained close coordination with international actors to address the needs of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, while the political echelon made statements implying that restrictions were being placed on such assistance and that Israel was acting to curtail it.”

42. “[Minister Says Israel Racing Ahead to Wipe Out Gaza, Will Make It Jewish](#),” Times of Israel, July 24, 2025; Jeremy Sharon and TOI Staff, “[Smotrich Says Gaza to Be ‘Totally Destroyed,’ Population ‘Concentrated’ in Small Area](#),” Times of Israel, May 6, 2025.

43. Maia Davies and Tiffanie Turnbull, “[Netanyahu Accuses Australian PM of ‘Betraying’ Israel](#),” BBC, August 20, 2025; AFP and TOI Staff, “[Issuing Ultimatum. Netanyahu Tells Macron Palestine Recognition Fuels Antisemitism](#),” Times of Israel, August 19, 2025; “[Netanyahu Launches Attack on Starmer, Macron and Carney after Washington DC Shooting](#),” Sky News, May 23, 2025; Matthew Doran, “[Penny Wong and Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Sa’ar Clash in Heated Phone Call](#),” ABC News, December 18, 2024; Jacob Jaffa, “[Foreign Ministers of Israel and France Clash Online Over ‘Pay for Slay’ Scheme](#),” Jewish Chronicle, September 4, 2025.

to delete condolence messages for the late Pope Francis<sup>44</sup> despite his role as the spiritual leader of 1.4 billion Catholics, and the direct attack on the British Prime Minister by Minister of Diaspora Affairs Amichai Chikli<sup>45</sup> without incurring formal reprimand.

The head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate was meant to warn the expanded cabinet, the political-security cabinet, and the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee about the severe damage being caused to Israel's international standing due to dysfunction in the public diplomacy sphere, the lack of clarity regarding the war's objectives, and the detrimental impact of the ministers' statements. The head of the directorate was also expected to insist on separating narrow political agendas from Israel's national interests and to ensure effective leadership and proper function of the Israeli public diplomacy apparatus.

The absence of a senior professional authority has contributed to the current politicization of public diplomacy and to the disregard during cabinet meetings and Knesset committee discussions of Israel's disastrous international image. And yet, no head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate was appointed to manage Israel's image crisis despite its acknowledged severity — perhaps in order to avoid confronting the internal contradictions within the government between ministers concerned about Israel's image and others who were not.

#### **4. Failure to Address the Humanitarian Aid Issue Effectively**

Despite recognition both in the government and in the security establishment of the importance of effectively handling aid delivery to Gaza's residents to preserve the legitimacy of the campaign,<sup>46</sup> there was great difficulty translating these intentions into practice. Israel controlled all crossings into Gaza and was therefore perceived as responsible for solving the aid problem. In practice, however, Israel viewed itself as obligated only to meet its duties under international law, namely, to allow aid to enter territory controlled by the enemy. International public opinion expected more: that as the dominant power in the area, Israel bore not only a legal duty but also a moral and practical responsibility to ensure that aid actually reached the civilian population in need or, alternatively, to repair its relations with aid organizations so that the humanitarian objective could be achieved. The repeated disregard by Israeli officials for this expectation was perceived—even by prominent pro-Israel commentators—as moral and emotional callousness.<sup>47</sup>

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44. "[The Foreign Ministry Posted Condolences for the Pope—and Deleted Them](#)," Ynet, April 22, 2025.

45. "[Israel's Diaspora Minister Calls Keir Starmer a 'Pathetic Doormat'](#)," Jewish Chronicle, February 9, 2025.

46. "[Netanyahu: 'We Will Not Be Able to Withstand Images of Mass Starvation Before the Americans'](#)," [Hebrew] Kan, May 19, 2025.

47. David French writes, "The dominant power in Gaza is Israel, not Hamas, and Israel, not Hamas, is the only entity with both the power to control aid distribution and the ability to obtain and distribute aid in the Gaza Strip. There is no way for Gazans to feed themselves. They are utterly dependent on Israel, and Israel removed the United Nations from the aid distribution network without replacing it with an effective alternative." See his "[Israel Must Open Its Eyes](#)," New York Times, August 3, 2025; Ross Douthat writes, "Deaths from famine are a clearer matter, which is why the threat of starvation is leading even some of Israel's strongest supporters to [warn](#) its government that something must be changed. Here, Israel has made a strategic choice, trying to separate food distribution from a system that it argues Hamas was exploiting for its own purposes. But if your strategic choice leads to children dying of starvation when the food is available to feed them, then a civilized nation has to make a different choice—even if that makes things easier for its enemies to some degree." See his, "[How Israel's War Became Unjust](#)," New York Times, July 26, 2025.

Despite unequivocal statements by the IDF and senior Israeli leaders,<sup>48</sup> Israel failed to convince international public opinion—or even the Israeli media—that there was no famine in Gaza,<sup>49</sup> as reflected in President Trump’s emphatic statement during a phone call with Prime Minister Netanyahu.<sup>50</sup> Israel also failed to convincingly rebut the UN’s IPC report (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification), even though it contained major flaws. As with the failure in media handling and the public diplomacy effort, there was no clear address and no single official authority responsible for the humanitarian aid effort. A dedicated IDF major general should have been appointed as a project leader for aid provision, responsible for all relevant aspects: removing obstacles on the ground, ensuring that food reached those in need, managing relations with international aid organizations, providing reliable and realistic reporting to the political leadership, and communicating Israel’s aid effort effectively and convincingly to the international media.

Israel was often perceived as tone deaf and emotionally heartless toward the suffering of Gaza’s civilians. It would have been appropriate—and it still is—to find appropriate means to convey compassion toward hardship in Gaza through steps such as providing medical treatment through IDF clinics in exceptional humanitarian cases and renewing treatment for Gazan cancer patients in Israeli hospitals. There may be considerable emotions in the Israeli public opposed to such gestures, but a responsible government should know how to contend with aggrieved sentiments, understandable as they may be, and act properly and in accordance with the national interest.

## 5. Poor Handling of Social Media

Israeli public diplomacy was thoroughly defeated in the social media sphere. During the Gaza war, the ratio of anti-Israel to pro-Israel content on TikTok was approximately 17:1.<sup>51</sup> The enormous quantities of visceral visual material from the fighting in the early months of the war, together with active involvement by influence operations in China and Russia, created a challenge for which the Israeli system did not have a proper response, and for which it still lacks appropriate means to cope.<sup>52</sup> To illustrate: Israel’s response to Hamas’s starvation campaign on social media appeared late; the content was unconvincing and poorly adapted to social media; it did not attract attention or penetrate the awareness of relevant audiences; and was essentially ineffective.<sup>53</sup>

Social media is the most significant battlefield for shaping public opinion among younger generations. It is an anarchic and chaotic digital space that amplifies polarization and negativity, posing a significant challenge

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48. “[Netanyahu Denies Reports of Starvation in Gaza, Blames Hamas for Stealing Aid](#),” AP, July 28, 2025; Yoav Zitun, “[The IDF Insists There Is no Famine in Gaza](#),” [Hebrew] *Ynet*, July 22, 2025.

49. Amit Segal, “[The Price of Flour Shows the Hunger Crisis in Gaza](#),” *The Free Press*, July 24, 2025; Rawan Sheikh Ahmad, Isabel Kershner, and Abu Bakr Bashir, “[Gazans Are Dying of Starvation](#),” *New York Times*, July 24, 2025.

50. “[Trump Exploded at Netanyahu in a Phone Call: There Is Famine in Gaza, I Saw Proof](#),” [Hebrew] *Kipa*, August 8, 2025.

51. Naomi Nix, “[TikTok Posts on Israel-Gaza War Are Overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian](#),” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2025.

52. Omer Benjakob, “[With a little help from Moscow and Beijing, Israel lost the social media battle](#),” *Haaretz*, September 5, 2025.

53. “Israel’s public position—a nation forced into a defensive war and making every effort to minimize civilian casualties—is eroded by more documentary evidence each day online” said Emerson Brooking, the director of strategy at the Digital Forensic Research Lab of the Atlantic Council, which studies online communities . . . In contrast, Israel’s attempts at reaching online audiences have faltered, said Mr. Brooking of the Atlantic Council. The Israeli government appeared to be ‘de-emphasizing persuasion altogether,’ he said, in favor of trying to shut down Palestinian social media posts by targeting cellphone and internet towers in Gaza.” See Sheera Frenkel and Steven Lee Myers, “[Americans’ Views of Israel-Gaza War Shift Alongside Changing Social Media Posts](#),” *New York Times*, October 1, 2025.

for all Western governments.<sup>54</sup> But Israel cannot take comfort in that fact, nor can it afford such a serious failure—one that has led broad swaths of normative young people to perceive it as a pariah state deserving only of condemnation. The deep and prolonged failure of Israeli public diplomacy on social media platforms is dangerously eroding the very legitimacy of Israel’s existence in the eyes of students and young people around the world.

Israel currently addresses this challenge through at least five separate government bodies, each working independently, without coordination and without sufficient professional expertise. These bodies have created at least six expensive and overlapping monitoring systems, some of which have already been abandoned.<sup>55</sup> Unless the effort to meet the social media challenge issue is reorganized under one official expert authority directly subordinate to the Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate, Israel’s ongoing digital failure is unlikely to improve.

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54. Ezra Klein, [“A Theory of Media That Explains 15 Years of Politics,”](#) *New York Times*, February 25, 2025.

55. The government bodies involved in digital activity include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, the Ministry of Defense, the Influence Department in the IDF Operations Directorate, and the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit. See Omer Benjakob, [“‘Inseparable from the war’: Despite failure of Israeli social media influence companies with Hamas, a new industry is emerging,”](#) *Haaretz*, September 21, 2024.

# Chapter Three: Urgent Required Measures

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Can the damage to Israel's image be repaired? Israel's global reputation, after more than two years of fighting in the Gaza Strip, is at a nadir which harms the country's national security and the security of Jewish communities in the diaspora. The declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza is akin to the application of a tourniquet which stops critical hemorrhage, but without healing the underlying cause. Anti-Israel demonstrations continue, though with diminished frequency and intensity, and there are signs of declining tolerance in many countries for disruptions to public order. At the same time, silent boycott processes continue to deepen without sign of abatement, particularly in academia<sup>56</sup> and in the cultural sphere. The proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and courts in various countries pose a serious threat to Israel's image and to the ability of Israeli soldiers and elected officials to travel safely around the world without fear of harassment or arrest.

Moreover, the duration and intensity of the war created an opening for calls denying Israel's very right to exist, in a manner that has made a deep impression on young people. We are witness to a malicious mainstreaming of primordial anti-Jewish hatred in podcasts and prominent public forums in the United States. The prolonged war and sustained protest against Israel have left a stain that requires Israel to adopt immediate emergency measures, as well as a comprehensive, long-term corrective plan for its public diplomacy.

## Essential Immediate Measures

### ***1. Appoint Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate***

A senior professional figure respected across the political spectrum must be appointed immediately. This figure will rebuild the National Public Diplomacy Directorate and lead the effort to restore Israel's image. The head of the directorate will implement immediate and urgent required measures and will formulate a long-term comprehensive work plan to reinvigorate Israel's public diplomacy, repair its strategic communications and address the legitimacy crisis in all critical areas.

The Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate must possess a strong media presence in English and Hebrew and will appoint a team of skilled spokespersons capable of engaging the international audience. The directorate head will take up the budget and leadership reins of Israel's hasbara apparatus in order to design and implement a national recovery plan which will guide all government bodies and ministries. Appropriate legislation should be advanced to create coordination between Israel's varied communication arms under the guidance of the national public diplomacy directorate. Specific emergency budget legislation should be enacted to fund both the urgent required measures and the comprehensive work plan.

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56. "[Even the end of the war does not guarantee the academic boycott will end—on the contrary](#)," [Hebrew] *Haaretz*, October 24, 2025.

## **2. Initiate public diplomacy campaign to combat the genocide charge**

The Israeli government must internalize that the state is sitting in the dock accused before the highest judicial forum of the gravest and most heinous crime — a proceeding that places Israel in an extraordinarily perilous position that can affect its international standing and reputation for decades. The entire Jewish people will be deeply affected by the results of the ruling and hence the defense effort should be viewed in historical terms.

Israel's legal defense must be treated as a national project. Political attacks by Israeli ministers on the International Court of Justice must cease immediately,<sup>57</sup> and Israel must prepare to defend its good name in the most serious and professional manner. The reasons for Israel's loss before the ICJ in the UNRWA case needs to be carefully examined and lessons learned — both regarding the weaknesses in the case presented by Israel and missteps in navigating the internal politics of the Court.

Alongside the work of an expert and charismatic legal team, a strong and adequately resourced research team should operate to prepare an in-depth rebuttal response to the many reports published against Israel and already submitted to the Court.<sup>58</sup> These response documents should be given wide public distribution, and not submitted solely for the private purview of the court. A senior staff officer, serving as the Chief of Staff's personal representative, should be assigned full-time as a permanent member of the research team to ensure the mobilization of all relevant IDF capabilities for gathering the materials required to build a persuasive defense, including - dedicated intelligence collection, access to targeting data and related considerations, the vast collection of video and photographic materials gathered during operations, and other essential knowledge held by the IDF and required for a robust defense.

The role of Chief of Staff's representative is to break down bureaucratic barriers, to assist the defense team in gathering all necessary materials for the proof of Israel's innocence, and to incentivize the IDF and defense establishment to gather and obtain essential exculpatory information not yet in its possession.

Israel's defense effort must include a robust public relations campaign using all available resources to prove Israel's innocence before the ICJ and in the court of world opinion. The genocide charge is weak and specious, but Israel may lose its case if the hostile political agenda attempting to influence the court is not adequately countered. Accordingly, the defense team will be supported by a public diplomacy team, led by the Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate, which will conduct a well-resourced campaign dedicated exclusively to the priorities of Israel's legal defense.

The Gaza war was improperly communicated, or barely communicated at all, by the Israeli public diplomacy apparatus - and it is now necessary to present the war messaging retrospectively. The public diplomacy

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57. "Sa'ar: ICJ Is a kangaroo court, weaponized by Israel's enemies," Arutz 7, October 23, 2025.

58. For examples regarding allegations of deliberate starvation and casualty numbers in Gaza: IPC Report, September 2025, "[Famine confirmed in Gaza Governorate, projected to expand](#)"; Paul B. Spiegel et al. "[Stop the Starvation: Restore civilian aid and protect health care in Gaza](#)," The Lancet, September 13, 2025; Michael Spagat et al., "[Violent and Nonviolent Death Tolls for the Gaza War: New primary evidence](#)." On genocide allegations, see reports by the Human Rights Council, "[Legal Analysis of the Conduct of Israel in Gaza Pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide](#)," September 16, 2025; International Association of Genocide Scholars, "[IAGS Resolution on the Situation in Gaza](#)," August 31, 2025; Amnesty International, "[You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza](#)," 2024.

team will address the challenge of the Wikipedia pages relating to genocide and starvation accusations in Gaza,<sup>59</sup> which currently present a plainly biased anti-Israel position. The team needs to address the specific photographs of allegedly starving Palestinian children published in the media, most of which their credibility is in doubt. Israel's leading advertising firms should be mobilized to assist in the planning and implementation of a compelling campaign designed for strategic audiences—rather than preaching to the converted, as Israeli public diplomacy currently tends to do.

The public diplomacy team needs to engage directly with prominent journalists and eminent scholars who write on the genocide issue in order to present to them directly the substantive Israeli position.<sup>60</sup> This essential step has not yet been carried out and needs to be rectified immediately. Some efforts to present Israel's case have been undertaken by independent researchers and online activists, but not in an official or organized manner on behalf of the State of Israel, which has also failed to make adequate use of their research output.<sup>61</sup>

Alongside the legal dimension and the public diplomacy arena, extensive diplomatic activity is required towards the member states of the ICJ, as the court is at least indirectly influenced by their national positions. Israel's defense case should be presented directly to these governments at all relevant levels to persuade them of the lack of factual basis and the complete injustice of the genocide allegation against Israel.

It would be appropriate and wise if Israel renewed medical assistance to Gaza residents suffering from serious illness and established designated clinics on the Israeli side of the Yellow Line to treat exceptional humanitarian cases. The war in Gaza is perceived by many in the West as a brutal conflict in which Israel made limited efforts to avoid harm to noncombatants and was drawn into acts of destruction that were not militarily justified. It is advisable that Israel take tangible steps of concern for civilian suffering in Gaza, as has always characterized Israel's Gaza policy prior to October 7.

Israel needs to recognize that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling will have a profound impact on Western public opinion. The temptation to engage in delegitimizing the court, rather than preparing and presenting a persuasive defense in the courtroom and to the world, is a strategy destined to fail. An ICJ dismissal of the genocide charge would significantly ameliorate the moral and reputational stain left by the war and would profoundly undermine the ongoing effort to isolate Israel. If the unfortunate were to happen, and the court were ultimately to rule against Israel, the most effective delegitimization of the ruling would be through the carrying out of a persistent, persuasive, well-documented and highly public defense as here proposed.

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59. See, for example, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian\\_genocide\\_accusation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_genocide_accusation); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza\\_genocide](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_genocide); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza\\_Strip\\_famine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_Strip_famine)

60. Piers Morgan Uncensored (Podcast) "[Is Israel Committing Genocide](#)," April 2, 2024; The Ezra Klein Show, "[Is Israel Committing Genocide in Gaza?](#)" August 13, 2025.

61. See, for example, the detailed report by the Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA Center), "[A Critical Examination of the 'Genocide' Allegations in the Swords of Iron War](#)," July 9, 2025.

### **3. Gather the leadership of the Jewish People and Israel's allies to meet the legitimacy crisis**

Israel and its allies need each other. The President of Israel should convene a meeting at the President's Residence of Jewish, pro-Israel Christian, cultural, intellectual and business leadership to brainstorm effective solutions to meet together the many challenges of the legitimacy crisis and to adopt a comprehensive plan to defend the right of the State of Israel to exist in security and peace.

The current attack on Israel's image is directed not only at its actions during the fighting in Gaza but also against its very right to exist as a state that embodies the Jewish people's right to self-determination. This campaign is finding a receptive ear amongst vital audiences that must not be lost—young liberal Jews, progressive evangelical youth, broad segments of the university campus in North America and Europe, and significant circles in the US on both the moderate left and right who are influenced by the toxic discourse at the extremes of their respective camps.

Israel needs the help of the Jewish diaspora and its friends in the Christian world and beyond to reassert the Jewish historical narrative and restore the term *Zionism* to its proper place of respect in the global lexicon. In the current threat environment, Israel will struggle if it must confront alone a global campaign of defamation on social media and delegitimization in the academy and at the widening fringes of American politics. It requires the strong support of its allies and friends in formulating and advancing a comprehensive, proactive strategy for the rebranding of Israel.

# Chapter Four: Work Plan for the Repair of Israel's Public Diplomacy

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This chapter presents a work plan for repair of Israel's strategic communications in areas essential for Israel's image. The purpose of this framework is to provide a comprehensive and integrative roadmap to reinvigorate Israeli public diplomacy which has struggled to cope with the challenges posed by the Gaza war (*Swords of Iron*).

## 1. Improve Engagement with the Media

**The handling of foreign media was poorly managed during the Gaza war** – the international media arena was severely neglected and lacked oversight from a single central authority within the Israeli public diplomacy system. There was no clear division of responsibility between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters and Israel's missions abroad to ensure adequate liaison with key broadcast programs, nor was there orderly cooperation among Israel's various spokesperson units.

Official Israeli spokespersons appeared only rarely on international media platforms. Requests for concrete information regarding IDF activities were often left unanswered by the relevant bodies: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit, and the Prime Minister's Office. During the Gaza war, no systematic briefings were held for the international media by the IDF Spokesperson, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Spokesperson's Unit, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or the National Public Diplomacy Directorate to address policy questions, communicate humanitarian assistance efforts, or respond to challenging field reports by means of verification and investigation. In the absence of a head of national public diplomacy, and without a single responsible address for press and media relations, engagement with the international media was ineffectively managed.

**Absence of an official spokesperson for the Government of Israel** – As of January 2026, the State of Israel has been without a head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate for nearly two years. This position must be filled urgently to coordinate messaging and cooperation among the various official civilian and military spokesperson bodies. The failure to fill this essential role has effectively meant that the State of Israel has lacked an authorized civilian spokesperson to present government policy regarding both the short- and long-term objectives of the fighting in Gaza. This stands in contrast to standard democracies, where even in times of calm and routine the government spokesperson holds an official press briefing at least once weekly. In the absence of structured briefings or of a responsive official point of contact, international media outlets relied on the extreme statements by ministers and political figures which did not reflect official Israeli policy, and information (primarily casualty figures) originating from Hamas.

**Large presence of international media in Israel: challenge and opportunity** – International media maintain an outsized presence in Israel, even in comparison to other major conflict regions. By comparison, more than 700 foreign correspondents generally cover war operations in Gaza, while only about 2% of that number covered the Syrian civil war.<sup>62</sup> Even in routine times, approximately 350 international correspondents live and

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62. "[Some Questions for Reporters in Gaza](#)," Canadian Jewish News, August 18, 2014.

report from Israel—a number approaching the foreign press corps in capital cities such as Washington and London. This large media presence requires Israel to maintain sufficiently robust media relations bodies to respond to inquiries, offer interviewees, and maintain proactive engagement.

The scale of the international media presence in Israel presents both a challenge and an opportunity. A challenge—because it exposes Israel’s policies and IDF activities to constant scrutiny and, at times, excessive criticism. An opportunity—because, if handled wisely, the presence of these media outlets can create numerous opportunities to make Israel’s case and communicate its perspective.

**Prioritizing Israeli media at the expense of foreign media** – All of Israel’s media relations bodies prioritize Israeli media requests over foreign media. Such preferential treatment is predictable, and indeed understandable, in a democratic system that is responsive to domestic public opinion and seeks to provide accountability. Prioritization of the Israeli press is particularly evident in the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, where only about 10% of personnel—out of roughly 700 positions—are allocated to handling international media. Despite the importance of responsiveness to the Israeli public, this resource distribution is unreasonable in Israel’s reality, and certainly during wartime, when the state faces unsympathetic and harsh coverage in global media on the one hand, but requires international support and legitimacy on the other.

In summary, the main challenges in engaging with traditional media are:

- Absence of a central authority managing Israel’s communications effort;
- Structural preference for Israeli media over international media;
- Overreliance on the IDF Spokesperson to communicate issues that are primarily political in nature;
- Slow and at times inaccurate response to media inquiries.
- Many inquiries by foreign media during the Gaza war, apparently the majority, went unanswered altogether.

### **The following are the key recommendations for improving media engagement:**

**1) Appoint a senior coordinating authority to lead Israel’s media effort** – to direct and coordinate the civilian and military spokesperson bodies in Israel. The two relevant persons to carry out this function — Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate and their deputy, National Public Diplomacy Chief of Staff — have remained unappointed for an extended period.

The Head of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate will present the political leadership with an assessment of Israel’s image situation and will guide all official spokesperson bodies accordingly. The head of the directorate will be responsible for message consistency, will participate in formulating government response and in shaping relevant initiatives, and will ensure that a structured process of frequent briefings to the international media is conducted by Israel’s spokesperson bodies. The head will also ensure that spokesperson units are staffed with a reserve of capable individuals possessing strong communication skills.

**2) Redefine areas of responsibility of Israel’s spokesperson bodies** – During the Gaza war, as in previous military operations, there was an overreliance on the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit for political matters, rather than use of civilian spokespersons who are intended to address matters of policy. Israel’s

frequent use of uniformed spokespersons on issues lacking a specific military dimension does not serve the public diplomacy interest.

The IDF Spokesperson should focus on communicating military affairs for which it has specific expertise and access, and refrain from addressing political matters which are the proper domain of the National Public Diplomacy Directorate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant government civilian bodies.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit should structure its human resource in a more balanced way in order to provide adequate response to the large foreign media corps operating in Israel and covering IDF operations. In emergency, a joint operations room should be established for Israel's spokesperson bodies to monitor international media coverage in real time and serve as a central hub for information flow and message coordination across all state spokesperson units.

An IDF Chief of Staff directive should be issued stipulating that information sharing and cooperation between the IDF Spokesperson and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other civilian spokesperson bodies are essential and integral to communications success, especially during wartime.

**3) Establish clear areas of responsibility and mechanisms to ensure response** – The National Public Diplomacy Directorate should ensure a clear division of responsibilities to guarantee engagement with the most important media outlets. By way of example, Piers Morgan stated on air that he had not yet concluded whether Israel has committed genocide. A statement of this nature required Israel's public diplomacy system to proactively engage with Morgan to provide a comprehensive response addressing his questions in full – a follow-up which did not occur in this case. Only in rare instances is it appropriate to ignore a media inquiry and refrain from responding. However according to many accounts, non-response to media was the norm in the course of the Gaza war. Israel's communications system collapsed and generally failed to respond to journalists' inquiries.

It is recommended to study Taiwan's "2-2-2 model," which requires official bodies to respond to incidents of disinformation with two images, two hundred words, and within twenty minutes.<sup>63</sup> Israeli public diplomacy needs to incorporate a model of rapid response and performance metrics by which media inquiry and response are tracked and evaluated. Such a model may prove an effective tool for ensuring quick reaction to false viral posts on social media.

**4) Expand the use of intelligence capabilities** – Every target attacked by the IDF is accompanied by a "target file" containing incriminating evidence and legal justification for the strike under the laws of war. When military actions cause significant civilian harm, such as strikes on schools and hospitals resulting in many civilian casualties, the non-classified incriminating evidence should be made available. Such materials were rarely presented to the international media, even in cases where the reputational damage to Israel was severe.

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63. You-Hao Lai, "[Disinformation and Civil Defence: How Did Taiwan's Civil Society Counter Foreign Information Manipulation?](#)," DSET, June 16, 2024.

## 2. The Social Media Challenge

**Israel's public diplomacy was comprehensively defeated in the social media arena**—from as early as October 2023, the ratio of pro-Israel to anti-Israel content on TikTok was no less than 1:17. This represents a strategic failure of Israel's public diplomacy for which there is currently no adequate response. Government activity in the social media sphere is managed by at least five different bodies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism, Ministry of Defense, Influence Department in the IDF Operations Directorate, and the IDF Spokesperson's Unit), which operate with almost no coordination, resulting in wasted resources and a lack of necessary professional expertise. Unless this vital issue is centralized under a single leading authority, the situation is unlikely to improve.

**Social media as a primary source of news** – Social media platforms play a dual role in users' lives. On the one hand, they serve as platforms for social interaction; on the other, they function as a source of news in every respect. According to research studies as of 2025,<sup>64</sup> more than three billion people used Facebook, and between 1.5 and 2.5 billion people used each of the platforms YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok. This gives social media platforms enormous power in shaping international perceptions on current issues, including Israel. As noted, many of these users consume news through these platforms. This is true for 35% of the world's population and approximately 54% of people in the United States<sup>65</sup>—making social media a more central source of news than television and print media.

**Built-in anti-Israel bias** – The social media arena is characterized by an anti-Israel bias. The number of users from Arab and Muslim countries, along with anti-Israel Western users, far exceeds the number of Israeli, Jewish, and pro-Israel users. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that some social media platforms exhibit systemic bias against Israel. For example, a *Wall Street Journal* study showed that new TikTok accounts with no connection to Israel or the Israeli-Arab conflict are quickly exposed to profuse anti-Israel content almost immediately after being created.<sup>66</sup> Former company executives testified that bias exists among management and among teams that determine which content is promoted on the platform.<sup>67</sup>

**Constraints on the official Israeli public diplomacy** – Anti-Israel content is amplified by state and non-state actors with vested interests who operate fake accounts (“bots”) that increase exposure and generate new content, some of which is false and AI-generated. Any Israeli use of bots and other technologies to counterbalance anti-Israel bias must be conducted cautiously and in accordance with the norms of internet ethics. Although many actors employ such methods, the State of Israel cannot engage in subversive or legally questionable conduct, as is practiced by network actors operating on behalf of governments such as China, Russia, and Qatar. It is important to note that solutions based on paid promotion of content have proven to be only partially effective, and at times even harmful, as they are perceived as lacking credibility.

**Nature of the challenge and means of response** – The anti-Israel effort on social media is characterized by initiative and sustained activity over time, regardless of the political situation. In contrast, the pro-Israel effort is largely reactive, focused on responding to negative campaigns and centered around specific incidents and

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64. Stefan Larson, “[Social Media Users 2025, Global Data and Statistics](#),” Priori Data, January 16, 2025.

65. Michael Savage, “[Social media overtakes TV as main source of news in US, analysis finds](#),” *The Guardian*, June 17, 2025.

66. Sam Schechner et al., “[How TikTok Brings War Home to Your Child](#),” *Wall Street Journal*, December 22, 2023.

67. Itamar Mainemer, “[TikTok's fact-checkers rely on Al Jazeera](#)”: [Exclusive report from the tech giant](#),” [Hebrew] N12, August 18, 2024.

events. It is necessary to learn from adversaries how to promote a continuous, creative, and assertive effort—even during routine times.

Additionally, the Israeli public diplomacy system lacks monitoring capabilities. Israel identifies discourse trends belatedly—for example, the emergence of the Hamas-led “starvation” campaign in the Gaza Strip—and struggled to prepare an appropriate response, both in terms of speed and quality of social media content. The Israeli effort is fragmented and managed by uncoordinated actors, preventing the pooling of resources and the concentration of capabilities.

Official Israeli public diplomacy bodies active on social media produce formal, polished content that tends to convince only those already persuaded and lacks the creative, “edgy” dimension required for success online. As a result, the produced content does not go viral or reach broad audiences. They can also cause damage, as the content is often perceived as heavy-handed and reinforce a view of Israel as aggressive and forceful. In addition, the official content is subject to a slow chain of approvals and generally aligns with the interests of the government and the responsible minister, rather than the interests and needs of Israel’s public diplomacy.

This does not mean that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, and other state bodies should cease producing official content, which is essential for the flow and accessibility of information and for refuting false claims. However, the overall approach must change. The role of official Israel public diplomacy should be to create conditions that enable a free market for the production of high-quality, credible, and potentially viral pro-Israel content. This task requires engaging leading social media influencers who serve as opinion leaders for strategic audiences, as well as creating optimal creative conditions for pro-Israel influencers in Israel and abroad.

In summary, the key challenges in the social media domain are:

- Inherent anti-Israel bias and a clear quantitative advantage for actors with anti-Israel leanings.
- A persistent, institutionalized anti-Israel effort, likely supported by state-supported influence operations.
- A fragmented Israeli effort managed by numerous official bodies without coordination, characterized by slow and clumsy response to negative campaigns, and an overall approach lacking expertise, initiative, and creativity.
- Failure to harness the exceptional capabilities of Israeli technology companies, Israel’s young people, and pro-Israel audiences abroad.

## **The main recommendations for addressing the social media challenge are as follows:**

### **1) Centralize responsibility for social media within a single professional unit, directly subordinate to the National Public Diplomacy Directorate. The roles of this expanded unit would include:**

- Developing doctrines and methods to address Israel's structural disadvantage on social media through algorithmic means.
- Leverage the expert capabilities of Israeli technology and advertising companies to manage pro-Israel campaigns and influence strategic audiences; develop and pool skills in creativity, research, data, discourse analysis, technology, and OSINT.
- Mobilize Israel's trust-tech sector (which monitors violations of community guidelines on social media) for the rapid detection of influence attacks against Israel and develop counter-capabilities. Israel is a global leader in online trust technologies, yet these capabilities have not been utilized to advance Israel's public diplomacy efforts.
- Better manage relations with major platforms to enable the quick removal of false content that violates community standards.
- Establish a social media division within the National Public Diplomacy Directorate, tasked with creating favorable conditions for pro-Israel content production in cooperation with civil society. This would include opening content creation hubs on Israeli campuses, hosting influencers tailored to target audiences, and ensuring content production aligned with audience segmentation and strategic objectives.
- Respond effectively to anti-Israel content on Wikipedia and in AI search engines.
- Respond effectively to foreign influence (e.g., Chinese and Russian) through diplomatic and additional means.

### **2) Promote a joint initiative between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora to address the social media challenge.**

Israel will struggle to deal with the full range of challenges posed by social media on its own—in terms of capabilities, budget, administration, and required deep familiarity with target audiences. The social media space represents both tremendous challenge and significant opportunity, but Israel needs the support, creativity, sophistication, and direct connection to audiences found among young Jews and Israel's young non-Jewish allies. This initiative will form a central component of the joint organization dedicated to advancing Israel's global branding.

## **3. Rehabilitation of Israel's Standing in the Academy**

**Isolation of Israel on campuses** – Israel is facing an unprecedented challenge on Western campuses, profoundly affecting the physical and mental well-being of Jewish students and faculty, as well as political discourse in those countries. From the Hamas attack on October 7 through the end of 2024, approximately 4,000 large-scale anti-Israel demonstrations took place on campuses across the United States. Campuses have posed a significant challenge to Israel since Operation Cast Lead (2008–2009), serving as polarized environment that promotes cancel culture and the silencing of Israeli speakers. These trends have intensified dramatically during the ongoing fighting in Gaza. Although the scale and intensity of protests declined following the October 2025 ceasefire, university administration de-escalation efforts and measures taken by the

Trump administration have not eliminated the high levels of hostility and anti-Israel sentiment that persist—particularly among a broad segment of academic staff. Israel remains intensely targeted, and opposition to it is viewed by many students as a central symbol in the struggle against global injustice.

Israel finds itself unwittingly at the forefront of the culture wars in the United States, a phenomenon particularly evident in academia. The university space is critical for engagement with the moderate progressive elite in the United States, and Israel has no interest in becoming entangled in the debate over gender, LGBTQ rights, affirmative action, minority immigration, and the other topics fragmenting the American discourse. Despite the inherent challenge, Israel must not abandon engagement with the academy. It needs to remain persistent and adamant in presenting the historical justice of the Zionist narrative and on the removal of the Israeli–Palestinian issue from the core progressive criticism of Western power structures.

**The ideological challenge among faculty members** – The difficulty Israel faces on American campuses is not limited to student attitudes, which can shift over time; it is compounded by entrenched anti-Israel positions among a broad segment of faculty. This challenge exists across many humanities and social science departments and is particularly pronounced in departments of anthropology, ethnic studies, gender studies, and Middle Eastern studies. These ideologically rigid anti-Israel positions are rooted in postcolonial theories that frame Israel as a Western colonial entity in the Middle East, lacking any legitimacy as a Jewish state. Tenured and junior faculty alike work to establish an academic infrastructure that justifies and embeds this perspective in their research and course syllabi, in the recruitment of like-minded faculty, in media appearances, and in active encouragement of campus protests. In line with their activist approach, these faculty members view the promotion of their particular worldview as an essential part of their educating role, rather than the fostering of critical thinking, exposure to diverse perspectives, and analytical critique—the principles that have traditionally defined liberal academia. University presidents at elite institutions often hold a broader and more moderate outlook than some of their faculty and may be willing to serve as partners in improving attitudes toward Israel on campus.

**The impact of Qatari funding** – It is estimated that Qatar invested \$4.7 billion in US higher education institutions between 2001 and 2021—more than any other foreign country.<sup>68</sup> Through foreign funding from Gulf states, Middle East studies centers were established that reshaped research and teaching on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in leading academic institutions across the United States.<sup>69</sup> However, there are conflicting assessments regarding the direct impact of foreign funding on current protest activity or on the organizations leading it. The issue warrants examination and investigation by appropriate authorities.

**Universities at the center of the crisis** – Not all universities exhibit the same level of hostility toward Israel, and the primary challenge is concentrated in elite institutions.<sup>70</sup> There are approximately 20 million undergraduate and graduate students in the United States across more than 2,400 institutions. Clearly, resources cannot—and should not—be spread across all of them; efforts must be focused on the most important institutions and key individuals based on a strategic assessment.

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68. Neetu Arnold, “[Outsourced to Qatar: A Case Study of Northwestern University Qatar](#),” National Association of Scholars, September 2022.

69. Martin Kramer, [Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle East Studies in America](#), Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001.

70. Robert Kelchen and Marc Novicoff, “[Are Gaza Protests Happening Mostly at Elite Colleges?](#),” Washington Monthly, May 24, 2024.

**Damage to academic cooperation with Israel** – Academic boycotts of Israel have led to a significant decline in collaboration between Israeli academic institutions and their counterparts abroad,<sup>71</sup> in cooperation among researchers, in publications by Israeli scholars in leading academic journals,<sup>72</sup> and in the participation of Israeli researchers in conferences. Israel’s image also jeopardizes its participation in international initiatives, such as the European Horizon program, which funds research in Israel on a significant scale.

Israeli universities have established a dedicated body under the Committee of University Heads (VERA) to address boycott challenges, but have not received adequate support from the state. The Israeli government needs to take a more active role in supporting higher education institutions—key engines of innovation and advanced technology—in confronting ongoing boycott efforts that have persisted despite the ceasefire.<sup>73</sup>

**The Jewish dimension** – Protests against Israel have often spilled over into outright antisemitism. Jewish organizations, even those less engaged in overt pro-Israel advocacy, have become targets of attack by anti-Israel activists. The hostile atmosphere toward Israel has led growing numbers of Jewish students to seek connection with Hillel, Chabad, and other local Jewish student groups.<sup>74</sup>

Jewish students on campuses generally hold pro-Israel views but do not necessarily act publicly on Israel’s behalf. Even among pro-Israel activists who are graduates of Jewish education, there is often insufficient depth of knowledge to confidently counter anti-Israel arguments. It is essential to equip pro-Israel students with the knowledge base required to engage in robust discourse on the justice of Zionism from a position of internal conviction.

**Israeli students abroad** – Approximately 26,000 Israeli students study outside Israel,<sup>75</sup> with more than 8,000 of them in OECD countries. These students represent a significant potential resource for balancing discourse about Israel in Western academia. A framework should be developed to train and empower this important asset.

In summary, the key challenges in the campus and academic arena are:

- Entrenched ideological hostility toward Israel among segments of academic faculty and some students.
- Boycott of Israeli institutions and researchers - often silent and undeclared, at times formal.
- Harm to Jewish students, many of whom are inadequately prepared for the challenge.

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71. Shira Kadri-Ovadia, “[Universities report on hundreds of cases of academic boycott and difficulties in cooperation](#),” [Hebrew] Haaretz, February 24, 2025.

72. David Matthews, “[Global research collaboration with Israel sharply down this year](#),” Science|Business, September 25, 2025.

73. Theodore Sasson, Shahr Eilam, and Derek Lief, “[How Israel Should Respond to Pro-Palestinian Protests on US Campuses](#),” INSS, October 27, 2024.

74. “[U.S. College Students and the War in Israel: Jewish Engagement and Social Tension on Campus](#),” Jim Joseph Foundation, February 20, 2024.

75. “[Data on Israeli students who study in foreign institutions](#),” [Hebrew] Knesset Research and Data Center, December 27, 2021.

## **Key recommendations for overcoming Israel's isolation on elite campuses and in academia:**

**Guiding principle** – The work plan should focus on the 100 most important universities, based on the following parameters:

- Leading institutions that produce political, economic, and cultural leadership;
- Campuses with a significant Jewish presence;
- Consultation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Committee of University Heads in Israel, and pro-Israel organizations active in this sphere.

**1) Initiate visits by presidents of the top 100 academic institutions to Israel** – University presidents will be invited to visit Israel under the auspices and hospitality of the Committee of University Heads (VERA). These visits should take place as a concentrated effort within 18 months. Consideration should be given to expanding the initiative to include senior members of university administration.

**2) Formulate a national plan to restore ties between Israeli academia and its counterparts abroad** – Establish a 100 million dollar annual fund for joint Israel–international research over the next three years aimed at rehabilitation of Israel research engagement with foreign academic institutions. The plan will support convening of academic conferences in Israel across diverse fields and efforts to strengthen connections with journal editors and leading research scholars.

**3) Establish Israel studies departments at select institutions** – Achieve marked expansion of Israel studies footprint through establishment of Israel studies departments at ten universities per year. These departments will provide a permanent Israeli presence among faculty and a meaningful knowledge resource for Jewish and pro-Israel students.<sup>76</sup> The departments should be established in a manner that ensures their leadership and faculty remain non-partisan and within the Zionist consensus.

**4) Prepare Jewish students for campus life** – Some graduates of Jewish education arrive on campus with insufficient background on the history of modern Israel and the Middle East conflict and are inadequately prepared to contend with the toxic and biased discourse. This gap opens the door to the common claim by anti-Zionist Jewish organizations that “no one told me about the occupation.”

In cooperation with Jewish communities, an Israel curriculum should be developed for Jewish youth to be taught in 11th–12th grades in Jewish high schools, at Zionist youth movement summer camps, and in supplementary synagogue education, equipping them not with talking points, but with credible knowledge and enabling education. Jewish youth in these frameworks need to study the history of modern Israel with the same seriousness as American history, including challenging issues such as the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, alongside the history of the expulsion and immigration of Jews from Arab lands. The curriculum should not shy from issues of contention and should address in depth the false claim that Israel is an apartheid state.

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76. An insightful Jewish philanthropist summed it up as follows: “Israel Studies centers need to be set up on campuses instead of buildings bearing Jewish names where anti-Zionism is taught.”

**5) Accessible online course: Israel and the History of the Conflict** – The course will be prepared by a recognized academic institution, taught by leading scholars in Israel and abroad, and will present the historical roots of Zionism, the establishment of the State of Israel—its political and diplomatic background; the society and economy of Israel; the history of the Arab–Israeli conflict; the peace process vis-à-vis the Palestinian national movement; the events of October 7 and the Swords of Iron war; and a credible, substantive response to the progressive critique of Israel and the accusations of apartheid and genocide.

The course will enable pro-Israel students to study from a trusted and reliable source and in a safe environment, and will serve as an academically rigorous resource for grounding the legitimacy of the Zionist narrative on an objective historical basis. Well-produced content purporting to teach “the history Zionist settler-colonialism” is abundant in the anti-Israel camp, and surprisingly – high-level on-line materials with in-depth historical content defending Zionism is almost entirely absent in the pro-Israel ecosystem.

**6) Dedicated app for the pro-Israel student and lecturer** – The app will provide information about developments in Israel both during routine and in emergency, and will serve as a unipoint, reliable, and immediate resource for essential updates for the pro-Israel community.

**7) Framework to support Israeli students and lecturers abroad** – Before traveling to the countries where they will study and teach, students and lecturers will be offered a course that provides debate skills, in-depth historical knowledge, and additional relevant training, such as social media content production skills. Follow-up courses will be offered during semester break periods when participants visit Israel.

A mechanism will be established to connect these students and lecturers with Jewish and pro-Israel organizations at their host institutions, as well as with Israeli missions abroad, to provide them with a support and knowledge network. The framework will focus on Israeli doctoral and postdoctoral students studying abroad and will include the development of an incentive program to encourage their return to Israel upon completion of their studies, especially in the fields of science and advanced technology.

## 4. Outreach to the Middle East: Media Activity in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian

### Definition of objectives:

- To engage with audiences in the Middle East in their own language, with respect for their culture and history, and to express the desire of Israel to live as a good neighbor and natural resident of the Middle East.
- To establish the legitimacy of a Jewish state in the Middle East by making accessible the historical story of the Jewish people—from the biblical period, through the centuries of exile in Arab countries and in Europe and the return to Zion.
- To present the Hebrew language, the ancient mother tongue of the Jewish people, and a sister language to Arabic.
- To articulate the Israeli position in the conflict and the aspiration and desire for peace.
- To promote familiarity with Israeli society, economy, and science.
- To present the Arab minority in Israel—its challenges, rights, and achievements.
- To counter antisemitic views in Arab societies and highlight the many similarities between Judaism and Islam.
- To serve as a reliable and accurate source of information on current affairs.

### Definition of objectives vis-à-vis Persian- and Turkish-speaking audiences:

- To extend the hand of friendship to the Persian and Turkish peoples and express respect for their ancient and modern cultures.
- To promote awareness of Israeli society, particularly Israeli communities and personages of Iranian and Turkish origin and their notable achievements.
- To make accessible the shared history of the Jewish and Persian peoples, in both ancient and modern periods.
- To convey Israel's position against the aggression of the ayatollah regime and explain why Iran's nuclear program is perceived as a strategic threat by Israel and the West.
- To express Israel's dismay and opposition to the escalating hostile rhetoric of President Erdoğan.

**A challenging arena** – Social media and established media channels in Arabic present a complex challenge due to their rigid anti-Israel narrative, which occasionally spills over into blatant antisemitism. Israel's efforts may seem like a drop in the ocean compared to the volume of Arab media and social networks and their hundreds of millions of consumers. Therefore, the task must be approached with humility and realism.

**Audience segmentation** – The Arabic-speaking audience should not be treated as a monolithic group. Content and methods should be tailored to varied target audiences. Messaging for Muslims in Cairo, Christians in Lebanon, the Palestinian diaspora, and citizens of Yemen, Morocco, Libya, Iraq, and the Gulf cannot be uniform. Communication with each group requires appropriate platforms, specific dialect, and calibrated messaging at a level of sophistication and knowledge that may not currently exist within the Israeli system. If Israel treats this as a vital objective, it will be possible to meet the challenge and build effective communication channels with the Arab world—but this will require a learning process, humility, and sustained investment and effort.

**Capability development** – The State of Israel must recruit speakers, producers, writers, and talent capable of addressing the diverse audiences of the Middle East. There is enormous potential among Jewish Israelis who speak Arabic and Persian, as well as among the Arab and Druze citizens of Israel who are native Arabic speakers. These individuals can effectively convey the Israeli reality and narrative to our neighbors near and far across the Middle East and North Africa.

**The deterrence message** – Israeli communication in Arabic and Persian also has a strategic role, especially during periods of security tension. This objective requires developing capabilities to manage campaigns focused on Arabic audiences and potential allies in the Arab world.

In summary, the main challenges in Arabic and Persian communications outreach are:

- Anti-Israel and antisemitic narratives entrenched over decades;
- Vast and diverse audience with varying politics, religion and spiritual outlooks, media consumption habits, and multiplicity of dialects;
- Capability gap in terms of knowledge and practical experience in the Israeli system which will require significant resource allocation, sustained effort, active learning and creativity.

### **Key recommendations for engagement with the Arab public and Iranian people:**

**1) Establish a dedicated government authority for media communications with the Arab world and Iran** – The authority will operate under the National Public Diplomacy Directorate in cooperation with the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation and will initiate a renewed public diplomacy effort toward the Arab world and the Iranian people. It will develop appropriate platforms on social media, websites, and satellite and radio broadcasts to deliver content to broad Arabic-, Persian-, and Turkish-speaking audiences. The authority will be properly funded and will broadcast news and high-quality content for at least 12 hours a day.

**2) Develop strategic plan for Arabic-language outreach** – Resources are not realistically available to create specific broadcast and social media content for all diverse populations across the many Arab states; therefore, a planning process based on strategic prioritization will guide capacity development.

**3) Engage with mainstream Arab media and social networks** – Initiate proactive effort to balance the narrative against Israel by offering interviews with Arabic-speaking Israeli figures. This will require developing a pool of official spokespersons with appropriate language skills, sophistication and knowledge.

## 5. Strengthening Solidarity with the American Jewish Community

This section addresses Israel's relations with diaspora Jewry, with an emphasis on US Jewry in particular. American Jewry is the largest, strongest and most resourced Jewish community outside of Israel, and the unrestrained public attacks on it since the outbreak of the Gaza war create a new level of challenge for Jewish communities everywhere.

**American Jewry under attack from right and left** – US Jewry is caught in a pincer movement between both sides of the American political spectrum. On the left, a progressive faction with extreme positions toward Israel has adopted anti-Zionism as a central tenet and seeks to lead the Democratic Party. On the far right of the Republican Party, prominent public figures are reviving conspiracy theories rooted in the isolationism of Charles Lindbergh and Father Coughlin from the 1930s.<sup>77</sup> The election of an anti-Zionist mayor in New York City, supported by a significant minority of young Jews, contributes to community demoralization. At the same time, the public attack by conservative broadcaster Tucker Carlson on Christ-killers, his national platforming of a neo-Nazi thinker, and his labeling of Christian Zionism as “heresy” are causing severe strain within the Jewish community. Within the most robust and successful Jewish diaspora in history, prominent voices are asking whether the golden age is nearing an end.<sup>78</sup>

**The Israeli component of the crisis** – Israel's isolation and the severe reputational damage to its image as a moral state have created an opening for ideological antisemitism to emerge at the extremes of both major American political parties. Extremists on the right and left have converged in a near-perfect manifestation of the horseshoe theory to accuse Israel of genocide.<sup>79</sup> It is unclear whether an anti-Zionist candidate such as Zohran Mamdani could have been elected mayor of New York without the toxic discourse surrounding the fighting in Gaza.<sup>80</sup> Israeli leadership is not responsible for the domestic American political consequences of criticism directed at it, but it would be unwise not to take note.<sup>81</sup>

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77. According to Ted Cruz, “In the last six months, I’ve seen more antisemitism on the right than I had in my entire life,” Cruz said. “This is a poison,” he continued. “And I believe we are facing an existential crisis in our party and our country.” See Joseph Strauss, “[Ted Cruz to Jewish Republicans: ‘Antisemitism is an ‘Existential Crisis in Our Party.’](#)” Times of Israel, November 1, 2025.

78. See Franklin Foer, “[The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending.](#)” The Atlantic, March 4, 2024. For a somewhat less pessimistic view, see Elliott Abrams, “[Is the Golden Age Over?](#)” Annual Assessment of the Jewish People 2025, Institute for Jewish People Policy Planning. However, the very fact the question is asked is in itself of high significance.

79. According to an interviewee well-versed in the American political landscape: “Israel’s isolated and wounded status as a pariah state invites the predators.”

80. “The split came mostly—but not solely—along generational lines. It’s honestly difficult to imagine a Mamdani election before the campus and street protests about Israel’s actions in Gaza; his campaign built on this momentum.” See Jo-Ann Mort, “[The Delicate Dance of the Democrats.](#)” Prospect, November 11, 2025.

81. A more critical position was voiced by Haviva Pedaya in her article “[Destruction and Symbolic Destruction.](#)” [Hebrew] New Language (September 2025):

“The erosion of the State of Israel’s responsibility toward Diaspora Jewry is greater than ever. The state’s extreme and irresponsible conduct—having defined itself as the home of the Jewish people and, on that basis, maintained a symmetry between religion and nationhood—leads to the destruction of the value of the State of Israel in the world. And the destruction of the state’s political, diplomatic, and ethical value entails the destruction of the symbolic value of the Jewish people as a whole.”

**Internal weakening of the Jewish community fabric** – This acute crisis occurs against the backdrop of long-term processes threatening the community’s continued vitality: high intermarriage rates and low fertility;<sup>82</sup> declining numbers of Jewish students in elite universities; weakening of the federation system and fundraising capacity; declining affiliation rates and synagogue membership in the liberal streams; internal political fragmentation between progressive Jewish communities and the mainstream Jewish organizations; and a sense among Jewish leadership that it is invisible to the Israeli government—a perception that has intensified since the war began and as security threats to Jewish communities grow.<sup>83</sup>

**The need of the hour: Renew connection and mutual support** – Israel cannot remain indifferent to the challenges facing US Jewry. Weakening Jewish identity almost always leads to diminished ties and solidarity with Israel. Beyond Israel’s obligation as the nation-state of the Jewish people, there is a need for gratitude: American Jewry supported Israel even before its establishment and has been a vital source of economic, political, and moral support throughout its existence.<sup>84</sup> Weakening of the American Jewish community harms Israel in every conceivable aspect, in particular it diminishes Israel’s public standing in the United States, and thereby contributes to Israel’s deepening international isolation.

Despite tensions over the years on issues like religious pluralism, US Jewry remains—and will always remain—Israel’s most loyal and important ally. American Jews are the essential and irreplaceable bridge for engaging the moderate American majority in both political camps; and this is the strategy required to curb the toxic discourse at the extremes.

Israel and US Jewry must renew the mutually empowering bond that has always characterized their relations, and need to get back to listening to each other.

**The attack on pro-Israel Christian allies** – Israel’s isolation has also created an opening for unrestrained attacks on non-Jewish allies, including leaders of Christian Zionism and millions of pro-Israel evangelicals. When Tucker Carlson accuses them of “heresy,”<sup>85</sup> he means to give voice to a broader assault on the very notion of shared Jewish–Christian values as the underpinning of Western culture and morality.<sup>86</sup>

In summary, the challenges facing the American Jewish community are:

- American Jewry faces antisemitism from the right and anti-Israel animus from the left in a significant challenge manifest in both US political parties.
- Israel’s isolation and its reputational damage facilitate an attack on American Jews emanating from both ends of the political spectrum.
- American Jewry is undergoing long-term processes that weaken Jewish identity and

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82. Among non-Orthodox American Jews, the intermarriage rate stood at 72% in 2020, and the average fertility rate was 1.4 (the average fertility rate for the overall US population is 1.6, the lowest ever). See Pew Research Center, “[Jewish Americans in 2020](#).”

83. Ted Sasson and Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis, “A Strategy for Protecting and Deepening Israel’s Alliance with the American Jewish Community,” unpublished paper, November 6, 2025.

84. Assaf Orion and Shahar Eilam, “[The American Jewish Community and Israel’s National Security – A Call for Action](#),” Memorandum, INSS and the Ruderman Family Foundation, August 2019.

85. “[Tucker Carlson Accuses Christian Zionists of Heresy: ‘I Dislike them More Than Anybody](#),” CBN, October 29, 2025.

86. Ross Douthat Interview with Yoram Hazony, “[It’s Deeper Than Nick Fuentes: Understanding the Right’s Antisemitic Turn](#),” New York Times, November 22, 2025.

communal affiliation.

- The pro-Israel evangelical movement is under open attack by influential figures on the populist far right.

### **Key Recommendations for Engagement with American Jewry and the Pro-Israel Christian Public**

A proactive strategy is required to reinvigorate Israel's ties with liberal American Jewry, especially with young people. If implemented, the below operative steps will boost morale and breath renewed energy into the Israel–diaspora relationship:

**1) Boost Birthright participation** – Birthright is the only program in the Israel–diaspora toolkit capable of reaching the vast majority of young Jews unaffiliated with any Jewish framework. A budgetary source should be secured and a recruitment campaign launched within Jewish communities everywhere to bring 70,000 young people to Israel annually.<sup>87</sup> Birthright as an organization is capable of carrying out this mission scale given appropriate funding. It operates through joint funding by the Israeli government, North American Jewish communities, and Jewish philanthropy abroad. Waiting lists due to insufficient funding cannot be accepted. As an emergency measure, the Israeli government should cover any budget shortfall for the next two years, if such required.

**2) Comprehensive program to renew engagement with liberal American Jewry** – A dedicated team will be established in cooperation with the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency, the Council of University Presidents, and other relevant bodies to promote large-scale visits by liberal American Jewish communities to Israel. The program will include:

- **Subsidized participation of 10,000 Jewish students annually in third-year study abroad at Israeli academic institutions** - This goal requires joint coordination between all Israel higher education to create program frameworks that meet international academic standards and accommodate necessary capacity at cost.<sup>88</sup>
- **Renewal of rabbinic leadership delegations from the liberal streams** – Official Israel should extend a hand of invitation to the rabbinic leadership of Reform and Conservative Judaism to promote study visits to Israel by the majority of American liberal rabbis in the course of the next two years.<sup>89</sup>

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87. The annual potential pool for Taglit-Birthright is 100,000 young people aged 18–26. Peak participation approached 50,000 per year in the years preceding COVID-19 and the Gaza war. In 2023, Birthright was forced to turn away 20,000 applicants due to budget constraints. The organization expects 30,000 participants this year but is unable to expand participation primarily due to budgetary constraints. Based on the organization's past experience, 70% of those placed on waiting lists do not seek to participate later—indicating that the creation of waiting lists is not a viable outcome. Source: Interview with Birthright leadership.

88. This idea was suggested by Ted Sasson and Avishay Ben Sasson-Gordis in “A Strategy for Protecting and Deepening Israel's Alliance with the American Jewish Community,” unpublished paper, November 6, 2025.

89. There are currently [2,200 active Reform rabbis](#) and [1,700 Conservative rabbis in the United States](#); therefore, this is a feasible undertaking, should a decision be made to pursue it.

- **Incentivize Jewish community visits by young families and young adults** – In addition to leadership visits, a strategic program should be realized to incentivize delegations to Israel from the 850 Reform and 600 Conservative congregations in North America.<sup>90</sup>

**3) Birthright for evangelical youth** – In cooperation with Christian organizations, 100,000 young Christians will visit Israel annually based on the Birthright model. This initiative will inject major energies into embattled pro-Israel Christianity and will provide the most appropriate and effective response to the ideological attacks by anti-Israel and anti-Jewish elements in the Christian right.<sup>91</sup>

## 6. Concluding Recommendation:

### Establish a Joint Israel – Jewish People – Pro-Israel Christian Initiative

The purpose of this initiative is described in detail in Chapter Three as one of the three required emergency measures. There is an unprecedented campaign aimed at isolating Israel and denying the very legitimacy of its existence as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This campaign is not directed against Israel alone, but targets its close friends and allies as well: the Jewish people as an idea and collective, the American Jewish community, Jewish communities worldwide, the pro-Israel Christian community everywhere, and indeed the foundational concept of Judeo-Christian moral values.

We ought not to act alone. The President of Israel should convene leaders and talents from Israel, world Jewry, Christian Zionism and non-affiliated prominent friends of Israel to discuss adoption of a planned strategy for proactive response and to establish a joint organizational initiative for its implementation. Israel cannot contend alone across all fronts—on social media, the academy and campus, the toxic discourse in the American political system, the intense anti-Israel sentiment in Europe and on other continents, and the severe antisemitism in the Arab world. It requires the assistance of its own people - the Jewish people, and its close friends within the Christian world.

Clearly the primary responsibility rests with the State of Israel and its government, which must undertake essential corrective steps in both policy and in operation and structure of its public diplomacy. Israel must take a hard look inward and ask how it reached such a low point in its relations with the international community and what corrective steps are now required. First and foremost, it must appoint a senior authority to manage the entire public diplomacy effort and rectify existing deficiencies. In parallel, Israel must properly prepare a robust and well-resourced legal defense effort to protect its good name, and that of the Jewish people, before the International Court of Justice in response to the false and defamatory accusation of genocide.

Restoring Israel's standing and repairing the damage of the past two years will require a major and protracted effort and will not occur unless the government defines and understands it as a vital objective. However, if Israel undertakes a sophisticated and broadly ambitious public diplomacy effort, it will be possible to restore its international standing and to return the term Zionism to its proper place of respect in the global lexicon.

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90. See the websites of [Union for Reform Judaism](#) and [United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism](#).

91. Pro-Israel Evangelical Christian organizations recognized long ago the challenges of the current era among younger generations, as well as the importance of promoting visits by Evangelical youth to the Holy Land and modern Israel as a vital component in preserving support and faith. Accordingly, they established [Passages Israel](#), which has brought 11,000 young people to Israel since its founding in 2016.

# Appendix—Terms and Definitions

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## 1) Is anti-Zionism always antisemitism?

This is essentially a semantic question. If the term “antisemitism” is meant to describe a psychological state of hatred, revulsion, or rejection toward Jews as a collective, then not every anti-Zionist position is necessarily antisemitic. However, if antisemitism describes - as it is most often understood - the adoption in practice of a hostile or discriminatory position toward Jews as a collective, then almost every anti-Zionist position is antisemitic, because it specifically denies to Jews the right to self-determination, disproportionately discriminates against the state that realizes this principle, and threatens the welfare and security of the overwhelming majority of the world’s Jews.

Former Harvard University President Larry Summers aptly defined the “antisemitic in effect” nature of the anti-Zionist position in his famous 2002 speech at Memorial Church in Cambridge addressing the calls to boycott Israel:

*“Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are antisemitic in their effect if not their intent.”<sup>92</sup>*

In this policy paper, the terms “anti-Israel” or “anti-Zionist” are used when referring to a position that opposes the very existence of the State of Israel, even though in most cases such positions are antisemitic in practice. The term “antisemitism” is used when referring to a position against Jews specifically, regardless of a connection to Israel.

## 2) What is the preferred term for Israel’s legitimacy effort?

In the Israeli lexicon, there are several terms used to describe Israel’s legitimacy effort,<sup>93</sup> some old and some relatively new:

*Hasbara* – Literally “explanation”. *Hasbara* is the term used by Israeli government and society even prior to the first days of the state and until the present. The senior state body charged with managing Israel’s communications effort is called in Hebrew the “National Hasbara Directorate.” Many Israelis tend to ask: “Why is Israeli *hasbara* so ineffective?”

The term is often criticized for several reasons. First, it is perceived as outdated, passive, apologetic, and ill-suited to the challenges Israel faces on social media, in street protests, and in the scale of hostility and delegitimization that characterize the current period. Second, since *hasbara* translates as “explanation”, it reflects a naïve approach that attempts to provide substantive, fact-based explanations can be effective vis-à-vis actors and audiences who are biased and driven by entrenched hostile interests.

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92. President Lawrence Summers, [Address at Morning Prayers](#), Memorial Church, Cambridge, MA, September 17, 2002.

93. For an expanded discussion on this issue, see David Siman-Tov and Ofer Fridman, “[Strategic Communication in Israel: A Journey Through Different Approaches](#),” [Hebrew] INSS, August 3, 2020.

On the other hand, the term *hasbara* reflects a value-based approach and the belief of Israelis and Israel's supporters in the historical justice and the righteousness of their cause. The term, in its stress on rationality and the possibility of dialogue, does not abandon the basic conception that Israel is a state and society worthy of the support of the Western world, aspiring to realize humanitarian-liberal values and to act in accordance with the principles of international law. The term remains in Israeli discourse because of the optimism and faith embodied in it—the world misunderstands Israel, but if we will just succeed in presenting our point of view fairly and effectively, a reasonable public will be persuaded and accept Israel's case.

**Strategic communications** – an integrated media and communications effort intended to convey a credible, coherent, and persuasive narrative to select target audiences in order to advance a strategic objective. This objective usually includes: preserving political and social resilience, undermining enemy morale and establishing deterrence, engaging in dialogue with the international community while preserving the legitimacy of planned strategy, and maintaining alliances and strategic ties. The strategic communications approach recognizes that actions taken to achieve these goals may at times conflict, and hence there is a need to balance vital needs that do not always co-align.

The term strategic communications defines precisely the doctrine required for Israel's communications effort. It highlights Israel's security needs and confronts the challenging reality without manipulating the audience, as implied for example by the term "influence." However, the term strategic communications does not translate easily in Hebrew and has not yet been fully absorbed into public discourse in Israel.

**Public diplomacy** – seeks to present Israeli soft power, including achievements in the economy and culture, and the values of civil society. The public diplomacy approach corresponds to branding efforts, cultural export, and the promotion of ties between states through avenues of civil society and not only between governments. Rather than leading with substantive arguments, public diplomacy advances a holistic approach aimed at generating appreciation and empathy toward Israel. It may seem likely that the public diplomacy approach is better suited to times of calm and peace than to the current period, which is characterized by ongoing conflict.

In the mid-2000s, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs changed the name of its Hasbara Division to the Public Diplomacy Division to reflect the transition from classical *hasbara* to a broader range of activities intended to promote affinity and Israel's attractiveness. The term *hasbara* is often translated as "public diplomacy", and hence the National Hasbara Directorate on its English language website is called National Public Diplomacy Directorate.

**Cognitive campaign** – sometimes also called "influence"—emphasizes the use of social media and other technological means to shape public opinion. This term refers to the unique challenge posed to Israel by the digital sphere in a chaotic, manipulative, and post-truth reality. It is clear that Israel must engage in this arena with utmost sophistication and energy, but it should likewise be recognized that overreliance on influence operations may lead to neglect of substantive argument and the advance of value-based positions.

In the Hebrew version of this policy paper, the term *hasbara* is generally used because of its uniquely Israeli and value-based character, but also out of a clear understanding that the term must undergo renewal and updating. The renewed Israeli *hasbara* effort must adopt and utilize a versatile and well-resourced toolbox that indeed includes “explaining” Israel’s substantive position, but also robust strategic communications, expanded public diplomacy, and a sophisticated cognitive campaign.

In the English translation of the policy paper, we generally used the term *public diplomacy*, despite its limitations, because it is the most often used English translation of *hasbara* and because it can be understood to describe the broad required effort described in the preceding paragraph.

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