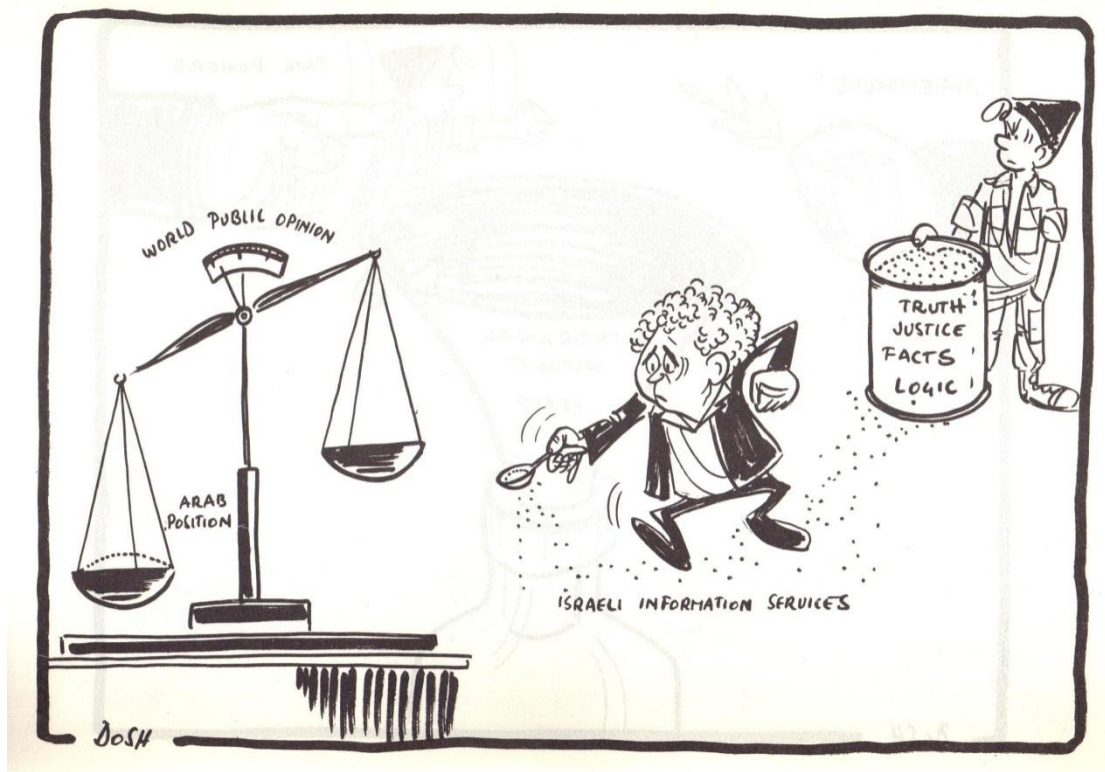


# The London School of Economics and Political Science

'Muddling Through' *Hasbara*: Israeli Government Communications

Policy, 1966 – 1975



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A thesis submitted to the Department of International History of the London School of Economics and Political Science for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

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*'In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who moulds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.'*

Abraham Lincoln

*'By persuading others, we convince ourselves'*

Junius

## **Declaration**

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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## Abstract

This thesis is the history of an intense period of Israeli attempts to address the issue of how the state should communicate its national image, particularly on the international stage. Between 1966 and 1975, the Eshkol, Meir and Rabin governments invested far more time and energy in the management of Israel's international image than the governments before or after. Those responsible for this policy were informed by a developing Israeli national political culture that bore the strong influence of pre-independence Jewish history and which reinforced the simple and pervasive concept of *hasbara* (literally 'explaining') as Israel's communications strategy. At the same time external factors, particularly the wars of 1967 and 1973, made government information efforts and Israel's international image far more politically important. Yet, by the end of the period, nothing much had changed. This thesis examines why that should be the case. Using newly-released archive material, personal interviews and existing research, this thesis presents a new assessment of the domestic determinants that shaped the formulation, institutionalization, and execution of Israeli policy in the period under review.

Three themes emerge from examining the domestic sources of Israeli government communications strategy in the period under question. Together, they explain why such an intense period of activity should produce such limited results. Firstly, the political culture of *hasbara*, an instinctively defensive, tactical, persuasive and Jewishly-rooted approach to generation and maintenance of international

support for Israeli foreign policy aims, itself a residue of the pre-state period, proved an imperfect lens through which to view the world, and was an obstacle to cogent policy-making. Secondly, structural features of Israeli politics contributed to the lack of substantive progress in addressing the perceived failures of *hasbara*. The ruling *Mapai* party was split between the dominant ‘activist’ camp, which broadly dismissed the pursuit of international legitimacy in favour of the ‘practical Zionism’ of David Ben-Gurion, and the ‘diplomats’ who attached a much greater value to it. However, whilst the *Mapai* ‘diplomats’ were sometimes strong enough to limit ‘activist’ policy, they lacked the power to articulate or pursue a real alternative. Given *Mapai*’s unchallenged leadership at a national level, the sporadic bursts of opposition – in parliamentary or public debate - on this issue in the period under review produced very little real change. In addition, the environment in which these issues were discussed accentuated the role of personality in foreign policy decision-making. Finally, in the absence of clear political leadership, policy was often decided by bureaucratic ‘muddling through’, a model that describes incremental change from a limited set of options, an already-familiar feature of Israeli political culture.

## Acknowledgements

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The research for this thesis is based in a series of interviews and conversations I had with many of the participants and observers in the episodes described here. The opportunity to talk to these people was an extraordinary privilege. I thank them all, but particularly Professor Meron Medzini and David Landau, whose wise counsel has enriched my understanding of these issues immeasurably. I am grateful to those who shared private collections of documents with me, some of which were not to be found in the archives, particularly Alouph Hareven, Moshe Yegar, Shlomo Gazit and Elad Peled. I would also like to thank the archivists and librarians at the various repositories in Britain and Israel I consulted for helping me find material that I found interesting, particularly if no-one else did.

The frontispiece, a cartoon by Kariel Gardosh ('Dosh') from his 1969 collaboration with Ephraim Kishon, 'Woe to the Victors!' (Tel Aviv: Maariv Library, 1969), is reproduced with the kind permission of the Gardosh family, and I thank them for it.

My family – Orli, Nomi, Tomer and Ella – has accompanied this project across continents and decades. Their love, faith and toleration of this *meshugas* have been constant in our ever-changing lives. For that, I can find no words to fully express my love and thanks.

London-Kfar Saba-New York

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## Abbreviations and Glossary

**Ahdut Ha'Avoda** – Unity of Labour (Hebrew); an 'activist' left-leaning political party which joined the *Maarach* and later the Labour Party

**CZA** – Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem

**Gahal** – Gush *Herut*-Liberalim (Hebrew); the Liberal-*Herut* bloc; largest right-leaning political party whose constituent parties were in opposition from 1948 until 1977

**Hagana** – Defence (Hebrew); the main Jewish defence force of pre-State Palestine.

**HaKibbutz HaMeuchad** – United Kibbutz (Hebrew) – grouping of *kibbutzim* represented politically by *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*

**Hasbara** – explaining; Israeli term for government communications, government information and press liaison

**Hofjude** – Court Jew (Yiddish)

**IBA** – Israel Broadcasting Authority

**IDF** – Israel Defence Forces

**IDFA** – IDF Archives, Ramat Gan

**JAFI** – Jewish Agency for Israel

**JTA** – Jewish Telegraphic Agency

**kehilla** – community (Hebrew, Yiddish); Jewish communities of Central and Eastern Europe, often with some level of autonomy

**LPA** – Labour Party Archive, Beit Berl

**Ma'arach** – Alignment (Hebrew); the political party formed in 1965 from the union of *Mapai* and *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*. In 1968, *Rafi* joined the *Ma'arach* to form the Labour

Party. In 1969, *Mapam* joined the Labour Party, which was once again known as the *Ma'arach*

**Maki** – Israeli Communist Party (Hebrew)

**Mapam** – United Workers' Party (Hebrew); left-wing party which joined the second *Maarach* in 1969

**mamlachtiut** – statism (Hebrew)

**Mapai** – Workers' Party of the Land of Israel (Hebrew); largest left-leaning political party, in power from 1948 until 1977

**MFA** – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Palmach** – *Plugot Machatz* or 'strike units' (Hebrew); semi-professional standing force of the *Hagana*

**poletz** – non-Jewish landowner or local power (Yiddish)

**Rafi** – Israeli Workers' List (Hebrew); breakaway party from *Mapai* founded by David Ben-Gurion in 1965

**shlilat haGalut** – 'denigration of exile' (Hebrew); Zionism's highly negative perception of diaspora life

**shtetl** – little town (Yiddish)

**shtadlan** – intercessor (Yiddish)

**TNA: PRO** – The National Archives of the United Kingdom: Public Records Office, Kew

**YTA** – Yad Tabenkin Archives, Ramat Efal

## Introduction

'The Israeli public relates to the problems of *hasbara*, particularly at times of crisis and danger, in a way that seems to have become a matter of obsession which is not easy to explain. In any event, it has no parallel in any other country in the world,' wrote Professor Yehezkel Dror as Israel's war in Lebanon ground on, further sapping the country's international support.<sup>1</sup> On the precipice, as Israelis so often feel themselves to be, the shortcomings of *hasbara* are an easy target. If only we could explain ourselves better, runs the argument, perhaps 'they' would understand us. If only the right words could be found, how much better would our position be. If only.

Israel's search for international support and sympathy is as integral and natural an element of its foreign policy as it is in almost every other modern state. A positive national image is a cornerstone of the rational pursuit of international legitimacy. However, Israeli *hasbara* ('explaining'), the local variant of this unremarkable element of international diplomacy, is the subject of endless, often heated and unresolved domestic debate. The success of the Israeli government in communicating its message to the wider world is triumphed in ideological-historical terms as proof of the normalisation of the Jewish people. Failures to do so, which appear far more frequently, are a cause for deep existential gloom. It is hard to imagine another society in the world that attaches such strong value to the issues of international legitimacy, but is so dissatisfied with its record.

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<sup>1</sup> Moshe Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] (Herzliya: Lahav, 1986) 12-17.

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This thesis examines efforts to address the domestic determinants that shaped the formulation, institutionalization, and execution of Israeli policy on question of international legitimacy between 1966 to 1975, a period bounded by the appointment of a minister with responsibility for government communications and the dismantling of the Ministry of Information. This was a period of unusually intensive attention to the issue but has not yet been the subject of scholarly research. The three Israeli governments during this period, of Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin, attempted to formulate domestic policy to address concerns regarding Israel's national image and its international legitimacy in ways that had not been done under the long premiership of David Ben-Gurion. During this period, Israel appointed a minister with responsibility for government communications, fought one war which fundamentally altered its domestic politics and its international image, introduced television broadcasts after many years' delay, appointed a government commission of inquiry into government communications, fought another war which shook the foundations of its political system and further damaged its international image, and established and then quickly dismantled a Ministry of Information.

Yet, by the end of the period under review, Israel had only been able to 'muddle through' questions of policy and structure in the pursuit of a more solid basis of international support, limited – primarily – by domestic factors. There was no greater sophistication in Israeli thinking on the subject, and the many organisational changes left no stronger administrative structure. 1975 looked a lot like 1966. The central inquiry of this thesis, then, is why did Israel fail to convert

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good intentions and sustained attention to an acknowledged weakness into a new policy approach?

The political culture which influenced policy-making during the period can be best understood by noting two deeply-held and conflicting perceptions of the importance of international legitimacy. On the one hand, as the inheritor of Zionism's doctrine of the 'negation of exile', Israeli political culture called for the end of Jewish dependency on outside legitimisation.<sup>2</sup> Given the accumulated experiences of diaspora Jewish life, this is not entirely surprising. On the other hand, Israel and the Zionist movement have never entirely disregarded world opinion, as David-Ben Gurion made clear: 'We are dependent on the whole world like every country and more so than every other country'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Israel has, at times, granted almost mythic power to 'what people say'<sup>4</sup>, and systematically – and quite rationally - pursued securing the support of the international community in order to improve its chances of achieving and maintaining independence. To care, or not to care about what 'they' think, say and do? This unresolved paradox formed the context for Israel's inability

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<sup>2</sup> David Ben-Gurion, Rebirth and Destiny of Israel (London: Thomas Yoseloff, 1959) 137-8. Speaking to a *Mapai* youth rally in 1944, Ben-Gurion said 'Exile is one with utter dependence - in material things, in politics and culture, in ethics and intellect, and they must be dependent who are an alien minority, who have no Homeland and are separated from their origins, from the soil and labour, from economic creativity. So we must become the captains of our fortunes, we must become independent - not only in politics and economy but in spirit, feeling and will.'

<sup>3</sup> Ben-Gurion's diary entry for 22.7.1950, quoted in Uri Bialer, "Facts and Pacts: Ben-Gurion and Israel's International Orientation, 1948-1956," David Ben-Gurion: Politics and Leadership in Israel, ed. Ronald W. Zweig (London: Frank Cass, 1991) 216-17.

<sup>4</sup> There is nothing irrational about paying attention to what people say. A 1951 study explored children's attitude towards foreigners. A Swiss child, who described the French as 'not very serious', the Russians as 'bad – they always want to make war' and the Americans as 'ever so rich and clever. They've discovered the atom bomb', was asked how he knew these things. He answered 'I don't know... I've heard it... that's what people say.' Jean Piaget and Anne-Marie Weil, "The Development in Children of the Idea of the Homeland and of Relations to Other Countries," International Social Science Journal 3 (1951).

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to articulate coherent policy or to implement structural changes to its government machinery.

Three specific arguments are advanced in this thesis in order to explain why Israeli attention to the issue yielded such limited results. First, the Israeli conception of *hasbara* was an obstacle, rather than an aid to cogent policy-making. Rooted in the experience of Jewish Diaspora life of highly circumscribed power, it was ill-fitted to the realities of modern Israeli statecraft. Second, within the dominant *Mapai* party, the security-minded 'activist' camp was powerful and largely dismissive of attempts to improve Israel's international standing. A smaller 'diplomat' faction fought unsuccessfully for more consistent and productive attention to the issue. Third, given the first two factors, policy options were severely limited. Israeli decision-makers 'muddled through', repeatedly returning to a limited set of possible remedies. It should be noted that the empirical analysis within this thesis highlights the bureaucratic politics, the dynamics of state formation and personal rivalries which were ultimately more influential than the residues of Jewish history in determining Israeli government information policy in the period under review,

### **The limits of *Hasbara***

The first argument posits that *hasbara*, the political culture determining Israeli approaches to the generation and maintenance of international support, acted as an imperfect lens through which to view the world and ensure cogent policy-making.

For the purposes of this thesis, Fein's definition of political culture is adopted:



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...how people think and feel about the political world, what they believe and what they believe in, how they behave, and how all these beliefs, behaviours and feelings are distributed among the groups in society.<sup>5</sup>

*Hasbara* is a concept unique to the Zionist movement and the State of Israel. Its roots are in the Biblical expression *sever panim*, meaning countenance or facial expression<sup>6</sup> which was familiar in 1960s Israel, the period under review in this thesis, as a slogan for encouraging incoming tourism.<sup>7</sup> According to Kouts, Nahum Sokolow brought the term *hasbara* into the Zionist lexicon, bringing a uniquely Jewish character to an emerging term of art in the field of propaganda and public relations.<sup>8</sup>

However, *hasbara* is a term difficult to render satisfactorily in English. Its literal translation - 'explaining' - is insufficient to cover the full range of meanings it carries in Hebrew. It has been described as 'soft propaganda and public relations' and as 'government advocacy',<sup>9</sup> and as 'public relations [that implies] an information offensive'.<sup>10</sup> According to Even-Shoshan, in modern Hebrew usage *hasbara* is defined

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard J. Fein, *Politics in Israel* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968) 32.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase appears in Tractate *Avot* of the Mishna, a transcription of Jewish oral law dating from around 200 BCE. See, for example, 'Shammai said: Make your study of the Torah a fixed habit. Say little and do much, and receive all men *with a cheerful face*' [my emphasis]. *Avot*, 1:15. The phrase reappears in the Jerusalem Talmud, a later exposition of the oral law dating from around 350 – 500 CE. 'Let not the judge be *well-disposed* to one and ill-disposed to the other' [my emphasis]. *Talmud Yerushalmi, Yoma*, 32:2.

<sup>7</sup> The advertising campaign picked up on this theme, using '*Hasber Panecha le-Tayyar!*' (*Be Welcoming to Tourists!*) as its slogan. See, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kaqLIZMrJuY>

<sup>8</sup> Gideon Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," *Kesher* 41.Winter (2011): 65.

<sup>9</sup> Margalit Toledano and David McKie, "Social Integration and Public Relations: Global Lessons from an Israeli Experience," *Public Relations Review* 33 (2007): 390, 96.

<sup>10</sup> Patricia A. Curtin and T. Kenn Gaither, "International Agenda-Building in Cyberspace: A Study of Middle East Government English-Language Websites," *Public Relations Review* 30.1 (2004): 28.

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as 'shedding light, interpreting something, clarifying'.<sup>11</sup> A more modern Hebrew dictionary refers to *hasbara* in its entry on public relations:

Public relations: *hasbara*, advertising, and propaganda on behalf of someone (a state, an institution, a public entity, public figure and such) that is intended to create positive image in public opinion.<sup>12</sup>

However difficult it is to pin down a precise definition, *hasbara* is undoubtedly a communicative act, a form of diplomacy. Diplomacy itself can be defined as 'a regulated process of communication', or as 'the communication system of the international society'.<sup>13</sup> 'Yet,' notes this author's first teacher on the subject,

traditional diplomatic historians, and indeed many practitioners, have too often failed to appreciate the extent to which the media are actually an integral part of an informed understanding of the foreign policy making process. They have tended to see the study of the media as a somehow separate activity, almost as a sideshow divorced from their own central concerns.<sup>14</sup>

Social scientists have produced a large body of work on national image and international legitimacy, with early work by Lippmann and Boulding supplemented and refined by Kunzick in light of the emergence of a more intrusive and ubiquitous mass media.<sup>15</sup> Since this thesis deals explicitly with government communications,

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<sup>11</sup> Avraham Even-Shoshan, New Dictionary [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1947) vol I, 288.

<sup>12</sup> Yaakov Shvika and Uzi Friedkin, Rav-Milon: A Complete, Comprehensive and Updated Dictionary of Contemporary Hebrew [Hebrew], 6 vols. (Jerusalem: Steimatzky, 1997) 776.

<sup>13</sup> Costas M. Constantinou, On the Way to Diplomacy (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 25, Alan James, "Diplomacy and International Society," International Relations 6.6 (1980): 942.

<sup>14</sup> Philip M. Taylor, "Back to the Future? Integrating the Press and Media into the History of International Relations," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 14.3 (1994): 321.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Lippmann, Public Opinion (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), Kenneth E Boulding, "National Image and the International System," Journal of Conflict Resolution III.2 (1959), Kenneth E Boulding, "National Images and International Systems," International Politics and Foreign Policy, ed. James Rosenau (New York: Free Press, 1959), Kenneth E Boulding, The

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recent research on the business of modern news management is also illuminating, building on earlier research by Bernard Cohen.<sup>16</sup> However, following Taylor's exhortations, this thesis seeks to take a historian's approach to understanding *hasbara*. As one historian has described it, 'it's the collecting of data, it's the collating of data, it's thinking about it, piecing it together, trying to extract meaning from it and trying to establish patterns out of thousands of little scraps of information'.<sup>17</sup>

So, *hasbara* is a form of diplomacy. According to Shenhav, Sheafer and Gabay, '*hasbara* can be seen as the Israeli interpretation of the larger field of public diplomacy,'<sup>18</sup> which Manheim describes as 'efforts by the government of one nation to influence public or elite opinion in a second nation for the purpose of turning the foreign policy of the target nation to advantage'.<sup>19</sup> At first glance, this seems a logical and convincing assertion. It has been adopted by the State of Israel, whose current incarnation of the Ministry of *Hasbara* is formally titled the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs in English.<sup>20</sup> However, it is ultimately unsatisfactory.

The contention that *hasbara* should be considered an element of diplomatic practice is contrary to Gilboa's critique of *hasbara* and his recommendation that it be

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Image (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1959), Michael Kunczik, Images of Nations and Public International Relations (Mawah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Barbara Pfetsch, "Government News Management," The Politics of News: The News of Politics, eds. Doris Graber, Denis McQuail and Pippa Norris (Washington: CQ Press, 1998), Bernard Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> Barbara C. Orbach, "The View from the Researcher's Desk: Historians' Perceptions of Research and Repositories," American Archivist 54.Winter (1991): 29-30., quoted in Margaret Stieg Dalton and Laurie Charnigo, "Historians and Their Information Sources," College & Research Libraries 65.5 (2004): 400.

<sup>18</sup> Shaul R Shenhav, Tamir Sheafer and Itay Gabay, "Israeli Public Diplomacy During the Disengagement and the Elections in the Palestinian Authority," Israel Studies 15.3 (2010).

<sup>19</sup> Jarol B. Manheim, Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 4. See also: Kunczik, Images of Nations and Public International Relations.

<sup>20</sup> [www.hasbara.gov.il](http://www.hasbara.gov.il)

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replaced with public diplomacy, 'the missing component' in Israeli foreign policy.<sup>21</sup> Gilboa's clarification is extremely valuable. It is true that *hasbara* shares many of Nye's characteristics of 'soft power' - of which public diplomacy is an element - which include attraction, seduction and persuasion, using the attractiveness of a nation's values, cultures and policies to act in a spirit of cooperation, rather than coercion.<sup>22</sup> However, there is an important difference between *hasbara* and public diplomacy: where public diplomacy is – or should be – strategic and proactive, factoring the effect of a particular policy choice on international public opinion before it is taken, *hasbara* tends to be tactical and retroactive, contributing to what Gilboa describes as a 'limited, defensive and apologetic' outlook.<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, according to Medzini – a practitioner, as well as an analyst - *hasbara* carries connotations of passivity, defensiveness and an instinctively apologetic stance.<sup>24</sup> In the period under review in this thesis, the disparity between public diplomacy and *hasbara* will be clearly evident. It is here, particularly, that *hasbara* is an obstacle to cogent decision-making.

If *hasbara* is not public diplomacy, it must also be distinguished from propaganda. Despite Driencourt's assertion that '*toute est propagande*', some definition is important.<sup>25</sup> The Zionist movement did not always insist on such a

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<sup>21</sup> Eytan Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy: The Missing Component in Israel's Foreign Policy," Israel Affairs 12.4 (2006).

<sup>22</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics (New York: Public Affairs, 2004) 5-11.

<sup>23</sup> Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy: The Missing Component in Israel's Foreign Policy," 735.

<sup>24</sup> Meron Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Levi Eshkol Institute for Social, Economic and Political Research in Israel, 1972), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Driencourt, La Propagande, Nouvelle Force Politique [French] (Paris: Colin, 1950) 26.

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distinction. Kouts notes that in the early years of the Zionist movement, its official bodies used the terms interchangeably.<sup>26</sup> Sokolow, the 'father' of *hasbara* used the Hebrew term *ta'amula*, or propaganda, as a synonym. In this period – the early twentieth century - the terms 'explanation' and 'clarification' (from the German 'Aufklärung' and 'Erklärung') were also interchangeable with 'propaganda' in English usage:

Propaganda is likewise disguised 'explanation'. Spokesmen for the administration in power are frequently given free use of broadcasting stations and the recent tendency of such spokesmen has been to gain favour by 'explanation'.<sup>27</sup>

According to Kouts, '*hasbara* is, therefore, propaganda in disguise'.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is unsatisfactory. Firstly, it is difficult to find a settled definition of propaganda in the scholarly literature, although there is a rich seam of attempts to do so.<sup>29</sup> At least one researcher has claimed that 'a clear-cut definition of propaganda is neither possible nor desirable'.<sup>30</sup> If *hasbara* is indeed propaganda, as Kouts asserts, we still need to agree on which interpretation of propaganda.

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<sup>26</sup> Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," 73.

<sup>27</sup> Hadley Cantril and Gordon W Allport, The Psychology of Radio (New York: Harper, 1935) 65. See also: Hadley Cantril, "Propaganda Analysis," The English Journal 27.3 (1938). 'Another method for building up public attitudes regarding someone's pet idea is to disguise propaganda as 'explanation'.

<sup>28</sup> Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," 73.

<sup>29</sup> One widely accepted definition is that of the Institute for Propaganda Analysis: 'Propaganda is the expression of opinions or actions carried out deliberately by individuals or groups with a view to influence the opinions or actions other individuals or groups for predetermined ends through psychological manipulations'. Jacques Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes (New York: Vintage Books, 1965) xii.

<sup>30</sup> Leonard Doob, "Propaganda," International Encyclopedia of Communications, ed. Erik Barnouw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), vol. 3, 4 vols., 375.

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Propaganda has a bad reputation. Tainted by its association with the totalitarian regimes of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, it had already had a 'bad odour' for some analysts by the 1930s.<sup>31</sup> That odour is persistent, with Jowett and O'Donnell noting that 'words frequently used as synonyms for propaganda are *lies, distortion, deceit, manipulation, psychological warfare and brainwashing* [emphasis in the original]'.<sup>32</sup>

Whilst Lasswell characterised propaganda as a tool, 'no more moral or immoral than a pump handle', Israel of the 1960s was not nearly as agnostic.<sup>33</sup> *Hasbara* was largely seen as legitimate and necessary; propaganda was its antithesis, carrying unwelcome associations with totalitarian regimes from which many Israelis had recently escaped. Two examples of the special sensitivity Israelis exhibited towards the issue appear in this thesis. Firstly, in the opening episode of this thesis, the appointment of Yisrael Galili as minister with responsibility for *hasbara*, drew comparisons with the Josef Goebbels' Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the 1969 Peled Commission on Government Communications explicitly opposed the creation of a separate Ministry of Information, since it was a feature of totalitarian regimes that 'as a democracy, the State of Israel would find it difficult to adopt'.<sup>35</sup> In that sense, if in no other, a distinction must be drawn between *hasbara* and propaganda.

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<sup>31</sup> Leonard Doob, *Propaganda: Its Psychology and Technique* (New York: Holt, 1935) 3.

<sup>32</sup> Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 2nd ed. (Newbury Park, Calif: Sage Publications, 1992) 2.

<sup>33</sup> Harold Lasswell, "The Function of the Propagandist," *International Journal of Ethics* 38.3 (1928): 260.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan Ribon, "Is the Information Centre a Ministry of Propaganda? [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 2 December 1966.

<sup>35</sup> ISA/RG124/4847/5. Peled to the Ministerial Information Committee, 25.11.1969.

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However, other studies have noted that 'propaganda itself is neither evil nor sinister'<sup>36</sup>, and that 'propaganda and information management are normative aspects of modern democratic societies'.<sup>37</sup> This may be a feature of a departure from earlier psychologically-oriented studies by social scientists, placing the study of propaganda 'firmly in the camp of the modern professional, empiricist historian'.<sup>38</sup> If that is the case, the questions raised in this thesis fit within in a body of work which James Chapman refers to as 'the new propaganda history', and which looks at structures and policies that determine the nature of propaganda<sup>39</sup>. 'New propaganda history' has focussed largely on the period of the Second World War, both the period when propaganda was most widely used in the pursuit of popular support for national goals, and for which archival material held under a thirty-year rule has become available. With archival material for the 1960s and 70s now open, Israeli decision-making from that period can now be analysed in that light.

Since some definition is desirable, this thesis will understand *hasbara* as a persuasive communication effort, using O'Donnell and Kable's definition of 'a complex, continuing, interactive process ...through which the persuader attempts to influence the persuadee to adopt a change in a given attitude or behaviour because the persuadee has had perceptions enlarged or changed'.<sup>40</sup> Toledano and McKie

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<sup>36</sup> Philip M. Taylor, Munitions of the Mind: War Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Nuclear Age (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens, 1990) 11.

<sup>37</sup> Kevin Robins, Frank Webster and Michael Pickering, "Propaganda, Information and Social Control," Propaganda, Persuasion and Polemic, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1987).

<sup>38</sup> James Chapman, "The Power of Propaganda," Journal of Contemporary History 35.4 (2000).

<sup>39</sup> Chapman, "The Power of Propaganda."

<sup>40</sup> Victoria O'Donnell and June Kable, Persuasion: An Interactive-Dependency Approach (New York: Random House, 1982) 9.

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suggest similarities between *hasbara* and *voorlichting*, or enlightenment, the term used in the Netherlands for government communications and public relations.<sup>41</sup> Their research concludes that the two terms share characteristics of ‘soft-selling “persuasion”’, and ‘dialogue, negotiation, and consensus-building’. This is a valuable contribution, correctly understanding that *hasbara* was initially aimed inwards – that is to say, as a tool for enlisting Jewish support for the Zionist movement.

As Avineri has shown, Herzl’s decisive contribution – ‘the breakthrough’ - was to turn the efforts of the Zionist movement outwards, seeking the support of international powers for the cause of Jewish national independence.<sup>42</sup> This, according to Taylor, was evidence of the essentially rational nature of Zionism.<sup>43</sup> Yet, as Schleifer and others argue, *hasbara* continued to bear the stamp of Jewish communal life from which it emerged.<sup>44</sup> This should not deter us from considering *hasbara* as a legitimate element of foreign policy analysis. According to Femenia, ‘emotion-laden concepts – specifically, national self-images – are an often ignored but essential tenet of every nation’s foreign policy-making.’<sup>45</sup> Sokolow, Herzl’s successor and the ‘father’

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<sup>41</sup> Toledano and McKie, "Social Integration and Public Relations: Global Lessons from an Israeli Experience," 391.

<sup>42</sup> Shlomo Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) 88-100.

<sup>43</sup> Alan R Taylor, Prelude to Israel. An Analysis of Zionist Diplomacy 1897-1947 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961) 2. Taylor cites Hans Kohn’s view that ‘political Zionism drew much of its inspiration from nineteenth-century influences which either had nothing to do with Jewish traditions *or were in many ways opposed to them* [my emphasis]. Hans Kohn, "Zion and the Jewish National Idea," The Menorah Journal XLVI.1-2 (1958): 23.

<sup>44</sup> Ron Schleifer, "Jewish and Contemporary Origins of Israeli 'Hasbara'," Jewish Political Studies Review 15.1-2 (2003). See also: Raymond Cohen, "Israel's Starry-Eyed Foreign Policy," Middle East Quarterly 1.2 (1994), Alan Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question," Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA) 3.1 (1999), Alan Dowty, "Jewish Political Culture and Zionist Foreign Policy," Global Politics: Essays in Honour of David Vital, eds. Abraham Ben-Zvi and Aharon Klieman (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Nora Femenia, "Emotional Actor: Foreign Policy Decision Making in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War," Social Conflicts and Collective Identities, eds. Patrick G. Coy and 12



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of *hasbara* never decisively broke with the values and cadences of Jewish communal life in the way that Herzl – whose leadership of the Zionist movement lasted less than a decade – attempted to.<sup>46</sup> Liebman and Don-Yehiya note the very strong influence of the consensual and consociational politics of the *shtetl* and the *kehilla* on Israeli political culture as a whole.<sup>47</sup> This thesis, then, will examine *hasbara* as an instinctively defensive and tactical, persuasive and Jewishly-rooted attempt to obtain and maintain international support for Israeli policy. It also acknowledges that the political culture of *hasbara* was an influence, rather than a final determinant, of policy. It is those characteristics which also form the basis for the critique of *hasbara* that runs through this thesis. The genesis of *hasbara* will be discussed more fully in Chapter I.

One final comment on *hasbara*: where the word appears in Hebrew – in official documents, scholarly literature, press reports, parliamentary transcripts or interviews – it appears in transliteration. In my own writing, I have used the word where appropriate, but also used phrases such as ‘government communications policy’, ‘information efforts’, ‘press liaison’ and variants of them where the Hebrew would be less clear.

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Lynne M. Woehrlé (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000) 41. For further analysis of normative influences on policy-making, see Amitai Etzioni, "Normative-Affective Factors: Towards New Decision-Making Models," Decision Making: Alternatives to Rational Choice Models, ed. Mary Zey (New York: Sage, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]."

<sup>47</sup> Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

### **Structural weaknesses: ‘activists’, ‘diplomats’ and the role of personality**

The second argument of this thesis is that structural features of Israeli politics contributed to the lack of substantive progress in addressing the perceived failures of *hasbara* in the period under review. Two features of the Israeli political system are germane in this regard. Firstly, and despite ‘the political party’s pre-eminence’, the adoption of proportional representation and consequent multi-party coalition governments, all of which might have produced a more dynamic political system, Israeli governments in the period were remarkably stable.<sup>48</sup> The most notable feature was that one party – *Mapai* – formed all Israeli governments from independence until 1977. As the largest single faction within government coalitions, and often with smaller parties that placed less emphasis on foreign policy, it determined policy in this sphere almost unopposed.<sup>49</sup> The second-largest party – *Herut*, later *Gahal* – was a genuine opposition, with an equally cogent ideological outlook and a stable constituency, but was not able to form a government during the country’s first three decades.<sup>50</sup> *Mapai*’s dominance allowed it to determine which issues were on the national agenda, and with what intensity. *Hasbara* fell some way down the list of national priorities, particularly during the long premiership of Ben-Gurion.

The second feature derives from the first. Whilst Allison and others downplay the role of personality in foreign policy decision-making, there are

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<sup>48</sup> Fein, *Politics in Israel* 67.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 121.

<sup>50</sup> *Herut* did join a government of national unity immediately before the outbreak of war in June 1967, and remained in the coalition until August 1970.

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circumstances in which it would be expected that individuals would exert a significant influence.<sup>51</sup> Jensen identifies four criteria for an individual to have a strong influence on policy: a high level of interest in foreign affairs; high decisional latitude; a non-routine situation; and ambiguous, insufficient or overwhelming information on the situation.<sup>52</sup> Those criteria are met as a matter of course in Israel. Israeli political discourse is strongly inclined towards foreign affairs and defence issues, and the electoral system encourages 'decisional latitude' – or a lack of political discipline - whilst perpetual crisis and information 'gaps' are also commonplace. It is important not to overstate this, however. Schulze argues that groupthink, rather than the overweening influence of Sharon over Begin is the most satisfactory explanation for the Lebanon War of 1982, whilst the *conceptzia* – the rigid thinking of the politico-military establishment in the run-up to the 1973 Yom Kippur War – was a dominant feature in that 'fiasco'.<sup>53</sup> In the period under review, though, personality did play a significant role in the search for cogent government information policy

One of the most influential and pervasive orthodoxies was that of the dominant 'activist' camp, led by Ben-Gurion, and which was largely dismissive of the importance of international opinion.<sup>54</sup> A smaller 'diplomat' camp which followed Moshe Sharett was more disposed to engage with international opinion, and whilst not often strong enough to determine policy, was sometimes able to block the

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<sup>51</sup> Graham T Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink: A Psychological Study of Foreign-Policy Decision and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

<sup>52</sup> Lloyd Jensen, *Explaining Foreign Policy* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982) 14-15.

<sup>53</sup> K E Schulze, "Israeli Crisis Decision Making in the Lebanon War: Group Madness or Individual Ambition?," *Israel Studies* 3.2 (1998).

<sup>54</sup> Brecher devotes an entire chapter to the difference in outlook between Ben-Gurion and Sharett, and by extension, articulates the key differences between Israeli 'activists' and 'diplomats. Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* 251-90.

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'activists'. This 'maladroit admixture of military activism and diplomatic immobility' was, according to Shlaim and Yaniv, a recipe for a foreign policy that was unsystematic, directionless and 'singularly reactive'.<sup>55</sup> This argument, then, resonates with a core proposition of the previous theme – the essentially reactive nature of *hasbara*.

Ben-Gurion and Sharett, the pre-eminent figures of the formative years of Israeli politics, personified the 'activist' and 'diplomat' strands of Israeli foreign-policy attitudes. Their outlook was rooted in differences in personality, character and outlook: where Ben-Gurion was decisive and single-minded, Sharett was hesitant and careful.<sup>56</sup> According to Shimon Peres, although Ben-Gurion respected Sharett's personal qualities 'he felt that Sharett lived in an artificial world where gestures, words, were given great importance'.<sup>57</sup> Ben-Gurion's outlook was different, placing almost exclusive emphasis on Jewish action, encapsulated in his well-known phrase 'our future does not depend on what the goyim say, but on what the Jews do'.<sup>58</sup>

Abba Eban later wrote:

The difficulties between Ben-Gurion and Sharett went far beyond quarrels over 'turf'. In theory, they should have constituted a balanced harmony. Each possessed some virtues and had some faults that the other lacked: Ben

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<sup>55</sup> Avi Shlaim and Avner Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," International Affairs 56.2 (1980): 242.

<sup>56</sup> Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process 253.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Shimon Peres, June 1966. Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process 255.

<sup>58</sup> Speech to IDF Independence Day Parade, Ramat Gan, 27.4.1955. BGA. *Goyim* is a mildly denigrating term for non-Jews, or for the non-Jewish world. Ben-Gurion's other well-known phrase on the issue dates from the same year. Sharett records Ben-Gurion as saying 'it was the daring of the Jews that created the state, not the decisions of *Oom-Shmoom*', a mocking diminution of the Hebrew term for the UN. Moshe Sharett, Personal Diary [Hebrew], 8 vols. (Tel Aviv: *Maariv*, 1978). 29.3.1955, vol.4, p. 174. For a fuller discussion of the genesis and significance of *Oom-Shmoom*-ism, see Neil Caplan, "Oom Shmoom Revisited: Sharett and Ben-Gurion," Association for Israel Studies Annual Conference (2010).

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Gurion was impulsive, imaginative, daring, dynamic; Sharett was prudent, rational, analytical, realistic. Had they been able to work in close harness, an ideal equilibrium might have been achieved. But the contradictions that divided their characters also created an incompatibility of emotion... Far from moving toward a sense of partnership, they had become unable to bear the sight of each other. Ben-Gurion thought that Sharett was talented, but pedantic, excessively meticulous, and inclined to confuse the vital with the incidental. Sharett, with all his admiration for Ben-Gurion, considered him demagogic, tyrannical, opinionated, devious, and, on some occasions, not quite rational. Their complementary virtues should have been harnessed for the national interest, but their antipathies were too strong for those potentialities to be fulfilled.<sup>59</sup>

According to Sheffer, the fundamental incompatibility of their two outlooks was that of the search for 'conflict resolution' (Sharett) as opposed to 'conflict management' (Ben-Gurion).<sup>60</sup> The two clashed repeatedly throughout the four decades during which they were the dominant voices in Israeli politics, but the difference was perhaps clearest during the campaign for Israel's independence in 1947-8. Whilst Sharett the 'diplomat' sought the support of the United Nations for its partition plan<sup>61</sup>, Ben-Gurion the 'activist' was single-minded in his belief in the military route:

I find it difficult now to understand any other language than the language of war. Any other language sounds to me like a foreign tongue which I heard once and which has since, as it were, sunk into oblivion.<sup>62</sup>

The activist-diplomat schism was far more pervasive than a difference in outlook between the two men. Disagreements over Israel's policy of retaliation against cross-

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<sup>59</sup> Abba Eban, Personal Witness: Israel through My Eyes (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992) 249-50.

<sup>60</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, Resolution vs Management of the Middle East Conflict: A Reexamination of the Confrontation between Moshe Sharett and David Ben-Gurion [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1980).

<sup>61</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, Moshe Sharett : Biography of a Political Moderate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 244-70.

<sup>62</sup> Zeev Sherf, Three Days (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962) 191.

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border raids, the Lavon Affair of 1954 and the Suez War of 1956 can all be traced to this fundamental difference in thinking. It was a primary factor in the ousting of Sharett from the foreign ministry, and from front-line politics in 1956.<sup>63</sup> And crucially, the next generation of Israeli leaders maintained the distinction. Amongst the 'activists' Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres rose to prominence, whilst Yigal Allon and Abba Eban continued in Sharett's more moderate 'diplomat' style.<sup>64</sup>

Two additional aspects of Israeli political life which limited policy innovation must also be factored into this argument. From June 1967, the question of what to do with the territories captured during the Six Day War became a dominant – if not the only – determinant of Israeli foreign policy. Competing 'activist' and 'diplomat' approaches were replicated, intensified and sometimes complicated by the emergence of 'hawk' and 'dove' camps on the Palestinian question.<sup>65</sup> According to Aran, 'political divisions stretched across a multidimensional dove-hawk spectrum'.<sup>66</sup> The crowded political agenda had even less room for an already marginal discussion regarding the importance of international opinion. And, as Freilich notes, the central administration of Israeli politics, the Prime Minister's Office, the Cabinet Secretariat

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<sup>63</sup> Neil Caplan, "The 1956 Sinai Campaign Viewed from Asia: Selections from Moshe Sharett's Diaries," *Israel Studies* 7.1 (2002).

<sup>64</sup> Paraphrasing Henry Kissinger's well-known remark about Israeli foreign and domestic policy, Dayan is quoted as saying 'Israel does not have a foreign policy. It only has a defence policy.' Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Siege: The Saga of Israel and Zionism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986) 508.

<sup>65</sup> Avner Yaniv and Fabian Pascal, "Doves, Hawks, and Other Birds of a Feather: The Distribution of Israeli Parliamentary Opinion on the Future of the Occupied Territories, 1967–1977," *British Journal of Political Science* 10 2 (1980).

<sup>66</sup> Amnon Aran, *Israel's Foreign Policy toward the PLO: The Impact of Globalization* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009) 20.

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and the prime minister's private office, generally lacked 'the capacity to conduct systematic policy formulation and coordination'.<sup>67</sup>

It is important not to overstate the claim, however. Despite the constraints of the political system, Israel was a fully-functioning society and polity in the period under examination. Indeed, according to Dror, Israel was able to confront extraordinary challenges partly *because* of its unique political system.<sup>68</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv's proposition is valuable here: 'a severely constrained and reactive foreign policy, while not conducive to success in attaining national goals, is not doomed to perpetual failure either'.<sup>69</sup> This thesis will examine the development of one element of Israeli foreign policy – its efforts at obtaining and maintaining international support – in light of that proposition.

In order to do so, it locates itself within a broader debate on Israeli foreign policy. Several themes emerge from the scholarly literature. Firstly, to what extent does the regional environment influence the way Israel conducts its foreign policy? According to Harkabi, sustained external threat is a strong determinant of Israeli foreign policy, whilst Inbar notes that a more benign international environment can result in a lowered Israeli threat perception.<sup>70</sup> Dror has proposed that Israel's

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<sup>67</sup> The distinction between the Prime Minister's Office (*Misrad Rosh HaMemshala*) and the prime minister's private office (*Lishkat Rosh HaMemshala*) is slightly clearer in Hebrew. Charles Freilich, "National Security Decision-Making in Israel: Processes, Pathologies, and Strengths," *Middle East Journal* 60.4 (2006): 641-42.

<sup>68</sup> Benjamin Azkin and Yehezkel Dror, *Israel: High-Pressure Planning* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966).

<sup>69</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," 247.

<sup>70</sup> Yehoshafat Harkabi and Misha Louvish, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1972), Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Strategies and Israel's Response* (London: Collier Macmillan, 1977), Efraim Inbar, "Israeli National Security, 1973-1996," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558 1 (1998). the Israeli level of threat

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environment is so threatening as to be *sui generis*, and that in such circumstances, uncertainty is a norm and crises are expected.<sup>71</sup> Shlaim and others also note that regional uncertainty calls for high levels of flexibility and improvisation.<sup>72</sup> Aran identifies a second theme in the literature, that Israeli foreign policy is determined by ideological predispositions.<sup>73</sup> Finally, researchers have written extensively on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy in Israel, which 'is particularly profound because foreign policy involves existential questions and questions of national identity which weigh much more heavily on the mind of the Israeli public than on that of most other countries.'<sup>74</sup> In other words, according to Henry Kissinger, 'Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic politics'.<sup>75</sup>

Yet, as Brecher pointed out, these themes are complementary, rather than competing. His pioneering work on Israeli foreign policy remains the most comprehensive study of the subject.<sup>76</sup> The three approaches outlined above are described as the 'Operational Environment' (Part I), the regional setting, as well as domestic military, economic and political structures; the 'Psychological Environment' (Part II), the ideological or 'attitudinal prism' of decision-makers; and the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy in 'Process' (Part III).

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perception became lower primarily because of the emergence of a more benign international environment

<sup>71</sup> Yehezkel Dror, Grand Strategy for Israel [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1989) 69.

<sup>72</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," 242, Raphaella Bilski Ben-Hur, Can Planning Replace Politics?: The Israeli Experience, Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation Series (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980) 115.

<sup>73</sup> Aran, Israel's Foreign Policy toward the PLO: The Impact of Globalization 10.

<sup>74</sup> Avi Shlaim, "Israeli Politics and Middle East Peacemaking," Journal of Palestine Studies 24.4 (1995): 21, Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel."

<sup>75</sup> Edward R. F. Sheehan, The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East (New York: Reader's Digest Press, 1976) 163.

<sup>76</sup> Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process, Michael Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).



### **The political culture of ‘muddling through’**

Given the conceptual and practical limitations placed on decision-makers, this thesis advances a third argument: changes in Israeli government communications policy in the period under review conform to Lindblom’s assertion that ‘democracies change their policies almost entirely through incremental adjustments. Policy does not move in leaps and bounds.’<sup>77</sup> In Etzioni’s terminology, policy-making is a process of ‘disjointed incrementalism’<sup>78</sup>. ‘Muddling through’, as the theory was titled, was described and developed in a well-known series of articles and books<sup>79</sup>. The original article has been reprinted in some 40 anthologies<sup>80</sup>; Lindblom’s two books on the subject are ‘classics’<sup>81</sup>. His claim that small and incremental policy changes are characteristic of pluralistic societies, as opposed to the centralised planning of totalitarian societies, is relatively uncontroversial. However, his assertion that such ‘muddle’ is often preferable to radical change, has drawn critical responses<sup>82</sup> and

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<sup>77</sup> Charles Edward Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," Public Administration Review 19 (1959): 84.

<sup>78</sup> Amitai Etzioni, "Mixed-Scanning: A 'Third Approach' to Decision-Making," Public Administration Review 27.5 (1967): 386.

<sup>79</sup> Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through.", Charles Edward Lindblom, "Still Muddling, Not yet Through," Public Administration Review 39.6 (1979), David Braybrooke and Charles Edward Lindblom, A Strategy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), Charles Edward Lindblom, The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision Making through Mutual Adjustment (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1965).

<sup>80</sup> Lindblom, "Still Muddling, Not yet Through," 524.

<sup>81</sup> Jonathan Bendor, "A Model of Muddling Through," The American Political Science Review 89.4 (1995): 819.

<sup>82</sup> Yehezkel Dror, "Muddling Through: 'Science' or Inertia?," Public Administration Review 24.3 (1964), Etzioni, "Mixed-Scanning: A 'Third Approach' to Decision-Making.", Kenneth J Arrow, "A Strategy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process, Reviewed by Kenneth Arrow," Political Science Quarterly 79 4 (1964). Dror raised concerns that the article would reinforce ‘pro-inertia and anti-innovation forces prevalent in all human organizations’, whilst Arrow worried it was ‘a complacent acceptance of our imperfections’.

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remains largely speculative.<sup>83</sup> Other elements of the model – the beneficial effects of repeated attempts to solve policy problems ('seriality') and of several policy-makers working on a problem in parallel ('redundancy') – are also relevant to the subject of this thesis.<sup>84</sup>

This thesis does not engage any further with the theoretical discussion of the applicability of Lindblom's work, and adopts the concept of 'muddling through' in its descriptive, rather than its prescriptive term. However, two words of caution are necessary here. Firstly, it would be unwise to ignore the generally conservative nature of government decision-making, and its natural resistance to radical change. The absence of sweeping policy initiatives is the norm, rather than a regrettable exception or a particular Israeli weakness. Secondly, it is inherent in the adversarial nature of politics that 'competing values and groups reach agreement through compromise'.<sup>85</sup>

In Lindblom's own words, there are six indicators of 'muddling through', which are useful in assessing whether Israeli government information policy conforms to the model:

1. Rather than attempting a comprehensive survey and evaluation of all alternatives, the decision-maker focuses only on those policies which differ incrementally from existing policies.
2. Only a relatively small number of policy alternatives are considered.
3. For each policy alternative, only a restricted number of "important" consequences are evaluated.

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<sup>83</sup> 'This is a frustrating and unsatisfactory state of affairs. Three-and-a-half decades after 'The Science of Muddling Through' was published, we should have a better grasp of the theory's central propositions.' Bendor, "A Model of Muddling Through," 819.

<sup>84</sup> Bendor, "A Model of Muddling Through."

<sup>85</sup> Camille Cates, "Beyond Muddling: Creativity," Public Administration Review 39.6 (1979): 528.

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4. The problem confronting the decisionmaker is continually redefined: Incrementalism allows for countless ends-means and means-ends adjustments which, in effect, make the problem more manageable.
5. Thus, there is no one decision or "right" solution but a "never-ending series of attacks" on the issues at hand through serial analyses and evaluation.
6. As such, incremental decision-making is described as remedial, geared more to the alleviation of present, concrete social imperfections than to the promotion of future social goals.<sup>86</sup>

In another article, he compares the ideal of fully rational decision-making (the 'Rational-Comprehensive' model) with the far more realistic model of Successive

Limited Comparisons:

Rational-Comprehensive model	Successive Limited Comparisons
1a. Clarification of values or objectives distinct from and usually prerequisite to empirical analysis of alternative policies	1b. Selection of value goals and empirical analysis of the needed action are not distinct from one another by are closely intertwined
2a. Policy-formulation is therefore approached through means-ends analysis. First the ends are isolated, then the means to achieve them are sought.	2b. Since means and ends are not distinct, means-end analysis is often inappropriate or limited
3a. The test of a 'good' policy is that it can be shown to be the most appropriate means to desired ends.	3b. The test of a 'good policy' is that various analysts find themselves directly agreeing on a policy (without agreeing that it is the most appropriate means to an agreed objective).
4a. Analysis is comprehensive; every important relevant factor is taken into account.	4b. Analysis is drastically limited: Important possible outcomes are neglected Important alternative potential policies are neglected Important affected values are neglected
5a. Theory is often heavily relied upon.	5b. A succession of comparisons greatly reduces or eliminates reliance on theory.

Table 1: Lindblom's model of Successive Limited Comparisons, or 'muddling through'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Lindblom, The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision Making through Mutual Adjustment 144-48.

<sup>87</sup> Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," 81.

Given the disdain for formality which derives from Zionism's attempt to forge a decisive break with a Jewish history characterised by the need to conform to other peoples' rules, discussed in more detail in Chapter I, a political culture characterised by creative improvisation, intensive short-term planning and a lack of reliance on theoretical models seems entirely historically consistent.<sup>88</sup>

### **The existing literature and historiography**

The central question of this thesis – why did the intense period of Israeli attention to *hasbara* yield so little conceptual or organisational change – is not well covered in the secondary literature. Moshe Yegar's *History of the Israeli Foreign Information System* is the most complete, but was written before the opening of official archives on the period, and so relies on extensive quotations from limited primary sources, primarily the parliamentary protocols, *Divrei HaKnesset*.<sup>89</sup> However, his long experience of working on these issues at the Foreign Ministry makes it a useful practitioner's account. Medzini accurately describes the impact of the Six-Day war on Israeli government communications, although his research only covers until 1970.<sup>90</sup> Neither the Peled Report of 1969 or the establishment and dismantling of the Ministry of Information have been the subject of research.

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<sup>88</sup> Azkin and Dror, *Israel: High-Pressure Planning*.

<sup>89</sup> Yegar, *History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew]*. See also: Shlomo Raz, "Review of 'the History of Israel's Foreign Information System'," *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 9.4 (1987).

<sup>90</sup> Medzini, *Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew]*.

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There is a distinct body of research on the introduction of television to Israel. Oren establishes the case that, after some deliberation, Israeli created a television service that would serve political-security, rather than cultural and educational, ends.<sup>91</sup> The autobiography of Chaim Yavin, Israel's 'Mr Television', Gil's memoirs, and Katz's shorter article on the subject, represent the insiders' views on the establishment of television.<sup>92</sup> Two unpublished PhD theses predate the opening of archives, but contain useful anecdotal material.<sup>93</sup> However, none of these existing studies places the establishment of television in Israel within the context of foreign policy-making or as an example of national image-making.

Of the three central personalities covered in this thesis, Shimon Peres is the most prominent and has been the subject of biographies by Matti Golan and Michael Bar-Zohar, as well as an autobiography edited by David Landau.<sup>94</sup> However, these accounts all refer to Peres' tenure as Minister of Information only in passing, raising questions regarding the importance that Peres himself attached to this phase of his political career. As Ben-Gurion's protégé, his reservations about the importance of *hasbara* are a well-established theme in this thesis. Yisrael Galili is the subject of a

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<sup>91</sup> Tasha G Oren, Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004). See also Tasha G Oren, "The Belly-Dancer Strategy: Israeli Educational Television and Its Alternatives," Media, Culture and Society 25.2 (2003).

<sup>92</sup> Haim Yavin, Mr. Television [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Hemed Books - *Yediot Ahronot*, 2010), Tzvi Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1986), Elihu Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," The Use and Abuse of Social Science, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1971).

<sup>93</sup> Gil Sadan, "Problems in the Establishment of Television in Israel," University of Missouri, 1970, Harvey L Gotliffe, "Israeli General Television: A Historical Exploration of Content and Influence," Wayne State University, 1981.

<sup>94</sup> Matti Golan, Peres [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1982), Michael Bar-Zohar, Like a Phoenix [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: *Yediot Ahronot*, 2005), Shimon Peres, Battling for Peace: Memoirs (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995).

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PhD by Amos Shifris, subsequently published as the first political biography of Galili.<sup>95</sup> A second biography was published soon afterwards.<sup>96</sup> Again, and entirely consistent with Galili's own views on his work in this field, these studies largely sidestep Galili's work in government communication, as do three volumes of Galili's own writings published after his death.<sup>97</sup> Aharon Yariv is also yet to attract the attention of researchers or biographers, although this is more surprising considering his very considerable contributions in the field of Israel national security as Director of Military Intelligence from 1964-1972 and his public role as military analyst during the 1973 war.

As this thesis covers the period in which Israel fought two wars – 1967 and 1973 – the literature on these wars and the key historiographical debates it has sparked also need attention. Much of the very extensive scholarly debate on the foreign policy aspects of the 1967 war has revolved around the question of inadvertency. Did misperception and miscalculation produce a war 'that neither side wanted', that 'neither Israel or her enemies were able to control', as Shlaim and others contend?<sup>98</sup> It is worth noting that this debate straddles the often-unbridgeable

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<sup>95</sup> Amos Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000, Amos Shifris, Yisrael Galili [Hebrew] (Ramat Efal: Yad Tabenkin, 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Danny Harari, Yisrael Galili: Untitled Authority [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2011).

<sup>97</sup> Yisrael Galili, At the Apex of Activity and Decision: From the Speeches and Writings of Yisrael Galili [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1987), Yisrael Galili, The Taste of Battle [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1987), Yisrael Galili, To and About: Letters and Personalities [Hebrew] (Ramat Efal: Yad Tabenkin, Yisrael Galili Center, 1990).

<sup>98</sup> Avi Shlaim, The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 236 - 42. Benny Morris also takes up this theme, describing the war as 'a product of error and mutual miscalculation'. Benny Morris, Righteous Victims : A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999) 302. See also, Michael B. Oren, Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

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divide between Israel's 'old' and 'new' historians<sup>99</sup>; older research, written without the benefit of access to the official archives, struck a similar tone.<sup>100</sup> More recently, additional themes of research have opened up. Firstly, the role of the Soviet Union is attracting attention with new evidence shedding light on the 'Soviet warning' intelligence report of 13 May 1967.<sup>101</sup> This fits into an existing body of work on the impact of the Cold War on Israeli foreign policy.<sup>102</sup> Secondly, Oren has focussed attention on the role of Egypt in precipitating war.<sup>103</sup> Finally, as an antidote to the David-and-Goliath myth-making of early Israeli history, recent work on the early settlement enterprise gives a more rounded picture of the consequences of the war.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> On the highly-charged question of the 'new historians' see, for the prosecution and the defence, respectively, Efraim Karsh, Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians", 2nd rev. ed. (London: Frank Cass, 2000), Benny Morris, "Refabricating 1948," Journal of Palestine Studies 27.2 (1998).

<sup>100</sup> Richard B. Parker, The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) 126-59, Janice Gross Stein, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1967: Inadvertent War through Miscalculated Escalation," Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management, eds. Alexander L. George and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>101</sup> Uri Bar-Noi, "The Soviet Union and the Six-Day War: Revelations from the Polish Archives," Cold War International History Project e-Dossier No. 8 (2003), <<http://stage-wilson.p2technology.com/publication/e-dossier-no-8-the-soviet-union-and-the-six-day-war-revelations-the-polish-archives>>, Isabella Ginor, "The Cold War's Longest Cover-Up: How and Why the USSR Instigated the 1967 War," MERIA Journal 7.3 (2003), Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, Foxbats over Dimona: The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). The various theories regarding the 'Soviet warning' are discussed in Parker, The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East 3-20.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Efraim Karsh, "Israel," The Cold War and the Middle East eds. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), Nigel J Ashton, ed., The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73 (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Oren, Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East. A counter-view can be found in Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War," The Middle East Journal 60.2 (2006): 293-98.

<sup>104</sup> The best works on this subject are, in this author's opinion: Gershon Gorenberg, The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977 (New York: Times Books, 2006), Akiva Eldar and Idit Zertal, Lords of the Land: The Settlers and the State of Israel, 1967-2004 [Hebrew] (Or Yehuda: Kineret, 2004).

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Study of the 1973 war has focussed on the inaccurate intelligence estimate immediately preceding the war. Bar-Joseph notes that the Agranat Commission's main conclusion - the intelligence fiasco was the responsibility of senior Military Intelligence officers - was initially widely accepted.<sup>105</sup> The erosion of that consensus, initially by those accused of failure<sup>106</sup> has produced a range of answers on the causes of the war.<sup>107</sup> With most of the documents scheduled to be opened to the public only after 50 years, the diplomatic aspects of the war have been less well covered, leaving the wider question of whether there was a political alternative to the war unanswered.<sup>108</sup>

Largely absent from these scholarly discussions is the role that *hasbara* played during these wars. A rare exception, Medzini has looked at *hasbara* during the Six-Day war, as well as the changes in government communications in its wake.<sup>109</sup> Susser's edited volume of conference proceedings marking thirty years since 1967 devotes some attention to the role of media and public opinion in 1967, but does not discuss the Israeli government's efforts to secure and maintain international

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<sup>105</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, "Main Trends in the Historiography of the Yom Kippur War: A Thirty-Year Perspective," Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture 24.2 (2005): 252.

<sup>106</sup> For the participant's view, see Eli Zeira, The Yom Kippur War: Myth against Reality [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1993).

<sup>107</sup> On the question of the intelligence 'conception' see, for example Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). On the psychological environment in which decisions were taken, see, for example Zvi Lanir, Fundamental Surprise: Intelligence in Crisis [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1983). On Marwan Ashraf, the Egyptian informant, see Aharon Ze'evi, "The Egyptian Deception in the Plan of the Yom Kippur War [Hebrew]," Tel Aviv University, 1980.

<sup>108</sup> Bar-Joseph, "Main Trends in the Historiography of the Yom Kippur War: A Thirty-Year Perspective," 261.

<sup>109</sup> Meron Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," Keshet 36.Autumn (2007), Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew].



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support during war.<sup>110</sup> While this thesis does not focus on wartime *hasbara* or information warfare *per se*, it addresses this gap in the literature. Given the considerable interest in the questions of inadvertency, miscalculation and misperception in the historiography of the 1967 war, it is tempting to speculate what the effect of a clearer presentation of Israel's interests and intentions would have had in the critical 'waiting period' before the war. The discussion of this missed opportunity in Chapter 2 is an additional aspect of Israel's ineffective diplomatic signalling and a new contribution to the study of the Six Day War. The Peled Commission, discussed in Chapter 4 looks at the information aspects of the Yom Kippur War, particularly as a trigger for the establishment of the Ministry of Information, which have thus far been neglected in the scholarly debate.

## Sources and methodology

In order to avoid the kind of historical research Lord Chesterfield derided as 'just a confused heap of facts', some methodological rigour is needed.<sup>111</sup> This thesis is based on primary source material as far as is possible, held in a number of different archives. The main body of official papers relating to the State of Israel is held at the Israel State Archives. They include those relating to Galili's tenure as minister

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<sup>110</sup> Amnon Rubenstein, "*Haaretz* and the Eshkol Government," *Six Days - Thirty Years: New Perspectives on the Six Day War* [Hebrew], ed. Asher Susser (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), Hannah Zemer, "Before There Was Television," *Six Days - Thirty Years: New Perspectives on the Six Day War* [Hebrew], ed. Asher Susser (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999), Shlomit Levy and Elihu Katz, "Public Opinion and National Mood in the Six Day War," *Six Days - Thirty Years: New Perspectives on the Six Day War* [Hebrew], ed. Asher Susser (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1999).

<sup>111</sup> Lord Chesterfield to his son, 5 February 1750, in Bonamy Dobrée (ed.), *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield*, vol. 4, Letters: 1748-1751, 6 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1932) 1501.

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without portfolio between 1966 and 1970 (Record Group 44/G) under the heading of 'Ministers without Portfolio', and include the day-to-day paperwork of a ministerial office. Since much of Galili's time was spent on other matters, particularly his championing of building Israeli settlements following the 1967 war, there was a good deal of sifting to find material relating to his work relating to *hasbara*. However, since Galili was part of both Levi Eshkol and Meir's inner circle of advisers, useful insights were to be found throughout the files. Similarly, the files of the short-lived Ministry of Information (also held in RG 44/G) under Peres and Yariv was crucial. The most complete files from the Ministry of Information are those of the minister's private office, and of the department headed by Alouph Hareven. Some material in Hareven's private collection was not to be found in the Ministry's files, raising questions about their completeness.

Other relevant documents from the Israel State Archives were in the files of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government Press Office. For the pre-State period, the Central Zionist Archives of the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Israel hold the papers of the various organizations and institutions from the inception of the Zionist movement. Use is made of the files of the *Hasbara* Department (S23) and the Political Department (S25) of the Jewish Agency for Israel, as well as those of the London office of the World Zionist Organisation (Z4) and the WZO office in New York (Z5). It also holds some three hundred personal archives, containing the private papers of leaders and functionaries. This thesis makes use of the archives of Gershon Agron (A209), and of Moshe Yegar (A468). Documents and papers are held at number of other archives in Israel, including the Israel Defence Force Archive (Ramat Gan), the Yad

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Tabenkin research and documentation centre of the United Kibbutz Movement (Ramat Efal), Yad Ben Zvi (Jerusalem), Yad Eshkol (Jerusalem), the Ben-Gurion Archives (Sde Boker), the Lavon Archives (Tel Aviv) and the Israel Labour Archives (Beit Berl). In London, the National Archives (Kew) and the Liddell-Hart Centre for Military History at King's College were sources of supplementary information.

The parliamentary protocols, *Divrei HaKnesset*, are a valuable source, as are the annual reports of the State Comptroller, a national ombudsman, and the published comments on those reports issued annually by the Minister of Finance. The issue of *hasbara* was raised frequently over the period, both on matters of procedure – such as the appointment of ministers, shifting of ministerial responsibility from one ministry to another and on questions of budget – as well as debates that invited broader perorations on the issue. As Ihalainen and Palonen note, reference to parliamentary debates, side-by-side with the study of archival sources and secondary literature, produces ‘a first-hand picture of the particular time in focus, of its political constellations and of the contemporary political language’.<sup>112</sup>

In some cases, special permission was required to view archival material that had not yet been seen.<sup>113</sup> In the case of the papers held at the Israel State Archives relating to Yisrael Galili, his involvement in other areas of high national security sensitivity required a detailed review of each file before access was granted. In

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<sup>112</sup> P. Ihalainen and K. Palonen, "Parliamentary Sources in the Comparative Study of Conceptual History: Methodological Aspects and Illustrations of a Research Proposal," *Parliaments, Estates & Representation* 29.1 (2009).

<sup>113</sup> Israel adopted the ‘thirty-year rule’ for official documents from the British Mandate administration. However, some documents are restricted for longer and – as a general rule – documents are only reviewed and released on request after they become available for viewing. This, incidentally, allows the first viewer of the document to know that the files have not yet been seen.

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almost all cases the material was made available, and redactions in files were not a major obstacle to the research. An application to view the long-lost Karni Report of 1973 was eventually approved and, subsequently, the IDF Archive has made this important and hitherto unseen document available online to the public.<sup>114</sup>

The Jewish National and University Library (JNUL) at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem was a valuable source for contemporary newspapers and journals, as was the Beit Ariella Library in Tel Aviv, the Central Zionist Archive and the British Library's Newspaper Library in Colindale, London. The Journalists' Yearbook, published annually by the Association of Journalists, is useful in giving an insight into the attitude of the domestic and international press.

The private papers of a number of individuals were consulted, and this thesis makes use of those of Yisrael Galili, held by the Yad Tabenkin Archive of the United Kibbutz Movement, and some of Aharon Yariv's papers, made available to me with the kind permission of his family. Repeated attempts to access the Abba Eban Archive were unsuccessful. In the absence of that material, the files of the Foreign Ministry at the Israel State Archives and the secondary sources were sufficient to give a rounded account of the foreign minister's views on the matter. Similarly, the author was unable to access the private papers of Ambassador Abraham 'Abe' Harman, who headed an early incarnation of the Israeli government information service. However, since his work was only of marginal importance to the main area of inquiry, this is a minor discrepancy.

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<sup>114</sup> The full text of the Karni Report is now available at:  
[http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/Exhibitions/agranat/agranat\\_id.asp](http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/Exhibitions/agranat/agranat_id.asp).

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This research is also based on some forty interviews, as well as a number of informal conversations, with many of the key personalities involved in government decision-making in the period in question. The interviews followed a loosely-structured interview guide in pursuit of qualitative insights, rather than a single questionnaire that might produce a quantitative body of data. In some cases, there were return interviews, later in the research phase. Miles and Huberman encourage this approach, since 'analysis during data collection lets the field worker cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new - often better quality - data'.<sup>115</sup> Some interviewees also shared written material, often undisturbed in private collections since the early 1970s, and allowed it to be used in the writing of this thesis.

The use of oral sources in historical research is not without its challenges. According to Taylor and Bogdan, the essential characteristics of interviewing for qualitative research are 'repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and their informants directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words'.<sup>116</sup> That is quite true, but there is more. Interviews are, uniquely, 'pieces of evidence which historians create and produce'.<sup>117</sup> Creating historical evidence carries responsibility, particularly if the transcripts remain as a researcher's private hoard, conveniently unverifiable. This thesis follows the excellent example of Brecher, making use of

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<sup>115</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods (London: Sage, 1984) 49.

<sup>116</sup> Steven J. Taylor and Robert Bogdan, Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource, 3rd ed. (New York: Wiley, 1998) 77-78.

<sup>117</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, Holly Cowan Shulman, Richard S. Kirkendall and Terry L. Birdwhistell, "Interviews as Historical Evidence: A Discussion of New Standards of Documentation and Access," The History Teacher 24.2 (1991): 227.

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interviews as a valuable source, but avoiding using them as a single source to establish or verify a significant argument.<sup>118</sup>

## Structure

This thesis analyses Israel's failure to convert good intentions and sustained attention to the acknowledged problems of its international image into a new policy approach.

It will start by examining the historical roots of the political culture of *hasbara* which produced a paradox within Zionist thinking regarding the importance attached to international legitimacy. An understanding of this context is critical when drawing a distinction between the commonplace pursuit of projecting a positive national image and its particularly Israeli variant, *hasbara*. The second section of this chapter considers early attempts to organise communications functions within the Zionist movement and in the first years of independence.

The following five chapters examine episodes in the period under review in order to illustrate the thesis' main arguments, introduced above. Consistent with those arguments, they focus on the domestic *sources* of Israeli government communications policy, rather than Israel's place on the international stage. However, it is clear that the policy deliberations were aimed – largely unsuccessfully - at improving Israel's image on the international stage.

Chapter Two will examine the appointment of Yisrael Galili as minister without portfolio with responsibility for government communications, a sign of wider

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<sup>118</sup> Brecher's liberal use of quotes from his own interviews is an excellent source. Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process.

## Introduction

change under new prime minister Levi Eshkol. However, Galili's personal suitability for the job was an obstacle to constructive policy-making and did not positively impact Israel's capacity for diplomatic 'signalling' in the three-week 'waiting period' of May 1967. The outbreak of war in June 1967 marked a critical turning point in the value attached to Israel's international image by the government, marked initially by successful 'muddling through' by bureaucrats and officials, and later by a sharp deterioration in Israel's international image. Galili's 'activist' influence on the establishment of a security-oriented national television service, spurred on by its assumed influence on Israel's international position, is considered in Chapter Three. However, and perhaps paradoxically, Galili's work on television is revealing as a departure from *hasbara* thinking, rather than its successful implementation.

Chapter Four considers the Peled Commission of Inquiry on Government Communications, conceived primarily as a way of salvaging Eshkol's damaged reputation. Stubbornly non-political and clear-sighted in its analysis, its key recommendation, to establish a strong national information agency but to refrain from establishing a Ministry of Information, was ignored. Personal politics played their role in this missed opportunity.

Chapter Five deals with the long gestation period of the Ministry of Information during Golda Meir's premiership. Having rejected the Peled Report in 1970, strong domestic opposition to her and her government in the wake of the 1973 war strongly affected her decision-making. Despite the unsuccessful opposition of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to its establishment, Meir pressed ahead. The final chapter considers the short tenure of Shimon Peres as Israel's first Minister of Information. Whilst Peres laid important ground-work, Aharon Yariv's stewardship

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of the Ministry of Information in the 1974 Rabin government foundered on personal disagreements and political gridlock, and the decision to close it after only eight months of operation was greeted neither with surprise nor regret. The thesis concludes by assessing the short distance Israel travelled over the period in its thinking on government communication policy.



## Chapter I

### The Genesis of *Hasbara*

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Israel is a Jewish State. The only Jewish State in the world, it was re-established deliberately by the Jewish people as a Jewish solution to the Jewish problem, which has scarred the history of mankind for over 2,000 years. This is the cardinal feature dominating all Israel's policy, domestic and foreign. This makes Israel unique. Without appreciation of this elemental factor, it is impossible to understand Israel or any aspect of Israel's policy – domestic or foreign.<sup>1</sup>

Zionism conceived of itself as a decisive break with the history of the Jewish people, an entirely novel method of displacing the isolation and particularism of the past and rejoining history by resetting Jewish life in modern ideological constructs. In the words of Nahum Goldman, 'everything has changed. Our generation is therefore the first to have the opportunity of laying down a Jewish policy, and it has everything to learn in this field'.<sup>2</sup> However, even its revolutionary vanguard never fully disconnected from the historical experience of sustaining Jewish life for centuries within a non-Jewish setting. The Jewish masses certainly did not. Whether consciously or not, the Zionist movement and the State of Israel looked through the lens of Jewish history. Older scholarship, particularly that favoured by the founding generation of the Zionist leadership, reinforced the concept of an essential discontinuity of Jewish history. By compartmentalising 'Jewish' history on one hand, and the history of the Zionist movement on the other, the Zionist movement was detached from millennia of Jewish life that preceded it. Modern studies have also

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<sup>1</sup> Shabtai Rosenne, "Basic Elements of Israel's Foreign Policy," *India Quarterly* 17.4 (1961), Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process*.

<sup>2</sup> Nahum Goldman, *The Jewish Paradox* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) 61-62.

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continued this theme, insisting that the inception of the Zionist movement required the creation of 'new Jewish diplomacy, a field in which Jews, owing to their lack of statehood, had not been previously active'.<sup>3</sup> This chapter rejects that distinction, and argues that there are essential continuities in the history of Jewish life. In doing so, they preserved and modified many elements of the political culture that Jews had refined in asserting their collective interests during centuries of diaspora. According to Michael Brecher, Jewish history served as 'attitudinal prism' through which Israeli political discourse of the 1960s and 70s was filtered.<sup>4</sup> According to Brecher, 'societal factors, such as ideology and tradition, which derive from the cumulative historical legacy' are amongst the 'psychological predispositions' that exert an influence on decision-makers. According to Klieman, 'Jewish statecraft may often have proved to be failed statecraft, and for the longest time stateless statecraft, but it was statecraft nonetheless'.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, independence also called for new conceptions of relations with the outside world. In moving from diaspora to political sovereignty, the Zionist movement and the State of Israel was forced to innovate a system of foreign relations where one had not previously existed. 'Confronted constantly with unforeseen situations, Israeli foreign policy perfected the art of improvisation rather than that of planning'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Moshe Schaerf, The Journalist, the Sultan and the Princess: Herzl and International Diplomacy in the 19th Century [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 2006) 133-276.

<sup>4</sup> Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process 11-12.

<sup>5</sup> Aharon Klieman, "Shtadlanut as Statecraft for the Stateless," Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs 11.3 (2008).

<sup>6</sup> Rafael Israel, ed., Flowers for David: In Memory of David Farhi [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Government Printers, 1981) x.

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Thus, the political culture of Israel in the 1960s and 70s under review here, and specifically its attempts to articulate coherent policy in the sphere of its international image, exhibits inherited traits from the way in which diaspora Jewish communities managed their relations with the outside world as well as more newly-learned patterns of policymaking.

This chapter, then, sets the stage for the later examination of Israeli government communications policy in the 1960s and 70s by discussing its ideological and historical roots. The first section describes three themes on the question of external relations that emerge from the experience of two millennia of diaspora. The first is an intense mistrust of the outside world, where Jewish life was often precarious. Secondly, when contact with figures of external authority was necessary, the intercessor – both Jewish and non-Jewish – inhabited a well-defined role, although sometimes suffered from contempt for authority both outside and within communal life. Finally, in order to minimize friction between Jewish communities and the outside world, it was important to be able to articulate the interests of the community in an appropriate way. The second section takes up the narrative of how the Zionist movement, and later the State of Israel, addressed the considerable challenges of articulating and implementing cogent policy in this field.

### **The inheritance: from Diaspora to the birth of Zionism**

The destruction of the Second Temple in 70CE by the Romans is a watershed event in Jewish history, marking the end of sovereignty and the start of two millennia of diaspora. In his contemporary account, Flavius Josephus wrote:

And thus was Jerusalem captured ...From King David, the first of the Jews who reigned therein, to this destruction under Titus were one thousand one hundred and seventy-nine years ...but neither its great antiquity, nor its vast riches, nor the diffusion of its nation over all the habitable earth, nor the greatness of the veneration paid it on a religious account have been sufficient to preserve it from being destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

Traditional accounts of Jewish history after the destruction of the Second Temple paint a picture of enforced passivity and powerlessness. As Salo Baron notes, 'no-one was more eloquent in describing the sufferings of the Exile and the disgrace of living in subjection to foreign rulers than were the Jews themselves, beginning with the ancient rabbis'.<sup>8</sup> Diaspora life was not a neutral experience; it was life lived in a state of *galut*, or exile.

Max Weber brought the self-perception of the Jews as exiles to wider audiences, casting them as *Gastvolk* living on foreign soil. 'Sociologically speaking, what were the Jews? A pariah people.'<sup>9</sup> He claimed they had a lack of autonomous political organisation, and described the tabooistic prohibitions against intermarriage as roots of political and social disprivilege.<sup>10</sup> Central to Weber's conception of Jewish

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<sup>7</sup> Flavius Josephus, Flavius Josephus: Selections from His Works (New York: Viking Press, 1974) 238. Flavius Josephus was born Yosef ben Matityahu, descended from a Jewish priestly family, and – according to him – was related to the royal Hasmonean house through his mother's family. In the course of the Jewish revolt against Rome, in which he commanded the Jewish forces in the Galilee, Josephus was captured and taken to Rome where he announced his loyalty to Vespasian. Returning to Judea in AD70 as an aide to Titus, he was instrumental in the siege and later fall of Jerusalem. Despised by his compatriots, he returned to Rome. His seven-volume record of the war, *Bellum Iudaicum*, is a critical record of the period.

<sup>8</sup> Salo Wittmayer Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) Vol I, 297.Vol I

<sup>9</sup> In his article *Das antike Judentum*, (Ancient Judaism), first published in 1919, Weber gave wide circulation to the concept of the Jew as pariah, although earlier references do exist. See Arnaldo Momigliano, "A Note on Max Weber's Definition of Judaism as a Pariah-Religion," History and Theory 19.3 (1980): 313.

<sup>10</sup> Max Weber, The Sociology of Religion, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff and introduced by Talcott Parsons (London: Methuen, 1965) 108-09.

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pariah status was that it was self-imposed – ‘voluntarily and not under pressure of external rejection’.<sup>11</sup>

The belief that diaspora was synonymous with powerlessness was also enthusiastically adopted by the Zionist movement, accentuating the contrast between the powerlessness of the Jewish past with the promise of independence and sovereignty ahead. Under the leadership of Theodor Herzl, the Zionist movement disassociated itself from traditional Jewish life, caricaturing it as politically impotent and as the manifestation of the powerlessness of exile. In this, Herzl largely accepted the voguish anti-Semitism that portrayed Jews as parasitic, vulgar and unprincipled, while arguing that it was Christian oppression that had deformed Jewish character. In its place, the Zionist movement argued for a new Jew – a Hebrew.

*Shilat HaGalut*, or the ‘denigration of the diaspora’ was a central tenet of Zionism and was vigorously – and sometimes violently – applied.<sup>12</sup> Ben-Gurion described Zionism as a revolutionary movement, not only against political, social and economic systems, ‘but against destiny, against the unique destiny of a unique people’:

What, therefore, is the meaning of our contemporary Jewish revolution--this revolt against destiny which the vanguard of the Jewish national renaissance has been cultivating in this small country for the last three generations? Our entire history in the *Galut* has represented a resistance of fate--what therefore, is new in the content of our contemporary revolution? There is one fundamental difference! In the *Galut* the Jewish people knew the courage of non-surrender, even in the face of the noose and the auto-da-fe, even, as

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<sup>11</sup> Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, trans. Hans Heinrich Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1967) 417.

<sup>12</sup> The Battalion for the Defence of the Language campaigned for the use of Hebrew amongst the Jews of pre-state Palestine, and against the use of other languages which they collectively dismissed as ‘jargon’. Their slogan: ‘Hebrews! Speak Hebrew!’ was sometimes accompanied by violence. Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York, N.Y.: Metropolitan Books, 2000) 264.

in our day, in the face of being buried alive by the tens of thousands. But the makers of the contemporary Jewish revolution have asserted: Resisting fate is not enough. We must master our fate, we must take our destiny into our own hands! This is the doctrine of the Jewish revolution - not non-surrender to the *Galut*, but making an end of it.<sup>13</sup>

Yet this revolutionary strain of Zionism was a minority voice. Herzl's leadership of the Zionist movement was short-lived, barely outliving the 'daring breakthrough' of the first Zionist Congress in 1897, which brought the movement international attention.<sup>14</sup> After his death, the centre of influence swung from west to east, with Herzl's top-hatted 'political Zionism' eclipsed by the 'practical Zionism' of the settler pioneers. It was rare for Russian and Polish Jews to have grown up without some familiarity – and in many cases a very solid education – in Jewish law, tradition and history.<sup>15</sup> Their Zionism was selective in its reading of history, taking what might be useful in building in the future, and freely rejecting unhelpful themes, 'but on the whole few Zionists rejected all connection with Jewish history'.<sup>16</sup> Traditional Jewish life was indeed largely closed off from the outside world; the requirements of Jewish religious life did set these communities apart. But, as David Biale powerfully argues, Jewish communities were not inherently powerless.<sup>17</sup> Exile did not exempt the Jews from political activity. In order to survive, Jewish communities had to manage their internal affairs, their relations with the outside and

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<sup>13</sup> David Ben Gurion, 'The Imperative of the Jewish Revolution' in Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader, 1st ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959) 607.

<sup>14</sup> Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State 89.

<sup>15</sup> David Vital, The Origins of Zionism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) 148.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Dowty, "Zionism's Greatest Conceit," Israel Studies 3.1 (1986).

<sup>17</sup> David Biale, Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

balance the needs of one against the other. In fact, their survival under these unpromising circumstances is an indicator of 'a wide spectrum of persistent and ongoing political activism'.<sup>18</sup>

Jewish communities never lived in total isolation from the outside world. The history of self-preservation in Jewish and Zionist history produces three dominant characteristics – a defensive posture, profoundly mistrustful of the outside world; the delegation of external relations to Jewish and non-Jewish intercessors coupled with a contempt for authority; and the imperative of having a clear answer to an accusatory 'other'. These themes will be developed below.

**'Seek no intimacy with the ruling power'<sup>19</sup>**

Jewish life in the diaspora was tenuous. Political activity – the advancement and preservation of the interests of the community - and sometimes the physical security of the community itself, was dependent on the tolerance of the larger community in which it existed:

On the one hand, the Jews, as an alien minority, demonized by the Gospels and Christian doctrine as Christ-killers, were utterly beholden to the prince. Their well-being rested on his good will. On the other hand, should he choose to withdraw his protection, complete disaster loomed. So the *poritz* [Yiddish for local potentate] was both benefactor and potential tormentor at one and the same time.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Biale, Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History 6. See also: Amos Funkenstein, Passivity as the Hallmark of Diaspora Jews – Myth and Reality [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Tel Aviv University Publications, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> *Avot*, 1:10.

<sup>20</sup> Cohen, "Israel's Starry-Eyed Foreign Policy."

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Basic rights, such as residence and the conduct of trade, were subject to petition and negotiation with local rulers. The ever-present danger of outside intervention in the community's internal affairs, sometimes as the result of the actions of 'informants' from within the community itself, set limits to the extent and assertiveness of political activity. The only reliable allies were other Jewish communities. Michael Brecher refers to this deep-seated attitude as the 'two-camp' thesis: the bifurcation of the world into Jewish and non-Jewish camps, with the latter seen as essentially hostile.<sup>21</sup> Jews were ultimately dependent on themselves. Self-reliance encouraged internal cohesion, and, despite a tradition of scepticism for authority, strong leadership. Since there was little recourse to coercive authority, voluntarism was critical. Since it was voluntary, Jewish self-government had to be inclusive, accountable, representative and pluralist. Separation was also paramount, with special contempt for the informer (*malshin*) and protection for those who prevent damaging information from reaching external authority (*din moser*). As a last resort, excommunication was a real threat to those who threatened the community from within.

That sense of insularity permeated the politics of the Zionist movement as it began to articulate the demand for Jewish independence, 'veering from the heights of elation to the depths of depression [and] ...burdened with a deep-rooted suspicion of foreign powers'.<sup>22</sup> The need for secrecy transmuted into a predisposition for 'backstage diplomacy', with unofficial envoys negotiating issues as critical as post-

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<sup>21</sup> Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process 274ff., 90, 98, 314, 39, 502.

<sup>22</sup> Sasson Sofer, Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 379.



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Holocaust reparations from Germany, the release of Soviet Jews and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At an official level, Israel's relations with pre-revolutionary Iran, apartheid-era South Africa, Ethiopia, and Jordan before the 1993 peace treaty were conducted primarily behind closed doors.

Zionism's chosen strategy of placing the fate of the Jewish people largely in the hands of the international community was, and perhaps remains, an uncomfortable gamble with history. Ben-Gurion's well-known phrase 'our future does not depend on what the *goyim* say, but on what the Jews do' may have been as much wishful thinking as a clear-sighted analysis of the dependence of Israel on international opinion.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, according to Abba Eban 'Ben-Gurion's rhetoric of contempt for world opinion did not reflect his real view. He had an almost reverent belief in the necessity for Israel to have a strong position in the eyes of the world, and especially in the United States'.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to all intentions, the establishment of the State of Israel did not fully displace the deep-rooted sense that Israel remains 'a people that dwells alone'.<sup>25</sup>

### Hofjude, Shtadlan, diplomat

Separation from the outside world also resulted in the need for intercessors to maintain and advance their interests with external powers. However, given the suspicion of a process in which Jews had little experience, and the limited resources Jews had for engaging in the diplomatic game, these representatives were often

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<sup>23</sup> Speech to IDF Independence Day Parade, Ramat Gan, 27.4.1955. BGA. *Goyim* is a mildly denigrating term for non-Jews, or the non-Jewish world.

<sup>24</sup> Avi Shlaim, "Interview with Abba Eban, 11 March 1976," *Israel Studies* 8.1 (2003): 155.

<sup>25</sup> Chaim Herzog, The War of Atonement: October, 1973 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975).

caught between the two worlds of the traditional Jewish society they claimed to represent and the secular powers they served.

From the early medieval period, the intercessor was typically a wealthy 'useful' Jew who acted as a financier at the court of a local ruler. The position of *Hofjude* or *Hoffaktor* ('court Jew') was precarious, protected only so long as they were useful and always vulnerable to the denunciations of rivals and to criticism from within the Jewish community for failing to ensure its safety or falling prey to the temptation of apostasy. A variant, the *shtadlan*, was less likely to bring financial skills to the task of representing the Jews' interests. They were, in effect, diplomats.<sup>26</sup>

The Zionist movement accentuated the fundamental precariousness of representing Jewish interests, vilifying the 'court Jew' and the business of *shtadlanut*, stereotyping him as 'a bearded, somewhat sinister medieval figure, cringing and deferential, alternatively grovelling and fawning before pashas and princes in begging for scraps of mercy on behalf of that potentate's helpless Jewish wards'.<sup>27</sup> Aaron Klieman argues for an essential continuity between the *shtadlan* of traditional Jewish life and modern Israeli diplomacy:

Strong traces of traditional *shtadlanut* still characterize Jewish affairs because neither post-modernism nor Israel's founding have resolved the basic acceptance-rejection duality of the Jewish relationship to the non-Jewish world, and of the world to Jewish ascendancy.<sup>28</sup>

However, Israeli diplomats have often enjoyed a profile not much higher than that of the *shtadlan*, despite representing a sovereign foreign government rather than being the subject of historical forces. Foreign affairs have been subordinated to

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<sup>26</sup> Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question," 26.

<sup>27</sup> Klieman, "*Shtadlanut* as Statecraft for the Stateless," 100.

<sup>28</sup> Klieman, "*Shtadlanut* as Statecraft for the Stateless," 110.

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security affairs, and foreign ministers further from the centre of power than defence ministers. Indeed, for most of the period under review, the position of defence minister was held by the prime minister, whose office became 'the principal venue for shaping Israel's foreign policy', rather than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>29</sup> In some cases, the foreign minister was completely excluded from foreign policy discussions, including the direct contact between Prime Minister Golda Meir and her ambassador to the United States, Yitzhak Rabin and Israeli-Romanian relations under Rabin's premiership.<sup>30</sup> Neither foreign ministers Eban or Allon were able to assert the ministry's role on these occasions.

There is a wider issue at play here, though. The inherited suspicion of power discussed above also contributed to a politics that was contentious in style and hostile to hierarchy.

The Jewish People throughout the ages was essentially a class-less society. The Diaspora had its sages, its millionaires and its beggars. But, broadly speaking, there was no Jewish ruling class and no Jewish proletariat. A Jewish equivalent of Pope or Bishop is unthinkable. ...After two thousand years there is again a Jewish Government. But the intervening gap has done much to discredit Government as such in Jewish eyes. Government was always Their Government and usually Public Enemy Number One. Every Jew criticized the Government in his heart and openly where he dared, whatever the Government did. It is difficult to throw over the habits of twenty centuries in two years.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Moshe Yegar, "Moshe Sharett and the Origins of Israel's Diplomacy," *Israel Studies* 15.3 (2010): 21.

<sup>30</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life [Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: Steimatzky Agency, 1975) 291, 312, 23, Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1979) vol.1, p. 258, p. 302; vol.2, p. 542.

<sup>31</sup> CZA A209/131. Edwin Samuel, 'How To Improve the Efficiency of The Israel Government Administrative Machine', n.d., This copy of the memorandum is noted 'To Gershon [Agron], with affectionate regards, from Nebi', and dated 23.ii.1950.

According to Amos Oz, who also remarked on the absence of a Jewish Pope, 'throughout their history, the people of Israel have disliked obedience'.<sup>32</sup> In its modern manifestation, Ehud Sprinzak described theme this as 'illegalism' in Israeli political culture, or expediency towards the law.<sup>33</sup> The rules of international diplomacy, the conventions and manners of diplomats, are not easy bedfellows with the political culture Israel inherited from traditional Jewish communal life.

### Know what to reply

In the *Ethics of the Fathers*, a post-Biblical commentary, R. Eleazar b. Arach says: 'Be alert to learn Torah and know what answer to give to an Epicuros'<sup>34</sup> Knowledge has a value beyond one's own erudition; presenting it to the outside world is also important. In Rabbinic literature the term *epicuros*, derived from the Greek name Epicurus, denotes a non-believer.<sup>35</sup> The Babylonian Talmud develops the point further, distinguishing between the Jewish and the non-Jewish *epicuros*.<sup>36</sup> According to Rashi, a leading rabbinic authority, since the Jewish non-believer does so knowingly, further discussion is unlikely to alter his attitude, and may even encourage

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<sup>32</sup> 'Ma lungo la sua storia il popolo d'Israele non ama ubbidire'. Amos Oz, "We Jews Have No Pope [Italian]," *La Stampa* 23 July 2007: 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ehud Sprinzak, "Illegalism in Israeli Political Culture: Theoretical and Historical Footnotes to the Pollard Affair and the Shin Beth Cover Up," *Israel after Begin*, ed. Gregory S. Mahler (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Avot II: 19. R Travers Herford, *Pirke Aboth. The Ethics of the Talmud: The Sayings of the Fathers*, 9th Printing, 1978 ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1962) 61.

<sup>35</sup> The term *epikoros* is also a play on the Hebrew root form p-k-r from which words meaning 'unrestrained' or 'free from restriction' are derived. R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (New York: Ktav, 1975) 120.

<sup>36</sup> Seder Nezikin, Masechta Sanhedrin, Daf 38b.

him to develop his views further. On the other hand, 'knowing what to say' to the outside world has a greater potential for change.<sup>37</sup>

Examples of Jewish *apologia*, defences against a range of allegations, are threaded through history. The most important work of the classical period is *Contra Apionem* (*Against Apion*) by Flavius Josephus, a refutation of claims that Judaism was no more ancient, and thus no more authoritative, than the Greek pagan religions of the time. In the medieval and modern period, learned Jews were compelled to debate Christian theologians and answer accusations. These disputations or *vikuchim*, notably the Paris Disputation of 1240, the Barcelona Disputation of 1263 and the Tortosa Disputation of 1413-14, were also barely-disguised attempts to proselytise.<sup>38</sup> Knowing what to say was a delicate balance. 'Since 'winning' a debate could well jeopardize the security of the Jewish community at large, political considerations certainly entered into what Jewish disputants publicly said or refrained from saying'.<sup>39</sup> Knowing what to say became a key feature of Jewish communal life.

Israel enthusiastically adopted the notion that words could be a powerful form of defence. Safran approvingly notes the place of 'passion, oratory and zeal' in Israeli political culture, making an explicit link to Jewish religion: 'the fury and

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<sup>37</sup> Isidore Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nezikin*, vol. V - Sanhedrin I, 34 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1935) 244.

<sup>38</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*, Littman Library of Jewish Civilization (London: Associated University Presses, 1982). See also: Yehuda David Eisenstein, *Yalkut Vikuchim: Disputations in Which the Great Men of Israel Were Forced to Defend the Torah and Contradict the Religion of the Christians [Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: Institute for Encouraging Torah Learning, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> Michael J. Cook, "Evolving Jewish Views of Jesus " *Jesus through Jewish Eyes: Rabbis and Scholars Engage an Ancient Brother in a New Conversation*, ed. Beatrice Bruteau (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001) 15.

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splendid invective of the prophets seem to echo again in the land'.<sup>40</sup> The phrase '*Da ma sh'tashiv*' ('know what answer to give') re-appeared in 1967 as the title of a series of handbooks in English and Hebrew in the form of a series of questions and 'recommended' answers. For example:

Q: In the days preceding the 5th June all the world powers warned Israel against a conflagration in the Middle East and requested Israel and Egypt not to take any military action. Why, then, did you start the war in spite of these warnings?

A: Israel did not start the war. She fought because she had to, after she was attacked...<sup>41</sup>

As Schleifer argues, 'One thousand and eight hundred years of submissive *hasbara* ... has left its mark on the Jews'.<sup>42</sup> That mark, in sum, was a strong legacy in dealing with the 'outside world'. It was based on an assumption that life was to be led in a profoundly hostile environment, and consequently featured an easily-evoked sense of insecurity and a deeply-rooted pessimism. Yet Jewish life was also characterised by a high level of communal organization for self-reliance, a strong sense of community, habits of separation and secrecy from the outside and a tradition of diplomatic intercession with outside authorities. Those qualities persisted even as Jewish life underwent its most fundamental change since biblical times, with the inception of Zionism.

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<sup>40</sup> Nadav Safran, *The United States and Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963) 113.

<sup>41</sup> World Zionist Organization Information Department, *What to Answer? Questions and Answers on the Six-Days War and Its Consequences* (Jerusalem: Information Centre of the Prime Minister's Office, 1967) 3.

<sup>42</sup> Schleifer, "Jewish and Contemporary Origins of Israeli 'Hasbara'," 129.

### ***Hasbara* in practice: From the inception of the Zionist movement**

At the inception of the Zionist movement, there was propaganda whose aim was to bend hearts towards the idea of redemption; afterwards, we turned to publicity; in the phase of realisation we reached information – conveying reports, announcements, communiqués, declarations, press corrections etc. With the state, we reached a new stage – *hasbara*.<sup>43</sup>

This section looks at the key developments in the development of the practice of Jewish foreign media relations, from the inception of the Zionist movement, through the years of British Mandatory control of Palestine, Israeli independence and the first twenty years of government communications policy. This is a critical period, in which the political culture of *hasbara* emerged, and where the limitations *on* Jewish politics and the limitations *of* Jewish politics in the transition from diaspora to independence began to exhibit the characteristics of ‘muddling through’ as a policy-making preference.

#### Herzl and Sokolow

Theodor Herzl initiated a breakthrough in the affairs of the Jewish people, establishing the Zionist movement that would successfully lobby for Jewish self-determination. His contribution, though, was neither in the originality of his ideas, nor in the mobilisation of mass support. Others had been articulating the imperative of Jewish nationalism for decades; it would be decades before Zionism gathered mass support, and then only when there was no other choice. However, Herzl transformed the desire for self-determination from a marginal phenomenon of Jewish

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<sup>43</sup> CZA A209/111/3, Gershon Agron to the Cabinet, 22.9.1950.

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life into 'a subject for world opinion ...on the canvas of world politics'.<sup>44</sup> He was 'a theoretician and practitioner of persuasive communications'.<sup>45</sup>

Addressing the First Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897, its tail-coated and top-hatted spectacle itself a production of political theatre calculated to draw international attention, he articulated his approach:

From time immemorial the world has been misinformed about us. ...Doubtless there will be discussions on the subject of an organization the need for which is recognized by all. Organization is an evidence of the reasonableness of a movement. But there is one point which should be clearly and energetically emphasized in order to further the solution of the Jewish question. We Zionists desire not an international league but international discussion. Needless to say this distinction is of the first importance in our eyes. It is this distinction which justifies the convening of our Congress. There will be no question of intrigues, secret interventions, and devious methods in our ranks, but only of unhampered utterances under the constant and complete supervision of public opinion.<sup>46</sup>

For Herzl, the principle challenge was to drag Zionism out of the world of ideological disputation and erudite discussion in obscure publications. He wished to push the Jewish question on to the world stage, correcting non-Jewish distortions and misunderstandings, benign or malignant, of the Jews and their demand for national independence. Lacking state power or armed force, his strategy was to lobby emperors and kings. In his 'aristocratic republic', 'politics must take place in the upper strata and work downwards'.<sup>47</sup> He toured the courts of Europe, seeking an international charter of support from the Pope, Emperor Wilhelm II, the Ottoman Sultan, the Archduke of Baden and the British Colonial Secretary,

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<sup>44</sup> Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State 89.

<sup>45</sup> Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," 65.

<sup>46</sup> Theodor Herzl, 'Opening Address at the First Zionist Congress'. Theodor Herzl, Zionist Writings : Essays and Addresses, 2 vols. (New York: Herzl Press, 1973) vol I, 132-38.

<sup>47</sup> Theodor Herzl, The Jewish State (London: Penguin, 2010) 86.



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motivated by a 'profound understanding that the efforts of a small and persecuted people could become successful only if they were thrust directly, without mediation, with unrelenting simplemindedness, straight into the commanding heights of world power and international opinion'.<sup>48</sup> It was a powerful legacy, and perhaps the key weapon in the Zionist organisation's campaign for independence.<sup>49</sup> Unable to bring genuine and significant economic or political power to bear, and with only minority support from within the Jewish community, they relied on the 'intellectual and spiritual resources of a highly literate and vocal people, adept at polemics, loquacious and oriented toward public debate'.<sup>50</sup>

Herzl did not develop a specifically Jewish or Zionist approach to his pursuit of international support for the movement. His lobbying for Zionism shared many of the characteristics of his journalistic writing – a flashy, superficial brilliance which drew attention but lacked real depth. It was one of his successors, Nahum Sokolow, who synthesised his own experience of Jewish diaspora life and Herzl's determined pursuit of international opinion to become the 'first strategist and professional of Zionist *hasbara*'.<sup>51</sup> For Sokolow, *hasbara* was an essentially Jewish undertaking, a theme he developed in an article ostensibly about the German-Jewish industrialist Emil Rathenau and his son, the politician Walther Rathenau.

Emil Rathenau was not an inventor or an original creator: he used to explain ... a world invented by others. This role of *hasbara*, accomplishment and expansion, has a special Jewish quality. ... We have, in amazingly large numbers, messengers-apostles, spreaders of knowledge, transmitters of

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<sup>48</sup> Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State 90.

<sup>49</sup> Mordechai Naor, "Herzl as a PR Man [Hebrew]," Kesher 40 Summer (2010).

<sup>50</sup> Avineri, The Making of Modern Zionism : The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State 91.

<sup>51</sup> Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]."

genius, conductors of plenty, bearers of huge containers, bright moons, without whom the world would be dark and chaotic, and all the discoveries and novelties would be hidden and buried. ... This role, of the man in the middle, he who elucidates and mediates and explains between nations and peoples, is the special ability of the Jews. Very few praise him, while many condemn.<sup>52</sup>

But for Sokolow *hasbara* was more than a cultural or national predisposition for mediation. It was a profession requiring training, expertise, and formal instruction. 'This is a science, and we must study it,' he told Zionist emissaries in 1934. He called for 'logical *hasbara* ... not rainbow-coloured decorations of the wonderful panorama of our country, things that evoke enthusiasm for a moment, but prove nothing, except the need to widen and deepen the understanding'.<sup>53</sup> Sokolow introduced the term *hasbara* into the Zionist lexicon, alongside the more generally-used 'propaganda'.<sup>54</sup> A journalist by profession, and from a rabbinic family he was deeply rooted in the cultural and political life of European Jews. In his early career he edited the Zionist newspaper *HaTzifira* in Warsaw, whose readership included both traditional Jews and those attracted by the *haskala* or Jewish shift to modernity. Located at the heart of this debate he was able to clarify his own thinking, and influence that of others:

In the Monday parties in his home and in gatherings of college students, he explained the nature of Zionism, refuted its opponents, considered its

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<sup>52</sup> Nahum Sokolow, "The Rathenaus: Father and Son," Selected Writings: Personalities [Hebrew], ed. Nahum Sokolow (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1958) 410-12.

<sup>53</sup> Nahum Sokolow, "Speech to Emissaries of the Keren Hayesod in Jerusalem, 28.9.1934," Selected Writings: A Watchman over the House of Israel [Hebrew], ed. Nahum Sokolow (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1961).

<sup>54</sup> For a fuller discussion of the linguistic origins of the term *Hasbara*, see the Introduction.

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principles and the doubts raised about it, preached its new doctrine and converted many students.<sup>55</sup>

Debating the merits of Zionism within the Jewish community was important groundwork, but it was not the outward-facing advocacy that Herzl had demanded when he dismissed the Fourth Zionist Congress with the words 'time for arguments and speeches has passed; now is the time for deeds, for propaganda, for work!' Initially, that work continued to follow Herzl's model of high-level diplomacy. Taking up a formal position of leadership - Secretary-General of the World Zionist Organisation – in 1906, Sokolow moved around Europe, seeking opportunities to advance the movement's interests. In 1908, following the Young Turk Revolution, he was in Constantinople, exploring the possibility of obtaining the Turkish support for Zionism.<sup>56</sup> But the mission was fruitless, leading Sokolow to conclude that 'in the near future, public opinion will play a decisive role regarding the government, the constitution and everything else, and our organization, on its part, can do nothing more effective than focusing all the time on fundamental and extensive *hasbara* on its aspirations'.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, the Zionist movement was beginning to develop a dual strategy of conventional diplomacy aimed at political leadership combined with broader-based

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<sup>55</sup> Yitzhak Grinboim, "The Life Work of Nahum Sokolow (Eulogy to the Twentieth Zionist Congress)," The Sokolow Book: A Selection of the Early and Later Writings and a Collections of the Letters of Nahum Sokolow. Articles and Obituaries on the Author, Statesman and Leader [Hebrew], ed. Shimon Ravidovich (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organisation - Bialik Institute, 1943) 12.

<sup>56</sup> Mordechai Eliav, David Wolffsohn: The Man and His Time. The Zionist Movement, 1905-1914 [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Chaim Weizmann Institute for the Study of Zionism, Tel -Aviv University, 1977) 132-70.

<sup>57</sup> Sokolow, "The Rathenaus: Father and Son," 147-49.

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public diplomacy aimed at opinion-formers. In 1912, Sokolow moved to London, where he would remain, working for the Zionist movement, for the rest of his life. Pursuing this dual strategy, he was instrumental in obtaining the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the formal acknowledgment that the Zionist movement was the representative of the Jewish people in all affairs relating to the 'establishment of a national home for the Jewish people' in Palestine.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, he continued to reach out to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.<sup>59</sup> Sokolow was Zionism's first *masbir*.

### The public diplomacy of the Zionist movement

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the capture of Palestine in late 1917, Britain was in a position to implement the rather vague pledge of support for Zionism contained in the Balfour Declaration. The Zionist movement, now headed by Chaim Weizmann, dispatched a Zionist Commission under David Eder to advance its interests from Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> In 1922, Colonel Frederick Kisch was appointed as Director of the Political Department of the Zionist Organisation and to head the Palestine Zionist Executive (PZE) in Jerusalem. The Executive, which replaced the Zionist Commission, was intended to serve as 'a kind of cabinet' for the Jewish

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<sup>58</sup> Dvorah Barzilay-Yegar, A National Home for the Jewish People: The Concept in British Political Thinking and Policy Making, 1917-1923 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 2003) 13-34.

<sup>59</sup> It is worth noting the 'first strategic working paper of Zionist *Hasbara*', written by Sokolow in June 1912 and aimed at building support for Zionism from British Christians. Kouts, "'The Sokolow Document': The First Strategic Working Paper of Zionist *Hasbara* [Hebrew]."

<sup>60</sup> Leonard Stein, "Eder as a Zionist," David Eder: Memoirs of a Modern Pioneer, ed. J. B. Hobman (London: Victor Gollancz, 1945) 134-98.

Agency, the Jewish proto-government in Palestine under British Mandatory rule.<sup>61</sup>

Kisch, an engineer officer in the British Army, 'a British Jew and a great patriot', was, in effect, Jewish Palestine's first foreign minister.<sup>62</sup> Gershon Agronsky (Agron), who headed the PZE's press bureau from 1924, wrote that Kisch 'believes in publicity not just to disseminate information, but as a way to spark constructive criticism and proposals for change. The press has a vital role to play, and it is the duty of Zionist officials to assist the press to fill this role'.<sup>63</sup> Kisch himself met the press infrequently, but when he did, his aim was 'neither to interfere with liberty of the press, nor to gain any personal favours from it'.<sup>64</sup>

Agronsky, who had 'a flair for such things', quickly established an Association of Foreign Press Correspondents in order to develop relations with the international press in order to ensure greater understanding of the Zionist movement.<sup>65</sup> He also began to publish a weekly bulletin, *News from Eretz-Yisrael*, which came out in Hebrew, Arabic, English, German, Spanish and French editions.<sup>66</sup> The anti-Jewish riots of 1929 were the background to the first major clash between the Jewish community in Palestine and the British authorities. The resulting revision of British policy, the Passfield Report, was a major blow to the Zionist movement. Kisch's position – 'the indignation of Palestine Jewry at what it considers the virtual abolition

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<sup>61</sup> The Palestine Mandate, approved by the Council of the League of Nations in July 1922, provided that "an appropriate Jewish agency shall be recognised as a public body for the purpose of advising and co-operating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home and the interests of the Jewish population in Palestine."

<sup>62</sup> Segev, One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate 196.

<sup>63</sup> Gershon Agron, Slave of Duty [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: M. Newman, 1964) 45.

<sup>64</sup> F. H. Kisch, Palestine Diary (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938) 213.

<sup>65</sup> Kisch, Palestine Diary 120-21.

<sup>66</sup> Moshe Yegar, The History of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library - Bialik Institute, 2011) 125.

of the Balfour declaration and the death knell of the Jewish homeland' - was carried in the international press to support his claims that the British had failed in their duty to protect Jewish life and property.<sup>67</sup>

Chaim Weizmann's leadership of the Zionist movement ended in 1931. A younger generation, predominated by the socialist Zionists, took up the mantle. In place of Kisch, Chaim Arlosoroff of *Mapai* (the Workers of the Land of Israel Party) took over the Political Department. His deputy, who replaced him in June 1933 when Arlosoroff was murdered in Tel Aviv, was Moshe Shertok (Sharett).<sup>68</sup> Sharett would remain a leading figure in the foreign relations of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel until the late 1950s and an important, if largely unsuccessful, advocate for cogent government communications policy.

In 1934, the now-enlarged Jewish Agency for Palestine moved the World Zionist Organisation's *hasbara* department from London to Jerusalem, with the aim of engaging with Jews and non-Jews, in Palestine and overseas.<sup>69</sup> It also established a news agency, the Palestine Correspondence Agency or Palcor.<sup>70</sup> Close relations developed between the local Hebrew press and the Jewish Agency.<sup>71</sup> The press saw

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<sup>67</sup> "Serious Defeat Seen by Jews in Palestine," New York Times 22 October 1930.

<sup>68</sup> Yosef Shapiro, Chaim Arlosoroff [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1975) 222-79.

<sup>69</sup> Zionist Organisation and Jewish Agency for Israel, Report of the Executives of the Zionist Organisation and of the Jewish Agency for Palestine: Submitted to the 20th Zionist Congress and the 5th Session of the Council of the Jewish Agency at Zurich Ab-Elul, 5697, August, 1937 (Executives of the Zionist Organisation and of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1937) 186, Moshe Yegar, Yosef Guvrin and Oded Aryeh, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The First Fifty Years [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002) 1048.

<sup>70</sup> Elisheva Ayalon, "Palcor: The Story of the News Agency of the Jewish Agency [Hebrew]," Keshet 4 (1988).

<sup>71</sup> Haviv Canaan, The Press' War: The Hebrew Press' Campaign against British Rule [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1969).

itself as an active participant in the pursuit of independence, whilst the Jewish Agency lobbied against the restrictions placed on the press by the Mandatory.

'The journalists themselves were very willing to take instructions from the national institutions, at least on issues that were not politically contentious. The assumption that they were expected to take such instructions did not concern the newspapers at all'.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, so compliant was the local Hebrew press, that in 1942, in the wake of the *Struma* incident, they formed an editors' committee, a forum in which leading journalists and the Zionist leadership shared information and agreed common strategy.<sup>73</sup> With no fear that its independence might be compromised, the editors expressed hopes that the arrangement would be 'an appropriate and desirable tool for influencing public opinion in the spirit of Zionist policy at this time'.<sup>74</sup>

Success with bringing the Hebrew media in line with Zionist policy was not mirrored in relations with the international press. Having suffered a significant defeat with the promulgation of the May 1939 Palestine White Paper, the Jewish Agency stepped up its overseas efforts, re-establishing an information department at its offices in London.<sup>75</sup> Moshe Shertok asked Gershon Agronsky, who had left public

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<sup>72</sup> Dina Goren, "The Press under Siege [Hebrew]," Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1971, 177.

<sup>73</sup> The *SS Struma*, carrying 769 Jewish refugees from Romania, was sunk in the Black Sea in February 1942 after its entry to Palestine was blocked. It was a rallying point for Jewish opposition to British rule in Palestine.

<sup>74</sup> The committee, originally called the 'response committee' was formed in February 1942, but officially announced only a year later. Goren, "The Press under Siege [Hebrew]," 189. The editors' committee continued to operate in this manner for the entire period studied here, only beginning to unravel in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur war.

<sup>75</sup> CZA Z4/14574, 'Short Minutes of a Meeting Held on Wednesday, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1941 at 77, Great Russell Street, London WC1'; CZA S23/284. Organisation Department to Jewish Agency Executive, 11.2.1942. The Palestinian Arabs had been active in London since 1936, running the Palestine Information Centre. See Rory Miller, "The Other Side of the Coin:

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service in 1932 to found the *Palestine Post*, to prepare a memorandum for the Zionist Executive regarding the establishment of a government information service<sup>76</sup>.

Agronsky had remained engaged in political life, with his newspaper 'regarded by all as [the Jewish Agency's] semi-official mouthpiece'.<sup>77</sup> Agronsky's proposals were modelled closely on the British wartime Ministry of Propaganda, headed by Lord Beaverbrook and then Brendan Bracken. Agronsky thought that it would appeal to Ben-Gurion, who he thought would be flattered by the implicit parallel with Churchill.<sup>78</sup> However, the memorandum was ignored, at least for the time being.

With the end of the war, the Zionist movement renewed its demands for independence in earnest. There was disappointment that Britain's new Labour government maintained pre-war limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine, and frustration that the Palestinian Arab case was being more forcefully made by Arab Offices in London and Washington.<sup>79</sup> In October 1945, the Jewish Agency Executive headed by Ben-Gurion, agreed on a campaign of armed opposition to British rule. In his plans for the insurgency, Ben-Gurion considered 'explaining Jewish retaliation to world public opinion was as important as the retaliation itself'.<sup>80</sup> This was no simple

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Arab Propaganda and the Battle against Zionism in London, 1937–48," *Israel Affairs* 5.4 (1999): 198.

<sup>76</sup> CZA A209, Agron to Sharett, n.d.

<sup>77</sup> Giora Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946-7," *Israel Studies* 16.3 (2011): 5.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.6.2008.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes of *Mapai* Secretariat meeting, 19.10.1945. LPA 2/24/1945/14. See also Rory Miller, "More Sinned against Than Sinning? The Case of the Arab Office, Washington, 1945-1948," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 15.2 (2004), Rory Miller, *Divided against Zion: Anti-Zionist Opposition in Britain to a Jewish State in Palestine, 1945-1948*, Cass Series: Israeli History, Politics and Society; (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

<sup>80</sup> Shimon Golan, *Obedience and Struggle During the Uprising: The Activism of the Labour Movement and the Activism of the Dissident Undergrounds, 1945-6 [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: United Kibbutz Movement, Yisrael Galili Institute for the Study of Defensive Force - Yad Tabenkin, 1988) 87.



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task; whilst international opinion opposed the British blockade of Palestine for Holocaust survivors, it would be harder to justify attacks against British military and civilian targets. The Jewish Agency was drawing up plans to open a public relations office in the summer of 1946, when the British launched Operation Agatha, a countrywide 'cordon and search' operation to seize arms and arrest the top Zionist leadership.<sup>81</sup> Agatha, or the Black *Shabbat*, launched 'an intensive media war' which 'severely tested the propaganda capability of the Jewish Agency'.<sup>82</sup>

The planned public relations office was hurriedly established, headed by the extremely able Walter Eytan (Ettinghausen), an Oxford lecturer who had worked on breaking German codes at Bletchley Park during the war.<sup>83</sup> He came to Palestine in 1946 with the brief of establishing the Institute for Higher Studies, a training school for the future state's foreign service.<sup>84</sup> However, he was diverted into *hasbara* affairs as soon as he arrived. He got to work quickly, issuing printed bulletins and establishing a daily press briefing.<sup>85</sup> He also developed a critique of 'Zionist propaganda', which suffered from improvisation, a lack of long-term planning, a multiplicity of organisations and not enough funding, as well as the failure to

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<sup>81</sup> CZA S25/1362, Daphne Trevor to Bernard Joseph, 27.5.1946; CZA S25/10355, Daphne Trevor to Bernard Joseph, 6.6.1946. For an eye-witness account from a British soldier, see R. Dare Wilson, Cordon and Search: With the 6th Airborne Division in Palestine (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1949).

<sup>82</sup> Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946-7," 6.

<sup>83</sup> Ernest Maas, "Israel: New Names, Old Memories," New York Times 19 June 1949. Discussing the trend for Hebraicizing names, Maas wrote 'the motive is a natural one: a desire to cast off old associations, some of which have been distasteful for many generations and to identify one's self not only with the new nation but with its venerable language and history.'

<sup>84</sup> Arye Levavi, "The Foreign Service School," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The First Fifty Years [Hebrew] eds. Moshe Yegar, Yosef Guvrin and Oded Aryeh (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002) 5-7.

<sup>85</sup> CZA S23/374, 'The Political Department's Services for Foreign Visitors', n.d.

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distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. Eytan called for the professionalization of Jewish information efforts, requiring that those who spoke for the Zionist movement had an understanding of news agendas and the power of visual images.<sup>86</sup>

Eytan was initially on the back foot, with the leadership of the *Yishuv* in some disarray. Responding to Operation Agatha, he remarked only that 'Jews are disinclined to look to anyone else but themselves for defence'.<sup>87</sup> However, after the July 22 bombing of the King David Hotel by the *Irgun*, his denial of British allegations that the Jewish Agency was involved in the outrage was reported in the international press as credible.<sup>88</sup> He was on easier ground when dealing with a non-fraternisation order issued by the commander of British forces in Palestine, Lt-Gen. Sir Evelyn Barker, after the bombing. The order, which was posted in the Jerusalem officers' mess, called for 'punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as much as any, by striking at their pockets and showing our contempt of them' by forbidding any contact with them. Major Aubrey Eban, an intelligence officer at the time, saw the order in his officers' mess and passed the text to Jon Kimche, a pro-Zionist British journalist who was working for Reuters, from where it was widely and unsympathetically reported.<sup>89</sup>

The Jewish Agency's decision in August 1946 to renounce armed insurgency put Eytan's public relations office on the offensive. In September, he opened his own

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<sup>86</sup> Walter Eytan, "Zionist Propaganda [Hebrew]," *HaTzofe* 18 March 1948.

<sup>87</sup> Clifton Daniel, "Showdown in Palestine Is Believed Imminent," *New York Times* 7 July 1946.

<sup>88</sup> "British Link Fate of Palestine to US; If Truman Rejects New Plan They Say Whole Scheme Must Be Reconsidered," *New York Times* 28 August 1946.

<sup>89</sup> Abba Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography* (Steimatzky's Agency: Jerusalem, 1977) 62-63.

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press centre, opposite the British Press Information Office.<sup>90</sup> His small staff included his deputy Gershon Hirsch, who gave daily briefings in his absence.<sup>91</sup> Michael Comay and Daphne Trevor, both South-African born, produced written material in English, whilst Nahum Sternberg arranged hospitality and press tours.<sup>92</sup> To prevent 'duplication and disorder' Eytan took charge of all foreign press work, bringing the press departments of the *Keren Kayemet*, the *Keren Hayesod* and the *Vaad Leumi* under his control.<sup>93</sup> He gave an additional, more detailed briefing, for journalists who wrote both for the domestic Hebrew press and the international press, since some of their questioning was so probing that he 'dare not reply' to the whole press corps.<sup>94</sup>

London was also an important focus of Eytan's efforts, as tension with Britain rose. The London office of the Jewish Agency sent him regular reports on how events in Palestine were reported in the British press.<sup>95</sup> At the suggestion of Teddy Kollek, who was already in London, the press department was reorganised, with Aubrey Eban – now out of British uniform – appointed its new head.<sup>96</sup> Eban's task was 'to capture some islands of sympathy and understanding', writing articles, pamphlets, booklets, lunching with editors, reporters, and MPs and pursuing 'my information work with more show of self-confidence than I felt'.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> CZA S25/2282, Walter Eytan to Richard Stubbs, 8.8.1946.

<sup>91</sup> CZA S25/2105, Reports on daily press conferences.

<sup>92</sup> CZA S25/2282, Nahum Sternberg to the Political Department, 26.1.1947

<sup>93</sup> Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946-7," 10.

<sup>94</sup> CZA S25/8171, Walter Eytan to Zeev Sherf, 19.8.1947.

<sup>95</sup> CZA S23/2266, Walter Eytan to Gershon Agronsky, 31.7.1946. See also CZA 23/2266. Reports from the London office of the Jewish Agency to Eytan.

<sup>96</sup> CZA Z4/32639, Note on the Information and Middle East Department, 17 September 1946.

<sup>97</sup> Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography* 64-67.

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Once Britain had passed the Palestine question to the United Nations in February 1947, the Zionist movement also shifted focus. Moshe Shertok, the head of the Jewish Agency's political department travelled to New York and 'plunged into a dizzying whirlpool of activities and meetings, aimed at counterbalancing British actions and denigrating [British foreign secretary] Bevin himself'.<sup>98</sup> The Jewish Agency had opened a press office in Washington in 1943. Now, Isaiah Kenen was recruited from the American Jewish Conference to head a new press office in New York. Kenen's approach was 'not merely to react to events, but to assist in creating them', and 'to put the British on the defensive'.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, Britain was already conclusively on the defensive. The Labour government unsuccessfully attempted to deny the unique status of hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees and survivors in Europe, and to present them as 'participants – some willing, some duped – in a nationalistic struggle'.<sup>100</sup> Speaking at a press conference in November 1945, Bevin had warned 'the Jews, with all their sufferings' against wanting 'to get too much at the head of the queue' when their claim for immigration to Palestine was only one element of the upheaval of European post-war reconstruction.<sup>101</sup> World opinion felt differently. It was the story of clandestine immigration of holocaust survivors to Palestine, often on boats of dubious safety and with highly evocative names, which provided a rich vein of material for journalists. The most notorious, the *Exodus 1947*, 'became such a

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<sup>98</sup> Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett : Biography of a Political Moderate* 221.

<sup>99</sup> CZA Z5/46, Meeting of Jewish Agency Executive American Section, 7.4.1947.

<sup>100</sup> Arie Kochavi, "Britain's Image Campaign against the Zionists," *Journal of Contemporary History* 36.2 (2001): 305.

<sup>101</sup> Quoted in: Alan Bullock, *Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, 1945-1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 181-83.

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British publicity disaster that little had to be done by the Jewish Agency other than providing background material and statements from the sidelines'.<sup>102</sup> And it was against this background that the United Nations voted on the partition of Palestine were taken in November 1947.<sup>103</sup>

### Press relations after independence

Substantive discussions of Agron's proposal for the establishment of an information ministry took their place behind negotiating the British withdrawal, Israel's declaration of independence in May 1948, and the consequent outbreak of war. In the meantime, information activity was characterised by improvisation with little clear organisation during the period of the war.<sup>104</sup> For the fifty-five foreign correspondents who were accredited to Tel-Aviv, as well as the 'parasitical fringe of novelists, columnists, poets, children's book authors, producers, dramatists and part-time pundits', the transition from British rule to Israeli was quite a shock.<sup>105</sup>

According to Kenneth Bilby, the correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*, 'the Arab-Jewish squabble had been a newspaperman's dream, truly unique in the annals of foreign correspondence' before the British left. Journalists were free

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<sup>102</sup> Goodman, "'Palestine's Best': The Jewish Agency's Press Relations, 1946-7," 19.

<sup>103</sup> Serialised accounts of life on the immigrant ships were widely publicised, and some were later published as books. See, for example: Claire Neikind, *Our Goal Was Palestine* (Victor Gollancz, 1946), M. P. Waters, *Haganah: The Story of Jewish Self Defence in Palestine* (London: Newman Wolsey, 1947), I. F. Stone, *Underground to Palestine* (New York: Boni & Gaer, 1946).

<sup>104</sup> Dina Goren, *Secrecy, Security and Press Freedom [Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: 1978). 356-377

<sup>105</sup> Kenneth W Bilby, *New Star in the near East* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1950) 138. Between 1945 and 1948, 220 foreign correspondents visited Palestine, with about 30 were present at once. See: 'Public Information Office Jerusalem: Final Report', The National Archives of the UK (TNA) CO 537/4206.

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to roam between Arabs and Jews, and to seek an official view from the British Press Information Office. The PIO was headed by Richard Stubbs, and offered the press congenial surroundings, cable facilities and constant access to officials.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, the journalists were welcomed wherever they went.

From November 29, 1947, when the United Nations adopted partition, until May 14, 1948, when the British departed, the war was as much propaganda as bullets, and the foreign journalist, particularly American or British, found himself a very important person indeed. For the American, it was never too late at night to rout prominent Jewish Agency officials out of bed for specific comment or general discussion; for prominent British journalists, Sir Henry Gurney, chief secretary of the mandate government was generally available.<sup>107</sup>

This all ended with the departure of the British. Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister had an uncomplicated outlook on the question of press relations: 'I'm interested in guns, not in stories,' he is reputed to have told journalists.<sup>108</sup> Certainly, during the war of 1948-9, he spent no time dealing with the question of Israel's international image, or briefing foreign journalists. Ben-Gurion was determined that he should have administrative responsibility for setting the government's information policy, but since he was so firmly focussed on the military and diplomatic aspects of the war, that policy remained 'packed away in the great brain of the chairman, as if it were sealed in a box'.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps this was preferable. When Ben-Gurion did voice his opinions about the press, it often complicated matters. In November 1950, the editors' committee –

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<sup>106</sup> Richard Stubbs, Palestine Story: A Personal Account of the Last Three Years of British Rule in Palestine (Bury St Edmunds: Ipswich Book Company & Miro Press 1995).

<sup>107</sup> Bilby, New Star in the near East 139.

<sup>108</sup> Bilby, New Star in the near East 143.

<sup>109</sup> Sharett to Agronsky, apparently June 1948. Goren, "The Press under Seige [Hebrew]," 357-8.

by any measure a friendly audience - cancelled its annual dinner with the prime minister to commemorate the 1947 UN partition plan in protest at his dismissive attitude. In an act apparently calculated to smooth things over, Ben-Gurion invited the editors to meet him in January 1951, but then berated them for responding only to 'the impression of today, the event of today, the sensation of today, the public mood of today'.<sup>110</sup> In the Knesset, he was even more scathing:

What is a newspaper? Someone who has money hires some workers to print what he thinks. Is the thought more important because it is printed on paper? Is there any difference between a written comment and a spoken one? What does it mean 'it's written in the paper'? It means it was said by someone. Someone said it. Do you think that the 'someone' who said it is more important than you?<sup>111</sup>

Feeling that the issue of press relations was 'horribly neglected', Sharett arranged with Ben-Gurion that he would take responsibility for government information activities until a more formal decision was taken.<sup>112</sup> Sharett, whose earlier career included membership of the editorial board of *Davar*, was also capable of offending journalists, this time in the guise of collegial advice. During a trip to Paris in 1951, *Yediot Ahronot's* Paris correspondent reported that 'the foreign minister of Israel thinks it appropriate to devote his valuable time ... to teach them, the journalists, a lesson in professional journalism'.<sup>113</sup> Sharett was, at least, convinced that the press was an integral element of foreign policy. 'He believed that an understanding and even supportive public opinion was an important component

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<sup>110</sup> *Davar*, 7.1.1951

<sup>111</sup> Ben-Gurion to the Knesset, April 1951. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 8, p. 1588.

<sup>112</sup> Sharett to Agronsky, apparently June 1948. Goren, "The Press under Siege [Hebrew]," 359.

<sup>113</sup> *Yediot Ahronot*, 24.12.1951

aiding Israel's government to pursue its policies'.<sup>114</sup> Whilst he did not cavil at the use of military force, he believed that 'the possession of arms in itself and the show of military muscle, indispensable as they may be, were not sufficient to ensure Israel's security'.<sup>115</sup>

His initial intention was to establish a unified government information service. He hoped the foreign department would be headed by Moshe Perlman, a journalist with military experience from the wartime British army and press experience from a posting as an attaché to the British Embassy in Athens after the war, whilst the domestic department would be headed by a journalist on loan from *Haaretz*. To head the service, he recalled Gershon Agronsky, whose 1944 proposal to establish an information ministry had yet to be discussed.

Writing to Agron, he remembered that 'somewhere in one of the protocols there is a decision that regarding an 'information bureau' – whatever that means – that is to be subordinate to the Minister of Internal Affairs'.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, officials from the information department of the Jewish Agency had already set up an information service at the Ministry of the Interior, headed by Yitzhak Regev, which was intended to assist local journalists.<sup>117</sup> Sharett told Agronsky that he did not want to clash with minister of the interior Yitzhak Greenboim 'which would certainly turn into a personal dispute', and so asked Agronsky to establish a 'government information

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<sup>114</sup> Yegar, "Moshe Sharett and the Origins of Israel's Diplomacy," 17.

<sup>115</sup> Israel, ed., *Flowers for David: In Memory of David Farhi [Hebrew]* 55.

<sup>116</sup> The term used is 'lishkat modi'in', which could also mean 'intelligence bureau'. However, since a military intelligence unit had been established by Chaim Herzog and Isser Be'eri, the intention appeared to be to deal with government communications. Sharett to Agronsky, apparently June, 1948. Goren, "The Press under Seige [Hebrew]," 357-8. See also: Sheffer, *Moshe Sharett : Biography of a Political Moderate* 350.

<sup>117</sup> Note here on the Jewish Agency before and after independence



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service', run jointly by the defence and foreign ministries, to provide information for the foreign press. However, the offer did not include Agronsky attending cabinet meetings, which had been a key element of his original proposal. Agronsky declined the offer, and – for the time being - remained in Jerusalem.<sup>118</sup>

The foreign press certainly needed information. On 14 May, the Blue Train telegraph apparatus, which had sped copy over the imperial wireless system to London in a matter of minutes, was packed up and sent to Amman. Assured by the Jewish Agency that they could continue to file from Jerusalem, a dozen foreign correspondents remained in the city. But no-one was able to get new telegraph machinery into Jerusalem. For two weeks, the journalists were stuck in the besieged city, neither able to file their copy, or to leave. When they did manage to leave Jerusalem, they went to Tel Aviv, via Amman and Cyprus, where they found similar problems. The city was 'teeming with correspondents, all acutely unhappy about the lack of press facilities and the over-burdened wireless system'.<sup>119</sup> It was, though, relatively safe.<sup>120</sup>

The foreign press liaison department, based first at the Scopus Club on HaYarkon Street and then at the Ritz Hotel in Tel Aviv, was headed by Moshe Pearlman. According to one of the foreign journalists in Tel Aviv in 1948, Pearlman 'uninhibitedly fell to converting Tel Aviv's sandbagged Hotel Ritz in to the most

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<sup>118</sup> Agron, *Slave of Duty* [Hebrew] 185-86.

<sup>119</sup> Bilby, *New Star in the near East* 143.

<sup>120</sup> Gene Currivan, "Life Goes on in Israel, Despite Trials of War," *New York Times* 30 May 1948.

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wideawake press camp in the dreamy Middle East'.<sup>121</sup> He was assisted by another British-born spokesman, Jewish Agency official Avraham Harman, and by Lionel Peyton. Initially, they struggled, with Perlman giving irregular and unscheduled press briefings.<sup>122</sup> Yaakov Dori, the IDF's first chief of staff, did not grant a single interview during his term of office. According to the editor of *Maariv*, Dr Azriel Carlebach, the foreign correspondents in Israel suffered a great deal:

They suffered from disruptions to the post, and the failure of the minister of transport to even connect Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv. They suffered from power struggles between ministers' offices and their ministries and from restrictions on travel. From the lack of manners of clerks and military commanders ...and from the stupidity of the censors. How do we want to win on the propaganda front at home and abroad if those appointed are clerks with no experience, no training and no understanding of journalism? Why weren't press men called up to serve on the press front?<sup>123</sup>

In fact, Perlman was a credible spokesman and his briefings were popular enough with both foreign and Israeli journalists that Harman worried that the Israelis were attending Perlman's briefings and asking questions 'about matters we are not interested in the foreigners hearing about'.<sup>124</sup> In September 1948, Pearlman was appointed as the first IDF spokesman, leaving Harman to run the international communications department alone. By the autumn of 1948, and with the encouragement of foreign minister Sharett, a more effective Israeli press liaison system was in operation. Harman was responsible for issuing credentials, whilst

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<sup>121</sup> "On the Scene in the Middle East - Coverage of the War," *Time* June 16 1967. The article quotes a review of Pearlman's book 'The Army of Israel' by Hal Lehrman 'who was on the scene in 1948'.

<sup>122</sup> "The Press and the Military [Hebrew]," *HaTzofe* 20 November 1948.

<sup>123</sup> Azriel Carlebach, "Who Killed the Murder? [Hebrew]," *Maariv* 24 September 1948.

<sup>124</sup> Goren, "The Press under Seige [Hebrew]," 382.

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Peyton acted as an escort on press trips to the front.<sup>125</sup> New telegraph equipment was brought in. Press trips were organised.<sup>126</sup> An information office was opened in New York.<sup>127</sup>

As Carlebach noted in *Maariv*, the Arab states, and Jordan in particular, had taken a more amenable attitude to foreign journalists during the war, offering access to the front and to senior political and military figures so that it was possible, 'within twenty-four hours of arrival to meet cabinet ministers, senior statesmen or army chiefs'.<sup>128</sup> However, both Arabs and Israelis enforced strict censorship on what journalists could publish.

The Zionist leadership, transitioning into statehood, was concerned about preventing the release of information that may have been of use to the enemy, but the few professionals who could guide them lacked clear authority or clear policy to follow. In the absence of such policy, they 'muddled through', both limiting access and censoring publication. As the war continued, the military censors, 'a well-educated group of young men, [who] treated the foreign press amicably but suffered from the prevalent spy bogey and from the security concept of the old underground

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<sup>125</sup> Haviv Canaan, "New Premises for the Press Office [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 20 November 1960.

<sup>126</sup> Although such trips remained relatively rare, the office organised a trip to Beer Sheva in November 1948, which had recently fallen to Israeli forces. According to Radio Cairo, nine taxis were commandeered to take foreign correspondents to visit. See: Canaan, "New Premises for the Press Office [Hebrew]."

<sup>127</sup> CZA/A209/130, Report on the Activities of the Israel Office of Information in New York, Calendar Year 1949. The Israel Information Centre in New York, headed by IL 'Si' Kenen, was a mine of activity. In 1949, it published 83 information releases, distributed 60,000 copies of speeches by Israeli politicians and diplomats and liaised with the United Nations press corps, as well as with the American Jewish community.

<sup>128</sup> Bilby, *New Star in the near East* 143.

days', imposed harsh restrictions on the press.<sup>129</sup> Apart from the chief of staff, the chief of operations and the commander of the Jerusalem front, no IDF officer could be named, nor could the designation of any military unit be mentioned. They blocked publication of major stories, such as the *Altalena* incident and the friendly-fire death of Colonel 'Mickey' Marcus, who was commanding the Jerusalem front.<sup>130</sup>

The censors also tried to prevent foreign reporting of the assassination of UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in September 1948, during the second ceasefire of the war. Whilst Bilby of the *Herald Tribune* thought Israeli censors were 'as gentle as a Mediterranean breeze' compared to their Jordanian counterparts, Carlebach of *Maariv* was horrified:

They sit here, about a hundred or more people, bored. There's a ceasefire, there's nothing to report ...and on Friday afternoon at 5pm, Bernadotte is assassinated. An event with a capital 'E'. The most important event in the world ...That's what they were sitting here for. ...They listen and they write their despatches. Very urgent. Double-urgent. And they go to the table of the censor in Tel Aviv and present their copy, and he doesn't accept it. Stop. Total black-out. You may not say that Bernadotte was murdered. ... In the meantime, the enemy's radio is reporting the event, along with their English commentary ...and later the entire world hears the enemy's version. Only Israel keeps quiet. ...The newsrooms telegraph their correspondents in Israel, and the correspondents ask to send an absolutely private reply, just to let them know that the censor is blocking them, but the censor blocks even this correspondence. They try to explain to the Israeli clerk how great the damage they are causing; everyone will see suspect motives in blocking publication, and we only want to dispel those suspicions.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Bilby, New Star in the near East 146.

<sup>130</sup> In the case of the *Altalena*, an *Irgun* arms ship whose cargo was claimed by the newly-independent State of Israel, attempts to obfuscate were hampered by the fact that foreign journalists could view the incident as it unfolded from the balconies of their hotels along the Tel Aviv front. See: Goren, "The Press under Siege [Hebrew]," 359.

<sup>131</sup> Carlebach, "Who Killed the Murder? [Hebrew]." See also: Bilby, New Star in the near East 156.

The domestic press had an altogether easier time, so long as they complied with the government.<sup>132</sup> The editors' committee, which had been established before independence, continued to meet senior politicians and security figures regularly and receive briefings on matters of a sensitive nature. The Israeli media accepted self-censorship as preferable to the interference of the military censor, whose powers to prevent the publication of sensitive security information and to preserve public order under the 1945 Defence (Emergency) Regulations were extensive.<sup>133</sup> There was also a semi-official censorship where senior officials would 'discuss' the next day's coverage of news with editors and journalists.<sup>134</sup> In some cases, officials simply dictated the news to the press: "On Saturday morning I would walk into the radio station of *Kol Israel*, which was controlled by the Prime Minister's Office and just dictate the news to the reader, reporting about the lectures given by ministers and government officials on Friday evening."<sup>135</sup> In other instances, the press actually reported what politicians wished they had said, rather than what they said in reality:

'Moshe Sharett ...delivered an important speech in the Knesset. Hearing it reported on the radio, he regretted some of his remarks, telephoned *Jerusalem Post* editor Gershon Agron, and dictated a different text to him. The fact that his speech had been recorded in the Knesset chronicles and broadcast in Hebrew throughout the country did not deter him from rewriting it after the event. However, the most interesting aspect of this story was the newspaper editor's response. After all, who would know better

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<sup>132</sup> Ben-Gurion's views were plain: 'Discipline and public responsibility are required of the entire public, and above all, of the press.'

<sup>133</sup> The 1945 Regulations, along with most other Mandatory law, were incorporated into Israeli law in 1948 by the promulgation of the Law and Administration Ordinance (1948).

<sup>134</sup> Sharett, *Personal Diary [Hebrew]* vol 5, p.1506. See also: Benny Morris, "The Israeli Press in the Qibia Affair, October-November 1953 [Hebrew]," *Theory and Criticism* 8 (1996).

<sup>135</sup> Toledano and McKie, "Social Integration and Public Relations: Global Lessons from an Israeli Experience," 395.

than the minister himself what was good for the country, and who was Agron, a newspaper editor, to argue with the minister?<sup>136</sup>

In April 1949 the Israeli government returned to Agronsky's proposal for an information ministry. Commenting on the improvised wartime system, Agronsky wrote to Sharett that 'the division of the task into two, with two conductors for the information services and two ministries – internal affairs and foreign affairs – brings little benefit and a great deal of complication'.<sup>137</sup> Sharett endorsed the proposal and recommended Agronsky should establish and head the government press and information department, subordinate to the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>138</sup> This time, Agronsky accepted on condition that he would attend cabinet meetings, although without ministerial rank.<sup>139</sup>

He established an information office that served all government ministries, and divided it into six units: domestic press, foreign press, broadcasting services, public opinion research, the defence ministry's public affairs department and the IDF spokesperson's unit.<sup>140</sup> The first Israel Government Yearbook shows that by June 1949, all the information services of different units had indeed been concentrated in the Prime Minister's Office, as Ben-Gurion had ordered.<sup>141</sup> His plans included a staff

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<sup>136</sup> Yoram Peri, Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004) 84.

<sup>137</sup> Agron, Slave of Duty [Hebrew]. 183-185.

<sup>138</sup> Moshe Yegar, "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Structure, Administration and Lessons from Moshe Sharett's Diaries [Hebrew]," Kivvunum 10 (1981): 43-45. See also: CZA A209/111/3, Moshe Perlman to Agron, 25.5.1949. Perlman corrected the typist's rendering of Agron's surname, striking out the redundant letters 'sky'.

<sup>139</sup> CZA 209/111/2, Contract of employment, 2.8.1949. See also: "Gershon Agronsky Assumes Duties as Israeli Information Chief; Changes Name to Agron," JTA 10 June 1949.

<sup>140</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 38.

<sup>141</sup> Israel Government, Israel Government Yearbook [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1949).

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of 1949, split between a unified press office that would deal with foreign and domestic journalists, and the broadcasting service which oversaw *Kol Yisrael* radio.<sup>142</sup> He also called for a large increase in expenditure, although he noted that 'the governments of America and England devote a much higher percentage of their budget on *hasbara*' than he was requesting.<sup>143</sup>

But Agron made little headway. *HaDor*, the evening paper of the ruling *Mapai* party – recently established at his recommendation - carried an article in March 1950 which noted 'a few months ago an institution called the Information Service was established in Israel, and its head is a pleasant and capable man. But for some reason, there has been very little progress in this area'.<sup>144</sup> Replying to an earlier letter from Agron in which he apparently shared his frustrations, the director-general of the foreign ministry, Walter Eytan, suggested a solution:

Why don't you ask the Govt. to devote one of its weekly meetings (or a special meeting) to public and press relations? I am sure M.S. would support such a suggestion, + it would give you the opportunity to lecture them on the A.B.C. of the problem. I quite agree with you – at present there is scarcely a single member of the Govt. who has the remotest notion of the press (local + foreign), nor (what is worse) of the vast harm which is done as the direct result of this ignorance or contempt of the subject. So you'll have to teach them.<sup>145</sup>

Two weeks later, Agron did brief the cabinet. Ben-Gurion was less than enthusiastic, remarking that 'once a stable government is formed I hope it will

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<sup>142</sup> CZA A209/1110, P Kollek, Information Services to Mordechai Nurock, Prime Minister's Office, 20.8.1949.

<sup>143</sup> CZA A209/1111/2, 'Information Services – Budget', memorandum by Gershon Agron, 16.2.1950.

<sup>144</sup> Yosef Lev, "We Need a Modern *Hasbara* Service with Broad Authority [Hebrew]," *HaDor* 6 March 1950.

<sup>145</sup> CZA A209/1111/1, Walter Eytan to Gershon Agron, 7.9.1950.

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discuss this'.<sup>146</sup> Offended, Agron resigned in early 1951, and returned to the editorship of the *Jerusalem Post*.<sup>147</sup> In his letter of resignation, he listed a series of administrative changes he had been unable to implement.<sup>148</sup> He later wrote to Ben-Gurion of his frustrations:

I am not leaving with a sense of disappointment because I was able to learn that a system needs definition, and that without such clarity productive work is impossible; my disappointment is with myself and that I thought I could manage without it, that I found that in government work, as in civil society, the value of definition, authority etc. to someone faithfully carrying out his job are so unimportant.<sup>149</sup>

There now followed a series of re-organisations. In January 1952, Agron's six units were rationalised into three – the Government Press Office to deal with foreign and domestic press, the Broadcasting Service which ran *Kol Yisrael* radio and a new domestic *hasbara* department whose target audience was the Israeli population, and which became the *Minhal haHasbara* (the *Hasbara* Administration) in 1954.<sup>150</sup> Meanwhile Sharett considered establishing a department within the Foreign Ministry that would send material to diplomatic missions in order to help them explain Israel's positions to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.<sup>151</sup> He continued to 'lavish attention on the press' and was distressed by ministerial colleagues who did not

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<sup>146</sup> CZA A209/111/3, Protocol of Cabinet Meeting, 22.9.1950.

<sup>147</sup> Agron, *Slave of Duty* [Hebrew] 217-19.

<sup>148</sup> CZA A209/111/3, Agron to Director-General, Prime Minister's Office, 31.1.1951.

<sup>149</sup> CZA/A209/111/3, Agron to Ben-Gurion, 27.2.1951.

<sup>150</sup> *Israel Government Yearbook* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Government Printer, 1950) 17.

<sup>151</sup> Diary entry for 16 November 1953. Sharett, *Personal Diary* [Hebrew] vol 1, p. 152.



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share his belief that international public opinion was a valuable component of the country's standing.<sup>152</sup>

In 1954, Ben-Gurion appointed Zalman Aranne as minister without portfolio, and asked him to deal with the domestic aspects of government information. Aranne was given responsibility for the *Hasbara* Administration, which was responsible for organising political outreach events to Israeli citizens, the Israeli Film Service, which produced and distributed educational and public service films for domestic and foreign audiences, and the Government Publications Service, which printed and distributed official publications. Under Aranne, the three were combined into the *Hasbara* Directorate, and were transferred to the Ministry of Education and Culture in late 1955, when he was appointed minister. This was the case until 1960, when the three bodies were once again separated from each other, and returned to authority of the Prime Minister's Office. Foreign information efforts, apart from the liaison with foreign journalists in Israel, were the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry for the entire period.

This frequent shifting of responsibility, the multiplicity of agencies and the lack of central authority over the issue as a whole did not improve Israel's ability to articulate a clear message to international audiences. These problems were not unique to the challenges of formulating policy in the sphere of government communications. In late 1949 and early 1950, Edwin Samuel gave a series of lectures to directors-general of government ministries, entitled 'How to Improve the Efficiency of the Israel Government Administrative Machine'. He noted the many

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<sup>152</sup> Yegar, "Moshe Sharett and the Origins of Israel's Diplomacy," 17.

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problems the new administration faced, including the pressure of external events, a shortage of experienced senior civil servants, over-centralisation, inadequate integration of the former Mandate government officials with the Jewish Agency officials, and the malign influence of party politics in senior appointments.<sup>153</sup>

In 1956, during Operation *Kadesh* in the Suez, Israel's ambassador to Paris, Yaakov Tsur, wrote in his diary:

The people at the French foreign ministry are worried about the weakness of our *hasbara*. All the provocation by Egypt has been forgotten. ...All that remains is the (Israeli) attack and Nasser has quickly been able to get his version of events out to the world. Because of the secrecy and speed of the operation, there was no way we could prepare opinions and we are going to pay the price for it.<sup>154</sup>

The perceived weakness of the system was debated in the Knesset soon afterwards, when Aryeh Alterman (*Herut*) tabled a proposal for a debate on the government's information activities overseas, remarking that 'there is almost no *hasbara* overseas. Whenever we do explain, we do it late, and whatever we do explain, we do it badly'. Chaim Ariav (General Zionists) noted that the deficiencies in the system existed before the war, and that 'it is clear to me from contact with those who deal with this issue that there is no higher authority whose responsibility it is to set *hasbara* policy'. In response, Ben-Gurion admitted that more could have been done, but that

it is something of a naïve illusion to assume that everything depends on *hasbara* ...we cannot explain things to people if they, for political or

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<sup>153</sup> CZA A209/131, Edwin Samuel, 'How To Improve the Efficiency of The Israel Government Administrative Machine', n.d., This copy of the memorandum is noted 'To Gershon [Agron], with affectionate regards, from Nebi', and dated 23.ii.1950.

<sup>154</sup> Yaakov Tzur, *Paris Diary: The Diplomatic Campaign in France 1953-1956 [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968) 301.

economic reasons, take a position against us, and not everything is related to the quality of *hasbara*.<sup>155</sup>

Foreign Minister Meir offered a different explanation for the perceived weaknesses of Israeli information efforts. 'Many of the critics of *hasbara* frequently ignore, deliberately or not, the objective limitations in which *hasbara* must operate,' she told the Knesset in April 1957.<sup>156</sup> By this, she meant the small budget granted to overseas information efforts, as well as the false distinction between domestic and foreign work. There was some progress. In March 1959, Meir was able to report to the Knesset that 'despite the meagre resources available', her ministry was reaching audiences in more countries and in more languages, although they faced the formidable force of individual Arab states and the Arab League in many places.<sup>157</sup> A year later, she announced the establishment of Israel Information Centres in Paris and in Buenos Aires, to join the New York office that had opened in 1949, and the start of *Kol Yisrael* broadcasts to Africa. Meir also identified another problem. She warned the Knesset, 'the next person to assess our *hasbara* should remember that the nature of this work is that there is no way to measure or quantify it'.<sup>158</sup>

Ben-Gurion continued to pay scant attention to the issue, and became no more enthusiastic about press freedom. In 1957, the government passed the Penal Reform Act (State Security), which strictly limited official contact with journalists, with only ministry spokespeople allowed to brief the press.<sup>159</sup> When Elimelech Rimalt (General Zionists) submitted a written question to the prime minister, asking if there

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<sup>155</sup> Knesset debate, 9.1.1957. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 21, cols. 712-713.

<sup>156</sup> Golda Meir to the Knesset, 2.4.1957. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol.22, col. 1655.

<sup>157</sup> Golda Meir to the Knesset, 30.3.1959. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 26, col. 1709.

<sup>158</sup> Golda Meir to the Knesset, 23.5.1960. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 29, col. 1298.

<sup>159</sup> Goren, "The Press under Seige [Hebrew]," 387.

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were any truth to the notion that 'a national *hasbara* authority was to be established, that would include all Israeli *hasbara* departments, both domestic and foreign,' Ben-Gurion gave a single word answer. 'No,' he replied for the record.<sup>160</sup>

### Conclusions

Jewish diaspora life was never, and could never be, lived in total isolation. Indeed, the lessons learnt through dealing with the outside world, however troubled those relations were, were vital to the success of Zionism in achieving political independence for the Jewish people in 1948. It is from here that Israel drew the characteristics of self-reliance, a strong sense of community, and a long tradition of diplomatic intercession with outside authorities, as well as the habits of separation and secrecy. However, Herzl's decisive intervention in pulling Zionism onto the agenda of the world at large was, and perhaps remains, an uncomfortable gamble with history. Given the assumption that Jewish politics must be played out in a profoundly hostile environment, it was possible for Israelis in the period under review to couple engagement with the international system with an easily-evoked sense of insecurity and a deeply-rooted pessimism.

This is the context from which the political culture of *hasbara* emerged, and where the limitations *on* Jewish politics and the limitations *of* Jewish politics in the transition from diaspora to independence – the 'imperfect lens', described above - began to exhibit the characteristics of 'muddling through' as a policy-making preference. And, as Israel moved into independence, the difficulties of *hasbara* did

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<sup>160</sup> David Ben-Gurion to the Knesset, 11.6.1960. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 29, col. 1817.

not diminish. The focus, though, shifted from the 'explanations' of a national liberation movement to the policies of an independent state. Whilst Ben-Gurion's dismissive attitude towards the press and to international opinion may be somewhat overstated, his attention was fixed firmly on the creation of the state.<sup>161</sup> His doctrine of *mamlachtiut* (statism) emphasised the transformative role the state could have in producing strong, rooted and fierce Israelis out of the remnants of Jewish exile.<sup>162</sup> In order to do so, the use of military force became a key characteristic of Israel's early foreign policy.<sup>163</sup> Foreign Minister and leading 'diplomat' Sharett, who 'took *hasbara* seriously', did not succeed in bringing considerations of international image into national policy-making, particularly in the security sphere.<sup>164</sup> Finally, the considerable demands of the early years of independence, and the fact that neither man devolved power easily, meant that the issue was not given priority.<sup>165</sup>

This discussion relates to the paradox which forms the basis of the argument of this thesis, which is explained in the Introduction: whilst Zionism is predicated on

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<sup>161</sup> See, for example, his cautiously positive assessment of the United Nations in the early 1960s: 'It has not the power, the authority or the will to put its principles into practice. The State of Israel felt that weakness the very day it was born ... All the same ... some kind of supreme authority for mankind is taking shape. ... The UN may yet do great things in drawing the peoples closer and building peace in the world.' David Ben-Gurion, "Achievements and Tasks of Our Generation," Government Yearbook, 5722 (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1961-62). See also: Caplan, "Oom Shmoom Revisited: Sharett and Ben-Gurion."

<sup>162</sup> For further discussion of *mamlachtiut*, see Liebman and Don Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State 81-131, Yagil Levy, The Other Army of Israel: Materialist Militarism in Israel (Tel Aviv: *Yediot Ahronot*, 2003). For the image of the Israeli, see Oz Almog, The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>163</sup> Benny Morris, Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993). For further background, see Anita Shapira, Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948, Studies in Jewish History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>164</sup> Yegar, "Moshe Sharett and the Origins of Israel's Diplomacy," 53-56. See also: Diary entry for 5 October 1955, Sharett, Personal Diary [Hebrew] vol. 4, p.1192.

<sup>165</sup> Meir, My Life [Hebrew] 207.

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the rejection of Jewish life that is not independent, it adopted a rational strategy to achieve its aims – primarily the creation of Jewish political autonomy or independence - which was highly dependent on the support of the international community. That was, and remains, an uncomfortable position. The following chapters analyse why a concerted attempt in the 1960s and 1970s to resolve this paradox by articulating clear policy to explain Israel's policies to international audiences was largely unsuccessful.

## Chapter 2

### Government Information Policy under the Minister without Portfolio, 1966-1967

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‘Until 1967, it was easy to explain – everyone believed you.’<sup>1</sup>

With the retirement of Ben-Gurion from front-line politics in 1963, a new phase of Israeli government communication policy could begin.<sup>2</sup> In late 1966, his successor, Levi Eshkol, appointed Yisrael Galili as Minister without Portfolio. Later in the same year, he asked Galili to take ministerial responsibility for government communications. This was the first time that the issue of *hasbara* had been put under ministerial authority, and the timing – several months before the outbreak of war in June 1967 - was opportune. However, as this chapter will show, Galili’s mandate was limited and he was personally unsuited to the job of recasting the concept of *hasbara*. Indeed, had it not been for the Six Day War, the appointment of Israel’s first minister with responsibility for *hasbara* would have been more quickly revealed as an essentially defensive and tactical attempt to cultivate the image of the prime minister in the domestic press. As it was, his ‘activist’ outlook hampered effective attempts to obtain and maintain domestic and international support for Israel in the strongly critical post-war environment.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Arnan ‘Sini’ Azaryahu, 19.6.2005. Azaryahu was Yisrael Galili’s chief of staff during his tenure as Minister without Portfolio with responsibility for *Hasbara*.

<sup>2</sup> On the transition from Ben-Gurion to Eshkol, see Zaki Shalom, Ben-Gurion's Political Struggles, 1963-1967: A Lion in Winter (London: Routledge, 2006) 12-17.

However, the appointment of Galili did mark the beginning of a period of intensive attention to the issue of national image cultivation and public diplomacy. The 'muddling through' of decision-making – the third theme of this thesis – was not all ineffective. The issue was brought from periphery into the heart of government business, with ministerial authority. Thus, this chapter will argue that 1966 was a critical turning point in the history of Israeli government communications. It was the moment at which Israel acknowledged the need for addressing the problems that had emerged in the first years of independence, though not yet the obstacles it would face or the difficulties of articulating cogent policy or creating the apparatus of government communications.

### **Appointment of Galili to take responsibility for information efforts**

Galili had been at the heart of the military-political elite for two decades, but determinedly resisted offers of ministerial office when joining the government. Eshkol tempted him into government by persuading him that the way Israel was perceived, particularly by international observers, had a direct contribution to its national security.<sup>3</sup> However, appointing an 'activist', whose clear preference was for doing rather than saying, only sharpened the clash with the 'diplomat' faction of the government, and particularly with Foreign Minister Abba Eban.

Levi Eshkol, the 'last of the first' generation of Zionist leaders, was more disposed to consider Israel's international image than his predecessor.<sup>4</sup> He was also

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Arnan 'Sini' Azaryahu, 19.6.2005.

<sup>4</sup> Amos Eylon, "Eshkol: Last of the First [Hebrew]," *New Outlook* 12.3 (1969).



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more effective at devolving power to ministers and granted real authority to his foreign minister, the erudite British-educated former diplomat Abba Eban. Eban needed no convincing of the value of Israel's international image. 'The image and reputation of Israel overseas are not determined only by discussions of international policy. They are also constantly being shaped by the way the country presents itself and the way in which it conceives of itself in all that it does,' he told the Knesset in early 1967.<sup>5</sup>

When Eshkol turned to Galili to bring the existing machinery of government communications under centralised control, the prime minister may have assumed that it would be a simple task, a shuffling of the administrative deck. Galili took responsibility for the Government Press Office which was responsible for press liaison, the domestic information services and the newly independent Israeli Broadcasting Authority, bringing an element of coordination between them and clarifying the division of responsibilities amongst them. But he did not have authority over the Foreign Ministry's network of embassies and consulates, critical for managing Israel's international image. This false distinction between domestic and overseas communications was to dog his efforts and reflects the second theme of this thesis, the way in which the 'activist' and 'diplomat' camps neutralised each other and the possibility of real change to Israeli government information policy.

Yisrael Galili was far from an obvious candidate for the job. Largely uneducated, not well-travelled and with little grasp of the world at large he was, as one of the people who worked closely with him said, fundamentally a 'local

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<sup>5</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 4.2.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 48, cols. 1290-1304.

politician'.<sup>6</sup> Others were even less complimentary, describing him as an 'anachronistic *politruk* trapped in the past' and his appointment as 'the strangest in the history of Israeli politics'.<sup>7</sup> One person who worked closely with him noted that 'he was mentally very strong, but operationally very weak', and that his management skills were very poor. Yet Sini Azaryahu, his chief of staff during his political career, insisted he had a great deal of political wisdom, even if he lacked formal education beyond primary school level.<sup>8</sup>

His early career was in the pre-state Hagana militia. Rising quickly through the ranks, he joined the *Hagana's* national leadership in 1935 and ended up as the Head of the National Command, the organisation's commander, during the 1947-8 War of Independence. But, in May 1948, he was summarily dismissed from his position, with Ben-Gurion assuming direct control over the newly unified armed forces of the State of Israel.<sup>9</sup> The move, nicknamed the 'war of the generals', was Ben-Gurion's response to growing political opposition emanating from within the *Hagana*, justified under the guise of purging pro-Soviet influence.<sup>10</sup> Yigael Yadin, the

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.6.2008.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Amnon Dankner, 20.7.2010. Dankner, Interview with Yossi Sarid, 29.7.2010. Both men recalled the reference that Galili supplied in support of Sarid's scholarship application for studies overseas. Written in block capitals, in pencil, it read simply 'TH MAN IS GOOD' [sic.]. Other, anonymous, interviewees described him as 'the single most destructive influence on Israeli politics', and as a 'Bolshevik' whose refusal to countenance the Egyptian peace initiative of 1971 may well have caused Israel another, highly destructive, round of conflict in 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Ofra Armoni, Friend and Confidant: Talks with Sini Azaryahu [Hebrew] (Bnei Brak: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 2008) 81.

<sup>9</sup> Anita Shapira, The Army Controversy, 1948 [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, Ben-Gurion (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978) 154-55. See also Yoram Peri, Generals in the Cabinet Room : How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006) 54-57.

soldier-scholar operations chief of the *Hagana* accused Ben-Gurion of attempting 'to transform the army as a whole into an army of one political party'.<sup>11</sup>

Characteristic of Ben-Gurion's often brutal transition from national liberation movement to independent state, it left Galili on the political sidelines for close to twenty years.<sup>12</sup> It also left him with a lifelong grudge against Ben-Gurion, and by extension, against his protégés Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>13</sup> With the establishment of the state, Galili moved into politics, a highly influential and skilled political operator, with a skill for writing.<sup>14</sup> He was particularly close to Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, and shared their relaxed toleration of Yiddish, which was frowned upon by Ben-Gurion and the *Mapai* ideologues. According to one observer, 'Golda relied on Galili absolutely.'<sup>15</sup> Years after independence, he retained the characteristics of the underground fighter. His telephone manner was particularly disarming. When making a call, he would remain silent when the other party picked up the phone until they had identified themselves to him.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Yoram Peri, *Between Battles and Ballots: Israeli Military in Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 55.

<sup>12</sup> Although a member of Knesset from 1948 and of its influential Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee from 1955, Galili was the biggest victim of the 'War of the Generals'. Of his *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* colleagues, Moshe Carmel was a minister by 1956, Yitzhak Ben-Aharon by 1959 and Yigal Allon by 1961, all appointed by Ben-Gurion. Only Galili was frozen out until Ben-Gurion retired.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.11.2011.

<sup>14</sup> Although most remember Galili as the consummate drafter, he was not without his critics, one government minister writing: 'Galili had a wonderful capacity for drafting 'in plain Hebrew' hazy reasoning that looked 'cleaner' and more aesthetic than the Prime Minister's objectionable views.' Victor Shem-Tov, *One of Them [Hebrew]* (Tel-Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1997) 94.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.6.2008.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 3.6.2008.

Galili was a member of the *Ahdut Ha'Avoda-Poalei Zion* (Unity of Labour-Workers of Zion) party, led by Yitzhak Tabenkin.<sup>17</sup> Springing from the common roots of the socialist Zionist movement articulated by its ideologues Ber Borochov and Berl Katznelson, the party was distinguished from the David Ben-Gurion's *Mapai* (Workers of Israel Party) by its pro-Soviet orientation, a greater 'activism' in military affairs, and was most closely associated with the *Palmach*, the elite, full-time, forces of the Hagana. *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* was also known for its refusal to countenance the division of the land of Israel to allow both Jewish and Arab independent states. Tabenkin had strongly opposed partition when it was first mooted by Britain in the early 1930s. In 1937, following the report of the Peel Commission that recommended the partition of mandatory Palestine into Jewish and Arab areas, the Twentieth Zionist Congress debated the matter. The bitter disagreement between Tabenkin and Ben-Gurion over partition was directly responsible for the later split in *Mapai* in 1944.

With Ben-Gurion's split from *Mapai* in June 1963, the way was clear for Yisrael Galili to enter government, under new prime minister Levi Eshkol. Following the January 1966 general elections, in which *Mapai* and *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* ran together as the Labour Alignment, his party colleagues Yigal Allon and Moshe Carmel

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<sup>17</sup> *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* underwent three distinct phases of its existence. Founded in 1919 by Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson as a successor to *Poalei Zion* (Workers of Zion), the 'historical' party merged with *HaPoel HaTzair* (the Young Worker) in 1930 to form *Mapai*. In the early 1940s, a faction emerged within *Mapai* to challenge Ben-Gurion's moderate social programme. Led by Yitzhak Tabenkin of Kibbutz Ein Harod, it was known simply as Siah Bet (Faction B). In 1944, it split completely from *Mapai*, and took the name *Ahdut Ha'Avoda-Poalei Zion* Movement. Between 1948 and 1954, the party merged with *HaShomer HaTzair* (the Young Guard) to form *Mapam* (the United Workers' Party). Splitting once again in 1955 as *Ahdut Ha'Avoda-Poalei Zion*, it was an independent party until 1965, when it re-aligned itself with *Mapai* in the Labour Alignment, which itself united with *Rafi* in 1968 to form the Israeli Labour Party.

accepted the offer of government ministries.<sup>18</sup> But Galili, not wishing either the exposure or the restrictions to his freedom of movement that running a ministry would bring, did so as minister without portfolio.

Eshkol was keen to decentralise some of the responsibility that he held as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, and to achieve greater clarity in Israel's foreign press relations. Under Ben-Gurion, a weekly meeting chaired by the director-general of the Prime Minister's Office, Teddy Kollek (the 'Teddy Forum') had formulated press policy, mostly directed at the domestic media. A separate forum, held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dealt with Israel's image in the foreign press. This division had not been successful; in both the Ben Barka affair and the attempted assassination of German scientists who were advising Egypt on long-range missiles, Israel's muddled explanations damaged her foreign relations.<sup>19</sup> Eshkol had already made one change to the business of government communications, appointing a spokesman for the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>20</sup>

Now, Eshkol began discussion with Galili about him taking responsibility for *hasbara* issues. His adviser, Sini Azaryahu, was stunned to find out just how much responsibility for formulation of government information policy resided in the hands of the Prime Minister's Office. It included direct authority over the domestically-oriented *Hasbara* Centre, the Government Press Office and the Israel Broadcasting

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<sup>18</sup> Cecil Roth, ed., *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 17 vols. (Jerusalem: Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972). Entry on 'State of Israel: Political Parties', vol. 9, p.950.

<sup>19</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 147.

<sup>20</sup> Ben-Gurion had had no spokesman, often sending Yitzhak Navon to brief the press on his behalf. It should be noted that Eshkol's appointees – first Avraham Avichai, then Yossi Sarid and from the summer of 1965, Meron Medzini – spoke with the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, but not on behalf of Eshkol himself. Interview with Meron Medzini, 9.4.2006.

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Authority, yet to receive its independence. Allon, the leader of *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* and deputy prime minister, agreed with Eshkol – but for different reasons. He felt it was inappropriate for Galili to enjoy the perks of ministerial rank – a car and a salary – if he had no public responsibility. He told Azaryahu ‘we know his value, but *they* don’t’.<sup>21</sup> In October, Galili gave Eshkol an answer:

I am sending you the summary that you were looking at during our meeting on October 4<sup>th</sup>, on the subject of *hasbara*, and the matter is now in your hands. Let me again stress: if you have any reason to withdraw from the issue, you should feel free to do so, and there will be no distress on my part.<sup>22</sup>

The following day, Galili wrote to Eshkol agreeing to take responsibility for *hasbara* on his behalf. He stressed that he was doing so to ‘lighten the load’ on the Prime Minister.<sup>23</sup> Galili had shown no real interest in the questions of government information policy, even when the issue of state control over broadcasting was a central concern during the debates over the creation of the IBA in the early 1960s. A rare reference to the issue was in the late 1950s when he wrote a memo on leaks to the press:

The media outlets belonging to coalition parties should not attack each other, and should maintain a cultured and comradely tone in their disagreements. In order to ensure this, a committee will be established consisting of the editorial boards of the newspapers of the coalition parties<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Sini Azaryahu, 19.6.05

<sup>22</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/344/6270. Galili to Eshkol (handwritten note), 6.10.1966.

<sup>23</sup> YTA 15/57/2/1. Galili to Eshkol, 7.10.1966.

<sup>24</sup> YTA 15/22/8/13. Undated memo by Galili. The memo apparently dates from the coalition negotiations of 1958, and was a response to a leak to the press regarding the visit of ‘the security personality’ to Germany. This referred to a controversial visit by the IDF Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, and was leaked to Lamerchav, the paper of rival party *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*. For further details on the ‘security personality’ leak, see Avner (Walter) Bar-On, The Stories That Were Never Told: The Diary of the Chief Censor [Hebrew], ed. Aviezer Golan (Jerusalem: Idanim, 1981) 99-102. The newspapers in question were *Davar*, the newspaper of 90

Galili was installed in the office of Teddy Kollek, who had been elected as mayor of Jerusalem, with its connecting door to the prime minister's private office. Direct access to Eshkol was vital to Galili, which he made a written precondition for his appointment, adding 'I hope that if I take up the position, you will ensure that this is the case'.<sup>25</sup> Galili added that his agreement was also conditional on Eshkol's assurance that no Ministry of Information would be established, and that administrative authority would remain in the Prime Minister's Office.

He did not demand a title, budgets or a large staff. It was far more important for him to ensure that his close relationship with Eshkol continued, and that he continued to have access to sensitive and confidential material relating to matters of defence and foreign affairs. For his part, Eshkol mostly wanted Galili to neutralise the influence of *Rafi* on the domestic media. Ben-Gurion, supported by a younger generation of politicians including Dayan, Peres and Kollek, was sniping at Eshkol from the opposition, and in the pages of the domestic press.<sup>26</sup> Using their considerable residual influence, they criticised Eshkol for allowing American inspectors to visit the nuclear facility at Dimona, for souring relations with De Gaulle, for his handling of the visit of Konrad Adenauer in May 1966 and for his handling of the Ben Barka affair.<sup>27</sup>

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*Mapai*, *Lamerchav* (*Ahdut Ha'Avoda*), *Al Hamishmar* (*Mapam*) and *HaTzofe* (National Religious Party).

<sup>25</sup> YTA 15/57/2/. Galili to Eshkol, 7.10.1966.

<sup>26</sup> *Haaretz* was strongly identified with *Rafi*, and promoted Dayan as Eshkol's successor. Rubenstein, "*Haaretz* and the Eshkol Government."

<sup>27</sup> On US inspections of the Dimona nuclear reactor, see Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 222. On the Adenauer visit, see Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War*,

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol announced to the Knesset on 19 October 1966 that Galili was to take responsibility for the Information Centre, the Government Press Office and for radio and television affairs.<sup>28</sup> The appointment did arouse some suspicion that the government was creating a ministry of propaganda, but it was hoped that Galili would be able to create a more consistent and effective approach to government communications.<sup>29</sup> It would not be the last time that the Knesset debated the precise scope of Galili's appointment, and what it was intended to achieve.<sup>30</sup>

From the outside, the principal problem with government information efforts before 1967 was the lack of coordination between the various government bodies responsible. Apart from the period between 1953 and 1955 when Zalman Aranne took responsibility for the information administration, there was a distinction between information activities that were directed towards Israel's citizens, and which fell under the ministerial responsibility of the Prime Minister, and foreign information efforts, which were the responsibility of the Foreign Minister.

However, with the Prime Minister also holding the defence portfolio, apart from Sharett's premiership in 1953 – 55, no real attention was given to creating joined-up policy. In its absence, political considerations dominated. There was a high

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Revolution and Reconstruction. Vol. 2: The Statesman, 1952-1967 (Oxford: Berghahn, 1997) 787-90. On tension regarding relations with France, see Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy 123, note 84. On the Ben Barka affair, see Shalom, Ben-Gurion's Political Struggles, 1963-1967: A Lion in Winter Chapter 3.

<sup>28</sup> Levi Eshkol to the Knesset, 17.10.1966. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 1; See also Eshkol to the Knesset, YTA, 15/64/2/5, Cabinet Secretary Yael Uzai to Yisrael Galili, 18.18.1966. ISA/RG 124/G/344/6270. Uzai wrote to Galili to explain the transfer of authority from the Prime Minister to Galili under the Broadcasting Authority Law (1965).

<sup>29</sup> Nathan Ribon, "Is the Information Centre a Ministry of Propaganda?", *Haaretz*, 2.12.1966. The second part of the article was published two days later.

<sup>30</sup> Eshkol to the Knesset, 19.10.1966. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, cols. 53-67; 78-90



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level of political influence over the state-controlled Kol Yisrael in the early years of the state. Ben-Gurion dictated who would be interviewed and who would not, through his aides Teddy Kollek and Yitzhak Navon.<sup>31</sup> Politicians who held views contrary to the 'Old Man', either from *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*, *Mapam* on the left or from *Herut*, Liberals on the right had a hard time getting their voice heard.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, each government ministry and non-governmental organisation had its own information department and spokesperson. Consequently, there was no one minister who was responsible for considering how a policy decision might be received by domestic and international audiences. Such considerations were often neglected in the policy-making process. Galili, the newly-appointed Minister with responsibility for information services, did not have to wait long for the cracks in the system to be exposed.<sup>33</sup>

### **Waiting for Nasser**<sup>34</sup>

On 14 May 1967, as Israel was celebrating its 19<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and entered the Sinai Peninsula, quoting a Soviet intelligence

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<sup>31</sup> Derek J Penslar, "Transmitting Jewish Culture: Radio in Israel," *Jewish Social Studies* 10.1 (2004). 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Nissim Mishal, "Israel Broadcasting Authority: Political Dynamics [Hebrew]," Bar-Ilan University, 1978, 40-48.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the cracks were already evident. Meron Medzini, the director of the Jerusalem branch of the Government Press Office, wrote some 350 foreign policy editorials for the *Jerusalem Post* newspaper, as well as regularly broadcasting - under an assumed name - on Israel Radio's foreign language service. Galili knew of this, and demanded only that Medzini not directly criticise the government.

<sup>34</sup> The title refers to the popular Mike Burstyn song of the time, 'Nasser is Waiting for Rabin'. Haim Hefer's words include lines such as 'Nasser's waiting for Rabin/Let him wait/let him sit tight/'cos we'll be there all right' and 'Nasser's waiting for Rabin/You'll all see/ the day will come/he'll be begging for peace.' <http://mp3music.gpg.nrg.co.il/lyrics/9410.html>

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report that Israel was amassing troops on its border with Syria.<sup>35</sup> Egypt began to move large numbers of troops and armoured vehicles into the Sinai Peninsula, ending a ten-year truce period. While Egyptian troops massed along Israel's border in the south, the Syrian army prepared for war on the Golan Heights in the north. Two days later, General Fawzy, the Egyptian Army's Chief of Staff, demanded a partial withdrawal of UNEF - the United Nations Emergency Force peacekeepers - from Sharm el-Sheikh, where they had been stationed since 1956. Secretary-General U Thant complied with what Israel considered to be indecent haste, leaving Egyptian forces unopposed.<sup>36</sup> On 23 May, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran, a declared *casus belli*. Israel was alone and encircled by armies whose leaders had vowed to bring about its annihilation.

The coming conflict was popularly presumed to be a war of survival for Israel. Speaking to the Egyptian parliament on 25 May, Nasser declared his intention 'to exterminate the state of Israel for all time'.<sup>37</sup> The following day, speaking to Arab Trades Unionists, he said 'the battle will be a general one and our basic objective will be to destroy Israel'.<sup>38</sup> Other Arab leaders, including President Atafi of Syria and Iraqi President Abdul Rahman Aref, as well as government controlled radio and

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<sup>35</sup> 'Egyptian Battle Order No. 1, Issued by Field Marshal Abdul-Hakim 'Amer, 14 May 1967'. Mahdi Abdul-Hadi, ed., Documents on Palestine, 1st ed., 8 vols. (Jerusalem: PASSIA, Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1997) vol II, 262.

<sup>36</sup> 'Report of the Secretary-General on the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force', 26.6.1967.

<http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/D21AF95689E8F2C00525660B0051640F>

<sup>37</sup> Nasser's speech to the Egyptian Parliament, 25.5.1967, Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict, 5th revised and updated ed. (London: Penguin, 1995) 175-85.

<sup>38</sup> Statement by President Nasser to Arab Trade Unionists, 26 May 1967, Robert Stephens, Nasser: A Political Biography (London: Allen Lane, 1971) 479.

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newspapers, called for a united Arab front to redress the mistakes of the 1948 war and predicted the elimination of Israel.<sup>39</sup>

Historians continue to debate whether Nasser's military moves, and his rhetoric, were intended as a show of strength<sup>40</sup>, and to deter Israel from escalating tension with Syria, and whether the war that followed was the result of mutual miscalculation.<sup>41</sup> Van Creveld, on the other hand, suggests that it was a set of coincidences that resulted in Israel's victory.<sup>42</sup> Either way, it marked the start of a tense 'waiting period', with Israelis and international observers conscious that war was likely.<sup>43</sup>

### Government information policy in the 'waiting period', May 1967

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's continued search for a diplomatic solution to the crisis during the 'waiting period' may have exhibited sound political judgement, but he

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<sup>39</sup> World Zionist Organization Information Department, What to Answer? Questions and Answers on the Six-Days War and Its Consequences 28-32.

<sup>40</sup> The strongest advocate of an Egyptian intention to initiate war is Oren, Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East. For a contrary view, see Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War."

<sup>41</sup> As noted above, there is a strong body of work on the theme of miscalculation and misunderstanding in the leadup to the Six Day War. See, for example Parker, The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East, Gross Stein, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1967: Inadvertent War through Miscalculated Escalation."

<sup>42</sup> Martin Van Creveld, The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israel Defense Force (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998) 172.

<sup>43</sup> ISA RG130/G/4091/23. Johnson to Eshkol, 28.5.1967; Eshkol to Johnson, 30.5.1967; ISA/RG 130/G/6444/5. Telegram no. 423 from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem to all delegations, 30.5.1967; Eitan Haber, ed., War Will Break out Today: Memoirs of Brigadier-General Yisrael Lior, Military Secretary to Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Eidanim, 1987) 190-93. Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy 396.

appeared indecisive to Israelis.<sup>44</sup> Foreign journalists also struggled to hear Israel's voice. Eshkol, Galili, Meir, Ben-Gurion and Begin all refused to talk, since they were unsure of how events would unfold. Foreign Minister Abba Eban and General Aharon Yariv, the head of IDF military intelligence, were prepared to speak but only in non-quotable and non-attributable briefings. Peres, who had excellent relations with journalists, did agree to brief the foreign press but would not discuss the discussions within the IDF general staff regarding Israeli preparations for war.<sup>45</sup> These details, in any case, would have been removed by the military censor.

Yisrael Galili, with ministerial responsibility for government information efforts was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, it was important that domestic and international audiences should be reassured by Israel's capacity to contain aggressive Egyptian and Syrian postures, even after it had become clear that Israeli deterrence had failed. On the other, Israel also needed international support – particularly from the United States and European allies – with the collapse of the security regime in place since the end of the 1956 Suez War. Galili failed to fully grasp that the way Israel was perceived in the international arena was of supreme consequence.<sup>46</sup> Instead, he remained absorbed with domestic affairs, trying to prevent the establishment of a national unity administration that would bring *Rafi* and *Herut* into government. His principle target was *Haaretz*, whose editorial line was

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<sup>44</sup> David Tal, "Paving the Road to War: Israeli Diplomacy and the 1967 Crisis," Global Politics: Essays in Honour of David Vital, eds. Abraham Ben-Zvi and Aharon Kleiman (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 149.

<sup>46</sup> 'A single occupational group, the journalists, shape decisively the public's perception of reality.' Michael Kunczik, "Images of Nations and Transnational Public Relations of Governments with Special Reference to Kosovo," Conference on the Final Status for Kosovo: Untying the Gordian Knot (Chicago-Kent College of Law: 2004), vol.

strongly supportive of *Rafi* and, by implication, the replacement of Eshkol with Dayan.<sup>47</sup>

One incident illustrates his grasp of media affairs. With the closure of the Straits of Tiran on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, it was clear that there would be war. Eshkol, who had restricted his public comments since the Egyptian entry into Sinai to two statements in the Knesset, now felt he should speak. On 28 May, after a cabinet meeting in which all but one minister agreed to continue the diplomatic process, Eshkol decided to inform the nation of the decision.<sup>48</sup> He was physically exhausted by the weeks of intense attention to the threat of war, had a bad cold, and was presented with a draft statement prepared by Galili and cabinet secretary Yaakov Herzog, which he then heavily amended in pencil.<sup>49</sup> Although Eshkol had intended to record the speech from his office for later broadcast, there was now no time, and he travelled to the *Kol Yisrael* radio studio. Fearing that delaying the broadcast to allow a typist to incorporate the changes into the text would be interpreted as further weakness, Eshkol went on live radio from a studio with only one bulb lit over the microphone.<sup>50</sup> But he stumbled and stuttered over his own corrections to the text, stopping at one

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<sup>47</sup> Rubenstein, "Haaretz and the Eshkol Government." *The Jewish Observer and Middle East Review*, a London-based publication edited by Jon Kimche, served a similar role in advocating *Rafi*'s positions to English-speaking readers.

<sup>47</sup> Haber, ed., War Will Break out Today: Memoirs of Brigadier-General Yisrael Lior, Military Secretary to Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir [Hebrew] 190-98.

<sup>49</sup> Tamar Brosh, ed., A Speech for Every Occasion [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: The Open University Press, 1993) 56. Galili later distanced himself from the mishap, noting that Eshkol insisted on altering the draft, not leaving enough time to retype the speech. Yeshayahu Ben-Porat, Dialogues [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Edanim, 1981) 99. The typist, Mitka Yaffe, later recalled that she wished she had double-spaced the typing to make it clearer. Tali Lipkin-Shahak, "The Muse of History [Hebrew]," *Maariv* 30 January 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew] 41. Yoel Marcus, "Five Comments on the Situation [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 8 June 2007.

point to ask his political secretary, Aviad Yaffe, 'what does this mean?', referring to the phrase 'retreat of forces'.

Yaffe went white. Eshkol put on his glasses, picked up a pencil and struck out the words 'retreat of troops', wrote 'redeployment of forces', and continued reading until the end. The pause only lasted a few seconds, and the people in the studio didn't grasp its significance. But the listeners, waiting for a Churchillian address, heard a laconic and static speech, littered with mistakes and confusion. The disgrace was enormous.<sup>51</sup>

Eshkol was badly shaken.<sup>52</sup> The impact on domestic public opinion was calamitous.<sup>53</sup> Hearing the broadcast, soldiers in the Negev desert were said to have burst into tears.<sup>54</sup> The IDF General Staff, which he briefed later that evening, was in uproar.<sup>55</sup> Eshkol, perhaps unaware of the tension the high command was under, instructed them to speak plainly to him. They did. General Ariel Sharon predicted that Eshkol's indecision would cost thousands of deaths. As Eshkol was leaving, Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin told his colleagues, 'It looks as if the only strength the country can rely on is in the army'.<sup>56</sup> As well as bringing Israel close to a *coup d'état*, the

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<sup>51</sup> Gil, [A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television \[Hebrew\]](#) 41.

<sup>52</sup> Yossi Goldstein, [Eshkol: Biography \[Hebrew\]](#) (Jerusalem: Keter, 2003) 557.

<sup>53</sup> Brecher, [Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy](#) 401. See also Tamar Liebes, "Acoustic Space: The Role of Radio in Israeli Collective History," [Jewish History](#) 20.1 (2006).

<sup>54</sup> General Elad Peled, who had been appointed to command the formation that was to hold the Israeli-Syrian border, was travelling north to review operational plans. He heard the news on the car radio, and said the speech had the impact of 'a bomb going off inside the car'. Interview with Elad Peled, 21.11.2005. See also, Oren, [Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East](#) 132. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, [Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History](#) (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also Dayan and Katz, [Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History](#). Eshkol's broadcast was a 'transformative' media moment of the kind described Dayan and Katz: experienced collectively and understood to be a watershed moment.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Bar-Zohar, [Embassies in Crisis: Diplomats and Demagogues Behind the Six-Day War](#) (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970) 145.

<sup>56</sup> 'Il devient de plus en plus évident que le seul force sur laquelle on puisse compter dans cet pays est l'armée'. Elishu Ben Elissar and Zeev Schiff, [La Guerre Israëlo-Arabe, 5-10 Juin 1967 \[French\]](#) (Paris: Julliard, 1967) 97.

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'stuttering broadcast' was also the butt of jokes. Writing the next day in *Maariv*, Israel's leading satirist, Ephraim Kishon, quipped 'we don't remember the exact wording of the official announcement because Mr. Eshkol only broadcast it five times last night over Kol Yisrael'.<sup>57</sup>

Yet, as Gluska notes, the real problem was not the delivery of the speech, but rather its content. Eshkol had revealed the horrible truth: Israel's fate was dependent on external forces, not on its own power:

The entire Zionist Israeli ethos was on trial: independence, self-reliance, national pride and, above all, the invincible IDF which had been elevated to the status of myth. All this appeared to have been abandoned in an instant in light of the threat, and the new Jew seemed to be reverting to being the old, Diaspora Jew, namely helpless and begging for protection by foreigners.<sup>58</sup>

Eshkol's failing credibility had a direct impact on the composition of the government. Two days later, he bowed to public pressure and, with the greatest possible reluctance, appointed Dayan to replace him as Minister of Defence.<sup>59</sup> He hoped keep the defence portfolio for himself, but also considered Allon as an alternative to avert bringing Dayan into government. Justice Minister Yaakov Shimshon Shapira came up with a creative solution: in order to make space for Dayan in the cabinet, he proposed promoting foreign minister Abba Eban to Deputy Prime Minister, with responsibility for foreign affairs and for foreign information efforts. Eban refused, sending Shapira a note saying simply 'I am prepared to resign

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<sup>57</sup> Ephraim Kishon and Dosh, *So Sorry We Won!* (Tel Aviv: *Maariv* Library, 1967).

<sup>58</sup> Ami Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War : Government, Armed Forces and Defence Policy, 1963-1967*, Middle Eastern Military Studies (London: Routledge, 2007) 196.

<sup>59</sup> Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* 411.

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from the government, but not to change my job'.<sup>60</sup> Eshkol also invited leader of the opposition *Herut* party Menachem Begin – utterly demonised during Ben-Gurion's long dominance of Israeli politics - to join a government of national unity.<sup>61</sup>

If the 'activists' were struggling to deal with domestic information efforts, the 'diplomats' were also struggling on the international front. Foreign Minister Abba Eban's diplomatic mission at the end of May 1967 to secure international support for an Israeli pre-emptive strike was unsuccessful. He returned empty handed.

Addressing a joint meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Security and the IDF General Staff on June 2, Major-General Ariel Sharon mocked Eban: 'Our scurrying about – and I won't use the word *shtadlanut* [asking for support from those in power] – among the superpowers is not part of our stance in protection of our rights'.<sup>62</sup> Rebuking Sharon for mocking Eban, Eshkol reminded him that 'Everything that the IDF has with which to fight is a result of this 'scurrying about'. Let us not forget that, and let us not regard ourselves as Goliaths as a result'. It was Meir Amit, head of the Mossad and the archetypal 'activist', who got the green light from the United States for pre-emptive action.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis: Diplomats and Demagogues Behind the Six-Day War* 164.

<sup>61</sup> Haber, ed., *War Will Break out Today: Memoirs of Brigadier-General Yisrael Lior, Military Secretary to Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir [Hebrew]* 199-203. See also Zeev Schiff, 'Three Weeks that Preceded the War', *Haaretz*, 4.10.1967, Shlomo Nakdimon, *Approaching Zero Hour: The Drama That Preceded the Six-Day War [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Ramdor, 1968). Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* 318-454.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes of the Ministerial Security Committee meeting with the IDF General Staff, 2 June 1967. IDF Archive 192/74/1201. See also Haber, ed., *War Will Break out Today: Memoirs of Brigadier-General Yisrael Lior, Military Secretary to Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir [Hebrew]* 204-12.; Ami Gluska, "Israel's Decision to Go to War, June 2 1967," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 11.2 (2007).

<sup>63</sup> Yossi Melman and Dan Raviv, *The Imperfect Spies: The History of Israeli Intelligence* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989) ch. 3.



The three-week waiting period in May 1967 did allow time to organise an effective structure for dealing with the large influx of foreign journalists who wanted to cover the war.<sup>64</sup> Based around the Government Press Office, and relying in part on the hundreds of foreign volunteers who came to assist Israel, facilities were made available for some eight hundred foreign journalists.<sup>65</sup> Given the very limited access to senior military and political figures, foreign correspondents were given access to civilians and army units as they prepared for war. 'The sense of impending annihilation encouraged the correspondents to write articles supportive of Israel, and in particular to compliment Israelis who were trying to carry on with normal life whilst preparing for the worst.'<sup>66</sup> Foreign correspondents on assignment to Israel were much taken with Israel's image of pioneering independence in the face of Arab opposition, and with institutions of Israeli society such as the Kibbutz and the IDF.<sup>67</sup> Israel was seen by many as a success story.<sup>68</sup> Public opinion in the West firmly

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<sup>64</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew].", Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew], 24. See also ISA/RG 124/G/4885/1. Yosef Nevo to Yisrael Galili, 16.9.1967. Nevo notes the high level of coordination on domestic information efforts, 'but there was no monitoring or action on information efforts overseas, a field which remained in the hands of the Foreign Ministry's information set-up.'

<sup>65</sup> Fewer foreign journalists came for the Eichmann trial in 1961; more came for the first Papal visit to Israel in 1964. Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 145. See also: Reuven Levitan, "The IDF Explains Its Exploits to the World," The Journalists' Yearbook 1967 (Tel Aviv: Union of Journalists' Press, 1967) 50. and Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2661.

<sup>66</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 150.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Harold Jackson, 25.8.2006. See also William Frankel, Tea with Einstein and Other Memories (London: Halban Publishers, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Eleanor Stapleton-Finkelstein, "Israel's Image Abroad," The Journalists' Yearbook 1966 (Tel Aviv: Union of Journalists' Press, 1966).

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supported Israel in the face of the build-up of Arab aggression.<sup>69</sup> According to one account, support for Israel in the West was around 60 percent, whereas only 2-3 percent expressed support for the Arabs.<sup>70</sup>

Hollywood had played its part in establishing a positive international image. Popular films such as *Exodus* (1960), *Judith* (1965) and *Cast a Giant Shadow* (1966) presented Israel as 'normal' and easily identified as a western-style nation. As Ella Shohat argues in her analysis of *Exodus*, the casting of (non-Jewish) Paul Newman as the heroic Zionist pioneer Ari Ben-Canaan suggested that 'the Israeli experience has normalised the Jew'.<sup>71</sup>

In Israel, foreign news organisations were provided with constant material, special communications liaisons and information officers.<sup>72</sup> Moshe Pearlman, who had led Israeli press services in 1948, and remained involved in the field in various capacities, was recalled. 'It's as if you were asleep for 10 years and then opened your eyes and there was Colonel Pearlman again, doing the briefings,' said one foreign correspondent.<sup>73</sup> Briefings were held at 6:30pm so that European correspondents could make the following morning's deadlines; Americans had until early the next morning to file. Journalists were taken to the sites of border incidents, flew on military planes and were allowed to interview combat soldiers. Foreign media access

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<sup>69</sup> Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War* Cambridge Studies in Public Opinion and Political Psychology, eds. James H. Kuklinski and Dennis Chong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995) 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> 'Israel in the Eyes of the World', Alouph Hareven to Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7.12.1973, p. 2. Private Papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>71</sup> Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989) 67.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Koren, "Israel in the Eyes of Foreign Correspondents[Hebrew]," *The Journalists' Yearbook 1967* (Tel Aviv: Union of Journalists, 1967).

<sup>73</sup> "Voice of Israeli Army: Moshe Pearlman," *New York Times* 12 June 1967.

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was orchestrated with a certain amount of sophistication, as one IDF liaison officer recalled at the end of the war:

One particular problem ...was how to organise the foreign journalists' tours so that they would be in the right place at the right time ...without thinking that they were being herded like sheep.<sup>74</sup>

The attention lavished on foreign reporters and the seemingly casual attitude towards access reinforced Israel's advantage in international public opinion, ensuring further interest and sympathetic coverage once the war began. Writing on the first day of the war, the Jerusalem correspondent of the *New York Times*, James Reston, captured the mood:

These people have gone to war with remarkable calm and kindness to one another. There is a curious combination of sadness and determination in their manner.<sup>75</sup>

Galili, who had ministerial responsibility for liaison with foreign journalists but had devoted very little time to the issue, basked in the reflected glory, telling the Knesset after the war that '[journalists] were deeply impressed by the IDF's unique, rare and special qualities and expressed it in thousands of articles, radio and television broadcasts; they praised Israel all around the world'.<sup>76</sup>

The generally open access offered by Israel stood in sharp contrast to the Arab's refusal to allow foreign coverage and their notoriously unreliable reports<sup>77</sup>. Arab states were apparently conscious of the deficiencies. In September, Tunisian

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<sup>74</sup> Levitan, "The IDF Explains Its Exploits to the World," 50.

<sup>75</sup> James Reston, "A War's First Hours," *New York Times* 6 June 1967.

<sup>76</sup> Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2661.

<sup>77</sup> Oren, *Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television* 119. Oren suggests that Nasser was dismayed to find out that Radio Cairo's reports of Tel Aviv being in flames on the second day of the war were untrue.

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Secretary of State for Information Chaldi Klibi told a dozen of his colleagues, gathered for an Arab Information Ministers' Conference, that their 'verbal excess' was such that 'no one any longer pays more than relative attention to what we have to say'.<sup>78</sup> One consequence may have been the establishment of a joint Arab information ministry.<sup>79</sup>

The relative successes of May and June 1967 masked the unanswered question of authority. Without clarity on this issue, the problem of coordination that was endemic to Israeli government information efforts would soon return. During the war, though, Israel 'muddled through', finding immediate, concrete, incremental solutions for problems. The Government Press Office, the Foreign Ministry's press department, and the IDF Spokesperson's unit devised a rough division of labour, with the Foreign Ministry and the IDF responsible for briefings and escorting journalists to the front, and the Press Office offering technical support to ensure that material reached the correspondents' home organisations. As Oren notes, the intensive work and commitment of stretched resources yielded results. 'By the time the war broke out, foreign journalists already had their story'.<sup>80</sup>

### Radio broadcasts in the Six-Day War

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<sup>78</sup> "Tunisian Official Scores Arab Information Media," New York Times 29 September 1967.

<sup>79</sup> "Arab Information Agency Set," New York Times 17 October 1967. In November 1967, the IDF's Intelligence Branch issued a pamphlet which enumerated the failures of the Arab government's information efforts. See: IDF General Staff Intelligence Branch, Arab Information: Failures and Lessons from the Six Day War [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Government Publisher, 1967).

<sup>80</sup> Oren, Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television 117.

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In the early hours of 5 June, Israel's air force launched a surprise attack on Egypt's airfields, destroying the Arab world's most advanced fighting force on the ground in a little over two hours. The ensuing war, which lasted six days, brought significant areas of land under Israel's control, tripling its territory. But alongside the Old City of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Desert, Israel's population of some 2.6 million was swelled by another million Arabs.

On the morning 5 June, the newly-appointed Minister of Defence Dayan addressed the nation. 'We are a small people, but a brave one,' he said. 'We seek peace, but are ready to fight for our land and our life'.<sup>81</sup> In fact, by 10:30 in the morning, when he spoke, the IAF had completed Operation *Moked*, and the Egyptian air force lay ruined in its bases. His speech, designed for both domestic and international consumption, indicated that radio was both an element of the military effort, and a tool for soothing public fears. As Oren notes, wartime domestic radio was 'doubly addressed to friend and foe, Israeli and Arab, here and there'.<sup>82</sup>

In fact, this was already the case before the war. In 1964, *Kol Yisrael* radio broadcast 34 hours each week overseas in Arabic and eight other languages. Each week, 52 hours of domestic broadcasting were in Arabic, for the Arabic-speaking citizens of Israel and the surrounding countries. The programming was considered reliable, objective and informative.<sup>83</sup> Now, the most memorable element of *Kol*

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<sup>81</sup> Yigal Lossin, "War over the Ether [Hebrew]," *The Journalists' Yearbook 1967* (Tel Aviv: Union of Journalists' Press, 1967) 58.

<sup>82</sup> Oren, *Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television* 118.

<sup>83</sup> Medzini, *Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew]*, 15. 105

*Yisrael's* wartime schedule was the nightly broadcast by Chaim Herzog.<sup>84</sup> Herzog began his talks on the evening after Eshkol's infamous 'stuttering speech', amid falling morale and flying rumours. His calm, professional analysis, earned him the nickname of 'the national soother'. Herzog was to reprise the role in 1973. Speaking on the second night of the war, he reassured Israelis, many of whom spent the nights in bomb shelters for fear of Arab aerial assault that 'If I were faced with the choice of sitting in an Egyptian plane headed to bomb Tel Aviv, or to sit at home in Tel Aviv, on purely selfish considerations of the good of my health I would prefer to sit in Tel Aviv'.<sup>85</sup> It is worth noting that by this point, the IDF had comprehensively destroyed the Egyptian air force, the only force likely to have posed a significant aerial threat to Tel Aviv. He also encouraged a sense of historic, if not epic, perspective to the war:

Generations of Jews for thousands of years will think of us, this small and select handful of Jews in the State of Israel, who lived and created these moments steeped in historical significance for the Jewish people.<sup>86</sup>

Israeli radio broadcasts were not only used to shore up Israeli domestic opinion during the war. According to van Dam, they were also used to undermine the positions of its enemies.<sup>87</sup> *Kol Yisrael's* Arabic broadcasts used local dialects, rather than 'classical' or 'standard' Arabic, in order to reach illiterate or semi-literate listeners. The Arabic broadcasts encouraged dissent within Arab states, for example

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<sup>84</sup> Chaim Herzog, *Living History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997). There was a subtext to the broadcasts, with Herzog – a *Rafi* supporter – taking the role of 'national soother' that Eshkol was evidently unable to fill. I am indebted to Meron Medzini for this observation.

<sup>85</sup> Brosh, ed., *A Speech for Every Occasion [Hebrew]* 58.

<sup>86</sup> Chaim Herzog's daily broadcast on *Kol Yisrael* radio, 6.6.1967. Brosh, ed., *A Speech for Every Occasion [Hebrew]* 60.

<sup>87</sup> Nikolaos van Dam, "Israeli Sectarian Propaganda During the October, 1973, War," *The Muslim World* 47.4 (1977).

drawing attention to the power of the minority Alawites within the post-1963 Syrian regime, and more generally to crises in inter-Arab relations. When, on 8 June 1967, the main Jordanian transmitter in the West Bank fell into Israeli hands, *Kol Yisrael* used it to carry its Arabic programming.<sup>88</sup> There is little reliable data on how intensively Israeli broadcasts were listened to during the war, although 'in periods of crisis ...there seems to be a special desire to compare the news content of the Arabic service of *Radio Israel* [sic] with the news content of the broadcasting services of Arab states, which often has been of rather poor quality'.<sup>89</sup>

Radio was certainly a constant presence for Israelis during the war, with regular programming suspended and all of *Kol Yisrael's* channels broadcasting a single, rolling schedule of hourly news bulletins, battlefield reports and music.<sup>90</sup> Under public pressure, programming for children was eventually reintroduced.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, one popular format was quite deliberately removed from the schedule. Call-in shows, where soldiers would often send recorded messages and record request were cancelled for fear that a now-dead soldier's voice would be heard by grieving relations.<sup>92</sup> The new schedule started at 8am on 5 June, and was marked with a change to the station's standard call-sign. Instead of 'From Jerusalem, this is *Kol Yisrael*', wartime broadcasts began with 'This is *Kol Yisrael* on the Hebrew

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<sup>88</sup> "Israel Claims Jordan Station," *New York Times* 9 June 1967.

<sup>89</sup> van Dam, "Israeli Sectarian Propaganda During the October, 1973, War."

<sup>90</sup> Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limor, *The in/Outsiders: The Mass Media in Israel* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1999) 134. A foreign journalist later wrote 'No audience survey is needed to determine Israel's most popular radio program. It is the hourly news broadcast. Thirteen times a day, Israeli stop whatever else they are doing.' A H Raskin, "Israel Tells the World: Keep Hands Off," *New York Times* 7 July 1969.

<sup>91</sup> Oren, *Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television* 118.

<sup>92</sup> Lossin, "War over the Ether [Hebrew]," 60.

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broadcasting network'. The change was neither accidental, nor trivial. Since the main radio transmitter was sited in Jerusalem, and close to the Jordanian border, there were fears that it may fall victim to the fighting.<sup>93</sup> In order to ensure that broadcasts would not be disrupted, plans were drawn up to use generator-driven relay stations and temporary studios if either of the main stations in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv were damaged. Pre-recorded programmes of appropriately 'national' songs were ready for such an eventuality.

The six days of war in June 1967 were days of glory for *Kol Yisrael*, which broadcast news, battlefield reports and commentary around the clock. At its end, Galili wrote an emotional letter of thanks to the workers of *Kol Yisrael*. 'The people listened closely to the commentary, to peace breaking out from the fronts. *Kol Yisrael* strengthened and united us'.<sup>94</sup>

### **Israel's international image after the Six Day War: the 'debacle'**

A wave of warm friendship and understanding of Israel is washing over the world.<sup>95</sup>

There was much for Israel to celebrate following the Six-Day War. The return to the Old City of Jerusalem and sites of religious significance were representative of a significant shift in Israeli cultural narrative from the siege mentality of 1948 to the embrace of Israeli heroic military might. For Israel's western allies, the victory was a triumph over the Communist-supported Arab states. 'They Did It!' proclaimed *The*

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<sup>93</sup> In fact, it was the Jordanian transmitter that fell into Israeli hands, as noted above. See: "Israel Claims Jordan Station."

<sup>94</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Yisrael Galili to Binyamin Eliav, 12.6.1967.

<sup>95</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2661.



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*Economist's* cover story.<sup>96</sup> Ordinary people could also identify with Israel. In London, the Israeli Embassy received many thousands of letters of support, offers of financial and material aid, and applications to volunteer in hospitals, schools, kibbutzim and to join the military forces. On June 6, Mr J R Hebda wrote:

All my thoughts are with the brave people of Israel, for whom I have the greatest possible respect and admiration. Being a Pole, now living in Britain, and having shared with my brothers, the Jews, the atrocities of the German occupation of Poland, I sympathise with your nation's efforts to maintain its independence and freedom.<sup>97</sup>

Israel's occupation of Jordanian and Egyptian territories, and their large Palestinian populations, was initially seen as benign.<sup>98</sup> Israel was a compelling subject for journalists, with ever larger numbers of foreign correspondents permanently stationed there. Between 1967 and 1970, the number of foreign journalists permanently based in Israel nearly trebled, from forty to over 100.<sup>99</sup> But the adulation that had accompanied Israel's military victory in June 1967 soon began to dissipate. Already on the fourth day of the war, Thursday 8 June 8, there were reports about Palestinian refugees who were unable to cross the Jordan River and find safety.<sup>100</sup> In an attempt to make sense of the destruction of almost the entire Egyptian air force, whilst it was still on the ground, in the first hours of the war,

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Van Creveld, The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israel Defense Force 199.

<sup>97</sup> Jeremy Robson, Letters to Israel, Summer 1967 (London: Published for Volunteers' Union by Vallentine, Mitchell Ltd., 1968) 34.

<sup>98</sup> Charles Mohr, 'Israeli Occupation of Jordan Area Is Termed Gentle', *New York Times* 23.6.1967. However, there is no record of the *New York Times* describing Israel's occupation as 'the most humane occupation ever', quoted by Chaim Herzog, the military governor of the West Bank immediately following the war. Herzog, Living History.

<sup>99</sup> Foreign Press Association in Israel, Who's Who in the Foreign Press Association (Tel Aviv: The Foreign Press Association, 1968).

<sup>100</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]."

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Radio Cairo accused Britain and the US of sending their air forces to assist Israel.<sup>101</sup>

Nasser himself suggested that Israeli planes alone could not have attacked in such force, noting that '[Israel] was relying on something more than his normal strength.'<sup>102</sup>

The allegations were quickly dismissed by the *New York Times*' editorial writers as 'fanciful invention ...spawned in the desperation of sweeping defeat [and] ...military ineffectiveness'.<sup>103</sup> However, officials in the British Foreign Office's Information, News and Guidance Department noted their concerns that Nasser's 'big lie' was accepted by even moderate Arab leaders, and that western governments would need to regain their support by 'finding a face-saving formula'.<sup>104</sup> The minutes went on to clarify the matter. 'In effect this means that the United Kingdom must be seen to oblige the Israelis to accept less than they demand'.<sup>105</sup>

At the international level, Israeli diplomatic efforts surrounding the UN Security Council resolution 242 made it clear that there was little support for Israel's claim to hold on to the territories she had conquered during the war until an Arab partner was prepared to enter peace negotiations.<sup>106</sup> The Soviet bloc, apart from

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<sup>101</sup> BBC Monitoring Service, Second Series, ME/2484/A/18, 7.6.1967. See also chapter 4, 'The Big Lie' in Frank Brenchley, Britain, the Six-Day War and Its Aftermath (London: IB Taurus, 2005).

<sup>102</sup> Randolph Spencer Churchill and Winston S. Churchill, The Six Day War (London: Heinemann, 1967) 82.

<sup>103</sup> "...And the Birth of a Myth," New York Times June 8 1967.

<sup>104</sup> GS Littlejohn-Cook to Rose, 7.6.1967. The National Archives: Public Records Office, hereafter TNA: PRO FO26/211

<sup>105</sup> Minute by Arbuthnott on GS Littlejohn-Cook to Rose, 7.6.1967. TNA: PRO FO26/211. The file also contains a note from Arbuthnott reporting that a delegation of Labour MPs had called to offer their services towards improving relations with the Arabs in order to contradict the 'big lie' about British collusion with Israel.

<sup>106</sup> Eban, Abba Eban: An Autobiography. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967, Laqueur and Rubin, The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict 217-18.

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Romania, broke diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>107</sup> Newspaper articles appeared that described Israel as 'giddy with victory' and discussed the roots of militarism in Israeli society.<sup>108</sup> Unwelcome comparisons were drawn with rogue states such as South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia, and with the domestic turmoil in the US in the era of Vietnam and the civil rights movement.<sup>109</sup>

Internally, the debate over the fate of the occupied territories was beginning. An emerging peace movement derided Israeli society's intoxication with her military power, decried the fact that the search for peace had turned to territorial ambition, and pointed out that Israeli control of the territories was at the expense of the Palestinians now under their control.<sup>110</sup> The erosion of both international and domestic support for Israel, from the high-point of the summer of 1967, became a matter of concern for the Israeli government.

### Domestic criticism of government information policy

Domestic concerns about the deterioration in Israel's international image were reflected in the media, with articles questioning the government's ability to effectively present its message.<sup>111</sup> Even *Davar*, the ultra-loyal mouthpiece of *Mapai*, joined in the

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<sup>107</sup> Harold M Waller, "Israel in the International Arena," The Impact of the Six-Day War: A Twenty-Year Assessment

ed. Stephen J Roth (London: Macmillan, 1988) 156.

<sup>108</sup> Len Whartman, "Why Is Israel Losing the Press Relations War?," Overseas Press Club Bulletin XXIII (1968).

<sup>109</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> Reuven Kaminer, The Politics of Protest: The Israeli Peace Movement and the Palestinian Intifada (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1995), Mordechai Bar-On, In Pursuit of Peace: A History of the Israeli Peace Movement. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1996).

<sup>111</sup> S Rosenfeld, "A Failure Called *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," Maariv 12 April 1968.

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chorus of disapproval.<sup>112</sup> Six weeks after the end of the war, MK Binyamin Avniel (*Gahal*) told the Knesset that Israel had failed to influence international opinion and that following the war:

There has been a drastic change for the worse in public opinion towards us... We were entirely unprepared for the information campaign, and we certainly didn't approach it with anything like the application or readiness that accompanied the military campaign.<sup>113</sup>

Avniel focussed his opprobrium on Yisrael Galili, and suggested 'the minister lacks the necessary authority' to face the challenges of Israel's international image.<sup>114</sup> Further similar criticism was expressed in 1967 and early 1968, with numerous parliamentary questions about Israel's communications policy, and her deteriorating image in the international media.<sup>115</sup> Galili responded that Israel had made 'enormous advances in international public opinion, and not just because of our information efforts, but because of the victories of the Israel Defence Forces and by virtue of the justice of our right to exist... Those responsible for government communications in the international arena are to be praised for their great achievements'.<sup>116</sup>

Galili was not exhibiting false modesty. His ministerial responsibility extended only to the domestic arena – the *Hasbara* Centre, the Government Press Office and the Israel Broadcasting Authority. The job of cultivating Israel's image on the international stage remained the remit of the Foreign Ministry, whilst all news relating to the IDF was the domain of its spokesperson's unit, directly subordinate to the Director of Military Intelligence. However, due to this unnatural division of

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<sup>112</sup> Nachum Pundak, "The Problems of *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," *Davar* 1968.

<sup>113</sup> Binyamin Avniel to the Knesset, 19.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, cols. 2659-2662.

<sup>114</sup> Binyamin Avniel to the Knesset, 19.7.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2660

<sup>115</sup> *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 50, cols. 386-8, 414-7, 565-71; vol. 51, col. 1054, 1429.

<sup>116</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, cols. 2659-2662.

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responsibility, relations with foreign correspondents - perhaps the most significant factor in creating Israel's national image in 1967 – did partly fall under Galili's authority, through the Government Press Office.

In fact, the experience of the international press during the war was mixed. Some correspondents echoed Israel's own satisfaction with the efficiency with which the large number of correspondents was accommodated and their reports transmitted overseas.<sup>117</sup> However, there was also criticism of the lack of coordination between the relevant Israeli agencies, the delays in Israeli response to Arab propaganda, and of Galili himself. One foreign journalist wrote 'perhaps [the fault] lies in the Minister of Information, who doesn't seem to possess the vaguest idea of public relations'.<sup>118</sup>

Galili admitted that the experience of the war had highlighted some deficiencies. Addressing the Knesset in July, he told parliament 'we must work according to a plan, making use of professionals and the knowledge already acquired'.<sup>119</sup> He indicated he was focussing some attention on the issue, hinting that his approach was essentially organisational. 'The government is aware of these problems. It also knows of the mistakes because of inadequate coordination between the various bodies dealing with this issue'. As a partial response, Galili announced the establishment of a committee of directors-general of the relevant government ministries to coordinate information efforts more fully, and a ministerial committee

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<sup>117</sup> Koren, "Israel in the Eyes of Foreign Correspondents[Hebrew]," 87-91.

<sup>118</sup> Koren, "Israel in the Eyes of Foreign Correspondents[Hebrew]," 90.

<sup>119</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, cols. 2659-2662.

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to oversee information policy.<sup>120</sup> He would not rule out the possibility of creating a Ministry of Information.

Three factors, discussed in more detail below, lay behind the failure of those responsible for Israel's international image in the wake of the 1967 war. Firstly, the political leadership squabbled over the credit for the success of the war. Secondly, as negotiations started over the status of the territories Israel had captured, contradictory ministerial briefings eroded public confidence in the government. Finally, the distinction between domestic and foreign information efforts which had been blurred during the war, came back into focus. Together, they earned the unwelcome nicknames of 'the debacle' and 'the war of the Jews'<sup>121</sup> – the second a situation in the Israeli political lexicon indicating grave internal disagreements that pose an almost existential threat.<sup>122</sup>

### Who won the war?

Immediately following the war, a bitter argument was played out in the Israeli press whether it was Levi Eshkol, who was Prime Minister and Minister of Defence until June 1 1967, or Dayan, who took the Defence portfolio on that date, who was primarily responsible for Israel's dramatic victory. Meir had been the leading opponent of Dayan's entry in to the government, and continued to argue that it had

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<sup>120</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, cols. 2659-2662.

<sup>121</sup> Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew], 31.

<sup>122</sup> The nickname is a reference to Josephus' *Bellum Iudaicum* (*The Jewish War*), written around 75 AD, which deals with the history leading to the fall and destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans five years earlier.

been unnecessary.<sup>123</sup> There were few people in public office that Meir disliked more than Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres. She was furious when she suspected that Ben-Gurion was grooming one or the other as his successor, and perceived them as traitors when, in 1965, they joined Ben-Gurion in leaving *Mapai* and forming *Rafi*. When Eshkol died in early 1969, though suffering from cancer and more than once having announced her desire to retire, she agreed – reluctantly - to accept the nomination of the party and be appointed prime minister. It was too late to rehabilitate the reputation of Eshkol, but she was still able to prevent the popular Six Day War hero, Moshe Dayan, from getting the job.<sup>124</sup>

The question had political ramifications, since Eshkol and Dayan belonged to different factions within the government coalition – *Mapai* and *Rafi* respectively. The debate also made the job of communicating Israel's position to its domestic and international audiences considerably more difficult. The leaders of *Mapai* came to the defence of Eshkol, claiming that there had been no need to establish a national unity government, that Eshkol had prepared the country well for war, and that he could have continued to serve as Minister of Defence. Interviews with victorious generals, who said that they knew that Israel would easily win all along, were enthusiastically received.<sup>125</sup> Much was made of the extensive planning for Operation *Moked*, the pre-emptive air strikes on the Egyptian air force which effectively decided the war on its first morning. But many Israelis felt that if victory was so certain, their leaders could have done more to calm the public in the three-week 'waiting period' before the

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<sup>123</sup> Meron Medzini, *The Proud Jewess [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Edanim, 1990).

<sup>124</sup> Sarah Schmidt, "Hagiography in the Diaspora: Golda Meir and Her Biographers," *American Jewish History* 92.2 (2004): 171.

<sup>125</sup> Allon interview in *Lamerchav*, 4.6.1967; Rabin interview in *Maariv*, 4.10.1967; Eshkol interview in *Maariv*, 4.10.1967; Rabin interview in *Maariv*, 4.10.1967

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war. The panic before the war, which appeared unnecessary after it, became a major factor in the lack of trust in the government.

For international observers, revelations by Eshkol's supporters that the military campaign had been some years in preparation stood in sharp distinction to Israel's claims that she had unwillingly fought an essentially defensive war. Rather than a desperate attempt to fend off an existential threat, some questioned whether Israel had not, in fact, waited for an opportune moment to expand her territories at the expense of Jordan and Egypt – whose calls for the destruction of Israel and joint defence pact were forgotten. The glossy victory albums that were produced in great numbers immediately after the war also reinforced the image of Israel as a military power, and for some, as a militarist society.<sup>126</sup>Contradictory briefings

Immediately following the war, the Israeli government adopted a set of conditions regarding its position in any negotiations, and made them public. Israel would not consider returning territories outside of a comprehensive peace deal; she was entitled to secure and agreed boundaries; she was entitled to internationally binding peace treaties; and Jerusalem would not be re-divided.<sup>127</sup>

But there was a range of views within the cabinet, and ministers did not hesitate to make them public. Foreign Minister Abba Eban briefed journalists that Israel's presence in the Sinai, West Bank and Golan Heights was temporary, pending

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<sup>126</sup> Dalia Gavrieli-Nuri, "Saying "War," Thinking "Victory" - the Mythmaking Surrounding Israel's 1967 Victory," *Israel Studies* 15.1 (2010). For examples of the victory albums, see: Libbie L. Braverman and Samuel M. Silver, *The Six-Day Warriors: An Introduction to Those Who Gave Israel Its Vigor and Its Victories* (New York: Bloch, 1968), Avi Golan, *The Commanders, Victors of 1967: 25 Profiles of Israel's Senior Officers* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: A Mozes, 1968), Uri Paz, *Commanders of the Six Day War and Their Battle Reports* [Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv: Ramdor, 1967).

<sup>127</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 11.



negotiations.<sup>128</sup> Dayan told the BBC on June 12 that he was waiting for King Hussein to call, presumably with a peace offer.<sup>129</sup> Menachem Begin, who had joined the government on 1 June, and his colleague from *Gahal* (*Herut-Liberal Bloc*), would not consider the return of any of the territories taken by Israel, even as part of a comprehensive peace deal.<sup>130</sup> Labour Minister Yigal Allon, who headed the *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* (Unity of Labour) faction of the Labour Alignment, began to discuss his plan to retain only those territories necessary for Israeli security. Ministers from the left-leaning *Mapam* faction hinted that they would support a unilateral withdrawal from almost all of the territories Israel had captured.<sup>131</sup> The three ministers who represented the National Religious Party<sup>132</sup> offered a different approach, suggesting that there was a distinction to be drawn between the territory captured from Jordan, which contained a number of religiously significant sites, and that captured from Egypt which was largely the Sinai desert.<sup>133</sup>

Such public disagreement was noted with dismay in the Knesset. Yitzhak Levin (*Agudat Yisrael*) asked 'does everyone really have to make statements – ministers and deputy ministers and party leaders – because they look to publicise their ideas? They make bombastic statements and never consider the fact that by

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<sup>128</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 153.

<sup>129</sup> Shlomo Gazit, *Trapped Fools: Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (London: Frank Cass, 2003) 9.

<sup>130</sup> The *Gahal* (the *Herut-Liberal Bloc*) ministers were party leader Menachem Begin (without portfolio), who represented the dominant *Herut* wing of the party, and Yoseph Sapir (without portfolio) of the Liberals

<sup>131</sup> Israel Barzilai (Health) and Mordechai Bentov (Housing)

<sup>132</sup> Yosef Burg (Welfare), Haim Moshe Shapira (Interior) and Zerach Warhaftig (Religious Affairs)

<sup>133</sup> Medzini, *Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew]*, p. 37.

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doing so they cause the state great damage'.<sup>134</sup> International audiences may not have grasped the details of Israel's parliamentary system which encouraged small factions to differentiate their positions both inside the political system and to domestic and international observers.

The response was hardly better than the original problem. Stung by Eshkol's criticism of some of his answers to journalists, Dayan decided to stop giving any interviews to the international press in September 1967.<sup>135</sup> Menachem Begin, too, decided that he would not speak to foreign journalists whilst he was a minister in the national unity government.<sup>136</sup> The decisions denied international audiences of both Israel's most visible figure of the 1967 war, and of an alternative to the dominant *Mapai* analysis.

### Organisational challenges

Immediately following the war, whilst hundreds of foreign correspondents were still in Israel, the reservists and volunteers who had supported the much-expanded work of the Government Press Office and the IDF Spokesperson's unit began to leave. Although journalists still required assistance in covering the aftermath of the war, these units soon began to lack trained and experienced personnel.

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<sup>134</sup> Yitzhak Levin to the Knesset, 21.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, cols. 2766-2789

<sup>135</sup> Yohanan Manor, "'Integrating *Hasbara* into Policy.'" *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 33, Fall (1984): 32.

<sup>136</sup> Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew]. pp. 32-33.

When he took responsibility for information affairs, Galili had convened an 'information committee' that met sporadically until the outbreak of war in June 1967.<sup>137</sup> The first meeting was attended by the Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office, Yaakov Herzog, although much of the work was done by lower-level officials. In early July 1967, the government empowered Galili to coordinate all government information efforts – both domestic and international.<sup>138</sup> Speaking to the cabinet, Eshkol stressed that 'there is a special importance to Israel's information efforts at present because of the political challenges we are currently facing.'<sup>139</sup> He also created a ministerial committee to deal with information issues, attended by Galili, Abba Eban, Menachem Begin, Yosef Burg, Mordechai Bentov, Moshe Dayan and Moshe Kol.<sup>140</sup>

Attempts to centralise the coordination of information efforts, however, were again frustrated. Despite Galili's newly-granted authority over foreign information efforts, the network of embassies and a number of information centres<sup>141</sup> remained under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The division of responsibilities underscored the significant distinction between Galili's organisational approach, and that of Eban, whose extensive diplomatic experience led him to conclude that the primary challenge was content. The debate between Galili and Eban regarding content and methods was to return in 1969 with the report of

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<sup>137</sup> ISA/RG 124/4886/4, Minutes of Information Committee meeting, 30.10.1966.

<sup>138</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4884/12. Yael Uzai, State Secretariat, to Galili, 4.7.1967. The letter carries the text of government decision 590, and encloses the minutes of the cabinet meeting of 2.7.1967 in which the decision was taken.

<sup>139</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4884/12. Yael Uzai, State Secretariat, to Galili, 4.7.1967.

<sup>140</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/4. Minutes of Ministerial *Hasbara* Committee, 7.7.1967.

<sup>141</sup> Yegar, Guvrin and Aryeh, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The First Fifty Years [Hebrew]. p. 1005. Information Centres were opened in New York (1951), and in Paris and Buenos Aires (1960).

the Peled Committee on Government Information, and in the early 1970s with discussions around the creation of a Ministry of Information.

### **Conclusions**

The appointment of Yisrael Galili as minister with responsibility for government information efforts marked a welcome change to the years of deliberate neglect under Ben-Gurion. However, although the Eshkol government attempted to confront the problem, the minister appointed was badly-suited to the job. More importantly his mandate was badly-suited to the challenges of the issue. By only granting Galili authority over domestic information efforts, Eshkol established a false distinction that was to dog subsequent efforts to articulate cogent policy. This is particularly puzzling given the relatively low status of the Foreign Ministry, in whose hands foreign information efforts remained.

Overly concerned with inter-factional party politics, Galili fought the wrong battle when war came in June 1967. Rather than embracing the opportunity to contribute to Israel's foreign policy by engaging with the hundreds of foreign correspondents who flooded to Israel in the 'waiting period' before the war, and with those who stayed behind in a much enlarged press corps after it, Galili battled for Eshkol's reputation in the domestic press. Given the considerable interest in the questions of inadvertency, miscalculation and misperception, it is tempting to speculate what the effect of a clearer presentation of Israel's interests and intentions would have had in the critical 'waiting period' before the war. This missed opportunity, an additional aspect of Israel's ineffective diplomatic signalling, is a new contribution to the study of the Six Day War. In any case, Galili's work was largely

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irrelevant. The hesitant Eshkol was no match for the dashing bravado of Dayan and Rabin, the popular heroes of the war for the watching world. It was they, not he, who featured on the front pages of *Life* and *Time* magazines.

Whilst the gridlock of 'activists' and 'diplomats' contributed government information policy that was unsystematic, reactive and somewhat lacking in direction, the resulting 'muddling through' in wartime was a virtue. Policy choices were limited by availability – radio dominated because there was no television, for example - and incremental changes addressed immediate and concrete deficiencies, rather than abstract and theoretical problems. However, this approach was not appropriate for the post-war reality, with Israel under far more exacting scrutiny.

Whilst ordinary Israelis were dismayed as international approval seeped away after the war, policy-makers were frustrated at the lack of accurate data to quantify and explain the erosion of support, particularly from the US and from Western Europe.<sup>142</sup> Galili continued to 'muddle through', where the circumstances called for a comprehensive survey of the issue and evaluation of a wide range of policy options. The Eshkol government did, though, take action on two issues, both of which had been on the national agenda for some time – the introduction of television to Israel, and reform of the government's structures and organisations that dealt with domestic and international information efforts. These issues will form the basis of the following two chapters.

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<sup>142</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/4. Minutes of the Government Information Committee meeting, 7.7.1967. The Committee discussed the lack of reliable data available to them, and the need to coordinate efforts to ensure that relevant data was collected and that there was no duplication of effort across government ministries. See also Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Information, presented to the Ministerial Committee on Information Issues, Jerusalem, December 1969 (hereafter Peled Report), YTA/15/53/5/8, p. 9.

## Chapter 3

### Breach Birth: The Introduction of Television to Israel

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I'd like to see what Israeli culture – or any culture, for that matter – would be like without the all-intrusive proliferation of witless TV shows.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1968, Israel celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence. The event was marked by a military parade through the streets of Jerusalem. Tens of thousands of Israeli soldiers marched along the route, showing off the weapons that won the war – and some of those captured from their defeated enemies.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the previous year, there were no burdensome restrictions on the number or type of arms Israel could bring into the now-united city. There was no passing of notes between VIPs with worrying news from the Egyptian front. This year, Israel was broadcasting a new political reality to the half-million citizens who lined the streets of the capital. There was another difference, too. Watching the parade from the tribune, minister without portfolio Yisrael Galili cradled a television monitor between his legs.<sup>3</sup> This was the first televised event in Israel's history.

Preparations for the introduction of television began in 1965, but it was the perceived failure of Israel's government information policy in the aftermath of the 1967 war – popularly referred to as the 'debacle' – that acted as the catalyst for the establishment of 'general' television broadcasts in Israel.<sup>4</sup> The issue had been debated in official circles and

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<sup>1</sup> Herzog, *Living History* 111.

<sup>2</sup> 'Celebration: Israel's 20<sup>th</sup> Independence Day'. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRChaQWRc3o>. The film was made by the Film Service and the Israely [sic] Military Spokesman.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Elihu Katz, 19.7.2005.

<sup>4</sup> Tom Segev, *Israel in 1967 [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Keter, 2005) 58. See also Gil, *A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew]*. Oren, *Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television*. The term 'general television' was adopted in Israel to distinguish it from the educational or instructional television broadcasts that had commenced in

had been on the public agenda since the early years of independence, but no consensus had emerged on the kind of television service most suitable for Israel.

The Israeli media of the late 1960s conformed to a developmental model described by McQuail, in which nation-building is an overriding objective and collective ends, rather than individual freedoms, are emphasized. A certain level of journalistic freedom is subordinated in its service.<sup>5</sup> This was certainly the case with Israeli media, which was, to a large extent, subject to party political control. The domestic media was extremely active, with daily and weekly newspapers – at least one each for the major political parties and some that claimed independence, and the radio stations *Kol Yisrael* ('The Voice of Israel') and *Galei Zahal* (IDF Radio).<sup>6</sup> However, political control was pervasive, with the radio stations run from the Prime Minister's Office and the IDF General Staff and newspaper editorials dictated, at times, from government ministries.<sup>7</sup> The clearest example of political control was the 'Editors' Committee', established before Israeli independence, where newspapermen and politicians agreed together what news Israelis could read.<sup>8</sup>

Within this framework, Oren states, there were three possible ways in which Israel could have conceived of its television service: as an educational resource for a population still developing national values, as an advertisement for Israel to the wider world, and as a

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1966, and is still sometimes used to distinguish IBA Channel 1 television from its commercial competitors.

<sup>5</sup> Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction* 4th ed. (London: Sage, 2000). 121.

<sup>6</sup> Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limor, eds., *Mass Media in Israel [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1998), Raphael Mann and Tzipi Gonn-Gross, *Galei Zahal - All the Time [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 9.4.2006.

<sup>8</sup> Peri, *Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel* 76. Goren, *Secrecy, Security and Press Freedom [Hebrew]* 142.

propaganda tool to counter the often aggressively anti-Israel programming of Arab states.<sup>9</sup>

While early discussions promoted television as an educational vehicle, the eventual outcome was closer to Ellul's 'propaganda of agitation', which seeks rebellion or war, and nourishes revolutionary movements.<sup>10</sup> The choice was a result of the Israeli government's deep discomfort over the post-war criticism of its information policy, the influence of the political culture of *hasbara*, and the 'activist' predisposition of Galili, the minister responsible for information policy.

This chapter will look at early discussions regarding the introduction of television to Israel, will examine how the outbreak of war in 1967 influenced the issue, and analyse the – brief - post-war displacement of the developmental-educational model of television by what Galili described as 'a kind of a weapon'.<sup>11</sup> As opposed to the other episodes examined in this thesis, Galili's intervention in the establishment of television was strategic and proactive, and thus free of the limitations that the political culture of *hasbara*, discussed in Chapter I, might have imposed. Indeed, as a tool of propaganda rather than a tool of persuasion it is an exception to the model of *hasbara* this thesis has established. However, as a policy initiative aimed at improving Israel's international standing and weakening its opponents', it is consistent with the overall argument described above.

### Early discussions on introducing television

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<sup>9</sup> Oren, Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television 38-69.

<sup>10</sup> Ellul describes this model as the 'propaganda of integration – the propaganda of developed nations and characteristic of our civilization ...It is propaganda of conformity ...[which] aims at making the individual participate in a society in every way'. Ellul, Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes 71-75.

<sup>11</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4604/1.Yisrael Galili to Pinchas Sapir, 31.10.1967.



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In the years immediately following independence, Israel received a number of inquiries regarding the establishment of television. In 1950, a group of investors from Canada and the UK proposed the establishment of a commercial television service in Israel.<sup>12</sup> In June 1951, a group of Americans with ties to the television industry approached the Israeli Consulate in Los Angeles to obtain a license to begin television broadcasts. They noted that their group included Robert Sarnoff, the son of General David Sarnoff, the Chairman of the Board of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA).<sup>13</sup> In July 1952, an American Jewish student sent a detailed technical proposal to the Ministry of Posts – apparently the most appropriate government body to deal with such a matter – noting that the \$563,000 required to bring television to the people of the book could be raised from the Ford Foundation.<sup>14</sup> He noted the educational and cultural possibilities that television could offer – Hebrew language for new immigrants, agricultural advances for farmers, and concerts and plays for residents of outlying settlements who could not reach the cities.

In July 1952, David Sarnoff himself visited Ben-Gurion to discuss the issue. ‘Sarnoff – the electronics General - came to see me,’ wrote Ben-Gurion in his diary<sup>15</sup>. ‘He suggested television in Israel as a way of ‘ingathering the exiles’. I said that I doubted that our balance of payments would justify further unnecessary foreign currency expenditure.’<sup>16</sup> Peri suggests that Ben-Gurion’s objection to television was informed both by his deep love of the written word, and by the experience of seeing his grandchildren utterly transfixed by the television

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<sup>12</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5504/13.

<sup>13</sup> ISA/RG 43/G/5504/13. Letter dated 14.6.1951

<sup>14</sup> ISA/RG 43/G/5504/13. Letter dated 31.7.1952

<sup>15</sup> David Sarnoff, a pioneer of modern communications in the US, had served as communication consultant to General Eisenhower during World War II. He was generally referred to as General Sarnoff.

<sup>16</sup> BGA. Diary entry for 26.7.1952, reference 3209.

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– to the point of ignoring him - when he visited them in London.<sup>17</sup> According to Yitzhak Navon, his political secretary, the way that Ben-Gurion retold the episode confirmed that it had left a deep impression on him. ‘It was clear to me that the old man was saying in his downright way: that’s a mind-destroying device. It wastes time and addles the brain. We won’t have it in our country.’<sup>18</sup>

But Zvi Gil, an enthusiastic supporter of Israel television and its first chronicler, quotes another of Navon’s anecdotes, indicating that Ben-Gurion could be persuaded of a different role for television. In 1960, during a visit to France, Navon urged him to watch a documentary, filmed using a microscopic camera, which showed the collective labour of life inside a beehive. Ben-Gurion was utterly transfixed. ‘How do they get inside the hive? Look at the queen! Quite remarkable – you can see everything that they are describing! I really never imagined that you could show bees in such an educational and eye-opening way. Wonderful, truly wonderful!’<sup>19</sup> Other Israelis saw the benefits to be derived from television. Undeterred by Ben-Gurion’s rejection, David Sarnoff proposed a cooperative venture with the Israeli Ministry of Defence. Peres, newly installed as director-general, responded enthusiastically, and issued a set of guidelines to the ministry’s delegation to New York to

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<sup>17</sup> Peri, Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel. p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Peri, Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel. Peri quotes from his interview with Yitzhak Navon, 2.3.1977. Former President Chaim Herzog echoed this objection, noting that Ben-Gurion had thought that television was ‘...the ruin of mankind. At times, I think he may have had a point.’ Herzog, Living History 141.

<sup>19</sup> Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew] 18-19.

explore the issue.<sup>20</sup> That suggestion was quickly shelved, the victim of Ben-Gurion's moral and financial objections. However, the issue was regularly revisited.<sup>21</sup>

In 1956, Teddy Kollek, director-general of Ben-Gurion's office, appointed a government commission of enquiry to 'research and investigate the possibility of establishing a television network in Israel'.<sup>22</sup> Two previous committees had already recommended that Israel begin television broadcasts.<sup>23</sup> Its proponents, too, argued that television would be a valuable educational tool, helping the large numbers of new immigrants to Israel acculturate and integrate, widening the use of the Hebrew language and familiarising citizens with political developments.<sup>24</sup>

Katz notes that objections to television went much deeper than financial considerations.<sup>25</sup> Having fought hard to establish Hebrew culture in Israel, the ideological elites were concerned that television would subvert this effort by introducing foreign influences into Israel.<sup>26</sup> There was particular concern that television would bring American values to Israeli society.<sup>27</sup> Religious circles were concerned about the secularising influence that television might bring, and political leaders were concerned that television would erode national solidarity and lead to social fragmentation.

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<sup>20</sup> IDFA 540/55/42. Undated guidelines for the Ministry of Defence delegation to the US, arrival date-stamped 15.12.1952; H Ben-David to IDF military attaché to the US, 28.12.1952; Shimon Peres to B. Shamir, 30.12.1952.

<sup>21</sup> Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew] 22-30, Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," 253, Gotliffe, "Israeli General Television: A Historical Exploration of Content and Influence," 68.

<sup>22</sup> ISA/RG 43/G/5505/10. Report of the Television Committee of the Prime Minister's Office.

<sup>23</sup> ISA/RG 43/G/5505/10. The commissions reported in 1951 and in 1955.

<sup>24</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4604/16. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into National Television Broadcasts, 1955. See also: Segev, Israel in 1967 [Hebrew] 42.

<sup>25</sup> Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," 255.

<sup>26</sup> Zohar Shavit, The Construction of Israeli Culture: The History of the Jewish Community in Pre-State Israel since the First Zionist Immigration [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Yosef Tamir to the Knesset, 21.12.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 609. Tamir (*Gahal*) asked Galili if all four of the companies that offered to assist in establishing television in Israel were American.

International experts played a vital role in overcoming fears that television would be misused, and that it could have play a constructive role in nation-building. In June 1961, Dr H R Cassirer of UNESCO and T S Duckmanton of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation issued a report on the advisability of introducing television to Israel.<sup>28</sup> They acknowledged Israeli reticence about introducing television, noting that 'emphasis on [television's] constructive role seems especially called for in view of the potential harmful effects of television which preoccupy Israel public opinion'.<sup>29</sup> They concluded that, despite the costs, it was in Israel's interest to establish

a publicly operated television service, financed out of non-commercial revenues, serving the entire territory of Israel with a limited number of programme hours whose objective is educational and cultural ... and include in it a programme range from instruction to cultural enjoyment.<sup>30</sup>

A report by the European Broadcasting Union suggested that the particular nature of Israeli society called for 'a certain seriousness' in programming, encouraging political engagement, rather than the more familiar model of television as diversion from reality.<sup>31</sup> However, so long as television remained under the direct control of the Prime Minister's Office, the strongest objection to the introduction of television was that it could become

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<sup>28</sup> H Cassirer and T S Duckmanton, Educational Television in Israel: Report of a UNESCO Mission, 31 May-27 June 1961 (UNESCO, 1961). ISA/RG130/G/4604/1. Meir Avidor, Evaluation of the UNESCO Report into Educational Television, presented to the Minister of Education and Culture, 1962; Report of the Council on Educational Television, 1962; Shmuel Bendor, Report of the Interministerial Commission of Enquiry into General Television Broadcasts, 1965. UNESCO (1961), the European Broadcasting Union (1965) and the Canadian Broadcasting Commission (1970) were each invited to consider the question of television broadcasts in Israel. See also Meir Avidor, *Evaluation of the UNESCO Report into Educational Television, presented to the Minister of Education and Culture, 1962.*

<sup>29</sup> Cassirer and Duckmanton, Educational Television in Israel: Report of a UNESCO Mission, 31 May-27 June 1961 6.

<sup>30</sup> Cassirer and Duckmanton, Educational Television in Israel: Report of a UNESCO Mission, 31 May-27 June 1961 10.

<sup>31</sup> Amit Schejter, "The Cultural Obligations of Broadcast Television in Israel," Gazette 56 (1996): 185.

the mouthpiece of one party. This ran counter to the highly politicised but highly competitive ethos of the Israeli media. Eshkol, seeking to dismantle some aspects of Ben-Gurion's highly centralised administration, proposed that the state-owned media should be given its freedom. Despite its formal independence, the decisions around the establishment of Israeli television show that political influence was still considerable.

### Moving television out of the Prime Minister's Office

The 1965 Broadcasting Authority Law transferred authority for *Kol Yisrael*, Israel's national radio network, from the Prime Minister's Office to an autonomous Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) where it would be free from political control. The IBA's new director was Hanoch Givton, who had formerly been Head of Radio at *Kol Yisrael*.<sup>32</sup> Givton was keen to explore the possibilities of bringing television to Israel, and keener still that he be responsible for it. In July 1965, the cabinet decided, in principle, that the IBA should also create a television service and appointed a committee under Shmuel Bendor to examine the political, financial and cultural implications of the decision. The recommendations included the following:

1. The Broadcasting Authority should be the guarantee to the level of the programs and their *mamlachtiut*<sup>33</sup>.
2. The power of television will be of considerable magnitude in the advancement of a few *mamlachti* targets such as the ingathering of the exiles, population dispersal, the elimination of ignorance and the teaching of Hebrew.
3. An Israeli television will reduce the destructive cultural and political influence of foreign television. The less educated people are, the more inclined they are to watch television and be affected by its content. Therefore, the most vulnerable population is also the one that watches the most television.

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<sup>32</sup> ISA/RG124/G/6344/3. Government decision of 13.6.1966 to appoint Givton as head of the IBA, with the issue to be revisited when television broadcasts began.

<sup>33</sup> In this context, *mamlachtiut* and *mamlachti* should be read as 'national' or 'nationally-minded'. The intention here was to signal the apolitical nature of the IBA.

4. Television programs should be attractive and not frugal. This is to ensure that the audience will watch them instead of turning to foreign broadcasts.
5. Television broadcasts must reach all areas of the country, especially remote areas.
6. Israeli television, especially Arabic broadcasts, will serve as a useful tool of *hasbara* in neighbouring countries.
7. The programs will be in one language. In certain programs in Hebrew, there will be Arabic translation.
8. General television will begin by broadcasting 14 hours a week in Hebrew and about 3.5 hours in Arabic. It is preferable that broadcasts begin at the same time. In questions of quality versus quantity, quality should prevail.
9. Israeli television programmes will not be broadcast in the Diaspora but they will be attainable through programme exchanges.
10. The programs should be as Israeli as possible. This will also help create an industry of writing and producing television programmes.
17. For the benefit of the young television service, it should develop and be strengthened without outside influences. The budgetary needs should be met by government rather than by commercials.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst Bendor was aware of the *hasbara* potential of television, describing it as ‘a useful tool of *hasbara*’ and noting the importance of pulling Israeli viewers away from foreign television, the recommendation that programming should be overwhelmingly in Hebrew, and not in Arabic, indicated the acceptance of the ‘developmental’ model proposed by UNESCO and others.<sup>35</sup> In January 1966, the first experimental broadcasts were enthusiastically received.<sup>36</sup> At the end of the month, the government approved a contract with the American company Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) to act as the IBA’s consultant.<sup>37</sup> The cost of the contract - IL300,000 in 1966-67 – was considerable.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Shmuel Bendor, Report of the Interministerial Committee on General Television [Hebrew]. State of Israel, 1965).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Elihu Katz, 19.7.2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Maariv*, 7 January 1966. 9; *Haaretz*, 4 January 1966. 5. The first broadcast lasted for around half an hour, ending with pictures of Israel’s US-supplied Hawk missile system to the rousing music of Tchaikovsky’s ‘1812’ Overture.

<sup>37</sup> Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew] 36.

<sup>38</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 21.12.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 609.

Three months later, Prime Minister Eshkol inaugurated an educational television station, the gift of the French branch of the Rothschild family, which transmitted sporadic educational films to a few classrooms.<sup>39</sup> Despite the support of foreign philanthropists, the television project was a heavy financial burden for Israel, which was experiencing a deep recession in 1966. That summer, the budget for establishing television broadcasts was cut by IL10m.<sup>40</sup> The Finance Minister, Pinchas Sapir, was reluctant to commit further resources to television, particularly since he thought that there would be very little interest in it.

However, Sapir was wrong. By 1967 30,000 Israelis owned television sets,<sup>41</sup> and in the absence of local broadcasts, those television owners who did plug in their sets picked up black and white broadcasts from Cairo and Beirut.<sup>42</sup> Public pressure for Israeli broadcasts propelled the government towards action, albeit cautious and in slow increments.<sup>43</sup>

When Yisrael Galili agreed to take ministerial responsibility for information affairs, in October 1966, the IBA and the television project fell into his remit.<sup>44</sup> He was conscious of the suspicions of political control over such a powerful new medium.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the question of independence was at the top of the agenda for a meeting of the inter-ministerial

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<sup>39</sup> *Haaretz*, 25 March 1966. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Levi Eshkol to the Knesset, 12.6.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 46, col. 2123.

<sup>41</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, 'Statistical Abstract of Israel', vol. 20, 1969. 273; Peri, Telepopulism: Media and Politics in Israel. 21. Jordan would initiate television broadcasts only in 1968, along with Israel.

<sup>42</sup> Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book." 253. Katz assessed that 'only about half the sets were actually plugged in.'

<sup>43</sup> 'Common Sense', *Haaretz*, 7.9.1967. 2

<sup>44</sup> Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," 183.

<sup>45</sup> YTA 15/062/3/2. Handwritten, undated note by Galili. The note was apparently written before a government discussion on the introduction of television. He notes the views of Haim Moshe Shapira (National Religious Party): 'It all depends on Minister Galili, and how he handles these matters. If he can ensure, in whatever way, that it will be absolutely objective about what is happening in the state, I'll be for it. If not, I'll fight against it.'

committee on general television, which he chaired, of 23 April 1967.<sup>46</sup> This issue was also picked up by the national press, which called for entirely new legislation, rather than the simple addition of television to the existing IBA Law, in order to prevent political influence extending to television.<sup>47</sup>

Galili shared Eshkol's caution with regard to the benefits of television. Progress was accordingly slow. Speaking to the Knesset in December 1966, he said that whilst it was 'still too early to set an exact date' for the launching of television in Israel, it was possible that broadcasts might begin by the end of 1968, if there were no unexpected delays.<sup>48</sup> He did, however, appoint one of his protégés from the IDF to keep things ticking over.

In February 1967, Galili appointed General Elad Peled, who was heading the IDF's National Security College at the time, as his special assistant with responsibility for launching the television project.<sup>49</sup> Peled had been a junior officer in the *Palmach*, and had come to attention for his part in organising the besieged Jewish population of the town of Tsfat, and, later in the summer of 1948, the military operation to capture it. When the *Palmach* was disbanded, Peled remained in the IDF, moving up the ranks. In 1965, on his appointment as commander of the National Security College, he joined the IDF General Staff, the first of his

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<sup>46</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/6344/5. Galili asked that the committee discuss three matters – how to ensure that television would have a 'national', and not a party-political, nature; the issue of television during election campaigns; and television broadcasts on the Jewish Sabbath and religious holidays.

<sup>47</sup> 'Sooner or Later on Television', *Haaretz*, 7.4.1967. See also Amnon Rubenstein, 'Television's Coming', *Haaretz*, 7.4.1967. Rubenstein called for the IBA's Board of Governors to be ratified by the Knesset plenum, rather than the cabinet, and for the IBA's budget to be an internal matter, rather than requiring the approval of the Knesset's Finance Committee. Both of these recommendations were aimed at reducing possible political influence on the IBA. See also Yona Cohen, 'The Campaign against Television' *HaTzofe*, 7.4.67.

<sup>48</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 21.12.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 609. Galili returned to the Knesset two months later and repeated that progress was being made, but that it was still too early to predict exactly when television broadcasts would begin. Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 15.2.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 48, col. 1313.

<sup>49</sup> YTA15/061/05/7. Peled to Galili, 2.2.1967; YTA/10/061/05/8. CV of Major-General Elad Peled.; Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," 251.



generation so to do.<sup>50</sup> By his own admission, he was one of the few senior officers of his generation with ‘intellectual curiosity’, and regularly volunteered to stay behind at General Staff headquarters whilst his fellow generals rushed off to watch a football match.<sup>51</sup> Peled was also politically neutral. As a member of the *Palmach*, he might have been expected to identify with *Ahdut Ha’Avoda*, like Allon and Galili, but in one of the myriad splits and fractures in the labour movement of the 1940s, Peled’s *kvutza* had sided with Ben-Gurion and *Mapai*.<sup>52</sup> He, though, was never a party member.

Galili and Peled agreed that the appointment would eventually be as Director-General of the IBA, but that in the interim, Peled would work for Galili from the Prime Minister’s Office with responsibility for the television project.<sup>53</sup> The appointment drew criticism of Peled, who as a soldier was considered temperamentally unsuited to the job, and of Galili who was accused – erroneously - of appointing one of his political allies from *Ahdut Ha’Avoda*.<sup>54</sup> By having Peled work the Prime Minister’s Office, he was also criticised for reinforcing government control of the media.<sup>55</sup>

The criticism of Peled’s appointment was, in fact, a serious misinterpretation of Galili’s approach to the television project. Firstly, Galili was indicating that although he was willing to advance preparations for the introduction of television, he would not do so without parliamentary approval. He proposed to present new legislation to widen the authority of the IBA, whose 1965 charter did not explicitly mention television, but talked only of broadcasting. While previous government decisions interpreted the charter as

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<sup>50</sup> YTA/15/061/05/08. CV of Major-General Elad Peled.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008

<sup>52</sup> *Kvutza* refers to a small group of young people, often formed by membership of youth movements, which formed the nucleus of new settlements in the early years of Israeli independence.

<sup>53</sup> Peled to Galili, 2.2.1967. YTA/15/061/05/07

<sup>54</sup> Zvi Zimmerman to the Knesset, 19.10.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 57.

<sup>55</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 15.2.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 48, col. 1312.

including television when it began, Galili insisted on parliamentary approval to amend it<sup>56</sup>. At the same time, he was indicating that he wanted television and radio to be entirely independent and free of government control. In order to do so, he recognised that the IBA would need stronger leadership<sup>57</sup>. There was also a personal element to his decision. Peled's military background was certainly an advantage, but Galili's principal purpose was party-political. Galili was bent on dismissing Hanoch Givton, who was closely associated with *Rafi*.<sup>58</sup> Unhappily, Givton tendered his resignation, and after some discussion was offered the post of Ambassador to Lima.<sup>59</sup>

With Peled now in place, Galili brought the matter back to the government, which decided on 23 February 1967, following decisions of 18 July 1965 and 11 September 1966:

To establish general television with national coverage and to expedite preparations to begin broadcasts.

Television will not be used for the election campaign of 1969

Television will operate within the framework of the Israel Broadcasting Authority

The aforementioned decisions will be brought before the Knesset

To request that Minister Y Galili and the Minister of Justice prepare an amendment to the Israel Broadcasting Authority law, as required by para. 4, and to bring it immediately to the Knesset.<sup>60</sup>

In its editorial of 29 March 1967, *Haaretz*, itself associated with *Rafi*, warned of 'the danger represented by the decision to place the issue of government communications in the hands of Minister Y Galili, who intends to take control of the entire broadcasting system, radio and television. We must oppose this trend'. The newspaper also urged its readers to 'block

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<sup>56</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 21.12.1966, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 47, col. 609. Galili referred to a cabinet decision from 18.7.1965 in which it was clear that television would fall under the remit of the IBA.

<sup>57</sup> YTA/10/061/05/4. Galili speech to IBA Council, n.d.

<sup>58</sup> Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," 195, Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew].

<sup>59</sup> YTA/15/061/05/3. Galili to Eshkol, 3.2.1967; YTA/15/061/05. 'Givton Affair' file

<sup>60</sup> YTA/15/061/05/3.

the plans to turn [television] into a tool of influence for one party alone'.<sup>61</sup> The Six-Day War was to provide Galili with the opportunity to divert television away from its lofty goals of education and enlightenment and to use it for the political ends he had sensibly objected to before it.

#### Emergency domestic television broadcasts in the 'waiting period'

Towards the end of April 1967, the General Security Services, Israel's internal security agency, convened a discussion to discuss the impact of television on national security<sup>62</sup>. The main conclusion was that broadcasts from neighbouring Arab states, particularly Egypt, were highly influential for Israeli Moslem Arabs, although the Christians preferred the more moderate broadcasts from Lebanon. The GSS assessed that the broadcasts strengthened both the sense of Palestinian identity amongst Israeli Arabs, and their desire to eradicate the State of Israel. The report noted that there were 1305 television sets in Arab towns, of which around half were to be found in largely Christian Nazareth, and another 750 sets in 'mixed' towns<sup>63</sup>. In total, there were around 30,000 televisions in Israel at the time, of which 22,000 were registered with the Israel Broadcasting Authority<sup>64</sup>.

There were thirty-two television stations operating in the Middle East – in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus, amongst others - and another twenty-eight were planned. Many of these stations, particularly those from Egypt and Lebanon, were picked up

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<sup>61</sup> *Haaretz*, 29.3.1967. *Haaretz* was strongly supportive of Ben-Gurion's *Rafi* party, and critical of Labour. In conversation with Shimon Peres, a protégé of Ben-Gurion and one of his allies in the breakaway *Rafi* party, Peres stated '*Haaretz* is the bravest and best newspaper in Israel.' Galili responded '*Haaretz* is more supportive of *Rafi* than *Davar* [the Labour Party's newspaper] is of Labour.' Rubenstein, "*Haaretz* and the Eshkol Government."

<sup>62</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. 'Security implications of television', 21.4.1967.

<sup>63</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. 'Security implications of television', 21.4.1967. p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Response to a parliamentary question by Y Tamir, 29.3.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset* vol. 48, col. 1877.

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in Israel. The GSS thought that an Israeli television transmitter would be able to block these broadcasts, even if only partially. An Israeli transmitter would be able to reach Gaza, some of Sinai, the Hebron area and a large part of the 'triangle' of Arab towns in the Galilee. Broadcasting deep into the Arab states was not considered technically possible, although a transmitter placed on Mount Meron in the Galilee – which would cost \$1 million - would be able to reach around 800,000 Lebanese and 1,500,000 Syrians<sup>65</sup>.

With the full support of Yisrael Galili, whose predisposition to view the world through the prism of Israeli national security was well-known, the government decided to press ahead with emergency television broadcasts, even if they were highly improvised.<sup>66</sup> In the same week, he had received the first of a set of public opinion surveys from the Israel Institute of Applied Social Research and the Institute of Communications at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Galili was much impressed by the researchers, the US-born Professors Louis Guttman and Elihu Katz, and remained in close contact with them. Moshe Hovav, a *Kol Yisrael* employee who had taken a three-month course in television production in Scotland was asked to head the emergency television team. Hovav had heard from Arab participants on the television course that Israeli radio was picked up in neighbouring states, and was considered to be a highly reliable source of news. He reported that the Arab journalists had begged him to press for Israeli television. 'Start soon, and start well, because we are waiting for Israeli television back home. If you start well, you'll convince the Arab viewer immediately. How? Broadcast good entertainment. Not the cheap stuff.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Memorandum of the Engineering Department, Ministry of Posts, May 1967. ISA/GL/14246/9.

<sup>66</sup> Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]."

<sup>67</sup> A Lavie, 'Arab States are Asking 'Let's Have Israeli Television'', *Maariv*, 12.3.1967, p.5.

The emergency broadcasts were planned to be transmitted from the Educational Television studios in Ramat Aviv, by government order. Since the Educational Television initiative was a private project by the Rothschild Foundation, the only way the government could gain access to the studio was by an emergency edict. As war approached, the government did indeed make a formal step to take control of the Ramat Aviv facility.<sup>68</sup> On 4 June, the day before the war broke out, the IBA Board discussed the plans for emergency television broadcasts, and authorised an initial grant of IL10,000 for the project, on the understanding that most of the expenditure would not be covered by the IBA's regular budget. The emergency television project was considered a government project, and the IBA board discussed the possibility of establishing an inter-ministerial board of management, which would include the IDF and the information services, as well as the IBA. They even suggested a formulation for the title of the broadcasts: 'Israel Broadcasting Authority, Emergency Broadcasts Unit, in cooperation with the IDF Spokesperson's Unit'.<sup>69</sup>

The thing was almost ready. We had a daily schedule of three and a half hours, comprising news with films and slides, foreign reports, filmed interviews, arts shows, feature films and so on. We had done all the coordination. The IDF Spokesperson's unit had even organised a Piper light aircraft to pick up the films from cameramen on all the fronts every day. But the war was too quick. When we were three or four days away from starting, we were told to stop. And that's how it ended.<sup>70</sup>

Hovav was disappointed but not beaten. He wrote to Hanoch Givton, the IBA's acting Director-General, and stressed the need for Arab-language broadcasts. He was aware of the difficulties, including the lack of trained television personnel who spoke Arabic, but noted that 'it should still be possible to plan general television broadcasts in Arabic, which

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<sup>68</sup> A Bar-Kedma, 'Why Did Israel Hesitate to 'Shoot' the Television Weapon?', *Yediot Ahronot*, 25.6.1967. p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Binyamin Eliav to Yisrael Galili, 8.6.1967.

<sup>70</sup> A Bar-Kedma, 'Why did Israel hesitate to 'shoot' the Television weapon?', *Yediot Ahronot*, 25.6.1967. p. 5. See also ISA/RG 24/G/4886/9. Moshe Hovav to Hanoch Givton, 3.7.1967.

would include news in Arabic, documentaries (from those broadcast in Hebrew) with dubbing or subtitles in Arabic, interviews in Arabic and discussions with commentators in Arabic.<sup>71</sup> He found a powerful ally in the minister, Yisrael Galili.

### **On the offensive: government information policy in the wake of the Six-Day War**

The last week has brought a totally new reality. Amongst the Jewish population, morale remained firm, and does not need any new emergency treatment at this point. On the other hand, the Arab population of the state has grown to around a million. The danger to morale – Arab in particular, but also Jewish – of television from Arab states may not be serious at this point, but we must look to the future'.<sup>72</sup>

Immediately following the end of the war, the Chairman of the IBA Board wrote to Galili, urging him to divert efforts for establishing domestic television. 'We must ensure that we give the Arab population now under our control appropriate, comprehensive and detailed *hasbara*, using all media possible – including television.'<sup>73</sup> Galili needed little convincing of the value of using radio and television as a tool of government policy. 'It's a kind of weapon,' he explained to his cabinet colleague, Minister of Finance Pinchas Sapir.<sup>74</sup> Galili's weapon was to be used in the war against what he saw as an unchecked stream of Arab propaganda<sup>75</sup>.

Galili then convened the Ministerial Committee on Television and spoke in the same terms<sup>76</sup>. He reported on the preparations made by the IBA for emergency domestic broadcasts before the war, but noted that the circumstances were now entirely changed. Galili explained the need for shifting the focus of television. On one hand, it would help

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<sup>71</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Moshe Hovav to Hanoch Givton, 3.7.1967.

<sup>72</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Binyamin Eliav to Yisrael Galili, 10.6.1967. ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9.

<sup>73</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Minutes of the Ministerial Committee on General Television.

<sup>74</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4604/1. Yisrael Galili to Pinchas Sapir, 31.10.1967.

<sup>75</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 15.2.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 48, col. 1309; 29.3.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 48, col. 1877. Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book." p. 245.

<sup>76</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Minutes of the Ministerial Committee on General Television.

explain Israel's position to the Palestinians. It would also serve to block the transmissions of less positive broadcasts from the surrounding Arab states. The Committee voted unanimously in favour of his proposal and authorised Galili to 'examine the possibility of establishing broadcasts to the [Palestinian] Arab population.'<sup>77</sup>

Following discussions in September, the cabinet instructed Galili to bring the matter before the Knesset for approval and to make the necessary legislative amendments to the IBA Law<sup>78</sup>. In November 1967, Galili announced to the Knesset that the time had come for Israel to begin television broadcasts, and to use them as a propaganda tool<sup>79</sup>, just as the Arab states had done before the war<sup>80</sup>. 'The anti-Israeli element in television broadcasting in the Arab countries has been strong for some years, and even more so after the Six-Day War.'<sup>81</sup> Others, too, were convinced that it could be a useful tool for the government. Television, argued one politician, would 'show the Arab population on our borders

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<sup>77</sup> ISA/RG 124/G/4886/9. Minutes of the Ministerial Committee on General Television.

<sup>78</sup> ISA/RG 818/G/6288/4. Yael Uzai, Cabinet Secretary, to Yisrael Galili, 7.11.1967. Announcement to the Knesset on the government's decision on establishing 'general' television:

Decided, following government decisions of 26.3.1967 and 17.9.1967 to:  
Bring the matter of the government's decision on the establishment of 'general' television to the Knesset for ratification;  
Present to the Knesset, as soon as possible, amendments to the IBA Law to include television in its sphere of responsibility;  
'General' television will begin once the amended law passes into law.

See also YTA/15/62/2/9. Nathan Cohen, Legal Adviser to the IBA, to Elad Peled, 18.5.1967.

<sup>79</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 13.11.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 50, col. 125. Galili opened a debate entitled 'Government Announcement on the Introduction of General Television'.

<sup>80</sup> Abba Eban to the United Nations' General Assembly, 19.6.1967, Laqueur and Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict 165-85*. Arab states were believed to spend at least \$50 annually on propaganda efforts. YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 12

<sup>81</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 13.11.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 50, col. 125

...everything that is good, beautiful and noble in the state of Israel.’<sup>82</sup>The Knesset approved a budget of £IL8.5m for the establishment of an emergency television service.<sup>83</sup>

Galili suggested that the government install televisions in coffee-shops, social clubs and schools to ‘reach different publics, and influence previously conceived, anti-Israel opinions’.<sup>84</sup> The service would broadcast four hours a day – three in Arabic and one in Hebrew.<sup>85</sup> This was a significant reversal of the Bendor recommendations of 1966, which envisaged 14 hours of Hebrew and only 2½ hours of Arabic programming each day. Galili did not ignore the ‘developmental’ model of television. In the same debate, Galili described television as a tool that would ‘unite the people in a country of immigrants, raise standards of culture and education, combat ignorance, encourage reading, allow those living in remote communities to benefit from the treasures of art and culture’.<sup>86</sup> He had maintained contact with Professors Guttman and Katz, and had commissioned opinion surveys before, during and after the war<sup>87</sup>. When they presented the surveys to him in August 1967, he received the results with some dismay, noting that whilst most Israelis supported the retention of the recently-captured Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, and some wanted to hold onto Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula, when faced with a map, very few could accurately identify these areas. The solution, suggested Elihu Katz, lay in starting television broadcasts. ‘If there were television in Israel, and if the weather forecast was broadcast with a map as a

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<sup>82</sup> Aharon Yadlin (Labour) to the Knesset, 13.II.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 50, col. 125

<sup>83</sup> Gil, *A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew]* 131.

<sup>84</sup> Gil, *A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew]* 131.

<sup>85</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 28.II.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset* vol. 50, col. 127. Galili was responding to the debate on the establishment of general television.

<sup>86</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 13.II.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 50, col. 127

<sup>87</sup> Edited Findings on the Changes in Public Concerns and Public Opinion between the Six-Day War and April 1969 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: The Guttman Institute for Social Research - The Institute of Communications, 1969).



background, many more Israelis would be able to identify the occupied territories on the map.<sup>88</sup>

In earlier discussions, Galili had noted the contribution that the establishment of television could play to establishing Israel's electronics industry.<sup>89</sup> There was also popular pressure to bring television to domestic audiences. *Haaretz* called for the 'triumph of common sense' - Israeli television for Israelis, not for Arabs.<sup>90</sup> Speaking later, he clarified his position. 'I saw television as having the potential to do some good, in engendering responsible Zionist consciousness and love of the land, but not for preaching or indoctrination ... I saw television's role as making people's leisure time more pleasant, and bringing culture to the people.'<sup>91</sup>

### From General Peled to Professor Katz

In fact, the eventual direction taken by Israel television was influenced as much by personality as by policy. Galili's first choice to lead the project, Major-General Elad Peled, returned to the IDF in May 1967, and had commanded operations with great success, capturing the Golan Heights from Syria. When the war ended, he asked Galili to allow him to stay on in the IDF, and to be released from his job with the television<sup>92</sup>, a decision which

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<sup>88</sup> Uzi Peled, "Memories from the Creation of Television [Hebrew]," *Ottot* 93.156 (1993): 10.

<sup>89</sup> Undated handwritten notes on television by Galili, apparently from 1967, before the cabinet and Knesset discussions on television. YTA/15/62/3/1.

<sup>90</sup> 'Common Sense', *Haaretz*, 7.9.1967, p. 2

<sup>91</sup> Zvi Gil interview with Yisrael Galili, early 1983. Quoted in Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," 185.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 21.11.2005. Galili to Eshkol, 27.7.1967, YTA/15/061/05/23. Mishal, "Israel Broadcasting Authority: Political Dynamics [Hebrew]," 108-09.

saddened his colleagues and angered Galili.<sup>93</sup> In an uncharacteristic show of emotion, Galili told Peled he felt betrayed.<sup>94</sup> But Peled had begun to sense that he and Galili did not agree on the principle of the independence of television and radio from political influence. 'I see the independence of the Broadcasting Authority as a cornerstone of democratic life in Israel', wrote Peled. 'I am not sure we share a common assessment of the coming developments, and so I doubt my ability to manage the broadcasting service by the principles of non-dependence.'<sup>95</sup> Peled may also have been influenced by concerns that debates over the use of television would place him in an uncomfortable position in the possible clash between Minister of Labour Yigal Allon (*Ahdut Ha'Avoda*) and Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan (*Rafi*), with both of whom he had close personal relations<sup>96</sup>.

In his place, Galili turned to Shmuel Almog of *Kol Yisrael* to head the expanded IBA. Despite Almog's known opposition to Jewish settlement of the West Bank and Gaza, which was strongly supported by Galili, he was seen as reliable and loyal<sup>97</sup>. His appointment was approved by the cabinet at the beginning of November<sup>98</sup>. Galili then asked Elihu Katz, whose enthusiasm for television was already apparent, to replace Peled in establishing television as head of the 'television task force'.

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<sup>93</sup> 'Resignation of General Peled saddens Kol Yisrael workers', *Davar*, 23.7.1967; 'New coordinator for television to be appointed in place of General Peled', *Haaretz*, 23.7.1967

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.08. Galili used a biblical reference from Jeremiah 5;11: 'The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been *utterly treacherous to me* [my emphasis] declares the Lord.'

<sup>95</sup> YTA/15/061/05/23. Peled to Galili, undated draft of letter.

<sup>96</sup> Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," 186.

<sup>97</sup> Shifris, "Yisrael Galili Ideology, Policy and Political Action, 1935-1967 [Hebrew]," 186. Shifris notes an interview with Almog in 1999, in which Almog recalled that once Galili asked his opinion on the establishment of settlements, and heard the response, he did not ask again.

<sup>98</sup> YTA/15/061/05/23. Yael Uzai, Cabinet Secretary, to Yisrael Galili, 7.11.1967. Uzai noted the cabinet decision that Galili should refer the appointment of Shmuel Almog as head of the broadcasting services to the IBA board.

Oren suggests that Galili was determined to appoint a 'trouble-free and popular successor, an authority who would appear above political motivation and would bring unquestioned expertise to the post'.<sup>99</sup> He was also motivated by the desire to prevent Hanoach Givton from once again staking a claim on the television project<sup>100</sup>. Katz certainly had expertise in communications, but he also made no efforts to hide his scepticism regarding Galili's proposal to use television as a short-term propaganda tool, aimed primarily at Palestinian Arabs.

Katz did not believe that television could be used to reduce tensions between Israel and the Arab population under its control. 'In choosing me, the government could not have found a more sceptical person as far as belief in the short-term mass media effects are concerned. I did not think that television could by itself cause the Arabs to like Israelis, and I said so.'<sup>101</sup> Rather, he saw a role for television in reinforcing the substance of government policy – which could either be one of reconciliation or of ongoing conflict. He was particularly interested in television as a vehicle for broadening Israel's image abroad from one where political and military interests dominated to finding areas of mutual interest with its Arab neighbours.

In order to explore the alternatives to Galili's views regarding broadcasting policy for Israel Television, Katz convened a round-table discussion in September 1967, to which he

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<sup>99</sup> Oren, Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television 127.

<sup>100</sup> YTA/15/061/05. 'Givton Affair' file. Givton to Galili, 4.10.1967; Galili to Givton, 4.10.1967. Givton wrote to Galili, asking to resign, rather than face the procedure Galili had begun in September to remove him. See also the government decision of 22.10.1967 to accept Givton's resignation by a vote of 10 for and 5 abstentions. See also Hebrew University of Jerusalem Institute for Contemporary Jewry, Oral History Division 174/32, Nathan Cohen interview of Shmuel Almog. According to Almog, Givton's dismissal was not based on political differences with Galili, but because Galili doubted his integrity. However, Shifris notes that Givton was associated with the *Rafi* faction of the Labour party, whilst Galili was one of the leaders of the rival *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* group.

<sup>101</sup> Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," 254.

invited officials, academics and practitioners in the field of government communications.<sup>102</sup> A compromise was reached in which emergency broadcasts to the Arab population would precede the introduction of Hebrew-language and imported programming, but that the schedule would become bilingual as soon as was possible.<sup>103</sup> Galili's national-security dominated television service would come first, but was to eventually give way to a domestically-targeted vehicle for education and culture.

'Finally, something to watch!'<sup>104</sup>

With news that Jordan was about to inaugurate television broadcasts in early 1968, Katz's television team weighed the possibility of a debut broadcast for Israel's Independence Day on 2 May.<sup>105</sup> The first anniversary of the victory would be an appropriate opportunity to unveil the new television service. Time was short, with the decision to broadcast in early May taken only nine weeks beforehand.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps more significant was the lack of experienced staff, insufficient budgets, and no equipment. A team was hastily assembled from Israelis who had experience of television, many of whom were living abroad, and from diaspora Jews who were willing to bring their skills to the new service. It was a matter of debate what would happen first: whether the Israelis would learn how to use the equipment, or the foreigners learn how to speak Hebrew.<sup>107</sup> The budgetary requirements were also a heavy burden for the accounting department of the Prime Minister's Office,

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<sup>102</sup> YTA/15/057/04/1. Round-table discussion on 'Hasbara tools in operation'.

<sup>103</sup> Katz, "Television Comes to the People of the Book," 254.

<sup>104</sup> Gideon Reicher, 'Finally Something to Watch', *Yediot Ahronot*, 5.5.1968. Reicher's 'The Small Screen' column was the first regular column on television in an Israeli newspaper.

<sup>105</sup> Gil, *A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew]*.

<sup>106</sup> Oren, *Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television* 132.

<sup>107</sup> Peled, "Memories from the Creation of Television [Hebrew]," 11.

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which was nominally responsible for the task force, resulting in delayed payments to suppliers and staff.

There was also a serious shortage of broadcast equipment, which according to a contract with the American RCA firm would only arrive in the summer of 1968. Following a tip-off from CBS's office in London in March 1968, Uzi Peled, Katz's deputy, was despatched to purchase a mobile broadcast unit that was up for sale. Peled recounts that he was unexpectedly met with great ceremony by a senior British military officer when he landed in London. Several hours later, it transpired that he was not General Elad Peled, one of the heroes of the Six-Day War, who had also led Israel's television efforts before the war.<sup>108</sup> The mobile unit was purchased with great haste, and at rather greater cost than intended, from under the noses of a Jordanian team who had intended on buying the same truck for their new television service.<sup>109</sup> With only three weeks to prepare for the broadcast, there was little time for training. Louis Lentin, an experienced television producer from Ireland, and recently arrived in Israel, was appointed as producer. The CBS instructors manned the cameras. Chaim Yavin, Elihu Katz's assistant and later Israel's 'Mr. Television', acted as the anchor.

The sense of enthusiasm, Peled later admitted, was bravado in the face of real ignorance of the realities of television production.<sup>110</sup> There was no back-up equipment to cover breakdowns; if broadcasts stopped, there was no slide to notify viewers what was happening. Yet it caught the popular mood, with the public racing to buy one of the sixty models of television sets available for purchase.<sup>111</sup> More than 42,000 sets were sold between

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<sup>108</sup> Peled, "Memories from the Creation of Television [Hebrew]," 12.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Elihu Katz, 19.7.2005.

<sup>110</sup> Peled, "Memories from the Creation of Television [Hebrew]."

<sup>111</sup> Roman Prister, 'The Citizen and Taxes', *Haaretz*, 18.5.1968

February and April. Yisrael Galili watched the parade live from the government tribune; but he also had a portable battery-operated monitor installed discreetly between his legs that he watched.<sup>112</sup>

The broadcast was watched by nearly 60 percent of the population and over 80 percent rated it as highly successful.<sup>113</sup> However, there was no time for complacency. The next day, newly-qualified television critics wondered why there were no pictures of the soldiers marching along the route, and why Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan was not more prominent in the broadcast.<sup>114</sup> The explanation for the second complaint was more prosaic than political; Louis Lentin, the Irish-born producer of the broadcast, was still unfamiliar with the faces of Israel's politicians and was unaware of Dayan's significance to Israeli viewers.<sup>115</sup> Elihu Katz later described the broadcast as a 'media event', which was both collectively experienced and remembered.<sup>116</sup>

Galili's chief of staff, Sini Azaryahu, told Sapir that interest in television would be infectious – 'like keeping up with the Joneses', and he was right.<sup>117</sup> Writing a little over a year after the beginning of broadcasts, the British press attaché in Tel Aviv reported to London that 'General Television has already affected Israel's cinemas to the extent that there is now no problem in obtaining a seat on the days that TV is on the air.'<sup>118</sup> And Israelis

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<sup>112</sup> Peled, "Memories from the Creation of Television [Hebrew]." See also Oren, Demon in the Box: Jews, Arabs, Politics and Culture in the Making of Israeli Television 134.

<sup>113</sup> 'Broadcasting the Parade – Survey Results', *Al Hamishmar*, 23.5.1968, p.4

<sup>114</sup> Gideon Reicher, 'Finally Something to Watch', *Yediot Ahronot*, 5.5.1968

<sup>115</sup> Gil, A House of Precious Stones: Case History of Israeli Television [Hebrew]. Others claim that Lentin was fully conversant with Israeli political affairs, and would have grasped Dayan's significance. I am indebted to Prof. Rory Miller for this observation, 15.3.2013.

<sup>116</sup> Dayan and Katz, Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Arnan 'Sini' Azaryahu, 19.7.2005

<sup>118</sup> EJW Barnes, HM Ambassador to Tel Aviv to BR Curson, Information Policy Department, FCO, 30.6.1969. TNA: PRO FO 26/342. Barnes forwarded the annual information policy report prepared by the Embassy's Press Attaché, Tom Quinlan.

were not content to watch television in black-and-white, despite Eshkol's pleading that there was no need for expensive colour TV, and the best efforts of the government to stave off this symbol of Americanisation. Within ten years, 80 percent of households watched television in colour, a far quicker rate of penetration even than in the United States.<sup>119</sup>

One of the commentary team on the day of the parade, Ram Evron, was stationed on top of the Notre Dame convent, overlooking the route of the parade as it passed the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. He remarked that where machineguns had been deployed a year ago, now television cameras stood.<sup>120</sup> 'The IDF's Independence Day parade marched through the streets of reunified Jerusalem,' wrote *Haaretz* in retrospect, 'through Channel 8 on the coast and Channel 10 in the Gulf, and continued to march, unimpeded, across screens in Jewish and Arab homes alike. Thus another fact was established, and it too has a meaning more political than technical: Israel has gained sound and light and the new medium will be, from now on, a regular weapon of propaganda.'<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusions

The television service that went live in 1968, after many years of discussion and delay, was sharply different to the one envisaged only a year earlier. The thinking that influenced the

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<sup>119</sup> Segev, *Israel in 1967 [Hebrew]* 42. Herzl Bodinger, then a young Lieutenant in the Israel Airforce, and its commanding officer in the 1990s, wrote to the Prime Minister that Israel needed to broadcast television in colour to achieve maximum impact. See also: Aluf Benn, 'The Return of the Censor', *Haaretz*, 18.1.2005. The Israeli television system was built for colour broadcasting, but to prevent mass buying of colour sets the government converted colour broadcasts to black and white using a device that quickly earned the nickname 'the eraser.' Ever inventive, Israeli consumers obtained a device that cancelled the effect of the eraser, nicknamed the 'anti-eraser'. When it became clear that most of the public could see colour television, and that those who could not preferred the colour broadcasts from Jordan, the government gave in and ended the use of the 'eraser'.

<sup>120</sup> Dina Goren, "The Television We Love to Hate [Hebrew]," *Ottot* 93.156 (1993): 6.

<sup>121</sup> Ran Perry, 'Television's Debut Performance', *Haaretz*, 10.5.1968, p. 6.

change, largely that of Galili, was strategic and proactive, and had the explicit and rational aim of influencing international public opinion – of neighbouring Arab states, at least - regarding Israel. It was based in comprehensive analysis of the issue, with professional advice sought on the various different options. Despite the unsuccessful scramble to start emergency broadcasts during the war, and the successful scramble to launch television in May 1968, this was not another example of ‘muddling through’ the policy decisions.

However, neither was it the kind of policy designed to engage audiences in ongoing dialogue with the aim of persuading by enlarging or changing perceptions, as discussed in the Introduction. Galili thought that Israeli television would be a valuable post-war propaganda tool, which is also at variance with the definition of *hasbara* outlined above. In short, and perhaps paradoxically given his own views on the wider issue, Galili’s approach to establishing television in Israel does not conform to this thesis’ definition of *hasbara*.

Three comments are necessary to clarify this. Firstly, and in the face of much misdirected criticism, Galili appointed an army officer, General Elad Peled, to advance the ‘educational’ model of television. When Peled returned to the IDF, it was an academic, Professor Elihu Katz, who unwillingly implemented a more ‘offensive’ model after the war. Galili directed policy, they implemented it. Secondly, the television service of May 1968 existed for a short time in a micro-environment of post-war Israel. Under the direction of Elihu Katz, it soon returned to the ‘developmental’ model recommended by international experts earlier in the decade, focussing on broadcasts in Hebrew as a cultural and educational vehicle for Israeli society, rather than on propaganda broadcasts in Arabic for Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese audiences. Finally, Galili’s policy was all the more effective because of the absence of those characteristics of *hasbara*.



## Chapter 3

Peled's absence was brief; he was recalled by Galili in 1969 to undertake a comprehensive review of government communications policy, which forms the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### The Peled Commission on Government Information, 1969

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*'Hasbara* is a kind of diplomatic 'artillery', whose job it is to create a more comfortable climate of international public opinion for direct diplomatic efforts'.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after the end of the Six Day War, minister without portfolio Yisrael Galili acknowledged that there was room for an overhaul of the government's information infrastructure. Speaking to the Knesset in July, he acknowledged 'the government is aware of the problems. It also knows the mistakes that were made because of inadequate coordination between the different bodies dealing with the issue'.<sup>2</sup> His advisers also indicated to him that his own mandate of responsibility for government information efforts was insufficient for the challenges ahead. Writing to him in July 1967, the head of the Information Service in the Prime Minister's Office, Yosef Nevo, pointed out the painful fact that, 'the main effort after the battle ended has moved to engaging international audiences, ...and the minister responsible has absolutely no authority even though he is the recipient of all claims and complaints'.<sup>3</sup>

However, it took over a year for Galili to develop a practical approach the problem of Israel's perceived failures in the information field. In the interim, the extra resources that had been available during the war dried up, as did the willingness to coordinate information work. A Ministerial *Hasbara* Committee was established within a month of the war ending.<sup>4</sup> However, the committee was convened only a handful of times. In its absence, the various

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<sup>1</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report , p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1967. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2662.

<sup>3</sup> Yosef Nevo to Yisrael Galili, 16.7.1967. ISA RG124/4885/1.

<sup>4</sup> Government Decision 590, 19.7.1967

directors-general of the relevant ministries and their subordinates ‘muddled through’ the policy questions in weekly meetings.<sup>5</sup>

Galili himself spent much of the immediate post-war period concentrating on issues far closer to his heart, and consistent with his ‘activist’ outlook. *Ahdut Ha’Avoda*, his political party, had never accepted the principle of partitioning the land between Jews and Arabs. When the Twentieth Zionist Congress debated the Peel Commission’s proposal for partition in the summer of 1937, Yitzhak Tabenkin, the leader and ideologue of the *Kibbutz HaMeuchad* movement, rejected any compromise on the issue. ‘His outlook was voluntarist, pioneering and devoid of any hesitation regarding the Jewish people’s right to Palestine as its historic homeland.’<sup>6</sup> Thirty years later, his godson and political disciple, Galili, was the most vocal advocate for Jewish settlement in the areas conquered by Israel during the 1967 war – particularly in the West Bank, with its considerable historical and national resonance for the Jewish people.

So it was only in March 1969 that Galili announced to the Knesset, newly under the premiership of Golda Meir, that the Ministerial *Hasbara* Committee had appointed a commission of enquiry to investigate the coordination of government information efforts.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> ISA RG124/4878/4. See also Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew], 33. “‘But it turned out that also these people were too busy to deal with the issue, and the task fell once again to middle-ranking officials – deputy directors-general, department heads and clerks who could make no policy decisions and had no authority regarding organisation or budgets.’”

<sup>6</sup> Sofer, Zionism and the Foundations of Israeli Diplomacy 149.

<sup>7</sup> Yisrael Galili to the Knesset, 26.3.1969. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 54, col. 2286. Galili responded to a written question from Uri Avnery (*HaOlam-Hazeh/Koach Hadash*) regarding disagreements between Galili and Foreign Minister Abba Eban over the establishment of the commission, citing an article in *Yediot Achronot* from February 7. Galili responded that no such disagreement existed, and that the committee had been established. In fact, the Ministerial Information Committee was split over the establishment of a commission of enquiry, and only agreed on its composition on February 24. The decision was formalised by Government Decision 489 on March 25, the day before Galili reported the fact to the Knesset. See YTA/15/057/02/5. Peled to Galili, 25.11.1969.

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The commission was to be headed by Elad Peled, who had retired from the IDF in the summer of 1968. When it was published, later in 1969, its report was the most comprehensive survey of the problems of articulating clear *hasbara* policy and its recommendations the first serious attempt to create an organisational framework that could advance Israel's national interests through the use of public diplomacy.

The Peled report was also to bring the 'activist' and the 'diplomat' schools of government information policy, championed by Galili and Eban respectively, into brief, direct confrontation. The quiet shelving of the report is the clearest example of the failure of Israel to articulate *hasbara* policy in this period of intense yet inconclusive policy-making this thesis seeks to investigate.

### **The background to the commission**

'The whole world is against us –  
It's an old song  
That our fathers taught us  
To sing and dance

It's a song we learnt  
From our aged parents  
And we'll sing it too  
And after us, our sons  
And our grandchildren's grandchildren will sing  
Here in Eretz Yisrael  
And anyone who is against us  
Can go to hell'<sup>8</sup>

The roots of the Peled Committee were to be found in the immediate aftermath of the war. Eshkol's perceived lack of decisive leadership, popularly characterised by his 'stuttering' radio address of May 28 1967, had contributed to a wave of existential panic

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<sup>8</sup> Song written by Yoram Tahar-Lev, popular in late 1969

amongst Israelis that Israel would be annihilated. Although the results of the war dramatically disproved these concerns, Eshkol was a broken man. Galili's decision to commission an inquiry into the perceived failures of government information policy was one outcome of a wider campaign to try and rehabilitate Eshkol, whose reputation had been grievously harmed in the three-week 'waiting period' of May 1967.

After the euphoria of victory subsided, Israelis were left to deal with both the problems they had faced before, including an economy in marked depression, and some new ones. In Sinai, Egypt continued to engage IDF forces in a war of attrition. In the West Bank, the government seemed indecisive over claims to settle Judea and Samaria. International and domestic support began to dwindle. They began to notice a decline in the country's international image. The lightning victory, which saw Israel take the West Bank from Jordan, the Sinai desert from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria, also resulted in Israel controlling the affairs of a million Palestinians. Although Israel enjoyed some benefits that came with its display of military proficiency, namely 'the appreciation (diluted with jealousy) of the military resourcefulness we have developed', Israel's new image as a military power was an uncomfortable new 'frame'.<sup>9</sup>

The theme was taken up in the Israeli media: 'Israel's loss of popularity – and about that, there's no disagreement – is caused by time and place. No-one likes a military conqueror; we are seen as the strong, the militarist; we are powerful, talented, developed, ruling over the weak with our superiority'.<sup>10</sup> The international press also noted the change,

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<sup>9</sup> 'Israel in the Eyes of the World', Alouph Hareven to Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7.12.1973, p. 2. Private Papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>10</sup> Amnon Rubenstein, "The Whole World's against Us? Nonsense! [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 5 December 1969.

the *New York Times* describing Israel as a 'tough victor' with an 'image problem'.<sup>11</sup> Another article asked 'has this people, so full of idealism and accomplishment, become a captive of the same self-righteousness that afflicted its oppressors through 4,000 years of struggle?'<sup>12</sup> Public concern about Israel's failing international legitimacy was accompanied by a loss of faith in the government's ability to handle the issue. New tools shed light on public opinion. In the first set of major, national opinion polls commissioned in Israel, in June 1967, 62 percent of Israelis felt that the government was doing all it could in the field of government information. By April 1968, that number had plummeted to 27 percent.<sup>13</sup> One particular focus of concern was the success of the Arab states in this field: 'Our embassies are unable to compete with those of the Arab states, who have 14 representatives in almost every country'.<sup>14</sup>

Eshkol's closest advisers and confidants, particularly Galili and Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir, were determined to rescue Eshkol's reputation, urging him to appear more in public. But he hesitated on making policy decisions after the war, and was battling – in private – with ill health.<sup>15</sup> Following a heart attack in late 1968 that the government reported as a bad case of bronchitis, Eshkol was frequently bed-ridden, with oxygen tanks delivered secretly to his residence.<sup>16</sup> His heirs presumptive squabbled over the succession.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> James Feron, "Israel Has the Image Problem of a Tough Victor," *New York Times* 20 July 1969.

<sup>12</sup> Raskin, "Israel Tells the World: Keep Hands Off."

<sup>13</sup> "Information, Please," *The Jerusalem Post* 8 December 1969: 4.

<sup>14</sup> Yosef Lamm, "Needed: A Ministry of Information [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 5 December 1969.

<sup>15</sup> On June 19, the cabinet agreed it was willing to return Gaza and the Golan Heights to Egypt and Syria respectively, in return for a peace treaty. Eshkol was undecided about the fate of the West Bank, and explored both the 'Jordanian' and the 'Palestinian' options.

<sup>16</sup> Goldstein, *Eshkol: Biography [Hebrew]* 600. Elinor Burkett, *Golda* (New York: Harper, 2008) 230.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Y Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organisation and Government in a New Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972) Ch. 12.

Defence Minister Moshe Dayan argued for economic integration of the West Bank and Jordan with Israel, with an active settlement policy. On the other hand, Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon limited Israel's interest in the 'territories' to security needs and advocated withdrawal from all but essential areas. However, the rivalry ran deeper, with both inter-factional political differences and decades of personal animus. Dayan had been a protégé of Ben-Gurion since before independence, and followed him into the breakaway *Rafi* party in 1965. Allon, along with Galili, was a member of *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*. He had been stung when he was passed over by Ben-Gurion for IDF high command in 1950 because of his political allegiance. In 1967, he had hoped to be appointed defence minister. However, under intense pressure from Dayan's supporters within *Mapai* and the new partners to the coalition, *Gahal* and the National Religious Party – which he later referred to as a 'putsch' – Eshkol had appointed Dayan instead.<sup>18</sup>

Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir, who also served as Secretary-General of the newly-formed Labour Party, worked to protect it from disintegrating back into its constituent parts if one of them succeeded.<sup>19</sup> Meir, who had retired from public life and as Secretary-General of *Mapai* in the summer of 1968 after the successful agreement to form the Labour Party, was called back to head the party and prevent a divisive leadership battle between Dayan and Allon.<sup>20</sup> Despite protestations to the contrary, and her own ill health, her

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<sup>18</sup> Shapira disputes the assertion that Allon lost the appointment to Dayan because he was out of Israel during much of the 'waiting period'. She notes that Allon returned from a rare and officially-sanctioned, if unofficial, visit to Moscow by 24 May, eleven days before the outbreak of war and nine days before Dayan's appointment. Anita Shapira, *Yigal Allon, Native Son: A Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 308-12. Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organisation and Government in a New Society* 291, Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War : Government, Armed Forces and Defence Policy, 1963-1967* 212.

<sup>19</sup> The Labour Party brought together *Mapai*, *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* and *Rafi*.

<sup>20</sup> Medding, *Mapai in Israel: Political Organisation and Government in a New Society* 298.

appetite for politics had not waned, although she initially agreed to head the party only until the elections, later in the year.<sup>21</sup>

In early February 1969, Levi Eshkol gave an interview to Michael Elkins and Arnaud de Borchgrave of *Newsweek*. He suggested that Israel maintain control only of those areas of the West Bank with security value – primarily the north-south ridge of the Samarian and Judean hills and the Jordan Valley, and leave the settled areas.<sup>22</sup> The policy, the work of Yigal Allon, was deeply divisive. On one hand, Foreign Minister Eban was opposed to the annexation of any territory outside of an internationally-backed agreement. On the other, the plan drew threats of resignation from Menachem Begin, leader of the right-wing *Gahal* party and a minister in the national unity government, if any land was evacuated. By the time it was published, the interview had unwittingly turned into his last political testament. During the interview, he complained of stomach pains, cut the meeting short, and vomited in his office. He returned to the Prime Minister's residence, and an hour later suffered another heart attack. He remained at home, muttering about his successor in juicy Yiddish: 'Die Klafte setz dort und wachtet' ('that bitch is sitting there, waiting').<sup>23</sup> He died on 26 February, early in the morning.

Thus, when the Peled Commission was announced in March 1969, Galili's principal goal - to rehabilitate Eshkol – was no longer relevant. Peled actually delivered his report to Meir, whose greater consciousness of the importance of Israel's international image was

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.11.2011. See also, Burkett, *Golda* 277.

<sup>22</sup> Arnaud De Borchgrave and Michael Elkins, "Exclusive: A Talk with Israel's Premier Levi Eshkol," *Newsweek* 17 March 1969. De Borchgrave noted in his introduction that Eshkol was 'easier and harder' than his previous scoop interviewee, Anwar Sadat. 'Eshkol was easier to get to, harder to interview.'

<sup>23</sup> Medzini, *The Proud Jewess* [Hebrew] 352.



overridden by a deep and persistent suspicion of the press and a predilection for secrecy.<sup>24</sup>

She was also 'inclined by temperament to resist external pressures on Israel rather than plan a positive long-range foreign policy'.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Peled Commission's recommendations – towards an Information Authority**

The commission, which was formally appointed by the Civil Service Commission at the request of the Ministerial Committee on Information, was asked 'to examine Israel's domestic and international communications efforts, the means and the methods used in the field of government communications, the delineation of authority between the various ministries and coordination between them on matters of domestic and international communications'.<sup>26</sup>

Galili turned to General Elad Peled to head the commission. As one of the heroes of the 1967 IDF General Staff, the stuff of instant legend, Peled was a visible public figure with an impeccable reputation.<sup>27</sup> He had returned to the IDF in May 1967 to take part in the war, following his brief spell at the head of the television task force. He commanded his forces with distinction, firstly on the Jordanian front in the area of Jenin and Nablus and then on

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<sup>24</sup> With the considerable calls on her time, and her suspicion of spokesmen and spin-doctors, Meir resisted appointing a government spokesman until late in her premiership. Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.11.2011.

<sup>25</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," 251.

<sup>26</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 1. The Ministerial Committee on Information comprised Yisrael Galili (Labour Alignment), Minister without Portfolio - Chairman; Abba Eban (Labour Alignment), Foreign Minister; Menachem Begin (*Gahal*), Minister without Portfolio; Yosef Burg (National Religious Party), Minister of Welfare; Mordechai Bentov (not an MK), Minister of Housing; Moshe Dayan (Labour Alignment), Minister of Defence; and Moshe Kol (not an MK), Minister of Development and Tourism.

<sup>27</sup> Peri describes the post-war 'cult of the generals', whose patriotism earned them easy access to an eager and compliant press. Yoram Peri, "Changes in the Security Discourse in the Media and the Transformation of the Notion of Citizenship in Israel [Hebrew]," *Democratic Culture* 4.5 (2001): 234-40.

## Chapter 4

the southern sector of the Golan Heights, against Syria. Following his retirement, he had offers to head a major supermarket chain, the Industrial Development Bank, and to become Director-General of the Israel Electric Corporation. But Peled was not interested in sinecures. He remarked that he had never visited a supermarket in his life, only went into banks to pick up cheque-books, and soon realised that his prospects as Incoming CEO of the electric company were limited.<sup>28</sup>

Peled wanted to continue to make a significant contribution to the state, but without becoming embroiled in political infighting. He had fought with the *Palmach* before the creation of the state, but took the unusual position of associating politically with Ben-Gurion and *Mapai*, rather than its natural leadership of Tabenkin and *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*. He had little time for the toxic relations between factions and splinters of the Israeli left, and never formally joined *Mapai*. His distaste for political infighting had been a significant factor in his resignation as head of the television task force in the spring of 1967, a decision which had infuriated Galili, the minister responsible.

With degrees in Economics and Philosophy, and a graduate of the *École supérieure de guerre*, Peled had a reputation as an intellectual, which set him apart from most of his colleagues. Few of his fellow commanders shared his understanding of the military tradition of antiquity. They were unmoved when Peled reminded them that victorious Roman generals had a slave whisper *sic gloria transit mundi* or *memento te mortalem esse* to remind them of the vicissitudes of fortune.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008. Peled was appointed to the Electric Corporation by Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir as Deputy and Incoming CEO in late 1969. However, it became clear that the appointment was intended as nothing more than a warning signal to the incumbent, whose political independence troubled Sapir.

<sup>29</sup> Golan, *The Commanders, Victors of 1967: 25 Profiles of Israel's Senior Officers* [Hebrew] 112. Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008. Peled remarked that the IDF of the time had 'no culture of

Government information policy was a suitably weighty task to attract the attention of Peled although he had very little previous knowledge of the issue. He found the work extremely interesting, but admitted that he simply applied common sense to a well-known problem, and produced an appropriately straightforward solution.<sup>30</sup> There was a high level of public interest in the issue following the 1967 war and an opening gap between Israel's self-perception and the way it seemed to be viewed by international observers. This gap was being observed by more and more foreign press, whose numbers had risen from around forty before the war to a permanent press corps of over one hundred in the years following it.<sup>31</sup> Government information efforts also carried a significant budget – from IL3,000,000 in 1968-69, rising to IL5,400,000 in 1969-70 and IL7,000,000 in 1970-71.<sup>32</sup>

Despite his somewhat worrying political independence, and his disappointment over Peled's resignation from the television task force, Galili was confident that his former *Palmach* comrade would adopt an appropriately 'activist' line. Eshkol, too, who approved the appointment, was aware that it would bring disagreements with Eban out into the open, but gave his blessing. Galili did not attempt to direct Peled in any way, or to interfere with his work. He may have been busy with the more pressing issue of settlement; he may have been

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learning', and that there was little intellectual curiosity. The exceptions on the General Staff were Mati Peled (Air Force), Aharon Yariv (Intelligence) and Uzi Narkis (Central Command).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 9.4.2006. Medzini headed the Government Press Office in Jerusalem, and was also spokesman for prime minister Eshkol during the war.

<sup>32</sup> ISA RG124/4847/5. According to Danny Rosolio's oral evidence to the committee, the budget required for all information efforts was closer to IL20,000,000. IL3,000,000 is approximately equivalent to \$75m at current prices. ISA RG124/4847/5.

somewhat blinded by the glare of glory emanating from a victorious member of the legendary 1967 General Staff.<sup>33</sup>

The three additional members of the commission were selected by Galili and his aide 'Sini' Azaryahu and brought both professional and political breadth to its work. Benjamin Eliav (Lubetkin), who had started his political career as Jabotinsky's personal secretary, was the deputy chairman of the Board of Governors of the IBA and editor of *HaDor*, a *Ma'pai* daily newspaper. David Shaham was a writer and commentator and was associated with the left-leaning *HaShomer HaTzair*. He had recently opened one of the first public relations offices in Israel. Yitzhak Taub, secretary and spokesman of the Bank of Israel, organised that the Bank would host the meetings of the commission. A fourth member, Professor Levontin of the Hebrew University law faculty, resigned from the commission soon after its formation.

As secretary to the commission, Peled approached Nahum Blass, with whom he had studied economics at the Hebrew University between 1964 and 1966. Blass agreed to return from studies at Rutgers University in the United States in order to work for Peled. He was 27 at the time, and was proud to be working on an issue which was at the centre of public discourse. He saw the work as a huge opportunity.<sup>34</sup>

The commission met 19 times, and in two sub-committees a further 10 times. In total, they took evidence from 52 witnesses, including ministers, senior officials, Israeli journalists and foreign correspondents, IDF officers, officials from the World Zionist

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008. Sini Azaryahu, Galili's chief of staff, concurred that Galili had a weakness for the 1967 General Staff, many of whom were his protégés from the 1948-era *Hagana* and *Palmach*. Interview with Arnan 'Sini' Azaryahu, 19.6.05

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Nahum Blass, 3.8.2008.

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Organisation, private individuals and representatives of Jewish organisations from Israel and overseas.<sup>35</sup> In some cases, oral evidence was supplemented by written submissions.<sup>36</sup>

Several clear themes emerged quickly from the evidence, which were reinforced in subsequent sessions. Firstly, Israel was suffering from an image problem which had taken it ‘...from the image of a few pioneers draining the swamps, paving roads and establishing settlements, ...creating an egalitarian society, via the image of underground fighters opposing a foreign invader and, during the War of Independence, the new Jewish warrior’.<sup>37</sup> Secondly, too large a number of bodies dealt with government communications, either directly or in passing. Finally, there was unsatisfactory coordination between these bodies. This was particularly evident in the distinction drawn between communicating with foreign and domestic audiences.

Peled came to his initial conclusions early in the process: so long as there was division between the various agencies, there could be no single policy.<sup>38</sup> He also identified the major obstacle: whilst the only sensible way for government information policy to be made was by the prime minister, or his closest advisers, the foreign ministry would bitterly oppose the loss of authority. Peled wrote his report alone. He sketched out the main structure of the report on a single 5’ x 8’ index card – introduction, main findings, recommendations, and appendices. Then, for each section, he detailed the points he wanted to make, attributing each point to evidence that he had heard in the evidence sessions. The secretary to the commission, Nahum Blass, prepared more index cards with the main points of the relevant testimony that the commission had heard. Amongst his papers were various

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<sup>35</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, Appendix B. The full list of interviews is in Appendix I, below.

<sup>36</sup> ISA/RG124/4847/5. See, for example, the written submission from Yehuda Ben-David, 27.8.1969.

<sup>37</sup> ISA/RG124/4847/5. Submission from the Government Press Office to the Peled Commission, June 1969.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 21.11.2005.

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notes, apparently scribbled down as the thoughts came to him: can you sell castor oil to children as if it were Pepsi-Cola?, he wondered; what is the difference between image, self-image and self-persuasion?<sup>39</sup> And then he sat and wrote it, longhand. The other members of the commission were asked to make comments, but the draft was approved without dissent.

On 8 July 8, 1969, Galili returned to the Knesset to report on the progress of the Peled Commission, whose work was not yet complete.

The experiences of the Six Day War, and mainly a look toward the future, have led me to the conclusion that Israel's government information system is unsuitable, both in structure and in scope of activity, and that there are too many sources of authority. We suffer from a lack of centralised work from a single authorised body.<sup>40</sup>

He went on to announce reforms that would remove the distinction between internal and domestic information efforts, and that such an effort would require financial resources 'quite different from those with which we are familiar'.<sup>41</sup> Some interpreted Galili's speech as a call for the establishment of a separate ministry of information, and that he was responding to criticism of his effectiveness.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps in response to this, he returned to the Knesset for an important point of clarification: 'Members of Knesset, I wish to remind you that the Knesset and the government never decided to establish a Ministry of Information that deals with activities within Israel, in the Jewish world and the world at large, domestically and internationally'.<sup>43</sup> Neither Galili nor Peled believed that government information efforts could, or should, be the work of a government ministry.

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<sup>39</sup> Handwritten note, undated. Private papers of Elad Peled.

<sup>40</sup> *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 55, cols. 3457-3458.

<sup>41</sup> *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 55, cols. 3457-3458.

<sup>42</sup> James Feron, "Israeli Official Seeks Stronger Information Arm," *New York Times* 14 July 1969.

<sup>43</sup> Galili to the Knesset, 19.7.1969. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2661.

In November, the commission issued its final report. Writing to the Ministerial Committee on Information that ordered the inquiry, Elad Peled indicated the five major findings of the report:

The commission took a view that the accusation of absolute 'failures of information policy' levelled against the Israeli information apparatus is fundamentally over-stated. It is a combination of criticism of policy or lack of policy, together with an objective difficulty in explaining to the world certain Israeli interests. In the body of the report, we have tried to elaborate on some of the difficulties this presents.

The commission came to understand that a special ministry for government information exists today only in totalitarian regimes, and is a byword for 'propaganda' in those countries. As a democracy, the State of Israel would find it difficult to adopt such a model.

The commission found it appropriate to recommend the establishment of an Information Authority, within the Prime Minister's Office. Its responsibilities would be the dissemination of government information for international and domestic audiences, whilst implementation would be in the hands of different bodies.

We found that, despite the considerable efforts in improving the apparatus of government information work and its activities, both in the Foreign Ministry and the Information Service of the Prime Minister's Office, there are still defects of organisation, working practice and methods of information dissemination. We have presented our principal findings in this regard and have recommended organisational and operational changes.

We take the view that the upswing in overseas information efforts requires larger budgets, appropriate recruitment of professional staff and some disconnection from the limitations of the government pay scale in order to do so.<sup>44</sup>

The most significant operational recommendation was the third: to combine all information activities under a single body, the 'Information Authority', which would be a branch of the Prime Minister's Office. The commission thought it preferable that the agency be headed by an official who held ministerial rank but would not be counted as a government minister, who would participate in cabinet meetings and would bear

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<sup>44</sup> ISA/RG124/4847/5. Peled to the Ministerial Information Committee, 25.11.1969.

responsibility for it to the government and the Knesset. However, the commission deliberately and explicitly refrained from recommending the establishment of a new government department, and the appointment of a minister of information, 'for fear that it would be described as a ministry of 'national propaganda', typical of totalitarian regimes, an observation echoed by Binyamin Avniel (*Gahal*) in the Knesset earlier in the year.<sup>45</sup> 'If the minister responsible for information has authority only over domestic matters, there's no need for such a minister. This is a democratic and free country, and in such a place we have no need for foreign propaganda'.<sup>46</sup> The press also had concerns that: 'using modern high pressure methods to sell Israel is alien and distasteful to the disciples of A.D. Gordon who built this country long before television was invented'.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the warning that a Ministry of Information might carry totalitarian overtones, it described the Military Censor as anachronistic, and the IDF Spokesman's announcements as dry and monotonal.<sup>48</sup>

On the first issue, the body of the report described the unreasonable expectations that Israelis had that more effective government communications could soften public attitudes to unpalatable policies:

Since the Six Day War a growing gap has emerged between the image we have of ourselves, and our image in the eyes of international public opinion. The root of this gap is changing international attitudes towards Israel, and the excessive expectations of Israelis regarding our ability to influence international opinion. The gap results in an uncomfortable feeling for the Israeli public and an impression of 'information failure'. The commission considers expectations that *hasbara* can operate outside of given policy to be unreasonable.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 6.

<sup>46</sup> Binyamin Avniel to the Knesset, 19.7.1967, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 49, col. 2660

<sup>47</sup> Philip Gillon, "The Tarnished Image," *The Jerusalem Post* December 12 1969.

<sup>48</sup> "Recommendations to Fix *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 7 December 1969.

<sup>49</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 4.



## Chapter 4

In contradistinction, the report described the achievements of Arab propaganda in creating an image of a romantic, heroic Arab freedom-fighter in the mould of Viking warriors or Che Guevara-style guerrilla fighters. This image was underpinned by Arab claims that Israel was an outpost of western imperialism, and that the Arab-Israeli conflict was part of the wider struggle against imperialism. This found particular resonance in intellectual and left-wing circles in the west, and in the developing world. Arab propaganda also stressed Israel as a conqueror, dispossessing Arabs from their homeland.

And, in reference to the fifth and final finding, the commission heard evidence that the Arab propaganda campaign had a declared budget of over \$50 million in 1969, primarily from Arab oil companies.

We must assume that the intentions behind the commission's recommendations were to ensure that whoever is sent on *hasbara* missions abroad will be professionals, and not people who are dealing with our representation on the UN Social Committee today, with consular matters in South Africa tomorrow, and with press relations in Scandinavia the day after.<sup>50</sup>

In the body of the report, Peled worked on the assumption that the most important work was to be done in the international sphere. Thus, he concluded, there was no sensible distinction to be drawn between 'domestic' and 'foreign' information. In fact, he simply ignored the issue of how the government should communicate with domestic audiences as unimportant. The report estimated that 80 percent of the material written on Israel in Western Europe originated from the foreign correspondents stationed in Israel, in whom Israel should invest most of its effort. It was crucial to build relations with the several hundred permanent correspondents, not the thousands of visiting journalists.

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<sup>50</sup> "G Meir Hands Domestic and International *Hasbara* to Galili [Hebrew]," Haaretz 9 December 1969.

## Chapter 4

The commission worked on the assumption that Israel's government communications strategy – *hasbara* – was a mechanism intended to 'sell' Israeli foreign and security policy. Thus, they reported, there must be a direct relationship between the policy itself, and the strategy adopted for ensuring its acceptance in international public opinion.

The strategy needed to:

- Disseminate information on the policy
- Ensure support for the policy in two ways:
  - Advocating the justness of Israel's policy
  - Advocating that the policy serves the interest of the 'other'<sup>51</sup>

On the issue of organisational structure, the report made the following assumptions:

- The State of Israel is a democratic regime
- One of the characteristics of a democratic state is the absence of 'national guidance' from a government ministry created for this purpose
- The state of war that Israel finds it itself in requires a system that is efficient, quick and coordinated
- The staff of the government communications system must be mostly professional
- There is no distinction between *hasbara* in Israel and *hasbara* overseas
- All *hasbara* activities overseas must be under the authority of the heads of the delegations, and guided by the central *hasbara* body in Israel
- There must be an ongoing assessment of Israel's international image, undertaken by a central body which will be responsible for bringing this assessment to the notice of the Prime Minister and the government.<sup>52</sup>

But, the number of bodies dealing with the issue of *hasbara* led the commission to conclude that there was unnecessary duplication of effort, as well as a lack of coordination in both planning and implementation of policy. This was one of the principal reasons for the failings it found in Israel's government communications effort, and the reason for the proposed reorganisation of the entire system under a single, new, information authority.

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<sup>51</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, p. 39.

Since the report dealt exclusively with international information efforts, it envisaged most of the work would be done overseas. Larger Israeli embassies were to have an information attaché, who would represent the new Information Authority, but would work under the ambassador. This mode of working was already familiar to military and defence attachés that represented the IDF and the Ministry of Defence abroad. The new information attaches were to be drawn from professionals in the field of mass communications, and on short-term contracts, unlike career diplomats. Peled also recommended that they not be paid according to the civil service pay-scale, which could not compete with private-sector salaries. In a similar vein, Peled concluded that the best way to influence the growing criticism of Israel that was emanating from the European 'new left' was through supporting local pro-Israel students, not by sending Israeli speakers on lecture tours.

Finally, the commission noted that there was no mechanism to ensure that policy presentation was automatically part of the policy-making process, and that in consequence such considerations, in fact, rarely formed part of the process. Thus, Peled recommended the creation of a body which would bring information and analysis of Israel's image in international public opinion to the attention of the Prime Minister and the government on an ongoing basis. This body would also present these issues when policy was being formed, ensuring that it was an integral part of the policy making process.

Although the report is only forty pages long, it was the most comprehensive survey of the issue ever undertaken by the State of Israel to that point, and its findings accurately diagnosed the problem and prescribed the solution. Yet, its careful analysis was quickly boiled down to a single headline recommendation to create a new body. Elad Peled was

frustrated that the politicians, and later the public, were only interested in structures and reorganisations which were only a minor part of his analysis.<sup>53</sup>

### **Eban's counter-attack and the shelving of the Peled Commission report**

‘[Eban] should reconcile himself to the assumption that an efficient information system cannot make a distinction between domestic and international activities’<sup>54</sup>

Peled was well aware that his decision to concentrate solely on foreign government information issues, in clear contradiction of his mandate, would bring him into conflict with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But he also knew that the ministry had only a limited influence. Both Ben-Gurion and Eshkol had given the generals, who shared and indeed implemented their ‘activist’ outlook, far more say than the ‘diplomats’ on the shaping of national policy. Moshe Sharett, in his time, had offered a real alternative to Ben-Gurion’s ‘activism’ in the early years of the state, but Israel’s foreign policy orientation was firmly ‘activist’.

The Foreign Minister, South African-born and British-educated Abba Eban, was the archetypal Israeli ‘diplomat’, and quite different from Peled’s generation of ‘activist’ native-born soldier-leaders. Eban was one of Israel’s best-known figures overseas, both amongst Jewish communities and on the international stage. He was certainly one of its most important advocates, representing Israel as Ambassador to both the United States and to the United Nations. Henry Kissinger recalled:

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008.

<sup>54</sup> "G Meir Hands Domestic and International *Hasbara* to Galili [Hebrew]."

I have never encountered anyone who matched his command of the English language. Sentences poured forth in mellifluous constructions complicated enough to test the listener's intelligence and simultaneously leave him transfixed by the speaker's virtuosity.<sup>55</sup>

During his tenure at the UN, it was said that he spoke finer English than the British ambassador, and more correct Farsi than the Persians. But, as an Israeli commentator noted witheringly, Yiddish was not one of the six languages he spoke.<sup>56</sup> His international standing was not replicated at home. When his Israeli compatriots said that he was 'made from different material', they were in earnest.<sup>57</sup> He had not served in the IDF, nor had he served his apprenticeship in a political party. His rich Hebrew was unintelligible to their simple ears.<sup>58</sup> They joked that he was like an ambassador from a foreign, but friendly country. His air of self-importance was at odds with the more earthy political culture of the times. His foreignness remained an obstacle to his full integration into the fabric of Israeli politics, giving him the persona of a diplomatic 'technician', rather than a fully-fledged politician.<sup>59</sup> Eban was aware of how he was perceived. 'I am not from Meskha, nor from Nahalal, nor from eastern Europe', he once remarked.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979) 358-9.

<sup>56</sup> Yoel Marcus, "There's Been a Change in Abba Eban [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 9 December 1969.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Elad Peled, 30.6.2008.

<sup>58</sup> Eban won a scholarship to Queens' College Cambridge, and achieved the rare distinction of a triple first in Classics and Oriental Languages, winning prizes in Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic during his studies. He later remarked that his studies made it impossible 'to adopt the routine Zionist stereotype that regarded the Arab nation with intellectual condescension.'

<sup>59</sup> Marcus, "There's Been a Change in Abba Eban [Hebrew]."

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010. Meskha is the name of the Arab village on whose land Kfar Tavor, an Israeli village in the Galilee and home to the Kadoorie Agricultural School where Yitzhak Rabin and Yigal Allon studied, was founded; Nahalal is the archetypal *moshav* - a collective settlement with less centralisation than the Kibbutz - and the birthplace of Moshe Dayan; eastern Europe was the typical birthplace of Eban's generation of Israeli leaders. Bentsur, his closest personal adviser, also recalled that Eban deliberately simplified his Hebrew when addressing Israeli audiences.

But the Abba Eban of 1969 was not the same as he had been when he came back to Israel a decade previously. When he was appointed foreign minister, in place of Meir, in 1966, he was only the third person to fill that role. His predecessors, Moshe Sharett and Meir, had worked for prime ministers who also held the defence portfolio.<sup>61</sup> After the Six-Day War, with a defence minister his contemporary and of equal rank, Eban set out to establish the Foreign Ministry's authority over foreign policy issues, and to reach a final status settlement with the Arab states. More assertive now, he clashed publicly with Dayan, opposed Allon's plan for annexing parts of the West Bank on the basis of security needs, and tried to clip the wings of his Ambassador to the United States, Yitzhak Rabin. 'It may be,' *Haaretz* speculated, 'that [Eban] feels that the race for the party leadership is open and he does not want to absent himself from it. It may be that reaching the age of sixty has given him new urges. It may also be that, in the absence of a clear direction from the government regarding our political-security future, it is worthwhile him taking a gamble on his own line which, although it is not popular at present, may be more acceptable later on when our security situation worsens'.<sup>62</sup>

Eban was aware that Peled's recommendations were a serious challenge to his authority in the sphere of international government communications. He had faced repeated parliamentary questioning on the government's policy regarding its information efforts.<sup>63</sup> In January 1969, Yitzhak Raphael (National Religious Party) asked about the organisation and budgets available for Israeli information policy. Eban's response typified the attitude of the

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<sup>61</sup> The sole exception was the brief tenure of Pinchas Lavon as defence minister in 1954-55, which ended with the failure of Operation Susannah, a 'black flag' operation, in Cairo. The 'unfortunate business' cast a shadow over Israeli politics and Israeli foreign relations for decades after, and did not endear the *Mapai* leadership to the idea of entrusting the defence establishment to anyone but the prime minister.

<sup>62</sup> Marcus, "There's Been a Change in Abba Eban [Hebrew]."

<sup>63</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 4.6.1968, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 52, cols, 2131-2; 12.8.1968, col. 3204.

Foreign Ministry and of the diplomatic corps to the sustained criticism of their work. 'The issue of content is more important than the issue of methods,' he said.<sup>64</sup> He announced that he would invite public relations professionals to join a 'brains trust' on government information issues that the Foreign Ministry had established.

In the meantime, Israel went to the polls on 28 October, 1969. Under Meir, the new Alignment of Labour and *Maḥam* party retained its dominant position, with 56 of the 120 Knesset seats. With the War of Attrition dragging on, Meir wanted to continue the government of national unity that had been formed immediately before the Six Day War with Menachem Begin's *Gahal* party. This was the first time that a left-right coalition had been negotiated at the beginning of a parliament, and the negotiations were lengthy and fractious. Although not natural coalition partners, the arrangement would survive until the summer of 1970, when Begin withdrew his party over the initial adoption of the Rogers Plan and, by implication, UN Security Council Resolution 242, which implied Israeli willingness for territorial compromise in the pursuit of peace with the Palestinians.

By October 1969, Peled's work was done. He sent the manuscript of the report to the printers, along with a covering letter dated 25 November, addressed to the Ministerial Committee on Information. In the covering letter, he noted:

We have concentrated on matters relating to foreign and defence affairs and have knowingly ignored domestic *hasbara*, and not because we are dismissive of these issues which undoubtedly require attention in a different framework.<sup>65</sup>

With the report already in print, Abba Eban summoned the members of the Peled Commission to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He presented them with his counter-blast: a

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<sup>64</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 6.1.1969, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 53, cols. 999-1006.

<sup>65</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Cover letter to the Peled Commission report, dated 25.11.1969.

detailed work-plan, written by the recently-appointed head of the ministry's information department, Alouph Hareven. Hareven, a former IDF intelligence officer, had recently left the Mossad, where he had specialised in psychological warfare. According to his successor, 'he was the closest Israel had to an expert in information affairs'.<sup>66</sup> He was also able to work collaboratively with other official bodies, which was a deficiency of the foreign ministry's somewhat insular staff.

Eban told the Peled Commission members that he 'rejected the current division of effort in foreign information affairs'.<sup>67</sup> He envisaged a new public diplomacy division within the Foreign Ministry that would bring together existing units, such as the ministry spokesman and the Protocol Department, and add new units for producing audio-visual and printed material. In the hurry to offer an alternative to Peled's proposal, Eban acknowledged had no budget to implement such changes, and that he would need to seek significant increases in his budget to absorb the cost.<sup>68</sup>

Undeterred by Eban's attempt to neutralise his report, Peled reconvened the members of the commission to discuss Eban's proposal and found that 'most of the recommendations were incorporated [in the Peled report], albeit in a different organisational framework. He wrote a second cover letter, explaining the situation, and sent the report to the Ministerial Committee on Information. The Peled Commission formally presented its findings to the government at the end of November 1969, even though there was, in effect, no government to receive it. Within a few days, the main points were leaked

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Moshe Yegar, 3.1.2012.

<sup>67</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Second cover letter to the Peled Commission report, dated 26.11.1969.

<sup>68</sup> "Leak of Peled Report Discussed by G Meir and Foreign Minister [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 7 December 1969. See also, *Jerusalem Post*, 8.12.1969



to the Israeli press, where it was generally well-received.<sup>69</sup> The *Haaretz* leader writer described the report as 'reasonable and logical', although acknowledged the recommendation to create an information authority independent of the foreign ministry would be an obstacle to the report's implementation. The *Jerusalem Post* went further, noting that 'a ministry carries more weight than an authority', and urging the prime minister to establish a body that would talk on all issues, including defence. The cabinet was less easily convinced, though, with most opposed.<sup>70</sup>

The timing was uncomfortable for Meir, who was under increasing pressure on the political front. The negotiations on the composition of her new government were dragging. She had already sought an extension on the deadline for swearing in the government, which was to expire on 11 December. She had threatened to resign at least once, and was in open conflict with deputy prime minister Allon, who was unhappy with the offer of the education portfolio for himself. Amongst other demands, the main opposition party *Gahal* was pressing for the creation of a Ministry of Information in the new government, and Begin wanted the job for himself.<sup>71</sup> At this point, Galili was also disposed to accept the position, had it been offered.<sup>72</sup> But Abba Eban, her foreign minister and an important ally, was bitterly opposed to the proposal.

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<sup>69</sup> "Leak of Peled Report Discussed by G Meir and Foreign Minister [Hebrew]." See also Feron, "Israeli Official Seeks Stronger Information Arm."

<sup>70</sup> Dan Margalit, "Most Ministers Do Not Support the Recommendations of the Peled Commission [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 8 December 1969.

<sup>71</sup> *Haaretz*, 3.2.1970, *Yediot Ahronot*, 20.2.1970.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 9.4.2006. Medzini was the son of Regina Hamburger Medzini, Meir's childhood friend from Milwaukee and had a close personal as well as professional relationship with her. Arnon Azaryahu, Galili's closest adviser, concurred that Galili was well-disposed to the offer of heading the Information Agency, or a ministry. According to Amos Shifris, Galili's biographer, Galili was hesitant because the appointment would lead to ongoing friction with Eban.

On 8 December, she met Eban at the airport at Lod to discuss the matter with him. He told her the Foreign Ministry was 'in uproar' at the proposal to create a national information authority that would take over 'one of the most important parts of the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ...and empty the foreign ministry of one of its principal responsibilities'.<sup>73</sup> She then went to visit Yisrael Galili at Asaf Harofe Medical Centre, where he was recovering from a serious car accident.

These two meetings produced a dramatic shift in Meir's thinking. Although Peled had called for a non-ministerial information authority, explaining his reasons for avoiding recommending the establishment of a separate ministry, Meir now changed tack. At a meeting of the Labour Party's Central Committee that evening, Meir announced:

I have come to the conclusion that the government should include a Ministry of Information, a ministry that will include all branches, foreign and domestic. This includes radio, television and everything it entails, including the [Government] Press Office. There are quite a few bodies that deal with information in this administration and, to say the least, this division has not brought great joy to the government.<sup>74</sup>

She also announced that she intended on appointing Galili minister, and that she envisaged 'far more than just organisational changes' to the current system.<sup>75</sup> 'We can't say that we are doing everything possible, and at the same time say nothing can be done,' she told the Central Committee.<sup>76</sup> However, she reported that Galili had told her that he was in no position to accept a ministerial appointment whilst he was recovering, and that he had agreed only to be appointed minister without portfolio until his health was better. Perhaps

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<sup>73</sup> "Recommendations to Fix *Hasbara* [Hebrew].", "G Meir Hands Domestic and International *Hasbara* to Galili [Hebrew]."

<sup>74</sup> Golda Meir to the Labour Party Central Committee, 8.12.1969. LPA 2-023-1969-99. See also "G Meir Hands Domestic and International *Hasbara* to Galili [Hebrew]."

<sup>75</sup> LPA 2-023-1969-99.

<sup>76</sup> "G Meir Hands Domestic and International *Hasbara* to Galili [Hebrew]."

with Eban's entreaties earlier in the day in mind, she told the meeting that the changes would still need further consideration, and that 'the problems are many, and they can only be solved when we sit down together'.<sup>77</sup> This would have to wait until Galili was back on his feet.<sup>78</sup>

The new proposal for a separate Ministry of Information was overtaken almost immediately by a far greater challenge. The next day, 9 December, at a speech to an adult education conference in Washington D.C., US Secretary of State William Rogers announced the results of Four-Power talks on an agreed interpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 242. To Meir's horror, the Americans envisaged no more than 'insubstantial alterations required for mutual security' to the borders of 6 June, 1967.<sup>79</sup> In other words, Israel would face demands for full withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza in the pursuit of peace. Meir was seriously shaken, but firm in her resolve: the Rogers Plan met with 'immediate and categorical Israeli opposition'.<sup>80</sup> She had agreed to lead the party to the elections when she took over from Eshkol in March, and grew in confidence during 1969. But the exhausting coalition negotiations with *Gahal* and the failure of the United States to stand by Israel, as they had failed in the Suez campaign and in the lead-up to the Six-Day War, made her question if she wanted to continue as prime minister.<sup>81</sup>

Now, more than ever, Meir needed the unalloyed support of her foreign minister. She certainly had no-one else to appoint in place of Abba Eban, who was aware of her

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<sup>77</sup> LPA 2-023-1969-99.

<sup>78</sup> Galili left hospital on 21 December, after an eight-week stay. It was reported that discussions of 'the exact nature of Mr Galili's responsibilities' would still take some weeks to clarify. "Galili Quits Hospital," The Jerusalem Post 21 December 1969.

<sup>79</sup> United States. Dept. of State, The Quest for Peace: Principal United States Public Statements and Related Documents on the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, 1967-1983, Department of State Publication; 9373 (Washington: United States Dept. of State, 1984) 23-29.

<sup>80</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel," 244.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.11.2011.

predicament. He later, rather witheringly, described her premiership as 'primarily an exercise in crisis management'.<sup>82</sup> She met him the next day, 10 December, on his way to the airport to fly to Washington and assess the damage for himself. Meir did not formally drop the proposed idea of a Ministry of Information, or the other recommendations of the Peled Commission. Indeed, she appeared on television that weekend, and again pledged to create a ministry.<sup>83</sup> The new ministry was reported in the international press as late as 14 December.<sup>84</sup> But when the government was sworn in on 15 December, both Galili and Begin retained their position as ministers without portfolio, along with a new entrant to the government, Shimon Peres. There was to be no information minister and no Ministry of Information, at least for the time being. Indeed, the report of the Peled Commission itself was to be sacrificed in favour of Eban's loyalty.

The report was only debated in the Knesset several weeks later. Answering questions in February 1970, and with barely disguised irritation, Foreign Minister Abba Eban noted that the document was an internal report for the Ministerial Information Commission that was published unlawfully.<sup>85</sup> 'It may well be that the report was approved by the three or four people who were active in the commission, but that fact does not give it any special status; it is a legitimate issue for discussion, like any other document on this issue'.<sup>86</sup> Speaking in the Knesset a few weeks later, Prime Minister Meir said simply, 'responsibility for *hasbara* overseas is currently in the hands of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Eban, Abba Eban: An Autobiography 597.

<sup>83</sup> Gillon, "The Tarnished Image."

<sup>84</sup> James Feron, "Information Post Is Added by Israel," New York Times 14 December 1969.

<sup>85</sup> Eban to the Knesset, 4.2.70. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 56, col. 707. He was responding to questions from Yosef Tamir (*Gahal*) tabled on 28.12.1969.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Golda Meir to the Knesset, 24.2.1970. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 56, col. 919.

That was indeed the case, but Yisrael Galili's office was still working on proposals to establish an information ministry that would bring both domestic and foreign efforts together. In January 1970, Galili received a one-page proposal for a Ministry of Information.<sup>88</sup> Two weeks later, he sent a more detailed plan, with budgets and a list of 'problems to investigate'.<sup>89</sup> Curiously, the list did not consider coordination with the foreign ministry a problem of any serious magnitude. Meir herself had not yet finally given up on the idea of creating an information ministry. She produced a document, dated 8 February, as the basis for discussion between Eban and Galili. The proposal, entitled 'The Ministry of Information' details the areas of responsibility of the new ministry, both for domestic and foreign information policy, which she proposed would be operational as early as 1 April, 1970.<sup>90</sup> In the sensitive area of relations between the new ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the draft clearly laid out the division of labour:

10. Policy direction regarding the operation of diplomatic missions will be given, of course, as previously, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Positions regarding political matters will be decided by the government. The Ministry of Information, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will work to convey them using the tools and processes of *hasbara*. The Ministry of Information, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will, from time to time, select political issues to which it deems appropriate to pay attention, with regards to timing and/or locale.

11. In order to carry out the work of *hasbara*, the Israeli Foreign Service will act as one, and there will be no separate foreign service for *hasbara* matters. Responsibility for *hasbara* activity in each diplomatic mission will be given to the head of mission, as accepted practice with regard to any type of Israeli activity....

The proposal was not quashed immediately. Nearly a month later, in early March, the prime minister sent the proposal to Yisrael Galili, who was still toying with the idea of

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<sup>88</sup> YTA 15/057/2/8. Anonymous memorandum to Galili, 14.1.1970.

<sup>89</sup> YTA 15/057/2/9. Anonymous memorandum to Galili, 28.1.1970.

<sup>90</sup> YTA 15/057/2/10. Meir to Galili, 3.3.1970. The letter encloses the proposal for establishing a Ministry of Information, dated 8.2.1970.

taking the position of minister. However, the proposal failed. On 31 March 1970, Meir announced that there was no intention of creating a separate Ministry of Information.<sup>91</sup> Two weeks later, on 15 April 1970, deputy prime minister Allon repeated the announcement, stressing that there were no plans to create a ministry.<sup>92</sup>

Between these two announcements, on 1 April 1970, government information services were reorganised, with much of the responsibility now dispersed between the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Prime Minister's Office.<sup>93</sup> As required, Prime Minister Meir reported on these changes to the Knesset a week later:

Having read the [Peled] report, I thought it would be appropriate to establish a separate Ministry of Information, headed by a minister. Since then, there have been clarifications to the issue, and last week, I brought to the government my proposals for a re-allocation of the various information bodies.<sup>94</sup>

The *Hasbara* Centre, film service and publicity departments were now to fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Culture, as was the Israeli Broadcasting Authority. The *Hasbara* Centre, which dealt with foreign students in Israel, Israeli students travelling abroad and voluntary organisations, was transferred to the Foreign Ministry. And, to the discomfort of its employees, the main work of the Government Press Office, dealing with foreign correspondents in Israel, both permanent and temporary, was also taken over by the Foreign Ministry. The GPO, whose rump fell once again under the authority of the Prime Minister's Office, was reduced to providing technical assistance, translation and issuing press cards to domestic and foreign journalists. It also remained the main channel for

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<sup>91</sup> Golda Meir to the Knesset, 31.3.1970. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 57, col. 1483

<sup>92</sup> Yigal Allon to the Knesset, 15.4.1970. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 57, col. 1728

<sup>93</sup> YTA 15/057/02/14. Draft government decision, dated 29.3.1970. See also an undated memo, with the hand-written note 'M.A.'s proposal', which exactly describes the organisational changes that were later implemented. M.A. is, apparently Cabinet Secretary Michael Arnon.

<sup>94</sup> YTA 15/057/02/15. Golda Meir to the Knesset, 8.4.1970, p. 25

forwarding urgent news updates to both domestic and foreign journalists, primarily from the Government Secretariat and the IDF Spokesperson's unit.

Meir's announcement was followed by a Knesset debate. Shlomo Lorincz (*Agudat Yisrael*) criticised the decision, on the basis that it gave additional responsibilities to Deputy Prime Minister and Education and Culture Minister Yigal Allon, who was already holding two full-time positions. He noted that Allon himself had asked that higher education be separated under its own ministry. Speaking for the opposition, Yoram Aridor (*Gahal*) used the debate to criticise the failures of previous Israeli governments to adequately articulate their positions: 'The issue of foreign *hasbara* in Israel, as it has been dealt with until now, has not helped improve the international image of the State of Israel'.<sup>95</sup>

Three months after the report was delivered, Elad Peled was interviewed in *Lamerchav*. He noted that the report was not in the public domain, that despite the fact the report bore his name he had no ownership over it and that he was not at liberty to discuss its findings. He also remarked that 'the Prime Minister herself said that she thought one thing and then did something else, for different reasons. Who am I to say different?'<sup>96</sup>

### Conclusions

The Peled Commission was commissioned primarily as a political act. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Levi Eshkol's bruised reputation needed burnishing, and the perceived failure of the government to explain its positions to international audiences was an issue of concern for many Israelis. Galili, as minister responsible for commissioning the report,

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<sup>95</sup> YTA 15/057/02/15. Yoram Aridor to the Knesset, 8.4.1970, p.44. See also Daniel Bloch, "Criticism of *Hasbara* and of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority [Hebrew]," *Davar* 9.4. 1970.

<sup>96</sup> Ram Evron, "Israelis Have Inflated Expectations from *Hasbara* - and That's Why They're Disappointed," *Lamerchav* 20.3.1970.

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understood that Israelis wanted to feel that their concerns were being dealt with. He may also have been motivated by wanting to divert attention away from his personal priority of encouraging Jewish settlement of the West Bank. Eshkol's death in early 1969, before his reputation was salvaged, was out of Galili's control. However, and perhaps unwittingly, his choice to appoint Elad Peled to head the commission produced a report that, for two reasons, could actually have made a difference.

Firstly, Peled was the antithesis of the political appointee. He had shown a stubborn unwillingness to allow political considerations to interfere with professional matters from his youth. Galili had already clashed with him over the decision to abandon the television project after the Six-Day War. Peled's lack of interest in comfortable jobs after he finally retired from the IDF in 1968 was yet another indication. Secondly, Peled was intellectually curious, well-educated and extremely thorough. He produced a report that was clear, simple and precise and which accurately described the problems of government communications policy and offered the most straightforward remedy to duplication of effort and unclear authority: bringing the issue under unitary control. The antithesis of Lindblom's model of 'muddling through', he eschewed successive limited comparisons in favour of a comprehensive review of possible policy directions. It remains the single most important consideration of the issues undertaken by any Israeli government. However, it is largely unknown.

Peled's lack of political patronage was the ultimate undoing of the report. When faced with the opposition of a foreign minister who was both professionally opposed to his ministry losing an important part of its work and personally determined to take a more assertive role in order to stake his claim to party leadership, the Peled Commission met its match in Abba Eban. Meir, installed as party leader and prime minister in order to prevent a



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damaging leadership contest between Allon and Dayan, was inclined to adopt the report. But, with Galili absent and facing a far greater threat from the United States in the form of the Rogers Plan, Meir decided that the issue of government information policy was simply not important enough to squabble over. The question of whether or not to create a Ministry of Information, and the wider challenge of ending the 'muddle' over government communications was to resurface in 1974, after the Yom Kippur War.

## Chapter 5

### The Ministry of Information on Hold, 1970-1974

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‘There is an artificial distinction between information for the local public and information directed to the foreign media’<sup>1</sup>

Shelving Elad Peled’s central recommendation to create a Ministry of Information, Israel in the early 1970s again moved away from formalising government policy on communications and closer to a now characteristic ‘muddling through’ of limited policy options. Yisrael Galili was re-appointed minister without portfolio in Golda Meir’s new government, without responsibility for domestic and foreign information affairs, but retaining both interest in and influence on the issue.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the economic situation in the early 1970s evoked strong objections from the Ministry of Finance regarding new policy initiatives.<sup>3</sup> However, under Abba Eban, the Foreign Ministry began a process of comprehensive re-evaluation of Israel’s foreign information efforts, largely directed under the able leadership of Alouph Hareven.

The Yom Kippur War of October 1973 ripped Israel apart, calling into question the most basic tenets of Israeli political and social life. Although the failures of Israel’s press policy were only one element of a far wider failure, they were a target for public disquiet, pushing the government to take action. Two reports – by Nachman Karni and by Shlomo

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<sup>1</sup> Hareven to Divon, ‘The *Hasbara* work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Some Suggestions for Reorganisation’, 20.5.1970. Private papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Yossi Sarid, 29.7.2010. Sarid was approached by Galili in the summer of 1970 to take up a new position of government spokesman. However, both Galili and Meir refused to allow the spokesman to attend cabinet. Sarid rejected the offer, asking Galili ‘what use is there for a spokesman who wasn’t in the meeting he is briefing about?’

<sup>3</sup> Yegar, *History of the Israeli Foreign Information System* [Hebrew] 86.

Gazit - added impetus to Meir's surprising decision to implement the Peled Report's main recommendation, the centralisation of information policy under a single authority. However, she now pressed for the creation of a Ministry of Information, contrary to Peled's findings.

This is the clearest example of the problem of the political culture of *hasbara*. Meir's decision to establish a Ministry of Information was taken at a moment of personal and national weakness. Far removed from the detailed, patient and insightful work of Peled and of Hareven, both of whom had begun to articulate a far more sophisticated approach to advancing Israel's national interests by attention to its international image, it was a reactive, defensive and apologetic response, triggered by an unprecedented national trauma. As the final chapter will examine, it was quickly revealed as mistaken. This chapter, then, deals with the impact of the Yom Kippur War on the unsuccessful, decade-long attempt to clarify an Israeli approach to cultivating and maintaining a positive national image on the international stage.

### **The Foreign Ministry in the driving seat**

Foreign Minister Abba Eban was the most frequent and vocal opponent of proposals to establish an information ministry. He stated a number of times that if such a move was undertaken, he would feel obliged to resign, since it would result in a significant loss of authority for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, much of whose diplomatic activity in small and medium-sized countries was in the field of public information. In fact, Eban had proposed that the Foreign Ministry should increase its authority in this area by taking responsibility for foreign correspondents stationed in Israel. Now, having rebuffed the Peled Report in late 1969, and seen Yisrael Galili return his ministerial mandate for domestic and international information efforts, Abba Eban was now in a position to take a lead.

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However, the Foreign Ministry was limited in its ability to affect policy. With security concerns often dominating the Israeli national agenda, the voice of the 'activists' was very often stronger than that of the 'diplomats'. According to Brecher, the security establishment 'persistently ridiculed' the Foreign Ministry

and its alleged soft line and concern for 'the *Goyim*': in their preoccupation with foreign reaction, was the charge, they did not contribute to Israel's crucial foreign policy objective - security.... To the Army the [MFA] was saturated with 'Sharettism', the policy of caution and exaggerated concern with 'the external factor'.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Eban was sceptical about the very idea of policy planning, preferring that his ministry should improvise in the face of uncertain developments. 'All that a planning department in a foreign ministry can do is to analyze the various possibilities of evolution', he said.<sup>5</sup> Israel's international image in the early 1970s was, in any case, precarious. Unsurprisingly, the progress made by Eban in securing international support was only incremental.

In the reorganisation of April 1970, he had increased the authority of his Ministry in two important areas. Firstly, the Foreign Ministry assumed responsibility for permanent and visiting foreign journalists, a job previously handled by the Government Press Office. Since 1967, the number of permanently-stationed foreign correspondents in Israel had more than doubled.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, the Foreign Ministry took responsibility for the *Hasbara* Centre, which had been established in 1968 and was aimed at engaging foreign students and voluntary organisations in Israel, as well as Israeli students overseas.

A year earlier, Eban had thrown down the gauntlet, warning those who criticised the government's performance in the field of *hasbara*: 'From now on, anyone who writes an

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<sup>4</sup> Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process* 399.

<sup>5</sup> Shlaim, "Interview with Abba Eban, 11 March 1976," 164.

<sup>6</sup> Yegar, *History of the Israeli Foreign Information System* [Hebrew] 87.

article on the government information 'debacle' is likely to find himself invited to join the brains trust and asked to apply himself to finding some answers'.<sup>7</sup> In April 1970, he launched the first incarnation of the 'brains trust', a public committee of forty experts in mass communications and public relations, Knesset members, academics and journalists, whose brief was to advise the minister on the information services that the Ministry provided. However, it met only a handful of times before it fizzled out.<sup>8</sup> A smaller, more junior, group met until mid-1971 under the leadership of the highly-experienced Aviad (Adi) Yaffe. Speaking to the Knesset, Eban reported that the committee had avoided discussions on day-to-day issues, and had focussed instead on advising the minister on the fundamental issues, such as 'a) the Zionist vision and our historical rights; b) Israel and peace; c) Soviet involvement and the risk of war; d) The refugee problem; e) Arab terrorism; f) Palestinian self-determination'.<sup>9</sup> He also reported that the committee had advised him on the principles, content, methods and techniques of Israeli public diplomacy, particularly with regards long-term planning and prioritising.

Eban's enthusiasm for dealing with the issue was felt most strongly inside his ministry. Whilst far more comfortable with matters of content than of organisational, Eban was 'innovative, and even revolutionary' in restructuring the ministry.<sup>10</sup> He brought together the departments that dealt with press, *hasbara*, cultural and scientific affairs and official visitors into a new information division, headed by a deputy director-general – firstly Eliashiv Ben-Horin, and from 1970, Shmuel Divon. The key position was head of the ministry's

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<sup>7</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 6.1.1969, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 53, col. 1005.

<sup>8</sup> Medzini, Changes in Israeli Foreign Communications since the Six Day War [Hebrew], 38.

<sup>9</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 59, col. 450-51. The members of the committee were Dr. Shlomo Avineri, Professor Binyamin Azkin, Yitzhak Navon MK, Gavriel Cohen, Gen. (res.) Chaim Herzog, Ambassador Abraham Harman, Gen. (res.) Yehoshofat Hakarbi, Y Bar-Nir, Yaakov Tzur and Yehoshua Yustman.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

*hasbara* department. But with no real authority to create and deliver policy, it had suffered from a high turn-over of officials. Within a three-year period, the job had been filled by Netanel Lorch, Yohanan Cohen and Yeshayahu Anug, cramping long-term planning. Eban now brought in an outsider to fill the role. Hareven had served for many years in IDF military intelligence, but had moved to the Mossad after the Six-Day War, where he had pioneered the field of psychological warfare.<sup>11</sup> Given the sense of inferiority that many diplomats already felt in relation to their colleagues from the security establishment, bringing in an ‘original, fresh-thinking’ outsider was a risky move.<sup>12</sup> Hareven never felt fully accepted by the diplomats, and indeed stayed for only four years.<sup>13</sup> However, the appointment paid dividends, with ‘muddling through’ replaced – at least temporarily – with structured policy planning.

Hareven focussed first on the work of the foreign ministry in the field of international public diplomacy. In a memo dated 20 May 1970, he outlined his suggestions to his immediate superior, Divon, for an initial re-think of the work of the ministry.<sup>14</sup> The new approach, he argued, was necessary because of three current problems: Israel’s poor international standing, the lack of clear organisational structure to deal with it, and the low domestic image of Israel’s public diplomacy efforts. He suggested a trial six-month period in which the foreign ministry would pose three questions - ‘1) Who are we?, 2) Who are our neighbours and what are their intentions?, and 3) What are our intentions regarding our neighbours?’ Hareven categorised his target audiences, prioritising government and political parties, then media and then universities. Jewish communities, trades unions and churches

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Alouph Hareven, 8.7.2005.

<sup>14</sup> Hareven to Divon, ‘The *Hasbara* work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Some Suggestions for Reorganisation’, 20.5.1970. Private papers of Alouph Hareven.

were considered less important. He also identified the United States as the key geographical target, with Western Europe and Japan following.

This initial paper outlined the principles which he believed underlie successful

*hasbara*:

Quality and content: The world is full of *hasbara* material, ours and theirs, which because of its mediocrity has no consumers. We must establish a strict rule that our *hasbara* material must be interesting – that is to say that its recipient must be sufficiently interested to study it. Our material (in whatever form it takes) must, therefore, be better than anything else comparable. It must be unusual in format, and where possible in content. Material that does not meet these criteria should be examined for effectiveness.

Impact of dissemination: Even if we have interesting, unusual material which is better than that of others – our success will still be dependent on its dissemination. Our material must get to every individual in the audiences we have determined as important. This means creating distribution lists of hundreds of thousands of people and addresses who we want to receive our information. In the Mossad, such lists have begun to be uploaded on computers, and it is suggested that this be adopted.

Hasbara is a mutual process: Traditional *hasbara* is a one-way street of sending material indiscriminately. A process that aims to be verifiable must attempt to be mutual. That is to say, it must try and arouse responses, in the form of dialogue, from its recipients. In this way, public diplomacy is humanised and there is ongoing human contact between the ‘explainers’ and their audiences.

We must ‘freshen up’ the lexicon of *hasbara*: The lexicon we use is that of the establishment, outdated and focused almost entirely on terms related to conflict. Too often, we use terms of moral condemnation. Too often, we appeal to ‘international public opinion’, which exists neither in theory nor in practice. The lexicon of *hasbara* needs updating and focussing on practical and realistic terms. For example, if an airliner is attacked by terrorists, we should reduce to a minimum the expressions of moral outrage (because the entire free world already shares them). On the other hand, we should describe clearly what we intend to do. Human society seeks practical information more than it does moral commentary. The lexicon of *hasbara* needs widening to include terms outside of conflict, in an attempt to create the consciousness that ‘there is another way’. We should describe the alternatives to war, stressing alternative uses for the tremendous resources which are currently wasted on war.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hareven to Divon, ‘The *Hasbara* work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Some Suggestions for Reorganisation’, 20.5.1970. Private papers of Alouph Hareven.

Hareven's work took the ministry in new directions. For the first time, the embassies and consulates were asked to give their feedback on the *hasbara* department's work, in order to assess its usefulness. Budgets were increased, doubling in 1971 alone. This allowed longer-term planning, with a rolling three-year work-plan.<sup>16</sup> In 1973, the foreign ministry conducted opinion polling amongst foreign audiences for the first time, with students in France, Sweden and Japan asked their views on Israel. However, this was an exception, since Hareven believed that public opinion had been essentially static since early 1968, with 'around 35 percent supportive of Israel, around 5 percent supportive of the Arabs and around 60 percent indifferent or undecided', and he believed it would remain so.<sup>17</sup> He also noted how expensive such polling was.<sup>18</sup> Hareven stressed the distinction between proactive and reactive efforts, and urged diplomats to channel their efforts into areas where Israel's international image could be improved by fuller discussion, and to avoid engaging in unproductive debate.<sup>19</sup>

Other departments in the foreign ministry were also involved in the work. The official visits department welcomed hundreds of official visitors each year. The public affairs department sent diplomats recently returned from foreign postings to speak to students, schoolchildren, soldiers and factory workers.

However, Hareven was not convinced that the Foreign Ministry was the best vehicle for this work. In August 1970, he presented a more detailed plan to Yisrael Galili, who remained a key figure in the debate about *hasbara* policy, outlining the rationale and a

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Hasbara Department, Data for Multi-Year Planning of International Public Diplomacy Services [Hebrew]. (Jerusalem, 1972).

<sup>17</sup> Hareven to Divon, 'The *Hasbara* work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Some Suggestions for Reorganisation', 20.5.1970. Private papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>18</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 87.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Alouph Hareven, 8.7.2005.



possible structure for a Ministry of Information.<sup>20</sup> The principal argument for such a body, he argued, was that the current mechanisms for distributing information about Israel were deficient. When several ministries explained complex issues each from their own standpoint, the message was disjointed and often conflicting. This was the case regarding the 1967 war, where the Ministry of Defence and the IDF presented the military analysis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs talked about the political aspects of the conflict, and the Ministry of Finance dealt with financial and economic affairs. But the critical issues facing the State were wider than a single ministry's purview; Israel needed a central body that would strike the correct balance between them, that would collate all information and that would consider the needs of the recipients rather than the distributors.<sup>21</sup>

The failures of the current system were clear. Firstly, too much attention was being paid to the Arab-Israel conflict. Although he was in no doubt that the conflict was the most significant important challenge facing the nation, he questioned whether it was healthy that 'civilian' issues were being pushed to one side. After all, he wrote to Galili, 'the unique nature of the State of Israel is not only her ability to manage armed conflict'.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, he noted that Israel was yet to take advantage of the advances in communications technology that would allow a more nuanced and flexible approach to different sectors in Israeli society, and to international audiences. Such developments might also allow government to develop a genuine and ongoing dialogue with its citizens and international observers.

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<sup>20</sup> YTA 15/53/5/1. Hareven to Galili, 'Ministry of Information: Outline of Staffing and Structure' [Hebrew], n.d.

<sup>21</sup> YTA, 15/53/5/1. Hareven to Galili, 'Ministry of Information: Outline of Staffing and Structure' [Hebrew], n.d., p. 4

<sup>22</sup> YTA, 15/53/5/1. Hareven to Galili, 'Ministry of Information: Outline of Staffing and Structure' [Hebrew], n.d., p. 2

## Chapter 5

The solution was a Ministry of Information that would both coordinate the existing information activities within the other ministries, and would also coordinate and provide professional support – such as the commissioning of opinion polls – on those issues that were wider than a single ministry's responsibility. In addition, the Ministry of Information would have representatives in Israel's embassies around the world, although he reassured his diplomatic colleagues that:

*Hasbara* must not become a routine, bureaucratic process. So the Ministry of Information must have as small a permanent staff of its own as is possible and use as many professionals as possible – either from government ministries or from outside.<sup>23</sup>

Not all the changes were successful, or popular. On 1 June 1970, Abba Eban was called to defend his 'brains trust', from charges that it was a party-political rubber stamp. When the names of the committee were announced, it appeared that all its members were associated with the Labour Alignment. Speaking in the Knesset, he answered a question from Yosef Tamir (*Gahal*) on the issue, and said

I appointed the members of the advisory committee without any regard for their party affiliation, to allow me to benefit from their views, their experience and their expertise in the different areas that comprise the problems of *hasbara* we are facing. One particular criterion was my personal relationship with these people. I aimed at finding a broad spectrum of knowledge and specialisation, not a broad spectrum of party political affiliation.<sup>24</sup>

In 1972, the State Comptroller issued a report which dealt with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' work in the field of *hasbara*. The report, which dealt with inspections carried out in early 1971, found some technical discrepancies in the work of the *hasbara* and

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<sup>23</sup> YTA, 15/53/5/1. Hareven to Galili, 'Ministry of Information: Outline of Staffing and Structure' [Hebrew], n.d., p. 7

<sup>24</sup> Eban to the Knesset, 1.6.1970. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 58, col. 1931. He was responding to questions from Yosef Tamir (*Gahal*) tabled on 12.2.1970.

cultural and scientific affairs departments.<sup>25</sup> However, the overall assessment was that the changes introduced by Hareven were positive. The Government Press Office, whose work had been dramatically cut with the transfer of responsibility for foreign journalists to the foreign ministry, unsurprisingly found fault with the changes. In a report on the issue written in 1972, the director of the Jerusalem office of the GPO wrote:

The current system is unsatisfactory, and does not answer existing requirements. In this field, there has been no progress since the Six-Day War. In fact, despite the achievements there has been deterioration, and instead of working to coordinate efforts, there has been diffusion of effort.<sup>26</sup>

In June 1973, Dan Pattir, who had served as press secretary to Yitzhak Rabin during his tenure as Ambassador to Washington, summarised the findings of a working group on government communications which reported to the Foreign Ministry.<sup>27</sup> It deliberately adopted a new term, *midu'a*, for government information in place of the ubiquitous term *hasbara*.<sup>28</sup> The report found that an 'information system that is efficient in organisation and activity is a requirement of the highest order'. It recommended a system with four elements:

A central information ministry/authority

Heading the ministry will be a minister/director who will be a member of the government or a permanent participant in its meetings, and party to its discussions and decisions

The government spokesman will be the minister heading the central information ministry (or the head of the central information authority), or his appointee

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<sup>25</sup> State Comptroller's Office, State Comptroller's Annual Report No. 22. (Jerusalem: State Comptroller's Office, 1972). See also: Ministry of Finance, Finance Minister's Comments on the State Comptroller's Annual Report No. 22, 26.4.1972 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: 1972).

<sup>26</sup> Medzini, "Government Communications for Overseas Audiences in the Six Day War [Hebrew]," 49.

<sup>27</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. Proposal for a Government Decision on the National Communications System, 13.6.1970.

<sup>28</sup> The term chosen, *midu'a*, implying the conveying of information, did not stick. Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010.

The central information ministry/authority will comprise the domestic information directorate, the foreign information directorate, the government spokesman and the Government Press Office and will coordinate *hasbara* policy and activity between government ministries and other bodies.<sup>29</sup>

Between April 1970 and October 1973, Abba Eban had begun a period of serious assessment of Israel's government communication policy. Whilst Hareven's work had shed some light on the issue of content, Eban had failed to tackle the question of organisation and inter-ministerial coordination. In fact, his starting point of protecting his own ministry's work by blocking the creation of a separate ministry maintained the key organisational deficiency: the distinction between domestic and international information efforts. Although this problem was subsumed by others during the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, the question of authority for *hasbara* did not disappear.

### **Government communications and the Yom Kippur War**

'The Yom Kippur War, which broke out in October 1973, re-opened the flood of criticism about 'foreign information failures' and showed that the changes made by the Foreign Ministry had been insufficient'.<sup>30</sup>

Whatever the changes to the structure and strategy of Israeli government communications between 1970 and 1973, they proved lacking during the Yom Kippur War. In the absence of clear objectives and coordination between the branches of government, Israel 'muddled through', with limited success. The IDF Spokesman, who naturally came to the forefront during war, bore the brunt of the failure.

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<sup>29</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. Proposal for a Government Decision on the National Communications System, 13.6.1970. p.2

<sup>30</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 90.

Israelis were not expecting war in 1973. The victory of 1967 had planted a misconception that Israeli military strength would deter any Arab attacks, and that – in the unlikely event that it did come - the next war would be like the last. Israel was dismayed to find out that 1973 was not remotely like 1967. Returning to Israel in early March 1973 from his term as Ambassador to the United States, Yitzhak Rabin found Israel ‘almost smug ... as befits a country far removed from the possibility of war’.<sup>31</sup> Foreign Minister Abba Eban described it as ‘a climate of exuberant self-confidence that began to border on fantasy’.<sup>32</sup> Speaking at Haifa University in March 1973, he warned of an obsession with the country’s physical borders, and a disregard for its moral and political frontiers.

The surprise attack, launched simultaneously by Egypt and Syria on Saturday 6 October was thus a profound shock to officials and the general public, who had dismissed the military build-up on the southern and northern fronts as yet more bluster by Anwar Sadat and Hafez Assad. The day before the war broke out, defence minister Moshe Dayan briefed Israeli military correspondents that the considerable build-up of Egyptian forces along the Suez Canal – the border between Israel and Egypt since 1967 - was merely a posture. President Sadat had first pledged to attack Israel in September 1970, following the end of the War of Attrition. He repeated it at the end of 1970, declaring that by the end of 1971 he would regain the lost Sinai. Then he said the ‘year of decision’ would be by the end of 1972, but that deadline had long since passed without incident. ‘Sadat swore by the Prophet Mohammed, but was in no hurry to keep his vow. Repetition only reduced his credibility both in Israel and in the rest of the world.’<sup>33</sup> Egypt had mobilised and then pulled

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<sup>31</sup> Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* 184.

<sup>32</sup> Shlaim, "Interview with Abba Eban, 11 March 1976," 158.

<sup>33</sup> Zeev Schiff, *October Earthquake: Yom Kippur, 1973* (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1974) 34.

back its forces three times in recent months, leaving Sadat 'a laughing stock in his own country'.<sup>34</sup>

On the evening of 5 October, Israel received credible information that the attack would come the next evening.<sup>35</sup> On the morning of 6 October, IDF Chief of Staff David 'Dado' Elazar asked Meir to approve calling up 200,000 reservists. Dayan, who had trouble grasping that war was imminent, urged a limited call-up of 20-30,000. The attack came in the early afternoon, with Syria and Egypt launching a simultaneous attack on Israel.

Dayan remained up-beat, for the time being. At 4pm, he briefed Israeli journalists to expect the real fighting to begin when the reservists arrived at the front the next day, when 'we will turn the area in to a gigantic cemetery'.<sup>36</sup> At a large press conference that evening, he declared 'the IDF will smite the Egyptians in Sinai hip and thigh. The war will end in a few days, with our victory'. Although he didn't mention the Syrian front in that press briefing, he did so in an interview on *Kol Yisrael*:

On the Golan Heights, it is possible that here or there a few Syrian tanks have broken through our lines, and they may have taken, in one way or another, control of one or more of our posts – that is, conquered our positions – but [they have] not, not made any significant progress.<sup>37</sup>

Meir broadcast a similarly optimistic message to the Israel people – although she subsequently gave only one interview to the press, and Dayan instructed the IDF Spokesman, Colonel Pinchas Lahav, to reassure the military correspondents that all was

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<sup>34</sup> Herzog, *The War of Atonement: October, 1973* 23.

<sup>35</sup> Mossad chief Zvi Zamir met his source Ashraf Marwan, the son-in-law of Nasser, in London. Marwan had told him that Egypt and Syria would attack at 6pm the next evening. Although there remain strong suspicions that Marwan was a double agent, passing information to Israel on behalf of Egypt, this was a decisive moment in Israel moving to war footing.

<sup>36</sup> Schiff, *October Earthquake: Yom Kippur, 1973* 62.

<sup>37</sup> "Dayan's Talk to Nation," *New York Times* 7 October 1973. Interview with Yirmiyahu Yovel, 5.2.2012.

well.<sup>38</sup> The 'absurdly optimistic statements' in the first days of war created an entirely false expectation of another quick Israeli victory which was soon proven wrong.<sup>39</sup>

In reality, Israel suffered an enormous blow on the Sinai front, and its defensive positions on the Golan Heights were overrun. Israel counter-attacked – unsuccessfully at first – after three days, but it took until the beginning of the second week of the war for Israel to fully absorb the blow and successfully push back Syrian and Egyptian forces. Israel had also lost the information initiative. Soon after the attack, Damascus and Cairo radios announced that Israel had attacked their forces. The first statement from the IDF Spokesman was short and factual. Zeev Schiff, military correspondent of *Haaretz*, noted 'The dry statement doesn't promise victories, but many Israelis are unimpressed by a later statement that a general blackout has been imposed; everyone expects an easy victory'.<sup>40</sup>

### Dealing with the press

In the initial scramble of getting troops to the fronts, arrangements for journalists were by no means the most pressing issue. Some local journalists, Israelis and permanent foreign correspondents, did get to the front on the second day.<sup>41</sup> However, their initial reports gave a deceptively optimistic account of the war. Three factors influenced this. Firstly, the optimism of Meir and Dayan, itself a product of the sense of Israeli invincibility that dated from 1967, was a powerful 'frame' through which they saw the early days of war. This framing was reinforced by the IDF Spokesman and his unit, the sole source of official

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<sup>38</sup> IDFA 73-2137/1991. Report on the Activity of the IDF Spokesman's Unit, chaired by Col (ret) Nachman Karni (Hereafter Karni Report), n.d., p.5.

<sup>39</sup> Terence Prittie, *The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle*, Noah Barou Memorial Lecture 1973 (London: World Jewish Congress, 1973) 7.

<sup>40</sup> Schiff, *October Earthquake: Yom Kippur, 1973* 62.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Michael Karpin, 1.3.2012.

announcements. Secondly, the Israeli correspondents were, for the most part, reporting from a war-zone from the first time. Almost all of them had seen action in 1967 as combatants, but they had not yet adopted a 'proper distance' between themselves and the war.<sup>42</sup> Thirdly, their field of view was limited, and the technology for getting news from the front back to the newsrooms was patchy. They extrapolated the view from a particular sector to the whole front. This was often incorrect. The initial reports were, consequently, rosier than the reality.

Early on 7 October, Israel Radio's Amos Ettinger reported, 'This morning will have some surprises for the Egyptians, as absorption turns to containment, if not more'. Three hours later, Michael Karpin of IDF Radio reported from the divisional commander's command post at Refidim, forty kilometres behind the front line, that 'Egyptian forces have not crossed the waterline, more or less, and in places where they managed to set up bridgeheads, our forces have repelled them on all fronts'.<sup>43</sup> He also had a bullish interview with divisional commander, General Avraham 'Bren' Adan who announced he was about to launch an Israeli counter-attack against Egyptian forces.<sup>44</sup>

Karpin admits that in the scramble to get to the front, he had failed to make the mental switch from combatant, as he had been in 1967, to journalist.<sup>45</sup> He managed to transmit his interview with Adan to the Tel Aviv studios of IDF Radio, using the general's

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<sup>42</sup> Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006). Several scholars have noted the tendency of journalists to adopt a patriotic, binary 'us-and-them' narrative in times of crisis. See also S Waisbord, "Journalism, Risk and Patriotism," *Journalism after September 11*, eds. B. Zelizer and S. Allan (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence – Hearing No. 26, 13.12.1973, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Michael Karpin, 1.3.2012.

<sup>45</sup> The Israeli media in this period was 'held in thrall by the myth of an 'invincible and omniscient army''. Yehiel Limor and Hillel Nossek, "The Military and the Media in the Twenty-First Century: Towards a New Model of Relations," *Israel Affairs* 12.3 (2007): 492.



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communications net. However, minutes later, rather than launching a counter-attack, Adan came under missile fire himself. The general beat a hasty retreat, leaving Karpin alone in the field. His status as a journalist began to be clearer.<sup>46</sup>

At the front, the reality was quite different. The counter-attack along the Suez Canal failed, with Israeli tanks coming under fire from Soviet-supplied Sagger anti-tank missiles, which IDF Intelligence had not known about. Israel Radio's Yirmiyahu Yovel was incensed by what he heard on the radio, and tried to get a more accurate picture of the fighting to the newsroom in Tel Aviv.

I picked up the field telephone, and said – a bit angrily, I admit – ‘we’ve just heard on the radio that our forces are containing the Egyptian army in the Canal Zone. Your correspondent wants to contradict the report. This is not like previous wars. This is a different war. This war is harder, will last longer, with more casualties. We’ll win in the end, for sure, but it will take far longer. We must not think of this war in terms of the Six-Day War. This is a different war’. That whole section was censored. Not one word was broadcast.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, official Egyptian spokespeople were reporting their successes with a good deal of embellishment, and ‘adding these claims up, one would have to suppose that the entire Israeli armour, and three-quarters of her air force, were totally destroyed in the first week of the war’, wrote the pro-Israeli British journalist Terence Prittie.<sup>48</sup> Arab states, particularly Egypt and Syria, as well as the Palestinians, had begun to broadcast in Hebrew in the early 1970s. By the summer of 1973, Cairo Radio had 12 hours of broadcasts aimed at Israel, in Hebrew, English and French, ‘a low-key, if sometimes awkward, attempt to persuade instead of conquer’.<sup>49</sup> For its part, Israeli radio broadcasts were ‘designed to show

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Michael Karpin, 1.3.2012.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Yirmiyahu Yovel, 5.2.2012

<sup>48</sup> Prittie, The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle 4.

<sup>49</sup> Prittie, The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle.

that Israel has eyes and ears in major Arab capitals,' including once broadcasting the answers to Egyptian school examinations the evening before the tests were to be given.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most important element of the 'very marked improvement' in Arab information efforts during the war was the pictures of the hundreds of Israeli prisoners of war captured in the first two days.<sup>51</sup> These were given to international news services, via whom they made their way to Israeli television for the evening news on Sunday night. They made extremely gloomy viewing, as well as contributing to a 'sudden drop' of credibility in the IDF's own accounts of the war.<sup>52</sup>

Dayan's elation turned to desperation during the course of 7 October. Addressing the cabinet, he proposed a retreat from most of the Sinai. At 3pm, he briefed Meir in more detail, urging her to retreat from the Golan Heights, as well as conceding the Suez Canal to the Egyptians. An hour later, he briefed Israeli newspaper editors and political commentators, now telling them the truth.<sup>53</sup> The Bar-Lev defensive line had fallen and the counter-attack had failed in the south, and the Hermon listening post had fallen to the Syrians in the north, putting the major cities of Israel under threat. He continued with a startling assessment: 'we are standing before the destruction of the Third Commonwealth', evoking the biblical destruction of the first and second Jewish Temples and the consequent loss of national independence.

That evening, Meir called for Elazar to brief her. Although the situation was grim, the chief of staff reported, it was too early to order a retreat. Earlier, Elazar had given a press conference, in which he responded to a question about the predicted length of the war,

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<sup>50</sup> "The Radio War," Time 18 June 1973.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Michael Karpin, 1.3.2012; Prittie, The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle.

<sup>52</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Main report, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Main report, p.5.

telling journalists 'I expect only one thing: that we will continue to attack, continue to beat, and that we will break their bones. I don't yet want to commit to how long it will take.'<sup>54</sup>

Torn between Dayan's cataclysmic gloom and Elazar's bullish assessment, the prime minister later said that, if Dayan had been right, that evening she would have considered suicide.<sup>55</sup>

The next morning, she was in decisive mood. She ordered a counterattack on both the Sinai and Golan fronts, appealed to the United States to begin an emergency airlift of supplies and ordered Israel onto nuclear alert, arming Jericho missiles and F-4 fighter planes.<sup>56</sup> The unpopular and ineffective southern front commander, Shmuel 'Gorodish' Gonen, was effectively replaced with former chief of staff Chaim Bar-Lev who was sent to oversee affairs as the personal representative of Elazar.

Dayan's pessimism was compounded when the counter-attack of 8 October did not yield immediate results. The following day, he briefed newspaper editors, telling them 'it's become clear to the whole world that we are no stronger than the Egyptians'. Gershon Schocken, the editor of *Haaretz*, said 'if you say what you have told us on television this evening, it will be cataclysmic for Israelis, for Jews and for the Arab world'.<sup>57</sup> At the urging of *Maariv* editor-in-chief Arye Dissentchik, Meir ordered Dayan to cancel his scheduled television broadcast that evening.<sup>58</sup> In his place General Aharon Yariv appeared. According to the military correspondent of *Haaretz*, Yariv's account of the fighting was honest, sensitive and balanced. 'Let's not delude ourselves with rapid and elegant conquests. The

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<sup>54</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo8XHIRHqT8>. Elazar was responding to a question from Dan Shilon of *Yediot Ahronot*.

<sup>55</sup> Amnon Barzilai, "Golda Meir's Nightmare [Hebrew]," *Haaretz* 3.10. 2003.

<sup>56</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel, America and the Bomb* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991) 225.

<sup>57</sup> Zeev Schiff, *Earthquake in October: The Yom-Kippur War [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Zmora, Bitan, Modan, 1974) 110.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

war is likely to go on, but let's not think in terms of danger to the population of Israel', he was quoted as saying.<sup>59</sup> Foreign press reports were similar:

Generally speaking I would say that we have now reached a certain phase in the war in which it is permitted to say that we have been able to redress the situation, but there is still a way ahead of us which will not be easy, for which we'll have to do a lot of fighting, in which our nerves will be probed and tested, in which there might be difficult situations, but during which I think we are permitted not to fail in our confidence as far as Israel's people and its defence forces are concerned.<sup>60</sup>

This was the first time the Israeli public were given a frank evaluation of the war – 'neither a continuation of the Six Day War, nor a blitzkrieg'.<sup>61</sup> After the 'breakbones' speech given by Elazar the previous evening, some Israelis were confused about what to believe. More, though, understood that they had been deceived until this point.<sup>62</sup>

Dayan now asked Yariv to take over press matters on a more permanent basis. Yariv had served as the head of military intelligence until his retirement from the IDF in 1972, and was serving as Meir's adviser on counter-terrorism.<sup>63</sup> Meir also invited General Chaim Herzog, the 'national soother' of the 1967 war, to resume his military analysis on Israel Radio. Fearing that matters were slipping out of his control, IDF Spokesman Colonel Pinchas Lahav fought to get a grip on the issue.<sup>64</sup> Starting from 9 October, the 'hasbara forum' met every day of the war with representatives from the IBA and the *Hasbara* Centre, professors, psychologists and sociologists, although without a representative from the Foreign Ministry. Their first meeting, though, compounded the credibility deficit. The forum decided to allow

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<sup>59</sup> Schiff, [Earthquake in October: The Yom-Kippur War \[Hebrew\]](#) 146.

<sup>60</sup> "Excerpt from Israeli General's Talk," [New York Times](#) October 10 1973.

<sup>61</sup> Schiff, [Earthquake in October: The Yom-Kippur War \[Hebrew\]](#) 146.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>63</sup> Limor and Nossek, "The Military and the Media in the Twenty-First Century: Towards a New Model of Relations," 495.

<sup>64</sup> IDFA 73-2137/1991. Handwritten notes by Nachman Karni.

only 'gradual and considered reporting of the difficulties we are experiencing in battle, and alongside that the obvious fact that in such a situation there is loss of morale and of life'.<sup>65</sup>

This was a mistake; the Israeli and international press were already reporting the losses of the first days and Yariv's more accurate broadcast had improved, rather than damaged morale. It was nothing new, though. Already in 1969, during the Israel-Egyptian War of Attrition, Lahav had faced accusations of delaying reports that Israeli soldiers had been killed in order not to depress Israelis on Independence Day. That time, Minister Yisrael Galili had made it clear that he would not tolerate such behaviour:

Interviewer: Mr Galili, you are the minister with responsibility for government communications in Israel. Can you assure the people of Israel that also very unpleasant, depressing news will be reported, even if it could damage morale? Isn't that preferable to hiding things and damaging credibility?

Galili: I can say that the government must report the whole truth to the people, and for two reasons: firstly, because we believe the Israeli people values truth and does not want to be misled by fantasy and deception, and that people are strong enough to face up to the truth, even when it is told plainly.<sup>66</sup>

Although he remained in position in 1973, Lahav's already tattered reputation did not survive the war.<sup>67</sup> Dayan had already started to blame IDF Chief of Staff David Elazar for failing to predict the start of war, and for his failure to immediately reverse the losses. Lahav, Elazar's protégé, was an easy target for Dayan's fury.<sup>68</sup> Dayan brought in his own man, Brigadier General Aharon Avnon, to supervise Lahav's work. Neither played any meaningful role during the remaining weeks of the war.

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<sup>65</sup> IDFA 73-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d., Main Report, p.11.

<sup>66</sup> YTA 15/057/01/5. Transcript of an interview between Minister Yisrael Galili and Gideon Samet, *Galei Zahal* radio, 24.4.69.

<sup>67</sup> 'Lahav, Pinchas' in Eitan Haber and Zeev Schiff, *Lexicon of the Yom Kippur War [Hebrew]* (Or Yehuda: Dvir, Zmora Bitan, 2003) 239-40.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011

By the end of the first week of war, intelligence head General Eli Zeira was exhausted. Yariv, his immediate predecessor, was now asked to 'shadow' Zeira and share some of the burden, and so, on 13 October, General Shlomo Gazit was handed the task of running *hasbara* efforts. As Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories since late 1968, Gazit was responsible for the security, political and economic affairs of Gaza and the West Bank. In this position, he had briefed the domestic and international press frequently, and was experienced and confident. Unlike any other of his colleagues in the IDF General Staff, he was also relatively unburdened during the war. His policy was to ensure 'business as usual' in the West Bank whilst the war was fought on the Syrian and Egyptian borders.<sup>69</sup>

Gazit took control quickly: 'I was, in effect, the minister of information, without a formal appointment. I coordinated the work of the ministries of foreign affairs, education, interior and so on. Under those circumstances it was understandable, natural and required'.<sup>70</sup> Those circumstances included a prime minister who, for fear of being asked about why Israel was so ill-prepared for war, gave only one televised briefing during the war – and that 'not a good performance' – and a foreign minister who was out of the country for most of the war.<sup>71</sup> Gazit's improvised position, therefore, carried enormous and ill-defined responsibilities. It was typical of Israel's 'muddling through' of communications policy.

Gazit exercised his authority with immediate effect. On 16 October the Knesset was scheduled to debate the progress of the war, the first time it had done so. The Speaker of the Knesset, Yisrael Yeshayahu, requested that the debate be broadcast live. Gazit felt

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005

<sup>70</sup> Private unpublished memoirs of Shlomo Gazit.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011

differently. 'There was no way of censoring mid-broadcast, and we could not risk an incautious slip of the tongue by one of the Members of Knesset'. He had another consideration: 'In the midst of battle, with the whole nation anxiously following every report from the front, it was not possible to stop for eight or more hours in order to broadcast the 'dramatic' speeches of 120 Members of Knesset'.<sup>72</sup> Only the prime minister's speech was to be carried live, and that only after it had been cleared by the military censor.

His instruction ruffled political feathers. The leader of the opposition *Herut* party, Menachem Begin, was furious that his speech would not be carried live. Speaking to Chaim Landau (*Herut*), Gazit offered the same terms to Begin as to the prime minister – any speech passed by the censor could be broadcast. 'I'd offer the same deal even to Meir Vilner,' he told Landau.<sup>73</sup> Now incensed that Gazit had compared him to Vilner, Begin complained to Dayan and to the chair of the Knesset Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee, Chaim Zadok (Alignment). 'For a week or even more – at the height of battle – there was nothing more important to deal with than Menachem Begin's bruised honour'.<sup>74</sup> Gazit apologised, but his grip on policy was firm. Begin's speech was not broadcast live.

Gazit spent his time between the 'pit', the IDF's underground command headquarters in Tel Aviv, and at the Beit Sokolow press centre across the road. His rank gave him access to the most up-to-date information about the progress of the war, without disturbing the minister. He was also able to talk directly to the prime minister, or to

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<sup>72</sup> Because of a lack of military correspondents to cover both fronts, Israel Radio and IDF Radio had agreed on a unified channel, as they had in 1967. If the Knesset debate had been carried live and in its entirety, listeners would have had no way of hearing reports from the front. Private unpublished memoirs of Shlomo Gazit.

<sup>73</sup> Meir Vilner headed the *Maki* (Israeli Communist Party) list. Gazit recalls that he did not fully appreciate the antipathy that Begin had for Vilner, nor the offence caused to Begin by the Ben-Gurion era slogan 'neither *Herut* or *Maki*' when it came to forming government coalitions. Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005.

<sup>74</sup> Private unpublished memoirs of Shlomo Gazit.

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communicate with her via Yisrael Galili, who had returned to his favoured position of *eminence grise*. Equipped with the best information possible, he organised twice-daily briefings, in Hebrew and in English, as well as personally briefing the more important journalists.<sup>75</sup> He also took control of the *hasbara* forum, which he considered a useful mechanism for sharing information and agreeing on messages and how they would be delivered.<sup>76</sup>

Despite Gazit's grip on the situation, Israel was still struggling to cope with an influx of hundreds of foreign journalists. Held up for the first 48 hours because Israel's only international airport was closed, they were reliant on Israeli reports, which gave their coverage the same false impression of Israeli military fortunes.<sup>77</sup> With the airport opened, they flooded in from 8 October.<sup>78</sup> By the end of the first week of fighting, over 500 journalists – reporters and their crews – had arrived. By the end of the war, there were nearly 900, as well as the permanent foreign press corps of around 400. This 'vast regiment' of visiting journalists was battle-experienced, and senior in their organisations.<sup>79</sup> Some of them had satellite telephones, which, despite the patchy quality, offered the advantage of broadcasting live, or filing copy immediately. The new technology was a source of envy for some Israeli correspondents. However, the foreign correspondents' tendency to stay well

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<sup>75</sup> Private unpublished memoirs of Shlomo Gazit.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005.

<sup>77</sup> Juan DeOnis, "Glowing Reports Carried on Radios," New York Times 7 October 1973.

<sup>78</sup> 136 journalists arrived on October 8<sup>th</sup>, when the airport opened; 149 arrived the next day. Dina N Goren, Akiba A Cohen and Dan Caspi, "Reporting of the Yom-Kippur War from Israel," Journalism Quarterly 52.2 (1975): 201.

<sup>79</sup> Two-thirds of the journalists who took part in this study had previously reported from a war, and of those who had reported from a war, 37 percent had also reported from Israel. 61 percent of the journalists had worked at their current news organisation for 5 or more years. Goren, Cohen and Caspi, "Reporting of the Yom-Kippur War from Israel," 203. See also: Prittie, The Fourth Arab-Israeli War: The Propaganda Battle 10.



behind the front lines and to embellish their reporting with fanciful, colourful details was not.<sup>80</sup>

The visiting journalists were not impressed with the facilities made available to them by Israeli officials. Max Hastings, reporting for the London *Evening Standard*, later recalled 'there was no point in harassing the Israeli press department for assistance – none would be forthcoming'.<sup>81</sup> They complained that, unlike in 1967, they did not have free access to the battle-zone, and had to be escorted by IDF liaison officers from the Spokesman's unit.<sup>82</sup> The IDF tours of the front were only a partial answer, although more than half went on one. Getting to the front required air transport, which was in short supply. 'We had to be arbitrary in allocating places and that led to quite a few complaints, usually from reporters representing small and medium organs, as well as from representatives of small Jewish newspapers'.<sup>83</sup>

Some did make their own way to the Syrian and Egyptian fronts and file their reports. One, Nick Tomalin of the *Sunday Times*, was killed on the Golan front, on such a trip.<sup>84</sup> The unmediated access to soldiers on the front that the IDF wanted to prevent, ironically generated some highly favourable coverage:

Until this war, I have never much liked Israel. But to see this society gathered in arms to save itself has been impossibly emotive. Down in Sinai under the stars, we sat and talked for hours to sentries who are agricultural engineers, tank commanders who are university dons, students who drove amphibious assault craft in the

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Michael Karpin, 1.3.2012.

<sup>81</sup> A junior reporter at the time, Hastings had missed reporting the Six-Day War. His seniority was decisive in getting him to Israel for the Yom Kippur War. Max Hastings, *Going to the Wars* (London: Macmillan, 2000) 141.

<sup>82</sup> Yegar, *History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew]* 90.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011

<sup>84</sup> One other journalist, Raphael Unger of Israel Radio, was killed during the war, on the Egyptian front. He was travelling with one of the armoured division commanders, General Albert Mendler, and was killed when Mendler's convoy was hit by Egyptian Sagger missiles.

murderous first crossing of the canal. Israel at war is a family at war, perhaps the most highly motivated family in history. Even in Syria, I have seen Israelis treat prisoners with nothing worse than amused pity, embarrassed by a terrified Arab grovelling for mercy to which he is quite unaccustomed, and does not expect. This is why it has felt so shameful to be a Western European in Israel; because we have been watching the Israelis displaying all the qualities for which we look in our civilization – military genius not least – while on the other side stood an enemy of whom there could be no doubt that, armed with an atomic weapon, he would hurl it like a hysterical child. ...I shall never go on holiday to Israel because the waiters are rude, the food is terrible, the architecture drab. But these last three weeks, I am proud to have shared the Israelis' camp fires in Sinai. For the only time in my life anywhere in the world, I wish that I had been carrying a rifle beside them.<sup>85</sup>

Only 35 percent of foreign journalists were satisfied with the information they received from the Israeli authorities, citing justified censorship and a need to preserve domestic morale as reasons for withholding information. However, unlike their Israeli counterparts, few of them directly blamed the inefficiency of the system or cumbersome bureaucracy.<sup>86</sup> They objected to Israeli military censorship, with 68 percent complaining that it interfered with their work 'all the time' or 'some of the time', and 41 percent said that it distorted their work all or some of the time. However, 74 percent of visiting journalists and 100 percent of the resident foreign correspondents said that, if they were Israeli, they would justify censorship under the same circumstances.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, even if they were unsatisfied, the reporters obtained a good deal of information from official sources. Around 80 percent of resident reporters and 60 percent of visiting reporters had off-record conversations with military and political leaders, and around the same numbers went on organised battlefield trips. Around half of the journalists had special trips arranged for them individually. They also tended to mark the official sources, such as

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<sup>85</sup> Hastings, *Going to the Wars* 165-66.

<sup>86</sup> Goren, Cohen and Caspi, "Reporting of the Yom-Kippur War from Israel," 203.

<sup>87</sup> Goren, Cohen and Caspi, "Reporting of the Yom-Kippur War from Israel," 208.

the IDF Spokesman's unit, the Government Press Office and official press briefings as both helpful and credible.<sup>88</sup>

After the second, permanent ceasefire on 25 October, the foreign press dispersed quickly. Those who remained made their dissatisfaction felt. On November 5, the Foreign Press Association, representing journalists permanently stationed in Israel, submitted a memo to the IDF Spokesman, Colonel Pinchas Lahav, complaining that he and his unit had not been truthful in their statements during the war.<sup>89</sup> He responded that he had always told the truth, but admitted that he had not always told all the truth. He also noted that 'boastful remarks' by public figures and senior officers in the first days of the war had compromised his credibility.<sup>90</sup> Lahav was dismissed early in 1974, as was Avnon who had been brought in by Dayan to supervise him.<sup>91</sup> The IDF unit he had headed underwent a thorough re-organisation, also in early 1974, formally changing its name from the IDF *hasbara* department to the IDF Spokesman's Unit.<sup>92</sup>

The failure of the IDF Spokesperson's unit to adequately prepare for handling the foreign and domestic press during conflict led to the establishment of two internal inquiries, headed by General Shlomo Gazit and by Colonel Nachman Karni. They were important steps in the creation of a Ministry of Information early in 1974.

### **Towards a ministry: Nachman Karni and Shlomo Gazit report**

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<sup>88</sup> Goren, Cohen and Caspi, "Reporting of the Yom-Kippur War from Israel," 203-4.

<sup>89</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 91.

<sup>90</sup> Pinchas Lahav, "All My Announcements Were the Truth [Hebrew]," The Journalists' Yearbook 1974 (Tel Aviv: Journalists' Union, 1974).

<sup>91</sup> 'Lahav, Pinchas' in Haber and Schiff, Lexicon of the Yom Kippur War [Hebrew] 239-40.

<sup>92</sup> IDFA 46-26/2011. IDF Spokesman to IDF Chief of Staff, 12.5.1974.

'In this war, the IDF became the chief source of government communication, perhaps the sole source, whereas in a proper system of government the army should only be one part of the system'.<sup>93</sup>

The Yom Kippur war was a profound shock to the Israeli political and military establishment, whose eventual consequences were to be found in the political upheaval of 1977.<sup>94</sup> Journalists were bruised, 'admitting that their silence also contributed to the catastrophe'.<sup>95</sup> Writing in *Davar*, Daniel Bloch hinted at the depth of the crisis of press-politics relations:

I don't accept the idea that the role of the press is to keep up morale. Its major role is to deliver accurate information, expose the truth, criticize and sound warnings. The role of the press today is to make every effort to open additional paths to independent sources of information, so that we will not be dependent on one source that is not prepared to reveal everything.<sup>96</sup>

Within weeks, Meir bowed to popular pressure and ordered the establishment of a State Commission of Enquiry, headed by Supreme Court President Shimon Agranat. Even before that, IDF Spokesman Pinchas Lahav appointed Colonel Nachman Karni to report to him on his unit's performance during the war.<sup>97</sup> Karni had served as IDF Spokesperson in the early 1950s, and served in a variety of roles in the intelligence and foreign liaison spheres. He had retired in 1968, but remained in close contact with his peers, many of whom were in senior political or military positions by 1973.

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<sup>93</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d.

<sup>94</sup> The upheaval, the electoral defeat of the Labour Party at the hands of the Likud opposition, was so profound that television anchorman Haim Yavin coined a new Hebrew word – '*mahapach*' - to express its enormity. Yavin, Mr. Television [Hebrew].

<sup>95</sup> Limor and Nossek, "The Military and the Media in the Twenty-First Century: Towards a New Model of Relations." See also: Yeshayahu Ben-Porat, The Failure [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Meuhedet Press, 1975).

<sup>96</sup> Daniel Bloch, "We Must Take Stock [Hebrew]," From Our Military Correspondent, ed. Tali Zelinger (Tel Aviv: Ministry Of Defence, 1990) 73.

<sup>97</sup> Nachman Karni to Pinchas Lahav, n.d. IDFA 274-2137/1991. The cover letter to Karni's report notes that the panel was created on 12 November 1973, two weeks after the ceasefire.

The panel also included Dr. Yirmiyahu Yovel, David Pedhatur and Moshe Shalit. Yovel taught philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, but had also been a military commentator for Israel Radio during the war. It was he who had protested at his colleagues' inaccurate reporting of the first days of the war. Pedhatur was a leading journalist, and had been the editor of *Lamerchav*, the daily newspaper of *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*, until 1971. When *Lamerchav* folded, it merged with the *Mapai* paper, *Davar*, where he became deputy editor. Shalit, a lawyer with close connections to the Labour movement, served as secretary to the panel. Despite their clear political affiliations, the report did not avoid the political aspects of the issue.

On the face of it, the Karni report was a minor detail. It was commissioned as an internal report for a discredited IDF Spokesman on the performance of his unit during the war. Lahav knew that he would face questions about his and the unit's deficiencies, and he hoped an independent assessment would shield him from further criticism.<sup>98</sup> The report was not made public, and, given the enormity of national soul-searching after the war, left very few traces in political debate.

Yet, the report is far more important than that. Largely by default, the IDF took responsibility for national information efforts, firstly through the IDF Spokesman and then through Generals Yariv and Gazit. Conscious of this, Karni effectively ignored the rather limited mandate he received from Lahav and presented a comprehensive critique of Israeli government communications. Its recommendations far exceeded the narrow focus it was intended to examine.

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Moshe Shalit, 1.3.2012.

## Chapter 5

There was also a personal element to their work. The members of the panel felt the war was 'an offence to the profession' to which they all belonged, in one way or another.<sup>99</sup> Within a few weeks of the end of the war, he was able to call an impressive list of witnesses to give evidence, as well as make use of relevant academic research to produce a report which, although not widely-read, represents an immediate, first-hand account of what went wrong.

Between late November and late December 1973, the panel met 10 times to hear evidence from 32 witnesses.<sup>100</sup> They heard from Israeli and foreign journalists, from officers within the IDF Spokesman's unit, as well as from Lahav himself, twice. General Shlomo Gazit, who played a key role in creating order from the chaotic first days, gave his account of the war to Karni, as did Alouph Hareven of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The report makes dismal reading, with four major themes emerging from the evidence.

Firstly, the unit was not prepared for war. There had been training for the unit's reservists in 1971, but not all of them came forward when the war started. Other reservists, without training, did appear and asked to serve<sup>101</sup> Career officers, whose peacetime jobs became less relevant during war, 'volunteered' where they felt there was a need.<sup>102</sup> There was no system for collating information on the hundreds of foreign correspondents, which could have helped ensure they received appropriate treatment, or

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Moshe Shalit, 1.3.2012.

<sup>100</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence.

<sup>101</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.5. Evidence of Eliezer Duvdevani.

<sup>102</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.4. Evidence of Lt-Col Ernie Simon.

for monitoring their output.<sup>103</sup> Karni's report noted that such improvisation was a missed opportunity:

'Information services during wartime are no less important than the work of other staff units. Indeed, information is one of the areas with the highest levels of marginal benefit since significant military and political advantage can be derived from relatively small investment'.<sup>104</sup>

The panel also heard that there was a lack of clear policy, at least until Gazit took charge. One senior officer told the panel: 'There was no 'guiding hand', and I did not – nor, I think did the IDF Spokesman – have anyone to tell me what our policy was'.<sup>105</sup> Only at the end of the third day of fighting, 8 October, did the unit's officers get an accurate picture of the war. That evening, Col Aryeh Tichon briefed the unit that the situation on the fronts was 'not as rosy' as they had been led to believe. 'That was the point,' one officer told the panel, 'at which we began to *restrain ourselves* [my emphasis]'.<sup>106</sup>

Karni also noted that the unit failed to adequately integrate reports from correspondents in the field into a comprehensive picture of the progress of the war. Such reports are inevitably narrow in scope and, in the first days of the war, were misleadingly optimistic. 'Some of these optimistic reports were sent, *as if they were news* [my emphasis], to the newspapers and in one paper an optimistic field report became headline news'.<sup>107</sup> This

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<sup>103</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.10. Evidence of Col Efraim Shorer.

<sup>104</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d.

<sup>105</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.2. Evidence of Col Aryeh Tichon. Tichon's role was to report on the progress of the war to Lahav, and to recommend when the Spokesman should issue announcements.

<sup>106</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.4. Evidence of Lt-Col Ernie Simon.

<sup>107</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d. Appendix: Protocol of Evidence, p.4. Evidence of Lt-Col Ernie Simon.

also resulted in misleading Spokesman's announcements, particularly during the first days of fighting, which were consequently less credible when the true picture emerged.

However, Karni's most significant contribution was to point out that the IDF was not only responsible for communicating the military aspects of the war to domestic and international audiences. 'During the Yom Kippur War, the State of Israel did not have *hasbara* as such, rather improvisation of a coordinating mechanism between the various bodies headed by a senior military officer'.<sup>108</sup> This task was 'totally disproportionate, and beyond what it could manage on its own'. His recommendation was to appoint an information minister:

'The IDF cannot successfully carry out its duty in the sphere of *hasbara* unless all government communication agencies are under the supervision and direction of a single authority, preferably with ministerial rank'.<sup>109</sup>

The question of how Israel handled information efforts during the war reached the Knesset on 25 December 1973. Shmuel Tamir (Free Centre) called for a debate on the 'shocking deficiencies, so destructive on the international stage, in Washington, the United States, Japan, Europe, the free world'.<sup>110</sup> He noted that 'only two or three people' in the Israeli embassy in Washington D.C. dealt with information efforts, and called for a significant increase to this work. He also criticised the work of the IDF Spokesman during the war, who he said proved incapable of dealing with the influx of foreign press and was primarily responsible for the decline in Israel's international credibility.

In response, Foreign Minister Eban noted the considerable disadvantages Israel faced in the field of international public opinion in the face of a well-funded campaign from Arab

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<sup>108</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d.

<sup>109</sup> IDFA 274-2137/1991. Karni Report, n.d.

<sup>110</sup> Shmuel Tamir to the Knesset, 24.12.1973. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, col. 4857.



states. Whilst agreeing with Tamir that the war had exposed deficiencies in both organisation and content, he was upbeat about Israel's current standing, noting the opinion poll research commissioned by Hareven earlier in 1973 which showed strong support for Israel in Britain, France, Sweden and Japan, whereas support for Arabs was very low.<sup>111</sup> In the United States, 6 percent of those polled indicated support for the Arabs, whilst 54 percent indicated support for Israel. 'Where is the great achievement of the oil money and the millions of dollars?' he asked. 'I do not believe any other country in the world has succeeded so fully in achieving influence'.<sup>112</sup>

This speech to the Knesset also contained his fullest public exposition of his underlying view on the issue, that the root cause of concerns about Israel's international image was to be found government policy itself and not than in the professionalism of Israel's diplomats:

'Once again, I feel a sense of intellectual frustration when the issue of how the government communicates is taken out of the context of the political reality. Because what really affects our image at the end of the day is not the skill of the policy advocate. It's not the salesman, nor the wrapper, but the goods themselves that matter. ...Israel's image is not a product solely of the words its diplomats use; it is a product of entirety of Israel's reality as seen from the outside. Her positions, style, atmosphere, the way her society conducts itself, her approach to peace, her relations with neighbouring countries, her position on universal human values, her view of her own and the world's culture and heritage – all these are taken into account. And the advocate for Israel is not alone in his task. There are positive influences and, to my regret, negative influences. ...I simply want to prove that not only we, not only policy advocates and government ministers and official representatives formulate our image and how we look'.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Alouph Hareven, 8.7.2005. Eban agreed with Hareven that public opinion polling 'was not an exact science', although his Knesset speech urged 'not to discount findings based on a generation of experience'. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, col. 4861.

<sup>112</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 24.12.1973. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, cols. 4861-4867.

<sup>113</sup> Abba Eban to the Knesset, 24.12.1973. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, cols. 4863-4864.

The debate also included the familiar concerns that a lack of sufficient coordination was responsible for the perceived failures. Nissim Eliad (Independent Liberals), whilst praising the ‘fine work done by the Israeli information system in its overseas work’, asked ‘whether the current division of responsibility was sustainable, and whether it might not be preferable to concentrate efforts under a single body’.<sup>114</sup> Shlomo Lorincz (*Agudat Yisrael*) returned to another well-worn theme, that Israel was ‘a nation that dwells alone’, before the call for a full debate on the issue was voted down.<sup>115</sup>

In early 1974, Gazit was asked to summarise his findings on the issue of *hasbara* during the Yom Kippur War. His principal finding, which he had shared with the Karni Committee in late 1973, was that the apparatus of government communications suffered from a lack of coordination, and that the various bodies should be combined, either in the Prime Minister’s Office or under a special ministry of *hasbara*. The report recommended:

- To establish a central focus for coordination of *hasbara* within the IDF
- To establish a central *hasbara* body at the national level
- To prevent the phenomenon of un-coordinated announcements by the authorised bodies
- To efficiently and quickly create coordination between the IDF Spokesman’s Unit, the Government Press Office and the Israel Broadcasting Authority.<sup>116</sup>

When he wrote the report, Gazit had effectively replaced Zeira as Director of Military Intelligence. With his focus on rebuilding the shattered intelligence branch, he had little time for information affairs.<sup>117</sup> Fifteen years later, in a subsequent report, he noted that

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<sup>114</sup> Nissim Eliad to the Knesset, 24.12.1973. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, col. 4865.

<sup>115</sup> Shlomo Lorincz to the Knesset, 24.12.1973. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 68, col. 4866.

<sup>116</sup> IDFA 4-64/2012. Organisation of the IDF Spokesperson’s Unit, n.d. (hereafter Gazit Report 1989), p. 17-8. Shlomo Gazit chaired another inquiry into the work of the IDF Spokesperson’s unit in 1989, in which he referenced the conclusions drawn by his earlier committee in 1974.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005.

the 1974 report 'was not dealt with properly, and we recommend that it be presented again for discussion'.

### Conclusions

On the day before the outbreak of war in October 1973, Alouph Hareven of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs drafted a detailed memorandum for Professor Yigael Yadin on international perceptions of Israel. In it, he described the changes in international perceptions of Israel since 1967, from 'underdog' to regional power, from pioneering to economic success and from 'a state that gives and takes, to a state that primarily takes'.<sup>118</sup> Because of the war, Hareven did not send his memorandum until two months later. In his cover letter, he noted a rise in international support for Israel following the war, explained by Israel's return to 'underdog' status, although not to the levels immediately following 1967. With regard to Israel's military image, Hareven suggested that the IDF had been perceived as a 'people's army' during the war, in place of more negative, militaristic, images that had been prevalent before the war. In short, he concluded, 'the war improved our *hasbara* position in the countries of the free world and created a contradiction – in Europe – between public opinion which is supportive of Israel and the views of governments, which are more hesitant'.<sup>119</sup> What he failed to note was that war exposed the Foreign Ministry, which had

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<sup>118</sup> 'Israel in the Eyes of the World (written in the day before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War)', n.d. Private Papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>119</sup> Alouph Hareven to Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7.12.1973. Private Papers of Alouph Hareven.

argued so forcefully for control of this sphere, as a bystander. Israel's international image was determined by external events, rather than cogent policy planning.

Having successfully prevented the establishment of a separate Ministry of Information, it fell to the foreign ministry under Abba Eban to assess the root causes of Israel's international standing, and to formulate appropriate policy. Given the restricted policy-making power of the ministry, and the outbreak of war in October 1973, it should be no surprise that they met more success in the first task than the second.

The ministry did have some success in creating a more coherent structure for communicating Israel's positions to international audiences, in secondary settings. Ahead of the Geneva talks that followed the war, Hareven produced a detailed plan for the organisation and content of Israel's spokespeople.<sup>120</sup> He also provided a detailed briefing booklet for the team of spokespeople who attended the peace conference, held on 19 and 20 December 1973, tasked with engaging diplomats and journalists.<sup>121</sup> The operation was considered 'a great success', at least by one of its participants.<sup>122</sup> The indefatigable Hareven also defended the ministry's work to domestic audiences, and urged them to join in Israel's information efforts overseas: 'Every Israeli, at home or overseas, can take part in the *hasbara* fight'.<sup>123</sup>

Yet, the failures of the Israeli government communications mechanism during the Yom Kippur War were clear, and the two inquiries that followed provided sufficient

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<sup>120</sup> Alouph Hareven, 'Organisation of *Hasbara* Ahead of and During the Geneva Peace Conference', 4.12.1973. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>121</sup> 'Hasbara Briefing: Geneva Peace Conference – Talking Points', 2.12.1973. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven. The spokespeople were Yitzhak Kahana (German), Avi Primor (French), Avi Pazner (Hebrew) and Meron Medzini (English). Professors Shimon Shamir and Shlomo Aronson were also despatched to Geneva. Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>123</sup> Alouph Hareven, "Israel's Foreign *Hasbara* [Hebrew]," *Maariv* 9 May 1974.

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ammunition for Prime Minister Meir to revisit her earlier decision not to create a separate Ministry of Information. She did so, somewhat surprisingly, as Israel agonised over its responses to the wider failures of the Yom Kippur War, and as her own political career drew to an end.

## Chapter 6

### **The Rise and Fall of the Ministry of Information, 1974-1975**

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‘What is the information minister supposed to do?’<sup>1</sup>

On 1 December 1973, David-Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, died. This was more than the passing of a leader; it was the end of a political era. As Israel struggled to comprehend the enormity of the 1973 war, Golda Meir found herself the last of the ‘founders’ generation’. Although she narrowly won the elections held after the war, she would soon hand over power to a new generation who came of age with Israel’s independence in 1948. With that handover of power came a greater understanding of the importance of political communications, if not the ability to create meaningful policy.

General elections were held on 31 December 1973. Whilst there was no great enthusiasm for Labour, whose party list was substantively the same as that for the 1969 elections, Israelis did want to see the prisoners of war returned home and progress in the internationally-sponsored talks with Syria and Egypt. The Likud’s opposition to the post-war Geneva peace conference, brokered by Henry Kissinger, was thus a lifeline for Labour.<sup>2</sup> Although the Geneva talks had failed to produce any progress towards peace agreements by election day, the Labour party successfully campaigned that the team that had begun the talks would have to continue them.

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Aharon Yariv. Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>2</sup> Medzini, *The Proud Jewess* [Hebrew] 467.

The new government, led briefly by Meir and then – after her resignation following the Agranat Commission's interim report into the 1973 war – by Yitzhak Rabin, included a Minister of Information for the first time. After nearly a decade of reports and recommendations to bring Israeli government communications under ministerial authority, it was now that the decision was finally taken. Yet, the ministry was a short-lived failure of 'muddling through'. This chapter will argue that the decision to establish the ministry was a knee-jerk reaction to Israel's wider post-war problems, with no attempt to address the underlying dilemmas that the same reports had identified. The gridlock of 'activists' and 'diplomats' then again limited policy options, producing a dilemma for Rabin, which was resolved largely by reference to personal, rather than policy, considerations. With no great surprise, and even less regret, two ministers and ten months later the Ministry of Information was dismantled. It disappeared without a trace. With regard to government information policy, Israel of 1975 was very much like Israel of 1966.

### **Establishing the Ministry, March-June 1974**

#### An unlikely birth

The establishment of a new ministry in early 1974 was, on the face of it, unlikely. Indeed, the timing was highly unpromising for creating a new ministry, with the consequent demands on legislative, budgetary and political agendas. Previous proposals to establish a Ministry of Information had fallen in the past because of the

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strenuous objections of the foreign ministry.<sup>3</sup> Abba Eban's position was no different now. And yet, the ministry was created.

In the months immediately following the Yom Kippur War, Meir had very little time or enthusiasm for internal party politics. She was preoccupied with the substantial challenges of negotiating ceasefires with Syria and Egypt, negotiating a \$2.2bn package of emergency aid from the US government to prop up Israel's precarious financial situation, and – closer to home - with growing public protests at her government's conduct of the war.

She had returned to public life unwillingly in 1969 on the death of Levi Eshkol, and although her appetite for political leadership had returned during her premiership, the failure to predict the Yom Kippur war was a massive blow to her confidence. Although Israel had reversed the early losses of the war, the substantial loss of life was a heavy burden. The catalyst for the post-war protests was Motti Ashkenazi, an IDF captain whose one-man protest tent outside the prime minister's office sparked a wave of public demands for political change. Outside Meir's office protesters blamed her daily for failing to predict the war and for the death of 2,500 Israelis, and called for her and her government to resign.<sup>4</sup>

The [protest] movement reminded the leadership that there was an urgent need to take drastic steps to change the government and the way it worked, but Golda was neither mentally nor physically capable of doing it. She was too busy with negotiations with the United States, and indirectly with Egypt, with the prisoners of war in Syria and soldiers who were missing in action, and with relations with America<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, above, the Peled Commission's proposals (1969), the recommendations of Pattir (1973), of Colonel Nachman Karni (1974) and General Shlomo Gazit (1974).

<sup>4</sup> Motti Ashkenazi, "The Tasks of the Non-Conformist Movement," *Haaretz* June 7 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Meron Medzini, *Golda Meir and the Vision of Israel: A Political Biography* [Hebrew], 2nd ed. (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, Sifrei Hemed, 2008) 590-91.



She dealt with internal party issues only when absolutely necessary. Despite the lack of popular support for the party's 'old guard' leadership – Meir, Dayan, Sapir, Eban, Galili and Allon – she had refused to allow internal elections to compose a new party list for the elections. Some new names did join the list, including former generals Yitzhak Rabin and Aharon Yariv, and she hoped this would satisfy the electorate and quieten concerns from within the party.<sup>6</sup> After the elections, in which Labour held on to power with a reduced majority, she took part in the coalition negotiations, although teasing together a parliamentary majority was a higher priority than re-allocating responsibility for government communications policy.<sup>7</sup>

Meir was emotionally and physically exhausted. Speaking to the Labour Party Central Committee in December 1973, she admitted 'I will never be the same person I was before the Yom Kippur War', and continued

I have been roundly criticised for appearing on television – as much as I have been on television since the war – since it doesn't help public morale that I look so sad. At my age, should I start using cosmetics? I would do it if I thought it would help. But I'm a realist about these things, and I can't put on a mask. I am sad. Sad like everyone else, and something else: the fact that I am prime minister.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rabin was appointed Minister of Labour and Yariv as Minister of Transportation. General Haim Bar-Lev, who was not an MK, was appointed Minister of Trade and Industry.

<sup>7</sup> The new Knesset had 51 members from the Alignment (Labour and *Mapam*), five fewer than previously. The newly-established Likud party, comprising *Gahal*, the Liberal Party and the Free Centre Party, took 39 seats.

<sup>8</sup> Meir to the Labour Party Central Committee, 5.12.1973. See also: Shlomo Nakdimon, Low Probability: A Narrative of the Dramatic Story Preceding the Yom Kippur War and of the Fateful Events Which Followed [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: *Yediot Ahronot* - Revivim, 1982) 260-61. 221

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The focus of the protests was Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, who faced both public and internal political opposition. Yaakov Shimshon Shapira, the justice minister, had called for his resignation as early as October 1973 and resigned from the government when Meir stood by Dayan.<sup>9</sup> Even when Dayan offered to step down, Meir supported him. She was determined that 'the street will not dictate political moves to me', and clung to the political system, even though it was deeply discredited.<sup>10</sup> Dayan also had the support of his junior colleague from *Rafi*, Minister of Communications Shimon Peres.<sup>11</sup>

However, it appeared to be a losing battle. When even senior IDF officers began to criticise him, Dayan decided that he could no longer remain in office.<sup>12</sup> Meir was distraught, and during the cabinet meeting of 24 February, she sent Peres a note pleading with him to stay. 'Shimon, to my great regret Moshe already considers himself out of office. I am in such despair there are no words for it'.<sup>13</sup> Dayan made his decision public at a rally of *Rafi* supporters in Jerusalem two days later. 'Somewhere along the way we reached the point where a responsible man cannot go on being Minister of Defence,' he told his supporters.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ben-Porat, *Dialogues* [Hebrew] 179-82.

<sup>10</sup> Medzini, *Golda Meir and the Vision of Israel: A Political Biography* [Hebrew] 590.

<sup>11</sup> Matti Golan, *Shimon Peres: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982) 141.

<sup>12</sup> The turning point may have been an angry remark by Colonel Gideon Mahnaimi at a meeting between Meir, Dayan and the IDF senior command staff on February 12. 'We were taught in the *Palmach* and in the IDF that someone is always responsible. The Minister of Defence is responsible for the IDF, so he is also responsible for what happened. He should understand this and go,' he said. Although Dayan was not in the room at that moment, the remarks were reported to him. Nakdimon, *Low Probability: A Narrative of the Dramatic Story Preceding the Yom Kippur War and of the Fateful Events Which Followed* [Hebrew] 274.

<sup>13</sup> Golan, *Shimon Peres: A Biography* 142.

<sup>14</sup> Golan, *Shimon Peres: A Biography* 141.

Reluctantly, Meir drew up a new government without Dayan and presented it to the Labour Party's Knesset faction on 3 March.<sup>15</sup> Three ministries were reserved for *Rafi*, should they choose to join the government, including a new Ministry of Information.<sup>16</sup> This was the first time the new ministry appears in the records, but its proposed creation was far from the most important issue of that stormy faction meeting; it was overshadowed by Meir's surprise resignation. Able only to establish a minority government of 58, she announced that she would go to the president that evening and 'return the mandate'. She demanded that the party now find an alternative candidate for prime minister.<sup>17</sup> She was serious about her intention to quit, but immense pressure from many of her cabinet colleagues convinced to remain, at least for the time being. Dayan's resignation, too, was averted. He was aware that his bluff could well be called, and his place at the Ministry of Defence taken by Yitzhak Rabin, who was unsullied by the Yom Kippur War. Dayan found his way back on 5 March, the day he was supposed to leave the defence ministry. A meeting of the Labour Party Central Committee that day, where he was dismayed by the lack of support from the grass-roots of the party, may have been the final straw.<sup>18</sup> Dayan's own memoirs indicated he was motivated to reverse his decision when the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee received reports of a

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<sup>15</sup> Medzini, *Golda Meir and the Vision of Israel: A Political Biography* [Hebrew] 603.

<sup>16</sup> David Landau, "Premier Meir Unable to Form Government; Due to Return Mandate to Katzir," *JTA* 4 March 1974.

<sup>17</sup> With 120 seats in the Knesset, a government needs at least 61 votes to ensure it can pass legislation. Meir's proposed coalition comprised only the Alignment (Labour and *Mapam*, 51 seats), and the Independent Liberals (4 seats). She could also count on the support of two Arab satellite parties (3 seats) which later merged into Labour. The National Religious Party (10 seats) was calling for a national unity government, which Meir strongly resisted, and so remained out of the coalition at this point.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

Syrian troop build-up on the border.<sup>19</sup> Yet according to Abba Eban, the information appeared to be no more serious than previous such reports, and that 'no more than a dozen Israelis could be found who took the Syrian threat seriously'.<sup>20</sup> When the new government was presented to the Knesset on 10 March, Dayan retained the defence portfolio, and Peres was confirmed as Minister of Information, whose ministry would 'coordinate *hasbara* activity in Israel and abroad ...in close contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ...[whilst] those working on *hasbara* in overseas delegations will continue to be under the authority of the Foreign Minister and his ministry'.<sup>21</sup>

Three factors combined to outweigh those that might have prevented the establishment of the new ministry. Firstly, Meir sincerely believed that special efforts ought to be made at this point to improve Israel's international standing. She had seen the faltering and ineffective performance during and after the war, and the limiting of Israel's room for manoeuvre in the internationally-sponsored talks with Egypt and Syria. The Karni and Gazit reports had highlighted the consequences of a lack of centralised authority, particularly during conflict. She therefore decided to implement the Peled Commission recommendations that she had so enthusiastically endorsed in 1969, and appoint a full-time minister.

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<sup>19</sup> Moshe Dayan, Story of My Life [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Eidanim, 1976) 734-35. See also: David Landau, "Syrian Arms Build-up Reason for Dayan's, Peres' Decision to Serve in Cabinet," JTA 1974.

<sup>20</sup> The perceived emergency was also enough to persuade the National Religious Party to join the government coalition, giving it a parliamentary majority. Eban, Abba Eban: An Autobiography 564.

<sup>21</sup> 'Presentation of the Government to the Cabinet – Remarks by the Prime Minister', 10.3.1974. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3.

Secondly, political and personal considerations played a role. Peres was aware that Meir's tenure as prime minister would be short-lived, and that her government would end with the report of the Agranat Commission. He wished to position himself for the inevitable shake-up in the party. Although he had developed his political standing during his short term at the Ministry of Posts, changing the name to the more modern-sounding Ministry of Communications, he now sought a better platform from which he could emerge from the shadows of Dayan and from the narrow confines of the *Rafi* faction.<sup>22</sup> It may not have been an immediate prospect, but he was already thinking ahead to a run at the leadership of the party. For her part, Meir was desperate for Dayan, and by extension Peres, to join her government. Although she strongly disliked and mistrusted Peres, particularly his incessant self-promotion, she was in no position to oppose him.<sup>23</sup> She wanted to establish the ministry, and her dislike of Peres was not strong enough to block it.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, whilst Meir's opinion of Eban as a diplomat and orator was very high, it was almost non-existent as a policy maker. Throughout her premiership, she maintained direct contact with Yitzhak Rabin in Washington, whilst 'Eban's political role was of a most limited nature'.<sup>25</sup> Eban was asked to remain in the US throughout most of the Yom Kippur War and the Foreign Ministry played no appreciable role during the war itself. The crucial relationship with US Secretary of State Henry

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Yossi Sarid, 29.7.2010. Peres had assiduously built relations with the domestic press since the late 1940s, on transactional rather than ideological grounds. By the mid-1970s he had a powerful set of allies including Shabtai Tevet (*Haaretz*), Yoel Marcus and Hagai Eshed (*Davar*) and Yeshayahu Ben-Porat, Dov Yudkovsky and Mira Auerbach (*Yediot Ahronot*) known as 'Peres United' for their support of him. See: Yair Sheleg, "United Peres [Hebrew]," *The Seventh Eye* 3.May (1996).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>25</sup> Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* 190.

Kissinger during the war was maintained by Simcha Dinitz, Meir's former chief of staff and Rabin's successor as Ambassador to the US. She was not alone in taking a dim view of Eban's failure to create an effective system to ensure international support for Israel, having strenuously opposed the establishment of a separate ministry in 1969.<sup>26</sup> This deficiency was made plain during and after the Yom Kippur War, and Meir now saw no reason to oppose the creation of a separate Ministry of Information any further.<sup>27</sup>

### Formalising the creation of the Ministry of Information

The new Minister of Information started work immediately, tackling the most obvious – and difficult to resolve – problems. There was little public questioning of his suitability for the job, even by the Likud opposition. 'There is no doubt that Mr Peres is one of the most suitable people in the country for the *hasbara* job,' Shmuel Tamir (Likud) told the Knesset.<sup>28</sup> Presenting the new ministry to parliament, Peres admitted he was somewhat overwhelmed by the 'the public expectations of the Ministry of Information. I saw that one public opinion poll showed that 85 percent of the population support such a ministry and have high hopes of it'.<sup>29</sup> Peres acknowledged the challenge of operating both domestically and internationally, and the concerns regarding duplication of work between the Foreign Ministry and his ministry, but made it plain he intended on doing both:

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<sup>26</sup> 'Until this very day, there has been no overseas *Hasbara*. This is one of the clearest, far-reaching failures of the government of Israel.' Moshe Nissim (Likud) to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>28</sup> Shmuel Tamir (Likud) to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

<sup>29</sup> Shimon Peres to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

The Ministry of Information has a dual role, as other speakers have already said: one inwards and one outwards. ...If the domestic task of the Ministry of Information is to help journalists do their job – the free press in Israel – its job overseas is to help Israel's voice be heard. ...It is not the intention of the Ministry of Information to break the 'chain of command' or disrupt the foreign ministry's administration ...but in the field of overseas *hasbara*, relations with the foreign press, *hasbara* intended to explain Israel's position overseas, this will be done by a single authority, and that is the ministry. ...I believe the role of the Ministry of Information is not administrative coordination, but 'to administer' [said, apparently in English], in other words to oversee as far as possible the presentation of Israel overseas.<sup>30</sup>

His reassurances were not universally accepted. Zalman Shoval (Likud) told the Knesset 'I find it hard to free myself of the feeling that the compromise reached between the Foreign Ministry and the Information Ministry will not benefit the issue, and the division of responsibility has as much to do with ego and power as with professional considerations'.<sup>31</sup> From the Labour benches, Yossi Sarid – a former prime minister's spokesman, fully aware of the challenges of the issue - warned '*hasbara* does not replace policy, and cannot take its place. Only when they are combined is there a chance of success. More than that: *hasbara* cannot cover up for an absence of clear policy, and can't bridge the gaps and contradictions in statements and declarations'.<sup>32</sup>

Within a week of taking office, Peres received a memorandum from Alouph Hareven of the Foreign Ministry entitled 'Basic Problems of *Hasbara*'.<sup>33</sup> Scarcely hiding his enthusiasm for a new ministry, even though he worked for its rival, Hareven noted that 'for each of the problems [outlined in the memorandum] the

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<sup>30</sup> Shimon Peres to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

<sup>31</sup> Zalman Shoval to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

<sup>32</sup> Yosef Sarid to the Knesset, 10.3.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, cols. 974-1054.

<sup>33</sup> 'Basic Problems of *Hasbara*', 17.3.1974. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven.

establishment of the Ministry of Information is a blessing'.<sup>34</sup> This document was to be the blueprint for the new ministry's work. His analysis was clear and precise, and included the following observations:

The key domestic problem – credibility of leadership

...The successes, and the failures, of *hasbara* are primarily a result of what [the prime minister, the defence minister and the foreign minister] said and say, and their credibility.

*Hasbara* in parallel with policy-making

There is currently no standard process by which national policy-making is accompanied by considerations of the *hasbara* connected to that decision. Frequently, *hasbara* is decided upon only after a policy is decided – because those with responsibility for *hasbara* knew nothing of the decisions. There must be a system by which the minister of information considers the implications, in the field of *hasbara*, of any government decision.<sup>35</sup>

According to Hareven, there was difficulty in recruiting appropriate people for this kind of work. 'It's a 'mongrel job'', he explained, 'since it isn't a profession in its own right, rather a tool that must reflect other professions such as diplomacy, history and economics. The basic problem of *hasbara* is that the professionals - diplomats, historians and economists – tend not to devote most of their time to it, whilst the 'professional explainers' don't have a profession of their own'.<sup>36</sup> Dismissive of 'PR firms and communications experts', Hareven proposed that three or four 'excellent' experts in their fields – Israel, past, present and future; Israel-Arab and Israel-great power relations; Jewish identity; and culture and economy – were sufficient to generate the necessary content with which to engage Israel's international audiences.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Hareven was also frustrated by the lack of progress he had made on these issues whilst working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interview with Alouph Hareven, 8.7.2005

<sup>35</sup> 'Basic Problems of *Hasbara*', 17.3.1974. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Alouph Hareven, 8.7.2005.

<sup>37</sup> 'Basic Problems of *Hasbara*', 17.3.1974. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven.



On the same day, Hareven also sent the new minister a proposed organisational structure for the ministry.<sup>38</sup> Consistent with his earlier thinking on the problems of co-ordination and influenced by his work at the foreign ministry, Hareven proposed that the senior management team of the ministry include not only the minister and director-general, but also permanent representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the IDF. Seven functional departments – feedback, content, audiences, dissemination, press liaison, training and administration – were to carry out the work of the ministry. He also outlined a format for a ‘war room’, to be activated during crises and to comprise the minister, his director-general, the IDF Spokesman, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives of other bodies.

The formal decision to establish a Ministry of Information was taken by the cabinet three weeks later, on 31 March 1974, as Cabinet Decision 402 under Article 33(a) of Basic Law: The Government (1968).<sup>39</sup> The following day, the Cabinet Secretary wrote to the new minister, detailing the areas for which his ministry was now responsible:

Decided:

In accordance with Section 33(a) of Basic Law: The Government, to establish a Ministry of Information, headed by a Minister of Information.

In accordance with Section 33(a) of Basic Law: The Government, to take the following areas of responsibility and their budgets from the Prime Minister’s Office, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture:  
From the Prime Minister’s Office: the Government Press Office;

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Ministry of Information – Organisational Outline’, 17.3.1974. Personal papers of Alouph Hareven.

<sup>39</sup> ‘33. (a) The Government may merge, divide and abolish Ministries and set up new Ministries. A decision under this provision shall require the approval of the Knesset.’

From the Ministry of Finance: the Government Publications department;  
From the Ministry of Defence: the publishing house;  
From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the publications department, the department dealing with visiting journalists and permanent foreign correspondents, the foreign guests' department (apart from state guests and political figures invited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the film and television department, the professional training department and the exhibitions department;  
From the Ministry of Education and Culture: the Government *Hasbara* Centre, the Israeli Film Service.<sup>40</sup>

The same day, Justice Minister Chaim Zadok informed the Knesset of the decision, telling the House that the Government has decided 'to create a Ministry of Information, to coordinate all *hasbara* activity in Israel and overseas. Clearly, those working overseas on *hasbara* issues will continue to be subordinate to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and his ministry'.<sup>41</sup>

However, on the same day that the Knesset was informed of the cabinet's decision to establish the ministry, the Agranat Commission published its interim report into the decisions leading up to the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War and during the first three days of fighting. The report found that 'the activities of the prime minister in the decisive days which preceded the war indicate an approach appropriate to the heavy responsibility which the prime minister shouldered'. On Dayan's performance, the commission absolved him of any responsibility, since 'the defence minister ... was not responsible for the operation of the deployment of forces and that this was under the jurisdiction of the chief of staff'.<sup>42</sup> The report did

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<sup>40</sup> Michael Arnon, Cabinet Secretary, to Minister of Information, 1.4.1974. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3

<sup>41</sup> Chaim Zadok to the Knesset, 1.4.1974. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 69, col. 974.

<sup>42</sup> Agranat Commission: Initial Report, 1 April 1974. Itamar Rabinovich and Jehuda Reinharz, Israel in the Middle East: Documents and Readings on Society, Politics, and Foreign Relations 1948-Present, 2nd Edition ed. (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2008) 278-83.

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not even mention Dayan by name. Bewildered, Israelis demanded that Dayan go, and that Meir go with him. For ten days, the Labour Party was in disarray, but on 10 April 1974, Meir resigned and her government fell. This time, her decision was irrevocable. 'I want to get up in the mornings without consulting my diary,' she told interviewers in a farewell television interview. 'I will not be homesick for my seat in the Cabinet or the Knesset'.<sup>43</sup>

Meir's resignation triggered leadership elections in the Labour Party. Two candidates, Minister of Labour Yitzhak Rabin, and Minister of Information Shimon Peres emerged from a larger field.<sup>44</sup> They were a generation younger than the party's old guard, and neither of them from the dominant *Mapai* faction. Rabin, with roots in *Ahdut Ha'Avoda*, won the contest and, somewhat unwillingly, nominated Peres, 'an incorrigible saboteur' as defence minister.<sup>45</sup> Peres' stock had risen rapidly since the start of the year, and the result was closer than had been expected. His request to be appointed Minister of Information had given him extra visibility and public profile, as he had hoped. His plan paid dividends; the Ministry of Information had been the ideal launchpad to high political office and a position of power within the Labour Party.

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<sup>43</sup> "Sons of the Founders," Time May 6 1974.

<sup>44</sup> Rabin's candidacy was put under pressure on April 22<sup>nd</sup> by the sensational leak of a memorandum written by Ezer Weizman immediately before the outbreak of war in June 1967. Weizman recorded his misgivings about Rabin's competency, and described a near breakdown by the Chief of Staff on 23 May, which had remained a secret until this point. Brecher, Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy 123. Terence Smith, "Rabin's New Government: Control Passes Irrevocably from Generation of Founders to the Native-Born," New York Times 5 June 1974.

<sup>45</sup> 'I did not consider Shimon Peres suitable, since he had never fought in the IDF and his expertise in arms purchasing did not make up for that lack of field experience. ...I accepted Peres as defence minister – albeit with a heavy heart. It was an error I would regret and whose price I would pay in full.' Rabin, The Rabin Memoirs 189.

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Whilst Rabin negotiated the new coalition agreement, the Meir government remained in power. Rabin and Peres, prime minister-designate and defence minister-designate, joined the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with Syria. Its last act was the separation of forces agreement, signed with Syria at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 31 May. Yet alongside his considerable other obligations, both around the leadership contest and now as a participant at the Geneva talks, Peres continued to lay the groundwork for his new ministry. Despite Abba Eban's considerable misgivings about the creation of a new ministry, he and Peres met several times in March and April to delineate the responsibilities of their ministries. Their discussions were unsurprisingly tense, with Peres demanding to take all information work, domestic and foreign, out of the hands of the foreign ministry.<sup>46</sup> Eban refused, arguing that it was inefficient to replicate an already existing system, but they did make some progress, producing a draft 'Peres-Eban paper'.<sup>47</sup> The gaps between their positions remained significant, and they handed the paper over to a small group of officials from both ministries to attempt to find agreement.<sup>48</sup> These talks were intended to create, for the first time, a clear division of labour for Israeli government communications efforts. They failed to do so. The draft Peres-Eban paper determined in the broadest terms that the foreign ministry would be responsible for all overseas information efforts, apart from press relations, contact with foreign press representatives in Israel and the preparation of information material to be distributed overseas. The Ministry of Information would be responsible for these

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>47</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 99.

<sup>48</sup> 'Interim Conclusions of the Meetings on Relations Between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Information', n.d.; 'Interim Conclusions (2) on Relations Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Information', 19.7.1974, ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3

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areas, as well as all domestic information work.<sup>49</sup> However, the professional discussions were unable to find a workable division of labour based on these principles, and the matter was brought back to the cabinet for discussion in September 1974.

Peres set to work as minister. He appointed David Farhi, a talented former IDF intelligence officer with a background in Arabic, as his director-general.<sup>50</sup> In March, only two days after he was appointed as minister, he presented the budget of the Israel Broadcasting Authority, for which he was also responsible, to the cabinet, and answered questions about television broadcasts on the Sabbath, which had been introduced during the war to the displeasure of the religious parties.<sup>51</sup> In early May, he brought the question of funding for his ministry to the cabinet. In 1972 actual expenditure on the various bodies dealing with information efforts had been I£6.5m, and the budget for 1973 was set at I£9m. The budget he now sought for the new ministry was significantly higher, at I£24m. Of this, existing budget headings for the Government Press Office and the *Hasbara* Centre were I£10.8m, and nearly the same amount was transferred from the foreign ministry budget allocations for information work. In effect, he requested I£2.7m of new funding. This was largely

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<sup>49</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 99.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010. See also: Rafi Israeli, Flowers for David: In Memory of David Farhi [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Raphael Chaim HaCohen, 1981) 138.

<sup>51</sup> Landau, "Premier Meir Unable to Form Government; Due to Return Mandate to Katzir." Peres had been given authority for the Israel Broadcasting Authority with Cabinet Decision 387 of 24.3.1974. See: Michael Arnon, Cabinet Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education and Culture, and Minister of Information, 25 March 1974. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3.

earmarked to establish a 'content and feedback' division under Alouph Hareven, whose 15 staff members were to form the backbone of the new ministry's HQ.<sup>52</sup>

By the time he left the Ministry of Information, after only two months, Peres had laid its early foundations, making progress on both budgets and mandate. Peres may have sought the position because of the opportunity it presented him personally, but he was dedicated to ensuring its success. Under his successor, the flaws that were responsible for the birth of the Ministry of Information would become clearer. They would also result in its quick dismantling.

### **The Ministry of Information at work, June 1974-January 1975**

On 3 June, the Knesset gave its vote of confidence to Rabin's new government. Amongst its new line up was Aharon Yariv as Minister of Information.<sup>53</sup> Yariv was a natural choice, 'a scholar and a gentleman, approachable, friendly and straightforward'.<sup>54</sup> In the 1950s he had served as a military attaché at the Israeli embassy in Washington D.C., and remained in touch with American officials and journalists he had met then. He was literate, well-travelled, and an excellent speaker.

<sup>55</sup> A long posting as IDF Director of Military Intelligence between 1965 and 1972 included the triumph of 1967 but avoided the stain of 1973. Since retiring from the IDF, he had advised the government on counter-terrorism and earned at least one

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<sup>52</sup> 'Budget Proposal for Budget Year 1974 With Explanatory Notes Presented to the Eighth Knesset, May 1974'. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. The new unit went through a series of proposed names, eventually settling as the Analysis and Research Branch, whose Hebrew acronym pleasingly earned it the nickname of 'Emet' or 'Truth'.

<sup>53</sup> L Daniel, "Israeli Cabinet Named," *Financial Times* 29 May 1974.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

foreign observer's approval as 'Golda Meir's Kissinger'.<sup>56</sup> His relationship with Yitzhak Rabin stretched back to the *Palmach* of the 1940s, and included serving on Rabin's IDF General Staff. The two remained on good terms and he was a welcome new face to an otherwise largely unchanged cabinet. Although not an information professional, and with only a cursory understanding of press affairs, Yariv had valuable recent experience in the field of government communications, having been brought in to improve Israel's damaged credibility in the early days of the Yom Kippur War.

He was not the only possible appointee for the job. There was some talk that Chaim Herzog, whose radio talks had distinguished him as the 'national soother' of 1967 and 1973, would take the position.<sup>57</sup> Instead, he was sent to New York to represent Israel at the United Nations. Yosef Tekoa, Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, was summoned to Jerusalem for consultations, and there was brief speculation that he, too, might be offered the job.<sup>58</sup> More significant was Rabin's offer that Abba Eban replace Peres.<sup>59</sup> Peres had pulled off a minor coup by enlisting Eban's support during the Labour party leadership campaign. Eban had seen himself as a possible leader, but was offended by *Mapai* strongman Pinchas Sapir's blunt dismissal of his candidacy. Peres, seeking the support of the *Mapai* faction of the party, knew Eban's pride was dented, and offered him a leading role in his campaign team. It was clear that Eban could expect little if Rabin became prime minister, and he accepted

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<sup>56</sup> CL Sulzberger, "A Shrewdness of Kissingers: I," New York Times 24 December 1972.

<sup>57</sup> Although Herzog would probably have taken the job if offered, his allegiance to *Rafi* may have been a block to the appointment. Interview with Mike Herzog, 28.06.2006.

<sup>58</sup> Gil Sedan, "Rabin Determined to Form New Cabinet before Friday," JTA 23 May 1974.

<sup>59</sup> "Rabin's Troubled Start," Time 10 June 1974, Sedan, "Rabin Determined to Form New Cabinet before Friday."

Peres' offer in the hope that together they could prevent Rabin's election.<sup>60</sup> Eban and Rabin had clashed continuously when Rabin was Ambassador in Washington, with Rabin later dismissing Eban as someone who had 'essentially explained policies formulated by others, rather than generate his own political thinking'.<sup>61</sup> When Rabin won the leadership vote, Eban was still hopeful that Peres would lobby for him to keep his position of foreign minister. However, that position went to Allon, Rabin's former commander from *Palmach* days. Like Rabin, Allon was dismissive of his predecessor's scholarly demeanour, and envious of Eban's easy relations with the international press.<sup>62</sup>

The position offered to Eban – a sign of its relative significance to Rabin – was Minister of Information, for which Rabin archly regarded him 'well-matched to the task I had in mind for him'.<sup>63</sup> Eban was enraged, refused the appointment, and effectively ended his front-line political career. Eban, the most consistent opponent of a separate Ministry of Information, later wrote:

I had always maintained, as was later to become evident to Shimon Peres and Aharon Yariv, that a separate Ministry of Information was not viable within a Cabinet system under which all department heads were responsible for informing the public about their own responsibilities and problems. A separate Information Ministry was bound to fail, as it subsequently did after Yariv's brief tenure.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010.

<sup>61</sup> Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* 189.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Amnon Dankner, 18.7.2010. Although Allon had studied at Oxford after being dismissed from the IDF by Ben-Gurion in 1949, he could scarcely compete with Eban's intellectual prowess. Indeed, according to Dankner, his spokesman, he had returned early from Oxford "half-baked – a semi-intellect, semi-British, having lost his charisma and lost his *chevremaniut*, his easy social style."

<sup>63</sup> Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* 190.

<sup>64</sup> Eban, *Abba Eban: An Autobiography* 578.



'What is the Information Minister supposed to do?'

Rabin retained the Ministry of Information in his new government largely by default, although there were also several identifiable reasons for him doing so. Firstly, his ambassadorial posting to Washington had exposed him to the American media and to the power of modern political communications. His long military career, as well as his somewhat shy personality, had made him diffident in his relations with journalists. However, he returned to Israel more confident in this regard. 'If I'm ever in any position of power,' he told his embassy spokesman, 'I will do as the Americans do'.<sup>65</sup> This outlook, apparently, included retaining the Ministry of Information.

Rabin also wanted a clean break from Golda's 'kitchen' cabinet style of government, where a nominated group of senior ministers and unelected advisers determined policy away from the public eye.<sup>66</sup> The change in style was both generational and political; Rabin was the first of the native-born leaders, unlike the older Meir and her contemporaries, and was from the smaller *Ahdut Ha'Avoda* political faction within the Labour Party. He had inherited neither the informal and collaborative political culture of the pre-state leadership, nor the support of the *Mapai* mainstream of the party.<sup>67</sup> His government would communicate its business clearly; his ministers would have a clear and visible mandate.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Dan Pattir, 3.8.2010.

<sup>66</sup> Lewis Brownstein, "Decision Making in Israeli Foreign Policy: An Unplanned Process," Political Science Quarterly 92.2 (1977).

<sup>67</sup> Rabin's leadership victory had been far from assured, and had nearly been torpedoed by Ezer Weizman's sensational revelation that he had suffered a nervous breakdown in the days before the outbreak of war in 1967. See, for example: Zeev Chafets, Heroes and Hustlers, Hard Hats and Holy Men: Inside the New Israel (New York: Morrow, 1986) 46.

<sup>68</sup> Smith, "Rabin's New Government: Control Passes Irrevocably from Generation of Founders to the Native-Born."

Perhaps most important, though, was the fact that Rabin was new to politics. He had only returned to Israel a year earlier, and had been catapulted into ministerial office, and then to party leadership and the premiership. Finding his feet, and with significantly more pressing matters to address, the continued existence of the Ministry of Information resulted primarily from a lack of decision to the contrary. Yariv was a natural choice for the role, but he unfortunately did not want the job. He had agreed to join the Labour list for the Knesset in 1973 in order to add some new faces to a largely unchanged party, but hoped to continue behind the scenes, advising on counter-terrorism affairs.<sup>69</sup> He did not hide his discomfort at agreeing to serve as Minister of Information. Within weeks of taking office, the gossip columnists were describing him as part of a 'frustrated minority' in the government, whilst leader writers noted that he was 'having very serious second thoughts about the point of having an Information Ministry at all'.<sup>70</sup> To his credit, his doubts and frustrations did not interfere with the work of establishing the ministry. He successfully averted the first challenge, a pay dispute at the Israel Broadcasting Authority that threatened to halt television and radio broadcasts.<sup>71</sup> He faced two much more serious problems, though, on the question of his ministry's budget and on the implementation of the Peres-Eban agreement with the foreign ministry, now

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<sup>69</sup> As Meir's counter-terrorism adviser, Yariv had taken a leading role in the planning of Mossad's Operation Wrath of God to target the assassins of 13 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. He had also led the Israeli team at the Kilometre 101 ceasefire talks with Egypt after the 1973 war.

<sup>70</sup> Mira Auerbach, "'The Frustrated Minority' around the Cabinet Table [Hebrew]," *Yediot Ahronot* 6 August 1974, "Information Problem Unsolved," *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review* 16 August 1974.

<sup>71</sup> Ernie Meyer, "Administrative Staffers' Strike Cancels Radio Shows," *The Jerusalem Post* 12 July 1974, "Sons of the Founders."

headed by Yigal Allon.<sup>72</sup> Underlying these was the unanswered question of the mandate Ministry of Information was to have, and the role of the Minister of Information himself. 'What is the information minister supposed to do?', he quizzed a senior foreign ministry official.<sup>73</sup>

In early August, the new cabinet approved proposals to reduce government spending by IL940m, a 15 percent cut across all government departments.<sup>74</sup> With Israel's foreign currency reserves badly depleted after the war, cuts were necessary to fund additional defence expenditure, including construction of fortifications on the new front lines, shelters and bunkers in border settlements and security fences in the north. The finance minister, Yehoshua Rabinowitz, also called on Israeli citizens to moderate their consumption in order to prevent a further round of cuts.<sup>75</sup> The Ministry of Information alone survived, Yariv having asked for a separate discussion of the proposed I£3m reduction of his ministry's budget.<sup>76</sup> In the meanwhile, the public debate continued over the fate of the ministry:

'The noose is tightening around Aharon Yariv's neck. Ever since he took the appointment that he asked not to receive, he has been fighting with shortages: no office accommodation, no budget, no staff, and worst of all – no authority'.<sup>77</sup>

At the end of the month, he argued his case, re-reading the text of government decisions to remind his cabinet colleagues that they had agreed to create a ministry that would 'coordinate domestic and foreign *hasbara* activities', that

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<sup>72</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5268/13. Yariv to Rabin, 4.8.1974.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>74</sup> "Cabinet Approves £91 Budget Cuts," *The Jewish Chronicle* 16 August 1974.

<sup>75</sup> "Sons of the Founders.", "Cabinet Approves Slashes in Government Spending," *JTA* August 12 1974.

<sup>76</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5268/13. Yariv to Rabin, 4.8.1974.

<sup>77</sup> Auerbach, "'The Frustrated Minority' around the Cabinet Table [Hebrew]."

would 'coordinate all *hasbara* activities' and that would be given 'all the necessary tools' to carry out this task.<sup>78</sup> If that were the case, he argued, he needed a clear allocation of responsibility for overseas information work, appropriate budgets and agreed work structures to ensure proper coordination. Losing I£3m from his budget would leave the ministry able only to fund its existing units. Rather, he claimed, the new ministry would need a budget *increase* of I£10-11m, if it were to do what the government and Knesset had said it should.<sup>79</sup> The cabinet agreed that there would indeed be an increase to the ministry's budget, the size to be determined by the prime minister. Yariv continued to battle for his ministry, appealing to the Ministerial Manpower Committee to define the ministry as an 'essential service', exempting it from a whole-government freeze on recruitment.<sup>80</sup>

On relations with the foreign ministry, Yariv initially stood firm: 'I am not ignoring the problematic nature of this issue, given that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is principally responsible for government activities overseas,' he told the cabinet in August. 'But I have no doubt that the cabinet and the Prime Minister were aware of this difficulty when they took the decision, despite everything, to create the

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<sup>78</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. 'The Ministry of Information', memorandum by Aharon Yariv, 27.8.1974. Yariv was referring to Golda Meir's announcement to the Knesset on March 10 of that year, and to Government Decision 402 of March 31.

<sup>79</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. The ministry eventually requested an additional I£12.5m, of which I£2.2m were intended for establishing a training school - the *Hasbara* Institute, I£1.5m for an Israeli news agency to provide wire stories for the international press, and I£400,000 for weekly opinion polling. See also: ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. David Farhi to Minister of Information, n.d.

<sup>80</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. Minister of Information to Ministerial Manpower Committee, 1.11.1973. The six-month freeze on recruitment for all government ministries was Government Decision 990 of 15.9.1974.

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Ministry of Information'.<sup>81</sup> He also charged that to strip his ministry of meaningful foreign information work was to subvert the wishes of Knesset members who had voted for the creation of the ministry in the clear understanding that it would deal with foreign, and not just domestic, information. 'Whether explicitly or implicitly, they opposed a ministry that would deal only with domestic audiences, for fear that it would become a "ministry of propaganda",' he argued.<sup>82</sup>

Foreign Minister Yigal Allon was determined not to allow his ministry's position to be eroded by the new creation, but he had no particular enthusiasm for engaging foreign opinion-formers.<sup>83</sup> This was a missed opportunity for Israel's information efforts. Following the Six Day War, Allon had formulated a pragmatic approach to the question of the Palestinian territories, rejecting both the Greater Land of Israel camp's messianically-infused territorial maximalism and the advocates of full withdrawal on the left. His concept of defensible borders, neither a return to the borders of 5 June 1967 nor full annexation, was the only one to be named for its inventor as the Allon Plan, indicating both his and its credibility.<sup>84</sup> Although never formally adopted by the Israeli government, it formed the basis of Israel's diplomacy with King Hussein and with the wider international community.<sup>85</sup> Thus Allon's natural reticence to engage foreign opinion-formers, borne of a the disappointments

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<sup>81</sup> 'The Ministry of Information', memorandum by Aharon Yariv, 27.8.1974. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3.

<sup>82</sup> 'The Ministry of Information', memorandum by Aharon Yariv, 27.8.1974. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3.

<sup>83</sup> Allon avoided contact with the foreign press, only once briefing the foreign press corps during his tenure at the Foreign Ministry. Interview with Amnon Dankner, 18.7.2010.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>85</sup> Avi Shlaim, Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace (London: Allen Lane, 2007) 287 ff.

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of a career which peaked in 1948 at the age of only 31, denied Israel of an important voice at a critical period.<sup>86</sup>

According to the Peres-Eban document, the Ministry of Information was to give 'professional direction' to Israeli diplomats on issues of information work. In the ongoing discussions of the document, information ministry officials took an ambitiously wide view, proposing that 'professional direction' should mean 'overseeing, advising and directing the content and working methods of all issues that the Ministry of Information deals with'. Here, again, the hand of Hareven can be seen. A year earlier, whilst heading the Foreign Ministry's information department, Hareven had drafted a paper on 'Israel's Foreign Delegations', in which he argued for a radical change in approach:

The traditional concepts with regard to diplomatic work are those of representation and liaison. However, the particular problems that the State of Israel faces require a significant change in this thinking. States generally act according interests. Israeli diplomats who restrict their work only to representation and liaison will find it difficult to achieve their objectives, since the interests of the states in which they are serving will determine how that state acts. ...in order to influence decisions, their work must change from formal contacts with foreign ministries to informal contact with target audiences.<sup>87</sup>

Allon rejected Hareven's proposal, instructing his officials maintain their traditional work patterns. He also worked to limit the influence of the Ministry of Information, which would undoubtedly have sought to engage wider audiences in the kind of 'informal' contact envisaged by Hareven. The foreign ministry's position was

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<sup>86</sup> Shapira, *Yigal Allon, Native Son: A Biography*. Shapira, Allon's sole biographer, briefly summarises Allon's entire post-1948 life as an epilogue entitled, tellingly, 'The End of Things'.

<sup>87</sup> "Israel's Foreign Delegations: Work Plan" (draft), n.d. Private Papers of Alouph Hareven. The draft paper has appended comments by Meir Amit, the former Mossad and military intelligence chief, dated August 1973.

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that the information ministry should have a far more limited role of 'technical training, guidance and advice in working methods such as the organisation of a card index, and improving distribution of material to different target audiences'.<sup>88</sup> This was hardly surprising, given the deep-rooted hostility towards the idea of a separate ministry, described by one diplomat as 'an exercise in futility, a sign of weakness, an abdication of responsibility'.<sup>89</sup>

The decision on defining the scope of each ministry's work was taken at the meeting of the cabinet on 1 September, with Rabin deciding to maintain the status quo. The situation was formalised in a meeting between Rabin and Yariv two days later, with Yariv agreeing to the following division of labour: 'Ministry of Information to coordinate domestic *hasbara*; Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be responsible for all *hasbara* overseas. Ministry of Information to assist by providing *hasbara* materials.'<sup>90</sup>

This was a major blow for Yariv, and for the successful establishment of a separate ministry of information. Both he and Peres had rightly insisted that the ministry's mandate, as agreed by both cabinet and Knesset, included both foreign and domestic information affairs. His failure to wrest any meaningful responsibility for overseas information efforts from the foreign ministry resulted in its demise only a few months later.

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<sup>88</sup> 'Interim Conclusions (2) on Relations Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Information', 19.7.1974, p.3. ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Eytan Bentsur, 19.7.2010.

<sup>90</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5269/3. "Issues for Discussion with the Prime Minister at Next Meeting", 3.9.1974. Appended to the agenda is Yariv's handwritten note of talking points for the meeting. See also: ISA/RG 44/5268/13. Yariv to Cabinet Secretary, 15.10.1974, 'Division of Responsibility between Ministry of Information and Ministry of Foreign Affairs'.

'We should not have unrealistic expectations'

Yariv's negotiations had resulted in a highly circumscribed mandate for his ministry, but he had succeeded in preserving, and even extending its budget despite Israel's dire post-war economic situation. With this, he got to work, instructing his Director-General, David Farhi, to set about establishing the bones of the ministry. Farhi established a bewildering array of discussion fora – the Government *Hasbara* Forum, the Ministerial Management Forum, the Heads of Branches Forum, the Film Committee, the Foreign and Domestic Journalists' Monitoring Committee, the Publications Committee and the Project Authorisation Committee.<sup>91</sup> Some met as scheduled, others met only once. There was some progress in coordination between the Ministry of Information and other ministries.<sup>92</sup> He then submitted an outline of the proposed organisational structure to the minister in early September, based on four divisions. Three already existed – the *Hasbara* Centre and the Israeli Film Service, from the Ministry of Education and the Government Press Office from the Prime Minister's Office. The new unit, an analysis and research branch, was established under Alouph Hareven. Strongly influenced by the IDF intelligence research and production division from which he, Farhi and Yariv had all come, the unit was to be a 24-hour newsroom that collated and analysed domestic and international media output, and disseminated its findings to government ministries

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<sup>91</sup> Israeli, Flowers for David: In Memory of David Farhi [Hebrew] 143.

<sup>92</sup> Relations between the Ministries of Information and Defence were delineated clearly, whereas there was difficulty in finding way of working with the Israel Broadcasting Authority, a statutory body independent of government. Ministry of Finance, Finance Minister's Comments on the State Comptroller's Annual Report No. 25, 25.4.1975 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: 1975), 110. See also: ISA/RG 44/G/5207/9. Hareven to Director of Military Intelligence's Assistant for Research, n.d., 'Proposal for Cooperation between Military Intelligence and the Ministry of Information.'



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and other official bodies.<sup>93</sup> Fudging the delineation of responsibilities with the Foreign Ministry, Hareven proposed to analyse both the domestic and the international press using both the wire services and military intelligence's open-source collections unit, *Hatzav*.

Another innovation was the establishment of an Israeli news agency, the Israel News Service, whose target audience was the 120 permanent foreign correspondents and the 200 part-time local 'stringers' who were registered with the Government Press Office.<sup>94</sup> The service would provide a daily bulletin of 'quotable semi-official thinking', competing with the Egyptian news agency MENA, and the Palestinian news agency WAFA.<sup>95</sup> The material would be produced by an impressive team of Israeli journalists: Ari Rath and Erwin Frankel of the Jerusalem Post as news editors, Hagai Eshed of *Davar* as political commentator, Daniel Bloch of *Davar* covering domestic and economic affairs, Ehud Yaari of *Davar* and *Galei Zahal* radio as Middle East and Palestinian affairs and Zeev Schiff of *Haaretz* as military and security correspondent. A regular stream of credible analysis, independent of government thinking but with good access to government sources, would have been a valuable resource for foreign correspondents. However, no proper budget was drawn up and the project never got further than a discussion paper before the Information Ministry folded in early 1975.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5270/9. 'Monitoring Department – Work Plan', Alouph Hareven to Minister and Director-General, Ministry of Information, 29.10.1974.

<sup>94</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5270/10. "Israel News Service", David Farhi to Minister of Information, 4.12.1974.

<sup>95</sup>Israeli, Flowers for David: In Memory of David Farhi [Hebrew] 148.

<sup>96</sup> Finance, Finance Minister's Comments on the State Comptroller's Annual Report No. 25, 25.4.1975 [Hebrew], 112.

Alouph Hareven, the creative force behind the ministry, continued to confront the issues that others had avoided, quietly, sensibly and without any prospect of success. In December, he wrote a note to Yariv about the tendency of the Israeli media to write about *hasbara* in a negative light. He drew up a plan of action, scheduling a series of meetings with editors and leading journalists. 'It is clear to me that we should not have unrealistic expectations in this field,' he wrote, 'but instead of arguing with a tough customer it would be better to try and develop a conversation with him.'<sup>97</sup> He re-established the relationship with the Institute of Applied Social Research and the Hebrew University, commissioning research on the 'average Israeli'. His conclusion was that, since 'I do not know who the "average Israeli" is', it was important to find the 'abnormal' Israelis – those whose resilience would make them useful opinion-leaders, and those whose vulnerabilities needed special attention. He recommended that the Prime Minister or Minister of Information appear at least once a month on television and, 'in simple language explain where we are and where we are going in the two areas that most worry the public: the conflict and the economic system.'<sup>98</sup> He also received polling data from Gallup on European attitudes towards Israel and the Arabs.<sup>99</sup>

Despite Hareven's work, the ministry was wilting for lack of political patronage, and Rabin's reticence was deliberate. In July 1974, in an interview on *Galei Zahal* radio, Yariv had made the startling declaration that Israel did not exclude the

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<sup>97</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5207/9. Hareven to Yariv, 22.12.1974, 'Explaining *Hasbara*'.

<sup>98</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5207/9. Hareven to Yariv, 12.1.1975, 'The Average Israeli – and current problems.' The Institute of Applied Social Research was headed by Louis Guttman and Elihu Katz, who had previously provided Yisrael Galili with research data.

<sup>99</sup> ISA RG 44/G/5270/12. '*Hasbara* Briefing – Gallup Poll on European Public Opinion on Israel and the Arabs', 6.1.1975. See also: "Yariv: Fatigue in Europe About the Middle East [Hebrew]," *Maariv* 23 January 1975.

possibility of negotiating with the Palestine Liberation Organisation if it recognised Israel, accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242 as a basis for negotiations and renounced terrorism.<sup>100</sup> He repeated his remarks on his first official visit as information minister to Washington.<sup>101</sup> This was a marked departure from the policy of Meir's government, which had denied that Palestinians had a distinct national identity, let alone described terms for negotiations. 'The claim that such a people existed was, in her eyes, an underhand ruse whose aim was the elimination of the State of Israel by creating in its place the secular democratic state that the PLO was fighting for,'<sup>102</sup> recalled one government minister.

Yariv's position had developed over time, and was particularly influenced by his term as counter-terrorism adviser to Meir. He found it increasingly unrealistic that Israel would be able to defeat Palestinian terrorism without entering political dialogue with the more moderate Palestinians. He found an ally in health minister Victor Shem-Tov, leader of the left-leaning *Mapam* faction of the Labour Party, although their thinking developed quite separately.<sup>103</sup> The Shem-Tov-Yariv formula, as it became known, was powerful because its two sponsors brought different, complementary strengths to the idea:

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<sup>100</sup> "Rabin's Troubled Start." See also: "Israel Slashes Government Spending," Kansas City Jewish Chronicle 16 August 1974.

<sup>101</sup> Shem-Tov, One of Them [Hebrew] 88. Yariv returned from the US convinced that the Ministry of Information should be responsible for work overseas, telling one American-Jewish leader that 'I am doing my utmost here to try and change the base attitude of the Government on this crucial subject.' ISA/RG 44/G/5268/13. Yariv to Moshe Decter, 16.12.1974.

<sup>102</sup> Shem-Tov, One of Them [Hebrew] 94. It was Yariv's predecessor as minister of information, Yisrael Galili, who most strongly influenced Meir's thinking on the question of Palestinian national identity – which he strongly rejected.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Victor Shem-Tov, 5.7.2010.

'Gen. (ret.) Aharon Yariv brought the formula the depth of strategic thinking, his credentials as a military man – a former Director of Military Intelligence, and the credibility of an academic researcher. I added the ideological, principal and historical perspective on the Arab-Jewish conflict from the school of *Hashomer HaTzair* and *Mapam*'.<sup>104</sup>

Yariv's statement on talks with the PLO was immediately dismissed by Rabin who told the Foreign Press Association 'I see no reason why Israel should negotiate with any organization that is its worst enemy and has as its aim the destruction of the state of Israel'.<sup>105</sup> This single act may have wrecked a promising political career, so strongly was he associated with it.<sup>106</sup> A week later, the Palestinian issue was brought to the cabinet, which unanimously reaffirmed its policy of negotiating with Jordan in pursuit of a two-state solution – Israel and a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation - and rejected negotiations with the PLO outright.<sup>107</sup>

### Dismantling the Ministry

Yariv now spoke openly of his willingness to leave government, although he continued to defend the work of his ministry, calling for greater efforts in the United States to counter an erosion of support for Israel.<sup>108</sup> His speech to the Knesset on 22 January was both an encomium on the work the ministry had done in 1974, and a thinly-veiled complaint about the frustrating process of securing both a clear

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<sup>104</sup> Shem-Tov, One of Them [Hebrew] 88.

<sup>105</sup> Terence Smith, "Rabin Bars Any Talks with Palestinians," New York Times 16 July 1974.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Mike Herzog, 28.6.2006.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Victor Shem-Tov, 5.7.2010. See also: Shem-Tov, One of Them [Hebrew] 98-101.

<sup>108</sup> Yoel Dar, "Yariv Prepared to Leave Government and Return to Army [Hebrew]," Yediot Ahronot 20 December 1974, "Yariv: Information in US Must Be Improved," The Jerusalem Post 20 December 1974.

mandate and a budget for the ministry: 'When I was appointed as Minister of Information I found it was necessary to clarify and confirm once again the sphere of authority of the Ministry of Information, the resources that would be made available to it and even the fact of its very existence'.<sup>109</sup> It was also his final formal act as minister.

His disagreements with Rabin ran far deeper than the vicissitudes of establishing the ministry. Yariv's short parliamentary career showed him to be intellectually honest, innovative and inclined towards reform on one hand, and, on the other, a rebel unwilling to accept the 'eunuch's role in Israeli policymaking' that a cabinet seat gave him.<sup>110</sup> In both regards, he was not content to 'muddle through', implementing incremental reforms from a limited set of options.<sup>111</sup>

Within weeks of taking his Knesset seat, Yariv co-sponsored a bill for far-reaching reforms to the Israeli electoral system.<sup>112</sup> Authored by Minister of Transport Gad Yaakoby, the proposals included diluting Israel's pure system of proportional representation in order to concentrate votes in a smaller number of parties.<sup>113</sup>

Yaakoby and Yariv also brought proposals to the Cabinet for 'procedures for systematic follow-up of Cabinet decisions, detailed examinations of major foreign

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<sup>109</sup> Aharon Yariv to the Knesset, 22.1.1975. *Divrei HaKnesset*, vol. 42, cols. 1430-1434.

<sup>110</sup> "A Touch of Gloom, a Hint of Peace," *Time* February 10 1975.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Shlomo Gazit, 1.6.2005. On leaving politics in 1977, Yariv established the influential Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University, the first independent think-tank and policy institute in Israel, which he led until his death in 1994.

<sup>112</sup> Gad Yaakoby, "The Electoral System and Governance: The Need for Change [Hebrew]," *Kivvunim Hadashim* 14 (2006). The proposal was brought to the Knesset plenum on 4 April 1974, where it was defeated.

<sup>113</sup> Gad Yaakoby and Ehud Gera, *The Freedom to Choose [Hebrew]* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975). Israel is one of a very small number of countries that use a pure system of proportional representation with a single, national constituency. See: Sheila Hattis-Roleff, *Proposals for Changes to the System of Governance and Electoral System in Israel: A Survey [Hebrew]* (Jerusalem: The Knesset, Centre for Research and Information, 2010), 12.

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policy and defence issues and the submission of prepared position papers, including options and alternatives, prior to Cabinet meetings', which were discussed and adopted, but not implemented.<sup>114</sup>

Thus far for Yariv the reformer. Yariv the rebel infuriated Rabin by working privately and publicly to widen the coalition by bringing *Gahal* back into government, against the prime minister's wishes.<sup>115</sup> In early December, he signed a public petition calling for a national unity government, noting that the government had not formally ruled out such a move in his defence.<sup>116</sup> Yariv objected to Rabin's reticence in clarifying the relationships between the prime minister, defence minister and IDF chief of staff, a failure which had been strongly criticised by the Agranat Commission. Despite a commitment to create a ministerial defence committee that would oversee important decisions, Rabin dragged his feet, fearing that it would encumber policy-making, rather than make it more efficient. In the meanwhile, 'Israel's top-level security decision-making machinery remained as rickety as ever'.<sup>117</sup> Yariv was also sceptical about Rabin's pursuit of further interim agreements with Egypt and, as noted earlier, had articulated clear conditions for opening dialogue with the PLO, to Rabin's fury.

There was also a personal element to Yariv's impatience. Despite his dislike of Meir's 'kitchen cabinet' politics, Rabin had replicated the system in his own administration. His inner circle of advisers – of whom only Allon and Galili remained

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<sup>114</sup> Terence Smith, "Yariv Resigns Israeli Information Post," New York Times 30 January 1975.

<sup>115</sup> Gidon Samet, "Questions for Aharon Yariv [Hebrew]," Haaretz 5 December 1974.

<sup>116</sup> "The Minister of Information's Extraordinary Act [Hebrew]," Davar 5 December 1974.

<sup>117</sup> Van Creveld, The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israel Defense Force 250.

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from Meir's administration – did not include Yariv. Frustration at being excluded from the highest levels of decision-making was an additional factor in his decision to quit. For his part, Rabin found fewer reasons to side with Yariv than with Allon, his *Palmach* comrade-commander. It was, according to one observer, no choice at all.<sup>118</sup> Yariv was bitterly disappointed, describing Rabin as 'not a *mentsch*.'<sup>119</sup> He called a press conference on 30 January, and was excoriating in his criticism, describing Rabin's leadership as 'inappropriate and inadequate to meet the needs of the current situation'.<sup>120</sup> The next day, he wrote formal letters of resignation from the government to the Prime Minister and to the Cabinet Secretary, invoking paragraph 21(a) of Basic Law: The Government.<sup>121</sup> He also wrote personal letters to his senior staff, including admitting to Alouph Hareven that he had 'a feeling of guilt' about the way Hareven's work had been so little appreciated.<sup>122</sup> His personal aide, Michael Hauchner, wrote to a colleague 'indeed, Arahle's leaving the government is a loss to the entire people of Israel'. As for the ministry, he wrote, only time will tell. 'My feeling is that the whole thing will fall apart. I'd be happy to be proven wrong'.<sup>123</sup> He was not.

The dismantling of the ministry was swift: on February 2, Government Decision 431 dealt with Yariv's resignation. Exactly a month later, Government Decision 511 dissolved the Ministry of Information, and shortly after that Government Decision 535 returned the various units that had comprised the

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Meron Medzini, 30.12.2011.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, "Yariv Resigns Israeli Information Post."

<sup>121</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5268/13. Yariv to Rabin, 31.1.1974; Yariv to Cabinet Secretary, 31.1.1974.

<sup>122</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5268/13. Yariv to Hareven, 2.2.1974.

<sup>123</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5268/11. Michael Hauchner to Yaakov Ben Haim, 7.2.1975.

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ministry, largely to their original homes.<sup>124</sup> The debate following the final decision described ‘the parcelling out of the sad remains of the Ministry of Information, which breathed its last after a short existence that was short on results’. Yitzhak Shamir (Likud) continued: ‘No-one is under the illusion that this division of the spoils will give our *hasbara* strength and power’. According to Yehuda Ben-Meir (National Religious Party) ‘In a country where each minister sees himself as a spokesman on every issues, whether relevant to his ministry or not, no one minister could properly carry out the duties of Minister of Information, which include acting as spokesman for all ministers’.

In its short life, the Ministry of Information did more to expose the obstacles to cogent policy-making than it did to resolve them. ‘The possibility of establishing an efficient and coordinated ministry as a central authority for *hasbara* in the country turned out to be unobtainable given the Israeli reality of internal rivalries, bureaucratic competition, personal and party political power struggles and inter-ministerial competition.’<sup>125</sup>

### Conclusions

The creation of the Ministry of Information in early 1974 was unexpected. However, neither its failure to thrive nor its quick dismantling was a surprise. Several good reasons for not establishing the ministry were ignored, whilst several against it were dismissed. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the short life of the ministry was

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<sup>124</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew] 105.

<sup>125</sup> Yegar, Guvrin and Aryeh, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The First Fifty Years [Hebrew] 1055.



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influenced more by personal politics than by cogent policy-making, a theme introduced at the start of this thesis.

Firstly, Meir had long believed in the importance of Israel's international image. From her years in the foreign ministry, as Ambassador and as Foreign Minister, she had fought – often in vain, and against her own instincts for secrecy and distrust of the press - for a greater appreciation of Israel's international standing. As her power waned, she was able to implement a policy she had long believed in. For his part, Peres saw the new ministry as a springboard to greater things. He was right to do so. From the unenviable position of junior partner to the popular, charismatic and powerful Moshe Dayan in the small *Rafi* faction, Peres found taking Dayan's place at cabinet and recognised as second only to Rabin in the Labour Party. His term at the Ministry of Information was a stepping-stone, giving him important public profile at a critical moment.

Thirdly, Meir's patience with Abba Eban had run out after the Yom Kippur War. Less reliant on him than she had been in 1970, when she was close to taking responsibility for foreign information efforts from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she now moved against him. Eban, who had fought valiantly for the principle that the Foreign Ministry should retain responsibility, was defeated. Indeed, in a matter of weeks, he had been swept out of political life by Rabin, Peres and Allon, native-born, security-minded and from outside of the *Mapai* mainstream.

But the Ministry, born in such unpromising circumstances, was never likely to flourish. Peres' early work in defining its mandate and budget were initially impressive, particularly given the very significant other responsibilities he bore, but ultimately insufficient. Yariv, who took the ministry unwillingly and as an indication of

loyalty to his former commander, Rabin, soon found that the mission was impossible. He soon relented on the critical issue of handing international information, leaving him with a collection of already-existing units – the Government Press Office, the Israeli Film Service, the *Hasbara* Centre and the semi-autonomous Israel Broadcasting Authority – for whom a change of minister was no great novelty.

Were it not for Alouph Hareven, and – to a far lesser extent – David Farhi – the Ministry of Information would have achieved no original thought at all during its short existence. Hareven brought the rigour and precision of an intelligence officer and a Mossad operative to the Ministry of Information with great enthusiasm in early 1974. It was effort largely wasted. Hareven, who had been formulating the most original thinking in Israel on these issues for most of the preceding decade, in the IDF Intelligence Branch, in the Mossad, in the Foreign Ministry and in the Ministry of Information, turned his professional attention elsewhere.

Israel's failure to articulate effective policy in support of its national image is not an obscure, complex detail of Israeli political history. The problem of *hasbara* was then, and remains now, a real-life obstacle to advancing Israel's foreign policy interests. Reviewing the predicted death of the Ministry of Information, Nachum Barnea, then the Washington correspondent of *Davar*, wrote a prescient obituary:

We are, in effect, cutting the branch on which we are sitting. The political, military and economic aid we receive is closely linked to our ability to explain our policy to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences. The chance of creating hostile and effective public opinion to the rise of the Arab bloc is dependent on our ability to help those who think as we do. Money that goes to this is one of the safest investments that the Government of Israel can make at present.

The main problem of our *hasbara* in the United States is, therefore, not the creation of a new post for a *hasbara* ambassador, as minister for information Aharon Yariv has repeatedly been saying recently. When there is no fixed policy on important issues, and there is no money, the most charismatic

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ambassador cannot help. When there is policy and there are means, even the least of Israel's consuls, without over-exerting himself, can help.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Nachum Barnea, "The New World Order and Other Marginal Issues [Hebrew]," *Davar* 8 January 1975.  
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This thesis has examined the implicit challenge presented by the Israeli formulation of *hasbara* as an approach to communicating its national image to international audiences. The essentially reactive and passive nature of *hasbara*, described here as 'an imperfect lens' hampered decision making. The thesis largely points to the failures, rather than successes of the three Israeli governments in the period under review to communicate Israel's national image more effectively. Through focussing on five significant events in the period – the appointment of a minister with responsibility for information policy, the initiation of television broadcasts, the wars of 1967 and 1973 and the creation and dismantling of the Ministry of Information - the thesis has established the domestic sources of the two major obstacles to cogent policy-making. Firstly, certain features of Israel's political system, namely the opposing forces of 'activists' and 'diplomats' and a sense of 'perpetual crisis', allowed individuals to exert significant influence on policy-making, though not enough to determine clear policy. Secondly, and as a consequence, policy-making was often characterised by 'muddling through', a process of incremental changes taken from a limited series of options.

The essentially reactive and defensive nature of *hasbara* is a constant theme through this thesis. Galili's sharp policy turn on the nature of Israeli television, the establishment of a government commission of inquiry into *hasbara* in 1969 and Meir's decision to establish the Ministry of Information in 1974 illustrate this kind of thinking. Here, the deficiencies of *hasbara* are clear. It is difficult to achieve long-term aims from reactive, defensive policy initiatives. 'Television as a weapon', Galili's

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preferred choice, was soon replaced by the kind of Israeli television Elihu Katz had proposed, prioritising domestic social development over the dubious pursuit of engaging Arab opinion. Elad Peled's report, intended as a saviour for Eshkol's domestic reputation, almost entirely ignored domestic information efforts in favour of confronting Israel's international image problem, for which Galili had no ministerial responsibility. Meir's decision to establish the ministry are less clear, but its short-sightedness was immediately apparent. It is rare, on the other hand, to find examples of *hasbara* as a positive, constructive aid to policy-making and -thinking. The 'imperfect lens' of *hasbara* hampered clear thinking.

It is worth noting that the Peled Commission, the most comprehensive and still the most accurate analysis of the problems of *hasbara* and the limited options available within existing Israeli political structures, has been entirely ignored by researchers. A comprehensive search produced nothing more than tangential references to the report, and no scholarly analysis.<sup>1</sup> The same is true for the short and unhappy life of the Ministry of Information, which has yet to be the subject of scholarly review.

*Hasbara* has been badly treated by academia, reflecting a public and political discourse which dismisses *hasbara* as separate from, and sometimes as opposed to, Israeli foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> *Hasbara* is not a component of Israeli foreign policy in the scholarly literature. Brecher, 'perhaps the single most important study of the

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<sup>1</sup> Yegar, History of the Israeli Foreign Information System [Hebrew]. Yegar's chapter on the Peled Commission, like much of his useful volume, is descriptive and not analytical.

<sup>2</sup> Raz, "Review of 'the History of Israel's Foreign Information System'," 87.

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structure of the Israel's foreign policy setting' largely sidesteps the issue.<sup>3</sup> Where it is mentioned, it is an ethereal reminder of diaspora Jewish culture in contemporary Israeli affairs, often as disquieting and unwelcome as Banquo's ghost.<sup>4</sup> Given the way in which the political culture of *hasbara* impacted on policy-making on the issues covered by this thesis – a distraction, a distortion and an obstacle - this may not be entirely surprising. However, to focus on the deficiencies of *hasbara* – itself a national obsession in Israel - carries the risk of dismissing Israel's rational attempts to project a positive national image on the international stage. That, as Gilboa has also noted, is grave mistake.<sup>5</sup> This thesis contends, then, that the period under review illustrates that whilst the political culture of *hasbara* as discussed in the Introduction was a poor guide for that that attempt, and whilst policy may have been poorly conceived and implemented, the attempt to secure international support was and remains an authentic expression of a paradox in Israeli political culture, an authentic element of Israeli foreign policy.

As Femenia reminds us, we ignore the 'emotional' elements of foreign policy, including those regarding national image, at our peril.<sup>6</sup> As this thesis has illustrated, there is no question regarding the seriousness with which Israel took the questions of its international image in the decade of intensive, unsuccessful, attempts to formulate policy. Despite early attempts by the Zionist movement to diminish the

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<sup>3</sup> Zeev Maoz, Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security & Foreign Policy (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009) 500, Brecher, The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Setting, Images, Process.

<sup>4</sup> Dowty, "Israeli Foreign Policy and the Jewish Question.", Cohen, "Israel's Starry-Eyed Foreign Policy.", Klieman, "*Shtadlanut* as Statecraft for the Stateless."

<sup>5</sup> Gilboa, "Public Diplomacy: The Missing Component in Israel's Foreign Policy."

<sup>6</sup> Femenia, "Emotional Actor: Foreign Policy Decision Making in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War."

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connection between the Jewish people and the wider world by ending the dependency of one on the other, the history of Zionism ran in the opposite direction. Israel never aspired to isolation, splendid or otherwise. Yet, Israel was unable to shake off one element of the legacy of Jewish history, its suspicion of external forces. It is in this paradox, amongst the 'emotional' elements of foreign policy, that Israel's troubled pursuit of international support must be located.

Policy-makers will have to address the ways in which Israel can rid itself of the problematic elements – the instincts of defensiveness, for apologetics, for reactivity, whilst preserving the essential and rational impulse for seeking and maintaining a positive national image on the international scene. In the meanwhile, scholarly study of *hasbara* which accepts its rightful place in the context of Israeli foreign policy is appropriate and overdue.

The second argument of this thesis is that the political system acted as a further, domestic, constraint on foreign policy making. Here, the case is somewhat simpler. Firstly, within *Mapai* and its ideological orbit, dominant throughout the period under review, the 'activists' were powerful enough to block the 'diplomats', but not enough to entirely disregard them. This case is well established in the scholarly literature.<sup>7</sup> Yet, as Shlaim and Yaniv note, whilst Israel's chosen electoral system may have replicated and amplified the vibrant but gridlocked politics of the diaspora and produced governments that were mathematically representative but lacking in executive authority, it did not doom Israel to foreign policy failure.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "Ben-Gurion and Sharett: Conflict Management and Great Power Constraints in Israeli Foreign Policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 24 3 (1988).

<sup>8</sup> Shlaim and Yaniv, "Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy in Israel."

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This thesis applies the established activist-diplomat split to a new area, that of national image-making policy. There are identifiable echoes of diaspora Jewish political culture, where consensus and inclusiveness were an important guard when facing outside powers. More significant, though, is that indecision and deadlock were indicators that *hasbara* was not perceived as sufficiently important to fight over. When, as in the case of Meir's decision to establish the Ministry of Information, she was easily able to overcome these structural restraints.

This indicates a second feature of the political system that was at play. As Jensen has noted, there is greater latitude for personalities to impact on foreign policy-making when they are interested in foreign affairs and have the authority to make policy. Additionally, 'non-routine' situations and ambiguous, insufficient or overwhelming information increase the possibility that individuals will exert a significant impact on policy.<sup>9</sup> These conditions were routinely met with regard to policy-making in the period under review, as a result of both Israel's political *structure*, which grants high levels of autonomy to individual ministers, as well as the often uncertain and ambiguous political *environment*, where expertise in foreign and defence matters are prized. Amongst the personal interventions that hampered cogent policy-making, we should mention Eshkol's decision to appoint Galili to oversee only domestic information efforts, a distinction which was impossible to change later. Indeed, the appointment of Galili himself proved a greater obstacle than an aid to policy-making. Abba Eban was the principal block to the creation of a single *hasbara* authority, a step that could have addressed the fundamental problem of

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<sup>9</sup> Jensen, Explaining Foreign Policy 14-15.  
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*hasbara*. In the credit column, Gazit gripped the issue firmly during the 1973 war, Hareven, an Eban appointee, produced some of the most sensible - if largely ignored - policy proposals, whilst Peres' early work on the Ministry of Information in 1974 laid the groundwork for far greater success than events allowed.

Given the restraints on policy-making, it is unsurprising that 'muddling through' was a consistent theme during the period under review. As noted in the Introduction, the salient feature of Lindblom's model is that 'policy does not move in leaps and bounds', but rather by a series of incremental steps.<sup>10</sup> This 'never-ending series of attacks' on the problem of *hasbara*, sometimes in parallel, should be familiar from reading this thesis.<sup>11</sup> It worth reiterating here that this thesis does not side with the critics of 'muddling through' as a preferred alternative to more radical change. Firstly, concerns that such thinking would be exploited by the 'pro-inertia and anti-innovation forces prevalent in all human organizations', and that 'muddling through' would indicate 'a complacent acceptance of our imperfections' are roundly disproven by the evidence in this thesis.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, *despite* a consistent 'muddling through' of policy decisions, Israelis remained highly critical, refusing to accept the deficiencies of *hasbara*. Innovative forces, such as Elad Peled, Shlomo Gazit and Alouph Hareven were undoubtedly disappointed that their work was not more fully appreciated, but they continued to innovate nonetheless.

'Muddling through' was, in fact, often an effective approach to making government information policy. Given the considerable limitations on Israel in the

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<sup>10</sup> Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," 84.

<sup>11</sup> Lindblom, The Intelligence of Democracy: Decision Making through Mutual Adjustment 144-48.

<sup>12</sup> Dror, "Muddling Through: 'Science' or Inertia?," Arrow, "A Strategy of Decision: Policy Evaluation as a Social Process, Reviewed by Kenneth Arrow."

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1960s and 1970s, comprehensive and scientific policy planning exercises were neither possible nor desirable. Israel's press relations during the two wars in the period under crisis showed the benefits of 'muddle' – dynamic and responsive, and aware of the limited resources available. This is a new aspect of Israeli policy-making in wartime, which has largely escaped scholarly attention. Gazit's appointment as *de facto* minister of information in 1973 is the most extreme example of 'muddling through' encountered in this thesis; it could equally form the basis for a study of civil-military relations during national emergencies.

It is impossible to conclude this thesis without a glance to contemporary Israel and to current events. The historian's challenge is to find the essential nature of things, *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, without judgement or prejudice. It is to have von Ranke's eye for the universal as well as 'a pleasure in the particular for itself'.<sup>13</sup> This study offers an extra challenge to that undertaking. The study of *hasbara* is no dry academic subject, insulated from contemporary reality. It is, and will continue to be, a highly emotionally and ideologically-charged issue for Israel. No less than in the period under review, it occupies an important place in contemporary discourse. It is more than likely that Israel will continue to search for still elusive answers to the challenges of articulating and implementing an effective approach to government communications so long as no alternative is found to the restrictions, the distortions and the diversions offered by *hasbara*.

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<sup>13</sup> Fritz Stern, The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present, 2nd. ed. (London: Macmillan, 1970) 57-59.

## Appendix I – Interviews held by the Peled Committee, 1969<sup>1</sup>

### Interviews held by the committee in full, or by sub-committees

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
1. Abba Eban	Foreign Minister	17.6.69
2. Yehuda Ilan	Head, <i>Hasbara</i> Centre	6.11.69
3. Michael Elkins	Foreign Correspondent (BBC, Newsweek)	9.9.69
4. Shmuel Almog	Director-General, IBA	14.8.69
5. Col. Rafael Efrat	IDF Spokesman	3.9.69
6. Michael Arnon	Cabinet Secretary	23.7.69
7. Chaim Baltzan	Manager, <i>Itim</i> Agency	6.11.69
8. Yehuda Ben-Dor	Head, Instruction Centre	21.8.69
9. Eliyashiv Ben-Horin	Deputy Director-General, MFA	21.3.69
10. Mordechai Bar-On	Head of Youth and Hechalutz, JAFI	16.7.69
11. Arthur Bar-Natan	Israeli Ambassador, Bonn	24.6.69
12. Moshe Brilliant	Journalist (New York Times, Times)	28.8.69
13. Brig. Shlomo Gazit	Coordinator of Activities, Occupied Territories	29.9.69
14. Yisrael Galili	Minister responsible for <i>Hasbara</i>	6.7.69
15. Simcha Dinitz	<i>Hasbara</i> attaché, Washington DC	24.6.69
16. Gen (ret) Chaim Herzog	Military commentator	28.8.69
17. Dr Yaakov Herzog	D-G, Prime Minister's Office	10.6.69

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<sup>1</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report, Appendix I  
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18. Aryeh Wallenstein	Journalist (Reuters)	28.8.69
19. Yaakov Hezma	Lawyer	29.9.69
20. Rabbi Arthur Lelyweld	American Jewish Congress	31.7.69
21. David Landor	Director, Government Press Office	30.7.69
22. Dr Meron Medzini	Head, Government Press Office, Jerusalem	9.9.69
23. Yaakov Morris	Deputy Head, <i>Hasbara</i> Department, MFA	1.10.69
24. Eliyahu Salpeter	Journalist ( <i>Haaretz</i> )	23.7.69
25. Nachum Pundak	Journalist and foreign correspondent ( <i>Davar</i> and Scandinavian press)	9.7.69
26. Teddy Preuss	Journalist ( <i>Davar</i> )	23.7.69
27. Rabbi Joachim Prinz	American Jewish Congress	31.7.69
28. David Kimche	Lecturer	21.8.69
29. Dr Yaakov Reuveni	Lecturer	24.8.69
30. Gen (res) Yitzhak Rabin	Ambassador to Washington	18.5.69
31. Daniel Rosolio	Head of <i>Hasbara</i> services	13.5.69
32. Moshe Rivlin	Secretary-General, JAFI	4.11.69
33. Gideon Rafael	Director-General, MFA	27.5.69
34. Rabbi Herschel Schechter	Chairman, Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organisations	29.7.69
35. Moshe Sasson	PM's adviser on Arabs	29.9.69

## Appendix II – Peled’s proposal for an Information Agency<sup>2</sup>

### Proposal for reorganisation

The Commission formed the impression that the current situation is one of the deficient elements of *hasbara* activities, and has come to the conclusion that there is a need for reorganisation of the *hasbara* system.

### Assumptions

The assumptions for organising the *hasbara* system are:

1. The State of Israel is a democratic regime
2. One of the characteristics of a democratic state is the absence of ‘national guidance’ from a government ministry created for this purpose
3. The state of war that Israel finds it itself in requires a system that is efficient, quick and coordinated
4. The staff of the government communications system must be mostly professional
5. There is no distinction between *hasbara* in Israel and *hasbara* overseas
6. All *hasbara* activities overseas must be under the authority of the heads of the delegations, and guided by the central *hasbara* body in Israel
7. There must be an ongoing assessment of Israel’s international image, undertaken by a central body which will be responsible for bringing this assessment to the notice of the Prime Minister and the government.

### Responsibilities of the ‘Information Authority’

In light of these assumptions, the Commission recommends the establishment of an ‘Information Authority’, alongside the Prime Minister’s Office, whose responsibilities will be:

1. Collection of information regarding Israel’s position in international public opinion and presenting a regular assessment from the point of view of *hasbara*, to the Prime Minister and relevant ministers.

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<sup>2</sup> YTA/15/53/5/8. Peled Report , 39-40.

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2. Establishing major *hasbara* talking points and formulating main *hasbara* points according to different target audiences and diplomatic and security considerations.
3. Distribution of briefings and background material to operative *hasbara* bodies at home and overseas.
4. Ongoing research and continuous monitoring of our position in international public opinion with particular emphasis on checking the effectiveness, form, means and methods of *hasbara*.
5. Identification and enlistment of opinion-formers in different countries for individual, special *hasbara*.
6. Preparation of *hasbara* material for distribution at home and overseas (written material, audio material and different film clips for television and cinema).
7. Direction of different *hasbara* bodies (official and semi-official) at home and overseas (mass communications, Jewish communities, Jewish intellectuals, Jewish and Israeli students overseas, etc.) and encouraging *hasbara* activity by non-official bodies.
8. Preparation of material for explaining basic ideological questions.
9. Direction of *hasbara* 'responses' to ongoing events, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
10. Responsibility for hosting foreign visitors to Israel where it is important to brief them on *hasbara* matters.
11. Handling all representatives of the foreign press, television and radio stationed in Israel.
12. Direction of the *hasbara* bodies of each government ministry and of semi-official organisations, such as the Jewish Agency, the *Histadrut* etc., in the framework of general *hasbara* guidelines.

### Management of the 'Information Authority'

The head of the 'Information Authority' will participate in Cabinet meetings and in meetings of relevant ministerial committees.

The head of the Authority will have ongoing, direct contact with the prime minister, foreign minister and the defence minister. It is possible that he will also be nominated as 'government spokesperson'.

It is possible that the prime minister will devolve some of his authority to another minister (deputy prime minister or minister without portfolio) who will be

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responsible for the issue of *hasbara*, without being called Minister of *Hasbara*, and without creating an independent ministry for that purpose (just as Minister Galili was given responsibility for the Israeli Broadcasting Authority).

The Authority will be managed by its senior managers, alongside which will be established a public advisory council, comprising professionals (newspaper editors, print, television and radio journalists, government spokespeople) and others.

The management of the Authority will comprise: the head of the Authority, the Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office, the Director-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representatives from the security establishment, the Director-General of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority.

### Structure of the 'Information Authority'

The Information Authority will comprise the following units:

1. Management
2. Overseas *hasbara* department: split into geographic units and functional units (for example: New Left, churches, etc.) Will work on overseas *hasbara* activity.
3. Domestic *hasbara* department: Will work on *hasbara* activity for Jewish residents of Israel. Will also have responsibility for events.
4. Arab *hasbara* department: Will work on *hasbara* for Arab residents of Israel and for Arab states.
5. *Hasbara* services department: Will include: Film Service, Publications Service, distribution and publishing services, performances department etc.
6. Press and hospitality department: Will deal with foreign journalists stationed in Israel and with those visiting Israel. Will incorporate the work of the Government Press Office, and some of the visits work of the Foreign Ministry in connection with *hasbara* officials.
7. Research department: Will collect information regarding Israel's image in international public opinion, identify global opinion-formers, etc.

## Appendix III – The Ministry of Information<sup>3</sup>

### General

1. The following proposed structure is based on the existing units and the tasks given to the Ministry according to the authorities defined for it by the Cabinet meeting of 1 September 1974.

### Management of the Ministry

3. The management of the Ministry will comprise the Director-General, Deputy Director-General (Administration), Comptroller and Spokesman.

### Departments of the Ministry

4. Below is a list of the departments and description of their responsibilities. The detail below refers only to changes to current description of responsibilities:

- a. Hasbara Centre
- b. Monitoring and Research Department: The head of the department will be responsible for the following units and for 'grey *hasbara*':
  - i. Monitoring and Feedback Unit: Will collate current information on Israel's image at home and abroad, will analyse the information daily and periodically and will present it to the management of the Ministry.
  - ii. Research Unit: Will implement and initiate research projects on issues of *hasbara*, its aims and its methods.
  - iii. Overseas *Hasbara* Materials Unit: Will prepare written *hasbara* materials for use overseas, as well as on placing radio and television programmes on foreign networks. The unit will operate the Israel Information Centres.
  - iv. Government Press Office: Will absorb the units dealing with foreign journalists from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
  - v. Film Service

See the appended diagram for structure

### Work patterns for management of the Ministry

5. The management of the Ministry will work according to the following for:

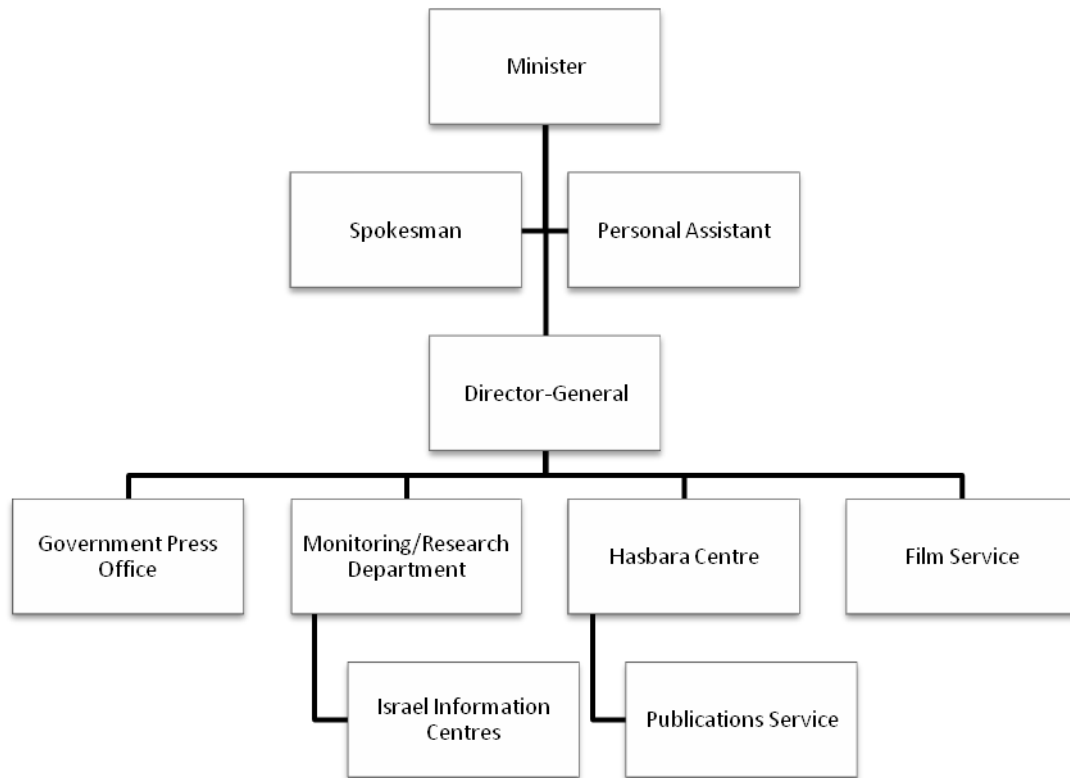
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<sup>3</sup> ISA/RG 44/G/5266/12. 'Structure of the Ministry of Information – Proposal for Discussion', 4.9.1974.



- a. Daily Information Forum: Meets daily each morning, headed by the Minister or the Director-General, to deal with the daily *hasbara* status and setting objectives, with the participation of:
  - i. Minister's personal aide
  - ii. Head of the *Hasbara* Centre
  - iii. Head of the Monitoring and Research Department
  - iv. Head of the Monitoring Unit
  - v. Director of the Government Press Office
  - vi. Ministry Spokesman
- b. Government *Hasbara* Forum: The Minister or the Director-General, heading government information work, will deal with questions of principle regarding *hasbara* policy and will convene the group every two weeks:
  - i. All participants in the Daily Information Forum
  - ii. Deputy-Director General for *Hasbara*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
  - iii. Director-General, Israeli Broadcasting Authority
  - iv. IDF Spokesperson
  - v. Chief Education Officer, IDF
  - vi. Spokesman, Ministry of Defence
  - vii. Representative from the Jewish Agency
  - viii. Deputy-Director General (Administration)
  - ix. Representative from Prime Minister's Bureau
- c. Ministerial Management Forum: Will convene monthly headed by the Minister or Director-General and will deal with the activities of the various departments of the Ministry, discuss administrative, organisations and operational matters. The forum will comprise:
  - i. Minister's personal aide
  - ii. Head of the *Hasbara* Centre
  - iii. Head of the Monitoring and Research Department
  - iv. Director of the Government Press Office
  - v. Head of the Film Service
  - vi. Ministry Spokesman
  - vii. Deputy-Director General (Administration)
  - viii. Comptroller
- d. Heads of Units' Forum: Will convene bi-monthly headed by the Minister or Director-General for general briefings on *hasbara* problems and reporting on the work of the units. The forum will comprise all heads of departments and units of the Ministry.

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