

Between Two Wars

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The State of Israel is currently in the midst of two wars.

The physical war which is being defined by many as a battle of Israel's continued existence as a state, and a war, no less dangerous despite not being the cause of casualties and wounds – The War of Perception.

I will describe the two wars from my personal and professional point of view as an Israeli citizen and as the Ombudsman for the Second Authority for Television and Radio.

The first is a terrible war.

In the dawn attack by Hamas terrorists on October 7th, 1,400 Israeli citizens were murdered, including women, children, the elderly and handicapped. In addition, over 3,000 citizens were wounded and 200 more were abducted and taken to the Gaza strip. Amongst the abducted were children, the elderly, the sick and Holocaust survivors.

There is no other way to describe the massacre carried out by Hamas terrorists than as a Nazi massacre. I will not go into the details of the extent of their cruelty, but I will say that it included the murder of entire families, burning, strangling, rape, dismembering, mass slaughter of young men and women who were participating in a peace rave, and more. In addition to mass murder and kidnapping of hundreds of residents and citizens, the terrorists looted their homes, taking whatever they could find.

Following this terrible massacre, the State of Israel embarked on a war to defend its citizens and to erase the Hamas reign of terror that has threatened it for many years. This is a war perceived by Israelis as a war for the existence of Israel. As I write these lines, there is concern that this war will extend to other arenas including the northern one, where the Hezbollah terrorist organization is located.

On a personal level:

During the horrific massacre, a number of my acquaintances were also murdered. These personal acquaintances included the daughter of a personal friend who was brutally murdered along with her boyfriend, the son of another good friend, who was shot while trying to protect his friends, and an intern student of mine studying media and communications, who was murdered at the musical event in the south.

Relentless barrages of missiles fall daily on Israeli cities. Four of them fell close to my home.

The situation is horribly, and there is no real sense of personal safety at all.

We have no idea what will happen next.

I may be included in an emergency drafting into the army, to protect my country and my home.

The second war has no death casualties or wounded. It is a war without blood, without borders and it is being waged all round the world. It is no less dangerous than the first war.

This is the War of Perception.

This war is going on in the media all around the world, and in the complex jungle of social media networks.

This war is trying to justify the horrific atrocities that befell the State of Israel and to present Israel as the bloodthirsty conquering perpetrator.

This war includes many videos that have been edited to show a presentation of the Hamas terrorists as humane. The terrorists are shown to be caring for the abductees and assisting them. However, the GoPro body cameras found on the corpses of the terrorists who were eliminated, reveal the horrific scale of the massacre. Both types of videos are distributed on social networks.

In addition, there are videos edited and manipulated by Hamas terrorists and their supporters, describing the supposed cruelty of Israel towards to Palestinians.

Fake news at its best.

Unfortunately, many of the global networks including experienced veteran news media with first rate professional journalists, fall into the trap of misinformation, by not checking enough, or being too hasty or not critical enough. These media outlets then broadcast what the other side "sells" them.

A typical example of this was the blaming of the Israeli military for firing a missile at the Al Ahly Hospital in Gaza, which caused the death of hundreds of innocent people. International news platforms were very quick to "adopt" the Hamas' fake information and accuse Israel of killing innocent people, without ever examining the facts. An examination of the facts did in fact prove that the cause was a failed missile of the Islamic Jihad Organization which fired the missile towards Israel, and which fell on the hospital causing the deaths. Sadly, even after Israel presented conclusive proof that it was the Islamic Jihad who caused it, some of the media platforms in the world continued to doubt the facts. Why let true facts ruin a journalistic story?

Though there may be room for criticism of the State of Israel and its military activity before criticizing, the facts must be examined and verified entirely, in the manner a decent, professional news outlet should carry out.

Israeli Media: to their credit, they are demonstrating professionalism and fairness, taking responsibility for the content they broadcast. Despite the great temptation, the Israeli media is refraining from broadcasting shocking, blatant content that is being spread throughout social media. On the contrary, they are highlighting instances of heroism of civilians and fighters and

paying tribute to every last murder victim. They are very careful not to report anything that is inaccurate or unverified. At the same time, they are trying to improve the morale of Israelis.

Many journalists of the Israeli media, risk their lives in the battle areas in order to bring the stories from the front.

In this current war, the Israeli media has proved mature and highly responsible. They are perceived as reliable compared to social media and public trust in the news reports is currently high.

And on a personal level:

Since the start of the war, the Public Inquiries department of the Second Authority for TV and Radio, has been operating in emergency mode around the clock. During these days of war, many of the citizens are glued to the television watching the news reports at all hours of the day and night. Naturally, many of them are feeling great anxiety which is expressed in their appeals to us.

Since the beginning of the war (14 days ago), the Public Inquiries department has received about 500 complaints. This indicates the high level of sensitivity of the viewers during this period. Most of the complaints demand that precise reports of the missile hits should not be mentioned so as not to assist the enemy. Others are outraged by statements made by some broadcasters and commentators that are perceived as devastating public morale. The department is in direct contact with newsrooms and broadcasting channels, examines the complaints and responds in a timely manner to these complaints.

We at the Inquiries Commission act as listeners to the plight of the applicants. We listen, we accommodate their difficulties and stress, we support, encourage and talk to some of them. As part of our emergency mode activities we examine their complaints and answer them as quickly as possible. So far, 90 percent of the complaints have received a response.

We also get inquiries that are unrelated to the broadcasted content. In their distress, people ask for help, and we do our best to help them. We consider this assistance our mission.

For example, I received an appeal from acquaintances of two Israeli citizens who were stranded in Australia, and requested to return to Israel early, after their relative was murdered in the massacre. Following my intervention, a free flight was arranged for them to return to Israel.

Another applicant requested my assistance in gaining a refund for a vacation package that he had acquired abroad. I did so.

The most painful request so far was from an acquaintance whose daughter was murdered, but her body had not been identified yet. He asked for my assistance in approaching the authorities to expedite identification procedures in order to bring her to burial by accepted Jewish customs.

I enlisted a number of friends to help him and a few days later, his daughter was identified and buried.

These are the facts of the 14th day since the war began, when this article was written.

No one knows what the next days will bring.

Here is to hoping for quiet days.