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## Analysis: Galant needs strategy for moral warfare

By GERALD M. STEINBERG

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Legal, political framing accompanies, even determines, outcome of 21st century wars.

Maj.-Gen Yoav Galant has the experience and qualifications necessary to be a successful IDF chief of General Staff, save for one crucial area. Like his predecessors, Galant has shown little understanding of the political, legal and moral framing that accompanies – and often determines – the outcome of 21st century warfare.

For over a decade, this shortcoming has severely affected the IDF's ability to defend the Israeli population from attack. But most of the time, only long after the damage was done, did senior officers, or the Defense Ministry, perceive there was even a problem.

At the end of September 2000, violent Palestinian confrontations with the IDF were staged in Gaza for political and media impact. That included filming what is now widely acknowledged as the staged "death" of Mohammed al-Dura in the arms of his father.

The footage (dubbed "Pallywood" by Prof. Richard Landes) was filmed by a Palestinian cameraman working for France 2 television, and immediately circulated the globe. Influential NGOs such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, together with local partner, B'tselem, led campaigns that wrongly condemned the IDF for killing this child.

The pattern of specious accusations regarding the killing of civilians – who were deliberately put in harm's way for precisely this purpose – was employed in the Jenin 'massacre' during Operation Defensive Shield (2002), the Second Lebanon War (2006), Operation Cast Lead (2008/9), the flotilla incident (May 31), and in many other examples. In each case, the IDF, totally unprepared, responded slowly and ineffectively to dramatic images of civilian suffering accompanied by allegations of systematic moral and legal transgressions.

Ten years after al-Dura, the Israeli military has still not developed a serious counter-strategy.

Galant was in the thick of many of these events during his IDF career, especially as officer in charge of planning and directing Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. Militarily, the operation was a major success: there were very few Israeli casualties, and the offensive largely ended the daily rocket attacks on southern Israel.

But Galant, like other senior IDF officers of the past decade, did not consider or develop a successful strategy to thwart the legal and moral distortions of this war.

During the war, hundreds of reports alleging numerous human rights and legal abuses were submitted. These were assembled in the UN's Goldstone Report, which called for legal proceedings and warcrimes charges against IDF officials and political leaders.

Nearly two years after the war, the IDF and Israeli government is still scrambling to counter these claims. In a few cases, it is belatedly filing charges in cases where appropriate.

Had Galant and the IDF officer corps, including current Chief of General Staff Lt.-Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, understood the political and legal battlefield before the war began, they would not have barred professional journalists from reporting from Gaza. This left the field to Al-Jazeera and to local stringers under the control of Hamas, so civilian casualty claims and accompanying war-crimes allegations were inflated.

Similarly, the IDF should have limited the use of certain weapons that create the appearance, if not substance, of excessive force, such as white phosphorous.

The operations in Gaza complied with international law, but, as in the case of al- Dura, the media images and distorted "testimonies" led by Human Rights Watch's Middle East division, created irreversible damage on the political battlefield.

On this new battlefield, the role of the IDF Spokesman's Office must be completely revised. Rather than an afterthought, this must become a fully integrated part of the battlefield, capable of winning the war with the anti-Israel NGO divisions on Facebook, Wikipedia, and Twitter.

As chief of General Staff, Galant will have to revise intelligence priorities, and develop the military tactics and strategy to face this new reality. This challenge is as important and difficult as any he will face from Iran, Hamas or Hizbullah.

*The writer is a professor of politics at Bar- Ilan University and heads NGO Monitor.*



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