

What is *Hasbara*?

Last week Ruth Yaron, a former IDF Spokeswoman, came to IDC to speak about the challenge of advocating for Israel among the nations. Many of the things she spoke about were very relevant to the recent terror attack and the way Israel is perceived in the world's eyes

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Ruth Yaron was the Chief Instructor of Israel's National Security College, the first woman to be an IDF Spokeswoman and currently, she is a consultant and lecturer in the field of national security and strategy. Many people came to listen to her; the classroom was so packed that the only available seats were on the floor.

At first, the audience was asked to give the English term for "*Hasbara*". It was difficult to find a fitting term and the closest possible was propaganda or advocacy. Yaron stressed how important it is for Israel to use this term correctly and gave the example of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla. Israel should have been first to react and spread the word about what was going on, however the government was not fast enough and kept looking for exact facts to publish and spread in the news agencies. In the meanwhile, the "other side" spread the word much faster, with video footage and pictures which will forever remain in the minds of Israel's biggest critics.

The main issue she decided to speak about was "change in Israel," which she divided into three categories. First of all, there has been a change in the nature of war. The Yom Kippur War was Israel's last conventional war; today, guns are not as prevalent in wars as they were before. Today the smart bomb is the human bomb.

The second change has been in the media. The media has greatly evolved and it is basically everywhere today. Yaron calls this the "Aquarium Effect," explaining that whenever there is a military operation the soldiers are surround almost 360 degrees by cameras. Therefore, as a soldier, you are fighting as if you are in an aquarium; nearly every move is caught on camera. She says *Hamas* is very talented in this type of forum; catching almost everything on tape and playing it for the world, making Israel look immoral.



Ruth Yaron speaking to IDC students

The third change is in Israel's society. She said that it is becoming a more normal society, where the military and the government are not above scrutiny. She explains that the State of Israel has Jewish and Israeli ethics, meaning that there are things that will just not be tolerated and this puts a plethora of obstacles on the society.



Going back to "*Hasbara*", Yaron says that it is a continuous campaign and as opposed to what many people think it is not "do something and then explain it." Israel is not good at this type of "*Hasbara*," according to her. Israel must be the first to tell the story, it must be quick at reacting and explaining to the world what is going on, as mentioned earlier in the Marmara incident. "Our enemy, Hamas and Hezbollah, understand this perfectly," she says. She gives an example of the "Jenine massacre", which occurred in 2002, where the Palestinian news agencies were the first to publish something, even though their facts were wrong. They told the story the way they wanted to and since this was what was first published it was also what people believed to be true, even though it was not.

Towards the end of her lecture, Ruth Yaron introduced a number of important questions/ cornerstones that must be brought to the open. The first question was "Why do we do what we do? Why do we need to fight in Gaza and Lebanon?" It is very important to answer this question and explain it to the world. "How are you doing it? Is it the right answer morally?" are two more important questions. Also, credibility is imperative, as she says; you cannot just give information without giving the right facts, otherwise, later on, you will have no credibility. Identification, too, is important, when talking about Israel and explaining the situation, one must also identify with it. According to Yaron, Israel is not quite there yet, at a point where it can explain Israel in a perfect manner to the world; it is getting there though.

Closing off, she emphasized how important it is for Israel to have

good policy and good advocacy, at the same time, because they go hand in hand; one cannot exist without the other. She said that Israel is a state in learning and it must continue fighting the "*Hasbara*" war and focus it on Europe and the United States.