How Israel kept truth flowing

ANALYSIS

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How Israel kept truth flowing without governmental restraint. The world media, hungry for information, needed to fill its newspaper pages and newscasts, was all too receptive. All that supporters of Israel abroad could do back then was sit back helplessly and worry, yelling at the television set. Even when the ability to mobilise support online was born, pro-Israel groups, lacking a media apparatus like Israel’s, were quick to embrace social media platforms, using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to spread their messages, while Israelis lagged behind.

But times have changed. The tweet that announced to the world the launch of Operation Pillar of Defence was followed by confirmation of the assassination of Hamas military commander Ahmed al-Jabari. Never before had an operation on this scale been announced on social media. Never before had social media so effectively informed the way major news outlets covered a conflict.

There is an army of local, national and international volunteers putting across Israel’s argument, each armed with a smart phone and each posting and tweeting Israel’s side of the story. Foreign university students at Herzliya’s Interdisciplinary Centre even translated advocacy materials into 23 languages. The result has been hundreds of thousands of followers around the world on pro-Israel Facebook and Twitter pages, and a far more successful circulation of Israel’s message around the world.

The results have been manifold. Tweets and Facebook postings play a significant role in breaking news, providing personal accounts and giving unprecedented access to places and perspectives previously unavailable to mainstream media.

For example, this week, social media brought to the world’s attention horrific images of Hamas gunmen publicly executing six suspected Palestinian “collaborators”, an unusual occurrence for the terrorist organisation currently running the Gaza strip, but one often hidden from view. Once filmed and tweeted, it was a feature on the majority of the major media channels.

Furthermore, slip-ups that would have gone unnoticed, such as photos of victims from Syria or even scenes of missile attacks in Israel being misrepresented as coming from Gaza have been quickly pointed out to reporters.

As a result, the international coverage of the Israel-Hamas conflict, while still somewhat slanted, has been far more balanced than in the past.

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