

# Public relations

By David Warren  
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My readers may not be entirely surprised to learn that I have never pursued a career in "public relations." I know people who have, however -- have known, for a long time -- and I am familiar with the risk-averse mindset, applied to the field of information.

"The best news is no news," a certain executive with responsibilities in this area once explained to me, "and every morning that I wake to find absolutely nothing about my company in the papers, is another fine day." He also mentioned that the best PR strategy is built into the ethos of the whole company: "We supply what you want, and there are never any problems."

There are different schools of thought, even within that old profession, however. I have detected the existence of a "pro-active" school. According to its tenets, you spread good news, purposely. An example of a company that did that was BP: years of "happy news" about the petroleum company's (minor and unprofitable) investments in windmills and photovoltaicism.

In light of recent events, it would appear the aggregate value of that effort was nil.

Countries are like companies in some limited sense, trying to preserve the polish on a brand name. There is a whole school of thought, in contemporary Israel for instance, that holds by the classic PR strategy: no news is good news. And indeed, it is hard to argue that a day without Israel on the world's front pages is like a day of sunshine, whatever the weather happens to be in Tel Aviv.

There is an alternative school that tries to call attention to underpublicized facts: that Israel is the one fully functional constitutional democracy in a region of sordid, murderous tyrannies; the only fully open society, in which Muslims, Christians and Jews are equal before an independent judiciary; that it has the only economy in the region not entirely dependent on foreign aid, and foreign resource extraction technology. But no one is listening, so why bother?

Of course, public relations departments would not exist if managers could not foresee days without sunshine. Things "just happen," for which one must be prepared. For instance: the flotilla that was sent, nominally to test Israel's Gaza blockade, really to give Israel a huge black eye, courtesy Turkey's Islamist-leaning ruling party.

There was no good response. Once you have psychopaths like the ones aboard the Mavi Marmara prepared, nay, hoping to become "martyrs" in the cause of hurting Israel -- there is no "nice" way to see them off.

Compare, if you will, the PR operation of Turkey's new ally, Hamas. It is quite the opposite of the classic strategy. The organization's propaganda states unambiguously that it exists to remove Israel from the face of the earth, by every means within its power. Meanwhile, it will control the lives of the Palestinians in its custody, executing any who gets out of line.

And the world queues to supply them with food and clothing and construction materials, thus freeing their budget for the acquisition of more weaponry.

Compare even the flotilla mission as an exercise in PR. It was brilliantly successful. The Israelis, thrown entirely onto the defensive, were condemned by almost every country but Canada, for having enforced an entirely legitimate blockade, recognized and supported by every Western country, plus even Egypt and the PLO, against an aggressor using illegitimate tactics. The United Nations' whole cumbersome apparatus of hypocrisy and deceit was then swung into gear, behind this aggressor.

The Israeli response has been classic PR. The Netanyahu government -- which will be dismissed as "fascist" no matter what it does -- is seeking ways to visibly "ease" a blockade that already allows anything not a weapon to pass through after inspection. Moreover, all this gratuitous aid to an enclave in which there is no current shortage of food, clothing or construction materials.

New flotillas are now being assembled under Iranian and Lebanese sponsorship. Their promoters do not hide their purpose: to attack Israel. Iranian propaganda openly denies Israel's right to exist, and dreams of a nuclear holocaust. And as one of the sponsors (the Palestinian businessman, Yasser Qashlak) declared, on Hezbollah television last weekend, Israel is "a dog infected with leprosy," whose people need to be "returned to Poland." ... "Even if our leaders sign peace agreements, we will not respect them."

The failure of Israel's allies -- including most signally the United States -- to speak unambiguously in Israel's defence in the face of such provocations has contributed directly to the prospects of war. Israel's enemies are encouraged to believe she is isolated, and therefore now is the time to strike.

There are moments when a PR strategy needs to be reconsidered. Cosmetic efforts are of no avail: it is time to speak directly to the existential issue, and prepare for the bloodbath, to which all policies of appeasement inevitably lead.