Escalating to Nowhere: The Israeli-Palestinian War

Rough Working Draft: Circulated for Comment and Correction

The Palestinian Tactical Response: Asymmetric Warfare and the Battle of Perceptions

Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy
Center for Strategic and International Studies

With the Assistance of Jennifer K. Moravitz

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Introduction

The reader should be aware that this is an initial rough draft. The text is being circulated for comment and will be extensively revised over time. It reflects the working views of the author and does not reflect final conclusions or the views of CSIS.
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XIII. The Palestinian Response: The Battle for Public Opinion and the Challenge of Reforming the Palestinian Authority

The previous chapters have shown that the Palestinian response to Israel’s tactics has been a mixture of political warfare and asymmetric violence. In the past, this has often led Israel and its supporters to point to the Palestinian leadership as insincere and as disguising their motives. Such charges, however, immediately raise the issue as to why the Palestinians should pursue any other course. Asymmetric wars are fought on the terms each side feels best suit their goals and objectives. When two sides have sharply asymmetric capabilities, they necessarily use different methods. Put differently, fighting the war on the other side’s terms means accepting defeat.

The Palestinian side of the Israeli-Palestinian War has also been divided into two major sets of forces that often do not agree on strategy or tactics and have sharply differing values. The mainstream of the Palestinian Authority has fought to win Palestinian statehood and sovereignty—although some within the Authority are convinced that some future struggle with Israel is inevitable. Movements like Hamas and the PIJ perceive the Israel-Palestinian War to be an extension of a permanent state of conflict where any peace or compromise will lead to a lasting defeat in the form of the permanent survival of Israel. While Israel has its own extremists and divisions, it has fought largely on a unified basis. The Palestinians have not.

Western values clearly oppose the use of terrorism and attacks on civilians, as well as the rejection of Israel’s right to exist. However, the analysis of war as war cannot be based on making value judgments that effectively legitimate one side’s military tactics in an asymmetric conflict by denying the other side the right to use force in the only means it has available. Terrorism, insurgency, and guerilla tactics are scarcely new. They have occurred in most wars in the West, and the moral and ethical difference between suicide bombing and conventional bombing or ground combat that produces civilian casualties is tenuous. As Chapter XI shows, the net impact of the war to date has also been to kill more Palestinian civilians than Israeli civilians, and the moral and ethical cost
of war must be measured in terms of the end result and not just the particular means used to achieve it.

**Suicide Bombings**

The key Palestinian counter to Israel’s conventional strength has been the same tactic extremists have used to undermine the peace process. Five weeks after Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount in September 2000 and the ensuing riots in the compound in Jerusalem’s Old City, an additional element was introduced into the Israeli-Palestinian War in the form of car bombings and suicide bombings. On November 2, 2000, a car bomb explosion, near Jerusalem’s popular downtown Mahane Yehuda market marked the beginning of a new wave of fatal bombings.

By early June, 2001, extremist Palestinian groups carried out at least nine suicide and ten car bombing attacks, and had left several explosive devices on roadsides. Their attacks killed a total of 51 Israelis and injured at least 630, not to mention the psychological damage of countless witnesses.\(^1\) While Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed responsibility for the majority of these attacks, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) claimed responsibility for a car bomb attack in the center of Jerusalem on May 27, 2001. In addition, there were several car and suicide bombings for which responsibility has never been clarified due to that fact that either no group claimed responsibility, or for which several groups claimed responsibility.\(^2\)

The extent to which the Palestinian Authority encouraged, turned a blind eye to, or attempted to prevent suicide bombers from perpetrating attacks has been the subject of near constant dispute since the start of the conflict. What has been verified, however, was that in the first days of the Israeli-Palestinian War, the PA leadership released a substantial number of prisoners known to have planned, or have been involved in, attacks including suicide bombings, against Israeli targets prior to the start of the war including suicide bombings. According to Israeli sources, the released prisoners—dozens of Hamas and PIJ activists—including Muhammad Deif, one of the men responsible for several bombings in Israel; Adnan al-Ghul, a top bomb-making expert responsible for several suicide bombings that swept Israel in February to March 1996, killing 59 Israelis; and Mahmud Abu-Hanud, another wanted man whose whereabouts remained unknown.
Israeli officials immediately charged that this mass release created an atmosphere for future bombings.3

There are, of course, a number of possible explanations for this release. The most widely speculated, however, was that the PA may have released the prisoners for internal reasons—in order to unify Palestinians of various political streams in light of an anticipated long-term confrontation with Israel. Another explanation was that perhaps it was simply in order to increase the pressure on the Israeli public and leadership.

As a result, it remains unclear whether the bombings can be classified as an “official” Palestinian tactic per se. Much depends on the actual degree of coordination between the Palestinian leadership on the one hand, and the organizers and perpetrators of the attacks on the other hand. It is most often near impossible to determine the PA’s role in such attacks since they are, for obvious reasons, reluctant to claim responsibility—at least to the international community.

Some analysts note that the number of attacks have declined after early June 2001, when international pressure on Yassir Arafat intensified following the suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv discotheque that killed 21 Israelis. At the time, Arafat had called for an immediate ceasefire.

Still others point to statements by Hamas and other organizations believed to sponsor terrorism following that suicide bombing. These groups stated that they would not adhere to a ceasefire and would continue with their attacks. The adherents argue that such statements proved that Hamas, and other groups not associated with the PA, were defying Arafat’s orders and thereby concluded that those organizations are not receiving orders from the PA, or might otherwise have grown more independent in the course of the Israeli-Palestinian War.

What has been clear during both the peace process and throughout the fighting is that individual anti-peace groups can often make successful use of such bombings for their own political purposes. It is conceivable that a group attempts to gain popularity or legitimacy by using suicide bombings or other extreme means, particularly when such actions enjoy wide popular support, and when other groups are perceived as too moderate.
The IDF has tried a number of different solutions to the onslaught of suicide bombings, from closures to increased patrolling of border areas, and from large-scale retribution and assassinations to a policy of restraint. None has been fully successful.

Continued suicide bombings in Israel have highlighted the effectiveness of such actions in asymmetric warfare. Confronted with a heavily armed conventional army such as the IDF, some Palestinian groups believe they have found at least one way to circumvent the conventional advantages of a militarily superior force. Unfortunately for both sides—they are not wrong.

The willingness of suicide bombers to die—and the willingness of those who sponsor, organize, and equip such bombers to sacrifice them—makes it extremely difficult to deter or defend against suicide attacks. At the same time, suicide bombings often succeed in causing physical destruction and even greater and more extensive psychological damage to their targets. They can thus easily serve as a powerful tool to inflict damage to any group of people, particularly a society such as Israel, which is very sensitive to the loss of human life.

**Mortars and Rockets Enter the Conflict**

Although the IDF has been able to keep the Palestinians from obtaining conventional artillery, it has not been able to prevent them from employing other, less accurate forms of long-range attack systems. The Palestinians introduced two new elements into the Israeli-Palestinian crisis in early 2001—mortar and rocket attacks.

Initially, Palestinians mortar fire concentrated on IDF outposts and Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip, though it eventually began reaching targets in Israel proper as well. On January 3, 2001, six mortar shells were fired at an IDF base near the disputed Shebaa Farms region on the Israel-Lebanon border. At the time, the IDF did not rule out that a faction supported by the PA was responsible for the attack, since the tactic was considered atypical of Hizbollah.4

On January 30, 2001, Palestinian elements in Gaza fired mortars for the first time. A mortar landed on the roof of a house in a neighborhood close the Netzarim junction. The IDF established that standard 82mm Soviet mortars and improvised 60mm mortars were being used. They labeled such attacks a “new trend” in Palestinian warfare and “a
clear escalation” in tactics. The 82mm mortars were believed to have been smuggled into Gaza from Egypt through underground tunnels near Rafah, or perhaps underwater by sea. The 60mm mortars appeared to be manufactured in the Gaza Strip, possibly with the help of Hizbollah. On June 21, 2001, a 120mm mortar round with a range of 4-5 kilometers—the largest type used since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian War—was fired on the Karni industrial zone. The mortar was also thought to have been made in Gaza.

The IDF attributed the introduction of mortar capability in large part to Massoud Ayyad, a lieutenant colonel in Arafat's Force 17 security force. Israelis suspected him of leading a Gaza-based cell of Hizbollah, and assassinated him in Gaza on February 13, 2002. While Palestinian mortar attacks have not caused extensive injuries or harm to infrastructure to date, they have acted as psychological weapons and have the potential to escalate a crisis. On April 17, 2001, for example, the IDF responded to Palestinian mortar fire targeted at Sderot—a town near the Gaza Strip and only a few miles away from a farm owned by Prime Minister Sharon—by mounting a 24-hour invasion of Palestinian-ruled areas in Gaza, destroying houses and military posts, and uprooting trees. This was the first time that mortars landed on a town in Israel proper.

In an interview with the Los Angeles Times on April 10, 2001 a Palestinian leader of a unit that carried out mortar attacks against Israeli targets described the rationale of Palestinian mortar attacks. Using his nom de guerre, Abu Jamal, the interviewee said that “it's true that it is not a very accurate weapon, but we don't actually care that it's not 100% accurate. Whether or not it hits the target, we want to create confusion and terror. We want the Israelis to think that their army cannot protect them.”

Mortars have also been used in more direct attacks. For example, in central Jerusalem on May 27, 2001, 52mm mortar shells shot from a vehicle landed unexploded on a porch of a house and in a public park hundreds of yards away. While mortar shells had been used before in bombs, up until this point, such attacks had all taken place in or near the Gaza Strip. The mortars used in the May 27 attack were thought to have originated in the West Bank. This was a grave concern for Israelis, for they had long feared that extremist Palestinian groups in the West Bank, might one day obtain mortars. Due to the proximity of Israeli population centers to the West Bank, they can be used to
inflict casualties and damages with considerably more precision than rockets launched from fire points in Gaza.

In another mortar attack on November 24, 2001, one IDF reservist was killed and two other IDF soldiers were wounded when Hamas militants fired mortar shells at the Gush Katif community of Kfar Darom in Gaza. This marked the first fatal mortar attack since the war began. It was not until one year later, on December 2, 2002, that another mortar was reportedly launched. This time one Palestinian was killed, and nine others were wounded, when members of Islamic Jihad launched two mortars at the Erez industrial zone in Gaza—clearly revealing the inaccuracies of such weapons.

These problems with mortar attacks also have been accompanied by rocket attacks. Palestinian militants began constructing crude unguided rockets in workshops throughout the Gaza Strip in early 2001. The initial model was designed and produced by Hamas and dubbed the Qassam-1, after Hamas’ military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades. The 79cm-long 60mm-callibur Qassam-1 had a 4.5kg warhead and a maximum range of 1.5-2 kilometers. The first Qassam-1 was fired on July 10, 2001, destroying an IDF bulldozer in the Gaza Strip. In October and November 2001, multiple Qassam-1 rockets were fired at the Israeli settlement of Gush Katif, IDF outposts around the Erez border crossing, and the town of Sderot in Israel, although none of these launchings caused any serious injuries or damage. 7

By early 2002, Hamas had developed and began production on an upgraded version of the Qassam rocket. The 180cm-long and 120mm-diameter Qassam-2 is capable of carrying 5 to 9kg of explosive payload and has an average range of 8-9 kilometers. The first Qassam-2 rockets were launched at Kibbutz Saad and Moshav Shuva on February 10, 2002. The relatively unsophisticated design of all Qassam rocket variants has made them fairly easy to produce using generally available components and makeshift facilities. 8

Although Hamas has been the principal manufacturer of Qassam rockets, both Hamas and Fatah’s Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades members have carried out Qassam rocket attacks. Israeli security officials allege that the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades has consistently supported Hamas’ efforts with the tacit approval of the Palestinian Authority. 9 In addition, by the summer of 2003 the Palestinian militant group Islamic
Jihad had developed and began launching its own type of rocket, called the Al-Quds, although these have been less effective than the Qassam series.¹⁰

As of late 2004, all rocket attacks have occurred in or originated from the Gaza Strip, although evidence indicates that Palestinian militants have been trying to extend the capabilities to manufacture Qassam rockets to the West Bank for some time. For instance, a truck carrying eight Qassam-II rockets was stopped at an IDF roadblock southeast of Nablus on February 6, 2002, and two rocket assembly workshops were uncovered by the IDF in the Balata refugee camp outside of Nablus later that month.¹¹ During an August 7, 2003 raid on the West Bank town of Jericho, IDF forces arrested eighteen Palestinian security personnel whom allegedly were setting up Qassam factories there.¹²

In total, over 350 rockets have been launched at Israeli targets in and around Gaza from mid-2001 to late 2004. Due to their simplistic design and haphazard construction however, the rockets have produced few casualties and little collateral damage. In fact, as of late 2004, only two rocket attacks have resulted in fatalities--June 29 and September 29, 2004 Qassam-2 rocket attacks on Sderot each killed two Israeli civilians¹³ Despite the minimal physical impact that launching rockets has produced, as in the case with mortar fire, Palestinian militants have continued to utilize this tactic due to the effect it has on the Israeli psyche.

**Using Peace and Ceasefires as an Extension of War by Other Means**

Terrorism and asymmetric warfare are not, however, the only key to the Palestinian tactics. Chairman Arafat responded to the outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian War as much by political means as military means because he had no real alternative. He sought to rebuild his image in the eyes of the Arab world and international community; maintain his influence over the Palestinian people; and survive Israeli military assaults. He fought back with both political statements and attempts to reform the Palestinian Authority.¹⁴ On December 16, 2001, in a speech broadcasted on Palestinian television, Arafat called for “a complete cessation of any operation or actions, especially suicide attacks” which provide Israel with a pretext for “military aggression.”¹⁵ In this speech,
Arafat repeatedly affirmed that the Palestinian Authority had always condemned suicide-bombing attacks.

This address marked the first time during the Israeli-Palestinian War that Arafat pleaded so broadly and visibly for an end to the violence against Israel. However, it was scarcely an altruistic appeal. Arafat was responding to the IDF effort to isolate him—by making a public speech that sought to place himself “above the fray” and removed himself as far as possible from accusations of being associated with terrorist networks. Arafat also acted due to increased pressure from the international community. In a meeting in Brussels on December 10, the EU’s foreign ministers told Arafat that he must “arrest and prosecute all ‘suspects’ and appeal, in Arabic” for an end to the Palestinian’s armed struggle. If Arafat wanted to maintain some degree of European support—he had to comply.

Arafat showed he then could still do much to curb the daily fighting, ambushes, roadside booby traps, and suicide attacks against Israel. As of December 21, 2001, Arafat detained at least 185 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad members—although only five were estimated to be among the top 36 on US envoy General Zinni’s “most-wanted” list and the other 180 were low-level Hamas and PJ members. Most of the 180 low-level militants were placed under “loose ‘house arrest.’” Then on December 12, 2001, Arafat shut down Hamas and PJ offices.

Arafat still mixed politics, however, with warfare. Only two days later, he withdrew the order. Moreover, he failed to confiscate the illegal weapons found in the hands of popular resistance committees, and Fatah-associated groups. There is also no evidence of a serious attempt to dismantle activities such as mortar-manufacturing factories and the smuggling infrastructure established across the Egypt-Gaza border.

This mix of political statements, arrests, and asymmetric warfare was typical of Arafat’s tactics in negotiating without abandoning armed struggle. Arafat had previously responded to Israeli and international pressure on a number of occasions by making token or limited arrests; while many militants on the Israel and United States most-wanted list were able to escape Arafat’s law enforcement. It is likely that some were not arrested because Arafat’s forces were unable to operate effectively, in part due to the damage they had suffered from Israeli forces. It seems more likely that Arafat simply responded to
Israeli pressure by offering a slight “crackdown” on terrorism—enough to help bolster his international credibility and maintain his support at home among the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian advantage, in exploiting political warfare has had a powerful impact in international relations and the world media, but it has its limits. Palestinian suicide bombings, for example, have a major detrimental effect on the Palestinian image. The series of Palestinian suicide bombings that culminated in an explosion in front of a Tel Aviv discotheque that killed 21 Israelis on June 1, 2001, drastically shifted the balance of world opinion in favor of Israel. The unilateral cease-fire announced by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ten days prior to the bombing, and Sharon’s decision not to take immediate military actions following the bombing, contributed further to improved relations between Israel and the West in early June 2001.21

The Haifa suicide attack in early March 2003 resulted in deaths of eight schoolchildren. This unfortunate situation swung public opinion toward Israelis and away from the Palestinian. Another suicide attack, in October 2003, that also occurred in Haifa, took place at an outdoor café, killing nineteen people and wounding fifty others. The café was owned by two families: an Arab family and a Jewish family. Likely since this was the case, the Palestinians lost some public sympathy due to the indiscriminate killing of both Arabs and Jews in a place where they seemed to coexist in relative harmony.22

Mohammed Aldura: A Case Study

The problem in assessing the ability of each side to exploit the “war of perceptions” is illustrated by an event that took place on September 30, 2001, only two days after the onset of the War. Mohammed Aldura, a twelve year old Palestinian boy, quickly became an iconic symbol of the Palestinian resistance. He and his father Jamal were caught between an exchange of gunfire between IDF soldiers and Palestinian demonstrators. Mohammed was shot and killed, and his father Jamal was paralyzed. The final few seconds of Aldura’s life were caught on videotape by Palestinian cameraman Talal Abu-Rahma, working at the time for the France 2 television network.

There are varying interpretations of the limited video coverage of Aldura’s death. Many, particularly in the Arab world, are convinced that IDF soldiers fired the shots that
killed Mohammed. Other pro-Israel sources claim that Palestinians fired the shots—either being an unfortunate result of crossfire or part of a grander staged event orchestrated to manipulate and influence international public opinion.\(^\text{23}\)

This has led to extensive disputes over whether the boy in the footage was or was not Jamal’s son, whether he was or was not shot, and if shot, whether the boy in fact died. For example, one article raises the following questions:

- Why is there no footage of the boy after he was shot? Why does he appear to move in his father's lap, and to clasp a hand over his eyes after he is supposedly dead? Why is one Palestinian policeman wearing a Secret Service-style earpiece in one ear? Why is another Palestinian man shown waving his arms and yelling at others, as if "directing" a dramatic scene? Why does the funeral appear--based on the length of shadows--to have occurred before the apparent time of the shooting? Why is there no blood on the father's shirt just after they are shot? Why did a voice that seems to be that of the France 2 cameraman yell, in Arabic, "The boy is dead" before he had been hit?\(^\text{24}\)

The chaos of combat often leads to such uncertainties and conspiracy theories, but timing also shapes the war of perceptions and the Palestinians benefited from the fact that pro-Israeli interpretations came after the fact. Soon after the footage was publicly released, the image of Mohammed was aired on Internet websites and television networks throughout the world—most repetitively on networks in the Arab world. He was instantly made into a “martyr,” in the Arab and Islamic worlds. Most Western networks and papers were generally careful to report that he was killed in “crossfire” or “an exchange of fire.”\(^\text{25}\) However, the scene of Mohammed Aldura, crouched behind a barrel with his father, has been compared to images such as the lone man challenging a tank in the Tiananmen Square uprising. Both images became compelling political symbols after being broadly disseminated via various media outlets.

Images of Aldura were disseminated globally on the Internet. In fact, the Internet’s global reach—made it an ideal medium for Palestinian use in the attempt to invoke international sympathy and support for the Palestinian plight. In effect, the Palestinians learned to fight an “Electronic” Intifada.

Israel also was slow to understand the political impact and question events. On October 3, 2000, after a rushed investigation, the IDF accepted that their troops were likely to blame.\(^\text{26}\) General Yom-Tov Savia, Commander of the IDF troops blamed for the attack, confirmed that, “it could very much be—this is an estimation—that a soldier in our position, who has a very narrow field of vision, saw somebody hiding behind a
cement block in the direction from which he was being fired at, and he shot in that
direction.”27 Israel was quick to complete the investigation and clearly wanted to put the
incident behind them. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon acknowledged that the video
was “very hard to see” and that Aldura’s death “was a real tragedy”—that should be
blamed on Yasser Arafat for instigating the war.28

In contrast, Palestinians and much of the Arab world made every effort to prolong
the incident and give it as much exposure as possible. Several Arab countries issued
postage stamps with Aldura’s picture—crouched behind his father moments before he
was killed. A street in Baghdad was renamed “The Martyr Mohammed Aldura Street,”
and a park in Morocco was named “Al-Dura Park.”29

According to Matthew McAlles ter of Newsday, “[Aldura’s] name is known to
every Arab, his death cited as the ultimate example of Israeli military brutality.”30 One of
the most abrasive Arab versions of the Aldura case was that “it proves the ancient ‘blood
libel’—Jews want to kill gentile children—and shows that Americans count Arab life so
cheap that they will let the Israelis keep on killing.”31

The harshest counter version from the Israeli side was that “the case proves the
Palestinians’ willingness to deliberately sacrifice even their own children in the name of
the war against Zionism.”32 Others from the Israeli side have argued that Aldura was not
really killed. Gérard Huber, a psychoanalyst and permanent Paris correspondent of the
Israel-based Metula News Agency, said: “the truth is first of all, that the child shown on
the screen is not dead. He plays dead.”33

It took two years after the initial investigation for a detailed Israeli revisionist
effort to appear. After much contemplation, Israeli General Yom-Tov Savia reenacted the
scenario alleging that it would have been nearly impossible for the deadly shot to have
come from Israeli fire. He hired a team of professionals to aid in the accuracy of the
reenactment and the second, more thorough IDF investigation of the case including:
Nahum Shahaf, a physicist and engineer who had worked with the IDF in the past, and
Yosef Duriel, another engineer. General Savia claimed in an interview with Bob Simon
of CBS that “the reason from my side [to reopen the investigation] is to check and clean
up our values.”34 CBS’s 60 Minutes did a program on the reenactment that aired on
November 12, 2001.
Nahum Shahaf was already well known to General Savia. Shahaf had contacted him soon after the original video footage of Aldura’s death became public—he had detected what he considered to be an apparent anomaly.\(^\text{35}\) He noticed that Jamal seemed to be particularly concerned with shots that seemed to be originating on the far side of the barrel behind which he and his son had taken shelter. However, from what could be determined from the video footage, and extensive analysis after he and his son were shot—the barrel seemed to be completely intact.\(^\text{36}\) This suggested that the fatal volley could not have originated from Israeli forces given the known positioning of the IDF soldiers at the time.

Aldura’s parents did not allow an autopsy of the boy, or the bullets to be removed before he was buried. As a result, General Savia’s investigators had to focus on indirect forensic evidence. They made a much more thorough examination of the indentations of bullet marks on the concrete wall behind where Jamal and Mohammed were crouched, the barrel behind which they were hiding, and the dust from the bullets—all physical evidence led this team of investigators to believe that the shots that killed Mohammed and injured his father Jamal “came from someplace behind the France 2 cameraman”—and not from the IDF outpost where the shot was allegedly to have been fired.\(^\text{37}\)

If there is a lesson to be learned in this case study, it is that images may not lie but can easily be uncertain and/or misleading. Moreover, initial impressions may be impossible to change regardless of whether one subscribes to the findings of the second team of investigators, the theory that the IDF shot and killed Mohammed Aldura, that the entire scenario was staged by the Palestinians in the attempt to gain much needed publicity, or that Aldura’s death was the result of unfortunate crossfire. While the truth about this case may never be determined, it shows that modern psychological warfare is fought more in the media than between armies.

In fact, according to B’Teslem, a human rights organization based in Israel, on the same day of Aldura’s death there were 15 other Palestinian civilians that were also killed in the fighting including another 12-year boy, Samir Sudki Tabanjeh, and three other minors. None of these deaths however, received the same attention as did Aldura’s.\(^\text{38}\)

Nahum Shahaf, the Israeli physicist on the investigation of Aldura’s death said:
I believe that one day there will be good things in common between us and the Palestinians….But the case of Mohammed al-Dura brings the big flames between Israel and the Palestinians and Arabs. It brings a big wall of hate. They can say this is the proof, the ultimate proof, that Israeli soldiers are boy-murderers. And that hatred breaks any chance of having something good in the future.

Whether Mohammad Aldura was killed by Israelis or by Palestinians, the boy’s image unarguably became a symbol of the conflict, and “avoiding this harsh truth does a disservice to Israel and the Jewish people, as well as to the Palestinians, hinders the quest for peace, and endangers everyone if the wrong lessons are drawn from the al-Dura incident.”

The IDF clearly learned from these events, and a major shift took place in the Israeli government’s approach to public relations and to media efforts. Only weeks, after Aldura’s death was captured on film, the Israeli government established a press center in Jerusalem and appointed General Nahman Shai to be the Ministry Director of Science, Culture and Sports. In this position, General Shai was in charge of coordination efforts of the Foreign Ministry, the Israeli Defense Forces, the Israeli police, the Israeli government’s Press Office and the Office of the Prime Minister.

Israel found it needed a spokesperson to try to counter negative publicity and manage the images of modern warfare. One of the main reasons why General Shai was chosen for this post, according to some Israeli sources, was that he was well respected in Israel for the “calming effect” he had on the nation during the first Gulf War, and because he was portrayed favorably in the Israeli and international media. Israel needed someone in this position that would be able to somehow hinder the effects of the media blitz—in effect, someone who was capable of effective damage control. According to Colonel (Res.) Ra’anan Gissin of the IDF, “a media war is always a war of the weak. If you’re not weak, all you can do is damage control.”

According to CNN Bureau Chief, Mike Hanna, there is an inevitable “difference between a crowd with stones and Israeli firepower. The reality of images, such as tanks and helicopters, raise the profile of the conflict to a totally different level.” Nevertheless, the Palestinians soon discovered that even the weak can lose battles of perception. As Colonel Gissin put it, Israel was given the opportunity to “beat them at their own game and exploit their mistake by making sure that the world saw the lynchings in Ramallah.” The IDF used television footage of the lynching and
mutilation of two Israeli reserve soldiers by Palestinian rioters to improve international perceptions of Israel.

General Shai decided after much deliberation, that even though he is not in favor “of putting such pictures on TV…we at least wanted there to be an option.” In addition, the IDF decided to allow more reporters to join their troops on missions so they would be able to better understand the situations in which the troops find themselves.

Even so, Israelis recognize they have remained at a disadvantage even as they have done their best to use the suffering caused by terrorism as a counter to the Palestinian suffering caused by Israeli military action. This has led some Israelis to argue that they receive better treatment in written media, as opposed to television media. For one, images can be misleading. Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Aviv Shir-On, contends that the “accelerated pace of media coverage puts Israel at a disadvantage, because reporters have less time to learn the facts, Israel receives better treatment in print media than on television…because the extra time allows the reporters to better examine a situation and learn the facts.”

**Jenin: A Case Study**

The “battle of Jenin” provides another case study in how each side can use images in the battle of perceptions. As has been described in the previous chapter, the “Battle of Jenin” began on April 3, 2002 when Israeli troops entered and surrounded the densely populated Jenin refugee camp as part of a wider Israeli offensive campaign against terrorism. The reasons for the campaign seemed to favor Israel. Operation Defensive Shield, was launched on March 29, 2002 and was initiated in response to the sharp increase in Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians throughout the month on March 2002. The “battle of Jenin,” however, became one of the bloodiest altercations between Israeli troops and Palestinian Authority (PA) forces since the war began in September 2000.

Palestinian sponsored terrorism had grown in severity and reached a new peak in March 2002. According to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) there were approximately 780 total terrorist attacks resulting in 135 Israelis killed and another 670 injured in that month alone. The “Passover massacre”—sponsored by Hamas— was one of the last and most
deadly attacks of the month, resulting in 30 Israeli casualties and injuring 140 others on March 27, 2002.

According to the IDF, the intent of Operation Defensive Shield was to target Palestinian residential areas in the attempt to eradicate the “infrastructure of ‘terrorism’.” The town of Jenin, and in particular the refugee camp in Jenin, was a primary target in this campaign since both Israeli and Palestinian observers acknowledged that it was a base where various Palestinian armed organizations organized and “cooperated unhindered in order to build explosives laboratories, attain weapons, recruit suicide terrorists and send them on suicide missions.”

The IDF believed that 35 fatal terrorist attacks (including 23 suicide missions) against Israeli citizens were planned and launched from the refugee camp in Jenin between September 2000 and April 2002, and a total of 121 Israelis were killed and an additional 643 were wounded as a result of these attacks. By April 2002, the IDF believed there to be approximately 200-armed men from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Tanzim, PIJ, and Hamas, operating from the camp.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the IDF used substantial amounts of force when entering the camp, and that the Palestinians resisted. Jenin became the first major urban battle of the Israeli-Palestinian War. The way in which the IDF handled the attack, however, led to immediate charges that the IDF used excessive force and forced further changes in the way in which Israel deals with the media.

As soon as the IDF entered the camp on 3 April, it declared that the camp was a closed military zone and imposed a round-the-clock curfew. The IDF then encountered a significant amount of resistance from armed Palestinians, and there was intense fighting that inevitably involved Palestinian civilians and property. The IDF attempted to limit the media impact of these losses by excluding all media from the camp. According to Eric Silver, a news correspondent in Israel for over 30 years, “It was a deliberate policy to keep the press out of Jenin…they didn’t want reporters to get in the army’s way. They knew they would be criticized.”

Reporters were forced to rely on IDF sources and reports from Palestinian contacts within the city. The absence of first-hand reporting and video footage contributed to the spread of supposed rumors regarding the level and intensity of
destruction and casualties taking place within the camp. There were great discrepancies in the accounts of what was transpiring.

The Palestinians were quick to recognize that the media might be their best weapon in the face of the superiority of Israeli troops and weaponry. In addition to providing many “eye witness” reports that made localized fighting seem much broader than later seemed to have been the case, the images that various Palestinian spokespeople portrayed in the media helped prompt the international community to react.

Many top Palestinian officials alleged that a massacre was occurring in Jenin. Palestinian Chairman Arafat stated in an interview with Fox television network on April 15, 2002 that “more than 600 people have been killed…” Saeb Erakat, the PA Minister of Local Government, made repeated claims that a massacre was taking place and alleged that at least 500 people had been killed. These claims were never substantiated, but inevitably influenced world opinion; and the problems were compounded by the way Israel dealt with NGOs. According to Amnesty International, “the IDF denied access to Jenin refugee camp to all, including medical doctors and nurses, humanitarian relief services, human rights organizations, and journalists.”

Media reports condemning Israel became the norm, although the majority of these reports were later found to be based on unjustifiable claims. Two such examples can be found in the British press: The Economist and The Independent. At the time, The Economist reported, “…the evidence of the Israeli army’s absolute negligence in trying to protect civilian life is everywhere.” The Independent reported, “Israeli officials were desperately scrambling to explain the war crimes committed at Jenin refugee camp as the international furor over the devastation rose to new heights.” Such reports were made before any real investigation occurred. They failed to provide both context and balance—according to the Anti-Defamation League.

The lesson of Jenin is that transparency and information ultimately work far better than exclusion and silence. World opinion turned against Israel because the IDF “stonewalled” most attempts to cover and investigate the fighting. Given the nature of independent investigations, world opinion had already shifted against Israel by the time they had concluded. Moreover, many outside Israeli perceived the investigations carried out by the IDF as biased, while many Israelis perceived the UN investigations as being
biased against Israel. As a result, these independent investigations had little effect on
already established public opinion.

Then on May 7, 2002, the General Assembly of the United Nations issued a report
regarding the alleged illegal actions of the Israeli Defense Force during Operation
Defensive Shield. UN officials issued this report without having made a visit to the city
of Jenin or any of the other cities cited as in question in the report. The team that was
assigned to the investigation of Jenin, focused on three main elements, using data
obtained largely from sources hostile to Israel:

- events in Jenin in the period immediately prior to Israel’s military operation;
- the battle in Jenin during Operation Defensive Shield; and
- efforts by humanitarian workers to gain access to the civilian population in
  Jenin after the end of hostilities.56

In the section of the report detailing testimony from journalists and humanitarian
organizations, the report asserted, “even journalists were shocked by the scenes of horror
that they witnessed in the Jenin camp.”57 It continued by quoting Walid Al-Amri, a
reporter from Al-Jazeera television station in Qatar, who was one of the few reporters to
enter Jenin during the incursion. According to Al-Amri:

The road we had taken was dangerous and largely impassable. It wasn’t easy to enter the
camp, and the scenes that we saw from the first moment were dreadful. We saw burned
and dismembered corpses and dozens of houses destroyed, to the point where it seemed
we were in an area hit by a huge earthquake.58

Other sources made similar reports. A Chinese journalist and TV cameraman called Shu
Suzki stated that:

I have covered a great many events and tragedies around the world, but the scenes I have
witnessed in the Jenin camp are the most violent and the ones that have touched me the
most...All of the victims were civilians...We discovered that some of them [bodies that
had been found under the rubble] had not been fatally injures, and that their deaths were
attributable to the fact that they had been unable to receive treatment. This is why I say
again that a huge massacre was committed, and that any person who has a conscience
anywhere in the world should work to bring an end to this war, this destruction and this
tragedy.”59
In contrast to the UN report, the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), an Israeli institute, released a study in August 2003 that claimed that Palestinian sources confirmed that at least 34 armed Palestinian terrorists were killed during all the fighting that took place in the Jenin refugee camp in April 2002, out of a total of 52 Palestinian casualties. These casualty figures seem correct, and to anyone familiar with intensive urban warfare, they are much more moderate than “eyewitness” accounts, and most journalist and humanitarian testimonies claimed to the United Nations after the battle.60

The JCPA report made other statements, however, that are less easy to substantiate. It claimed that the research for its report was conducted using a wide cross-section of primary sources including written testimony and material that was obtained from Palestinian books, newspapers and websites.61 It also claimed the evidence “clearly illustrates that Fatah, Islamic Jihad and Hamas prepared themselves thoroughly with automatic weapons, grenades, anti-tank missiles and explosives and perceived the confrontation with IDF troops as nothing less than a ‘military to military battle.’”62 In fact, the report revealed that a “joint military operations room” was set up in Jenin for use by the three groups in anticipation for the battle in Jenin. According to Dore Gold, the JCPA’s Director and a former Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations, the study “directly contradicts the baseless charges made by the PA leaders including Saeb Erakat, that Israel had massacred 500 Palestinians in Jenin.”63

Amnesty International conducted its own study about the “battle of Jenin,” and cited both Israeli and Palestinian sources after visiting the camp. In terms of casualties, the report found “…there were 54 Palestinian deaths…[including] seven women, four children, and six men over the age of 55. Six had been crushed by houses.”64 The report concluded that “the information in this report suggest that the IDF committed violations of international law during the course of military operations in Jenin and Nablus, including war crimes, for which they must be held accountable.”65 Examples of violations of the Geneva Convention, according to Amnesty International, were:

- Unlawful killings.
- Failure to ensure medical or humanitarian relief
- Demolition of houses and property.
• Cutting water and electricity supplies.
• Torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in arbitrary detention.
• The use of Palestinians for military operations or as “human shields.”
• Keeping the world away: the failure of international action.

In any case, , Israel had already long lost the propaganda battle due to the negative media blitz that had already shaped world opinion. If the casualties and physical damage were exaggerated at the time, they also were scarcely negligible. The IDF failed to explain and justify the scale of urban warfare that resulted, then failed to find a way to work with the UN when it conducted its investigation, and dismissed the Amnesty International investigation as being largely biased against Israel. As a result, the world had already perceived what happened in Jenin to be a “massacre” and the IDF troops to be largely at fault. Perceptions create their own reality—and to a large extent—are nearly impossible to alter after firmly established.

The Siege of Bethlehem: A Case Study

The siege of Bethlehem provides a third example of a battle that Israel won in military terms but lost in terms of global perceptions. Media coverage made it one of the most dramatic military sieges of modern history, even though the BBC was the only television network that obtained actual footage that was shot inside the Church of Nativity during the near 40-day siege.

On April 2, 2002 Israeli warplanes, tanks and troops launched a major land and air attack on the West Bank town of Bethlehem in the attempt, the IDF claimed, to capture suspected Palestinian militants. Approximately 200 Palestinians, many of them heavily armed militants, fled into the Church of the Nativity, one of the holiest sites in Christendom, in the attempt to secure a safe haven. The attack continued for five weeks until a deal was reached in early May, and the Palestinians freely left the church on May 10, 2002.

On April 3, the official “standoff” began. Israeli forces surrounded the church. The Palestinians that remained inside were in effect sequestered. They were forced to resort to eating food stored in the convent by the monks and nuns who were living in the church prior to the Israeli incursion. Over the weeks, this food stock would not prove sufficient and many would die as a result of hunger.
The siege had innocent casualties. Only two days after the siege began, Samir Ibrahim Salman, the bell ringer of the Church of the Nativity was shot dead by a sniper. At the time, there were various contradictory media reports regarding the events that transpired leading up to his death. Palestinian accounts indicate that Salman was on his way to the bell tower, as he had been every day for nearly three decades, when an Israeli sniper shot and killed him. According to other sources, Salman was walking from his home to the church through Manger Square when he was shot in the chest. 69

According to Israeli accounts, Salman ran outside the church (whether or not he was going to the bell tower remains unclear from the Israeli account) during an ongoing battle between IDF soldiers and Palestinian gunmen located within the church. The IDF feared that he might be a suicide bomber since he neglected to heed the warnings from the IDF soldiers’ orders for him to stop. When Salman failed to stop, the IDF soldier shot and aimed at his legs. 70

There were many other contradictory media reports at the time. Another example was regarding four Franciscan priests. According to Israeli sources, Palestinian militants inside the church had been holding the priests hostage. They determined this to be the case based on statements made by the priests themselves. However, there were some members of the Franciscan order, outside the church, that told reporters that the priests inside the church were there voluntarily to help hinder any further bloodshed and to show their solidarity with the Palestinians inside the church. It is not clear whether either group at the time knew the status of the priests inside.

As the siege continued, the media began to concentrate increasingly on the suffering of those inside. By April 20, there was no more food and water left in the church according to Palestinian sources. On April 23, the first round of face-to-face negotiations to end the “standoff” took place at the Peace Centre in Manger Square. Lieutenant Colonel Lior led the Israeli team and former PLO Commander Salah Tamari led the Palestinian team. It was not until April 24, that any real progress was made. The two sides agreed to their first deal—Israel would allow the bodies of two Palestinian policemen killed days earlier to be removed from the church while the Palestinians would allow a group of nine teenagers to leave the church and carry their remains.
Three days later, on April 27, after speaking and negotiating with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Palestinian negotiators were prepared to make a “food for people” deal with the Israelis. Before speaking to the Israelis, Salah Taamri entered the church and discussed this option with the Palestinians wanted by the Israelis. On April 30, twenty-four Palestinians left the church as part of the “food for people” deal brokered between Taamri and Lt. Col. Lior—even though no food had at the time been delivered.

Once again, trying to exclude the media had powerful negative effects. On May 2, a group of international activists and a Los Angeles Times reporter snuck into the church to deliver food to those still trapped inside. They were able to report via telephone to reporters and described the escalating deterioration of the conditions inside, claiming that “people have only grass and leaves for food.” United States’ pressure on Israel significantly heightened after these reports became public. On May 5, American representatives joined the negotiating talks. On May 6, a tentative deal was reached: where Israel’s “most wanted” Palestinians would go into exile in Europe and the other “less wanted” would be returned to Palestinian custody in Gaza. On May 9, 2002—after a 5-week long siege—the deal was finalized.

When the siege of Bethlehem ended on May 10, eight men had died during the siege and more than a dozen had been wounded. All the remaining Palestinians, however, safely left the church: 13 were initially sent to Cyprus and 26 were taken to Gaza. By May 22, the European Union finalized arrangements for the 13 exiled Palestinians—and three were sent to Italy, three to Spain, two to Greece, two to Ireland, and one to both Belgium and Portugal. The remaining Palestinian militant, also deemed the most dangerous by Israeli sources, remained in Cyprus until another country came forward that would accept him. In late November 2002, he was exiled to Mauritania. 71

The end result was far more costly to Israel in propaganda terms than the siege was worth. The religious and historical significance of the Church of the Nativity ensured that every detail of the siege in Bethlehem was closely followed all over the world. International concern for the preservation of the church, as well as for the well being of protesters who had clandestinely gained entry to the church, resulted in massive global media coverage of the events. The IDF faced steadily growing negative publicity as the standoff continued, and as international pressure on Israel also increased. The
sniper shooting of an Armenian monk inside the church, as well as reports that the IDF was preventing food from entering the compound, did nothing to improve international public opinion of Israel; and in the end, the Palestinians inside became martyrs that survived to enjoy a relatively pleasant exile.\(^\text{72}\)

As in the previous case study, the siege of Bethlehem resulted in conflicting post mortems. Both Israelis and Palestinians claimed that media coverage was biased against them. While most charges alleged that the coverage was anti-Israel, there were cases where the reverse seems to have been true. According to the Guardian Unlimited, the governors of the BBC failed to caution viewers of a documentary on the siege that the events portrayed in the film (comprised of footage taken during the siege) were taken “almost exclusively through the eyes of the Israeli military.”\(^\text{73}\)

What both sides did have in common is that both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government reacted by creating larger media centers and increasing support for journalists in the hopes of “leveling the playing field.”

**Dealing with Images of Terrorism**

Israel’s best political counterweight to the constant images of Palestinians’ suffering and their “under dog” status has so far proved to be publicizing Palestinian terrorism. While the Arab and Islamic worlds may accept some aspects of suicide bombing and attacks on Israeli civilians as the acts of freedom fighters, rather than terrorists, most Western nations and media do not. This is especially true after the events of September 11, 2001, and later terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, Bali, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.

If major Israeli incursions and attacks on the Palestinians cost Israel political support, Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians have the opposite effect. So does the use of young Arab men and women as suicide bombers. The end result is that Palestinian efforts to use the war as a political weapon are often undercut or counterbalanced by Palestinian violence. This reaction, however, varies by region. In the US in April 2002, for example, Gallup Organization asked Americans if they perceived Palestinian acts of violence against Israelis as acts of terrorism or acts of war, 70% said acts of terrorism while 24% said acts of war.\(^\text{74}\) In addition, when asked whether Hamas and Hizbollah...
were terrorists or freedom fighters, 51% responded that these two groups were in fact terrorist organizations. In contrast, many Arab and European countries treat Hamas and Hizbollah members as “freedom fighters,” and show far more sympathy for their acts.

It is interesting to note that Palestinian attitudes are generally supportive of precisely the same tactics that much of the world condemns. Since the war broke out in September 2000, polls indicate that, on average, approximately 70 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support suicide bombings. In a poll conducted in October 2003 by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) in Ramallah, nearly 75% of those surveyed supported the suicide attack at Maxim Restaurant in Haifa that killed 20 Israelis and 59% believed that armed confrontations have helped the Palestinian cause in ways that diplomacy and negotiations could not.

Then, in March 2004, the PSR reported that while 87% of Palestinians surveyed supported attacks against Israeli soldiers and 86% supported attacks against Israeli settlers, just over a majority—53%—supported attacks against Israeli civilians. One month later, in April 2004, an opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Studies Center in the West Bank found that 76% of those polled support suicide bomb attacks (martyrdom operations) in Israel proper. Moreover, the percentage of those that believe that armed confrontations help the Palestinian cause more so than could negotiations, increased from 59% in October 2003 to 67% in March 2004.

In the 1990s, suicide bombings and organizations like Hamas were less popular among Palestinians than they have been since the beginning of the war. Many Palestinians consider attacks by such groups to be a legitimate means of defying the Israeli occupation. In fact, in the study conducted by the Palestinian Studies Center in April 2004, 31% of Palestinians surveyed would actually vote for members of Hamas in local elections, while 27.1% would vote for Fatah. This marked the first time in which Hamas won the majority in any poll conducted in the West Bank. Such Palestinians argue that the world pays more attention to Israeli losses than it does to Palestinian ones.

**Casualties as a Political Weapon**

Both sides have used their casualties as a political weapon. The Palestinian side attempts to both exploit its own casualties and exploit Israeli sensitivity to Israeli
casualties as a primary tool in asymmetric warfare. Palestinian casualties can nearly always be used to produce a media reaction hostile to Israel. However, there are severe limits as to what an IDF force seeking to minimize its own casualties can do to avoid inflicting casualties on the Palestinians. Furthermore, there have been a long series of cases where IDF senior officers admit their soldiers may have overreacted and/or used excessive force.

The Israel-Palestinian War is a conflict where one side—Israel—has the goal of minimizing its casualties and establishing control. The other side—Palestinian opposition—has the goal of highlighting its suffering to achieve global sympathy. The end result is that Israel sometimes uses excessive force and the Palestinians sometimes provoke it. This has proved to be a remarkably poor combination of asymmetric goals for resuming a peace process.

**Rubber Bullets: A Case Study**

This process has affected the battle of perceptions since the start of the conflict. Israel initially sought to minimize the use of force against ordinary Palestinians and adopted the following rules of engagement: Tear gas and stun grenades are used first. Should these fail to disperse a protest, rubber-coated metal bullets—which are supposed to be shot at the lower body from a distance of 25 meters or more—are then used. Live ammunition, shot at the lower body, is used in response to firebombs; and finally, when encountering shooting and/or grenades, Israeli soldiers will shoot to kill.

Palestinian sources have claimed that Israeli forces have never actually abided by these rules, and have made frequent use of lethal shots with rubber bullets aimed at the upper body or head.\(^{83}\) Conversely, other Palestinian sources have argued that IDF troops deliberately aim at the legs of young men in order to cripple them quoting that as of November 12, 2001; approximately 21.4% of the 4,448 Palestinians admitted to hospitals were shot in the legs. Physicians for Human Rights claimed that the existence of such a pattern of injuries over time likely reflects an ongoing policy.\(^{84}\)

Once again, war is war, there are serious limits to what non-lethal force can accomplish, and the very term “non-lethal” is so misleading that most military experts call such weapons “less lethal.” Weapons like CS gas and rubber bullets have limited
range. They often are not effective in stopping large groups. At the same time, gas can be lethal in closed areas and with young children, the elderly, and the sick. Rubber bullets produce serious trauma in 5-20% of actual hits even when used within their proper range limits. They are much more lethal at very close ranges.

At the same time, the fact rubber bullets could become a political issue provides an example of just how critical limiting casualties and controlling collateral damage has become in modern warfare, and for the need for proper training and discipline. As a number of Israeli experts have pointed out, Israel’s problems in minimizing Palestinian casualties were compounded by Israel’s failure to develop large, well-trained and well equipped units dedicated to riot control and the non-lethal use of force before September 2000, and by the lack of joint training for such missions by both the IDF and Palestinian Security forces. It is yet another irony of the conflict that the emphasis on peace negotiations before September 2000, coupled to a heavy emphasis on counterterrorism, left both sides poorly prepared to minimize violence during a war and to enforce efforts to halt the violence.

In many ways, members of the media were equally ill prepared to report on these realities of war and—more broadly—most aspect of what is and is not practical in combat. For example, Western and Arab media often accepted the previous wound reports with little examination, and in ways that reflected a lack of military experience. Leg wounds often occur when troops are trying to avoid hits on the head or body, and require the target to be exposed—making the target more difficult to acquire. Discussing the finer details of wound patterns implies a degree of accuracy in combat that no army has ever achieved, as well as a degree of control over individual soldiers in a firefight or close combat situation that at best is possible only with small cadres of elite forces.

Even at the low levels of violence that occurred early in the war, combat was not part of some computer game. Both sides fought in a climate of emotion, fear, and misperception and the IDF almost certainly made mistakes and sometimes failed to exert proper restraint. Such problems are inevitable. No army in history has ever been able to create a force composed entirely of sharpshooters or keep a significant percentage of its troops from panicking and over-reacting.
This does not mean that Palestinian suffering was not real. A report issued by the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights, based on a visit to the West Bank and Gaza in November 2000, though highly dependent on Palestinian sources, illustrates the real-world human cost of asymmetric warfare even at low levels of violence.\textsuperscript{85} The report noted that a high number of rubber bullets did hit the eyes of Palestinians, and described the risks inherent in using rubber bullets and tear gas.

More controversially, the report quotes figures provided by the Minister of Health of the Palestinian Authority claiming that approximately 6,958 people (3,366 in the West Bank and 3,592 in Gaza) had been wounded between September 29 and November 9, 2000, and that 1,016 Palestinians had been wounded in Israel during that time. It also reported that 13 Arab-Israelis were killed following street demonstrations in late September and early October, and over 1000 were imprisoned.\textsuperscript{86} According to these Palestinian figures, 40% of those wounded were under 18 years of age, and 41% of the wounds were caused by rubber bullets, 27% by regular ammunition, 27% by tear gas, and 11% by heavier weapons like rockets.

At the same time, the UN report states that the IDF found that rubber (plastic coated) bullets, tear gas, and water cannons were not effective at ranges over 50-100 meters, and that “the IDF have over the last few months tested dozens of weapons but have concluded that less than lethal weapons effective to range of 200 meters do not currently exist.”\textsuperscript{87}

**House Demolitions: A Case Study**

Since the start of the war in September 2000, according to the Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B’Tselem, Israel has destroyed approximately 4,170 Palestinian homes.\textsuperscript{88} As of December 2004, there have been three main types of demolitions which are carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). According to B’Tselem, most house demolitions are considered “clearing operations”\textsuperscript{89} and mainly take place to help protect Israeli settlers and soldiers in the Gaza Strip. According to UNWRA, as of September 2004, 2,370 housing units in the Gaza Strip had been destroyed and approximately 22,800 Palestinians were left homeless due to these particular military operations.\textsuperscript{90}
Another type of the house demolitions carried out by the IDF are considered “administrative” meaning the destruction of Palestinian homes built without an Israeli permit. The Israeli government authorized the demolition of 768 Palestinian structures in Area C of the West Bank between 2001 and 2003, and 161 structures in East Jerusalem from 2001 to February 2004, because they were built without an Israeli permit.

And the third type of house demolition, are those in which involve houses of relatives and neighbors of Palestinians suspected of violent acts against Israelis civilians or soldiers. These “punitive” demolitions target the home where the suspects lived. Since 2001, the IDF has destroyed approximately 628 housing units of 3,983 people.91

The IDF has used house demolitions to punish Palestinians suspected of resistance or attempting to commit violence as far back as 1987, except between 1998 and 2001. According to the IDF, this policy is based on the idea that the fear of demolition will prevent Palestinian militants from attacking Israelis. According to former head of the Special Functions Division in the Israeli State’s Attorney office, Shai Nitzan, destroying houses is “intended, among other reasons, to deter potential terrorists, as it has been proven that the family is a central factor in Palestinian Society.”92

While there have been some documented cases where parents of potential suicide bombers prevented their children from following through on their mission so as to avert their home being destroyed by the IDF—this surely is not the norm.

One of the problems some cite regarding this policy is that the people who suffer most are the family members of the terrorists. B’Tselem for example, deems this type of demolition “a draconian measure against relatives who bore no responsibility for the suspects’ acts and were not charged with any offense.”93 This organization has reported that only 21% of the offenders were at large, while 32% of them were in custody and 47% were dead. According to B’Tselem, if suspects are still at large, they have nothing to gain by giving themselves up after their families are left homeless.94

On the other hand, part of the motivation to become a suicide bomber is that one’s family’s social and financial status will improve greatly after the bombing (their child being perceived as a martyr and heroic). Based on this assumption, many in the Israeli government and IDF are convinced that by destroying the homes of suicide bombers such benefits would be lost and it is their hope that possible suicide attacks will thus be

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averted. Israel argues that house demolitions act as a deterrent and are not necessarily meant to serve as a punishment. According to IDF Chief of General Staff Lieutenant-General Moshe Ya’alon, based on IDF intelligence, “neighbors and family members of Palestinian would-be suicide bombers have often come forward with information to prevent the pending attacks, in an effort to spare their homes from demolition.”

According to IDF Captain Jacob Dallal, a study by the IDF found that parents of suicide bombers oftentimes encouraged their children to follow through with their mission upon finding out of their child’s plans, and praised them publicly after the mission was completed. This was another reason why the IDF “decided to break this trend” through house demolitions.

There remains much debate regarding the legality of this policy under both Israeli and International Law. According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

> Israeli measures are not a form of “collective punishment” as some have claimed, as if the intention were to cause deliberate hardship to the population at large. While the security measures taken in self-defense and necessitated by terrorist threats do unfortunately cause hardships to sectors of the Palestinian population, this is categorically not their intent.

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “as permissible under the laws of armed conflict, Israel refrains whenever possible from attacking terrorist targets from the air or with artillery, in order to minimize collateral damage, a policy which entails risking the lives of Israeli soldiers. The death of 13 soldiers in ground operations in the Gaza Strip in early May 2004 is an example of the heavy price Israel pays for its commitment to minimize Palestinian civilian casualties.”

The Israeli High Court has extensively reviewed and has generally upheld the IDF practice of destroying the homes of those individuals who are known to have either carried out suicide or other lethal attacks against Israelis or against those who are found to have been responsible for sending individuals on such attacks. However, it is important to note that there have been numerous occasions when the High Court of Israel prohibited the destruction of Palestinian homes based on appeals. For example, on July 22, 2004, the court banned the demolition of 10 Palestinian homes in Gaza in response to a petition filed by Adalah, the legal Centre for the Rights of the Arab Minority in Israel.

Israel has received much international criticism over its house demolitions. They came under particularly intense scrutiny after an Israeli bulldozer killed American peace activist, Rachel Corrie, on March 16, 2003. According to witnesses, Corrie was trying to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian family’s home in Gaza. After this incident, the
United States’ Department of State outlined its views on this incident and on the policy as a whole:

Our policy on demolitions has been stated repeatedly and is well known. We have been very clear that we view demolitions as particularly troubling. They deprive a large number of Palestinians of their ability to peacefully earn a livelihood. They exacerbate the humanitarian situation inside Palestinian areas, undermine trust and confidence and make more difficult the critical challenge of bringing about an end to violence and restoring calm.\textsuperscript{101}

While Israel initially alleged that Corrie was killed by falling debris, the Israeli National Center for Forensic Medicine performed an autopsy and found that her “death was caused by pressure on the chest from a mechanical apparatus.”\textsuperscript{102} Israel guaranteed a thorough and independent investigation, and later deemed her death a “regrettable accident.”\textsuperscript{103}

The death of Rachel Corrie brought near immediate international attention to Israel’s policy of demolition. The lack of a widely regarded credible investigation, the fact that Corrie was an American, and the gruesome nature of her death, cost Israel international support at the time. The publicity of Corrie’s death was also effectively used by Palestinians to further their cause. In fact, one year after Corrie’s death, Yasser Arafat even hosted her parents to thank them for “their daughter's sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textbf{The Impact of Israeli Sensitivity to Casualties}

Israel’s acute sensitivity to casualties has compounded the problems of judging what level of force should be used. On the one hand, Israeli restraint can increase the risk of Israeli casualties. The risk of such Israeli casualties are real even when low level violence is involved the Palestinians do not make use of conventional weapons. Observers that have never been in a riot or watched clashes between civilian groups and troops often ignore the grim realities that can develop on the ground. Troops cannot allow mobs armed with stones or Molotov cocktails close in on their positions, or rely on the kind of riot control gear used in dealing with civil disobedience under such conditions. They must use lethal fire if they risk being overrun by an armed group that may kill.

The problems in showing restraint grow steadily more serious when there is a constant risk of sniping or small arms fire, where lethal and non-lethal force can easily become mixed, or where “civilians” can use suicide bombings and other means of attack with little or no warning. Under these conditions, it is almost impossible to separate
innocent civilians throwing rocks and those Palestinians from Palestinians using lethal force. Yet, this kind of asymmetric warfare also breeds fear and anger and makes the excessive use of lethal force and “overreaction” almost inevitable.

In contrast, the Palestinian side has strong reasons to provoke Israeli violence and to use the resulting Palestinian casualties as political tools. As the previous case studies have shown, Palestinian ability to use the Israeli inability or unwillingness to show restraint to exploit the media and world opinion is critical to Palestinian success in turning almost constant tactical military defeats into a political and strategic victory. The Palestinian side can only “win” in terms of major gains in a peace process or settlement if it can capture world opinion, and uses Palestinian suffering and “martyrs” to gain political support.

Furthermore, Israel’s sensitivity to casualties has repeatedly allowed Hamas, the PIJ, and other Palestinian rejectionist elements to block or present serious problems for any Palestinian Authority efforts to sustain a ceasefire or peace effort. Israel’s sensitivities and politics tend to force it to make impossible demands for absolute security that the Palestinian Authority simply cannot provide. This in turn makes the Palestinian Authority vulnerable to any major bombing or terrorist attack on Israel. The ability of Palestinian extremists to exploit this situation also makes it difficult—if not impossible—for the Palestinian side to implement anything approaching a coherent strategy.

**Trends in the Political Battle for World Opinion**

These actions illustrate the fact that the asymmetric struggle between Israel and Palestinians is as much an asymmetric political struggle as it is a military one. Both Israelis and Palestinians have made it clear from the start that they regard the other side’s goals as unfair and its uses of violence as excessive, and both have sought to exploit the other side’s excesses and apparent excess with hopes to gain the support of world opinion. This too, however, is part of the reality of war. Few asymmetric wars occur in which both sides can ignore the political and economic consequences of the struggle for world opinion. The struggle between Israelis and Palestinians has always been as much a battle of politics and political perceptions as a military and security struggle.
As discussed earlier, Israel suffers from political disadvantages in this aspect of the conflict that oftentimes partially offsets its military advantages. The side that suffers most tends to have the perceived “edge” in the battle for outside perceptions. Palestinian suffering is more visible and enduring than the shock of individual terrorist attacks and suicide bombings. For instance, in an EOS Gallup report published in October 2003, approximately 59% of Europeans surveyed believed that Israel poses the greatest threat to world peace. In the Netherlands, for example, this number reached 74%. On the other hand, a Zogby International poll conducted one month earlier, found that American voters surveyed reported that, when asked which side the United States should put more pressure on to try to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian war, 77% responded that both sides should be pressed equally.

The fighting between well-equipped Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians using sniping, rock throwing, and physical attacks, is a political and media battle in which the IDF can only use decisive force at the cost of media images of Palestinian suffering that oftentimes severely damage Israel’s political position. As a result, Palestinian “martyrs” become political weapons that can be as effective as Israeli conventional weapons. Furthermore, it is clear from UN Security Council resolutions that largely endorse the Palestinian demand for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 boundary that much of world opinion regarding Israel’s presence in the West Bank and Gaza has been on the Palestinians side.

In fact, a survey conducted by Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) in January 2003 examined the “warmth of feeling” of European countries for Israel. The study found that on average, Europeans surveyed allotted a designation of 40 to Israel—zero being a “cold and unfavorable feeling” and 100 being a “warm and favorable feeling,” with 50 considered to be neither “warm” nor “cold.” France, in particular, supported the Palestinians by a margin of two to one, perhaps because its large Muslim population had an affect on French public opinion. In Britain, however, the result was similar. It was driven by images of wounded and dead Palestinians—as well as reports of the excessive use of force in areas such as Jenin—which caused support for Israel to wane. The US sample maintained an average of 55, only slightly higher than the Europeans.
Gallup polls, however, conducted from the start of the conflict in September 2000 through February 2004 show that the level of American sympathy toward Israel has fluctuated between a low of 41% (in October 2000 and August 2001) and a high of 58% (in February 2004) during this time, with an average sympathy rating of 49.2%. The Gallup polls also show that, over the same period, American sympathy toward the Palestinians has ranged from a low of 7% (in September 2001) to a high of 18% (in February 2004), and averaged out at 14.73%. The same poll, conducted by the Israel Project from May 8, 2003 to March 23, 2004, produced similar results. It found that American sympathy toward Israel fluctuated between a low of 42% (in May and August 2003) and a high of 55% (in February 2004); and American sympathy toward Palestinian Arabs varied from a low of 6% (in August 2003) to a high of 18% (in February 2004).

In “Worldviews 2002,” the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations obtained results that mirror those given above. Their report ascertains that Americans have warmer feelings toward Israel than most Europeans do. Americans give Israel an average score of 55, compared with the European rating of 38. The Germans and Poles have the coolest feelings toward Israel among the European nations with a rating of 32 and 29 respectively. Thus, altogether, the polls cited above indicate that the majority of European public opinion has been much more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, whereas most Americans seem to favor Israel.

The Role of the Media in Forming Public Opinion

One universal theme in each of the aforementioned case studies is that both sides alleged that the media was biased against their cause. For example, some Palestinian supporters argued that the media portrayed attacks by Palestinian groups against Israelis civilians as “starting” a cycle that involved an Israeli “response.” On the other hand, the use of the word “bold” in a headline, such as “bold attack on Israelis,” that ran in the San Francisco Chronicle caused complaints because it was perceived, by some supporters of Israel, to be a positive portrayal of the attack.

The US media has become a battleground in this war. In many cases, both sides perceive bias in the same news story. Some pro-Israel supporters started to boycott major
US newspapers including the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, and the San Francisco Chronicle “in protest of what some readers perceive as an anti-Israel bias.”\textsuperscript{115} This feeling, according to the San Francisco Chronicle for example, extended to the limited coverage of pro-Israeli rallies compared to pro-Palestinian protests in the US.

On the other hand, many pro-Palestinians supporters have argued the opposite about the US media. The late Edward Said, a Palestinian-American scholar, has argued that there are “many advertisements in the newspapers attacking Arabs and praising Israel; and on and on. Because so many powerful people in the media and publishing business are strong supporters of Israel, the task is made vastly easier.”\textsuperscript{116}

Media plays a significant role in influencing public opinion. A study by Glasgow University Media Group found that approximately 82\% of those surveyed received their information about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from television news reports. The study also concluded that “the lack of explanation on the news about the origins of the conflict plus the differences in the manner in which both ‘sides’ had measurable effects on some public understanding.”\textsuperscript{117}

Improvements in communications – such as satellite TV news channels in the Arab world like Al-Jazeera and the rapid dissemination of the Internet – provide both opportunities and challenges in the war over public opinion. A survey by the Arab Advisors Group showed that in 2004, nearly 89\% of households in Saudi Arabia had satellites that carry Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya.\textsuperscript{118} During the first Intifada, the only sources of news in the Arab world were state owned media outlets. Before the war in Iraq which began in 2003, the Israeli-Palestinian War was the first war to be viewed live on Arabic satellite channels.

While in general the Arab media has failed to show the suffering of the Israeli victims of suicide bombings, it has brought images of anguished Palestinians to its viewers. This is not to say that the Arab world opinion of Israel was positive before such developments in communications, but that such images have simply exacerbated the situation. Many Palestinians, aware of this opportunity, have used the media to appeal to the “Arab world” for help, and have been able to generate increased financial support and impose greater pressure on Arab governments to support their cause.
Terrorism experts argue that the terrorists “want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead” and that they try to plan attacks to spread fear. While images of Israeli victims of suicide bombers typically enhance sympathy for the Israelis among the international community, such images also propagate fear and inflict psychological damage on the Israeli general public. However, such terrorist attacks can backfire against the militants who carry out and support them. For example, the Israeli public became more willing to tolerate hard line policies such as those of Ariel Sharon as a result of unremitting attacks.\(^\text{119}\)

The expansion of the media’s influence has affected the way in which Israelis have conducted themselves in this war. Throughout this war, both Israelis and Palestinians have appealed for global support and sympathy, and the contrasting media images of the effects of different kinds of combat and casualties have helped polarize opinion on both sides. The images of young Palestinians throwing rocks at tanks magnify the military imbalance, and reinforce the support for the Palestinians’ cause. However, the images of dead Israeli bodies on buses increase the sympathy for the Israelis. Despite attacks on Israel, various polls have shown that Palestinians generally receive greater sympathy than do Israelis in much of the international community, excluding the United States.
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4 “Shells Fired at Northern IDF Base,” Haaretz, January 4, 2001
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115. Fost, Dan “Jewish groups battle media over perceived bias” The Chronicle, other papers lose subscribers” The San Francisco Chronicle, May 22, 2002.


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