

War diary of a Jerusalem counselor

A day-by-day account of battlefront public relations

This is a different kind of war. As battle-ready commanders on Israel's borders sit passively, Iraqi Scud missiles streak over their heads toward their wives and children. The rear has become the front.

The media attention is proof enough. Over 1,000 foreign correspondents poured into the country to cover the war, turning the Tel Aviv and Jerusalem Hilton hotels into world-class media centers.

For public relations practitioners based in or working for clients in Israel, the Gulf War provided a surge of opportunities. On a slow day, the press covers itself, detailing how they report the war. Rarely, however, does a report emerge of how a communications company fits into the scene. These journal excerpts from Charley J. Levine, CEO of CLC Communications in Jerusalem, provide examples of that process:

JAN. 15: (*The U.N. deadline for Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait.*) The stage is set. The props—gas masks and antichemical injection kits—are distributed and dress rehearsals have taken place in sealed rooms throughout the country. Will war erupt?

Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv is a top Iraqi target, I muse as I head there at dusk to coordinate a great breaking story. Over 400 students from Yeshiva University in New York City are arriving on a chartered flight, a tremendous visual symbol of worldwide Jewish solidarity at a time when cameras are showing a rush of departures. Will the press show up, gas masks and all? Do they ever! Five TV crews materialize, including three U.S. networks. AP and Reuter Wirephoto are on hand and all of the Israeli press. The students deplane, dance and wave flags. Dr. Norman Lamm and Rabbi Israel Miller, two Yeshiva leaders are on hand, as is Rabbi Avi Weiss, the veteran activist who regularly confronts Austrian President Kurt Waldheim and counsels convicted spy Jonathan Pollard in prison.

JAN. 16: Only our foreign press director, Ruth Freedman, and I make it to the office. We seal one room in the office just in case. My partner, Susan Gopstein, and I meet with Professor Yuval Ne'eman, Israel's minister of science and a CLC client. This will be a hi-tech war and he will have much to say by way of analysis. He reveals that the United States to this late date has still not provided Israel with a single satellite photo of strike sites in Iraq. Overheard on the



The war provided a surge of public relations opportunities in Israel. TV crews cover the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations' visit to a missile damage site.

phone to his deputy minister: "I would have thought this morning, but for sure tonight." We head home...fast!

JAN. 17: I am awakened by my wife at 2 a.m., calling from New York with CNN blaring in the background. "Get downstairs now!" she warned. "Go to the sealed room! We're bombing Baghdad!" I lie for three hours alone, gas mask on, switching from BBC to VOA to Israeli radio and drift back to sleep from 5–8:30 a.m. The entire nation is ordered to stay at home.

JAN. 18: Eight missiles slam into Tel Aviv and Haifa. Israel's media stars are already emerging for this war. Deputy Foreign Minister Bibi Netanyahu, an expert on international terrorism, has replaced Abba Eban, the elder statesman who for years embodied "the voice" of Israel. A new national heartthrob has emerged overnight: Brig. Gen. Nachman Shai, a young, handsome army spokesman who tells us when to put on the masks and when it's all clear.

JAN. 20: The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, a U.S. organization charged with promoting Jewish interests to the White House and a long-time CLC client, has moved up its regular annual visit to a week from today, a very big story.

JAN. 22: Back to the office after five days at home with operations going by phone and fax from staff and CLC to media and clients.

JAN. 24: A preliminary meeting is held with Deputy Housing Minister and party leader Avraham Ravitz. In the midst of war, we are beginning to strategize image and fund-raising priorities for the next national elections, at least two to three years hence.

Professor Ne'eman, on the other hand,

has been banned along with all Cabinet ministers, from discussing the operational aspects of war with the media. This hurts our efforts for him. I appeal to the prime minister's spokesman for an "exemption" but am told, "Ne'eman's expertise is *exactly* what we don't want to talk about!"

JAN. 25: The International Christian Embassy busses 300 jogging suits, toys and toiletries to the victims of the Ramat Gan missile attack north of Tel Aviv, temporarily lodged in an area hotel. Tears of comfort are real. Photo coverage isn't half bad, either.

JAN. 27–29: The presidents, more than 60 of them, arrive for the conference. My staff moves into the Jerusalem Hyatt for the duration and sets up a media center. A press conference at the airport draws five TV crews, including NBC, ABC and CBS, newspapers and wire services. The group



Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents (sitting), getting made-up for live Israeli-TV interview.

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INSIDE TRACK

Persian Gulf War raises media relations, propaganda issues

Susan L. Fry, Editor

The perils of reporting on the Persian Gulf War, especially for a monthly publication like ours, include the risk that anything we write will be quite dated by the time you read it. In this month's most aptly named "Briefings," we have been fortunate to obtain an exclusive report from a public relations firm owner in Jerusalem. Charley Levine's diary gives a fascinating glimpse of life under siege in Israel. Levine's reports are hardly routine, but we think they give a hopeful, human perspective on one pro's life under wartime conditions.



heads to Defense Minister Moshe Arens.

We have a staff huddle at midnight back in Jerusalem and put out some releases by fax. I make a serious slip. My Arens summary contains one security-related fact that has significant potential for damage if publicized. My stomach churns as the army and CNN reach me simultaneously, alternately screaming and wheedling for confirmation. Thankfully the story is killed by the military censor without harm being done.

We visit Patriot missile sites. The Jewish leaders sing "God Bless America" to the TV crew, which rings authentic when viewed later on TV. A press conference at the Hilton press center with Chairperson Shoshana Cardin and Executive Director Malcolm Hoenlein, both exceptionally articulate spokespersons, is covered by CNN, key wires, radio and several dailies.

Best visual: Bibi Netanyahu rises to address concluding banquet and the sirens go off. We all head into the huge sealed room—Bibi, Shoshana and upteen TV crews—for an unplanned but superb 20 minutes of live actualities! We return after the Scud is blown up by a Patriot missile.

FEB. 3-7: We hope to counsel New York Mayor David Dinkins, New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato and actor Jackie Mason but they elude us, showing up with their own publicists—chutzipa! But the special opportunities continue:

- Dr. Ruth Westheimer, sex guru, comes over with a mental health task force dispatched by the Zionist Organization of America. She is a star, attracting universal media attention ("sex and the sealed room") while encouraging coverage of the group itself. Israeli English TV news, whom I have promised her to "first," are enraged when she makes her own arrangements to appear beforehand on Hebrew TV news. Can't win them all.

- American Friends of B'nai Zion Medical Center in Haifa help a New York cop and part-time clown come over to entertain the kids at the hospital. Normally a real ho-hum affair, but we pull in NBC TV, AP wirephoto and a weekend cover story in a Jerusalem magazine.

- The Mamilla Project, a private real estate development in downtown Jerusalem, and one of our most serious clients, is still building despite the situation. Instant photo opportunities abound.

- Hill & Knowlton sends in senior executive Mark Chataway from London. H&K realized that even a miraculous new heart medicine won't be paid too much attention to these days without a Middle East spin. Israel provides one because

heart attacks have claimed more lives following missile attacks than the projectiles themselves. We arrange his two days of work, including visits to B'nai Zion Hospital and Magen David Adom (Israel's Red Cross).

- The Joint Distribution Committee, a domestic client, helps develop a buzzer that can awaken deaf people when the audible-only air raid sirens sound their alert. We help with a live demonstration that attracts CNN and Israeli TV, and results in clippings from 12 Israeli publications.

- The Babylonian Jewish Heritage Center, an unassuming museum in a rural town suddenly takes center stage. The museum is the repository for tens of thousands of

former Iraqi Jews who live in Israel. We encourage the staff to find two people who had actual interactions with Saddam Hussein—it makes for an interesting "insight" story.

FEB. 8-11: New York City Councilman Noach Dear arrives from Moscow where he has had a private discussion with new Foreign Minister on Soviet Mideast policy Aleksandr Bessmertnykh. Some new and revealing thinking arrives with him, as does the usual gamut of coverage, culminating in a hotel press conference.

FEB. 12: I await the day's new surprise to hit us. There seems to be one virtually every hour.—Charley J. Levine.