Dear Friends

The past month has drawn everyone’s focus to the IDF’s Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. The conflict touched the lives of everyone living in Israel, including the faculty and students of the University of Haifa. This month’s newsletter is dedicated to the University’s public and academic war-related efforts.

Tens of our students were drafted into the war. Each of these students received an SMS from the Dean of Students with a message of support and a list of phone numbers to call with any query. We activated a program to enable the lecturers to record their classes on video for these students to view and catch up on upon their return.

Packages for children in the south and for soldiers in Gaza were organized at the University and we set up a Web site for the children in the south. A team of researchers and students visited therapy centers in the south and provided support. For citizens of Haifa and the north we established a hotline to provide consultation with specialists.

Studies carried out by leading members of our faculty underscore the significant effects that missile attacks have on Holocaust survivors and on hospital medical staff. A survey of media criticism revealed general loyalty to government and military action, while another study discusses government decisions concerning the protection of civilians in the south.

In solidarity with the IDF and the home front, the windows of our University tower were lit up each night for a week in the form of the national flag.

As a token of solidarity with the IDF soldiers fighting in Gaza and with the citizens in the south of the country, the University of Haifa turned its central tower into the national flag. Each night during the last week of the IDF’s operation in Gaza, the windows of the thirty-storey tower were lit in the form of Israel’s flag.
The “security basket”: protection of the areas surrounding Gaza

All of the decisions that the Israeli government has made relating to the protection of the settlements surrounding Gaza are ‘slapdash’ and no serious discussion probing the “security basket” has been held since the 1990s, when the “basket” was made applicable to the situation on the northern border, explains Prof. Nurit Kliot of the University of Haifa, who is researching the “Security Basket” and the security needs of the settlements on Israel’s disputed borders. As a result, she adds, the existing “security basket” does not sufficiently provide for the needs of the shelled areas in the Negev.

In the course of a study that Prof. Kliot carried out in 2006 researching the settlements located along the disputed lines in Israel, she claimed already then that the “security basket” provides feigned security and that the false impression will not suffice for the settlements surrounding Gaza for an extended period of time. “Two years ago I already claimed that the ‘security basket’ is only good for the prevention or reduction of criminal activity and against acts of terrorism, but it has no value in preventing shelling. The present reality in the south shows the failure of the present ‘security basket’,” Prof. Kliot pointed out.

Israel’s “security basket” is mainly comprised of fences, gates, lighting, and circumferential guarding for the settlements located along the disputed borders. According to Prof. Kliot, the problem stems from the fact that for almost two decades no serious discussion of the issue has been held, despite the fact that the situation has changed and that the capabilities of Israel’s enemies have improved. “The series of events in the settlements surrounding Gaza demonstrate how the decisions that were made were slapdash, with no serious deliberation. At first the prime minister says that ‘we will not protect ourselves to insanity’, but then he abruptly decides to pass the plan to construct protected rooms in Sderot. There is no principal decision here; Does the state believe that the ‘security basket’ should or should not include protected rooms? In 2005 a plan to provide protection for 46 settlements within a range of 7 km of the Gaza fence was passed, despite the fact that they already knew that the range of the Kassam rockets is more than 9 km. So based on what parameters did they decide to provide protection only within the limits of 7 km? In a report from 2006, the state comptroller also did not find an explanation for this decision. All of the decisions are ad hoc, with no relevant or principal discussion,” said Prof. Kliot.

Israel’s sense of security compels it to reach a definitive upper hand

“Israel’s grasping a definitive dominance means bringing the enemy to request a ceasefire, on our terms, when our forces are still on its territory, when we have significantly diminished its fighting ability and impaired its existing government standards,” said Prof. Gabriel Ben-Dor, Head of Security Studies at the University of Haifa, at a conference held by the University’s National Security Studies Center. Prof. Ben-Dor explained that Israel has an organized perception of security, even if it is not official and set in writing as in other countries. One of the central principles in this perception is that if deterrence has failed and it is necessary to go to war, Israel’s sense of security compels it to reach a definitive upper hand. He added that the best type of war is one that is not fought, but if deterrence has indeed failed – and it can fail for various reasons – a clear advantage must be achieved.

Prof. Ben-Dor also related to the components of national security within Israeli society. “Because of Israel’s small size and the magnitude of the Arab world, Israel’s concept of security has always focused on quality and not quantity. If there are politicians who say that we should make cutbacks in education in order to expand the security budget – they are simply going against Israel’s perception of security.”

Dr. Dan Shiftan, Director of the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, stated at the conference that the hurdle facing Israel is the attempt made by radical factors in the region to draw into the war against Israel those countries that are not interested in confrontation with us. “Only a clear upper hand that would sever the radical factors will enable the moderate Arab leaders to show their people the results of confrontation with Israel. Therefore, it is in the interest of moderate Arab governments that the Hamas be brought down by Israel. They, of course, will declare the opposite in public, but it is nevertheless their clear interest,” he said.
The media: Criticism with loyalty

A new study shows that the Israeli media expressed criticism during the Second Lebanon War, but most of this criticism did not undermine government and military decisions and dealt mostly with tactical issues and failed diplomatic relations. "The research discovered that the journalists in Israel are not entrenched in one standpoint and continuously fluctuate between two extremes: national loyalty and professional identity," stated Dr. Oren Meyers of the University of Haifa’s Department of Communication. “This study,” he added, “can teach us quite a bit about the present performance of the Israeli press regarding the military operation in Gaza.”

The study, which was performed by Dr. Meyers of the University of Haifa and Dr. Motti Neiger and Dr. Eyal Zandberg of the Netanya Academic College, reviewed news reports in the daily press between 13 July and 14 August 2006 and examined the levels and nature of their criticism. “During and after the war, two opposing views were articulated. On the one hand were studies claiming that the media was not critical enough. On the other hand, many claimed that the media was too critical. The current study is intended to examine how this polarity can be,” stated Dr. Meyers.

In the course of the study, it became evident that two central types of press criticism transpired. On the one hand is criticism that does not oppose government and military action – going to war in this case – and approves these operations, but criticizes the modus operandi taken to reach goals. On the other hand is challenging criticism that undercuts the basic logic behind the mere reality of war.

The researchers discovered that most of the criticism was of the first type - not opposing the war. Thus, in terms of broad strategy, most of it focused on the IDF’s minimized use of force and placing soldiers in the villages and not “razing” the areas. On the tactical level, the criticism focused on the management of war, diplomatic relations shortcomings, logistic problems, and deficiency in treating the home front. According to the researchers, most of the criticism that objected to the decision to go to war was expressed only at the end of the war, once its results had become known.

“A major part of the press’s practice in its essence is criticism. But the journalists themselves belong to and identify with the national collective, and therefore, in time of war the two can clash. Our findings demonstrate how the journalists, according to their perceptions, combine the two so as to minimize conflict,” noted Dr. Meyers.

The researchers also found another practice carried out to breach the conflict: The source of most of the anti-war criticism expressed in the media was from foreign factors - denunciations from other countries, Lebanese sources, and the like. As such, the media framed such criticism as part of the view “The world is always against us”.

Hospital staff stress and anxiety rises significantly in times of war

The University of Haifa in cooperation with Rambam Hospital in Haifa carried out a survey examining the occurrence of stress and anxiety amongst the hospital’s medical and non-medical staff in the course of the Second Lebanon War. The study, which was published in the medical journal Depression and Anxiety, showed that the war affected the emotional stability of 94% of the hospital’s personnel. However, the study also showed that these emotional conditions did not affect the staff’s capability at work.

Rambam Hospital’s Department of Psychology, headed by Prof. Ehud Klein, alongside psychologists of the University, observed 430 doctors, nurses, and management staff who were under the threat of Hezbollah missiles while treating civilian and military casualties of the Second Lebanon War. Of the 94% who reported suffering at least one symptom of anxiety and stress, fewer than 6% became dysfunctional at the workplace.

The study team explains that the collectivity of the trauma and the social cohesion of staff members at times of war are likely to account for the restraint of distress and for the ability to continue working despite the inevitable indicators of anxiety.

Kassam rockets bring back war memories for Holocaust survivors

An initial study that was carried out at the Center for Research and Study of Aging at the University of Haifa among Holocaust survivors living in Sderot and in the areas surrounding Gaza found that many of the survivors suffer feelings of loneliness, nervousness, fear, stress, and disquiet, and have an increased need for personal contact. Many of the survivors reported that the events brought back memories from their experiences during World War II. “The ongoing exposure to trauma intensifies the sense of loneliness amongst Holocaust survivors and therefore the importance of personal contact with someone who can speak to them and see how they are increases,” said Prof. Ariela Lowenstein one of the researchers at the University of Haifa.

The study, which was carried out at the initiative of the Holocaust Survivors’ Welfare Fund in Israel, aims to interview 250 Holocaust survivors living in Sderot and surrounding Gaza who receive assistance from the Fund and see what special needs arose as a result of the ongoing exposure to the rocket fire from Gaza. The initial study, carried out by Prof. Lowenstein, Dr. Dana Prilutzki, Batia Rapaport, and Dafna Halperin of the University of Haifa, examined 35 Holocaust survivors in February-April 2008. Their goal is to extend the study to include a comparison group of aged people who are not Holocaust survivors living in the area surrounding Gaza.

Data that was collected shows that the loneliness suffered by most of the survivors is not characteristic of Sderot citizens alone; it is equally common amongst survivors in the kibbutzim in the area. According to Prof. Lowenstein, a similar study carried out amongst Holocaust survivors living in the north of the country at the time of the Second Lebanon War showed that loneliness is one of the main complaints expressed by the survivors and its presence increased the importance of continuous personal contact. It also became evident that other common problems are a lack of funding for ambulance transportation to hospitals and a lack of distress buttons; these issues reinforce the importance of constant personal contact with the survivor.
Assistant in coping with the war – for therapists

A team of specialists in community mental health from the University of Haifa have assisted therapists in the south of the country in coping with the war. The researchers and students provided support for special-care teams in the south where mentally disturbed patients are treated. “The therapists have double the responsibility. They feel responsible towards their own families, but also towards their patients, which creates a number of problems, ethical dilemmas, and a lot of pressure,” said Dr. Marc Gelkopf of the University of Haifa, who was heading the project in cooperation with the Ministry of Health.

They provided support and encouraged the therapists in bearing up with the pressures. “We met people with a number of post-trauma symptoms. People who have to cope not only with the threat on their lives and the lives of their dear ones, but also on the lives of their patients. These are people who don’t have an outlet for weakness or to relieve the pressures – not at home in front of the children and not at work in front of the patients,” explained Dr. Gelkopf.

According to Dr. Gelkopf, these are rough and complex dilemmas that the therapists have to deal with. Many, for example, do not rush to the shelter when a siren is sounded. The therapists have to decide whether to endanger themselves and coax their patients into the shelter or to rush themselves to the protected area and leave the patients outside, while there is also the need to handle patients’ anxiety attacks when the sirens go off.

Prof. David Roe, Prof. Hanoch Yerushalmi, and Dr. Orit Karnieli-Miller of the Department of Community Mental Health at the University of Haifa, along with a group of volunteer students, visited therapy centers in Sderot, Ofakim, and Netivot. They created a space in which the teams of therapists could express themselves, receive support from one another, and be exposed to each other’s experiences, all of which supports and normalizes the feelings and fears of each of the participants. The specialists also taught specific exercises intended to give the therapists tools to cope with pressure that they can utilize for themselves and for their patients.

The researchers and students also visited Ashdod and Ashkelon to offer similar support there. “We were glad that the student response was more than we could take onboard. Within a few days, thirty of them agreed to help and we had to leave some of them in the north,” added Dr. Gelkopf.

University offers a unique Web site for children in the south

The Innovative Technologies in Education Graduate Department at the University of Haifa established a unique Web site to benefit the children in the south who were forced to stay at home during the war. The site includes interesting educational activities and links to different activities on the Web, such as online games, coloring pages, youth Web sites, science and technology pages for youth, and more. The children themselves could also update the site with various activities and chat through the site with children from the north of the country who went through similar experiences in 2006.

Dr. Sharona T. Levy came up with the initiative for this project and it is led by the head of the Advanced Technology track, Dr. Dani Ben-Zvi. The content of the site was voluntarily developed by postgraduate students of the track who are specializing in computer use in education.

Web site: http://negev.haifa.ac.il

Goodies for children and soldiers in the south

The Employees’ Committee of the University of Haifa readily responded to a request from the Lev Chash volunteer association that provides food for the needy, to gather candies and snacks for the children in the south of the country and for soldiers serving in the Gaza strip. Administration divisions promptly collected generous donations from University workers and the boxes were then picked up by energetic volunteers from Lev Chash to be distributed in the south. In a letter of thanks from the association, the University was praised for its readiness to put a smile on the faces of the children who were under constant missile fire and to bring cheer to the IDF soldiers.

The Interdisciplinary Clinical Center opened a hotline

Missiles and warning sirens in the south, as well as Katyusha rockets falling in the north last week and the fear of launching a northern front, can cause a renewal of the trauma experienced during the Second Lebanon War. It can surface in adults who were exposed to the missiles then and in children, especially if their parents are suffering anxiety. The Interdisciplinary Clinical Center at the University of Haifa opened a hotline for citizens living in Haifa and the north, for consultation with specialists on any question or problem that arises.

According to Dr. Rivka Yahav, Head of the Interdisciplinary Clinical Center, the Center received calls for help for children who refused to go to school, children who came home wet, and children who were afraid to part from their parents. The adult population also turned to the Center with complaints of anxiety and tension.

“Following the Second Lebanon War, we treated a group of children who experienced trauma, and now some of the parents have turned to us and reported symptoms of renewed trauma. I believe that the phenomenon is widespread in our society and it is important to legitimize and treat it . . . . It is crucial to take note of changes in behavior that continue over a period of time,” Dr. Yahav pointed out.