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### **Wars, the Military and Social Media: A Sticky Wicket**

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Posted by [Neal Leavitt](#) on November 18th, 2012 at 4:52 pm

In ancient China, soldiers along the Great Wall would use smoke signals conveyed from tower to tower to warn about a possible attack. The Roman Army established numerous forts and stations spread out along major road systems connecting the empire; relay points provided horses to dispatch soldiers and vehicles to quickly transmit messages. Those were rather rudimentary forms of social media but they successfully worked for centuries.

Fast forward a few thousand years. The relationship between the military and social media today has developed light years beyond what the ancients envisioned.

The most recent example is still playing out. While Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are poised for a possible ground invasion of Gaza, as extensively reported in the media, both the IDF and al-Qassam, Hamas' military

wing, have already been waging a war of words via Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media outlets.

[Time](#), for instance, reported last week that the IDF has unveiled ‘game dynamics’ on its war blog.

“These ‘gamification’ features, normally the province of social networking services like Foursquare and Facebook, allow visitors to the IDF’s blog to rack up ‘points’ for repeat visits or numerous tweets, as the blog tracks the progress of Israel’s escalating conflict with al-Qassam,” stated *Time*.

The IDF, added [The Verge](#), has also established an Interactive Media branch comprised of 30 soldiers that pen blog posts and status updates, headed up by Lt. Col. Avital Leibovich. One recent tweet generated by the branch was widely reprinted/broadcast by mainstream media in the U.S. and abroad:

“We recommend that no Hamas operatives, whether low level or senior leaders, show their faces above ground in the days ahead.”

Meanwhile, noted [Fast Company](#), an Israeli blog, [Yid with Lid](#), reported that Israeli military contacts are asking Internet users not to post attack locations because Hamas and other organizations could use social media to triangulate rocket launches.

“Geotagging of posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram makes metadata describing the exact location of a user publicly available,” said *Fast Company*. “GPS technology allows any outsider access to triangulation abilities that would have been a military secret even 10 years ago. For Hamas, the Israeli military and other players, access to real-time GPS information on the ground via social media is an increasing reality.”

Social media has also played an important role in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As reported last July by [Reuters](#), “foreign troops and insurgents have for years sparred on Twitter over the extent of victories against one another, while Afghan journalists are locked in a row with their government over press freedoms and new media laws.”

Ironically, the Taliban, which banned the Internet while they were in power, now frequently use social networking to communicate and promote their messages.

One bright spot that has emerged from the conflict in Iraq has been [RallyPoint](#), a LinkedIn for the military. Founded by two veterans, Yinon Weiss and Aaron Kletzing, the online professional network enables U.S. service members to form career connections and alliances with potential employers and each other. The site is accessible only to verified military members.

According to [Wired](#), RallyPoint “places active, reserve and transitioning veterans into contact with mentors, colleagues and civilian recruiters throughout the military and veteran communities.” Members can connect with units and other military professionals across the U.S. Armed Forces; they can also compare promotion/career progress to peers and mentors and learn from their decisions.

With respect to the Israel-Hamas conflict, hopefully diplomatic efforts will prevail and both parties will stand down. But social media’s role in escalating or mitigating conflicts around the globe will continue to be yet another factor that will have to be addressed.

Wouldn’t surprise me a bit then if someday – at least in the U.S. – we’ll also see a Secretary of *Virtual*




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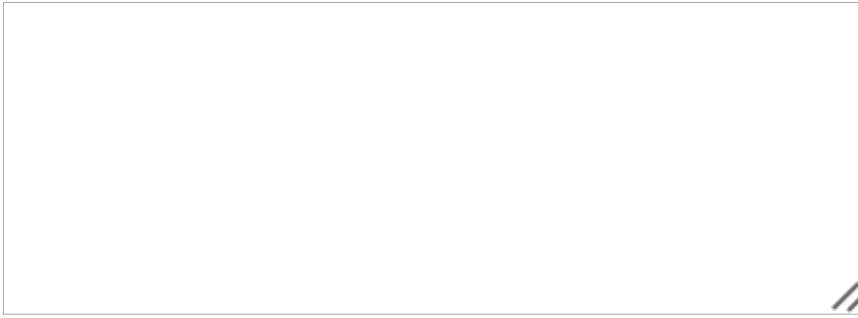
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