

Nov 04, 2016 by [Mark Dillen](#)

New Media, Old Truths ^[1]

Many journalists and commentators have examined and illuminated the role of new media and technology in the on-going protests in Iran. Exposing the electoral fraud perpetrated by Ahmedinejad last year and the violent repression of resultant protests certainly called for the skill of traditional journalists and the new media capabilities of Iranian citizen witnesses and participants. Since there were few foreign correspondents able to report first-hand from Tehran last summer, the “I Reports” sent to the world by ordinary Iranians were critically important in getting the truth out.

But what of the protests and conflict in Gaza and the West Bank? A few months earlier, during a two-week long Israeli military operation in Gaza, more than a thousand Palestinians were killed. By all accounts, most of these casualties were civilians.

Just as traditional journalism was restricted by Iranian authorities in the aftermath of the June Iranian elections, Israeli authorities placed severe restrictions on Western journalists trying to cover the Israeli incursion in Gaza in 2008-2009.

In fact, just as non-traditional media were and are critical to getting the word out on what was happening in Tehran, the same kinds of media are essential to bearing witness as to what has transpired — and continues to transpire — in Gaza and the West Bank.

One of the few scholars doing real research on the role of new media and technology in the occupied West Bank and Gaza is Charmaine Stanley, a graduate student at the University of Toronto. She spoke last week at the International Studies Association convention in New Orleans. You can listen to my interview with her here.

One of the striking aspects to Stanley’s findings is the way that smart phone technology not only communicates “actuality” about events — video recordings and “tweets” — but also serves to organize political protest. This technology has been instrumental in linking Palestinians and Israeli Jews who advocate peaceful change. During the Gaza incursion by the Israeli military, Stanley reports, the Israeli peace movement managed to give Palestinians cell phones they could use to record and transmit video images of the violence. Eventually some of these images found their way into mainstream media.

In response, Stanley notes, the Israeli military gave their own forces smart phones so that they could themselves record incidents that implicated Palestinians. Since Israeli authorities had clamped down on foreign media access, they couldn’t hope that foreign correspondents would get *that* story.

Iranian authorities have shown a capacity and a willingness to shut down access to the Internet, but eventually citizen journalists find a work-around. Israeli authorities also have the capacity to control Internet access and monitor, trace and track the many Palestinians they suspect of disloyalty. But here too peaceful protesters have shown enough courage and

commitment to get their message out.

We can't yet foresee how these new media measures and counter-measures will end, only hope that they may lead those contemplating large scale violence to think again.

It would be great if the proliferation of digital recording devices and access to Internet served to deter violence. Better still if the only weapons drawn in Gaza and the West Bank were smart phones.

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