

IDF Radio: Past and Possible Future

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This paper seeks to examine the justifications for maintaining a military radio station in Israel today. After presenting the history of Israel's military radio station "Galey Tzahal" (hereafter IDF Radio) and analyzing the arguments for and against maintaining it in its present form, the paper contends that it should be preserved only on condition it view IDF soldiers as the primary, even if not the exclusive, target audience. Therefore, it recommends that IDF Radio reorient its programming towards soldiers and their preferences. Other structural and administrative changes are suggested as well.

The **first chapter** describes the first years of the station, from its early iterations before Independence, through its formal establishment in 1950, and until 1967.

The **second chapter** traces the years from its re-birth following the Six Day War to current day.

The **third chapter** lays out the arguments made in favor of IDF Radio in its current form, with some commentary.

The **fourth chapter** enumerates the arguments against the current form of IDF Radio, with some commentary.

The **last chapter** contains a summary and the policy recommendations proposed.

In an **appendix**, a response to the paper from IDF Radio commander Yaron Deckel is reproduced, as well as the author's answer.

Summary

What started as an clandestine broadcast for the "*Hagana*" underground defense organization in the years before the State was established, was later founded by law in September 1950 as the official military station, envisaged by Ben-Gurion to have social as well as security objectives. After the Six Day war in 1967, Yitzhak Livni was appointed IDF Radio Commander, and he transformed it into a vibrant mainstream media platform in what was popularly called a "rebirth". Despite several attempts to shut down or shrink the station's activities, it has largely remained unchanged till today.

The arguments for maintaining the station in its present form include:

1. The need for an emergency media outlet to promote security objectives.
2. A desire on the part of the public and the soldiery to consume its news, security and military content.

3. The social and educational role the station performs for IDF soldiers.
4. The ability to generate quality content, stemming from several advantages (among them not being beholden to commercial interests).
5. The role it serves as a national training ground for journalism in Israel.

The arguments against include:

1. Categorical opposition to all public radio, and military radio in particular.
2. Changes in Israeli media and media consumption habits.
3. The inherent tension between the nature of a military organization and the need to ensure freedom of the press.
4. Broadcasts the target audience of which is citizens and soldiers in their home country.
5. Broadcasts which are generally not of a military character.
6. Broadcasters and other employees represent only a narrow segment of the Israeli population and political spectrum.
7. Frequencies are made less available to private broadcasters.
8. Partial funding by external commercial actors is problematic.
9. Mismanagement.

Recommendations

In general, the station only has legitimacy as a station for IDF soldiers, and should therefore broadcast content regarding the defense establishment and the IDF, or otherwise intended for IDF soldiers and pre-recruits (such as relevant news, cultural issues, and more), and work to achieve significant listenership rates among IDF soldiers and pre-recruits.

Specifically:

1. Conduct periodic surveys among IDF soldiers to map listening patterns and preferences.
2. Expand the number of military-focused programs.
3. Hold quinquennial discussions within the frameworks of IDF Radio, the Israel Broadcasting Authority, the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Communications regarding the stations' activities in relation to the extent of content consumption on radio and online, in order to examine the need for making substantial changes to its mode of operation.
4. Continue to work on diversifying the social profile of soldiers enlisted to IDF Radio and maintain turnover of the broadcasters.
5. Examine the possibility of separating the music channel and putting up a tender for it as a national music channel. At the same time, expand the musical programs of IDF Radio.
6. Submit a detailed breakdown of IDF Radio's budget within the publicly disclosed areas of the defense budget in the annual budget book for Knesset approval.
7. Anchor the selection process of the IDF Radio commander and determine the length of his or her term in the General Staff directives.

8. Assign the role of Public Complaints Ombudsman to an experienced and reputable journalist who has not worked at the station in the four years prior to the appointment and would be barred from working for the station during tenure and for a period of four years after. The commissioner would be an employee of the Ministry of Defense.
9. Examine various possibilities for the establishment of national private radio stations.

After sixty-six years of statehood, it is time to minimize the military broadcasting of a democratic state and strive to leave the advancement of political, social and economic goals in the hands of private and public civil parties. However, at a time when the production of non-commercial mass media is uncertain, IDF Radio can fill the role of preserving Israel's military legacy, Israeli social and national culture, and the connection between soldiers and civilians by producing content that is not driven solely by commercial needs. That being said, the station has legitimacy only as an IDF driven station - focusing on the military and its personnel as its main target audience, and tailoring programming to military content and soldiers' interests.

For the [full Hebrew paper](#)