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The First Word: The other side of hasbara

By DAVID BRINN



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Bob Dylan once wrote something about changing times, and if you can't lend a hand in making the new path, you should step aside to make way for those who can.

Thanks to an out-of-box approach by a number of American organizations and some visionary thinkers at our very own Foreign Ministry, the future path of hasbara is rapidly changing forever. While this new approach doesn't suggest that we abandon traditional methods of "explaining" Israel's positions, it certainly provides a complementary alternative outlook on not only how we conduct Israel advocacy, but how we want Israel to appear in the eyes of the world.

This past Sunday evening, 11 exhausted American journalists left Ben-Gurion Airport after spending eight days on a Youth Media junket sponsored by ISRAEL21c,



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the America-Israel Friendship League, America's Voices in Israel, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The reason for the sleep deprivation wasn't because of climbing the snake path to the top of Masada, or in-depth briefings on the Iranian nuclear threat from top think-tank specialists, or meetings with high-ranking military officials or Knesset members.

Rather, it was due to staying up all night in the hottest Tel Aviv nightclubs, touring the restaurants of Jaffa on foot with famed chef Nir Zuk, learning about the Israeli companies that are creating the next ICQ, dining with Etgar Keret, Ivry Lider, Idan Raichel, Hadag Nachash and Sagol 59, and discovering the latest cutting-edge fashions in the burgeoning "Gan Hahashmal" fashion-design district of Tel Aviv.

For this wasn't a group of reporters from *The New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal*. In the words of Israeli journalist Uriel Heilman, who covered the visit for JTA, it consisted of "reporters from hipster music magazines, racy publications and teen glossies."

While Israel's hasbara is generally aimed at readers of the staid, traditional media outlets like the *Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and CNN, a whole generation of Americans are eschewing those forms in favor of "new media" - Web sites, blogs, podcasts and magazines which cater to their interests in music, fashion, gadgets, trends and underground culture - media like *Stuff*, *Paper*, *URB*, *Bust*, *Flaunt*, and MTV's *Urge* Web site.

When I was growing up, my generation subscribed to *Rolling Stone* - which provided "all the news that fit" in regard to youth culture. Today, the palette is much broader; there isn't one "center" to youth culture, and young readers have a myriad of options to which to turn for information and entertainment.

These American consumers - aged 18 to 30 - are generally uninterested in the Middle East and the Israeli-

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Palestinian conflict. But the only images and information they've received over the past five years have been about suicide bombings, IDF raids, burned-out buses and Ariel Sharon's illness.

THE PURPOSE of the Youth Media Tour was to show the group of reporters and editors who write for the youth market that Israel is one cool place - bursting with music, sounds, food, ideas, opinions and youth culture - and provide them with concrete ideas for stories that they could write for their publications which would make Israel come alive and become more relevant to the lives of their readers.

Therefore, when the group attended a session on the Israeli film industry hosted by *Jerusalem Post* film critic Hannah Brown, and were addressed by successful producer/directors Joseph Cedar (*Campfire*) and Gal Uchovsky (*Yossi and Jagger*), they were treated to advance screenings of the director's upcoming films - both of which will be released in the US.

Likewise, when they attended a sneak-peek rehearsal of choreographer Emanuel Gat's dance troupe at the Suzanne Dellal Center, they learned that the show they enjoyed would be performed later this year at New York City's Lincoln Center.

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