'Brand Israel': hasbara and Israeli sport
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Introduction

Much attention is focused on the use of 'soft power' and specifically how sports events are used by nations to generate a more benevolent global image. Modern nation states are increasingly developing their own particular 'soft power' activities, drawing upon different resources and have different audiences in mind. Until relatively recently, the state of Israel was preoccupied with its military security and paid little attention to cultural politics. However, because of the military dominance of Israel other 'battlegrounds' have emerged. Academic research on soft power and sport has traditionally focused on high profile events (such as the FIFA World Cup finals and Summer Olympic Games). This paper spotlights an international sports event which, although relatively small and usually attracting limited interest from the mainstream media, when held in Israel, highlights regional politics, the role of UEFA/FIFA and becomes part of a wider debate over international public opinion.

Grix and Himpler (2007) identified how the United States used soft power as an alternative to its military activities and to counter its negative image post-2003 Iraq war, something that echoes Germany's use of sport to address the legacy of its *Third Reich* (Grix and Houlihan, 2013). This paper seeks to complement and extend the existing discussion by focusing on how the Israeli state is using smaller sports events, as one of its many soft power ('hasbara') activities, in an attempt to arrest its deteriorating international image. The paper begins by briefly outlining the concepts of public diplomacy and soft power. The specific principles of 'hasbara' are explained with illustrations showing how the concept is empirically operationalised (*'hasbara in action'*). The paper cites UEFA's Men's U-21 tournament held in Israel in 2013 to assess how the different groups responded to the event. An evaluation is made of the rhetoric that surrounded the event in print media and online: celebratory by the host nation, the Israeli Football Association (IFA) and UEFA, and supporters of the Israeli state;

highly critical amongst Palestinians and their supporters in the wider international community. The event is used to inform a wider discussion on the politics of sport and the role of soft power (here, hasbara) within the *realpolitik* of the Israel / Palestine conflict.

Public diplomacy and soft power

The concept of 'public diplomacy' as a distinct form of diplomatic activity first appeared in the late 1960s as part of the United States government's attempted to destabilise the Soviet bloc. It emerged in response to a growing awareness of the limitations of traditional diplomacy and the need for the US political establishment to seek alternative ways to advance its foreign policy whilst avoiding accusations of conducting overt ideological propaganda. The concept lay undeveloped until the 9/11/2001 attacks on the USA; after this event, many Western powers, and the USA in particular, realised they needed to respond to the changing nature of international relations, to address their international image and to re-engage with new forms of public diplomacy.

Nye (1990; 2004; 2008) developed and popularised the concept of 'soft power' which was seen as a guide on how to promote US foreign policy.[1] Nye's work was built on Organski's (1968) discussion of intangible forms of power and persuasion and Baldwin's (1979; 1985) work on the different forms of statecraft. Soft power was defined by Nye (2004: x) as,

> the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. [...] Soft power arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.

Nye's claim was that in a rapidly changing political and technological global environment, in order for the US to maintain its dominance, it would need to master information and communication technology (ICT) and use it to *set the political agenda and determine the framework of debate in a way that shapes others' preferences'* (Nye, 1990: 166). Developments in ICT allowed newer forms of 'public diplomacy' to emerge and generated greater awareness of public relations, marketing and media. The development of soft power and new forms of public diplomacy led to a shift away from foreign policy being established and maintained through 'gun-boat' diplomacy that typically involved politicians, civil servants and established

policy-makers. The focus shifted to one which cultivated wider public opinion by promoting positive images and values with engaged media 'pundits' and a broader public in an attempt to engender greater legitimacy. Whilst Nye (2004:2) explained soft power as an option to 'attract and co-opt' he acknowledged the continued role of hard power and its coercive strength to secure a desired outcome. Although still able to draw upon its hard power (i.e. military and economic strength), soft power would allow the US to utilise less tangible (but not necessarily less effective) resources to appeal more directly to the public in other countries. Combining military power and economic strength with soft power would produce 'smart power' which, according to Nye (2004:32), would help maintain the dominance of the US as *the* global super power.

The early work on public diplomacy and soft power contained a strong bias towards a United States worldview and has been challenged by those who question Nye's approach. The concept of soft power was criticized as containing an assumption that it will create a positive outcome for *all* parties. As Lepp and Gibson (2001, cited in Grix and Lee, 2013) have illustrated, soft power is used to draw attention away from any number of negative issues such as war, terrorism, poverty, gender inequalities, unemployment, crime and corruption, and poor standards in education and healthcare. While it is seen as a preferable form of diplomacy for the 21st century, Falk (2012) has argued that significant power still resides in the use of hard power (i.e. military) and economics such as financial loans and / or membership of political institutions (EU, WTO, NATO etc). As Grix and Lee (2013: 526) have noted, *'neither Nye nor other "soft power" scholars tend to spend much time pondering who decides exactly what "attractive" is in international relations.'* The growing use of soft power may be seen to reflect the gradual economic and military decline of the US. The ultimate aim of soft power is not necessarily benign as its normative bias can be seen as promoting US institutions, its particular approach to democracy, its popular culture and - by association - its underpinning ideology. As such, soft power can be interpreted as an exercise in the continuation of US neo-liberalism, its imperialist ambitions and a continued disregard for any genuine move towards a post-colonial agenda for self-determination.

Sports events and soft power

Recent years have seen significant interest in the political instrumentality associated with staging international sports events with nation states investing in staging mega-events using a rationale of 'urban regeneration' and / or 'place branding.' High profile sports events have become highly sought-after commodities (Nauright, 2004) and are increasingly being used to establish a global identify and / or improve a nation's international public image (Hall, 1989; 1992; Grix and Lee, 2013). As Horne (2007) and Roche (2000) have identified, sports mega-events have become an exemplary means to transmit promotional messages to a global audience. As signifiers of modernity which embody and reflect neo-liberal policies (Hall, 2006), Jackson (2013) has discussed 'the contested terrain of sports diplomacy in a globalising world' with Manzenreiter (2010) identifying an emerging discourse that identifies the abstract and intangible benefits of hosting mega-events.

As Grix and Lee (2013: 527) note, sport is presented as having universal appeal and thus hosting an international event allows the host to demonstrate,

> *that they not only share those values …[and that] … they are guardians of universal norms and … [can] … champion and collectively celebrate these within the context of their own distinctive cultural, social and political values illuminating truths such as fair play that have universal appeal.*

The FIFA World Cup Finals, the UEFA Championship Finals, and the IOC Summer and Winter Olympic Games are the established sport mega-events, with the secondary tier of sports events equally sought-after by smaller nation states (these include the IAAF and FINA Championships, the Pan American Games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, the African Cup of Nations, the UEFA Champions League final, F1 races, ICC and Rugby Union finals). Although smaller in scale and media interest, these events are accessible to those countries which (due to their size) would not be able to host a mega-event. Although the Men's U-21 tournament is one such event which does not attract extensive media or public interest, it is organised by UEFA/FIFA and therefore carries a level of prestige not found in many other sports events.

Grix and Lee (2013) identified a number of sports mega-events (e.g. South Africa, 2010 FIFA World Cup; China, 2008 Olympic Games; India, 2010 Commonwealth Games; Russia, 2014 Winter Olympics; and forthcoming, Russia, 2018 FIFA World Cup; Qatar, 2022 FIFA World Cup) where the host nation has sought to exploit their hosting of the event to improve its

international image (see also Grix and Houlihan, 2013). Cornelissen (2008) has shown how South Africa attempted this by hosting the 2010 FIFA World Cup and whilst Alegi (2008) has shown how sports politics and diplomacy were expressions of soft power in a South African context. Manzenreiter (2010) identified how international stereotypes and misconceptions were difficult barriers to overcome for those nations seeking to change their global image, with Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) identifying how the Qatari state is seeking to distance itself from the region's wider socio-political issues by hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup Finals.

When a national government decides to support hosting a major sports event, especially if it is seeking to address a negative international image, there are risks. This is particularly so for those states that *already* have a poor international reputation (Grix and Lee, 2013). Such countries need to ensure the event is subject to careful 'impression management' if a positive image is to be created and presented and result in greater international political legitimacy for the host. The global communication processes which now operate (Grix and Lee, 2013) mean that extensive effort is needed to ensure the mainstream news media are 'on message' and give priority coverage to the 'positive' messages identified by the host. The host can influence individual journalists with 'junkets' and official tours and underpin this with the threat to withdraw press accreditation if they drift too far from the 'official script.' The emergence of new / social media and the emergence of 'citizen journalism' (Hänska-Ahy and Shapour, 2013; Greer and McLaughlin, 2010) has led to an increase in distinctly 'off message' reporting which has embarrassed the hosts (such as the Formula 1 international motor races in Bahrain, 2012 and 2013 - see Brown, 2013). In many cases the legitimacy sought by the hosts can quickly diminish with Grix and Lee (2013) identifying as examples the 2010 Commonwealth Games in India, the 2012 UEFA Championships in Poland / Ukraine, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi (Russia), FIFA 2014 in Brazil, and FIFA 2020 in Qatar.

Previous research has concentrated on the use of sports 'mega-events' by emerging states and / or advanced capitalist nations **with a growing body of work accounting for the use of sports events by the state during Israel's formative era (see for example Galily and Ben-Porat, 2012; Sorek, 2007). The paper focuses on the key actors involved in the specific discourse surrounding U-21 event: specifically the Israeli FA, the Palestinian FA, the Israeli state, supporters of the Israeli state, and supporters of the Palestinians. Drawing upon news reporting of the event, and advocacy material issued by both 'sides' in the conflict, the**

paper identifies how a relatively small sports event can be seen as part of Israel's hasbara strategy and was designed to improve its international image. The discussion draws upon Manzenreiter's (2010) and Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) observation that 'raising a state's profile is one thing; managing it is another' by examining the actions of both those who supported, and those opposed to, Israel hosting this event. Nygard and Gates' (2013) mechanism of sports diplomacy and politics (i.e. image building, building a platform for dialogue, trust building, reconciliation, integration and anti-racism) work is also used to inform an assessment of the contemporary landscape and how soft power is being used by both Israeli and Palestinian supporters. The aim of the paper is to navigate through these complex debates and examine Israel's hosting of an international sport event, the response of the Palestinians and the role played by the sport's governing bodies, specifically UEFA/FIFA.

Israel's *hasbara* strategy

The state of Israel was created and maintained through military power. Despite being victorious in many of its wars, most significantly in 1948, 1967 and 1973 ('it cannot afford to lose'), the two Palestinian Intifadas (1987-1993 and 2000-2005) have caused significant damage to Israel's international image. The two wars in Lebanon (1982-1985 and 2006) and the occupation of territory since 1967, the isolation of (and repeated incursion into) the Gaza Strip, the building of the 'Peace Wall', and the continued construction of illegal settlements on the 'West Bank' have all increased international public criticism of the Israeli state.[2] Israel can no longer rely solely on its militarily dominance and in an attempt to counter the growing perception of the country as a place of war, terrorism, intolerance and religious conflict, coupled to increasing support for Palestinian human rights and an emerging narrative that seeks to compare Israel with apartheid South Africa, the Israeli government has invested heavily in 'hasbara' (**Bazz, 2015; Blumenthal, 2012; Ravid, 2013**).

The Israeli Foreign Ministry (2005) states there is no precise translation of the word 'hasbara' in English or in any other language. Israeli public diplomacy and the concept of *hasbara* have been defined variously as *propaganda, whitewashing, explaining, information providing, public diplomacy, re-branding* and *overseas image-building* (IFM, 2005; Ravid, 2012; Schulman, 2011; 2012). The primary cause of Israel's poor international image has been seen as a failure of hasbara (i.e. 'to explain') rather than the actions of the state (Molad, 2012;

Gilboa, 2006; 2008). Originally a campaign co-ordinated by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, hasbara is currently coordinated by the Ministry of Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs (Blumenthal, 2013). Other official advocacy bodies which promote Israel overseas include the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Prime Minister's Office, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) Spokesman's Office, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, and the Jewish Agency - each of which contains a dedicated hasbara unit (Blumenthal, 2013) and which operates its own *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube,* and *Flickr* accounts (Molad, 2012). Israel's public diplomacy efforts (i.e. hasbara) require an extensive communications strategy to coordinate its communication with the foreign media in Israel and overseas with multiple social networks and new media technologies fully utilised to created *'one of the most sophisticated and effective public diplomacy apparatuses in the world'* (Molad, 2012: 24). Professional staff are supported by volunteers with both parties accessing an 'Official Hasbara Handbook' to guide their activities across the mainstream and social media. According to Blumenthal (2013) this can involve relentlessly harassing ('trolling') those who express scepticism about official Israeli policy or show sympathy for the Palestinians by accusing them of anti-Semitism.

In 2005 in response to a growing international boycott of Israeli organisations operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the Foreign Ministry began a 'Brand Israel' public relations campaign as part of hasbara. They recognised that 'images on television have a much greater and immediate impact on what the public abroad feels about Israel, than the arguments Israel presents' (IFM, 2005; see also Schulman, 2012). The Foreign Ministry suggested that international audiences are not willing to invest time or energy in trying to understand the complex history of the region and that their collective memory is short. They go on to claim that there exists an 'automatic emotional support for the Third World, anti-globalism, hatred of the United States and other such agendas … [that] … favour the Palestinians over Israel'. In order to counter this, there is a need for greater public diplomacy and to use 'high-quality printed materials and multimedia materials […and …] a state-of-the-art computerized system', with Israeli diplomatic staff required to meet not only with 'government officials, the media, and Jewish communities abroad' but also 'with students and professors, ethnic and religious leaders, as well as key people in the business world and in the arts and sciences' (IFM, 2005).

Hasbara-related activity is increasingly focused on the activities of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In 2005 a campaign endorsed by over 170 Palestinian individuals and organisations from Palestinian civil society (those side-lined from both state-

to-state negotiations and in the armed struggle), called for a programme of boycott, divestment and sanctions until Israel complies with international law and ensures the fundamental rights of Palestinian people under the universal principles of Human Rights (Bakan and Abu-Laban, 2009; Barghouti, 2011). Hasbara has sought to discredit this campaign arguing that instead of traditional anti-Semitism (which attacked individual Jews and their communities), attacks on 'the Jews' are now made via the state of Israel. This is based on the claim that Europeans have - and continue to hold – a long-standing (for some pathological) hatred of the Jews (Klug, 2012; Tait, 2013; Weinthal, 2014).[3] How else, supporters of the Israeli state argue, can one explain why Israel is subject to so much criticism and is judged by different standards to those applied to many other countries?[4] This 'disguised' form of anti-Semitism is expressed in terms of undermining Israel's legitimacy, denying its right to exist and demonizing the Israeli / Jewish state (the collective approach known by a '3D' mnemonic of delegitimisation, double standards and demonization, see Sharansky, 2004). Although this approach is acknowledged as lacking rigour (Molad, 2012), it allows criticism of the Israeli state to be dismissed as anti-Semitic rather than anti-Zionist.

'Hasbara in action'

Each nation state has different resources available to advance their international public diplomacy efforts. This section discusses some of the resources available to Israel and how they coordinate their efforts through hasbara. Although Israel is a relatively small country (in terms of area and population), it has, for a variety of different reasons, access to resources to develop cultural exchanges far beyond the capacity of its immediate neighbours. Having militarily defeated their enemies, the Israeli state is shifting from 'warfare to lawfare' and is increasingly working through different organisations (e.g. American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Anti-Deformation League, Israel Project, the Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund, Sharut HaDin,[5] StandWithUs, United Israel Appeal, We Believe in Israel, World Zionist Organisation, Zionist Organisation of America) to counter criticism made of the state. Israel has highly developed science, electronics, technology and R&D industries, many of which are closely linked to the education system and its military (IDF), the latter of which lies at the heart of Israeli society.

The Israeli state has established numerous projects that seek to engage both Israeli citizens, young Jewish people, philosemites and those supportive of Zionism in order to advance the hasbara agenda (Molad, 2012). Under the 'law of return' Jewish people located anywhere in the world have an automatic right to Israeli citizenship[6] with the Jewish Agency (as part of the World Zionist Organisation) one of many organisations which promotes Jewish emigration to Israel ('aliyah'[7]). Automatic citizenship and numerous incentives are available including free return trips to Israel, financial and social benefits and tax exemptions all of which are designed to encourage aliyah (Hayeem, 2010). Those considering aliyah are guided towards locations within Israel proper, but also to areas around Jerusalem despite many of these settlements being on illegally annexed land and in direct violation of international law.[8]

The Jewish Diaspora is a significant ambassadorial source of soft power for the Israeli state and allows it access to well-established social networks through Jewish cultural exchange programmes and specific hasbara programmes, many of which target US and European campuses (Blumenthal, 2013). Campuses have become key sites in the struggle for public opinion with the Israeli government offering scholarships and 'fellowships' to those willing to actively promote Israel on campus – especially on social media (Bannoura, 2014). Investment in this area is due, in part, to the growing academic boycott of Israeli institutions (British Committee for Universities of Palestine, 2013; Goldberg, 2014; Rose and Rose, 2008).[9] In 2009 the British Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) voted to support an academic boycott of Israeli educational institutions, followed in 2013 by the American Studies Association (ASA). In 2014 the Modern Language Association (MLA) passed a resolution criticising Israel for restricting the right of US scholars to enter the West Bank to work at Palestinian Universities. Academic campuses in North America and Europe have seen student protest during the 'Israel Apartheid Week' (IAW), an advocacy event supported by BDS campaigners with various pro-Israel / Zionist groups challenging IAW event and the wider BDS narrative.

Amongst the 'soft power' resources the Israeli state has at its disposal are ones linked to religion and sexual orientation. The biblical history of the region and the shared religious heritage of Judaism and Christianity have allowed the Israeli state to build support amongst certain religious groups around the world. Israel's Ministry of Tourism has worked with influential Evangelical Christians (Christian Zionists) in an attempt to develop 'ambassadors' who advocate on behalf of the state of Israel, of 'Eretz Israel'[10] and specifically the city of Jerusalem (Bryant, 2013; Spector, 2008). This 'faith-based diplomacy' has generated

significant growth in Christian tourism, especially from developing countries such as Brazil, South Korea and Nigeria, states that have not traditionally supported Israel (Bryant, 2013). This particular form of diplomacy takes on greater resonance as the more progressive Christian groups and charities increasingly support the call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (Eleftheriou-Smith, 2014; Posner, 2014; Wyatt, 2014).

In 2011 Tel Aviv was named the world's best gay tourist destination (Haaretz, 2012). This award was a consequence of the international advertising campaign conducted by the Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs which promoted the country to the LGBTQ community as a modern, gay-friendly destination. Criticised as 'pinkwashing' (Schulman, 2011) this marketing strategy was seen as an attempt by Israel to exploit the fight against homophobia by drawing attention away from its violation of Palestinian human rights, its occupation of the West Bank, ongoing blockade of Gaza and building of its 'peace wall.' There is also the suggestion that Israel has used this particular issue to emphasise homophobia in Palestinian society and depict neighbouring Arab countries as reactionary and intolerant.

There have been efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together through various cultural and educational projects (such as the Barenboim-Said Foundation USA, Brighton University's Football-4-Peace project, various UNESCO initiatives and the Peres Centre for Peace, see Yashar, 2014). However, the BDS movement has called for an international boycott of all organisations which receive funding from the Israeli state, including the Batsheva dance company, whose performances are repeatedly disrupted by 'Don't Dance with Israeli Apartheid' protestors (Orr, 2012). Film makers, writers, artists, performers and musicians have refused to appear in Israel stating their appearance might be seen as condoning Israeli government policy (Electronic Intifada, 2006). However, others continue to visit, exhibit and perform in Israel on the grounds that 'bridge-building' between the different communities is better than isolation, an echo of the argument used by those who performed in apartheid South Africa.

UEFA's Men's Under-21 Tournament, 2013,
The UEFA Men's Under-21 Championship is a biannual tournament that has operated in its current format since 1978. In January 2011 UEFA awarded the championship to Israel. This would be the biggest soccer event staged in Israel and the most high profile international

sporting event since it had hosted the Paralympic Games in 1968. At the outset it is necessary to highlight that there was no direct link or explicitly acknowledgement by the Israeli government in respect of the U-21 UEFA championships. FIFA (and UEFA) are particular sensitive to government interference in the operation of a national FA and have suspended (but rarely expelled) those deemed to have transgressed.[11] Cognisant of this the Israeli government does not directly involve itself but works through others, primarily the Israeli FA (IFA), but also through its broader hasbara operation (outline previously); ultimately, in matters relating to national security the Israeli state has the final word.

In the build-up to the tournament the English FA and German FA cooperated with IFA on a number of 'football for all' and anti-racist initiatives (Willenzik, 2013; Ynetnews, 2013). Staging the tournament was an opportunity for Israel to attract public and media interest 'for the right reasons' (Dann, 2013) and, according to one of the German team players (Lasogga), would allow Israel to "show a different side of itself from the politics and what you see on the television" (quoted in Masters, 2013). A number of Zionist organisations (i.e. StandWithUs, the Zionist Federation and the Fair Play Campaign Group) asked English supporters to write to their U-21 players to wish them luck and to express hope that they enjoy their experience in Israel, but not to make reference to anything political or the attempted boycott of this tournament (Lipan, 2013). The tournament was promoted by the IFA, UEFA and the Israeli state as an opportunity to bring together diverse groups, to promote mutual respect and tolerance on and off the field and to portray the Israeli state as a democracy (Willenzik, 2013). The Israeli U-21 squad contained six Israeli-Arab players (Taylor, 2013) which reflected the 17%-20% Israeli-Arab population of Israel (depending if one includes Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and Druze in the Golan Heights); this part of the population, Palestinians living in pre-1967 Israel, occupy a very different position to Palestinians living as refugees in neighbouring countries, in the Palestinian diaspora and those living in the West Bank and Gaza (Shor and Yonay, 2010; Sorek, 2005; 2007).

As noted above, when a national government chooses to support the hosting of a sports event there is no guarantee it will go according to plan. Successfully managing a state's international image during a sports event, across both the mainstream and social media, has become increasingly difficult as the event can offer a platform for protestors to highlight 'messages' different to those promoted by the hosts. In the period immediately prior to UEFA's designation

of tournament host, fighting between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Hamas fighters in the Gaza Strip resulted in 139 deaths (6 Israelis and 133 Palestinians) and over 1000 people wounded (240 Israelis / 840 Palestinians) (see Beaumont, 2015).

The main sports stadium in Gaza was hit by the IDF, who claiming it was being used to launch rockets, killed four youngsters playing football in the stadium (Ogden, 2012). When UEFA announced their host country various organisations called upon UEFA to revoke its decision, including the Palestinian FA, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (UK). 24 British MPs[12] put forward an 'Early Day Motion 640' titled 'Racism in Football and European Football Tournament in Israel' which stated,

> *That this House congratulates the Football Association for its Kick It Out campaign against racism in football; registers with profound disapproval, however, that the FA is prepared to participate in the European Under-21 football tournament to be played in Israel in June 2013, even though Israel is geographically not in Europe and is a country which has policies of racial apartheid against Palestinians; and therefore calls on the Government to support the Red Card Israeli Apartheid campaign which calls for this European football tournament to be played in Europe* (Russell, 2012).

The British Guardian newspaper carried a letter from Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2013), politicians and others, under the heading 'UEFA insensitivity to Palestinians' plight,' which stated their shock at UEFA's decision to award the tournament to Israel and outlined their concern that Israel would use the event to "*whitewash its racist denial of Palestinian rights and its illegal occupation of Palestinian land.*" The footballer Freddie Kanoute, French-born of Malian descent and a Muslim, launched a petition that initially claimed to include a number of high profile football players; however, when some players subsequently denied they had given their explicit support, Kanoute responded by stating that they had been told to distance themselves from the campaign (Ogden, 2012). Immediately before the tournament began, Pro-Palestinian supporters staged a demonstration outside the UEFA Congress in London and disrupted a private dinner held for the UEFA delegates and invited guests (Warshaw, 2013); a further demonstration took place in Amsterdam on the eve of the UEFA Champions League Final.

When Michel Platini met with pro-Palestine campaigners at FIFA headquarters he said he would 'think about' moving the tournament (Abunimah, 2013). However, he later stated that UEFA and the Israeli FA were responsible for football and could not be held responsible for the politics of governments. Two years previously Platini had met Palestinian football officials and implied he would suspend Israel's membership of UEFA because of the restrictions they were imposing on Palestinian football players,

> We accepted them [Israel] in Europe and furnished them the conditions for membership and they must respect the letter of the laws and international regulations otherwise there is no justification for them to remain in Europe. Israel must choose between allowing Palestinian sport to continue and prosper or be forced to face the consequences for their behaviour (Palestinian Information Centre, 2010).

Upon securing the tournament the IFA described the event as an 'amazing opportunity' to promote the country and its footballing community not just to Europe, but to a global audience (Sanderson and Hart, 2011). The event would allow their national team to participate at the highest level and improve the country's infrastructure and raise expectations within Israeli football (Sanderson and Hart, 2011). Prior to the tournament's first game UEFA announced that 100,000 tickets had been sold; this was seen as a marker of the tournaments 'success' given that the 2011 tournament (in Denmark) sold some 50,000 tickets (Daskal, 2013). Average attendance was around 11,500 which was approximately 70% take-up of the total tournament capacity. A cumulative global audience of over 120 million followed the tournament via television, with 1.9m visits and 7.6m page views made to UEFA.com during the tournament; in addition some 100,000 fans linked to its U21 Facebook page and 9,000 followed its *@UEFAUnder21* twitter account (UEFA, 2013). At the end of the tournament Platini complimented the IFA for organising a successful tournament which saw no political violence or reports of demonstration **within the country during the event**; for Platini this vindicated UEFA's decision not to move the event. Platini stated that Israel had the same rights as the other 53 UEFA member nations to bid and host tournaments and that UEFA's decision had been 'to do what is good for football and not for politics' (Warshaw, 2013).

Discussion
Securing the U-21 tournament was a major accomplishment for the Israeli state. Unlike those nations which have sought to use sports events to advance its economic growth, the priority for

Israel was to present a positive international image and seek greater acceptance, especially within European sporting circles. **Using Nygard and Gates' (2013) mechanism of sports diplomacy it can be suggested that the IFA has used (international) football to support campaigns around anti-racism, but have been prevented by the Israeli government / state from extending this to meaningful, sustained activities around integration and trust building; by contrast the Palestinians FA have used football for 'image building' of the nascent state /territories. At the same time, t**he tournament allowed the Israeli state to present an alternative image to the recent conflicts in southern Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The success of the U-21 tournament claimed by UEFA and the IFA has given the latter greater influence within the former with the lack of protest **within the country** improving the country's potential to host future international sports events.[13] Although its size will limit its ability to host a truly mega-event, securing smaller international events will allow Israel to present itself as a 'normal' country and to gain greater acceptance in the international (sporting) community.[14]

Given that Israeli teams currently play in European club and national competitions supporters of the Palestinian cause have turned to UEFA and FIFA. However, UEFA have repeatedly stated that neither they, nor the Israeli FA, can be held responsible for the politics of the region or the decisions of the Israeli state. Michel Platini's claim that 'I don't do politics, I do football' is a re-statement of the canard that 'sport and politics don't mix' and a clear echo of those governing bodies which supported the maintenance of sporting contacts with apartheid South Africa. When FIFA recognised Israel and Palestine and admitted them into world football it, unwittingly, became involved in much wider geo-political issues. The IFA are caught between the Israeli state and UEFA/FIFA and an environment in which everything is seen through the lens of national security. Although the IFA has attempted to work with its Palestinian counterpart and with Arabs who live within Israel's pre-1967 borders, they admit they have no influence in matters of national security and the safety of the Israeli population (AP, 2013). The Israeli state has been careful not to be seen to interfere with football, as demonstrated by their lack of direct involvement in the U-21 tournament, and whilst UEFA/FIFA have the ability to exclude the IFA from its competitions, they have not done so, not least because they see themselves as a non-political organisation and fear the possibility of being labelled as anti-Semitic if they did sanction the IFA.

The Palestinian FA have also recognised the potential of sport and have been adept at exploiting football to advance their agenda. They have put themselves forward to host the symbolic annual FIFA Congress in 2017 which, if successful, would force Israel to allow access for all of the delegations from FIFA's 209 member associations. Highlighting the travel restriction placed on players and officials leaving and entering the Occupied Territories, the PFA have called for the expulsion of the IFA from UEFA/FIFA; however, during FIFA's pre-tournament conference in Brazil, 2014, the PFA withdrew this call in response to the IFA and FIFA agreeing to hold an investigation into the issue of free movement of players and officials. Whilst the FIFA president has stated his desire to see the PFA and IFA sign a formal co-operation agreement, what is evident is that IFA, the PFA, UEFA/FIFA are having to negotiate much wider (hard) political issues relating to national security, regional and geo-politics.

The soft power opportunities that arose with the staging of this event need to be read against a wider narrative. Whilst Israel used the tournament to promote its football and nation, supporters of the Palestinian cause used it to advance a different agenda. Whether or not Israel is seen as an ethnocracy, apartheid or colonial-settler state, supporters of the Palestinian cause need to assess whether sport is an Israeli 'weak spot.' During the era of South African apartheid, many white South Africans took great pride from the sporting prowess of their rugby and cricket players, something that gave the sporting boycott a particular resonance (Donnelly, 2008). Some claim that sanctions / boycott of Israeli science, technology, education and (non-sporting) culture would have a greater impact as these activities are more highly valued (Banks, 2013). Despite the trope that 'Jews don't like sport' a survey by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics showed *the* most common leisure activity was sport with Israeli men more engaged than women (55% compared to 24%) and watched more sports events (Lior, 2012). In the 2009-10 season average attendance at Israeli Premier League games was ranked 22nd across Europe. According to Dann (2012) this position corresponded with the quality of the league and Israeli teams' achievements in European football competitions. Although attendances have dipped slightly in recent years this can be read against the standard of play and how the English Premier League and matches involving other top flight European clubs are watched by audiences across the world (Pilger, 2014; Yeuh, 2014). Given the racist stereotype of the non-sporting / non-physical Jew (Dee, 2012; Klein 2000)[15] is just that, it is suggested that sport will continue to be a site for Israeli and Palestinian soft power activities.

However, excluding Israel from sports governing bodies and tournaments will have a more symbolic than economic impact on the country. While sport is not a substitute for the job of politicians, it is in a position to contribute to a programme of political, moral and cultural awareness-raising in the best tradition of public diplomacy and soft power. Soft power expressed through sports sanctions and / or a cultural / academic boycott are individually unlikely to make a significant impact on behaviour of the Israeli state. However, their cumulative impact on international public opinion has led the Israeli state to invest significantly in its hasbara apparatus. Sport can be used to introduce international audiences to the politics of the region and perhaps lead them to reflect on where they stand on the issue of Israel / Palestine. The next question would be whether they engage in the debate to better understand the issues and ultimately what, if any, action they chose to take.

This paper has identified how the Israeli state has an abundant range of soft power resources at its disposal and how this is underpinned and coordinated by its hasbara apparatus. However, the limits of hasbara are revealed in failure of the Israeli state to meaningfully address the fundamental human rights of the Palestinians (particularly those living in the OPT and in refugee camps in neighbouring countries). With significant efforts spent on soft power and public relations activity in an attempt to legitimise the policies of the state (such as the building of settlement on the OPT), one doubts whether a genuine solution to the Palestinian question will be possible. A just settlement with the Palestinians is essential with the current policy approach of Israeli state and hasbara neglecting Nye's (2004:110) observation that *"Actions speak louder than words, and public diplomacy that appears to be mere window dressing for the projection of hard power is unlikely to succeed."*

Conclusion

Hosting the U-21 tournament allowed the Israelis demonstrated they could successfully stage an international sports event with no 'terrorist' incident or protest (within the country). It allowed the Israeli state to present a positive image of itself as a sporting host and create a positive impression of the IFA within UEFA/FIFA and other international sporting bodies. At the same time, the Palestinians used the tournament to highlight their situation with European-based pro-Palestinian organisations spotlighting what they saw as a racist, apartheid system using a sports event to cover-up its fundamental lack of human rights.

The Men's U-21 tournament is traditionally a 'small' event which rarely attracts much interest from the mainstream media and wider public. However, this particular tournament did have symbolic value in the context of Middle East politics and in the struggle for legitimacy sought by both Israel and Palestine. The football tournament, when located within Israel's wider hasbara efforts, has allowed for constructive discussion on the competing discourses associated with the soft power thesis. Whilst the Israeli state does not appear to be overtly interest in football they are increasingly cognisant of their international image and are using 'hasbara' – be this related to sport, tourism, culture, academic - to counter the growth of the BDS movement. This discussion has extended the findings of Manzenreiter (2010) and Brannagan and Giulianotti (2014) by demonstrating how Israel is seeking to differentiate itself from its regional neighbours, to demonstrate that they are 'like their fellow Europeans' in their love of sport and that they are capable of successfully hosting an international sporting event.

When the international news media carry images of heavily armed Israeli security forces responding to peaceful, unarmed protestors or stone-throwing youngsters with tear gas, plastic and live bullets, discussion of soft diplomacy tends to fall away. Throughout its short history the Israeli state has responded aggressively to ensure its survival and shown little inhibition in using its hard (military) power; however, the landscape is changing and they have recognised they are facing a threat they cannot challenge exclusively via their military capability. The turn to hasbara to articulate their national interests has been necessary to confront the growing disquiet at its military actions. Likewise, the majority of Palestinians, having realised they cannot compete militarily with the Israeli state, have changed tactics by supporting the Intifadas and by making greater use of soft power. The global popularity of football makes it an attractive 'soft power' vehicle; thus the claim that sport and politics do not mix is little more than a hackneyed, nonsensical myth. Although 'sport' can be used to bring communities together, just because it is seen as 'soft' does not necessarily make it 'good.' What it can do is provide cover for inaction and the legitimisation of the status quo and unequal power relations.

Whilst both the Israelis and Palestinian (and their supporters) will claim success in terms of winning international public opinion, as Grix and Houlihan (2013:19) have noted *"it is far more challenging to demonstrate a causal relationship between sport soft power initiatives and progress towards specific diplomatic objectives.*' This paper has offered a critical assessment of the concept of soft power within the context of a relatively small international sporting event;

however, the imprecision and elusiveness of the base concept of soft power, makes it possible to identify only the immediate, but not the longer term, impact(s) of the staging the event. Soft power, in all its manifestations, is set to play an increasing role in the politics of the region with both the Israeli state and the Palestinian people using football to play out their aspirations.

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[1] Nye developed the concept of 'soft power' with Admiral William Owens (a military planner who became a vice-chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff).

[2] In 2012 Israel's international image was polled ahead of only North Korea, Pakistan and Iran see http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Poll-Israel-viewed-negatively-around-the-world

[3] The negative stereotypes of Jews are rooted in specific historical circumstances with early prejudice based on accusations of being Christ's 'killers' and continued through the 'blood liable' falsehoods, the expulsion of Jews from various European countries throughout the last millennial, the 19th century East European pogroms and the Holocaust (Shoah).

[4] For example, anti-Israel bias was seen in March 2014 when the UNHRC debated five resolutions on Israel - far fewer than all other neighbouring countries (Lazaroff, 2014).

[5] *"As was recently revealed, senior Israeli officials have been training such Israel-friendly lawyers for some time in an effort to deal with deligitimisation claims against Israel, such as appeals to arrest senior Israeli officials allegedly involved in war crimes."* (Molad, 2012: 35)

[6] The proposal in May 2014 by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to officially designate Israel as a Jewish state could be seen as strengthening the central hasbara strategy.

[7] Aliyah literally means 'ascent.' A basic tenet of Zionism it describes the act of immigration by a Jewish person to Israel.

[8] *"Today there are more than seven million Palestinian refugees around the world. Israel denies their right to return to their homes and land – a right recognised by UN resolution 194, the Geneva convention, and the universal declaration of human rights. Further, "an occupier may not forcibly deport protected persons... or transfer parts of its own civilian population into occupied territory"* [Article 49] see Hayeem, 2010).

[9] See also USACBI in the USA, AURDIP in France, PBAI in Spain, and the Teachers Union of Ireland. When the Palestine Polytechnic University was closed by Israeli authorities in 2003, Palestinian academics requested support from Israeli academics, but found none was forthcoming (Parr, 2014). As a result, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) was launched by a group of Palestinian academics in 2004.

[10] Greater Israel – which includes the regions of Judea and Samaria, currently known as the West Bank.

[11] The exceptions being South Africa whose FA was expelled in 1976 due to the government's apartheid policies, the Yugoslavian FA (in 1992) due to the conflict in the Balkans (Mills, 2009), and the Iraq FA in 2009. Other examples include Spain (2008), Brunei and Nigeria (both 2010). In 2014 although the Uruguay Football Association was suspended by Conmebol (the South American football confederation), over a domestic power struggle, FIFA stated that the team could still attend the 2014 FIFA World Cup.

[12] Of the 24 signatures, 14 were Labour Party members, 7 Liberal Democrats, and one from Plaid Cymru, the Respect MP (George Galloway) and the Green MP (Caroline Lucas). Early Day Motions

are used by individual MPs to draw attention to specific campaigns or events. Very few are actually debated in the chamber but they often receive media coverage and generate public interest.

[13] One suitably-sized event is the UEFA's Champions League Final which, in 2013, was aired to over 200 countries and an estimated global average audience of 150 million (UEFA, 2013). In March 2014, Israel was designated host for the 2015 European Short Course Swimming Championships.

[14] In April 2014 Israel submitted a bid to host part of UEFA's 2020 European Championship; although their bid was unsuccessful it received similar criticisms to their U-21 tournament with opponents claiming it would be *'a mockery of Fifa's* (sic) *Mission and Statutes if Jerusalem were awarded the status of hosting games in this tournament'* (Austin et al, 2014: 30).

[15] Along with not being seen as farmers or soldiers - hence the prioritisation within early Zionism of the 'muscular Jew' - most evident within the kibbutzim movements.