

# NGOs that Take Sides

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The war with Hizbullah, like all Israel's confrontations with terror groups in the past decade, includes a political front that is as important and complex as the military front. The words and images used by journalists, politicians, diplomats and officials of powerful non-governmental organizations (NGOs) set the framework in which the military actions are judged.

Where the Israeli response to Iranian and Syrian-supported terror is viewed as justified, which is largely the case in the United States, support for Israel is high, allowing for the dispatch of weapons necessary to defeat Hizbullah.

But in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, the dominant images are based on false allegations of "disproportionate force" and "war crimes," in which the Lebanese are portrayed as victims of Israeli aggression.

The central role of Iran and Syria in this war is easy to hide, creating a further distortion in the picture reaching international eyes. Reporters and politicians posing for photo-ops on the bomb-scarred streets of Beirut do not see any sign of the weapons and training from Teheran and Damascus. Most avoid looking at the concrete slabs with air holes below their feet that protect the Hizbullah command centers.

In a particularly surreal example, the BBC ran a program in which the presenter and Terje Roed-Larsen (the perpetual UN envoy remembered for promoting Jenin massacre myth in 2002) filled 30 minutes with meaningless UN-speak without mentioning Iran or Syria. This topic was only introduced when I joined the program and an Israeli voice was finally heard to counter the allegations about "collective punishment" of Lebanese civilians.

In this battlefield of political warfare, a group of powerful NGOs play a central role, introducing and amplifying the demonization of Israeli self-defense.

New York-based Human Rights Watch issued eight statements on the Lebanon conflict between July 13 and July 24, of which only one focuses on criticism of Hizbullah.

HRW, which has been producing anti-Israel propaganda for many years (often providing a single exception as a fig leaf to mention in responses to critics), included a detailed "Q and A" report purporting to analyze violations of international law, primarily by Israel.

In a detailed article written by Dr. Avi Bell and published by NGO Monitor, HRW's

analysis was shown to be based on "distorted views of the underlying facts, selective omission of crucial legal issues...[that] mislead readers and betray the bias of the piece."

HRW's campaign was joined by similar statements - some more balanced and honest than others - issued by Amnesty International, B'Tselem, Christian Aid, the International Commission of Jurists (based in Geneva), the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (based in Paris), Oxfam, Norwegian People's Aid, MIFTAH (run by Hanan Ashrawi), and others.

THESE NGO superpowers have immediate access to the media and politicians. HRW and Amnesty have annual budgets of tens of millions of dollars, of which more seem to be used for promotion than for actual research.

Enjoying what is known as the "halo effect," few if any journalists or diplomats bother to check the details, biases or credibility of NGO claims. When the details were examined by NGO Monitor's research staff, or Prof. Alan Dershowitz of Harvard University, the claims have often been shown to be false or unverifiable.

The impact of these anti-Israel campaigns, disguised by the rhetoric of international law, are amplified by the European Union and the UN. On July 13, the EU's "Non-Governmental Platform," which is part of the massive Euromed framework, issued a "Declaration about the situation in Lebanon and Gaza."

The only reference to the Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hamas and Hizbullah provides a classic example of facile moral equivalence. "Detainees and captured persons should be liberated, and we condemn and reject all acts of violence against civil populations."

Having made a seemingly balanced statement, the declaration goes on to "strongly condemn... the Israeli aggressions which are a striking violation of International Law" and calls on the EU to "intervene quickly and firmly in order to stop the Israeli government's military operations which are threatening the entire region with its dangerous escalation."

THE USE of EU funding and official frameworks under the cover of "civil society" for virulent anti-Israeli incitement is blatantly unethical. Under the guise of "peace partners" and "human rights" programs the EU, and the governments of Canada, Switzerland and Norway fund NGOs that promote the Durban strategy of painting Israel as a "racist apartheid state."

The latest examples are a further step, and undermine the European desire to play a serious diplomatic role.

The reduction of the role of NGOs in the political war against Israel would be an important step toward removing the justification of terror. The funders - private organizations, individuals and governments - in whose name the NGOs act need to take control to end this incitement, and halt the shameful distortion of the legitimate principles undergirding the pursuit of human rights and the advancement of international law.

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