

ANTISEMITISM AND THE PROPAGANDA WAR IN GAZA

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The scenario has been used and refined for many years –Palestinians or Hizbollah launch attacks against Israel using rockets or suicide bombers, causing deaths and injuries. Israel then responds, triggering a wave of condemnations blaming Israel for "war crimes", "massacres", and "indiscriminate attacks".

The fighting in Gaza provides the latest example, and the script as well as the actors – Palestinian officials on the BBC, NGOs claiming to promote human rights, United Nations officials and diplomats -- in this propaganda offensive are all familiar. The same techniques were used to promote the myth of the "Jenin" massacre in 2002, the campaign against the "apartheid wall" in 2004, the boycott and sanctions movement, and to attack Israel's response to Hezbollah's cross-border kidnapping and massive rocket fire in the 2006 war.

The current wave of accusations against Israel began in parallel with the convening of the Global Forum on Antisemitism that took place in Jerusalem on February 24 and 25. Many of the presentations focused on the new antisemitism, which singles out Israel as a nation, rather than "the Jews", and uses the rhetoric of international law and human rights, while denying Israelis the protection provided to other peoples and nations by these moral principles. As Irwin Cotler, professor of international law and former Canadian Justice Minister, observed, human rights is the civil religion of the modern world, and "Israel is the anti-Christ".

The participation of many non-Jewish officials and academics, who recognize that this discrimination and the accompanying campaigns constitute a different but no less invidious form of antisemitism, marked an important development. The voices of MP John Mann, who led the British Parliamentary Inquiry on Antisemitism, and his colleagues from other countries are important in turning back the type of propaganda attacks we are seeing in the case of Gaza and elsewhere. No one in the conference said that Israel is above criticism, or that all the protests result from antisemitism, but when these are obsessive and absurd, the evidence is clear.

For these reasons, Foreign Minister Tzippi Livni announced that Israel will not participate in the 2009 United Nations meeting called to review the implementation of the declarations adopted at the infamous 2001 Durban conference on "racism and other forms of discrimination". A few weeks earlier, the Government of Canada, as well as the two main opposition parties, made a similar decision, referring to the antisemitism which demonized Israel through terms such as "apartheid" and referred to the "holocaust" perpetrated against the Palestinians. Canada also barred funding for the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that use human rights to promote anti-democratic and antisemitic agendas. There is hope that France and other European countries will join this movement.

The Durban strategy of demonization goes far beyond legitimate criticism of Israel, and the opposition to the 2009 Review conference is a response to gratuitous attacks that label all Israeli self-defense measures as "war crimes". In the UN, the Human Rights Council is worse than its discredited predecessor, and "expert" John Dugard is using his platform to vent his own deep prejudices, in which Israelis have no human rights.

Similarly, the superpowers in the human rights network, including Human Rights Watch

and Amnesty International, campaigned against non-violent Israeli measures designed to pressure the Hamas leadership to end this war. When Israel reduced electricity and fuel sent to Gaza, the NGO chorus falsely condemned this as "collective punishment". This term is an entirely inappropriate reference to international law, and is most closely associated with the Nazi practice of killing innocent citizens to force others to cooperate. Using this rhetoric to describe Israeli policy is both offensive and mistaken.

In contrast, had the non-violent Israeli efforts succeeded in pressuring Hamas to end the rocket attacks, the current escalation and the far greater "humanitarian impact" would have been prevented. By using their considerable resources in the propaganda war against Israel, these organizations are undermining the moral foundations that they claim to promote.

Israelis are not the only victims of this offensive. At Durban, in the UN, and among the NGO networks, many groups with legitimate complaints of racism were ignored, including Tibetans persecuted by China, the Roma, who suffer systematic discrimination in much of Europe, the Egyptian Copts, as well as Blacks and other minorities in Europe and much of the Arab world. In 2007, New York-based Human Rights Watch published hundreds of pages on Israel – far more than on the abuses perpetrated by Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Libya. (HRW and Amnesty are not active in opposing antisemitism, in contrast to the group known as Human Rights First.)

For the participants in the policy discussions on the Durban Review Conference and the Antisemitism Forum, the strategy of exposing such absurd abuses through "naming and shaming" the perpetrators is the best hope for change. This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in the shadow of the Holocaust, and has become a major weapon in the war against the Jewish State. A wide refutation of the Durban process, including the cynical manipulation practiced in the current Gaza campaign, would be a major step towards the restoration of the principle as well as the practice of universality in human rights.

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