

January 22, 2009

## Right of Reply: War, Human Rights, and Democracy

**Gerald M. Steinberg**

Dear Naomi Chazan,

We have known each other for many years, as both academic colleagues and debating partners, but I was surprised at the virulence and deeply personal nature of your attack on me and on NGO Monitor's reports and analysis (*UpFront*, January 9). Instead of a factual defense of the powerful New Israel Fund (of which you are now the president - a point you neglected to mention in your article [though Chazan did point it out to the editors]), your diatribe included numerous inventions and blatantly false claims.

I can understand your intense desire to protect the NIF from an open analysis and debate that will show donors how the \$200 million it has provided over the years was actually spent. But this does not justify you putting thoughts into my head or words into my mouth which I have never said or written. Nor does this excuse the hysteria used to portray NGO Monitor's detailed and fully referenced research as part of a dangerous right-wing conspiracy. The language that you use ("Steinberg and others of his ilk") is a symptom of the attempt to prevent discussion through ad hominem attacks and senseless hatred which are inconsistent with the image NIF aspires to project.

On the substance, while some NIF funds go to nonpolitical organizations that provide important services, and other recipients have names and mission statements that sound perfectly reasonable, their actual activities often go in an entirely different direction. NIF provides millions of dollars to the leaders of anti-Israel campaigns in the media, the United Nations and other venues. As shown in detail by NGO Monitor, and summarized in the following paragraphs, these organizations frame the conflict

through the Palestinian narrative of victimization - one of the main weapons in the "soft power war" which justifies terror and condemns Israeli self-defense.

During the war in Gaza, NIF-funded organizations listed under the category of "civil rights" were again at the forefront of these campaigns. For example, Adalah, which is listed in NIF's annual report under the entirely legitimate heading of a "legal center for Arab minority rights in Israel" (receiving \$105,396 in 2007), joined militant Palestinian NGOs such as Badil, Al-Haq, and Al-Mezan in referring to the Israeli military operation as "collective punishment," "war crimes" and "willful killing... not justified by military necessity and... carried out unlawfully and wantonly." In this statement, there is no call for Hamas to stop its deadly rocket fire. If this is NIF's concept of "Arab minority rights," which precludes the existence of the State of Israel, your organization has totally lost its moral compass.

Similarly, a group calling itself the "Coalition of Women for Peace" (awarded \$200,000 by NIF in the past two years), published an article asking: "How is it that our consolation is that we hurt, we demolished, we killed?... The truth is that we really do like wars, that's our language, that's our culture... we will find all the explanations in the world to justify any war. Even this one, the spare one, in Gaza."

Like the other NGOs in this group, CWP refuses to recognize Israeli self-defense, preferring to demonize us as a bloodthirsty nation. Gilad Schalit and all of the victims of Hamas attacks are simply forgotten. I doubt that this is what most NIF donors expect - particularly those who give through their local Jewish federations.

IN ADDITION to reconsidering these substantive issues, I suggest that you withdraw allegations of "innuendo and factual errors." For example, you confidently state that contrary to NGO Monitor's analysis, "the EC gives no money to NIF in the US and never has." But the NIF's Form 990 for 2006, filed with the US Internal Revenue Service, lists the transfer of \$716,316 from the European Commission office in Washington to the New Israel Fund.

This is only one example of a deeply intertwined relationship between the NIF and European governments that, to put it mildly, do not have Israel's best interests in mind. Many of the political organizations funded by the EC and its member governments also receive support from the NIF. Your organization's support is used to justify European grants to Adalah, B'Tselem, Coalition of Women for Peace,

Mossawa, Machsom Watch, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Yesh Din and others. As a result, damage done by NIF funding is amplified and compounded. Were NIF donors told outright that they were supporting organizations which demonize Israel using terms such as "apartheid" and "racism," that campaign for and not against anti-Israel boycotts, they would surely demand an end to such funding, making it immeasurably more difficult for European officials to support the same NGOs.

ANOTHER PROBLEM that you sidestepped is the intense political role of NIF-funded NGOs outside Israel - which contradicts the claim to promote "self-critical democracy" and "democratic change within Israel." Many of these groups are active in UN processes which single out Israel for denunciation. For example, a few weeks ago, Yesh Din, Adalah and PHR-I submitted statements to the Universal Periodic Review of Israel held by the one-sided UN Human Rights Council. NGO Monitor examined their submissions in detail. Adalah presented its draft constitution which calls for the end of Israel as a democratic society with a Jewish character, and in which Jewish immigration would be prohibited except for "humanitarian reasons." Adalah also invited reporters to a press conference headlined "Israel's non-compliance with international human rights law" at the UN building in Geneva. And the same groups have announced plans to use legal mechanisms in different countries to bring Israeli officials to trial for alleged "war crimes," furthering the demonization process. Obsessive anti-Israel campaigning is protected by free speech, but do NIF's donors know they are paying for these attacks?

Similarly, B'Tselem has opened an office in Washington to lobby the US government and journalists, going far beyond the initial line of making Israel a more just society. To promote this agenda, they hired Mitchell Plitnick, who was active in the radical group known as Jewish Voice for Peace, which also promotes anti-Israel demonization, using terms such as "apartheid," adopting the narrative of Israel's enemies referring to the 1948 Arab invasion and the creation of Israel as the *nakba* (catastrophe). The NIF donors who think that they are changing and improving Israel surely do not want to destroy it.

These are some of the main differences between us, and they should be discussed openly and with tolerance, and not squelched by false claims and rancorous personal attacks. You might follow the example of Rabbi David Forman, from Rabbis for Human Rights, whose thoughts on the slogan of "collective punishment" in Gaza were published on January 2 in these pages. Forman is a liberal and a progressive, but

he acknowledges the reality of the evil Israel faces. "We had no choice but to react. Are we engaged in collective punishment? Absolutely."

As president of the NIF, you surely recognize the power and influence of the organization. NGO Monitor has the responsibility of speaking truth to this power. In the democratic spirit of NIF, well-meaning donors in the Diaspora deserve the opportunity of hearing different viewpoints and deciding for themselves.

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