הכנס לעתיד העם היהודי
The Conference on the Future
of the Jewish People 2010

DELEGITIMIZATION: ATTITUDES TOWARD ISRAEL AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Moderator: Prof. Todd Gitlin
Content prepared by: Brig. Gen. (Res.) Michael Herzog

GROUP MEMBERS:

Irina Nevzlin-Cogan	Sami Friedrich	Aaron Abramovich
Richard Pearlstone	Stanley Greenberg	Adil Anjel
Sever Plocker	Daviv Horovitz	Johanna Arbib
DJ Schneeweiss	Jeremy Issacharoff	Danny Ayalon
Aviva Raz-Shechter	Laura Kam	Judit Bokser Liwerant
Saul Silver	Phillippe Karsenty	Irwin Cotler
Alan Solow	Isabel Kershner	Daniel Diker
Eitan Wertheimer	Yossi Kuperwasser	Wayne Firestone
Moshe "Bogie" Ya'alon	Dan Meridor	Rachel Fish
	Alberto Milkewitz	Abraham Foxman

Working group discussions were aimed at laying the conceptual foundation for a comprehensive project on delegitimization initiated by the Jewish People Policy Institute. This is an in-depth, long-term project intended to examine the broad spectrum of the attitudes towards Israel, the Jewish people and the links between them. The participants also referred to the working paper prepared for the conference, which raised a series of questions in need of exploration.

At the conclusion of the group's discussions the moderator, Prof. Gitlin, summarized the general areas of agreement and disagreement that emerged in the discussions (see appendix). Main insights and areas of controversy requiring discussion and elaboration are detailed below.

1

Characterizing the phenomenon of delegitimization today

First, it is agreed that we are facing a phenomenon of significant strategic weight due to both its severity and the fact that legitimacy is a critical component of Israel's national security. Worrying data were presented showing a severe downturn in Israel's image in international public opinion, especially in Europe. Operation Cast Lead and the subsequent Goldstone Report have become watershed events in this context, since they braided into public consciousness the perceptions that Israel is guilty of using disproportionate force sometimes verging on war crimes. The damage to Israel's image was compounded against the background of broader perceptions that Israel does not contribute enough to the solution of the Israeli-

The Jewish People Policy Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

Givat Ram Campus | P.O.B. 39156 Jerusalem 91391
Tel: 972-2-5633356, Fax: 972-5635040

info@jppi.org.il
www.jppi.org.il

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

קמפוס גבעת רם | ת.ד. 39156 ירושלים 91391
טלפון: 5633356-02 .02. פקס: 02-5635040

Palestinian conflict and the broader discourse of human rights. It was noted that surveys in the United States still point to stable positive attitudes towards Israel, but a dangerous split regarding Israel is appearing between Republicans (massive support) and Democrats (eroding and declining support).

The phenomenon of delegitimization and contending with it is a type of asymmetric warfare, but this time conducted on the battlefield of ideas. After the attempts to defeat Israel both militarily and through terror have failed, Israel's enemies are now trying to pull the ideational ground from under its feet. This is a difficult, vexing challenge for Israel as it plays out on a global yet amorphous field, where ignorance, prejudice and Israel's vulnerabilities are exploited by a multiplicity of actors (including extreme Islamic and European leftist factions that opportunistically join forces) with a wide variety of tools. One of the observations raised in discussions was that delegitimization is a decentralized and diffuse phenomenon – with no single enemy, no single motive, and unconfined to any particular arena. Therefore, contending with it is much more difficult and requires different solutions than past challenges.

Given that anti-Semitism is an old, historical phenomenon, and that Israel has been dealing with manifestations of delegitimization since its inception in the Arab-Moslem world, we first conducted a preliminary inquiry into the changes in the global arena that have turned the phenomenon of delegitimization into one currently so prominent and threatening. Clearly we face a global order, agenda and logic that differ from what we have known. We live in a global, multi-polar world with asymmetric wars and a human rights discourse that champions identification with those perceived as being weak and having their rights suppressed. This is a world challenged and frightened by radical Islam, a world with strong voices fomenting radicalism, post-modernism and post-nationalism that question, among other things, the right of existence of the ethno-religious nation-state; a world of non-state actors developing new networks and formats for generating and disseminating information. In this kind of world, Israel, the Jews and the link between the two may well find themselves on "the wrong side of history."

The Jewish People Policy Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

Givat Ram Campus | P.O.B. 39156 Jerusalem 91391
Tel: 972-2-5633356, Fax: 972-5635040

info@jppi.org.il
www.jppi.org.il

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

קמפוס גבעת רם | ת.ד. 39156 ירושלים 91391
טלפון: 02-5633356. פקס: 02-5635040

Beyond these general observations, a debate arose concerning the primary source of the phenomenon of delegitimization in its current manifestations. Is the heart of the problem and its main thrust the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the branding of Israel in international consciousness as a peace refusing, dispossessing, and colonialist power, or rather are we faced with a deeper phenomenon – a type of modern anti-Semitism that grows and thrives in the contemporary global environment – and that denies justification for the existence of a nation-state for the Jewish people? If the latter hypothesis is correct, then even a permanent solution to the conflict will not diminish the phenomenon of delegitimization, and some argue that it will even aggravate it.

Despite this argument, it was agreed that when Israel and the Diaspora attempt to contend with the phenomenon of delegitimization it is important that they clarify to themselves their self-definition and the nationalist aspects of the definition of Judaism. In light of those denying the demand for recognition of Israel as the "Jewish State," it is important to define Israel not by stressing the religious aspect that arises from this concept but instead by stressing the nationalist aspect of "a state of the Jews" or "the nation state of the Jewish people".

Conceptual clarification

Discussion of the essence of the phenomenon raised the need for conceptual clarification. First, a question that requires further investigation within the framework of the project arose: what is the correct definition of "delegitimization," and where should the line be drawn between it and legitimate criticism? Clearly, the Iranian president's public call to "wipe Israel off the map" is delegitimization, but how should we deal with those who do not – at least publically -- deny Israel's right to exist, but who label it a racist state, apartheid state, Nazi, war criminal, colonialist, and other similar expressions that shovel the moral ground from under the country's feet?

The group also discussed the question of whether the targets of delegitimization should use the term itself. Some argued that our use of the term grants greater truck to the debate over our own legitimacy. Ostensibly this is a type of defensive expression that justifies unfairness towards Jews as a national group. Against this background and considering the previous item, several alternative terms were suggested such as: demonization, de-humanization or "the assault on Israel's legitimacy," implying that said legitimacy is a given, intractable fact.

The battlefronts

The various battlefronts were discussed, including public diplomacy, cyberspace, campuses, the legal front, the economic front (DBS) and others. Special attention was given to the academic and public diplomacy fronts. A worrisome picture of the campuses in the United States was presented (not everyone agreed with the grave description) and even more so in some European countries, to the point of feeling fear or apprehension to identify oneself as an Israel sympathizer. Many universities have networks of Islamic/Arab organizations that are active together with radical left factions; Arab and Muslim money is being poured into these networks or universities, and campaigns to silence supporters of Israel are being conducted. In many cases university administrations keep silent. Many ideas were raised to deal with the phenomenon including: establishing counter-networks, focusing the discussion on the topic of "boycott equals damage to academic values," exposing the flow of funds that finances delegitimization, creation of an information bank and an organizational backbone for those who are able and willing to stand on the frontlines of campus battles, encouraging student visits to Israel, dialogue between Jewish organizations with Muslims on campus, pressuring chief university administrators and their donors, and so on.

The importance of the campuses lies in their being greenhouses of influence on the young, educated generation that will eventually work in government and will fill in elite classes. Nevertheless, it was made clear that public opinion is mainly influenced, and by much larger percentages, by the media and the Internet. The challenge of rapidly disseminating large quantities of information, information that reaches a population lacking the basic knowledge to absorb and analyze it in a critical manner, was presented and discussed. Confronted with the media wave, the State of Israel and the Jewish organizational world often react too slowly, and at times, not at all. The public diplomacy challenge is clearly perceived in the realm of military intervention, in which the legitimacy of Israel's use of military force to defend its interests and citizens comes under an implicit attack by the delegitimizers (see "Cast Lead" and the Turkish flotilla) who exploit to their full advantage criticism on Israel for employing disproportionate excessive force, and the fact that "the entire world is on film."

It was agreed that a lot more needs to be invested in the media front, including allocating significant resources, developing and adopting better technological and professional tools, and networking information and action centers in the international arena. However, the group also arrived at the insight that it would be incorrect and impossible to "chase after the tail of every news item," and therefore efforts must be focused and more so – they must be proactive. In this

4

The Jewish People Policy Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

Givat Ram Campus | P.O.B. 39156 Jerusalem 91391
Tel: 972-2-5633356, Fax: 972-5635040

info@jppi.org.il
www.jppi.org.il

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

קמפוס גבעת רם | ת.ד. 39156 ירושלים 91391
טלפון: 5633356‏-02. פקס: 5635040‏-02

context it was agreed that the targets that must be focused upon in the West are the center and moderate left, where influence is possible, that it is important to recruit supporters from among the non-Jewish public, and that an information base, ongoing information, funding and organizational tools must be placed at the disposal of those at the front lines of the battle and those willing to join it. The Foreign Ministry presented its rationale for branding Israel, but no agreement was reached that this should be the main investment in public diplomacy. The group's attention was directed toward the phenomenon in which the source of a large part of the media coverage of Israel is the foreign media stationed in Israel and reporting from it, and that this population is "neglected" and must be accounted for.

Israel in the battle

During the discussion Israel was criticized for not providing adequate aid to the people and organizations willing and able to act against delegitimization in the international arena. Examples were given by representatives from various countries in the Diaspora concerning initiatives for which they have requested support from the State of Israel (such as a budget for translating a book or publishing an advertisement). When these requests are turned down, the reason given is usually "lack of funds". **Furthermore, some remarked that given Israel's current international situation it must incorporate the element of legitimacy in its decision-making to a far greater extent than is currently being done, and in the case of a military operations, a parallel, significant, accompanying plan must be prepared beforehand in the public diplomacy arena.**

Surely, contending with the phenomenon of delegitimization should not be limited to the realm of public diplomacy. Rather, areas of policy must be sought in which Israel can shape realities and thus improve its standing in the realm of legitimacy. It was argued that before Israel explains itself and its reality, it must strive to define itself and shape reality. The practical application of this determination still awaits exploration: partly it goes back to the argument over the main source of the problem (the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or denial of Israel's right to exist) and partly awaits further illumination.

The Jewish dimension of the problem was discussed in brief, that is to say: how the delegitimization attack affects the Jewish Diaspora and its ties to the State of Israel, and how Israel incorporates this in its behavior and policy. One of the dangers of the delegitimization attack is the possible erosion of identification of the Jewish Diaspora with Israel or at least a fear to identify with Israel and stand by it. This topic will assume an important position in the Institute's project.

The Jewish People Policy Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

Givat Ram Campus | P.O.B. 39156 Jerusalem 91391
Tel: 972-2-5633356, Fax: 972-5635040

![JPPI logo]
info@jppi.org.il
www.jppi.org.il

המכון למדיניות העם היהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

קמפוס גבעת רם | ת.ד. 39156 ירושלים 91391
טלפון: 5633356-02. פקס: 5635040-02

Approach and organization

The phenomenon of delegitimization is so broad and dispersed that a multi-discipline approach will be required to map it and focus on its centers. This approach should include a combination of a deep, historiosophical foundation with a wide survey of the entire complex of the areas of action and influence of delegitimization, and from there – a wide strategic view translated into tactics, into the tools required, and even into the creation of the appropriate conceptual language.

In the final part of the discussions an approach was presented according to which the delegitimization battle must be treated and engaged as one would engage a military battle, according to the principles of war. In other words, managing the battle requires defining strategic objectives, matching resources and tools to the objectives that have been defined, gathering intelligence, net assessment, planning, positioning forces and defining operational tasks, identifying the decisive focal points, maneuvering, the existence of "general staffs" and so on.

Notwithstanding, it was agreed that, beyond the classic tools, it is important to seek and develop unconventional, creative tools to manage the battle such as: computer games tailored to the task, films, recruitment of authors to write novels that would unfold the narrative of the " state of the Jewish people" (as Exodus – Ben Gurion's idea – shaped an entire generation's consciousness) and more.

In conclusion, the workgroup discussions were overflowing with important insights that comprise the foundation of the Institute's project on the topic of delegitimization.

To read the background paper prepared in advance of the working group discussions click
Here