

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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local and international writings on the Middle East**

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Israel's best piece of Public Relations: The Goldstone Report

Uri Marks, News Time, 11 April, 2011

http://www.newstime.co.za/column/UriMarks/Israels_best_piece_of_Public_Relations:_The_Goldstone_Report_/54/3287/

Since the Six Day War, I don't think the State of Israel has had a better piece of PR than the Goldstone Report.

Let me more precise: The Goldstone Report was a PR disaster. However, The Goldstone Report and its subsequent 'press' has been the best thing that has happened to Israel since winning the Six Day War.

Of course there is debate as to whether Judge Goldstone should have accepted the role in the first place. However, his acceptance of the role was a coup for the State of Israel.

Judge Goldstone, an internationally respected jurist, well known defender of human rights, and a Jew, was best suited to take up the role.

Judge Goldstone's credibility within the international community is (now, possibly: was) extremely high.

In taking up the role, Judge Goldstone had to prove to the world that, despite being Jewish, he was able to 'objectively' assess the human rights violations, and the fall-out of the Gaza conflict.

If a non-Jew, or a 'real' anti-semitic (not the Judge Goldstone type, as portrayed by Jewish Extremists) had accepted the role, the report would have had zero credibility within the Jewish world, and limited credibility within the rest of the world.

The fact that Judge Goldstone, a respected jurist, defender of 'human rights' and JEW took up the role, gave the Goldstone report the highest levels of credibility within the non-Israel/non-pro-Israel/non-Zionist world (i.e. 99% of the world's population - rounded down to the nearest percent).

Judge Goldstone and his colleagues released a report that was accepted by 99% of the world as credible, accurate and objective. Israel and its supporters viewed the report as biased (and anti-semitic).

Judge Goldstone's op-ed in the Washington Post revealed the true nature of a man who went into the process, with his eyes open (despite what Israel's 'defenders' initially claimed). Israel was not forthcoming with information (and they never should have been). However, that was seen as a pity by Judge Goldstone, since he knew that impartiality could not be guaranteed.

Regarding Israel's refusal to cooperate in the fact-finding mission, Judge Goldstone expressed his regret back then, when the report was published, and he expressed his regret last week, when he said: "I regret that our fact-finding mission did not have such evidence explaining the circumstances in which we said civilians in Gaza were targeted, because it probably would have influenced our findings about intentionality and war crimes".

The op-ed noted the following crucial points (actual quotes from Judge Goldstone's op-ed):

- "That the crimes allegedly committed by Hamas were intentional goes without saying — its rockets were purposefully and indiscriminately aimed at civilian targets".

- "Indeed, our main recommendation was for each party to investigate, transparently and in good faith, the incidents referred to in our report. McGowan Davis has found that Israel has done this to a significant degree; Hamas has done nothing".

- "Regrettably, there has been no effort by Hamas in Gaza to investigate the allegations of its war crimes and possible crimes against humanity".

Judge Goldstone's most telling, important and singularly most powerful statement is the following:

"I had hoped that our inquiry into all aspects of the Gaza conflict would begin a new era of evenhandedness at the U.N. Human Rights Council, whose history of bias against Israel cannot be doubted".

When the Goldstone report was released, it was hailed for its objectivity and its open criticism of Israel. Its acceptance was widespread in particular because of who headed the fact finding mission: Judge Goldstone

And now, that Judge Goldstone has been honorable and just, and dealt wisely (and bravely) with the new evidence that he has before him, does that make him less credible?

Do the 99% of the world who accepted the Goldstone Report and used it to violently attack Israel now see Judge Goldstone as a sell-out?

Possibly.

But that would speak of those peoples' own fallibility and flaws in their arguments against Israel. Arguments that are based more on hatred and vitriol than on facts and objectivity.

For those people, Judge Goldstone's (or any report) would not have changed their positions/mindsets anyway.

Whether Judge Goldstone should have taken up the position is debatable.

However, the fact that Judge Goldstone did take up the role, could not have worked out any better for Israel. Any other person leading that Gaza mission would never have resulted in such a positive outcome for Israel.

It was Judge Goldstone's credibility and objectivity then that still holds true today.

And that has resulted in a wake-up call to Israel's detractors.

KKL/JNF's position regarding Al-Arakib issue

Efi Stenzler, KKL-JNF World Chairman, 11 April 2011

The Keren Kayemet LeIsrael-Jewish National Fund is responsible for all forestry activities throughout the State of Israel, as stipulated in the Convention signed with the State in 1961. Under the Convention, the KKL-JNF also carries out tree-planting on State land under the instructions and funding of the Israel Land Administration, and after the ILA gives its undertaking that the area for planting is wholly and absolutely owned by the State, and all the KKL-JNF's activities are carried out solely in accordance with the law.

Throughout its 110 years of existence, the KKL-JNF has planted more than 240 million trees in Israel. These tree-plantings are conducted solely on land owned by the State or by the KKL-JNF as the trustee of the Jewish people only.

With regard to allegations about tree-plantings by KKL-JNF in the South in general, claimed repeatedly by the members of the El-Arakib tribe, there is no basis for the claims directed against the KKL-JNF. The facts are as follows:

1. In recent years, several claims were filed by the El-Arakib tribe against the Israel Land Administration, the body managing the State's land, in various court proceedings, regarding the ownership of the land. These lands are not owned by the KKL-JNF, but are managed by it. The KKL-JNF is not a party to the ownership issue, nor is it a partner in these proceedings in any way whatsoever.
2. The Israel Land Administration is the body requesting the KKL-JNF to carry out tree-planting for the Israel Land Administration. KKL-JNF begins planting only after coordination with the Bedouin Administration, the receipt of all the permits from the Israel Land Administration, and the conducting of surveys of the land before the planting. The KKL-JNF, as the body responsible for afforestation, began planting operations in the area under discussion only two months ago.
3. Last year there were dozens of illegal incursions into the area under discussion, which were cleared by the Israel Land Administration and its supervision unit. The KKL-JNF does not have the slightest connection with these evictions. The KKL-JNF, as a body acting by virtue of the law, does not have the authority to carry out such enforcement actions.

Tree-plantings carried out by the KKL-JNF in this area are agricultural plantings for the benefit of the general public and local residents living near the planting sites. In carrying out tree-planting, KKL-JNF makes use of methods used in ancient agricultural times in the Negev, and current knowledge derived from long-term studies. Planting upgrades the land and prevents soil erosion processes and desertification, prevents flood damage, and improves grazing ground for flocks of sheep, mainly for the Bedouin sector.

Not only does the KKL-JNF not damage Bedouin land - on the contrary, it is concerned and takes action on behalf of the welfare of the Bedouin population on several levels. For example, the KKL-JNF is working to establish a number of projects worth millions of dollars for and in cooperation with the Bedouin community.

In Rahat, we started work a few months ago on developing the Gerar River Park, and establishing a park and promenade in the community alongside the river, with a total investment of more than 3 million NIS. This project has biblical roots – it is taking place in the same place

where Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech, king of Gerar. In the Bedouin village of Segev Shalom, we set up a playground for the welfare of the residents with a total investment of over a million shekels.

In addition, the JNF will soon lay the cornerstone for the first project of its kind in the village of Hura. Until now, no project of this scale and scope has been carried out, and the KKL-JNF, in partnership with JNF USA, is the main donor and project leader. This sustainable environment-employment park, which will extend over about 2,000 dunams, will be established in cooperation with the Bedouin community, and we are confident that this project will considerably improve the quality of life of the Bedouin citizens of Israel living there.

As the largest Jewish environmental organization in the world, the KKL-JNF will continue to operate and serve as a bridge between the Jewish people throughout the world and the State of Israel, and will continue to develop the country, with dedication and responsibility, on behalf of all of its citizens today and in future generations.

In conclusion, it is important to note that the KKL-JNF operates strictly in accordance with decisions of the court. The courts at all levels of proceedings, as well as the Attorney-General, gave their approval to the Israel Land Administration to carry out tree-planting, and only after approval of the courts in Israel, including the Supreme Court in a number of cases brought before it. In view of the fact that it did not accede to requests to stop the work, the KKL-JNF is carrying out planting.

Where is the outcry against Arab Apartheid?

By Khaled Abu Toameh

<http://www.hudson-ny.org/1953/arab-apartheid>

Mohammed Nabil Taha, an 11-year-old Palestinian boy, died this week at the entrance to a Lebanese hospital after doctors refused to help him because his family could not afford to pay for medical treatment.

The tragic case of Taha highlights the plight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who live in impoverished refugee camps in Lebanon and who are the victims of an Apartheid system that denies them access to work, education and medical care.

Ironically, the boy's death at the entrance to the hospital coincided with Israel Apartheid Week, a festival of hatred and incitement organized by anti-Israel activists on university campuses in the US, Canada and other countries.

It is highly unlikely that the folks behind the festival have heard about the case of Taha. Judging from past experiences, it is also highly unlikely that they would publicize the case after they heard about it.

Why should anyone care about a Palestinian boy who is denied medical treatment by an Arab hospital? This is a story that does not have an anti-Israel angle to it.

Can anyone imagine what would have happened if an Israeli hospital had abandoned a boy to die in its parking lot because his father did not have \$1,500 to pay for his treatment?

The UN Security Council would hold an emergency session and Israel would be strongly condemned and held responsible for the death of the boy.

All this is happening at a time when tens of thousands of Palestinian patients continue to benefit from treatments in Israeli hospitals.

Last year alone, some 180,000 Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip entered Israel to receive medical treatment. Many were treated despite the fact that they did not have enough money to cover the bill. In Israel, even a suicide bomber who is -- only! -- wounded while trying to kill Jews is entitled to the finest medical treatment. And there have been many instances where Palestinians who were injured in attacks on Israel later ended up in some of Israel's best hospitals.

Lebanon, by the way, is not the only Arab country that officially applies Apartheid laws against Palestinians, denying them the right to receive proper medical treatment and own property.

Just last week it was announced that a medical centre in Jordan has decided to stop treating Palestinian cancer patients because the Palestinian Authority has failed to pay its debts to the centre.

Other Arab countries have also been giving the Palestinians a very hard time when it comes to receiving medical treatment.

It is disgraceful that while Israel admits Palestinian patients to its hospitals, Arab hospitals are denying them medical treatment for various reasons, including money. But then one is reminded that Arab dictators do not care about their own people, so why should they pay attention to an 11-year-old boy who is dying at the entrance to a hospital because his father was not carrying \$1,500?

But as the death took place in an Arab country – and as the victim is an Arab – why should anyone care about him? Where is the outcry against Arab Apartheid?

Israel and the UN

Editorial, Chicago Tribune, 4 April 2011

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/editorials/ct-edit-goldstone-20110404,0,5871957.story>

In 2009, a United Nations panel led by Richard Goldstone issued a 575-page bombshell of a report. It accused Israel of committing war crimes against the Palestinians in a three-week Gaza invasion. The Goldstone report was a diplomatic bonanza for Israel's enemies around the world. The report was so damning that some Israeli officials stopped travelling abroad for fear they'd be arrested for war crimes.

On Friday, Goldstone wrote an op-ed about his report in The Washington Post that can be summarized in two words: Never mind.

"If I had known then what I know now, the Goldstone report would have been a different document," he wrote. Goldstone said he no longer believed one of the report's most incendiary charges: that Israeli soldiers deliberately targeted Palestinian civilians during its invasion of Gaza.

So where does a nation go to get its reputation back?

Israeli leaders have complained for years that the UN is biased against the Jewish state, that it judges almost every action of Israel through a Palestinian prism.

And now ... evidence. Not just a disastrously wrong report. But evidence that the entire enterprise was skewed against Israel from the start.

Skewed is not our word. It's Goldstone's. He writes that he "insisted on changing the original mandate adopted by the Human Rights Council, which was skewed against Israel."

He writes that he "had hoped that our inquiry into all aspects of the Gaza conflict would begin a new era of even-handedness at the UN Human Rights Council, whose history of bias against Israel cannot be doubted."

That should surprise no one. Israel has hardly been blameless in the decades of Middle East strife, but the UN human rights panel has overlooked slaughter and genocide in places around the world and focused almost exclusively, year after year, on Israel's alleged misdeeds. The human rights panel once elevated Libya to leadership and coddled the worst human rights abusers around the globe, including Iran and Sudan.

Goldstone was supposed to be the exception: He wasn't believed to be reflexively anti-Israel. How did he get it so wrong? Goldstone regrets that his panel didn't have "Israeli evidence that has emerged" since the report's publication "explaining the circumstances in which we said civilians in Gaza were targeted, because it probably would have influenced our findings about intentionality and war crimes."

So absent facts, the Goldstone panel reached the conclusion that Israel had deliberately targeted civilians, a sensational accusation. We hope Goldstone continues to elaborate on whatever pressures or politics led to the conclusion.

So what do we know?

Israel didn't target civilians. Hamas did. It sent hundreds of rockets into Israeli towns. The report called on Israel and Hamas to investigate their soldiers' actions. Israel did. Hamas didn't. A Hamas official told The New York Times that there was nothing to investigate because firing rockets to kill civilians in Israel is "a right of self-defense..."

The UN should formally retract the Goldstone report. But it can't stop there. The UN needs to acknowledge that it has not been an honest broker in the Middle East. It needs to acknowledge that its human rights panel continues to be an embarrassment that greatly undermines the standing of the world body.

The New York Times reported Sunday that the UN may vote this fall to recognize a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. The UN would declare the boundaries - and that would put Israel in the position of occupying land belonging to a sovereign state and member of the UN.

The UN does not have the moral authority for such a declaration. It has not been an honest broker. Not even close.

Palestinian Authority gaining crucial boost for state from the IMF and World Bank

Joshua Mitnick, JWR, 14 April 2011

http://jewishworldreview.com/0411/palestinians_in_brussels.php3

Palestinians accelerated their drive toward statehood recognition at an international meeting in Brussels Wednesday, but it comes amid worry that Middle East unrest may further complicate prospects for peace by altering the regional landscape.

With peace talks with Israel already mothballed, Palestinians are pursuing a United Nations vote on statehood in September —a goal that seems more likely after foreign donors heard upbeat endorsements of the Palestinian Authority's (PA) ability to govern a sovereign state.

But others say the rising tide of Arab unrest could work against both the PA and Israel. For the PA in the West Bank, demonstrations in the region could spur protests against the lack of political progress, such as the five-year absence of elections or the failure of peace negotiations. It is missing an important ally due to instability in Egypt, which had significant sway over Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip.

Israel, too, lost a strategic partner with the fall of Hosni Mubarak, who was considered a key part of the Middle East peace-making architecture.

Israeli cabinet minister Dan Meridor criticized the Palestinian rush for international recognition but he also urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to come up with an initiative to restart peace talks.

"Time is not playing positively for us or them," he said, noting the regional push for domestic reform exposes the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah to demands by Hamas for institutional reform that could give the Islamic militants' new power bases. "We need to do something."

In Brussels Wednesday, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad told donor nations, which have contributed billions to PA, that "the building blocks of a modern state ... are now in place."

In the past week, the PA has been praised as ready for independent rule in reports prepared by the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. In particular, the IMF noted decreased dependence on aid and increased budgetary transparency. But concerns are mounting in Israel about a destabilization along its border with the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

Israeli analysts are blaming two rounds of flare-ups in less than a month on the fact that Mr. Mubarak is no longer applying pressure to the Islamic militants through their shared border.

While Egypt is focused on elections and a corruption investigation of the Mubarak regime, Hamas has launched more provocative attacks on southern Israeli cities, officials said.

Israel is also worried that the unrest will leave a vacuum for Iran to fill, bolstering Tehran's Hezbollah allies in Lebanon who could fire rockets on Israel.

While Arab unrest has not spread to the West Bank, the PA is watching it closely. Young Palestinian demonstrators have so far called for ending the political rift between Hamas and Fatah.

But if diplomatic efforts fail to produce tangible progress toward a Palestinian state, PA President Mahmoud Abbas could face calls to resign. He has already pledged not to run again in upcoming —albeit overdue —elections. Palestinian observers say that by raising hopes for statehood soon, the PA could be inviting a wave of protests.

"What I am afraid of is that people will have high expectations in September," says Munther Dajani, a political science professor at Al Quds University in Jerusalem. "Then nothing will happen, and then it will explode."

Is Obama abandoning diplomatic support for Israel?

By Jennifer Rubin, Washington Post, 4 April 2011

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/is-obama-abandoning-diplomatic-support-for-israel/2011/03/29/AF6x70QD_blog.html

Until the current president took office, it was accepted U.S. policy - consistent with multiple U.N. resolutions, expressions of U.S. policy and international agreements - that a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood was unacceptable and that Israel was entitled to defensible borders. While the administration hasn't formally rejected either of these, there is certainly cause for worry.

The Middle East Quartet has been discussing the potential for a proposal for Palestinian statehood based upon the 1967 borders "with land swaps," which is commonly understood to refer to settlements. Israel has repeatedly and forcefully told the U.S. that such borders would be indefensible. And yet the Quartet continues to mull this over, now delaying a scheduled meeting. This is curious since the U.S. is part of the Quartet. Why hasn't the Obama administration told the Quartet, which operates on consensus, flat out to forget about such a formulation?

Some reports suggest the US is doing so. ("The US – which along with the EU, Russia and the UN makes up the Quartet – is reportedly uninterested in the meeting at this time, concerned that declaring parameters along the 1967 armistice lines would unnecessarily antagonize Israel and not necessarily bring the Palestinians back to the negotiating table.") However, in his recent visit Dore Gold referred to this report in the Economist last month:

If Mr Cameron offers Israel mixed messages, he does so with the blessing of America's president, normally reliable diplomatic sources claim. Faced with what they see as the intransigence of the Israeli government led by Binyamin Netanyahu, Europe's big beasts and America are moving closer in outlook, according to those sources. Before the UN vote of February 18th, Barack Obama reportedly encouraged Mr Cameron and others to take a tough line on Israel. In phone calls to his European allies, Mr Obama is said to have expressed frustration at Mr Netanyahu's approach to settlements, but to have explained he had "too many domestic fires to extinguish" to risk a bust-up over Israel.

The White House strenuously denies this account. Number 10 would only confirm that Mr Cameron and Mr Obama had been in "regular touch" over the peace process. Since these are private conversations, it is tough for The Economist to know exactly what was said. But, in private, European officials have told Israel that their pressure is choreographed with America.

Gold said he did not have personal knowledge of this very serious charge, but observed that European diplomatic had made the same allegations.

It seemed that this was something that could easily be clarified. Beginning last Thursday I started questioning the State Department. Could its spokesman confirm that the U.S. would oppose a proposal for a '67 border settlement, given Israel's categorical statements that such borders would not be defensible? Could the administration confirm it would oppose and seek to block moves by the U.N. or Quartet to recognize a Palestinian state unilaterally (i.e., not as a product of bilateral negotiations)? These are not hard questions, and the fact that the administration would face questioning is an indication of how strained the U.S.-Israeli relationship has become.

After much back and forth, the only statement I could receive from a State Department spokesman was this non-answer: "Our goal remains to get both parties back to the negotiating table - that is, we believe, the best way to reach a comprehensive solution. We continue to engage with the parties to make that happen, and within the Quartet to see how it can best support that process." After further prodding the spokesman offered, "We do not support any unilateral declaration of statehood."

I was then referred to another State Department spokesman. Edgar Vasquez in Near East Affairs was equally circumspect. Is the U.S. supporting or encouraging a Quarter proposal for a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders? All he would say is "U.S. policy hasn't changed." The spokesman indicated the "preference" was for the parties to return to the bargaining table. "We are in discussions with the Quartet to support the [direct negotiation] process." What about a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state? "We do not think this is the way to go."

Administration equivocation has also rankled key members of the House and Senate, where support for Israel is strong and widespread. A senior Senate aide was chagrined at the State Department's waffling. "This sounds like a bad episode of State Department Gone Wild. The Administration should not abandon America's long standing policy on Israel's right to defensible borders. We need to hear in no uncertain terms that this Administration will not allow any Quartet statement that endorses a Palestinian state based on '67 borders."

Likewise on the House side, members of both parties are nervous that the administration is playing this too cute by half. A congressional aide to a key Democrat on Israel tells me, "The administration ought to remember where Congress is on this issue. The fact that they insist on continuing to go out of their way to upset many of their key supporters in Congress is baffling." He noted this wasn't the first instance in which Israel has been strung along. He recalled, "As with the US veto at the UN in February, the administration seems to be interested in repeating virtually every political and diplomatic mistake that led up to that vote. I assume they're going to do the right thing, but it would be nice if they didn't make us hold our breath for so long."

"Strategic ambiguity" is often helpful in dealing with our *foes*. The administration may be preserving vagueness in order to keep the Palestinians talking. But in the case of Israel, it is a dangerous game that may cause the Palestinians and Arab states to miscalculate, and it may embolden the voices of international de-legitimizers who seek to undermine Israel's right to exist and to live within defensible borders. If Congress wants to get clear answers or make a definitive statement of its understanding of U.S. policy, it will, it seems, have to grill the administration or issue its own declarations of policy.