OPINION

Countering the assaults on Israel

The frightening stupidity of the Israeli government, and our legitimacy is in jeopardy

• BARRY SHAW

When it comes to representing Israel against the libels and boycott campaigns, the Israeli government is not on the battlefield. Its record is a disgrace. Every action taken against us – the Goldstone Report, the flotilla incident, the Muhammed al-Dura case and the Israel apartheid libel – has been a complete failure when it comes to the official Israeli responses.

There is a case to be made that the government is supposed to be active in public diplomacy – to represent Israel officially, in real diplomacy, government to government. It doesn’t seem to now and this may explain why NGOs find visits to the Foreign Ministry and Knesset forums so frustratingly vacuous.

In South Africa, the anti-Israel Open Shuhada Street NGO has three times more paid employees than the Israeli Embassy in Pretoria. This is one reason why we are getting hammered in the South African media, in their national politics, on the campus there. We are simply unable to get any meaningful support from our government.

The Israeli government was roundly criticized by a distinguished panel of activists at a recent public meeting of Truth Be Told for its “declining budgets and mindless mind-sets.” NGO Monitor relays to us the massive funding of anti-Israel NGOs from European governments under the guise of “human rights” and social programs, amounting to millions of euros. Yet it is impossible for effective pro-Israel groups to receive any handout from government sources to mount any successful action in defense of Israel’s damaged reputation.

For those fighting the good fight, it seems as if our anti-Israel enemy has a bottomless well of funding, and he never sleeps.

Our government, I am sure, is aware of the dangerous threat of the demonization and delegitimization of Israel, and yet it has no answer and it has no action plan. Neither is it willing to listen to the advice of those fighting the good fight as to how it can help the cause.

With the inauguration of the new government, the first victim was the Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs Ministry. With the elevation of Yuli Edelstein to Knesset Speaker his ministry is dismantled. I have one question: Can anyone tell me what it did during the brief period of its existence, save for flying Edelstein to pompous events as the government’s figurehead and receiving VIP’s visiting Israel? Can anyone point to one effective and successful piece of action from this ministry in response to the wall of lies and hypocrisy against our country? It has gone, and nobody has noticed its passing.

This is more than a shame. It is a tragic example of government incompetence to those of us who carry the scars of the battle for Israel.

IT IS true that in Danny Ayalon’s tenure as deputy foreign minister, he understood the importance and strength of social media and produced a number of excellent short videos that are still useful tools in our arsenal. However, his intervention was a rare example of coordination between a ministry and those battling to place Israel’s narrative before a wider public. Rather, in regular circumstances, it is left to independent bodies to win the hearts and minds of the undecided.

One prime example is the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, who sponsored the Situation Room to counter the fraudulent message of the Gaza flotilla. Let’s recall the hubara (public diplomacy) disaster of the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident, when the government produced the evidence too little and too late. It has taken us years and we still haven’t lived down the official bungling. In 2011, the IDC donated an office and a bank of computers, as we called for a team of foreign language volunteers to battle the flotilla lies with truth – which we presented on Twitter, Facebook, blogs and self-produced websites. The daily messages reached hundreds of thousands of people in Europe and throughout the world, and helped enormously in having them question the motives of the flotilla extremists. We destroyed their message of being on a “humanitarian mission.” As an adjunct to this exercise, it was Jonathan Lux, a London-based lawyer and a member of UK Lawyers for Israel, who initiated a phone call to an Athens-based colleague that led to the flotillas being held in lockdown in Piraeus harbor. Such is the power of the individual and the volunteer when officialdom fails in its duty.

This year, the IDC under the guidance of Jonathan Davis, its vice president for external relations, sent five beautiful Israelis of Ethiopian background to Cape Town to counter the hateful Israel Apartheid Week. Their presence there was a shock to the anti-Israel organizers, as it projected the true face of Israel as a “rainbow nation” and blew the slanderous message of Israel being a racist state out of the water. Davis and IDC intend to send similar teams to Britain and other campuses throughout Europe. This is one perfect example of what can be achieved by non-governmental means. This counter-offensive could be so much more effective and widespread if only the government would support such initiatives.

Not only are government officials and well-connected Israelis not fighting on our side, they can often be found in the camp of our enemy. A perfect example of this has been the lone battle of Philippe Karsenty, who for decades has been fighting the Dura blood libel. When the news broke on September 30, 2000, that a Palestinian boy had been killed by Israeli gunfire at Netzarim junction, the IDF admitted responsibility, and in a knee-jerk reaction offered an apology for the incident. It was only later that it was proven that the IDF had no part in the incident – which Karsenty spent a decade proving to be a hoax perpetrated by France 2 TV, in collaboration with Palestinian media people.

Karsenty pleaded for the support of the Israeli government in the lawsuits brought against him by France 2 and Canal 22. None was forthcoming.

Karsenty claimed that prominent Israelis such as Kadima’s Yisrael Hasson, who had served in the Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency), endorsed France 2’s Charles Enderlin, who claimed in his book A Child is Killed that he had the support of the IDF and the Shin Bet. The only doctor to support Enderlin was Rafi Walden, who is the son-in-law of Prime Minister Shimon Peres, according to Karsenty. Even after Karsenty won his case and the message was out there that the Dura case was a media fraud, he continued to find antagonism from Yigal Palmor of the Foreign Ministry, and even from current Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, when Karsenty offered to gift his hard-earned success to the Israeli government, in order for it to officially expose the bias and in the case of France 2 and the Palestinians, the deliberate Dura fraud against Israel, Livni responded with “We don’t care about that,” according to his account to a Los Angeles audience.

Now we read in The Jerusalem Post that a government panel has just come to the conclusion that the IDF did not kill Dura. Good morning, Israeli government! Where have you been for the last 13 years?

There are worthy advocates out there who are willing to put themselves on the line for Israel. They are ready to take up Israel’s case on university campuses along with IDC and StandWithUs, against the media with Honest Reporting, in the courts with those such as Karsenty and UK Lawyers for Israel, and to win the hearts and minds of public opinion with groups such as Truth Be Told and many others. However, they need to know that the Israeli government stands with them in an active and affirmative manner.

The question is: Who is there in the lethargic, bumbling world of Israeli politics and official bureaucracy who is able to reach out in any type of Knesset or Foreign Ministry forum and listen to what can be done? Is there anybody there being hearing this message? Or are we alone, the individual NGOs and grassroots groups, to fight against a wall of hate and lies, as we attempt to reclaim the narrative for Israel?

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