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## ON ISRAELI *HASBARAH*

**T**here was an op-ed in the Jerusalem Post Weekend Magazine last Friday from Daniel Gordis, a talented and well-respected academic observer and commentator, about the reasons Israel *hasbarah*—that is PR, public diplomacy, propaganda, information, etc—has failed. He wrote that the effort to explain our positions was wasted because Europe and America have generally got fed up with us and aren't listening any more. And that PR was mostly a waste of time. I have written a response, which should appear in next week's Weekend Magazine.

I agree with every word of Daniel Gordis ("A Dose of Nuance" November 7th) , but he has missed the point. It is true that *hasbarah* seems pointless when everybody out there seems to dislike us, but the failure of our *hasbarah* is not because of that. The failure is because Israel does not have what *hasbarah* always requires: a clear, consistent, coherent policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians and the Territories.

The other side certainly does have such a narrative: they, the Palestinians, claim they are the original inhabitants of the land, which is theirs, while Israel is a colonialist usurper with no organic relationship to the land. Violence in restoring their stolen rights is therefore justified, etc. Any person with half an education knows that this is historical nonsense, but it doesn't matter whether this account is true or false; for the purposes of *hasbarah*, it's all there; a narrative which is clear, coherent, and consistent.

The same is true of American and European foreign policy about the green line and a 2-state solution, by the way. Doesn't matter that they think Ramat Eshkol and Gilo are settlements on occupied territory rather than neighborhoods of Jerusalem; the position has what's required; it's clear, consistent and coherent. And therefore permanent.

Compare Israel's muddle on dealing with the Territories and the Palestinians living there. On the one hand we have agreed in the amazing Oslo talks of 1993 to recognize a Palestinian people, and therefore a land and a state. And the government, whether willingly or under coercion, has reiterated this 2-state solution as official policy ever since. On the other hand, anybody with open eyes knows that the 2-state solution can never be allowed to happen, and won't, because the security threat – Hamas rockets over the airport – would be intolerable. So the government is, in fact, pursuing both halves of a mutually exclusive policy.

Under these circumstances, it wouldn't matter if every one of Daniel Gordis' assertions turned out to be wrong; that in fact they all love us, etc. There is still no way one could ever mount an effective *hasbarah* campaign to advance this position. It is neither clear nor coherent, and certainly not consistent.

The problem is that the solutions to this dilemma are either illusory (negotiate patiently until the Palestinians come around to seeing the justice of our position) or politically impossible (annex all the territories, make Israeli citizenship available to everybody, and offer free resettlement to anyone who doesn't like it). The problem of *hasbarah* is therefore simply unsolvable. We should keep trying – after all it does offer employment to any number of talented people – but not take the effort seriously, as it is doomed to failure. Not because of external pressure, as Gordis suggests, but because of its own internal logical impossibility.

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