

Learning to Decipher the Rhetoric in Israel

One of Israel's staunchest allies, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, recently visited the Jewish state and expressed great solidarity between the two countries. The highlight of the very warm and friendly visit was his speech before the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, where he told Israel's leaders that Canada would stand behind them through "fire and water."

The Israeli Knesset is known for the occasional heckling and outbursts of its members, but for the first time in history, a foreign dignitary, Prime Minister Harper, was heckled by one of the Arab members of Knesset. Israel has several Arab political parties, and one of them is represented in the Knesset by Ahmad Tibi, who is known for voicing anti-Israel views. Tibi reacted to Harper's pro-Israel speech by shouting at him about Israeli discrimination of Arabs and then walking out of the hall.

Due to the immense media coverage of the incident, another Tibi outburst that day received attention. Earlier that morning he had heckled Prime Minister Netanyahu, and the incident provides a clear example of the use of exaggeration and lies in order to make a case against Israel.

Lies Work

When Tibi shouted at Israel's prime minister, he exclaimed that his fellow Arab member of the Knesset, Taleb Abu Arar, did not have water or electricity in his home because of Israeli discrimination. "There's no water or electricity in his village," Tibi shouted at Netanyahu. "No water, no electricity. Give him water and electricity and he'll stop shouting."

Tibi's lies were uncovered when Israeli Channel 2 News showed that Abu Arar, a former schoolteacher and head of his local council, lives in a three-story home with water, electricity, air conditioning and a satellite dish, and that his street is well-lit by street lamps. Prime Minister Netanyahu posted on his Facebook page a picture of Abu Arar's three-story home with proof that it has both electricity and water.

When confronted with this information, Tibi acknowledged that he had been speaking more generally about alleged discrimination. Obviously, the facts were not important to Tibi. Nevertheless, his outburst got so much media attention that he has been invited to Canada to speak at anti-Israel forums across the country. If impact is the goal, lies work!

Reading Behind the Words

This incident highlights the problem that Western diplomats and foreign workers have when engaging the Middle East. The Western means of communication is radically different from the Arab or Middle-Eastern use of words. Therefore, the two societies arrive at truth quite differently.

The Western world takes a more linear and logical approach to things and uses words to convey fact. Fact can be delivered in less direct language, if necessary, to not offend or upset someone, but by in large, words are used to convey fact rather than emotion. So conversation in Western societies is to be taken at face value. Yes means yes, and no means no.

In the Arab world, however, words are used more for their impact than for their factual accuracy. Arabic is a beautiful and flowery language that lends itself to powerful poetry and rhetoric more moving than music. Language is an art, and in that context, great exaggeration can be employed to make a point more impacting. The emotional impact of one's words is what is important, not the facts.

Therefore, in the Middle East, one does not take words at face

value but arrives at the truth by reading behind the words. This requires skillful probing and the sifting of emotions in order to determine the facts.

Deciphering the Rhetoric

This is one of the reasons Israel is facing a mounting global propaganda campaign that is unprecedented in history. Israel's enemies, in complete disregard for the facts, have found a politically correct way to defeat her by branding her a racist, apartheid regime that should not be recognized or legitimized.

Tibi learned from his former boss, Yasser Arafat, who shocked President Clinton during the Camp David peace talks when he denied that the Jewish temple was ever in Jerusalem. Current Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is not any better. He not only denies the Holocaust happened but stood in front of the United Nations last year and denied the historical and biblical ties of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

The West must learn to decipher this rhetoric to arrive at the facts. For example, while Tibi intended to paint Israel as a racist state, Netanyahu boasted on his Facebook page that Tibi's heckling was proof of the vibrancy of Israeli democracy.

Now, that is the truth!

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