

Unpacking the Tlaib and Omar Propaganda Tour

As the dust settles over the planned, canceled, re-scheduled and then canceled-again trip to Israel by Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, two things come to mind offering perspectives on how this played out.

First, the scene from "Argo" when the CIA affirms that "This is the best bad idea we have." Why? Because no matter what had happened, Israel only had bad choices.

The second was my day as driver for Benjamin Netanyahu when, as Israel's ambassador to the U.N., he visited Atlanta to meet with CNN writers and producers to try to offer perspective on the Arab-Israel conflict which media routinely either misses or ignores because of ignorance or bias.

Why the best bad option? Certainly, Israel could have handled its decision much better. But either way, they played into the hands of the media hungry rabid anti-Semites who disgrace the U.S. Congress with their hateful views. Not allowing them to visit, then allowing Tlaib to do so on humanitarian grounds to visit her elderly grandmother was a no-win situation.

Tlaib and Omar weren't going to give Israel any slack. Their delegation of two to "Palestine" made that abundantly clear. That's why they were traveling separately from the largest ever delegation of Democratic Congressmen to Israel. The closest they got to any official meeting with Israeli representatives would have been dinner in a kosher Moroccan restaurant.

Tlaib and Omar were, and remain, out to delegitimize and malign Israel at every turn. Banning them may have indeed been the least bad idea. Their independent itinerary was organized by a group that supports terror and the destruction of Israel.

Their trip would have been an unabashed anti-Israel propaganda tour that would make Yasser Arafat blush in his grave.

Given the hate and malice, allowing Tlaib and Omar to come to Israel could have ended in any number of scenarios that would have created no less bad for Israel, perhaps much worse. It could have put both Israelis and Palestinian Arabs in harm's way. Imagine one of a variety of deliberately choreographed situations as my good friend, Abe, a Jordanian-born American academic depicts:

1. "Tlaib and Omar join thousands of Arabs at an Israeli checkpoint. The mob starts pressing and menacing IDF soldiers. The latter either retreat in defeat or push back and hurt the rioters, possibly including the terror supporting Congresswomen. People are jostled, fall and are hurt—possibly including Tlaib and Omar. Pulitzer prize-winning photos depicting only the anti-Israel narrative go viral immediately making front-page news all over the world."
2. "Tlaib and Omar arrive at the Temple Mount. They are followed by a mob of Islamists who provoke IDF soldiers. A riot ensues in which either Tlaib or Omar get injured: Even just a bruised knee or a slight concussion. Or the Congresswomen are not injured themselves, but they rush to help those who have fallen (an easy thing to do). It's all dramatic and it's all on film. Israel tries to explain who started the trouble, and the world will laugh as usual and call it an apartheid state."
3. "Best case scenario. No riots, scuffles, injuries or deaths. There are only pictures of Tlaib hugging her grandmother, embracing distant cousins, tears filling their eyes. There are photos of Omar praying at the Temple Mount with a throng of adoring Muslim women, raising her hands to Allah in supplication against the Zionist occupier, shedding tears of Muslim solidarity

which will be seen by every one of the 1.2 billion Muslims from Jakarta to Detroit. Violence is a preferred, but not a necessary, condition for Pallywood productions.”

This leads to the 1980s CNN briefing with Netanyahu.

While his briefing may have had a short-lived impact, with a news cycle that changes hourly, most media outlets are not reliable to offer context or nuance. They need to get their reports, photos and videos out before their competition. Even without bias or ignorance of facts, a lot is left out as they take the lowest common denominator to churn out the most dramatic “news.”

Some of the nuances missing in most reports this week include the following:

1. Assuming that Prime Minister Netanyahu caved to President Trump. If it weren't so transparent, it would be funny. For so many who hate everything about Donald Trump, the assumption is that he made Israel's decision. People project their disgust with Trump on Israel and Netanyahu without any awareness that there are other diplomatic and security concerns. There's no awareness that almost nothing is being done in Israel now without an eye on next month's election. While U.S. pundits blame Trump, Israeli politicians blame Netanyahu for putting his own election campaign above national interests. These are mutually exclusive. Only one can be right, if any.
2. Some criticize Israel for preventing Tlaib and Omar from getting “a firsthand look at what's going on.” But that's dishonest, given that by the very nature of their itinerary, they had no intent to get a firsthand look, but rather vilify Israel in every way possible.
3. Rather than visiting Israel with dozens of other

Democratic Congressmen, Tlaib and Omar were scheduled to go under the auspices of Miftah, an anti-Semitic Palestinian Arab organization. Miftah is so hateful that in 2013 this they condemned President Obama for hosting a Passover Seder in the White House. The condemnation was not for supporting an Israeli government or military action, but for hosting a Jewish holiday dinner. They used one of the most hateful blood libels to depict this: "Does Obama in fact know the relationship between 'Passover' and 'Christian blood'...? Or 'Passover' and 'Jewish blood rituals? Much of the chatter and gossip about historical Jewish blood rituals in Europe are real and not fake as they claim; the Jews used the blood of Christians in the Jewish Passover."

4. Some say barring them was a missed opportunity to depict the strength of Israel's democracy. To whom? Tlaib and Omar? To the rest of the world? So, someone could interject meekly, "ah but Israel is a strong democracy evidenced by the fact that they were allowed to come to Israel to begin with." Does being a democracy require one to be suicidal?
5. The final act (as of now) of this performance was that immediately after being denied to visit Israel as part of their anti-Israel propaganda tour, Tlaib appealed to Israel's interior minister to be able to visit her elderly grandmother who she might not see again. Israel approved this visit on humanitarian grounds. But Tlaib, never missing an opportunity to be indecent, decided kissing her elderly grandmother wasn't as important as slapping Israel in the face. She rejected Israel's offer because of "oppressive conditions." Given how she played this by using her own grandmother as a prop, there's little doubt what lengths she'd have gone to bash Israel while visiting.

"Argo" depicts a fascinating story that took place during the

early years of Iran's Islamic revolution when they held hostage 52 Americans. The intolerant Islam of Iran is now in the halls of Congress. It is relevant here in another way, other than the "bad idea" element. The very intolerance and historical revisionism of radical Islam which Tlaib and Omar represent, and which still thrives in Iran, prevents not only a peaceful solution, but even an ability to live together.

Why does it matter if they are "duly elected members of Congress" as is being parroted by so many? Does their office make them above the law, or basic decency? Why is Israel any less of an ally or a democracy when they prevent those who support terror and embrace Israel's delegitimization and destruction from getting free access?

Maybe Israel's decision could have been different, or done differently. But let's be completely clear that lots of nuance is needed to understand the depth of the issue, and that this may have indeed been Israel's least bad option. {eo}

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