Revolution of Consciousness: Sharing Israel's narrative with the Arab, Muslim worlds

written by Ruth Wasserman Lande | 15.01.2024

Our war for the safekeeping of Israel is being waged on several levels. The military level is undoubtedly the most important and basic one, as it is undoubtedly the physical battle which shall clear the Gaza Strip of terrorists and weapons. Yet the battle over our narrative is not less important.

Even without the support of the world, we will continue to stand firmly against the evil we face. Even without the international legitimacy we so deserve, we will continue to strive and work for the return of our abducted men, women, children, and the elderly.

Even without the tears of the citizens of the world, we shall continue in our righteous path, simply because it is so undoubtedly just.

Nonetheless, and despite all that, it is important to note that the battle for the acceptance or at least acknowledgment of our narrative in the Muslim world is not lost. The Muslim and Arab world is not exposed to almost any information that puts it at odds with the anti-Israeli messaging to which it is accustomed. Arab governments, which have signed peace agreements with the State of Israel, filter the messages to which their publics are exposed, in a manner which does not expose Israel's story.

The time has come to change this situation. This is not naïveté and it is not mere wishful thinking. It is doable.

How can Israel change the narrative in the Arab and Muslim worlds?

Why is it important? The Arabs and Muslims make up a significant portion of the world's population, that has a significant impact on global discourse, whether in international organizations or whether in its ability to harness mass public opinion on various campuses and on the streets of Europe, the US, Australia, and Canada.

Moreover, this is the neighborhood in which Israel is situated and although it is important to acknowledge that it is, indeed, a tough one and prepare accordingly, there is no reason in adopting a defeatist state of mind when it comes to trying to touch the hearts of the masses in this neighborhood.

Some basic principles reinforce the argument that with the right effort, the goal is attainable. First, Arab culture is significantly based on emotion and less so on rationalism. This is not an absolute statement, of course, but the emotional component carries a very significant weight for many in the Arab and Muslim world.

Any Israeli, Jewish or other effort to share the Israeli narrative with the Arab and Muslim world must be based largely – if not entirely – on emotion. And are the atrocities committed on October 7th not heart-wrenching? Are those actions not enough to shake the human soul? Are the testimonies of the abductees and especially the women abductees who were returned from hell not enough to take away one's breath?

IF WE put our inevitable cynicism aside for a moment, we will realize that these horrors and truths, almost entirely simply do not reach the Arab and Muslim public. It is important to internalize this – and to stop declaring defeat in advance, because "even if they knew, they would disqualify or ignore them, or even be happy that they had happened"… Some will, indeed, be happy. Some of them – in Gaza – even took part in the October 7th "Carnival of Horrors."

But a very large part of the Arab world simply does not know and is not exposed to what had happened and to what continues to be the lot of our abductees in the Gaza Strip. It is our duty to put this truth in front of their eyes, in cooperation with the Arab governments, and with the help of the US.

And that brings me to the second point that must be taken into account when it comes to the Arab and Muslim world. There are topics that are considered "haram" – absolutely forbidden according to Islam and the Arab tradition. One of these topics, and perhaps the most sensitive, is sexual abuse.

The fact that religious permits were given to the Hamas terrorists to commit acts of rape and even gang rape is not only unacceptable to Israelis and to those in the Western world. To many in the Muslim world, this is a shocking act that tarnishes the very image of their religion. It is our duty to raise what had happened, with all

its complexities, with all its gory and horrific details (and God only knows that there are many and there are simply beyond belief), again and again and to fight in order for these shocking, inhumane, despicable acts to be put before the eyes of millions of Muslims around the world.

The United States has much leverage vis-à-vis Arab countries, and therefore has the power to demand that their media broadcast the whole truth. It is not possible for us to accept as a fait accompli the reality that Arab governments prevent the knowledge of the suffering of our people from their public.

No more. Enough is enough. There is an element of Respect. And respect begets respect.

THE ISSUE must be made a condition for cooperation. There are quite a few issues where Israel is also required to be forthcoming, whether it is allowing Egypt to increase its military forces in the Sinai Peninsula beyond what is permitted in the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement or whether it is the humanitarian aid which Israel is required to allow into the Gaza Strip.

This is a condition that is of utmost importance since such exposure will create a real and lasting change in the consciousness of large publics towards Israel's plight.

As someone who has been involved, for many years, in "hasbara," or public diplomacy for the State of Israel, I am calling for the first time for a significant and massive fundraising campaign for the purpose of creating a global information campaign intended for the young generation worldwide, and specifically the young generation of Arabs and Muslims. This is a strategic investment which shall have an impact on Israel's resilience.

Such a campaign must include the best technology that will overcome the numerical weakness that is Israel's lot. Israel simply does not have the privilege of ignoring or turning a blind eye to the insane incitement against Israelis and the Jewish people, which is the foundation of much of the messaging which is being fed to many in the Arab and Muslim publics by some of their governments.

We must not turn a blind eye to the terrible educational programs that perpetuate the hatred towards us in the Gaza Strip, in Judea and Samaria, and in Jordan, not to mention in other Arab countries. Though, these places have already begun to

improve the messages sent out in exchange for incentives from the international arena, especially from the US.

This is a step that will also well serve the moderate Arab governments themselves, since incitement against Israel has always been a double-edged sword wielded by the regimes themselves. Standing by Israel and against terrorism and radical Islam is clearly in their best interest.

October 7 presented the State of Israel and the Jewish people with a difficult, painful, and shocking reality.

The events of that Black Shabbat shook us from our divisions and rifts that many in Israel had been busy with until that very moment. The events oblige us to reexamine old models, reconsider patterns of action that may have seemed impossible until now, to think entirely differently, openly, and creatively. Those who are ready to join this tremendous effort to carry out what I call a Revolution of Consciousness – this is the time to do so.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, January 15, 2024.