

Missing the point about hasbara

written by David M. Weinberg | 16.10.2026

Just about every political party and research institute opposed to the current government is flagging better “hasbara,” Israeli public diplomacy, as a critical priority looking ahead and as a reason to unseat Prime Minister Netanyahu.

But most politicians and analysts blabbing about this have failed to outline the tough messaging that must sweepingly replace Israel’s weak positioning of recent decades. Perhaps because they are afraid to do so; even incapable of recognizing the need to do so.

A few examples: Former MK Dr. Einat Wilf, who is running third on the Reservists-Economic party’s Knesset list, is calling correctly for a major expansion in the Foreign Ministry’s resources to combat anti-Israel narratives abroad (–beyond the NIS 500 million that current Foreign Minister Gideon Saar has smartly invested).

Her just-unveiled seven-point national policy plan calls for integrating Israel’s “war of consciousness” into national security decision-making. She proposes establishing a centralized information and intelligence hub for hasbara efforts, and using diplomatic, legal, and economic tools against supporters of terrorism. She demands that Israel shift from reactive to “proactive” postures in public diplomacy, where Israel would shape the international debate rather than primarily respond to criticism and accusations.

All good. But what Wilf does not say (even though she is one of Israel’s best spokespersons) is what the content of said “hasbara” would be. She doesn’t explicitly outline the revolution necessary in Israel’s messaging; resolute messaging that matches Israel’s necessarily aggressive new strategic and defense posture, and messaging that restores Jewish faith to Israel’s diplomatic arsenal.

Similarly, Dr. Pnina Sharvit Baruch, former head of the IDF’s international law department and a senior researcher at INSS, has penned a 24-page proposal for restoring Israel’s international standing that calls for “building professional, factual, and legal capabilities to address allegations, institutional biases, and campaigns against Israel” that also “appeal to emotion,” and “adopting differentiated policies towards different audiences” – all correct approaches that I

have advocated in these pages.

But she too shies away from biting the bullet, which is acknowledging that public diplomacy based on advocacy of the so-called “two state solution” is a recipe for continued Israeli failure.

Instead, she misguidedly calls for renewed “presentation of a credible diplomatic horizon” which is codeword for Palestinian statehood – as if nothing has changed in Israel’s diplomatic and defense world since the utter collapse of the Oslo Accords and since the 2023 assault from Gaza by Hamas.

THAT FACT IS that twenty-five years of Oslo-era diplomacy and hasbara epistles have not worked. It is simply insufficient to explain Israel’s security dilemmas or emphasize Israel’s past and potentially future diplomatic generosity towards the Palestinians. What is needed are three additional themes.

The first is making Israeli public diplomacy more unequivocally and candidly “Jewish.” In past, “secular” themes have dominated – Israel’s security needs and diplomatic bigheartedness. This was because secular messaging was most comfortable for secular Israeli leaders and diplomats themselves, and they also thought that such an approach was surely most relatable for foreign leaders and for Jews of the Diaspora too.

These days, given the ideological assault on Judaism and Zionism that underpins violent Palestinianism and its “progressive” fellow travelers, this must change. We all must insist on a narrative that proclaims incontrovertible, indigenous Jewish rights in Israel – including in Jerusalem, and Judea and Samaria! – and which speaks of Israel as a grand reunion of faith, people, and land.

We can win only if we speak about history, justice, and the Jewish nation. (Einat Wilf indeed excels at this.) Jews abroad also need to recognize that one cannot escape core Jewish identities and claims in the Land of Israel in any effort to support Israel.

Indeed, in repeat visits to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, I have found that urbane Arabs like the Emiratis respect Israelis for their faithfulness to Jewish tradition, for their belief in the power of Jewish history, for their loyalty to ancient heritage and unique national identity. The Emiratis seem to understand – better than we do ourselves, sometimes – that these anchors of identity are the greatest source of

strength and authenticity.

SECOND, there is no choice but to own-up and embrace Israel's strength. Israeli messaging must affirm Israeli power and articulate how that strength is justifiably and wisely being used to fight Iran, Islamic jihadism, and annihilationist-against-Israel Palestinianism.

The fact is that Israel is acting with overwhelming military power to reset the regional strategic architecture and roll-back its enemies. Israel is seeking to restore its dominance and deterrence across all its borders, and in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) too, and it will yet act even more forcefully. In fact, Israel is permanently resetting its borders with Gaza, Lebanon, and Syria for security reasons, without apology. Fiercer-than-ever takedowns of Iran and Hamas are surely coming too.

Of course, this presents a heightened hasbara challenge for advocates for Israel, but there is no way to avoid Israel's ferociousness. The challenge must be met defiantly and unwaveringly.

David Ben-Gurion's famous adage about the Messianic era when the lion will lie down with the lamb (as per Isaiah) is appropriate. "That will be great," said Ben-Gurion, "as long as Israel is the lion!"

So, supporters of Israel cannot be shy about Israeli military prowess. They must articulate the reasons why Israel must be the "lion" and use crushing force to destroy enemies and defend its homeland. In my mind, this is a vital turnabout in Israeli public diplomacy and global pro-Israel activism.

No apologetics or apprehension about Israeli power will improve Israel's standing. On the contrary, one can convey a deep sense of sincerity by clarifying Israeli red lines and owning up to Israel's unavoidably hard-hitting defense posture. People are forced to respect that, even if they may not impute to Israel spectacular charity.

THE THIRD and hardest theme necessary in Israeli policy and public diplomacy is the reintroduction of realism and truth-telling to the global dynamic.

This means more than basic restatement of the Jewish People's profound historic and national rights in Jerusalem and in the misnamed "occupied territories;" more

than clearly and constantly articulated outrage about genocidal anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish sentiment; and more than unabashed enunciation of Israel's determination to decisively beat all enemies.

It means more than stopping to appeal for global sympathy because we were massacred by Hamas, and more than combatting modern blood libels like the genocide and war crime charges with aggressive counter facts and lawsuits.

It means explaining why the two-state concept is suspended; why the Palestinians do not now deserve nor can be trusted with their own state – if they ever did or could. It means demanding that world dial back from the now evidently dangerous, impossible-to-implement, “everybody-knows-what-must-be” paradigm that imagined two democratic states living peacefully side by side after maximal Israeli withdrawals.

Israel will not yield to a stale formula based on wild Palestinian demands alongside minimal regard for Israeli security needs and national-historic claims; a discredited formula involving the uprooting of settlements, withdrawals from most of Judea and Samaria, and a division of Jerusalem.

Iranian-backed jihadism and Hamas-inspired rejectionism have thoroughly infected the Palestinian national movement and made such proposals passé. There are no “demilitarization parameters,” “governance reforms,” and “deradicalization programs” (really, denazification curriculums) that are remotely realistic regarding Palestinians in this generation.

Perhaps under long-term Israeli sovereignty and military control, and only then, might Palestinians be freed from the venomous doctrines and ruinous theologies that have overtaken their society and politics. And then they might find solace and solution in cooperation with Israel.

Of course, it is politically incorrect to say these things bluntly, but it is the rock-bottom mandatory basis for authentic Israeli policy and public diplomacy with any chance of succeeding. Israel cannot deflect boycotts and scuttle sanctions by fudging its defense policy and pussyfooting around with its diplomatic messaging.

Nothing less frank will reflect reality; nothing less audacious will ring true; nothing less bold will hold.

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