

The Haaretz poll travesty, NIF funding, and the Durban Strategy

Gerald M. Steinberg/JNS.org

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There is now broad agreement in Israel that the pseudo-poll and headline published by Haaretz on Oct. 23 (“Majority of Israelis support apartheid regime in Israel”) was a mistake, to understate the case.

Haaretz published a correction (albeit a brief note on page 5, rather than as a major headline, as was the case for the original poll). Gideon Levy published a half-hearted retraction or explanation that primarily served to signal that even he, a hard-core warrior, realized the error. In columns and talk shows across the Israeli spectrum, the manipulative methodology and shallow questions were dissected.

However, a great deal of damage has been done outside Israel, where this farce was used to further the campaign of anti-Israel political warfare and demonization. The Guardian, Independent, the Globe and Mail (Toronto) and the Sydney Morning Herald ran the story accompanied by headlines as misleading as that of the original Haaretz piece: “Many Israelis support apartheid-style state, poll suggests” and “The new Israeli apartheid.”

The poll that generated such attention was flawed in many dimensions. In Haaretz, former Israeli Minister Yehuda Ben Meir slammed the false statements in the original article, charging that the actual conclusion to be drawn from the poll results “is exactly the opposite of what’s written in the article’s headline” and that the majority of Israelis are “unwilling to live in a country with an apartheid regime.” As a “push” poll, involving only 503 people, this survey was driven by clear political objectives.

These activities are an integral part of an ongoing campaign that began in the NGO Forum of the UN’s 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. The crudely anti-Semitic event was described by the late Congressman Tom Lantos as “an anti-American and anti-Israel circus.” Under the banner of human rights and led by the Arab League and Iran, 5000 NGO officials adopted a declaration accusing Israel of “apartheid and ethnic cleansing” and adopted a strategy of “complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state... the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links.” It is in this context that the poll, the headlines that followed (based on an equally misleading press release) and those responsible for it, must be understood.

The pseudo-poll is another form of attack in this political war to demonize Israel. Responsibility for the attack, beyond Haaretz, lies with Amiram Goldblum, a founder of Peace Now, who runs the Yisraela Goldblum Fund (named after his late wife), which paid for costs, under the wider framework of the non-profit group known as “Signing Anew.” This funding, in turn, was provided by the New Israel Fund, and Goldblum is a member of NIF’s International Council.

In addition, according to Goldblum’s press release, the “questions” used in this political stunt were formulated by individuals closely connected to the NIF, the Durban Strategy and BDS. Michael Sfard is legal counsel for a number of NGOs involved in this immoral campaign, and Alon Liel (married to NIF’s Executive Director in Israel, Rachel Liel) has expressed his support for “targeted” boycotts in the Guardian and in the South African media. Mordechai Bar-On and Ilan Baruch are also members of the NIF’s International Council.

Everyone connected with this travesty shares responsibility for the immense political damage that has been caused—Goldblum, in particular, owes the Israeli public an apology. And just as the NIF takes

credit when its grantees impact positively on Israel, so too, must they take responsibility when its grantees like this do serious damage and demonize Israel as part of the Durban Strategy.

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