

Israel at 65: positive signs in the political war
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Sunday, April 21, 2013

In early April, the student council of the University of California at Santa Barbara held an all-night debate on an anti-Israel “Resolution to divest from companies that profit from apartheid.” In the vote at the end of this exhausting session, the resolution was defeated, shocking the anti-Israel activists who had invested heavily in the effort to win an important battle on this campus, known for its radical politics.

At almost the same time, the student union at the University of Manitoba voted to deny any support to the organizers of the Israeli apartheid week on its campus, citing the discrimination and harassment inherent in these activities.

The events at Santa Barbara and Manitoba are indicative of a gradual turn-around in the anti-Israel demonization campaigns that began at the NGO forum of the infamous 2001 UN anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa.

In both examples, the outcome was the result of very strong and convincing arguments exposing the fundamental immorality of the demonization campaigns that single-out Israel for attack by exploiting terms such as “apartheid” and “war crimes.”

At York University, where, in contrast to Manitoba and Santa Barbara, the student council recently did the wrong thing by lining up to endorse an instant boycott resolution, media accounts quoted a Jewish student leader who condemned the action as “fundamentally racist.” In the battlefield of ideology and ideals, highlighting the immoral basis of the political war to destroy Israel is essential. In the longer term, the aggressive messaging and tactics used to attack Israel at York and elsewhere will turn out to be counterproductive and self-defeating.

For many years, the leaders of this dirty political war have exploited the language of morality, human rights and humanitarian aid without much effective push-back. With no knowledge of the realities, entertainers such as Pink Floyd’s Roger Waters have been recruited to join the boycott, giving it publicity. Among some powerful Christian groups, expressions of sympathy for “Palestinian suffering” at the hands of Israel emphasize theological antisemitic themes and images.

But the dominance of the anti-Israel campaigns on the digital battlefields of Facebook, blogs, Twitter, and Wikipedia is now being answered effectively. Similarly, at the United Nations, the blatant double standards of the Human Rights Council have been exposed, including in the contrast between automatic condemnations of Israel and the minimal response on Syria. In parallel, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and their allies are being named and shamed, and the displays of bias that were overlooked in the past now draw negative publicity, tarnishing their moral claims and impact.

In Israel, there is growing recognition of the demonization and false narratives that consistently shift the blame of violence and warfare to Israel, while promoting the myths of Palestinian victimhood. A highly professional documentary on antisemitism, old and new, by Canadian producer Martin Himel, was shown in prime time on a major Israeli television channel, triggering extended discussions in the print media and blogs. And the hypocrisy of fringe Israeli academics and journalists who have given

the façade of legitimacy to vicious anti-Israel campaigns around the world are subject to well-deserved criticism at home.

Both on university campuses abroad (including in Canada) and in Israel, there are now many more articulate and dedicated activists promoting the legitimacy of Zionism, compared to just a few years ago. In this sense, as well as others, Israel's stock on the international political market is going up, while the layers of fiction and lies leading to demonization are being peeled back. The impact of this revival will grow as more pro-Israel activists are trained and enter positions of leadership.

So, as Israel celebrates 65 years of growth, there is room for optimism regarding the political war. The immoral attacks on Israel's legitimacy and the Jewish right to national sovereignty are continuing, and there are many battles to be fought on this front. But this fight is no longer one-sided, and the recent victories are signs of a fundamental change in the right direction.