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UNRWA and the code of silence

Alexander H Joffe and Asaf Romirowsky, *Jerusalem Post*, 7 November 2010

One of the first rules of being an UNRWA official is omerta. Above all the code of silence means refusing to tell two truths. First is the truth about UNRWA. It is a key mechanism that keeps Palestinians “refugees” over 60 years after their ancestors’ flight during the Arab war against the creation of the State of Israel. It is internationally funded, to the tune of \$1.23 billion for 2010-2011, but since it is run by Palestinians, it is a tool for reproducing their sense of grievance against Israel and the West, and a unique culture of dependence and entitlement with respect to the world.

The second thing UNRWA officials need to learn is to never, ever tell Palestinians the truth that they are not going back to their ancestors’ homes in what is now Israel. That pipe dream underlies the entire Palestinian sense of grievance and perhaps of self.

Recently, for perhaps only the third time in UNRWA history, a high official let the truth slip. In a speech to an Arab-American group, Andrew Whitley, outgoing head of UNRWA’s New York office, stated the obvious, “We recognize, as I think most do, although it’s not a position that we publicly articulate, that the right of return is unlikely to be exercised to the territory of Israel to any significant or meaningful extent... It’s not a politically palatable issue, it’s not one that UNRWA publicly advocates, but nevertheless it’s a known contour to the issue.”

UNRWA’s reaction was swift, saying “UNRWA unequivocally distances itself from the statements made by the director of its office in New York, Andrew Whitley, at the National Council on US-Arab Relations in Washington on October 22, 2010. These statements in no way reflect the policies or positions of the agency and are the personal views of Mr. Whitley.”

Unfortunately, Whitley came under such pressure from his former employer as a result of his comments that he publicly apologized for the error of his ways, stating that his comments were “inappropriate and wrong.”

To allay all doubt, he added that he “wish[ed] to put this letter on the public record out of concern that what I said in Washington could be interpreted in ways that negatively affect the reputation and work of UNRWA.”

So dedicated is UNRWA to lying to the Palestinians, perhaps as a function of maintaining its own role as their permanent caretaker, that it is willing to slap one of its own officials in public and even make him retract. The same thing happened in 2009 when James Lindsay, UNRWA’s former general counsel, wrote a critical report on the organization for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Among other things Lindsay criticized UNRWA’s continued employment of known terrorists and continuing politicization of the “refugee” issue.

Ironically, it was Whitley who then had the task of slapping down Lindsay, saying: “The agency is disappointed by the findings of the study, found it to be tendentious and partial and regrets in particular the narrow range of sources used... The study ignores the context in which UNRWA operates and the tight line the agency walks due to various pressures.”

Whitley also insisted that that “someone reading this paper with no background would assume that the Israeli government was a benign actor. No mention is made of the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.”

This conveniently forgets that Israel evacuated all of Gaza in 2005.

Sometimes UNRWA will simply deny its internal critics even existed. In 1952 Lt.-Gen. Sir Alexander Galloway, a noted British soldier-diplomat who was then UNRWA director in Jordan, made what was to become a famous statement to a group of visiting American church leaders: “It is perfectly clear than the Arab nations do not want to solve the Arab refugee problem. They want to keep it as an open sore, as an affront against the United Nations and as a weapon against Israel. Arab leaders don’t give a damn whether the refugees live or die.”

Galloway’s solution was straightforward: “Give each of the Arab nations where the refugees are to be found an agreed-upon sum of money for their care and resettlement and then let them handle it. If... the United Nations had done this immediately after the conflict – explaining to the Arab states, ‘We are sorry it happened, but here is a sum of money for you to take care of the refugees’ – the problem might have been solved long ago.”

In an op-ed in the same year Galloway was even more blunt about UNRWA: “Staff begets more staff. Plan follows plan. Typewriters click. Brochures and statistics pour out. The refugees remain and eat, and complain and breed; while a game of political ‘last touch’ goes on between the local governments and the director, UNRWA.”

He went on to say: “There is need to distinguish between a tempting political manoeuvre and the hard, unpalatable fact that the refugees cannot in the foreseeable future return to their homes in Palestine. To get this acceptance is a matter of politics: It is beyond the function of UNRWA. Second, a determined effort should be made to get the ‘host’ countries to take over relief from the agency, thus freeing it to get on with the much more important task of resettlement.”

For his honesty, Galloway was fired at the demand of the Jordanian government, which wanted UNRWA to hire local citizens instead of foreign nationals. Indeed, since that time UNRWA has done the precise opposite of what Galloway recommended, opting for the “tempting political manoeuvre” of lying to Palestinians about the future, never demanding that host countries resettle Palestinians and instead becoming the Palestinian ministries of health, welfare, education and, to an astonishing degree, foreign affairs.

Through a strange series of events historians and journalists transformed Lt.-Gen. Sir Alexander Galloway into “Ralph Galloway,” which has permitted UNRWA officials to this day to deny that any such person ever existed. But the problems he found in 1951 and 1952 remain, only vastly larger, more entrenched and more expensive.

The solutions he recommended may be equally valid today.

UNRWA’s raison d’etre is the existence of Palestinian “refugees” and it has in turn created dependency within Palestinian society on its services. Galloway may have been forgotten, but Lindsay and Whitley are harder to ignore in today’s information age. If

there is any chance for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, Western leaders need to find the political will to tell the truth to the Palestinians and exercise control over UNRWA, otherwise the organization will continue to lie, spend money and demand omerta from its officials.

Obama should give up on East Jerusalem

By Dov Zakheim, Foreign Policy, November 10, 2010

http://shadow.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/11/10/obama_should_give_up_on_east_jerusalem

The to-ing and fro-ing between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu government continues unabated, with each new verbal clash further dimming any chances for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. Last week the Israeli government moved another step closer to lifting its construction freeze by publishing in the Israeli press its plans to build 1,345 new housing units in mostly Jewish neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem. Two days later PM Netanyahu met with Vice President Joe Biden in New Orleans, where the impasse between Jerusalem and Washington remained as firm as ever.

Two days after that, President Obama, responding to a question at his Jakarta news conference about Israeli construction, first stated that he had not received "a full briefing on Israel's intentions," but then went on to say that such activity was "unhelpful." Naturally, the world press focused on the latter part of Obama's remarks, with breathless headlines proclaiming, in tabloid fashion, "Obama Rips Israel." Not to be outdone, Netanyahu responded to Obama's remarks by pointing out that Jerusalem was "not a settlement," and that the new housing units would not affect the outcome of peace talks. In effect the Israeli Prime Minister dismissed the entire flap as much ado about nothing (his actual term was "overblown"). At which point the State Department issued its own retort, arguing that there was indeed a linkage between construction and the peace process.

President Obama has clearly determined that construction in East Jerusalem is a "red line" that the Israeli government should not cross. The problem is that "East Jerusalem" does not merely consist of Arab neighbourhoods in the Old City or even outside its walls. Many districts of what is East Jerusalem have been home to tens of thousands of Israelis for years, even decades. Construction in these neighbourhoods never was an obstacle to peace talks until the Obama administration put the Palestinians in an impossible position by insisting that construction should stop.

Given Washington's position, the Palestinian Authority has had no alternative but to focus on the construction issue. It clearly cannot not take a softer line on construction than Obama has done. Meanwhile, Israelis of all political stripes, including many who otherwise have no truck with Netanyahu, are puzzled and angered by Washington's stance. Many suspect that he is simply trying to curry favour with the Muslim world at Israel's expense. His performance at the Jakarta press conference does nothing to allay that suspicion. After all, having said he needed to study the issue, he need not have gone any further. But he did, and Netanyahu responded in turn and in kind.

Why does the president continue to harp on settlements in East Jerusalem, as opposed to expansion of West Bank settlements that would be dismantled under the terms of any peace agreement between the parties? Obama may feel that he has crossed a Rubicon and must push forward. Or he may feel that he must put Netanyahu in his place; there is no love lost between the two men, and the Israeli reportedly feels that the recent Congressional elections have strengthened his position. Obama may want to show the Israeli that his grasp of the balance of power in Washington is not as strong as he thinks it is. (Which of the two men is right is another matter, and in any event will not be determined for some time.)

There is, however, another possibility: the president may simply not realize that while Israel might give up parts of Jerusalem, as both Prime Ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert were willing to do, even they were not ready to cede major Jewish neighbourhoods in what every prime minister since 1967, of whatever party, considers to be Israel's capital.

Whatever the reason, Obama's behaviour in Indonesia, and his constant harping on the construction issue, has complicated his avowed search for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians. Israel will not give in to his demands, and the Palestinians will not proceed unless the Israelis do so. The peace process is stalemated, and it is up to the president, who has, perhaps unwittingly, brought on this latest dead end on the long-standing saga of Israeli-Palestinian misery, to come up with a way that lets both sides move forward, even if it means that he personally has to take several steps back in order to do so.

Op-Ed: On Israel delegitimization, media matters

By Laura Kam, JTA, 1 November 2010

<http://jta.org/news/article/2010/11/01/2741532/op-ed-on-israel-delegitimization-media-matters>

Comedian Jon Stewart's recent selection as the most influential man in America in a poll by AskMen.com, a popular online magazine, is more than just an inane piece of trivia. It can help inform the international Jewish community of the approach we must take to confront the very serious and growing threat posed by Israel delegitimization.

So, too, can a look at the public relations strategy of Israel's biggest delegitimizers, Iran.

Stewart, of course, is the American comedian and star and executive producer of the widely popular and critically acclaimed "The Daily Show." His satirical TV news program lambastes mainstream TV news, particularly Fox, CNN and MSNBC, the three major 24/7 cable news channels in the United States. His show has the highest ratings of any American late-night TV show; it's the only source of news for many young Americans.

So Stewart receiving the most votes of the 500,000 respondents tells us something important about the influence of the media among Americans, especially the younger demographic.

The Israel Project (TIP) long has understood the importance of Stewart's "fake" news program. Quite often it deals with Israel and the Middle East conflict, mimicking how the American media inordinately and sometimes perplexingly focuses on Israel. TIP sends the show's producers the same news releases and background information we send to tens of thousands of "real" journalists across the globe. And each year for the past five years, our summer media fellows go to a taping of the show live in New York City and meet with some of the writers and producers.

"The Daily Show" is no joke for any strategic communications professional whose job it is to influence public opinion.

In fact, those who work on public opinion issues know full well that the vast majority of Americans of all ages get their news from television. Poll after poll conducted by The Israel Project demonstrates that 62 percent of Americans acquire their information on the Middle East from TV. That number is similar throughout Europe and 90 percent in the Arab world.

The Internet ranks second at 36 percent, but that, too, is derived mainly from the websites of mainstream news sources. Newspapers came in third at 23 percent. Contrast these figures with the 4 percent of Americans who say their Mideast views are shaped by schools and universities, and 3 percent from lectures or events.

It couldn't be any clearer where the bulk of the Jewish community's pro-Israel strategic communications efforts should be placed, especially in combating Israel delegitimization.

This issue and what it portends for Israel and Jewish communities around the world have become a rallying point and cause of great concern. Israel's image in many countries has suffered in the past few years, particularly since the Gaza War and even more since the flotilla incident, according to recent opinion polls.

Boycotts of Israel by performers and academics persist, though they are only moderately successful. The sanctioning of Israel in international bodies is going strong, requiring us to contend with the resources and might of nongovernmental organizations and their backers who work tirelessly to weaken Israel. The red-green unholy alliance of extreme left-wing groups and extreme Islamists is alarming and a security concern for Israel.

Israel's biggest delegitim�er and greatest enemy is Iran. A look at its public relations strategy for weakening Israel is instructive for the pro-Israel community.

The Iranians have invested tens of millions of dollars on PRESSTV, a 24-hour, global news network broadcast in English that also started Spanish broadcasts last month. PRESSTV is available free in much of the world on cable and satellite TV, and can be seen live online. It generally reports the news straight -- except on Israel and Iran. In covering Israel, PRESSTV uses blatant and subtle anti-Israel and anti-Semitic messages.

The Iranians understand too well that the most effective way to sway opinions against the Jewish state is to relentlessly repeat the same anti-Israel messages again and again on the media that shapes views the most -- TV and the web.

The Jewish community has the resources and know-how to fight Israel's delegitimizers the world over. But we have to learn the lessons available from disparate, even incongruous, sources. These point us to the persistent and consistent use of television (though not to the exclusion of other media and communications and education vehicles.) This communications strategy of focusing on television must be understood and utilized intelligently, applying the best research and tools at our disposal.

This is a battle for the hearts and minds of literally hundreds of millions of people whose genuine support Israel dearly needs. It is a battle with serious strategic consequences for Israelis and Jewish communities worldwide. It is a battle we must win.

To: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO)

H.E. Mrs. Eleonora Valentinovna Mitrofanova, Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

*Mr. Davidson L. Hepburn (Bahamas), President of the General Conference
Bureau of the World Heritage Committee*

Chairperson: H.E. Mrs. Mai Bint Muhammad Al Khalifa (Bahrain)

Rapporteur: Mr. Ould Sidi Ali (Mali)

Vice-Chairpersons: Mr. Tyronne Brathwaite (Barbados), H.E. Mr.

Narang Nout (Cambodia), H.E. Mr. Margus Rava (Estonia), H.E. Ms. Dolana Msimang (South Africa), H. E. Mr. Rodolphe Imhoof (Switzerland)

<http://www.petitiononline.com/rabbiv/petition.html>

We the undersigned protest The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) ruling that Israel has no right to add the **Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron**, where almost all of Israel's patriarchs and matriarchs are buried, to the National Heritage list. The Tomb of the Patriarchs, the oldest Jewish shrine and the second holiest site in Judaism, centers around the Cave of Machpelah, an ancient double cave revered for almost 4,000 years as the burial site of the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their wives. The connection of the Jewish people to the Cave of Machpelah was established some 3,800 years ago, when Abraham, the first Hebrew, purchased it for the express purpose of using it as a burial site for himself, his wife Sarah, and their future generations. It is the cradle of Jewish history and the focal point of Jewish identity. The rectangular enclosure over the caves is the only fully surviving Herodian structure. Thus the Tomb of the Patriarchs is of inestimable historical value as well as great sacred significance for the Jewish people.

We also protest the decision by UNESCO to re-label as an Islamic mosque the tomb of Rachel, Israel's other matriarch, and to demand that Israel remove the site from its National Heritage list. The Tomb of Rachel, Judaism's third-holiest site, has been the

scene of prayer and pilgrimage for more than three thousand years, and has an especially meaningful connection for Jewish women. Rachel, the matriarch who died in childbirth and was buried at that spot on the road to Hebron, has been a comfort and hope to Jews since biblical days. "Thus says the Lord, 'Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded...and they shall return from the enemy's land and there is hope for the future'... 'Your children shall return to their own country.'" Jeremiah 31:16-17. Until 2000, the Palestinians recognized the site as Rachel's Tomb. It was called "Rachel's Tomb" in Al-mawsu'ah al-filastiniyah, the Palestinian encyclopedia published after 1996 and in PALESTINE, THE HOLY LAND, a Palestinian publication, with an introduction by Yasser Arafat. However, during the second intifada, Al-Hayat al-Jadida, a Palestinian daily, announced a new-found historical connection to Rachel's Tomb, declaring that it was "originally a Muslim mosque."

In an effort to erase Jewish history and supersede Jewish religious sites with Islamic institutions, Muslims have intentionally built mosques upon numerous synagogues and Jewish holy sites. The clearest examples are the Al-Aqsa mosque which sits on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, and the Dome of the Rock, which was built on Judaism's holiest site of the two biblical Jewish Temples. This pattern repeats itself at the second and third holiest sites. Thus at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, there are domes over the tombs of Abraham and Sarah and a mosque over the tombs of Isaac and Rebecca. Photos from the early 1900's show no Muslim cemetery near the Tomb or Rachel. After 1948 Muslims built their own cemetery surrounding three sides of Rachel's tomb and now claim that Rachel's Tomb is one of their burial plots and that it contains a Muslim rather than Jewish notable.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office decried the ludicrous nature of the UNESCO decision:

"The attempt to detach the Nation of Israel from its heritage is absurd. If the nearly 4,000-year-old burial sites of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the Jewish Nation – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah –are not part of its culture and tradition, then what is a national cultural site?"

"Sites such as the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb (which sits on the edge of Bethlehem) present an inconvenient truth for the pro-Palestine movement and its supporters, who want to claim that the Jews have no historic ties to this land."

In cooperating with efforts to erase Jewish historical ties to Israel, UNESCO is aiding and abetting those who hope to and obfuscate Israel's Jewish past and undermine Israel's Jewish future.

The UNESCO mission states: "Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration."

We demand that there be no exception to UNESCO's mission when it comes to Jewish heritage. Israel's Jewish legacy must be recognized and preserved and not swept away to conform with the pro-Palestinian narrative. In attempting to sever the Jewish cultural, religious and natural heritage bond with the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb, UNESCO denies the history it is mandated to preserve, engages in a political maneuver designed to weaken a member UN nation, and undermines its own principles. It aims to rob the Jewish people not only of two sacred sites, which are irreplaceable sources of

life and inspiration, but also of their past and a legacy to pass on to future generations. We demand that UNESCO, whose purpose it is to protect heritage, also protect Jewish heritage, rather than deny it.

(There are currently 10 600 signatories to the petition)

***Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

ICEJ News, 15 November 2010: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to be able to push through his 15-member security cabinet an extended 90-day settlement freeze in return for a proposed package of American diplomatic and security incentives offered by the Obama administration during his visit to the US last week.

ICEJ News, 15 November 2010: Speaking while on a visit to Canada on Monday, IDF chief-of-staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi warned that violence is likely to erupt in Lebanon following the expected publication of a report by the special UN tribunal probing the assassination of former premier Rafik Hariri, adding that Hizbullah is poised to carry out a *coup d'état* in Beirut. Ashkenazi's comments come on the heels of a report issued on Friday by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon lamenting the deterioration of the political consensus in Lebanon since pro-Western elements won the 2009 general elections and cautioning against the growing instability in the country.

ICEJ News, 11 November 2010: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad once again accused the International Atomic Energy Agency of leaking sensitive information about its renegade nuclear program to the US and insisted that is the reason Tehran refuses to allow international inspectors wider access to the country's nuclear facilities.

ICEJ News, 11 November 2010: Scores of Palestinians attended remembrance ceremonies on the sixth anniversary of the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Thursday, but Hamas was determined not to let Fatah loyalists in Gaza join in the commemorations.

ICEJ News, 10 November 2010: A recent public opinion poll conducted in the West Bank and Gaza has found that 85% of Palestinians oppose a peace settlement with Israel if it requires making compromises on such key issues as the right of return, Jerusalem, borders and settlements. 65% said it was "essential" that any peace agreement include historic Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. A similar margin said it was "inappropriate" to dismantle the PA as a reaction to a failure in the negotiations. A full 80% believe general elections should be immediately scheduled and held as soon as possible. If such elections were held today, Fatah would win 42%, Hamas 11%, an independent party led by PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad 4%, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine 4%, and Islamic Jihad 2%.

ICEJ News, 9 November 2010: Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper gave a rousing pro-Israel speech before a conference on combating anti-Semitism being held in Ottawa with parliamentarians and experts from more than 40 countries. Harper said Canada would remain a steadfast supporter of Israel even if it meant losing stature internationally, pointing out that Israel is the only country in the world whose very existence is under attack. He denounced the new form of anti-Semitism which targets the Jewish people by "targeting the Jewish homeland, Israel, as the source of injustice

and conflict in the world and uses, perversely, the language of human rights to do so.” History teaches us that “those who threaten the existence of the Jewish people are a threat to all of us,” he concluded. Canada recently lost a bid for a seat on the UN Security Council in a vote widely attributed to its support for the Jewish state.