



If Canada chooses a 'balanced' approach, it will become rudderless in the Middle East

AVI BENLOLO

Special to The Globe and Mail

Published Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2015 6:00AM EDT

Last updated Wednesday, Oct. 28, 2015 6:00AM EDT

Avi Benlolo is president and CEO of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center

In the coming weeks and months, prime-minister-designate Justin Trudeau will consider a renewed and re-energized policy regarding Canada's position vis-à-vis Israel. Undoubtedly, he will want to differentiate his government's approach from that of the Harper administration. However, the test of leadership for Mr. Trudeau will be one of ethics and morality, as he ponders the pressure which is certain to arise from left of centre.

I would urge Mr. Trudeau to refrain from taking the increasingly popular route of blaming the Jewish victims of ongoing violence, and of holding those who have been murdered by rocks, cars, knives, guns and rockets as culpable in their own slaughter. This approach is no different than blaming the victim of any criminal act for inviting the attack.

The modern State of Israel has been threatened with annihilation from the day it was proclaimed by the United Nations; while the methods may change to reflect changing circumstances, the narrative of "Death to the Jews" and incitement to murder has not. These threats against Israel come not only from Iran, ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah and the Palestinian Authority but also from United Nations staff, who were recently suspended for inciting violence against Israelis and Jews on social media.

It is important for our new prime minister to acknowledge the anti-Semitism at the heart of this decades-long campaign against the Jewish homeland. The preamble to the charter of Hamas states: "Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it." Interestingly, those who criticize and demean Israel almost always ignore the matter of Hamas and how a future Palestinian state would include Gaza. Indeed, the very reason the Palestinians have been unable to establish a state is because of a violent and fanatical leadership in Gaza and a vindictive leadership in the West Bank.

The leader of the Palestinian Authority continues to chant the narrative of the "Dirty Jew" with "filthy feet"; the mere presence of a Jew in Jerusalem is condemned by Mahmoud Abbas as a desecration. Schoolchildren appear on Palestinian TV speaking about the glory of martyrdom and their hopes of killing Jews. The promotion of anti-Semitic hate on social media is pervasive and growing.

This anti-Jewish hate, undiminished by decades of attempts at unrequited peace, must be acknowledged and named by our elected leaders for what it is. The campaign of violence launched against the Jews must never be justified or validated; should Canada adopt this position, we would be complicit in aiding and abetting terror.

Additionally, I would caution Mr. Trudeau against accepting the questionable views of journalists like Amira Hass (banned from speaking at the Palestinian Birzeit University for the crime of being an Israeli Jew) who do not represent mainstream Jewish opinion. Ms. Hass does appeal, however, to those who often condemn Israel and wish to push forward the anti-Semitic boycotts against the Jewish state.

Canada can play an important role in the Middle East peace process, but if it chooses a “balanced” approach, as has the Obama administration, it will become rudderless in the region. Worse, the vacuum created by our silence will give voice to extremists.

Here is what I would recommend to Mr. Trudeau: Encourage the Palestinian people to accept the Jewish people and the state of Israel as partners in the Middle East; we are not interlopers, but indigenous people with a well-documented history in the land dating back thousands of years. Urge them to stop trying to kill the Jews. Urge them to stop incitement to violence against the Jews. Urge them to stop praising terrorists for killing Jews. Urge them to teach their children about tolerance, not hatred. Urge them to view Israelis as actual people, not “the sons of apes and pigs.” Urge them to accept us – and peace will follow.

Follow us on Twitter: [@GlobePolitics](https://twitter.com/GlobePolitics)