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## Benlolo: Instead of hugging a terrorist, how about speaking out

BY AVI BENLOLO, CALGARY HERALD NOVEMBER 20, 2014



Avi Benlolo

Photograph by: Extern

Just the other day, worshippers prayed peacefully in a quiet Jerusalem neighbourhood. Deep in a meditative state. Shrouded in Hebrew prayer shawls, with the words of the Torah wrapped directly on their arms. Facing the holy scrolls. Standing quietly, purposefully beneath the words, “Know before whom you stand.”

Last week, a group of pro-Palestinian students at McMaster University launched a sacrilegious campaign called “hug a terrorist.” It was a convoluted effort to build sympathy for the Palestinian cause. But they shall not receive sympathy for terrorism, especially not today. Not so soon after the massacre of five gentle and innocent souls in cold blood by two young Arab zealots who entered a sacred place of worship and, in the presence of God, unleashed the hatred and facile prejudice within their own hearts. A wanton lust for blood and honour brought to you on the nightly news.

But wait. Let’s “hug a terrorist,” say the McMaster students. Let’s make terrorism acceptable. Let’s make light of the true carnage and human misery caused by deliberate, vengeful acts of terror.

With judgment clouded by years of incitement from their elders, by children’s programming praising the “shahid” — the martyr — and by holy edicts and political charters, in a sacred place of worship and in God’s holy presence, these men carried with them all the venom and incitement they have been fed from childhood.

Hatred like that takes years to build, and now it’s at our universities, too.

This strategy of turning the abnormal into the new normal; the profane into the sacred, and the act of terror into an act of valour, is stealthily stealing the hearts and minds of a new generation.

Celebrate murder in Gaza. Hand out sweets to the children and rejoice in the brutality. It's a good day to kill a Jew. From the deepest despair of the Holocaust, we know that hatred and murder can be normalized by turning the murderer into the victim and the victim into the perpetrator of the crime. Go ahead, hug a terrorist. "Thou shall not kill" is irrelevant. These brutal murders were an act of war against an ancient enemy. This is not terrorism. They are freedom fighters. In this brave new Canada, we are all hugging terrorists.

It is hard to know how this campaign has affected the families of Cpl. Nathan Cirillo and Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent. And yet, does it matter? The students of McMaster — the future leaders of our country, have made their intentions plain. The writing for Canada's blood-stained future is on the wall, concealed in a gentle, yet deadly embrace. In a roundabout way, "Swiss" sort of way, the university has chosen to stay neutral.

A woman posted the following message on my Facebook page the other day: "It is your unjust and terrorist ways that have people hating you. To support Zionist Israel is inhuman. I am sick of your atrocities and war mongering that I think the only way to get peace in the Middle East is to blow up Israel."

It was her response to the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center's condemnation of recent terrorist attacks in Israel, in which two people were murdered in cold blood.

Go ahead, Canada. Hug a terrorist. Or, speak out.

***Avi Benlolo is president and CEO of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies.***

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