

March 2, 2012 Friday 8 Adar 5772 1:49 IST  Print  Back to original article

THE JERUSALEM POST

Israel's best-selling English daily and most-read English website

REAL AMERICANS OR THE MEDIA? WHO WILL YOU BELIEVE?

IT'S TIME TO CHOOSE

Paid for by Winning Our Future. Not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.



Photo by: Mohamad Torokman / Reuters

Media Comment: The watchdogs

By YISRAEL MEDAD AND ELI POLLAK
22/02/2012

If Israel is bashed, if anti-Zionism rages, if anti-Semitism is allowed to run rampant without response, we have only ourselves to blame.

The audience that had gathered for a special showing of the new documentary by Gloria Greenfield, *Unmasked: Judeophobia*, at Jerusalem's Cinematheque on Thursday, February 16, was quite upset. The scenes that had been shown from campuses, media reports, pockets of progressive politics and centers of Islamic extremism as well as the delegitimization campaigns and the testimonies from many experts had a very depressing effect.

After the lights came back on, the panel discussion participants found themselves, with everincreasing intensity, responding to questions and complaints. These were not so much related to the real threat from anti-Semitism as documented by the film, but rather about the fact that Israel's governments have done very little in counteracting it.

The panel included Yisrael Ne'eman, of the University of Haifa's International School, Manfred Gerstenfeld, of Jerusalem's Institute for Global Jewish Affairs, Robert Wistrich, director of the Hebrew University- based Vidal Sassoon International Center for Study of Antisemitism, Andrea Levin, head of CAMERA, Daniel Diker, Secretary-General of the World Jewish Congress and *Ma'ariv* columnist Ben-Dror Yemini. All, in one form or another, had to agree that Israel's governments had, for all they attempted to accomplish, a sorry record in the face of the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns, and to a great extent underestimated their influence on the resurgent anti-Semitism.

The audience's secondary target was the role of the media, and especially Israel's own media, in facilitating and pushing the BDS and delegitimization efforts. Our media was even perceived as lending support, intentionally or through lack of professionalism, to enemies of the Jewish people and Israel. Too many media outlets, here and abroad, have become forums for the discourse of narratives rather than for the reporting of facts.

One of the many sponsors of the film as well as a host of the screening was CAMERA, a media monitor with a 30-year record. Present also were representatives from Honest Reporting, Comment-is-Free at The Guardian Watch as well as Israel's Media Watch. The past 25 years have seen an unprecedented growth of Jewish media review organizations seeking to counteract bias, demand accountability and assure that the mainstream media will not unjustifiably defame Israel and the Jewish people.

Although the Israeli governments and their bureaucracies have been on the sidelines, many individuals have decided to "do something."

On the other side of the globe, Australian Jewry has created AIJAC, the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, “to highlight and counteract instances of anti-Israel bias and misinformation in the Australian media and the wider public debate.” AIJAC’s executive director Dr. Colin Rubinstein is one of the leaders in this struggle to keep the record straight.

Anti-Israel bias in the European media has been researched recently by Elad Segev and Regula Miesch from Tel Aviv University. In their paper, published in the *International Journal of Communications*, they find that “news reports are largely critical and negative toward Israel, with British news being the most critical, Italian news the most sensational, and German, French and Swiss news relatively more neutral. Opinions featured in the news are not in line with public opinion as presented in annual surveys of each country.”

The anti-Israel biases of the BBC are today well documented. The pioneer of BBC review is Trevor Asserson and his BBC Watch reports, which first appeared in the year 2000. His work led in part to the BBC’s commissioning the “Balen report” to investigate accusations of bias in its Middle East reporting. The BBC to this day has refused to make the 2004 report public, and the UK Supreme Court, adjudicating a complaint by the late Steven Sugar, has now unfortunately concurred.

Honest Reporting is another well-known media review organization. It monitors the news for bias, inaccuracy, or other breaches of journalistic standards in coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The organization mobilizes the public to take issue with false reporting, as for example in the June 2011 report by the BBC alleging that a rabbinical court in Jerusalem sentenced a dog to be stoned to death. Public protest led to a BBC retraction of the false story and an apology, in which it stated specifically “We failed to make the right checks.”

German Media Watch and Honestly Concerned are two organizations formed at the turn of the 21st century to combat anti-Israel media bias in German-speaking countries. GMW describes itself as replacing the question “Why didn’t you do anything?” in response to Nazism with the question “What can we do today?”

Eye on the Post is a media review organization which has taken upon itself the job of assuring accuracy and fairness in *The Washington Post’s* coverage of Middle East events. An original method of combat is the “Bad News Movement.”

Bad News blogs exist in 10 countries. For example, Bad News from the Netherlands, which was prompted by Manfred Gerstenfeld, describes itself as setting out “to demonstrate that media coverage can degrade a country’s image by using selective news without context... It is a reaction to the frequent misrepresentations of Israel in many ways in major media..., including those of the Netherlands.” And, of course, there was the late David Bar-Illan and his hard-hitting *Jerusalem Post* “Eye of the Media” column, focusing on the foreign journalists working from Israel.

Dr. Yehuda David is a prime example of a concerned citizen who could not accept the worldwide Israel bashing induced by the false Muhammed al- Dura story as had others like Phillip Karsenty and Nahum Shahaf. Dr. David exposed the lies that the father Jammal’s scars were IDF-caused, winning his French court case last week. David devoted time, finances and probably health to defend Israel. On Sunday, he will be given a special citation by Israel’s Media Watch for his effort.

Should the government be doing more to defend Israel’s name? Certainly. But a government cannot do it all. Its responses will always be considered propaganda. Private, non-political organizations such as the few of many mentioned in this article are at least as effective, and have led the battle to clear Israel’s name. Perhaps the true question which should be answered is why is our government, our philanthropists and the public at large not doing more to provide the necessary funding for such organizations to do their good work? Why do we find an Israel Prize in Chemistry and even Media but none for media review? If Israel is bashed, if anti-Zionism rages, if anti-Semitism is allowed to run rampant without response, we have only ourselves to blame.

The authors are, respectively, vice chairman and chairman of Israel's Media Watch, www.imw.org.il



Print



Back to original article

[About Us](#) | [Advertise with Us](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [RSS](#)

All rights reserved © 1995 - 2011 The Jerusalem Post.