

Israel's Image Problem

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Israel has yet to face its most dangerous enemy yet. Beginning with the 1982 Lebanon War, and accelerating rapidly after the start of the second Intifada in 2000, the Jewish state has come to be viewed in many quarters of enlightened opinion as a sinister presence on the world stage, it is quite clear that Israel has an image problem.

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Although founded on the principles of human rights, it is now seen as the tyrant of another people; once considered a courageously open society in a region of tyrants, Israel today is portrayed as a brutish garrison nation; once lauded as a beacon of civil rights and democracy, Israel is called an apartheid state. Zionism itself has become an important target of this rhetorical violence. At one time considered a heroic answer to pogroms and genocide, Zionism is now blamed for granting ideological absolution for the perpetration of those very crimes. All of these caricatures aim to redefine the basic character of Zionism and the state it helped create, thus undermining both the legitimacy of the Jewish state in its current form and the moral and ideological basis for its creation.

{jumi [includes/Adsense/banner.php]}The death of twelve-year-old Muhammad al-Dura in the opening weeks of the second Intifada was a first salvo and a defining one. Al-Dura was killed in a Gaza crossfire between IDF troops and Palestinians who opened fire on their position. A Palestinian cameraman working for the French news station France 2 captured the firefight on film, and this video was edited by France 2 and then released, free of charge, to other media organizations, accompanied by the declaration that the IDF not only had killed al-Dura but had done so intentionally. How did France 2's reporters know this? They did not. Their claim was based on the statement of one man, the cameraman, who could not have known whose bullets actually struck al-Dura, much less whether he was intentionally targeted. Not surprisingly, al-Dura was buried before an autopsy, bullet removal, or ballistics tests could be performed.

{jumi [includes/Adsense/banner.php]} Also not surprising the way the crisis was handled. The IDF, itself having conducted only a most cursory investigation, announced that it was "probably responsible" for the killing. Amnesty International blamed Israel as well, giving an imprimatur of objectivity to the Palestinian and French accusations. Largely owing to the cinematic sensationalism of the incident, images of al-Dura's death were seized upon in the Arab world and by the European media as icons of Palestinian victimhood and Israeli cruelty, as distilled truths revealing the entire character of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a single, frozen moment.

Presently, Israel is widely regarded as the world's number 1 terrorist along with America. Today, in some parts of America, a caricature of Israel that once flourished only on the ideological fringes has been mainstreamed: Israel is believed to be a sadistic oppressor, a wanton slaughterer of civilians, a relentless Middle Eastern warmonger, and a grave strategic liability for the United States and the Western world. Israel needs to work on its image to gain the upper hand.