



Israel Viewpoint

◆ STEPHEN KRAMER Jewish Times Israel Correspondent



Undermining the Enemy

Recently I attended the 9th World Summit on Counter-Terrorism at the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT). The Institute is located on the IDC College campus in Herzliya. According to ICT, its international conference has become one of the most influential annual events in the field of counter-terrorism and has achieved international recognition for its exchange of views on best practices among global counter-terror experts, security professionals and leading academic scholars.

"Manipulation of Western Mainstream News Media in Asymmetrical Warfare," a fancy description for terrorist groups' propaganda efforts, was the subject of the workshop, one of many presented during the conference. Among the five speakers were a US naval officer, a college professor

from Boston, researchers from two NGOs (non-profit organizations), and the chief editor of an Italian TV station.

Lt. Commander Stuart Green, who was quick to announce that he was speaking as a private citizen and not as a U.S. Navy representative, put the subject matter into historical context by describing how the Soviets took active measures to manipulate the conceptions of their target societies (the enemies) during the Cold War period. Their object was to set up a model which softened the enemy's resistance to communism by persuading significant groups to consider communism as a viable alternative to democracy.

Green pointed out that in modern warfare, the terrorists take control of the intellectual "high ground," increasing their propaganda as the conflict

continues and obscuring the truth. By example, before 1967 Israel enjoyed the favorable status of underdog, but in the ensuing decades after 1967, particularly after the 1982 war, Israel's overwhelming strength and its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza deprived Israel

of its favored "underdog" status. Over time, and with the growing intensity of propaganda, the empirical truth that the Arabs absolutely

opposed a Jewish state regardless of its size was replaced by an "acceptable discourse," the Palestinian narrative. This Muslim-inspired "truth" has become so engrained that the actual cause of Israeli-Palestinian strife has been obscured and almost forgotten.

Green used another example from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, whereby the cause of Palestinian terrorism is attributed to checkpoints and settlements, not the longstanding Palestinian refusal

to accept Israel's existence. He described the media as a "force multiplier," promoting the message of the underdog/terrorists and geometrically increasing its effect. The media is overwhelmingly democratic, meaning it is anti-army, pro-

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underdog, and universalistic - assigning moral equivalence to democracies and dictatorships. Answering the question about

what to do to combat the media manipulation, Green said it's imperative that the public understand the fact that we're at war with radical Islamists.

Ms. Tamar Sternthal spoke on behalf of CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, a media watchdog group that focuses on coverage of Israel. She equated the news media strategy of Hamas and Hizbollah, which both use as psychological warfare to fight Israel. Both conceal deaths of their combatants by hiding

them among civilians, to increase the number of "civilian" casualties and to hide information about their military losses. They enlist friendly NGOs in their cause and bring in partisan individuals, often doctors with extreme left wing pasts, to disseminate propaganda against Israel. Sternthal chided the mainstream media for being overeager to accept eyewitness accounts without delving into their background and context. She advocated debunking and refuting false claims, publicly and privately, as often as possible. Forceful, timely and responsive government action is needed. Sternthal cited the recent Israeli move away from a default apology, to immediately questioning the validity of so-called war crimes. According to Sternthal, this proactive activity against Islamist propaganda is imperative and she welcomed its increasing use.

Moderator of the workshop was Professor Richard Landes of Boston University. He reported at length on the Mohammed al Dura affair,

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