

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 0237

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL ASSESSES ITS IMAGE ABROAD

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELIS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT MASSIVE ARAB INFO CAMPAIGN IN US AND EUROPE, FOCUSING ON ISRAELI ADMINISTRATION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND DEMAND OF PALESTINIANS FOR RIGHT TO NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION. IN TURN, ISRAEL'S INFO POLICY IS ON THE DEFENSIVE, CONSTRAINED BY FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS AND INHERENT DIFFICULTY OF PRESENTING COMPLEX ISRAELI CASE IN CREDIBLE TERMS TO FOREIGN AUDIENCES.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN RECENT MONTHS ISRAELIS HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT ISRAEL'S DECLINING IMAGE ABROAD. ISRAELI PRESS HAS CARRIED NUMEROUS ARTICLES QUESTIONING EFFECTIVENESS OF GOI INFO POLICY IN PRESENTING ISRAEL'S CASE IN WESTERN WORLD AND RESPONDING TO ARAB PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN. ON NEW YEAR'S EVE ISRAELI TV CARRIED PRIME TIME 1-1/4 HOUR FEATURE PROGRAM ON ISSUE OF ISRAEL'S IMAGE ABROAD, WITH FILM CLIPS SHOWING PORTRAYAL OF ISRAEL BY MEDIA IN US, FRANCE AND NETHERLANDS FOLLOWED BY PANEL DISCUSSION.

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3. FOLLOWING ANALYSIS SUMMARIZES POINTS WHICH ISRAELIS THEMSELVES HAVE MADE RECENTLY ABOUT THIS ISSUE AND ABOUT CONNECTION BETWEEN GOI FOREIGN POLICY AND INFO POLICY.

4. ISRAEL CONFRONTS MASSIVE ARAB INFO OFFENSIVE, IN PARTICULAR ON BEHALF OF PALESTINIAN ISSUE, WHICH HAS INTENSIFIED SINCE OCTOBER WAR. PALESTINIAN CAUSE HAS TAKEN OVER SLOGAN OF RIGHT TO NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION, WHICH HAD BEEN USED BY ZIONISM AND OTHER NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS. MOREOVER, AS A BRITISH OBSERVER SAID ON ABOVE-MENTIONED PROGRAM, PALESTINIANS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN DRAMATIZING THEIR CAUSE BY ENCAPSULATING IT IN ONE SENTENCE, "ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION PEOPLE WERE DRIVEN OUT OF THEIR HOMES TO MAKE WAY FOR JEWS".

5. ISRAELI INFO POLICY IS ON THE DEFENSIVE, UNCERTAIN AS TO HOW TO EXPLAIN ISRAEL'S CASE ABROAD. AMONG ITS DIFFICULTIES ARE (A) PLURALISTIC NATURE OF TARGET AUDIENCES-- JEWISH OR NON-JEWISH, AMERICAN OR EUROPEAN. (B) FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS, (C) LACK OF COORDINATION IN STATEMENTS BY GOI LEADERS, MANY OF WHICH ARE INTENDED PRIMARILY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION AND (E) UNIQUE NATURE OF TERMS OF REFERENCE IN DISPUTE. AS ILLUSTRATION OF LAST POINT, ISRAELIS NOTE THAT PALESTINIANS CLEVERLY EXPLOIT CONCEPT OF "DEMOCRATIC SECULAR STATE" FOR ITS POSITIVE RESONANCE IN WESTERN WORLD. GOI HAS DIFFICULTY IN EXPLAINING THAT THIS EUPHEMISM FOR DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AS JEWISH STATE.

6. INTERNATIONAL MEDIA HAVE PLACED ISRAEL UNDER MAGNIFYING GLASS, WITH 300 FULL TIME ACCREDITED FOREIGN MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES STATIONED IN ISRAEL, AS WELL AS ANOTHER 200-300 STRINGERS. WHILE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA DOES NOT COVER ISRAELI AFFAIRS FROM OMOLITHIC PERSPECTIVE, EMPHASIS IS USALLY ON SENSATIONAL NATURE OF LATEST EVENTS -- E.G. WAR, POLITICAL CRISES, TERRORIST INCIDENTS, ISRAELI REPRISALS, LABOR STRIKES AND OTHER FORMS OF SOCIAL UNREST. MANY ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT EUROPEAN COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA, PARTICULARLY THOSE OF FRANCE AND UK AND TO ONLY SLIGHTLY LESSER EXTENT GERMANY, HAVE OPEN OR VEILED PRO-ARAB ORIENTATION. PRIME EXAMPLE OF THIS IN ISRAELI VIEW WAS INTERNATIONAL COVERAGE OF TERRORIST ATTACK ON BEIT SHEAN IN OCTOBER, IN WHICH FOREIGN PRESS TENDED TO HIGHLIGHT BURNING OF TERRORIST BODIES BY TOWNSFOLK RATHER THAN CONFIDENTIAL

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ATTACK ITSELF. THEY FURTHER NOTE THAT EUROPEAN LEFT WHICH IS INFLUENTIAL IN MEDIA SUPPORTS PALESTINIAN POSITION ON IDEOLOGICAL BASS, AND REGARDS ISRAEL AS "COLONIALIST-IMPERIALIST" FORCE.

7. ISRAELIS REGARD 1967 AS WATERSHED FOR ISRAEL'S IMAGE ABROAD. BEFORE 1967 ISRAEL WAS ABLE TO PORTRAY ITSELF ABROAD AS AMALL UNDERDOG STATE OF TWO AND ONE-HALF MILLION PEOPLE

SURROUNDED BY 80 MILLION ARABS. DECISIVE ISRAELI VICTORY IN SIX-DAY WAR CHANGED INTERNATIONAL PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT, WHICH THEREAFTER WAS NO LONGER SEEN ABROAD AS CONFRONTATION OF ARAB STATES AGAINST ISRAEL, BUT RATHER AS STRUGGLE BETWEEN PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND ISRAEL AS PORTRAYED BY MEDIA, ISRAEL'S ADMINISTRATION OF OCCUPIED TERRITORIES HAS GIVEN THIS PERCEPTION TANGIBLE QUALITY. IN MEDIA TERMS, ARAB/PALESTINIAN AUSE OF LIBERATION FROM ISRAELI OCCUPATION IS SIMPLER TO EXPLAIN THAN ISRAEL'S DEMAND FOR RECOGNITION BY ARABS AS LEGITIMATE STATE. AS ONE PANELIST ON TV PROGRAM SAID, STRUGGLE IS NOW PERCEIVED AS BETWEEN ISRAELI COWBOYS AND PALESTINIAN INDIANS, WITH MUCH OF WORLD CHEERING FOR INDIANS.

8. WHILE ISRAELIS DO NOT DRAW UNIFORM CONCLUSIONS FROM ABOVE OBSERVATIONS, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS GROWING AWARENESS, PARTICULARLY AMONG JOURNALISTS AND ACADEMICS, OF CLOSE LINKAGE BETWEEN GOI FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS IMAGE ABROAD. EXAMPLE OF THIS CONNECTION IS GOI REJECTION OF YARIV FORMULA EXPRESSING READINESS TO TALK WITH ANY PALESTINIAN ORGANIZATION RECOGNIZING EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL AND RENOUNCING TERROR. MANY ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT ISRAEL WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER EQUIPPED TO RESPOND TO ARAFAT'S UN SPEECH HAD THIS BEEN GOI POLICY.

9. COMMENT: ISRAELI AWARENESS OF THEIR DIFFICULTY IN PROJECTING A "POSITIVE" IMAGE AND REBUTTING ARAB AND/OR PALESTINIAN CASE IS RELATIVELY RECENT DEVELOPMENT. ISRAELIS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT EUROPEAN PUBLICS, AS DISTINCT FROM THEIR GOVTS, ARE SYMPATHETIC TO ISRAELI CAUSE, AND THAT AMERICAN JEWRY REMAINS FIRM DEFENDER OF ISRAEL IN US. WE HAVE NOTED, HOWEVER, AT LEAST BEGINNING OF A CANDID ACKNOWLEDGEMENT IN SOME CIRCLES THAT INFO POLICY CANNOT BE MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN FOREIGN POLICY IT PORTRAYS. IN EFFECT, DILEMMA OF INFO POLICY IS MIRROR OF ISRAEL'S RELUCTANCE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH ITS BASIC
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REGIONAL PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY WITH PALESTINIAN ISSUE. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT AWARENESS OF THIS SITUATION IS LEADING GOI TO DATE TO CHANGE ITS FOREIGN POLICY GUIDELINES.

10. DEPT REPEAT AS DESIRED.
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