

The Apologetics of Not Presenting the Palestinian Condition

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Some Palestinian and other speakers intending to impress Western audiences with the need to make progress on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process become apologetic when it comes to sharing the harsh and difficult realities in which Palestinians find themselves under Israeli occupation. The reasons for this apologetic stand are both personal and audience-related. On the personal level, the speaker likes to give the impression that he or she is for peace and accordingly there is no need to dwell on issues and conditions that would show the obstacles to peace imposed or practiced by Israel on the Palestinians. The audience-related reason has to do with the perception of the speaker of how receptive the audience is to what appears to be criticism of Israel or of lauding the actions of the Palestinian Authority in wanting to pursue peaceful means to end the conflict. If the Western audience is not immunized on criticisms of Israel, then the speaker thinks he or she is the wiser by not criticizing Israel or citing the many obstacles it places on the current peace talks including the expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank, among other obstacles. Another dimension that the wise speaker considers is by not mentioning on purpose the efforts of the Palestinian National Authority, and its President in particular, in pursuing peace even or in spite of the obstacles placed by Israel. Why commend Mr. Abbas for taking the most difficult decision of agreeing to the peace talks when he and almost everyone knows that the present Israeli coalition government is not serious about concluding a deal with the Palestinians.

While a majority of Palestinians are convinced that the way out is through serious negotiations with Israel in which the international community and the United States in particular would call on Israel and the Palestinians to uphold international commitments, as reflected in UN resolutions or the different Accords between Israel and the Palestinians or the Roadmap of the Quartet. It is not possible to work on a peace process that would not address the commitments above. Any speaker who wants to help Western audiences become an instrument for advancing peace prospects between Israelis and Palestinians should be clear on who is impeding the prospects and who is advancing them. The logic behind this is not condemnation of Israel but rather insisting that without an Israeli commitment to the peace process, and actions and practices on the ground that reflect such commitment, the likelihood that peace will happen becomes weaker.

Speakers are often free to express themselves and to choose their approach best suited to this or that Western audience. BUT the moral responsibility of speakers is to share with their audience the harsh realities on the ground. True it is often difficult to address the harsh realities given the prejudices and biases of some of the Western audiences in favor of Israel. Nevertheless if Western audiences are interested in the eventual peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict then they should be ready to listen to speakers who balance their diplomacy and love for pacifism with a reflection of the difficult conditions on the ground. Western audiences whether religious, academic or specific interest groups, should be treated with some of the realism in which thousands of Palestinians, and Israelis as well live and will continue to live, with the absence of genuine and just peace between the two sides. These audiences, often living in the comfort of their own lovely and green habitats, should rid themselves of their condescending attitudes and touch base with the realities on the ground. The task of a good speaker is to facilitate this process and not to acquiesce with the relative comfort of his/her audience.