The Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary



The Zionist handbook and its impact on media narrative and rhetoric concerning Palestine

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Background



Background

What is 'The Israel Project'?

The now defunct 'Israel Project' was as US-based NGO, founded in 2002 by Jennifer Laszlo Mizrahi. By its own description, the organisation was: "devoted to educating the press and the public about Israel while promoting security, freedom, and peace. The Israel Project (TIP) provides journalists, leaders, and opinion-makers accurate information about Israel... By providing journalists with the facts, context, and visuals they need, TIP causes hundreds of millions of people around the world to see a more positive public face of Israel. This helps protect Israel, reduce anti-Semitism and increase pride in Israel."

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Overview of The Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary



Overview of The Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary

Overview of 'The Global Language Dictionary'

The Israel Project's Global Language Dictionary is a 116-page media handbook, consisting of 18 chapters on how to best position Israel in media rhetoric, and appendices on how to answer "the toughest questions" and "posters that work". Handbook chapters include 'Gaza: Israel's right to self defense and defensible borders', 'Talking about children and the culture of hate', and 'The right of return = the right of confiscation'.

The handbook has been described as "part of a well-thought, well-orchestrated media strategy to mystify, mislead and even misrepresent the reality... in order to devise a strategy that neutralises Israel's critics and promotes and improves its media standing." ⁴

The report came after Israel's 2008 Gaza war and following US President Barack Obama's denouncement of Israeli settlements and his overtures towards Iran. It was prepared for internal use only and kept secret, until it was finally leaked in the fall of 2009.⁵

The handbook has consistent examples of "Words That Work" and "Words That Don't Work," alongside rhetorical tips such as "don't talk about religion" and "no matter what you're asked, bridge to a productive pro-Israel message".

The handbook has been compiled with a US-audience in mind specifically, with data from polling compiled by Dr Frank Luntz as part of the 'Luntz National Survey' in January 2009, that asked questions such as:

- "Which two of the following are the best reasons for the United States to stand with Israel?"8
- "Do you believe that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state would...lead to a reduction in the threat of terrorist attacks on US soil by Islamic extremists [OR] lead to a reduction in gas prices Americans pay at the pump?"9
- "In your opinion, is Israel in a more or less secure situation today than when it controlled Gaza?"¹⁰
- "Does Israel have a right to "defensible borders" if it meant retaining control over some minimal territory captured in 1967?" 11

It's important to note how language can be weaponised to perpetuate stereotypes, incite hatred and/or be used strategically to deflect from the real issues. The examples below illustrate how a well-thought-out communications strategy, based on political opinions of Americans in 2009, can influence and impact mainstream narrative. Although the handbook was compiled and circulated in 2009, it is essential to pay attention to the phrasing and vocabulary used around topics such as settlements and draw comparison to how the media and pro-Israel campaigners use those same tactics today, and in some cases, having normalised this rhetoric,

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Handbook Author: Dr Frank Luntz



Handbook Author: Dr Frank Luntz

American pollster and political strategist, Dr Frank Luntz, is an author and political commentator who has appeared as a guest on virtually every talk show in America, including multiple appearances on The Daily Show and Real Time with Bill Maher, as well as Meet the Press, Nightline, The Today Show, HBO, The PBS News Hour, and Face the Nation.

From 1989 until 1996, he was an adjunct professor at the University of Pennsylvania. He has also taught courses at Harvard University and George Washington University. Since 2018, he has taught two courses a year at NYU Abu Dhabi. In 1993, he was named a Fellow at Harvard University's Institute of Politics.

Dr Luntz has conducted focus groups for all major US broadcast networks, two of the three cable news channels and PBS, as well as for The Wall Street Journal, The New Yorker, The Times of London, and the LA Times. He has also worked in every British General Election from 1997 through 2015.

Dr Luntz, was asked to prepare a new updated media guide for "leaders who are on the front lines of fighting the media war for Israel2". The 'Global Language Dictionary' was written in the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead in December 2008 and January 2009, when 1,387 Palestinians and nine Israelis were killed.

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Key Points



BIDEN: U.S. INTEL SUGGESTS ISRAEL NOT BEHIND HOSPITAL BLAST





SCOTLAND



Hamas 'cut the throats of babies' in massacre



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The England striker Harr Kerter wants to play at Fig. 2029, when he will be 34.

Key Points

On 'Effective Communication':

"You have to understand that the frame from which most Americans view Israel is one of "cycle of violence that has been going on for thousands of years." Thus, you have to disarm them from their suspicions before they will be open to learning new facts about Israel. More words that work: ...'I ask you, how do you negotiate with those who want you dead?"¹²

"World view is especially important to the left as they see a world where basically all people are good and with education and communication we can all get along. This is stark contrast to most conservatives who believe that there are good people (i.e. Israel) and bad people (i.e. Iran) and that good people need to be protected from the bad people."

"We may disagree about politics and we may disagree about economics. But there is one fundamental principle that all peoples from all parts of the globe will agree on: civilized people do not target innocent women and children for death."¹⁴

—The shift in this narrative from 2009 to 2023 is important to note. In October 2023, US President Joe Biden cast doubt on the number of Palestinian civilians killed, telling reporters: "I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed¹⁵". In contrast, the US president described seeing images of mutilated Israeli children during a meeting with Jewish leaders at the White House, stating: "I never really thought that I would see, have confirmed, pictures of terrorists beheading children"16, despite Israeli officials being unable to confirm this as fact and the White House later withdrawing the President's comments.¹⁷

"Draw direct parallels between Israel and America—including the need to defend against terrorism. From history to culture to values, the more you focus on the similarities between Israel and America, the more likely you are to win the support of those who are neutral...It's our job to "wear white hats in public"—to remind Americans that Israel is a team for whom they can feel good about cheering." 18

"In contrast to those in the Middle East who indoctrinate their children to become hate-mongers and suicide bombers, Israel educates their children to strive for progress and peace." ¹⁹

"No matter what you are asked, bridge to a productive pro-Israel message. When asked a direct question, you don't have to answer it directly. You are in control of what you say and how you say it. Remember, your goal in doing interviews is not only to answer questions—it is to bring persuadable members of the audience to Israel's side in the conflict."

"Talk about the future, not the past. Spending time giving the public a history lesson on the maps of Israel will put your audience to sleep...remember—communications is not a test for who can remember the most facts. Listeners want simple messages that will answer their simple, silent question: 'what is in it for my country and for me to support Israel?'"²¹

"The world sees Israel and the Palestinians on completely different plains – and this is why they allow/ignore Palestinian crimes against Israel. It's David vs. Goliath – only this time the Palestinians are seen as David. Using the "mutual" context puts both parties on the same level..."²²

On 'Words that Work':

"Building - never talk about "giving" the Palestinians something. It sounds too paternalistic. Instead, talk about "building" because it suggests a step-by-step, layer-by-layer. improvement in conditions. Giving reminds people that you're in the stronger position and that creates more sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians."²³

"Equal Rights - emphasize that Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis enjoy equal rights and equal protections under the law in Israel. But don't stop there: 'the tragedy is that Palestinians have far less rights under their government than Israeli Arabs have under ours'."²⁴

"'Nobody has to leave their homes' - this is the most winning phrase in the lexicon of settlements. Use the principle of mutuality to explain that just as Arab Israelis are not expected to move out of their homes in Israel, Jews in a new Palestinian state should be allowed to stay in their homes, too."²⁵

To date:

- 7.98 million Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons who have not been able to return to their original homes and villages.²⁶
- *600,000+ Israeli settlers living on occupied Palestinian land.²⁷
- *100,000+ hectares of land appropriated by Israel from Palestinians since 1967.²⁸
- *50,000 homes and structures demolished by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) over the past 50 years.²⁹

On 'How to Talk about Palestinian Self-Government and Prosperity':

"'Peace before political boundaries'" sets up the perfect dynamic for you. It elevates the need to stop the rockets, stop the bombings, and create a ceasefire, while subtly downplaying the importance of a two-state solution by calling it 'political boundaries'".³⁰

"As the survey results below show, Americans don't believe that they will be safer or that gas will cost less if the Palestinian state is established."³¹

On 'Gaza: Israel's Right to Self Defense and Defensible Borders':

"You cannot let the debate over the Gaza War be framed as 'who did what first?' argument. Or a discourse on the appropriateness of 'proportionality'...use rhetorical questions to gain permission from the audience for Israel's actions."³²

"Americans agree that Israel 'has a right to defensible borders'. But it does you no good to define exactly what those borders should be. Avoid talking about borders in terms of pre- or post-1967 because it only serves to remind Americans of Israel's military history. Particularly on the left, this does you harm."³³

On 'Settlements':

"The settlements are necessary for the security of Israel. Tell audiences that the settlements weren't created randomly. They were put on the tops of mountains and in important militarily sensitive areas to provide a security buffer between Israel and her Arab neighbors."³⁴

"Where possible, make the settlement issue about the larger challenge of achieving a peaceful solution where Arabs and Israelis live peacefully side by side. Public opinion is hostile to the settlements...but if

^{*}These statistics were gathered in 2017 - the number is likely higher.

you make the issue part of the larger conversation about finding a way for two peoples to live side by side with equal respect and equal rights, then you move the debate to more favorable territory (so to speak)."35

"Semantics does matter, but if we correct Palestinians using the words 'disputed territory' when they say 'occupied territory,' we have to accept that the settlements are disputed territory as well." 36

"Claiming that Palestinians and other Arab groups are using the settlement issue to gain political advantage may be correct but it does nothing to legitimize Israeli policy."³⁷

On 'Loan Guarantees and Military Aid':

"All the arguments about Israel being a democracy, letting Arabs vote and serve in government, protecting religious freedom etc won't deliver the public support to secure the loan guarantees and the military aid Israel needs – not when it comes to U.S. tax dollars. There must be a national security angle – one that clearly links the interests of both Israel and America." ³⁸

"Remind audiences that Israel and America have common values, but then stress that we also share a common enemy."³⁹

On 'The Security Fence and Checkpoints':

"Helping the public understand the need for a security fence and checkpoints will be one of your most important tasks. As Palestinian leaders continue to call the security fence an 'apartheid wall' or 'separation wall', our telling the public that 'good fences make good neighbors' would only pour salt on views of what our citizens have already seen in the media as an obstacle to peace. Keep in mind that the messages for the security fence and the checkpoints are almost identical and Americans and Europeans alike will understand that."⁴⁰

"Already there is a fence between Israel and Gaza. And not one suicide bomber has come from Gaza to kill Israeli children. Not one."41

"Emphasize that the purpose of the fence is to save lives, NOT to add land. You can say this because it is completely true, and yet many don't know it. The fence was designed to (and has) saved lives. It does not annex territory nor does it establish any borders. Knowing this will change perceptions of the fence."42

"The placement of the fence is a more controversial issue than its simple existence. Research reveals that the idea of the fence isn't abhorrent to Americans; it's the placement of the fence that offends. For most Americans, the fence isn't a pleasant concept but it's one that is completely acceptable when explained."⁴³

"Remind people that Israel has done everything possible to try to limit the fence's impact on local residents, including the Palestinians. It has attempted to avoid using private lands, and when this was impossible, offered the owners full compensation."

On 'The Right of Return = Right of Confiscation':

"First and foremost, we cannot accept this phrase. We cannot allow it [to] enter the opinion leader lexicon. Whenever 'right of return is raised', we must immediately respond with 'no, you are talking about the right of confiscation. This is not about returning, it is about taking away and we will not accept it'. Nothing less will do."45

"The right of return is a tough issue for Israelis to communicate effectively because much of Israeli language sounds like the 'separate but equal' words of the 1950s segregationists and the 1980s advocates of Apartheid." 46

Rules of Right to Return Debate

"'Mass Palestinian immigration' - thanks to 9/11 and the continuing threat of terrorism, Americans are particularly afraid of mass immigration of anyone right now. Comparing the challenges facing Americans in dealing with unrestricted immigration and Israel's situation will be well received."⁴⁷

"UN is suffering from the greatest credibility gap since its founding, and about half of Americans are happy to see the organization wither away on the vine. However, as your communication challenge in America is on the political left, it is wise to offer at least some praise of some UN effort so not to look intransigent. That said, we also discovered that ridicule is a good devise here. Even when praising the UN, remind the listener that Cuba, Iran, and Libya all headed up various human rights committees. If that's not laughable, nothing is."48

On 'Talking About Children and the Culture of Hate':

"Use The Culture of Hate response whenever asked about the desire for peace among the Palestinian people." ⁴⁹

'The Culture of Hate' Response

"I still believe that the great majority of the Palestinian population is in favor of peace and supports peace. But remember, we're talking about a society which to a very great extent is governed by fear. We're talking about a totalitarian society -no freedom of expression, no freedom of the press. [Add where appropriate: It is ironic that the freest Arab press, not just in the region but in the world, is in Israel.] I do believe that the lack of freedom combined with the Culture of Hate and the campaign of incitement within the population instigated and led by Hamas will undermine the advocates of peace. As long as the Culture of Hate and incitement continues, the larger the support for terrorist organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. End the Culture of Hatred and replace it with democracy and understanding and peace can be achieved."50

"What kind of people would hide explosives in a nursery school? This isn't just an attack on Israel, this puts Palestinian children in harms way as well. Where is the care for their future? Nowhere else in the world, and certainly not in America, is the murder of innocent civilians considered a 'legitimate form of resistance'." ⁵¹

"...in Palestinian schools, rather than using schools to promote peace with their Jewish neighbors, Palestinians have persistently indoctrinated their children with anti-Semitic stereotypes, anti-Israel propaganda, and material that is designed more to promote hostility and intolerance than coexistence and understanding. Worse yet, the Palestinian authority has also tried to convince Palestinian children that Israel is out to kill them." ⁵²

On 'Talking to the American Left':

"Unlike mainstream Americans, the majority of the liberal elite believe the Israelis TOOK Palestinian land. You need to teach them otherwise."53

"With their heads, most liberals still support Israel. But their hearts go out to whomever looks like the biggest underdog. Right now they feel that is the Palestinians. It explains why liberals have become so openly hostile since the start of the Gaza war and why life for pro Israeli communicators will only get more difficult in the future." ⁵⁴

"...the fact is, the pictures coming into people's homes on a daily basis do a great deal to undermine Israel's cause. If you don't do something about both news sources, the communication problem will only get worse. (And you need to spend as much time focused on the visual component of the story as the language you use.)" ⁵⁵⁵

"The wealth, power and success of Israel actually hurts you in the eyes of the left, while the poverty and failure of the Palestinians work to their benefit." 56

"Remember the words from President Obama: 'If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I am going to do everything in my power to stop that, and I would expect Israelis to do the same'."⁵⁷

"Today immigration is a dirty word. Some advocates like to make the case for Israel by emphasizing how it takes in the distressed peoples of the world. This is simply not a strong argument with most Americans right now." 58

On 'Israel on Campus Communications':

"We must understand and accept the fact that American youths have sympathy for the plight of Palestinian youths and see their efforts as a struggle for freedom. While they might not support their tactics (and clearly some do), they do support their aims. The more supportive we are of the average Palestinian, the more likely we are to earn the support of students Jewish and non-Jewish alike." ⁵⁹

"While Jews make up a bigger percentage of the campus population, the Palestinian students are better informed, more knowledgeable and, most importantly, better able to communicate their beliefs. Worse yet, the pro-Israeli tone is often loud and emotional, while the Palestinian reaction was calm and rational. If you are faced with an overly aggressive foe, use a rhetorical approach." 60

Footnotes

- 1 See 'The Israel Project', www.jconnect.org/ department/the-israel-project
- 2 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 2
- 3 "The secret report that helps Israel hide facts", The Independent (23 July 2014) available at https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/israelgaza-conflict-the-secret-report-that-helps-israelis-to-hide-facts-9630765.html
- 4-5 "Israel's media strategy: What lies beneath", Al Jazeera (16 July 2014) available at https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/7/16/israels-media-strategy-what-lies-beneath
- 6 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 12
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- 8 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 11
- 9 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 27
- The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 45
- 11 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 55
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- The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 10
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- 24-25 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 20
- 26 "'A new Nakba': settler violence forces Palestinians out of West Bank villages", The Guardian (31 October 2023) available at https://www.theguardian. com/world/2023/oct/31/west-bank-palestinianvillages-israeli-army-settlers
- 27-29 "Israel's Occupation: 50 Years of Dispossession", Amnesty International (07 June 2017) available at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2017/06/israel-occupation-50-years-of-dispossession/
- 30-31 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 24
- 32 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, pages 46-48
- 33 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 54
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- 38-39 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 67
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- 56-57 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 96
- 58 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 96
- 59-60 The Israel Project's 2009 Global Language Dictionary, page 100