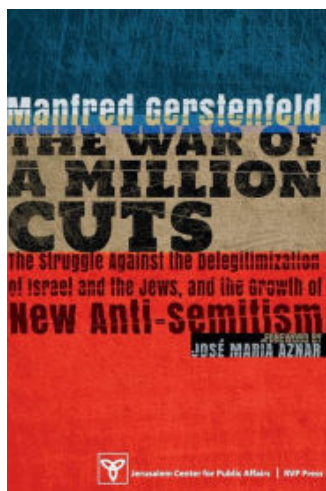


Pragmatic, Prudent, Prolific



Manfred Gerstenfeld's *The War of a Million Cuts: The Struggle Against the Delegitimization of Israel and the Jews, and the Growth of New Anti-Semitism*
(RVP Press 2015) 504 pp. \$29 paper

Sheri Oz*

One small paper-cut on a finger is painful and distracting; a million of them inflicted onto one's entire body surface would be unbearable. With growing virulence, this is what Jewish people face today observes Manfred Gerstenfeld.

Manfred Gerstenfeld has a singular ability to tackle this topic in a way not many others could. He has academic degrees in chemistry, economics, the environment and Jewish Studies. With such a broad interdisciplinary background, he brings both scientific and goal-oriented processing to a number of contemporary problems. Perhaps its his pragmatic problem-solving approach from years as a corporate consultant mixed with holism that allow for creative new solutions and thinking “outside the box.”

Defining the Problem

The first step in solving a problem is defining it. Is the problem growing antisemitism? Is it reawakening of antisemitism that has lain dormant, in at least part of the world, for a few decades after World War II? Is it the metamorphosis of antisemitism into anti-Israelism? Or are these just facts of life whereby the problem should be defined as the lack of an effective approach to combating antisemitism/anti-Israelism? Why does this make a difference?

If the problem is antisemitism, then we are going to spend a lot of time studying the issue of antisemitism. If the problem is lack of an effective approach to combating antisemitism, then the focus of our attention is directed toward studying alternative pathways for fighting it. This may seem like a small distinction but given the fact that there has, to date, been no coordinated effort for confronting global hatred toward the Jews and demonization of Israel, it seems the time is ripe for a focus on action.

I can make this clearer with a specific example. Defining the problem as antisemitism per se results in forums with recommendations such as those summarized in *The Action Plan for Combating Antisemitism in 2013 and Beyond*.¹ In this report, distinguished faculty and experts offered recommendations for fighting global antisemitism but to my knowledge, no action was taken. A recipe

ripe for inaction--there was no overall strategy and no evaluation procedures for assessing positive and negative results. Success in the anti-Israel propaganda war will not emerge from working groups such as these. What is required is a sustainable program that has been provided with the budget necessary for mobilizing all the resources that can be brought to bear in the international arena in which the war is being waged.

Recipe for Action

We can look at Gerstenfeld's *The War of a Million Cuts* as a collection of small volumes on a shelf, the Introduction and the final chapter serving as bookends holding it all together. In his Introduction he defines the problem when he states:

It is the responsibility of Israel's government to defend its citizens from all types of attacks. This should be true for the propaganda war – also called “political war” – as well. However, despite the great intensity of this major battle against Israel in the current century, no comprehensive and systematic approach has yet been undertaken by the Israeli government to fight it. (14)

The final chapter is entitled: “How to Combat Demonization of Israel.” Contained in these 35 pages, is a counterpropaganda blueprint detailing what needs to be done and how to do it in order to successfully overcome the war of words on Israel. Gerstenfeld points out that no other nation has been globally demonized as has Israel. And the need to invent something out of nothing, is something Israelis can do--they did it with a desert--they can do it with words.

The substance of the book is a treatise on a modern history of antisemitism and conflation of open antisemitism with anti-Israelism, symbols easily recognized as antisemitic have been transformed and used in the demonization of the Jewish state. The material covers the playing fields in which Israel's legitimacy is attacked: national and international bodies, academia, the media, faith groups and more. Its impact on Jews in Israel and the Diaspora are examined as is the phenomenon of Jews joining the fight against the Jews. It is a well-researched and documented compendium of the contemporary situation.

For many Jews involved in either Jewish community life or some form of pro-Israel activism, the material will not be totally new and will perhaps trigger, as it did for me, memories of personal encounters with antisemitism, making it heavy reading; at the same time, the wealth of information provides a depth of understanding and a wider context within which to comprehend the nature of Jew hatred and battle being waged against us.

Each chapter addresses a key issue in the propaganda war and each stands on its own merits. In fact, I was unable to read more than one chapter at a time. While I am no stranger to the phenomenon of antisemitism in both its pure and its recent anti-Israel form, I needed time to digest each chapter separately before going on to the next.

Fighting Contemporary Antisemitism: The Gerstenfeld Proposal

In contrast to extant approaches to fighting antisemitism which can be characterized as responding to events of the past and present, Gerstenfeld puts forward a structure that would also promote strategy and planning future developments. His proposal resembles military strategizing. In fact, he suggests that the body in charge of the anti-Israel propaganda war approach it in the same way as the Israeli security forces are now tackling cyber warfare.

While it may seem natural that the Foreign Ministry and the diplomatic corps engage in this war, our diplomats cannot be involved, according to Gerstenfeld. They have a distinct role to play on the international stage and cannot participate in anything that may negatively affect the relationships they

need to build in other nations. The anti-propaganda efforts must be run by professionals who are expert at dealing with an enemy and not with making friends.

The structure of the body fighting antisemitism/anti-Israelism would include three branches, each with its own personnel and tasks, as listed below:

1. Research Branch
 - a. Identification of:
 - i. Key motifs of demonization
 - ii. Origin of these attacks
 - iii. Main perpetrator categories in detail and interactions among them
 - iv. Means by which hatred is transmitted
 - b. Create profiles of leading anti-Israeli media and other actors
 - c. Anticipate medium and long-term societal and global developments in order to anticipate their impact on Israel and on the Jewish people as a whole
2. Monitoring Branch
 - a. Follow and document:
 - i. Incitement and aggression against Jews in specific countries (for example, had this been done, the antisemitism among the previous left-wing government in Norway could have been fought more effectively before it reached the extremes it has because there would have been a powerful Israeli agency to work together with local allies)
 - ii. Specific hate generating organs, such as media, extreme leftists, Muslim countries, Muslims in the west, Christians, NGOs, trade unions, fascists, academics, lawfare operators, etc
 - iii. Specific types of incidents, such as boycotts, divestments, sanctions, false accusations, application of double standards, false moral equivalence, scapegoating, and more.
 - b. Establish a database of enemies into which to record the above
3. Operations Branch
 - a. Identify bodies best suited to respond to incidents and threat of incidents: government, NGOs in Israel or abroad, or even individuals (this was done successfully for Durban II, but not generally applied)
 - b. Devise campaigns for each case

Gerstenfeld also describes broad strategic principles that should underlie the anti-Israel propaganda war. I will list but a few of the twenty ideas:

- No more free lunches – Every attack will be met by a counter attack.
- Sunlight is the best disinfectant – Establish local blogs that would make valuable material available and facilitate exposure of anti-Israeli inciters in each locale.
- Use clear language – Stop referring to the land beyond the armistice lines as “occupied territory” and call it “disputed territory”-- call the armistice lines just that, and not borders, refer to Jordan as the first Palestinian state and the current negotiations as considering giving rise to the second (Palestinian Authority-ruled) Palestinian state and possibly a third (Hamas-ruled) Palestinian state. Expose the lies and manipulations of a small number of big players (journalists, media outlets, politicians, NGOs, church leaders, academics) with the aim of destroying their reputations and many others will think twice before attacking Israel.
- Use resources efficiently – Select the battles wisely.
- Encourage promising individual activists.

Is the Government Ready?

In May 2015, Gilad Erdan was appointed Minister of Public Security, Strategic Affairs and Information. In December 2015, Mr. Erdan appointed Sima Vaknin-Gil as Director-General of the Ministry. The retired brigadier general brings 30 years air force intelligence and ten years as the IDF chief military censor to this endeavor. Together with a staff of eleven and an annual budget (2016) of approximately 100 million new shekels (23 million EUR/\$26 million US) Dr. Gerstenfeld might have hand picked her to lead the campaign against demonizing Israel.

Erdan recently stated that every time Israel has been threatened in the past “we knew how to come together and fight it and we will do so now as well.” He was proud to announce that all government ministries are cooperating with the efforts of his office and that they are in the advanced stages of designing a working strategy. It even felt to me as if he was paraphrasing Gerstenfeld when he said: “Until now those who delegitimized Israel got away with it. That is about to change – there will be a price to pay.”

At the same conference, Vaknin-Gil addressed coordinating the activities of all organizations, government and otherwise, so that each contributes what it does best. “We have not succeeded yet in getting our [Israel’s] message across because we do not yet have a unified message.” As a first step in gathering together a team over and above ministry staff, she said that 300 people came forward when a call went out asking for volunteers.

Vaknin-Gil said that antisemitism cannot be overcome if we deal with it on an emotional level. Those who demonize Israel, “operate experientially and emotionally and we will work cognitively.” The statements I heard from Erdan and Vaknin-Gil offer new hope and encouragement in that they are strongly committed to take a stand on the international stage, both overtly and covertly.

We may eventually find out that Erdan and Vaknin-Gil have patterned their recommendations along the lines of Gerstenfeld's final chapter in *The War of a Million Cuts*. His notions are simple and clear. Israel has taken a global lead in cyber warfare and intelligence. Using the experiences gained from our increasing cyber warfare capabilities, Gerstenfeld notes that “offensive” and “defensive” operations are now redefined while formerly disparate anti-Israeli groups are interlinked and cross-fertilizing. The same must occur if we are to succeed in the global war against Israel.

I can think of no better way to conclude this review than by quoting Gerstenfeld, himself in his penultimate page of this weighty tome:

If the delegitimization process with its million cuts [is successful,] it will have an additional consequence. Except for those committing the actual murders, few will feel responsible for what has happened. Not the many enemies who can claim that their individual contribution to the million cuts was insignificant, not the false friends who will say that they did not attack Israel, nor the many bystanders who looked away from the clear genocidal intentions proclaimed in parts of the Muslim world. At the same time, Israel will be accused of being responsible for its own fate because it turned the Palestinians (in reality a crime-permeated populace) into victims. All these lies together may flourish in an increasingly opaque society. (406)

None of this has to happen. There is no reason to be fatalistic unless the present Israeli incompetence in the propaganda war endures. It is not too late to turn the tables on Israel’s enemies. It requires, however, an effort that is radically different from what is taking place at present. Let us hope that Erdan and Vaknin-Gil are making just that effort.

*Sheri Oz is Haifa based author and psychotherapist who blogs on www.israeldiaries.com. oz.sheri@yahoo.com

¹ *Action Plan for Combating Antisemitism in 2013 and Beyond* (accessed April 13, 2016) <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Conferences-Seminars/Documents/AntisemitismBooklet2013.pdf>

² Erdan lecture (accessed April 13, 2016) <http://stopbds.ynet.co.il/english.aspx>