The Amoral Revolution in Western Values, and its Impact on Israel

By Colonel Richard Kemp CBE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: To fight for Israel on the international stage is also to fight for the values of democracy, freedom of speech and expression, and civilized social values everywhere. Unfortunately, the morality and values of the West have been transformed and undermined over the past thirty years almost beyond recognition. Judeo-Christian principles of honesty, honor, loyalty, family values, patriotism, religious faith and respect for the state have all been eroded; whereas negative values, such as the acceptance of betrayal, duplicity and deceit, have flourished. The Western media is chiefly culpable in advancing this deleterious values transformation. And this transformation is the basis for the growth of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist perspectives, and anti-Israel narratives.

What follows is the text of an address delivered by Col. Kemp CBE at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies on May 19, 2015. Kemp was Commander of the British Forces in Afghanistan. He subsequently worked for the Joint Intelligence Committee and the British cabinet national crisis management group. He testified in defense of Israel before the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, and the United Nations Human Rights Council in response to the Goldstone report. This week, he received an honorary doctorate from Bar-Ilan University in recognition of his stalwart defense of Israel.

As an officer cadet at Sandhurst in 1977, I studied the wars and campaigns of the Israel-Palestine conflict in great depth, learning lessons in leadership, tactics and strategy from the always victorious operations of the IDF.

Years before that, in my school playground, girls always shopped and boys played war. Normally it was British and Germans or cowboys and Indians. For a time in 1967 it became Israelis and Arabs. After a few weeks, however, it reverted to the usual antagonists because nobody seemed to want to play on the Arab side.

I gather a similar recruitment problem exists today in the playgrounds of England with the Taliban side short of troops.

At 8, I was a little young for the serious study of military science beyond the playground, but later, as a 14-year-old schoolboy, I remember one day during the Yom Kippur War, my form master, a young chap just out of teacher training, came into the classroom with an arm full of newspapers.

He said that normal lessons would stop as there was a 'real war' starting and that this was really exciting so we should study it. Every day, we followed the events, wrote stories of our own, and learnt the geography. My father was unamused when all of the articles about the war had been cut out before he could get his hands on his breakfast-time paper. We were quite disappointed when it finished quickly and we had to resume normal lessons.

Why am I telling you all this?

It was all about the good fighting the bad and the good were expected to win. It was very simple even to a 14-year-old.

Even as late as 1973, Israel was still widely seen as the good guys and the Arabs were the bad. Sympathy was with Israel because they were being picked on and bullied. There was little consideration of the 'legitimacy' of Israel; it was taken for granted.

In 1967, the capture and occupation of East Jerusalem, which of course we commemorated on Sunday as Jerusalem Day, and of Judea and Samaria were accepted as a legitimate act of self-defense.

This was not true just for those of us still at school and in the fledgling days of a military career. This was the general view of British people, and of many in the West, obviously with plenty of exceptions.

Back then, in the 60s and 70s, young minds were still being shaped by traditional views of good and evil. The Valiant comic, read by most schoolboys, was all about heroic Tommies beating the treacherous Nazis or

the fanatical Japanese. War films on the whole told the same stories, and without the graphic violence of today.

We had The Longest Day, The Guns of Navarone and Zulu. The BBC was neutral, and if anything supported the values of the country that paid for it. On the whole, like other UK news services of the day, it sought to convey events from the Middle East and everywhere else free of a political agenda, left or right.

In general, popular culture still reflected the long accepted beliefs and principles of a Christian society. All of this shaped the views of the majority of people.

We live in a very different world today. In 40 years the general opinion of Israelis and their Arab foes has been reversed.

What has changed? Some say the situation is different. But this is not the case. Fundamentally the situation remains the same. Israel's stance is unchanged from 1948. A desire for the survival of the Jewish national homeland, at peace with its neighbours.

All that has changed about this has been that Israel has made repeated costly concessions, including giving up land, for peace. Concessions which have not been reciprocated by the Palestinians, but instead exploited at the grave expense of Israel. Concessions which have not been acknowledged or remembered by the international community, who, like the Palestinians, simply and uncompromisingly demand more and more and more and more.

Nor have the Arabs fundamentally changed. We have of course peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. And the growing threats from Iran and from expanding Sunni jihadism may be leading to some temporary and below the radar mutual cooperation from parts of the Arab world.

But the underlying perspective and agenda, especially among the Palestinians, is the same as it was in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Rejection of Jewish communities in the land of Israel. The destruction of the Jewish State.

Some of the basic dynamics have altered. Before, organized, uniformed and relatively disciplined and conventional Arab armies fought under their national flag. Today the armies have been replaced by terrorist gangsters and black-cloaked jihadists. Conventional war has been replaced by terrorist attacks. Battles fought between tanks and infantry in remote deserts have

been replaced by battles fought in densely populated civilian areas and behind the protection of human shields.

In my view if such events as the Gaza conflict last summer were played out in the 1960s and 70s, the support for Israel in the West would have been greater than it was even then. The savage and murderous actions of the Palestinians are far more shocking today.

So I again ask the question, what has changed? And the answer is: The morality and values of the West. They have been transformed almost beyond recognition.

As public opinion in the West in the 60s and 70s was influenced by popular culture, so it is today. Throughout most of the West, certainly in Europe, Judeo-Christian principles, honesty, family values, respect for the state, honour and loyalty have all been eroded, often beyond recognition.

Negative values, such as the acceptance of betrayal, duplicity and deceit, have flourished. Defining values including patriotism and religious faith have been undermined.

We have gone from the heroic Tommies of the Valiant comic to the promotion of the criminal underworld in Grand Theft Auto. From Guns of Navrone to the naked violence of Terminator 3.

The 80s ushered in the insidious campaign of political correctness and moral relativity that has over the last 30 years gripped and taken over so much of our society.

Balanced, level-headed, impartial reporting in our media has been replaced by sensationalism as the purpose of mass media has swung from informing, educating and edifying to making money – and only too often to making the news rather than just reporting it. These negative and destructive values are being promoted constantly in the media.

The values and morality of the average person in the West have changed dramatically since the 70s. The new values often have more in common with Israel's enemies than with Israel itself.

We all know but rarely have the courage to say, that hypocrisy, duplicity, betrayal and sensationalism are the 4 corner stones of violent radical Islam as so often demonstrated to us on our TV screens by Hamas and the Islamic State.

It is impossible to avoid a connection between the shift in public opinion on Israel and the change in Western morality.

How has the new morality impacted on public opinion and perception?

The shift in the way war is presented has complicated the issue. War is no longer the good guy fighting the bad with the good expected to win. Political correctness encourages individuals to say what they think is seen as acceptable and will not offend the majority, rather than what they actually believe. This perpetuates itself and can lead to wholly unacceptable beliefs being outwardly and widely accepted and becoming the received wisdom. The destruction of defining values mean that people will now accept physical acts that would before have been utterly abhorrent to them.

The media destruction and character assassination of strong, outspoken leaders has led to the rise of the 'grey man'. Political leaders are often seen as weak and gutless and will not stake their reputations on making bold, uncompromising, principled statements or decisions. Instead they frequently take the safer middle ground. The population tends to take on the mannerisms of their leaders also becoming 'grey'.

Sensationalism and the graphic depiction of violence has made the population increasingly immune to the horrors of violent atrocities such as public beheadings, massacre, kidnap, execution, torture and forcing your own people to die as human shields. These acts are now less likely to swing public opinion towards the 'good guys'.

The glorious fight for a noble cause inspired by Christian values and beliefs and fought with honor and dignity, the like of which has preoccupied generations of British soldiers before me is now, regrettably, a thing of the past.

So many of these extraordinary changes have been influenced and even driven through by a media, especially broadcast media, especially television, that has to a very large extent been taken over and subverted by those with a moral relativism heightened by an abhorrence for the traditional Judeo-Christian values of the West and a desire to promote as superior the values of other cultures in a form of all-pervading post-Colonial guilt.

The target is Western values themselves; most often represented by the United States, the most powerful country in the world. But Israel has increasingly become a proxy for the United States. For three reasons.

Firstly, the US President and the US Government is at present left wing and liberal and thus harder for left-wing liberals to attack. Second, Israel is smaller and more easily bullied and impacted by corrosive media sniping than is a superpower. Third, Israel can be portrayed as a Western colonial outpost in a rightfully Arab world.

These three things are underpinned by a pervasive and increasing anti-Semitism which intensifies the obsession with Israel and its portrayal as a true evil to be attacked at every possible opportunity.

This contrasts with the post-Colonial guilt I mentioned, combined also with a frequent desire to appease violent Islam and promote its cause and values as being superior to our own and certainly to Israel's.

Any anti-Islam comment or perspective cannot be tolerated, while anti-Jewish, anti-Zionist and anti-Israel perspectives are all acceptable and encouraged.

In turn these double-standards are reinforced by the grey man syndrome, the corrosive political correctness that I mentioned, under which the majority feel obliged to support Israel's enemies, and oppose Israel, and feel nervous about not doing so.

History has proven time and again that Arab nations cannot defeat Israel on the field of battle, and this will always be the case. That is of course why the Palestinians have chosen to use terrorist methods to attack the civilian population rather than conventional military forces to attack Israel's army. It is why Hamas fires missiles at Israel and digs attack tunnels.

These measures, like other terrorist attacks against the Israeli population are not designed to damage or defeat Israel because they cannot and their perpetrators know they cannot.

They are designed for two different purposes. The lesser purpose is to demonstrate to their own population and their supporters that they are fighting for them against an existential threat - the last bankrupt recourse of all troubled regimes.

But the far greater purpose is to provoke the inevitable and unavoidable Israeli reaction. Hamas and the other Palestinian terror groups don't use human shields in the hope that Israel will refrain from attacking their rocket launchers, weapons dumps, command centers, terrorist bases or tunnel

entrances. They use human shields in the hope that Israel will attack and kill their people.

They do this for one purpose: to gain the global condemnation of the State of Israel.

Their particular target is the media, which they know will magnify and intensify their message to the world and force national governments, the UN, human rights groups and other international organizations to bring down unbearable pressure onto Israel.

This can only work of course if the media and these global organizations are willing to be subverted by their message. Willing to see them as the victims and Israel as the demons.

Fatah and the Palestinian Authority have a similar strategy. Their violence is of a different nature. Incentivizing terror by paying terrorists and the families of terrorists killed or imprisoned for attacking Israelis. By inciting anti-Israel hatred through speeches, newspapers, broadcast media, school textbooks and school teachers.

Not only does this entrench anti-Israel feeling that will prevent the acceptance of a two-state solution or any form of peace and future cooperation with Israel, but it also has the effect of inciting violence against Israeli troops and Israeli civilians who live in Judea and Samaria, including rioting, stone-throwing, ramming, battering, stabbing and murder.

Again the aim of this is to provoke an unavoidable reaction in order to attract global condemnation of Israel and bring unbearable pressure onto the Jewish State.

The next stage for the Palestinian leadership of course is to exploit anti-Israel pressure through the United Nations, the International Criminal Court, the European Union, the universities, businesses, trade organizations and now even FIFA.

The goal of all this activity is to undermine the Jewish State but the primary strategy is executed through a conspiracy with a compliant and complicit media. It is the media that brings pressure onto government leaders and heads of international organizations, compelling them to act in their weakness and with their values undermined.

Many of course need little persuasion but even here the media provides them with the excuse, the motive and the cover. It was strongly biased media reports alleging Israeli atrocities against Palestinians that either forced or allowed leaders like the US President, the British Foreign Secretary, the French Prime Minister and the UN Secretary General to demand that Israel did more to protect innocent civilians in Gaza during the fighting last summer.

Never mentioning, suggesting or even hinting at what more they can do. Never acknowledging the context for the action. Never condemning Hamas for the actual war crimes of using civilian locations as military facilities, compelling citizens to remain, and failing in their legal duty to evacuate civilians from a military area.

It is the media, the agents of moral relativism, the tools of the Palestinian leadership that are Israel's enemies in this conflict today. They can win over not just Western leaders but the public who are imbued with the new morality.

The media should of course get at the truth, and they should fearlessly expose wrongdoing and criminality from wherever it comes. While remaining even-handed, Western media should remain mindful of, and to an extent reflect, the values of the society that supports them, funds them and depends upon them.

And of course it is in the changing nature of these values at much of the problem lies as I have explained. It is not the role of the media, especially publicly-funded media, to undermine the values of their society. It is not the role of the media to turn a blind eye to wrong-doing, corruption, law-breaking and immorality of one side, while exaggerating, falsifying, distorting and over-emphasizing allegations of wrong-doing against the other.

But in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this is, with a few exceptions, exactly what they do. In many cases, the major media organizations have moved from reporting the conflict to being active protagonists.

Josef Stalin once famously asked: 'How many divisions has the Pope?' The term 'press corps' in relation to Israel has assumed a military meaning that was not previously intended. Like Stalin, we might ask: 'How many corps has the press?'

The answer is that the effectiveness of the press in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, on the side of Israel's enemies, is immense, probably immeasurable.

When the media distort and mislead, when they turn a blind eye, when they paint a false picture, they must be considered culpable for the consequences.

For the violence that is provoked, especially in this region, when they falsely report massacres, intentional targeting of babies, war crimes. For the anti-Semitism, including violent anti-Semitic attacks, and the terrorism around the world that their false prospectus inspires.

They must share culpability for the consequences that follow when political leaders and human rights groups respond to the pressure that their distorted reporting piles on. For the legitimacy that their reports give to political factions around the world that are opposed to Israel. For encouraging terror tactics, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the use of human shields by blaming Israel for the deaths of civilians, rather than the terror groups who are actually responsible.

I am sure most of you could recount many examples of exactly what I am talking about from your own personal knowledge and experiences in some cases. I will give you just a couple of recent examples from my personal experience.

I had just finished an interview on the conflict in Afghanistan in the studios of a major international broadcaster in London. I left the studio and was accosted in the corridor by the network's prominent Middle East correspondent, who said 'I want to speak to you about what you say about Israel'.

I said 'I wasn't talking about Israel but about Afghanistan'. He said, 'No but I want to speak to you about what you do say about Israel'. 'What is it?' I asked, expecting the worst. 'I agree with every word you say,' he said. 'Then why don't you say it?' 'Because if I did I'd be fired!' he responded.

I was in Israel for the duration of the conflict last summer. I was probably in a better position to understand what was happening than any other non-Israeli Western military analyst. Yet despite many offers to British, European and American networks I was not asked to do a single interview with the exception of Fox News in the US.

Why? Because I am a regular contributor of analysis to most of these networks on defence, security, terrorism and intelligence. They portray me as a reliable and trusted commentator. But they know that my perspective on Israel is objective and therefore contradicts their own political agendas. They

cannot undermine me and therefore they simply do not give me air time on this issue.

I have been accused of supporting genocide and being an apologist for war crimes. But in reality I have spent much of my life trying to prevent terrorist violence and attacks against innocent civilians and have often risked my own life to do so. I have been involved in peace-keeping operations and have physically intervened in situations where ethnic cleansing has been threatened.

In social media I have been the subject of sustained assaults by particularly virulent anti-Israel networks that I shall not name as I do not wish to give them the benefit of any publicity. I have had my words willfully distorted and falsified in the social media, even as recently as last night.

In universities I have been the subject of demonstrations that have sought to silence me. Most recently in the University of Sydney last month.

I have been publicly accused of corruption and being in the pay of the Zionist entity. I have been deliberately denied business opportunities. I have been subjected to virulent anti-Semitic hatred and threats. I have been placed on a terrorist death list.

Why is this? It is not because I speak out against the moral bankruptcy, corruption, incitement to terrorism or oppression of the Palestinian Authority; or the murder, brutality and terrorist violence of Hamas, Hizballah or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. I have spoken out at least as much against Al Qaida, the Taliban, the Iranian regime, the IRGC and many other sponsors of terror and terrorist groups without anything like this level of attempted intimidation.

It is for one reason, and that is because I fail to falsely condemn Israel in circumstances where to even be neutral on the subject is itself a crime in the eyes of so many. It is because I have gone further, and used my military experience and my objective view to explain and defend Israel's legitimate military actions.

Of course in the eyes of many in this region this is already heinous in and of itself. But it is only heinous in the Western world because of the distortions of the media that amplifies the message and helps mobilize a public that it has persuaded to reject traditional values and adopt a new politically-correct moral relativity.

How do we fight this new form of political warfare where so much of the media is the enemy?

As with all battles we must conduct both defensive and offensive operations. The defense in this case of course revolves around doing what we can to ensure that the truth is made known. Both the truth about Israel's enemies and how they act; and the truth about Israel and how its forces operate.

This must of course be the truth, I am not suggesting false propaganda. I include in this truth, open admissions when errors and wrong-doing take place, including and especially when innocent people die as a consequence.

This is one of the many things that separate us out from our enemies who so often refuse to tell or report the truth.

The offence in this form of political warfare is in exposing the bias, distortions, and untruth of the media. This is much more difficult but it is vital. As in all forms of war, the best form of defense is attack. Without effective offensive action our defensive work will succeed much less and can never produce decisive results.

Some good and vital work is already being done by a range of groups. But their effects remain limited. This campaign has had much tactical success and needs to continue and if possible to intensify. But so far there has been no real strategic impact. Nothing that has forced major media networks to fundamentally re-think their anti-Israel agenda.

Of course strategic effect requires strategic assets. And by strategic assets I mean the combination of significant funds, concerted and sustained will and large-scale, thoroughly planned and carefully-focused effort. The challenge is of course immense, and as with any battle, there is no guarantee of success.

As for myself I have gone through the transmutation from Infantry officer to fighter in this new form of political warfare.

Much of my fight, as was recognized yesterday in the honour graciously and generously bestowed upon me here at Bar-Ilan University, is a fight for Israel. The warm support, encouragement and friendship of this great seat of learning will help to sustain me and to renew my vigor in this fight for Israel and for freedom that I shall never give up.

But to fight for Israel on the international media stage is also to fight for the values of democracy, freedom of speech and expression, and civilized social

values everywhere. All of the principles and virtues that once made Britain great.

Make no mistake. This afternoon I have spoken about Israel's fight. But the danger that Israel faces and that the media projects extends far beyond Israel, and threatens us all.

We should never forget the words of Pastor Martin Niemoller: "When they came for the Jews I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no-one left to speak for me."

Israel's fight is the Western world's fight. Upon Israel's survival depends the survival of Western civilization.