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HOWARD KOHR: We all know Israel is a target. No nation -- none -- is the target of so many lies, so much contempt, smear, and double standard. But this is different. What we are experiencing today, the rhetorical war of words, is a concerted effort, a campaign, part of a larger strategy.

Hugo Chavez, the president of Venezuela, asserts Israel is doing the same thing as Hitler today.

In Geneva just last week, Iran's leader calls Israel a "paragon of racism."

A founder of Hamas and current foreign minister says Judaism has corrupted itself in a detour into Zionism, nationalism, and apartheid.

In Spain 30,000 march supporting Hamas and burning Israeli flags.

In the U.K. 400 British academics demanded that Britain's Science Museum cancel an event highlighting the work of Israeli scientists.

In Italy a trade union calls for a boycott of Israeli products and draws up a list of shops and streets where Israeli-made goods can be found.

In Berlin, Germany, thousands march under the banners that say, "Stop the Holocaust in Gaza."

Current United Nations general assembly president, Miguel d'Escoto, repeatedly likens Israeli policies to, quote, "the apartheid of an earlier era."

In the United Nations Human Rights Council, of the 33 resolutions since its creation, 26 target Israel.

Incredibly there now is even an Israel Apartheid Week conducted in cities across the globe. Its aim, to build boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns as part of a growing global movement.

What accusation will be next? What outrage will come tonight or tomorrow? The instances I share are just a few of the many on a very long list, but they are more than a list, more than a litany of statements made against the nation of Israel. They are part of a broader campaign not to simply denigrate or defame Israel, but a campaign to de-legitimize Israel in the eyes of her allies.

The epicenter of this campaign may be in the Middle East, but the campaign doesn't stop there. It echoes in the halls of the United Nations and the capitals of Europe.

But the campaign doesn't stop there. It is voiced without shame and without sanction in meetings of the international organizations that claim peace and partnership as their mandate.

But the campaign doesn't stop there. It is coming home right here to the United States. We see it already on our college campuses, America's elite institutions of higher learning, the places we've entrusted with the education of our children.

But the campaign doesn't stop there. No longer is this campaign confined to the ravings of the political far left or far right, but increasingly it is entering the American mainstream: an ordinary political discourse on our T.V. and radio talk shows; in the pages of our major newspapers and in countless blogs, in town hall meetings, on campuses and city squares; in Los Angeles, in Fort Lauderdale, in Chicago, where the language used borrows from the vile vocabulary of turncoats and traitors.

A paid consultant on a major news network, who is also a professor at a prominent American university, can call American supporters of Israel a fifth column or copperheads, where Israel stands accused of apartheid and genocide, where Zionism equals racism, where a former president of the United States can publicly accuse Israel of apartheid.

Now, to report to you any evidence of attacks on Israel is nothing new. But what makes these attacks different and more dangerous today, and what I would like to discuss with you this afternoon, is that these attacks come amidst the gathering clouds over Israel. What we are witnessing is something more than simple defamation. What we are witnessing is the attempted delegitimization of Israel; the systematic sewing of doubt that Israel is a nation that has forfeited the world's concern; a nation whose actions are, in the strict meaning of the term, indefensible.

This is more than the simple spewing of hatred. This is a conscious campaign to shift policy, to transform the way Israel is treated by its friends to a state that deserves not our support, but our contempt; not our protection, but pressured to change its essential nature.

And I want to be clearly understood here. I'm not saying that these allegations have become accepted. But they have become acceptable. More and more they are invading the mainstream discourse, becoming part of the constant and unrelenting drumbeat against Israel. These voices are laying the predicate for a abandonment. They're making the case for Israel's unworthiness to be allowed what is for any nation the first and most fundamental of rights: the right to self-defense.

It is critical for us to see what is happening, critical that we not allow ourselves to simply shrug and say we must be thick-skinned and that we've heard all this and worse before. When these voices take the very words and symbols that evoke the horrors done to Jews -- the name of Nazi, the charges of genocide and apartheid, the symbol of the swastika -- and turn them against Israel and her people, they're engaging in a process of dehumanization that we know all too well. They are preparing us for a world in which Israel stands alone, isolated, and at risk.

There is no more avid participant in this delegitimization campaign than Iran and its renegade rulers. Iran understands that this larger rhetorical campaign against Israel is creating an opening, a new receptivity to Iran's relentless allegations. Iran seems to sense that this is the moment to press its advantage. And why not?

Think back to the episode I cited at the beginning of my talk, the statements of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the Durban II conference in Geneva. As we all saw, the story that day was about the dozens of representatives who stood and walked out on Ahmadinejad's speech. But the fact is, for the few who walked out scores more remained. And when his speech ended, they greeted Iran's president with thunderous applause. And the representatives who walked out, they walked right back in again, went right back to their business as usual.

Denouncing Israel has become a normal part of international public discourse and Israel's slanderers are given public platforms and respectability in capitals around the world. So ordinary has this become that there's almost a kind of political correctness in how one reacts to it. We saw it at Durban II where a polite walk-out is seen as sufficient to register one's moral position.

My friends, I say that is not enough. It is not enough when Israel is defamed to pause for a moment and then go right back to politics as usual. We must urge people of good will to stand up and say this campaign is an outrage. It is an affront to what is right and just. It is immoral. And it is wrong. And that is why President Obama deserves our praise and our appreciation for making the choice not to take part in the Durban II conference.

We need to recognize that this campaign is about more than mere rhetoric. This is the battle for the hearts and minds of the world, a battle in which the defamation of Israel is like the artillery before the main assault, a key element in the softening up of the target. And here's the sad fact: Left unchallenged, allowed to go unchecked, it will work. It is working right now on the international stage. But it cannot -- it must not work here in this city -- in our nation's capital among our decision -- country's decision makers.

Divided as they are on so many matters of major importance, Israel's enemies and her allies can agree on one thing: This is a critical moment, a time when events can move in one direction or the other. And in this moment we must find our mission.

This evening we meet in the midst of a double-transition, the transition of a new administration here in Washington, a transition taking place against the backdrop of a global economic crisis and international conflict; and a second simultaneous transition as Israel seats her new government, putting new actors in place on both sides of the critical relationship that links the United States and Israel.

For us this is a noble moment in the life of any democracy, a moment that marks the peaceful transition of power. But Israel's enemies, they sense that this is a moment of opportunity, a chance for those whose long-term aim is to erase Israel from the map and their near-term strategy to strip Israel of its legitimacy in the eyes of its allies.

Now, there's little we can do to stop the boycotts of Israeli goods launched in London or Lisbon or Rome. There's little we can do to stop Israel Apartheid Week. But there is much we can do to stop this campaign from taking hold here. Here where it matters the most, in Washington, where United States policy is forged, we must stop the delegitimization of Israel. We must not let it penetrate the halls of Congress and the counsels of our president.

So this evening let me say to everyone in this room: We have a job to do. We have a story to tell, a story that's often overlooked, and that is the remarkable story of the true Israel. We must tell the story of Israel, who she is, what she does, and what she stands for in the world. And that truth will defeat the deformed vision of hate that seeks to separate Israel from her friends.

Here is why we must tell that truth and why we must prevail, because when Israel's enemies mount their war of words they aim at the absolute foundation, the base on which all else rests. They aim at the certainty that Israel is a worthy ally; an anchor of strength and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean; a dynamic economic partner; a fellow believer in progress and innovation; a force for justice, for faith, and freedom in a world where those values are all too often under assault; a true friend of America, who shares our basic interest and values.

You know, we've all heard many times Israel accused of being a Western outpost in the Middle East. To those who make that accusation I say you are right. Israel is the only democratic country in the region that looks West, that looks to the values and the vision we share of what our society, our country should aim at and aspire to. If that foundation of shared values is shaken, the rationale for the policies we pursue today will be stripped away. The reasons the United States would continue to invest nearly \$3 billion in Israel's security; the willingness to stand with Israel, even alone if need be; the readiness to defend Israel's very existence, all are undermined and undone if Israel is seen to be unjust and unworthy.

And so it falls to us to tell the truth, to teach the newly elected, to reshape the understanding of the misinformed, to remind old hands that Israel's cause is our cause, that her contributions to the world in just 61 years is breathtaking. Think of the Israel we know. Think of the Israel we know, the one indispensable ally in a sea of dictatorships, a hand in outreach to a world in need, an open door to immigrants, a bastion of free speech and minority rights, an outpost of women's rights, a beacon of science and higher learning.

Think of the Israel that has amongst its people eight winners of the Nobel Prize -- the Israel that produced more scientific papers per capita than any other nation in the world -- the Israel where Dorit Beinisch sits as the chief justice of the Supreme Court -- the Israel whose citizens freely and publicly demonstrate on every issue under the sun.

Israel, the only country in the entire Middle East to host a gay pride parade; the Israel that draws energy from the sun, water from air; the Israel that takes seriously the admonition to be a light unto the nations; the country that opened its doors to the Vietnamese boat people in the '70s, Ethiopian Jews in the '80s and '90s, to refugees from more than 100 countries, people with different cultures and customs who have built new lives in Israel.

Think of the Israel -- Israeli rescue worker dropping all to respond to the call to aid victims of the devastating earthquake just last May in Chengdu, China; of the Israeli aid workers who rushed to Sri Lanka after the tsunami, to New Orleans after Katrina, to crises and calamities everywhere, driven by the age-old summons of *tikkun olam*.

Think of the Israel whose scientists share their knowledge to bring deserts to bloom; the Israel whose doctors bring sight to the blind and are saving the world's children in Africa, in Asia, and in the broader Middle East.

Or consider Sudan in the sorrows of Darfur. How many protests and conferences and public demonstrations have we seen? How many denunciations of the genocide occurring there? How many news reports and video clips of thousands of people from Sudan desperately, desperately needing help? And yet when the issue is relocation of refugees from the genocide, who opens their doors? Israel. Israel.

Israel has taken in thousands of suffering Sudanese, the majority of them -- the vast majority of them -- of the Muslim faith, to give them a life, a home, and hope.

My friends, this is Israel. This is the Israel of open hands and open hearts and an honest desire to live free and at peace among all peoples and nations.

There is a battle for basic perception underway, a fight to focus the lens through which our policy makers will receive and perceive all events in Israel and the broader Middle East. And the stakes in that battle are nothing less than the survival of Israel, linked inexorably to the relationship between Israel and the United States. In this battle we are the firewall, the last rampart.

So what does all this mean practically? It means that we must add to our ongoing narrative with America's leaders. We must take the time to speak explicitly that which we hope they understand implicitly. Yes, we must lobby for the particulars -- Iran sanctions, peace process principles, foreign aid -- but our mission now is to do more than work our talking points. We must add context and foundational arguments that help America's leaders understand the rightness of our cause.

As most of the people in this room know, a trip to Israel is a transcendent experience on so many levels: emotionally, politically, historically, spiritually. Those who go to Israel, almost without exception, return with a newfound understanding and appreciation of the Jewish state. That grasp of Israel's reality permanently shapes their thinking, and for decision makers underpins their decisions and policies.

Of course, we hope that every member of Congress, every congressional staffer, every political pundit, every opinion shaper in Washington, will join us on a trip sponsored by our educational foundation. But that lofty goal is not achievable in the short-run. In the absence of an actual trip, we have to take the congressman, senator, or staffer with whom you have a friendship on a virtual trip. It's up to you to place our vital lobbying agenda in a context.

And if you're wondering what you might say, think about the Israel that got you to travel to Washington this week. Explain the Israel that caused you to get on a plane or in your car, in spite of the economic pressure, family obligations, final exams, even the swine flu. And on Tuesday, talk about the Israel that compelled you to ignore a thousand reasons not to come to Washington this year. Share your passion for Israel and America, and in doing so you will transform the debate here in Washington.

Each of us has a story, a person, a moment in time that for us exemplifies why Israel is different from any other place on earth. For me there are many stories, many people, numerous moments, but one in particular. August 7th, 1998. Al-Quaeda terrorists attacked the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, killing nearly 200 innocent victims. One hundred miles away a young man by the name of Nicky Mutinda heard about the attack and began his frantic trip to Nairobi to find his sister.

Josephine Zlanni [ph] had worked for an NGO attached to the American embassy compound. When Nicky arrived in the state capital days later, rescue efforts were already underway. As he approached the still chaotic scene of death and destruction, he saw something unexpected: an Israeli flag. And as he got closer, the first rescue workers he saw bore the sign of the Star of David.

You see, a unit of the Israeli defense forces had been dispatched to Nairobi and arrived just 18 hours after the blast first occurred, 170 members strong, including search and rescue professionals and medical personnel, all trained in dealing with the all too familiar scene that terrorists leave in their wake. These Israeli men and women had come to a country of which they knew little because they knew they could help, because they knew their help was needed. Under the smoke and in the rubble of that senseless act of brutality, rescue workers were able to save many victims. Unfortunately, Josephine Zlanni, Nicky's sister, was not one of them.

Nicky had been planning to leave Kenya in three weeks time to attend school in the United States. Still deep in his mourning over the loss of his sister, he decided to add a stop on his way to America. He flew to Israel. He wanted to touch the ground of the country which sent help when help was so desperately needed. In his brief visit to Israel Nicky walked the shores of Tel-Aviv. He traveled to Jerusalem. He went to the Wall, yearning to connect to the people and the nation who had gone to such lengths to help his family.

A few years later, when Nicky graduated college and was looking for a job in information technology, he came to AIPAC. He never shared with any of us the story of that awful day in August, of the smoke and the heat, of the anxious cries of loved ones, of tears, of Israeli soldiers reaching into rubble. He never told us until his last day of work when I invited him to say a few words of farewell.

"I've been privileged to work at AIPAC," he told us. "I have been privileged to be part of helping in some small way the tiny nation that looked beyond its shores to help my people in our time of need."

When I told Nicky that I wanted to speak about his experience tonight, he said, "I'm humbled that you'd like to share my story with AIPAC members. I hope Josephine's store helps illustrate just how terrorism affects us all, regardless of our nationality."

Today Nicky is a successful IT executive, about to receive his MBA, married to his beautiful wife Rachel and the father of a 1-year-old daughter named, in his sister's memory, Zlanni. As he is privileged to live the American dream he never forgets the unbearable pain caused by terror and the hope and renewal that both Israel and America represent.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming Nicky and Rachel Mutinda and their daughter Zlanni.

That is the story we each must tell.

Thank you very much.