The Legitimacy of Israel – Can Nation Branding Affect Change?

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Herzliya Conference Presentation:

A brief summary

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Introduction:

Legitimacy is rooted from the Latin word "legitimus" (lawful) as derived from "lex"-law referring to legal validity. Legitimacy of nations refers, in general, to legal validity by international UN bodies.

In the international discourse, the concept of legitimacy is characterized by confusion, misuse and semantic ambiguity. The Goldstone Kosovo verdict for example described the Nato intervention in Kosovo as "*illegal but legitimate*"(Thakur, 2006). Most scientific papers on international legitimacy link the concept of legitimacy to international law.

In the international literature on legitimacy there are three conceptual parameters for legitimacy: Legal legitimacy, Moral legitimacy and Social legitimacy. The legal legitimacy has to do with legal validation by international bodies. The Moral legitimacy relates to democratic legitimacy with the right of one actor to exercise power over another actor. The Social legitimacy relates to whether the relevant group of people believes that the system is morally or legally legitimate (Thomas, 2013).

The legitimacy of Israel's rule in the areas conquered in 1967, according to the international concepts described above is problematic relative to all of the three parameters. There are Israeli international lawyers who argue that Israel's hold of the territories is legitimate according to international law as was described by the Israeli government appointed Edmond Levy committee report submitted to the government on 21.6.2012.The Edmond Levy(retired supreme court judge) committee claimed that based on the Lord Balfur declaration of 1917 representing the British Mandate and the fact that the 1948 UN resolution 181was never adopted by the Palestinians, Israel is not an occupying force in the 1967 territories and according to international law Israel has the right to settle in these areas.[1] The Edmond Levy committee legal arguments were not accepted by international bodies.

It is widely accepted that a two state solution supported by UN bodies will resolve the question of Israel's' current legitimacy problems which seem to grow and escalate. But there is wide resistance by powerful Israeli politicians to a two state solution and for freezing settlements activities. On feb 22 2014 a group of 22 members of the Knesset of which seven are Deputy ministers, issued a call on Haartez newspaper titled "fear of building freeze" claiming that:

> *"These days we received news that Israel is demanded to put a freeze on construction and planning of settlements In Judea and Samaria. We strongly oppose a freeze of **any kind anywhere** and shall consider such an Israeli obligation as breaking of the rules".[2]*

No near future resolution of these issues is in sight and there is little hope that the joint prayer on June 8th 2014 in the Vatican by Pope Francisco, President Shimon Peres of Israel and President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmud Abbas, will advance any solution…

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[1] http://www.pmo.gov.il/Documents/doch090712.pdf
[2] http://my.ynet.co.il/pic/news/michtav2.pdf

A major debate is taking place in Israel is whether a massive nation branding campaign –the Start Up nation campaign- will assist Israel in its efforts to obtain international legitimacy. The Israeli MFA believes it does and started an international branding campaign under the slogan "*Israel –Land of Creation*" configured by a London based PR company.

Many countries integrate branding techniques into public policy to improve their legitimacy. This is termed "Policy Based Branding". Prof Simon Anholt, a leading global expert on nation branding and public policy said: "*We [in the UK] call it (nation branding) public diplomacy because we want it to sound posh and we don't want anybody to think that this is more of the spin-obsessed PR….*"(Kaneva, 2011: 124)

This brief summary of the Herzliya conference presentation is an attempt to highlight some of these issues. In my opinion-there is some merit in carrying nation branding campaign for Israel but the results can be expected to be very modest and will not resolve Israel's legitimacy problem. In the long run, unless Israel will have internationally recognized borders-it risks its very existence as a Jewish and democratic state.

International Nation Branding and Image Measurement Bodies:

There are several international companies who conduct annual surveys as to how international citizens or experts perceive the image of nations. The methods employed and the target audiences of those being surveyed vary from company to company. The Leading companies who conduct these surveys are the BBC annual Survey, Simon Anholt Nation Branding Index (NBI), and the Country Brand Index (CBI). There are some other International survey companies who study nation branding along niche dimensions like the Bloomberg survey who put special emphasis on economic matters.

The BBC Nation Branding Polls:

A total of 26,299 citizens across 25 countries were interviewed face-to-face or by telephone between December 10, 2010 and April 9, 2013. Polling was conducted for BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan and its research partners in each country, together with the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The polls ask the citizens in the polled countries a simple question: "*Do you consider the influence of these countries to be positive or negative*?". The BBC poll is conducted annually and allows to identify trends in the countries' perceptions.[3]

The NBI surveys:

The vision statement of the NBI group is "The way a country is perceived by international public opinion makes a critical difference to the success of its business, trade and tourism efforts, as well as its diplomatic and cultural relations with other countries."
Prof Simon Anholt a leading global expert on nation branding developed the Nation Brands Index in 2005 as a way to measure the image and reputation of the world's nations, and to track their profiles as they rise or fall in partnership with GfK Roper Public Affairs & Media, one of the world's leading research firms. The studies poll nearly 35000 people in35 countries each year, asking more than 40 questions about their perceptions of the countries.

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[3]http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may12/BBCEvals_May12_rpt.pdf
http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/2013%20Country%20Rating%20Poll.pdf

The questions cover six dimensions of activity: Tourism, Exports, Governance, Investment and Immigration, Culture and Heritage and People. Each year 35 countries are surveyed. Israel was last surveyed in 2006.[4]

The CBI surveys:

The CBI annual surveys are done by the company "FutureBrands", which concentrates on surveys which study country brands perception primarily from commercial angles. They look at "*where brands are made, the geographic location of businesses and the regulatory forces shaping global trade and industry…*".

The methodology of FutureBrands starts " *by collecting data from 3600 opinion formers and frequent international business or leisure travelers drawn from 18 countries around the world …as we offer relevant information for investors and tourists alike*".FutureBrand employs a proprietary Hierarchical Decision Model, or HDM, to determine how key audiences—including residents, investors, tourists and foreign governments—perceive a country's brand, from a baseline of awareness all the way up to brand advocacy.

In addition to the surveys the FutureBrand experts conduct deep interviews with a Global diverse panel of experts in policy and governance, international relations, economics and trade, international law, national security, energy and climate change, urban and regional planning, immigration and the media to form the final brand status of a country. The HDM model considers five dimensions: Value System, Quality of Life, Good for Business, Heritage and Culture and Tourism.[5]

The Status of Israel In the international Surveys:

Though the methods used by the BBC NBI and CBI in studying how countries are perceived are different, a general picture of how Israel is perceived over time is possible and shed some light on the value of its branding efforts of Israel as a "*land of Creation*" and "*startup nation*".

The NBI group conducted a branding survey of Israel in 2006 which concluded:

"*Global Survey Confirms Israel Is the Worst Brand in the World …Israel's brand is by a considerable margin the most negative we have ever measured in the NBI, and come at the bottom of the ranking on almost every question… If Israel's intention is to promote itself as a desirable place to live and invest in, the challenge appears to be a steep one*".[6]

The NBI was the pioneer of ranking of the world's nation brands.[7]

This finding is supported by repeated BBC surveys in which citizens were asked about how they viewed Israel's influence on the world .Last survey was conducted in 2012 -2013. The

[4]http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20061121005222/en/Anholt-Nation-Brands-Index-Global-Survey-Confirms#.U41l9PmSxSI
[5]http://mouriz.files.wordpress.com/2013/02/cbi-futurebrand-2012-13.pdf
[6]http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20061121005222/en/Anholt-Nation-Brands-Index-Global-Survey-Confirms#.U41l9PmSxSI
[7] See 6

results of the 2013 survey can be compared to the 2010-2011 survey to observe the direction of change in how Israel's global influence is perceived.[8]

In the answer to the question how people perceived the global influence of Israel in 2010-2011 survey, 21% viewed Israel's influence as "*mainly positive*" while 49% viewed it as "*mainly negative*". The rest-30% answered they were "*neither or neutral*". Only three countries received somewhat lower positive rating than Israel-Pakistan with 17% positive, North Korea and Iran with 16% positive.

In the 2102-2013 survey Israel received 21% positive (no change) but the negative perception of Israel's global influence increased by 3% to 52% negative. Again only three nations received somewhat lower positive results-North Korea 19% Pakistan and Iran 15%. Israel's **negative global influence** rating was in close proximity to Pakistan North Korea and Iran.

The BBC survey also measured the question of Global influence per audiences in specific countries. While in the period of 2010- 2013 there was some improvement in positive views of the Israeli global influence in the USA, there was an increase in the negative perception of Israel's global influence in Canada, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and India (in Russia the negative perception of Israel's influence rose from 17 to 32%!!).

The FutureBrand CBI surveys focus on commercial branding of a country and conduct the surveys among experts and opinion leaders in selected countries and do not poll the publics at large. Israel was ranked number 30 in 2010, number 28 in 2011 and number 27 in 2012 in a list of 118 countries surveyed. A slight improvement over time.[9]

It is clear that the commercial image of Israel is far better than its political perception among the world population surveyed by the BBC and earlier by the NBI. Israel does enjoy a strong economy which is a witness to this commercial perception. It is reasonable to assume that from the point of view of legitimacy, the political perceptions, especially in democratic countries, will have more weight in UN votes. In the long run, the negative political perceptions may have an adverse effect on the Israeli economy.

Can Israeli efforts in nation branding help Israel's legitimacy?

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) puts much emphasis on the branding of Israel as "*land of Creation*", the "*Start Up nation*". There is much debate among experts as to the real value of these efforts. The FutureBrand surveys do show that Israel enjoys a far better image along commercial dimensions than BBC NBI political polls. This in itself justifies the MFA branding efforts which are backed by hard evidence showing that Israel is one of the most innovative countries in the world per capita or other measures.

The BBC political surveys do show that a significant portion of the world population, around 30%, answered the question about how they view Israel's influence in the world as "*Neither-Neutral*". This is a significant group that can be influenced by the Israeli branding efforts. Viewing Israel as a positive innovative force that does solve some major global problems in health, food production, water purification and other life improving technologies, may have a positive effect on this groups' political image of Israel.

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[8] See 3
[9] http://www.futurebrand.com/images/uploads/studies/cbi/CBI_2012-Final.pdf

Allen Rosenshine the former Chairman and CEO of BBDO worldwide said in 2010 at a conference at IDC Herzliya on the issue of Israel's branding efforts:

"All of Israel's great achievements – social, political, economic, educational, medical, technological, agricultural – cannot counter the growing perception of Israeli hegemony and militarism… perceptions is reality, and the perceptions have changed radically…It is tempting to think of this as a branding problem but it belittles it…Unless and until Israel promotes coherent, consistent policies on the establishment of a Palestinian state… **Israel's image in the world will continue to decline to the point of threatening its very existence**".

Prof Simon Anholt the global expert on nation branding said: "*politics of a nation can affect every single aspect of a person's perception about a country. To succeed in permanently changing the country's image, the country has to be prepared to change its behavior*".[10]

Conclusion

Israel does not have internationally recognized borders. There is no consensus within the Israeli government about what the borders should be or a consensus on a two state solution. The international discourse on legitimacy, despite its ambiguous global definitions, is based on legal validation by international bodies. The UN views the territories conquered in 1967 as occupied areas under international law. Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-Moon told the UN Security Council on 20.1.2014:

"*Palestinians must be able to realize their legitimate aspirations to statehood, self-determination and freedom including an end to the occupation that had begun began IN 1967…2014 would be decisive in helping Israelis and Palestinians draw back from a perilous and unsustainable status quo*"[11]

Surveys show that the majority of the global population views Israel as having "*mainly Negative influence* " on the world and this negative perception seem to grow in the past three years even in countries which are considered as important allies of Israel. This is very alarming in light of the fact that within Israel there are strong political and legal forces who oppose the "two state solution".

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[10] http://www.israeltoday.co.il/default.aspx?tabid=178&nid=10395
[11] http://www.un.org/news/press/docs/2014/sc11252.doc.htm

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