

Standing up for peace amid the \"yo-yos\" of the US Congress

Claire Schaeffer-Duffy | May. 31, 2011 NCR Today

It was all rather disgusting. There they were, the members of the highest legislative body of the world's only superpower, flying up and down like so many yo-yos, applauding wildly, every few minutes or seconds, the most outrageous lies and distortions of Binyamin Netanyahu. ? Israeli writer, Uri Avnery, "Bibi and the Yo-yos."

The expression of support for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his speech before Congress this week was *almost* unanimous.

To a person, the U.S. lawmakers rose and applauded, 29 times, four times more than they did for President Obama's Inaugural Address.

But seated in the Capitol Gallery was one young woman who withheld her adulation: Rae Abileah, a Jewish-American of Israeli descent and member of the peace group CODEPINK.

Just as Netanyahu was praising the youth in the Middle East who spoke out for democratic reforms, Abileah took her cue, stood up, unfurled a banner and shouted: "No more occupation! Stop Israeli war crimes! Equal rights for Palestinians!" She was immediately tackled, gagged, tossed to the floor by members in audience, some of whom, she says, were wearing AIPAC buttons, and whisked out by ambulance to George Washington Hospital where she was treated for neck and shoulder injuries and then placed under arrest for disrupting Congress.

Moments after Abileah was carted away, Netanyahu reportedly said to his Congressional audience, "You can't have these protests in Tehran; this is real democracy."

"Is it?" asks Abileah in a forceful essay that was posted on *Mondoweiss* [explaining why she chose to disrupt](#) [1] Netanyahu's address to Congress yesterday. I recommend reading all of it, but here is an excerpt:

My neck pain is a small price to pay compared with the sacrifices made by numerous Palestinian, Israeli, and international nonviolent protesters who've risked their bodies and lives to defend the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. For example, recently the Israeli army arrested brothers Bassem and Naji Tamimi, who have organized unarmed protests in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh, and [they are currently imprisoned without trial](#). [2] Israel sent Palestinian Abdallah Abu Rahmah of Bil'in to prison for his role in organizing nonviolent protests against Israel's illegal, land-confiscating wall. In March 2003, the Israeli Army bulldozed 23-year-old American Rachel Corrie to death when she attempted to prevent the demolition of a Palestinian home in Gaza. In March 2009, the army shot 38-year-old Tristan Anderson of Oakland, Calif., who was participating in a nonviolent anti-wall demonstration in the West Bank, with a high-velocity tear gas canister, causing a near-fatal head wound and brain injuries. These are only some of most egregious and visible examples of the daily violence faced by Palestinians and their supporters in their struggle to uphold human rights and international law.

What's more, despite the growing nonviolent movement in the West Bank and Gaza, and the recent Palestinian Unity Agreement, in his speech to Congress, Netanyahu made it clear that the Palestinians have no partner for peace, and Congress would back his outrageous claims. In referring to the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the West Bank, he said, "And you have to understand this: In Judea and Samaria, the Jewish people are not foreign occupiers." Someone should inform Mr. Netanyahu that his own Supreme Court has written that the West Bank is "held in belligerent occupation."

The worst part of Netanyahu's speech to Congress was not what he said, but the appalling spectacle of watching our elected officials who literally applauded this bald-faced lie about the West Bank and the other outrageous statements Netanyahu made. It occurred to me that right now when it comes to this issue our Congress is more an outpost of the Israeli Knesset than a representative body of the United States.

The day before Abileah's ordeal in Congress, activists who repeatedly attempted to disrupt Netanyahu's speech at the AIPAC Gala were also assaulted.

Responding to the Israeli leader's claim that withdrawal to the 1967 was "indefensible" (international law requires this withdrawal), the five protesters sought to call attention to Israeli policies that are indefensible: starving Gaza, occupying and stealing Palestinian land, bulldozing Palestinian homes, silencing dissent within Israel. As each activist began to unfurl a banner and shout their protest, he or she was pounced upon by AIPAC audience members and dragged outside.

The AIPAC disruptions were one of many events this week organized by [MoveOverAIPAC](#) [3], a coalition of more than 100 peace and justice groups committed to challenging the influence the lobby has on U.S. policy in the Middle East.

At the top of this piece, I quoted from Uri Avnery's scathing critique of Netanyahu's speech before Congress. A veteran of the Israeli peace movement, Avnery sums up the prime minister's message in a single word: no. "NO to return to the 1967 Borders. NO to a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. NO to even a symbolic return of some refugees. NO to military withdrawal from the Jordan River-meaning a future Palestinian state would be completely surrounded by the Israeli armed forces. NO negotiations with a Palestinian government by Hamas, even if there are no Hamas members in the government itself."

And to Avnery's list, I would add, NO to all the core issues for resolving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. NO to peace.

Avnery rightly concludes what is becoming obvious to more and more reasonable people. Given the abysmal failure of Israeli and U.S. leaders, the path to peace is recognition of a Palestinian state at the U.N. coupled with a nonviolent movement within Palestine to end the Israeli occupation.

That nonviolent movement is already happening. But it needs more support.

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Links:

[1] <http://mondoweiss.net/2011/05/why-did-i-disrupt.html>

[2] http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/301/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=6780

[3] <https://www.ncronline.org/www.MoveOverAIPAC.org>