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**Ken Insley**

**"Winning American hearts & minds  
in building public/political support  
for a lasting peace in Jerusalem"**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **"Winning American Hearts & Minds in Building Public/Political Support for a Lasting Peace in Jerusalem"**

**by Ken Insley**

This presentation discusses how the Palestinian/Israel conflict is viewed by the majority of Americans, and through the use of humor and anecdotes, makes the argument that the public is more receptive to hearing the Palestinian perspective than ever before.

Most Americans are unaware of the impact its overwhelming support for Israel, while simultaneously turning a blind eye to their shameful treatment of the Palestinians, in Gaza, and in Jerusalem, has caused their country to be viewed more negatively in the Arab world than all of the other positive contributions it has done for the Arab world combined.

While the current Israeli leadership has done much to damage their international reputation, the Palestinian leadership has done a great deal to enhance theirs, and the American people are finally starting to understand that solving this conflict is essential to peace in the Middle East ... therefore, it is finally about time to "flip the makloubah".

Just like flipping makloubah, we are almost at the point where it is time to turn everything upside down in an instant, and some optimists predict that this conflict can be solved this calendar year of 2011.

So how do we flip it?

By better communicating with the American people DIRECTLY in order to get them on board with ending this conflict and by also supporting the Palestinians, for the very first time. This presentation makes the argument that support for the Palestinians has been the missing ingredient for some time and offers suggestions to better persuade the American people to become more pro-Palestinian, as well as opening their eyes as to the true nature of the conflict and what is happening today in Jerusalem.



## **"Winning American Hearts & Minds in Building Public/Political Support for a Lasting Peace in Jerusalem"**

**by Ken Insley**

Salam A'Lekum, Good morning.

I would first like to thank the Arab League for inviting me to speak to this important conference and to share my perspective on such an important subject as Jerusalem.

Before coming to the conference today, I happened to have my TV tuned to CNN International, which was interviewing an old Jewish man who apparently has been praying at the Western Wall every single day since 1948. The man said that everyday he makes the same prayer at the wall, which is to pray for peace in Jerusalem. And when the TV reporter asked him what does it feel like to make that same prayer after all this time, the old man said, *"Sometimes it feels like I am just talking to a brick wall."*

Am not sure if that joke translates in Arabic but I can assure you that it was funny in English.

So who am I? Well, I am an American (no one is perfect) and for the past decade, I have coordinated many international exchanges with State Department delegations, and I have worked closely with many Arab leaders visiting the United States to give them a better understanding of the unique political dynamics of my country.

And although I have worked with over 130 countries in the world, I am now of the opinion that no place in the world matters more than the place which is not yet a country ... Palestine.

In fact, I realized rather quickly that the Arab public seems to care as much about what is happening to the Palestinians as they do their own country.

I will never forget accompanying an Egyptian delegation to the state of Alabama, where they visited a civil rights museum in Selma, and how they were emotionally impacted after learning about the struggles of the African-Americans, especially in the South. The images of non-violent protesters that were sprayed with fire hoses, and young black children having rotten vegetables thrown at them because they were courageous enough to dare go to the same school as white children, caused all African-Americans - not just those in south - and the American people to push forward civil rights changes in the United States and end racial segregation.

Immediately after visiting that museum, one of the Egyptians told me that

whenever an Arab watches on TV the footage of what is actually happening in Gaza or the West Bank it causes Arabs to identify in a spirit of solidarity with their Palestinian brothers and sisters. I will never forget my Egyptian friend making that comparison.

As you might be aware television footage like the demolitions in Jerusalem or violence caused by Israeli settlers in Palestine are not something really ever shown in America - as it is in your media - nor is the impact of war in Afghanistan or Iraq covered so graphically in our media as well for that matter. Foreign policy is not such a major concern for most Americans, and is surprisingly not often discussed in political debates among our politicians, so that's a major reason why so little attention is given to it by our media.

After working on numerous political exchanges, and perhaps also because of my religious upbringing, I eventually decided to serve on the Board of Directors for an NGO which assists Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land, which included not just those living in Palestine, but also Jordan and even those in Israel as well.

I must confess it is slightly frustrating when faced with the ignorance of many Americans with respect to this region. Many do not even seem to realize that there was even such a thing as a Palestinian Christian.

In fact, what is also frustrating (or frightening) was that most Americans, before 9/11 and our most recent involvement in Iraq or Afghanistan, did not even realize the difference between Sunni & Shi'a or Al Qaeda & Baathists.

After almost a decade of being involved in two wars, I believe it is not so much that the American people are tired of fighting - since over 99% do not serve in our military - but rather I believe they are simply tired of hearing about endless war, or propping up corrupt regimes that can't seem to figure out how to run a democracy for themselves. We have enough domestic problems in our OWN country.

And unfortunately, most Americans are unaware of the impact our overwhelming support for Israel, while simultaneously turning a blind eye to their shameful treatment of the Palestinians, in Gaza, and in Jerusalem, has caused us to be viewed more negatively in the Arab world than all of the other positive contributions we have done for any of your countries combined. Am I right?

You probably know as well as I do just how much support for Israel has become a domestic issue in American politics, however, I feel that now more than ever before, this one-sided policy is being questioned by the people, including Jewish-Americans. Instead of supporting only Israel in this conflict, I feel that more Americans are finally coming around to also supporting the Palestinians too (perhaps not all of the politicians).

In 2002, Republican President George W. Bush became the first U.S. President to explicitly call for an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel



in peace. Where is that road map by the way? Can all of you please check under your chairs? I'm sure it's gotta be here somewhere.

After the failed attempt by the neoconservative-guided policies to "remake" the Middle East, while marginalizing the Israel/Palestine issue, it has only ended up weakening American power in the Middle East and strengthening Iran and its allies. Our foreign policy is starting to feel stuck and everyone back home is starting to realize that the U.S. is perhaps wasting its resources, instead of focusing on *our own* country and economy, like China seems to be doing so well.

The American people have invested enough in wars this past decade. Maybe it is time for all of us to invest in peace?

As you may know in September of 2009, Democratic President Obama said this about getting a final Israeli-Palestinian peace: *"It's not just critical for the Israelis and the Palestinians; it's critical for the world. It is in the interests of the United States. And we are going to work as hard as necessary to accomplish our goals."*

And in March of THIS year, U.S. General David Petraeus said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was fomenting anti-American sentiment due to the perception of U.S. favoritism towards Israel. Speaking to the Senate Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill, Petraeus explained that *"enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the area of responsibility"* and that *"Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples."*

So it would seem that to not support a peaceful solution to this conflict would simply be *unpatriotic* would it not? Or do you think U.S. politicians care more about Israel than the foreign policy interests of their own country? You DO, don't you? I knew it!

Settlement expansion and the demolition of Palestinian homes has occurred for years in Jerusalem and the West Bank without much concern in America. And even though seemingly every country in the world stands united against Israel, the world has pretty much always been powerless to do anything to help the Palestinians.

When people in your countries hear the word "Palestinian", they think of them as "victims", but when people hear that very same word in the U.S., it has almost always been associated with words like "terrorist" or "suicide bomber." For far too long, the only news from over here that ever seems to penetrate the U.S. media is when something blows up and lots of people get killed ... or perhaps when Qatar wins their bid to host the World Cup. Mabrouk.

Most Americans understand that not every Muslim is a terrorist, but from the way they are portrayed in our media, it almost feels like every terrorist just so happens to be a Muslim.

Now after this long occupation, and the continued confiscation of Palestinian land and the treatment of its people, Israel now has no other friend left in the entire world, except of course for one country. For a long time, my country's leaders had other priorities, or competing interests, or lacked the political will to solve this important conflict ... but it is also because, for far too long, most Americans could not have cared less about the Palestinians.

Perhaps after the flotilla incident, or maybe because of the friction that developed between Prime Minister Netanyahu & the Obama Administration over settlement expansion, Americans are slowly waking up to the truth of what is happening to the Palestinians and that it our blind support for Israel, no matter which government is in power, actually compromises our entire foreign policy in this region.

Also, more and more Americans (again, maybe not all of the politicians) are starting to distinguish between the Israeli people and the Israeli government.

And today instead of only hearing about Palestinian suicide bombers blowing themselves up and killing innocent civilians through acts of terrorism, the American media has started to show more Palestinians as non-violent, peaceful demonstrators, not simply as stereotypical suicide bombers ... but perhaps this is because there are indeed more peaceful Palestinian demonstrators than suicide bombers. This is today's reality.

The strong pace of economic development taking place in the West Bank, in combination with the capable political leadership, has shown that the Israelis now also have a true partner in the peace process on the Palestinian side of the equation.

But while the current Israeli leadership has done much to damage their international reputation, the Palestinian leadership has done a great deal to enhance theirs, and the American people are finally starting to understand that solving this conflict is essential to peace in the Middle East ... therefore, I feel it is finally about time to "flip the makloubeh"!

I'm not sure if this is an Arabic expression or not, but it should be. You see my fiancée is a great cook, and she also happens to be a Palestinian, and one of her specialties is makloubeh, which is a dish that is cooked upside-down and needs to be flipped over before being served. It is impressive to watch her do it actually. You can't make makloubeh in a microwave because of the need for everything to cook together.

But just like flipping makloubeh, we are almost at the point where it is time to turn everything upside down in an instant, and some optimists predict that this conflict can be solved this calendar year of 2011.

So how do we flip it? Well, it's not going to be easy, and if it's not done right, we could end up with a really big mess on the floor, since there are a lot of ingredients that go into making makloubeh, and also a lot of things that need to



be resolved between Israelis & Palestinians. But fortunately, this whole peace process has been in the oven for quite a while already hasn't it?

Today, I would like to help all of you better communicate with the American people DIRECTLY in order to get them on board with ending this conflict in Jerusalem by also supporting the Palestinians. I feel this has been the missing ingredient for some time.

In the U.S., we like to consider ourselves to be a democracy "of, by and for the people" ... so I think Arab leaders need to engage the American public directly and convince them that you are serious and care about a peace deal with Israel, and that you will recognize them as a neighbor, and will welcome them in the community of nations.

And if you can finally get the American people to start talking about the benefits of a peace deal with Israel and the Arab nations, including the future state of Palestine, and what peace in Jerusalem could possibly mean for the region, then I believe you can get them to finally listen ... and *that* will be what causes everything to be turned upside down.

We have always been pro-Israel, but have we ever been a pro-Palestinian country? Never. The truth is that America needs to be both pro-Israel AND pro-Palestinian and we are slowly beginning to realize it. This would certainly be a new development, but not an impossible one, and that is exactly what I predict will need to happen first if we ever want to flip the makloubeh.

None of you will not be able to change the fact that America will always support Israel, but what America can do is to help Israel to better get along with other countries in the neighborhood, including the future state of Palestine. And we can also be a true friend to Israel by speaking truthfully about the misguided policies of their current government.

"Zionism" used to be defined as the movement for the reestablishment of a Jewish nation in what is now Israel. Now, after this goal has already been accomplished, the movement seems to be more defined today as being representative of all those who are opposed to the creation of a Palestinian one beside it.

It is now well understood by almost everyone that either Israel will cease to be a democratic state, or a Jewish one, because it can't have both without the creation of a Palestinian state ... or it will lead to Armageddon. Maybe that's what the Christian Zionists want but I don't think the majority of the Israeli public feels that way.

I remember how much criticism President Jimmy Carter received for using the word "Apartheid" in one of his book titles because of the that word's racist connotation. His critics would have a stronger argument if more than 50% of the Israeli Jews were against the recent edict by (government sponsored) rabbis to avoid renting and selling apartments to Arabs. That policy is the very definition



of racist and was announced only a few weeks ago. I also read not too long after that about the 30 wives of Israeli rabbis who recently signed a letter urging Jewish women to avoid dating Arab men.

Play this game with me: If you were to substitute the word "white" for "Jewish" and replace the word "Arab men" with "NIGGER", then to most American ears, it sounds exactly like the pronouncements of racist segregationists in the 1950s and 60s in southern states like Georgia, which is where Jimmy Carter is from. I think President Carter knows a thing or two about racial discrimination. And so should the Jewish people.

After first being banished from Jerusalem many years ago, no group of people have been so persecuted throughout the world and throughout history. I would hope that Israel would behave differently. Recently some Israeli politicians have recently started to embrace Europe's anti-Islamists, not because the far-right politicians have now all of a sudden started to become fond of Jewish people, but rather because they hate Arab people that much more. Israel have no real friends in the mainstream politics of Europe, so look how desperate they've become ... embracing the skinheads from Austria's neo-fascist party. It is truly pitiful that that some Israeli politicians have lost their sense of shame.

Perhaps it is understandable to be perceived as racist when you are considered by some in the world to be God's own "chosen people", but it is not as if they are the only people in this region who discriminate based on race and religion, are they? How many of your Muslim daughters would be permitted to marry a non-Muslim?

I have followed the news with great sadness about the tensions between the Muslim & Christian communities in Iraq & Egypt, and I also understand just how difficult co-existence can be with respect to even Sunni & Shi'a within Islam.

Obviously I realize the analogy between the racial segregation of what happened in my country and what is happening in Jerusalem today to the Palestinians is not a perfect comparison, nor is South Africa for that matter.

In the U.S., we have certainly had our own shameful period of slavery and segregation between the races ... but the U.S. has come a very long way, in a rather short amount of time. I am sure all of you followed the public outcry caused by the plans to build an Islamic Center only blocks away from the Ground Zero site in New York City, and are aware that we still have quite a bit of religious tension in the United States. The history of the world is filled with conflict. It's not easy to live together with people that are different is it? This isn't a new challenge but rather a very old one, which sounds rather fitting for a place like Jerusalem.

Instead of continuing to focus on all of our differences, perhaps it might be easier to focus on what we have in common...



As you know, Abraham is the father of the three great monotheistic faiths for which the city of Jerusalem is so special. The Jewish people, after Moses angrily destroyed the Golden Calf, began to worship the very same God that Christians & Muslims also worship to this day. The Muslim & Christian faiths were built on theirs. It is the foundation. Muslims believe that Mohammed was the prophet of God who ascended into heaven from Jerusalem, and Christians believe that Jesus was the son of God who rose from the dead in the very same city - and I'm pretty sure most Jewish people do not - but what I think we sometimes forget is that we are all God's children, and we worship in our own unique ways, the very same God.

So what shall be the fate of Jerusalem? Who gets it? Can it ever be split? Will it ever be possible to persuade the Israelis to split it? I think that is what this conference is precisely here to debate. However, one thing that isn't up for debate, is that there will never be peace in this world until there is first peace in Jerusalem, because that is the key to it all.

Upon my first visit to Jerusalem in 2004, I was surprised to learn that the most common word spoken in the city was one of peace: *salam*, or *shalom*; and I found it even more surprising to learn that "Jerusalem" means city of peace in Hebrew, and the name of the city in Arabic is Al-Quds, which means "The Holy". Am not exactly sure when it was ever a "Holy City of Peace" but it has certainly never been in my lifetime. In one of the guide books I read, it was estimated that during its long history, the city of Jerusalem has been destroyed twice, attacked 52 times, and captured or recaptured 44 times.

However, in 2002, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia introduced the Arab Peace Initiative, which would normalize relations between the entire Arab world and Israel, in exchange for withdrawal from the occupied territories - including East Jerusalem - and a just settlement for the Palestinian refugees. That was almost nine years ago. Why didn't they take the offer?

I suppose it is important to put yourself in their shoes for a moment, and imagine how frustrating it must be to have been persecuted for so long after having their holiest site destroyed twice over, and then banished for many centuries from worshipping at their holiest site in Jerusalem. Did you realize that for about 1400 years, Jews were also forbidden from worshipping at their second holiest site, which is the Tomb of the Patriarchs, where Abraham is buried in Hebron? And so after all this time of having these sacred sites taken away from them, the world expects them to share it with the very same people who once forbid them from entering these holy sites?

How would you feel as a Muslim if you couldn't visit Mecca or Medina for many centuries, or after you finally could, there was a tall building from which Jews would sing Hava Nagila five times a day on loudspeaker? That could probably get annoying. Since I am not a Muslim, I wouldn't dare question just how sacred Mecca or Medina is to a Muslim. But if you do not think Jerusalem is just as sacred to a Jew, then it is probably because you are not Jewish.

And this is exactly what we are asking them to do: to share their holiest site, which is perhaps the most famous city in the world, one that has been elusive to them for many centuries and never forgotten.

Because Israel feels so alone in this world - other than the one nation remaining who still supports them - I feel that it is almost the moment when we can finally flip the makloubah, and create this Palestinian state, by together convincing the Israelis that all of their Arab neighbors want a real peace with them. It is also time for a much greater dialogue about the true significance of peace in Jerusalem and what it would mean for the world, not only among the people of my country, but also inside of your own countries as well. And if those of you in this room sincerely DO want this to happen, then a campaign to better inform the American people about the truth of what is happening today to the Palestinians in Jerusalem also needs to be waged with them as well.

In order to flip the makloubah, my country and all of yours, must truly believe that peace in Jerusalem is possible. I suppose all the vital ingredients have been cooking for a while, certainly long enough ... just not always together.

It is time to flip the makloubah so that Al-Quds/Jerusalem will finally live up to its name.

It is time for all of your nations to recognize Israel as a respected neighbor within the international community, and to finally at last see that very same respect given to the Palestinian people which has been deprived to them for so long ...

And insh'Allah it will happen in 2011.

Thank you so much for your attention.

Shalom A'Lekum