**Spin doctors**

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Wednesday, Nov 22, 2023

During the recent ‘March for Israel’ in Washington, DC, Al Jazeera interviewed a confident young man from Connecticut about the war in Gaza. Draped in an Israeli flag, Charlie appeared ready to answer any question.

He made it clear from the outset that the ongoing war is not “Hamas vs Israel”, but “Hamas vs the whole world”. He said he regrets children’s deaths and prays for innocent lives lost. But he had no doubt about who is responsible for the death of civilians in Gaza. While Israel does everything to avoid civilian casualties, he said, Iran-backed Palestinian terrorists bomb their own hospitals, use civilians as human shields, and even place kids next to rocket launchers. Iran and its proxies are the source of all evil in Palestine and the region, he added.

Charlie has clearly done his homework. He has studied the Israel Project’s ‘Global Language Dictionary’, memorised its lines, and repeated them verbatim, not missing a beat. The playbook was created in 2009 after Israel’s first war on the besieged Gaza Strip, to guide Israel’s supporters on how best to speak to the media about the conflict. Inspired by Israel’s leading spin doctors, such as Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu, it is directed at young activists, as well as politicians, pundits, journalists and more. It tells its readers what to say, and what not to say, alerting them to words that should be used and others that mustn’t.

One of my favourite tidbits in the playbook, as I wrote back in 2014, goes like this: “Avoid talking about borders in terms of pre- or post-1967, because it only serves to remind Americans of Israel’s military history. Particularly on the left, this does you harm.” And when civilian casualties mount during wartime in Gaza, the playbook recommends talking empathetically along these lines of “All human life is precious”, but emphasising that “it is a tragedy that Iran-backed Hamas shoots rockets at our civilians while hiding in their own” and that this “causes tragic deaths on both sides”.

Sounds familiar?

Like Charlie, I have also studied the spin playbook, albeit for different reasons. The playbook helps me detect more easily the spin in writings, speeches, and interviews.

Take the interview that Republican US presidential candidate Chris Christie gave to CNN the day after the ‘March for Israel’. He repeated the same soundbites that Charlie invoked the day before, albeit with less tact. Having had forgotten to mention ‘evil Iran’ in his answers, he clumsily rushed to insert it before the end of the interview, as if he was being tested.

Like Charlie and Chris, Joe also loves the playbook. President Biden and his minions in the US administration have eagerly embraced its recommendation to highlight Israel’s “right, indeed obligation, to defend itself” against the attacks of a “terrorist” organisation at every opportunity. Since October 7, the United States president has regularly deflected criticism of US complicity in the killing of thousands of Palestinian children, by accusing Hamas of, you guessed it, “using civilians as human shields”, and even repeating false Israeli claims about Hamas “cutting babies’ heads off” and “burning women and children alive”.

US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken went further, insisting that US officials stand behind Israel‘s claim that Hamas is using civilian facilities such as al-Shifa hospital in Gaza as “command centers”, and adding that “What we know across the board is that Hamas embeds itself in civilian infrastructure – in and under apartment buildings, in and under hospitals, in and under schools – and it uses people as human shields”, and hence, incriminating tens of thousands of doctors, nurses, teachers and others in war crimes. All of which has thus far proved to be no more than propaganda used by Israel to justify its bombings of hospitals and schools.

Excerpted: ‘Israel, Gaza, and the mass

production of myths for mass media’.

Courtesy: Aljazeera.com