

British Parliament, Feb. 26, 2013:

Gordon Henderson (Con): “May I say how delightful it is to have you chair this debate, Mr Dobbin? I am pleased to have secured this half-hour debate, because it gives me an opportunity to raise the issue of hate incitement against Israel and the West by the Palestinian Authority.

The year 2013 has been identified as the year of peace for Israelis, Palestinians and all the people of the region, but Israelis and Palestinians in particular face many difficulties if they are to secure peace. Overcoming those difficulties will require determination and willingness to compromise. For Israel’s part, they will need to readopt the land for peace doctrine that in the past has secured landmark peace agreements with its neighbours.

The Palestinians also have an important role to play, and I want to use this debate to raise one thing that they ought to do. It is clear that a culture of hate has wormed its way into the very fibre of Palestinian society. Incitement to hate is pervasive in Palestinian school textbooks, on television programmes and at cultural and sporting events. Palestinians have been consistently and unremittingly taught to hate Jews, Israel and the West.”

Mr Lee Scott (Ilford North) (Con): “I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that as the children of a future for Palestinians and Israelis alike, teaching them to love rather than hate each other and their doctrine can be the only right way forward?”

Gordon Henderson: “I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes a perfectly sensible point. I shall say something along those lines later.

Incitement has been done with very little condemnation by the international community, including, I have to say, the United Kingdom. My contention is that that activity fundamentally harms the peace process and any hope for a two-state solution. Ignoring incitement and hate education because we do not want to rock the boat will not help us along the path to peace, and it does not provide the steady foundations needed for peaceful coexistence.

Incitement takes many forms. It ranges from the denial of Israel’s right to exist to the abhorrent glorification of violence and infamous Palestinian terrorists. PA officials readily speak to western audiences about their determination to reach peace with Israel, but a very different story is presented to their domestic audience. Official Palestinian Authority media regularly paint a picture of a world in which Israel does not exist. In its simplest visual form, that is expressed through the distribution of maps depicting geographic Israel replaced by the “State of Palestine.”

During the Palestinian application for statehood at the United Nations in September 2011, the PA’s official TV channel broadcast a map that depicted all of modern Israel and the Palestinian territories wrapped in the Palestinian flag with a key through it. Therefore, at a time when President Abbas was telling the UN that he sought two states living side by side, residents on the west bank were being shown a map carrying an unmistakable message of Palestinian sovereignty over the whole area. In addition to denying Israel’s existence, official

Palestinian Authority media vilifies and demonises Israel and the Jewish people. **Last summer, a PA TV broadcast showed a painting depicting Israel as an ogre with a Star of David skull cap that impales and eats Palestinian children in Gaza.**

Just this month, **PA TV broadcast a music video honouring a number of convicted terrorists. The song featured excerpts of a speech by President Abbas, stating, “We will not rest until all prisoners are freed and the prisons are emptied.” One of the terrorists who was honoured in that video was Ibrahim Hamid, who is serving 54 life sentences in Israel for planning a series of suicide bombings that killed 46 Israelis during the second intifada.”**

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): “I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. The matters that he brings to the attention of the House are truly shocking and put a question mark over the status of the Palestinian Authority as a partner for peace. Would it be good for the Government to direct more of their funding to support genuine co-existence projects that bring peace between Palestinians and Israelis on the basis of two states?”

Gordon Henderson: “I agree with the hon. Lady. Teaching peace will always be better than teaching hatred. We must encourage the Government to put money into such a venture. I will come on to how the money is currently being spent by the British Government.”

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): “I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. In addition to the hon. Lady’s suggestions, we must also **ensure that we expose those terrible examples of output on PA TV. The one that my hon. Friend mentioned a few moments ago was changed after that exposure.** The key to bringing about such change is ensuring that British Government officials and representatives in the region make official protests about every single example of such output on TV.”

Gordon Henderson: “I agree with my hon. Friend, and I hope the Government will take that lesson on board. I have brought with me some examples that I will be passing over to the Minister. In the past, there has perhaps been a denial of such things, but when the examples are seen in black and white, they are hard to deny.”

As a direct result of PA-endorsed incitement, dying for the sake of Palestine remains an ideal that is an accepted part of Palestinian discord. Shockingly, **the official Facebook page of Fatah in the Lebanon recently posted a photo of a mother dressing her young son with an explosive suicide belt and encouraging him to blow up the sons of Zion.”**

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): “**Fatah’s Facebook page routinely publishes pictures and slogans venerating arms and violence against Israel. In some pictures, young children are even shown carrying rifles.** Does my hon. Friend agree that such glorification of violence during the peace process plays into the hands of the extremists and makes the idea of a two-state solution impossible?”

Gordon Henderson: “I agree with my hon. Friend. It is shameful that such incitement to hatred has been denied by too many people. I appreciate the Minister’s efforts in recent weeks to further the matter in the Foreign Office, but what discussions has he had with his colleagues in east Jerusalem on the issue of incitement and hate education and how will the Foreign Office play a part in ending it?”

The Palestinian school textbooks have included the same inflammatory messages that I have mentioned. I read with great interest a recent report into this matter by the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. The US-funded report concluded that both Palestinian and Israeli textbooks could do more peacefully to portray the other side. The findings once again highlighted the fact that both sides in the conflict need to prepare their populations for a peaceful future. The report also shows the need for those responsible for Israeli ultra-Orthodox education to re-examine the material that they are putting out.

However, there are shortcomings in the report about which any reasonable and unbiased person should have concerns. Those shortcomings could explain why a number of the study’s scientific advisory panel and leading stakeholders have refused to endorse the report. For instance, the report fails to emphasise that the ultra-Orthodox school system, which makes up only 8% of the Israeli student body, is not Government regulated. It does not represent an official Israeli line and should not be seen on a par with the PA-authorised textbooks. The report’s other major failure is that it justifies the levels of incitement found in Palestinian textbooks by asserting that perhaps it is because the Palestinians are at an earlier stage of nation building, are the weaker of the two adversaries and have suffered more hardships in day-to-day life. We must not be distracted on the path to seeking peace by that sort of moral relativism.

Consistent with the Palestinian Authority’s policy of glorifying terrorists, **the PA financially reward terrorism by paying a monthly salary to Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons convicted of terror offences. It pays a monthly salary of anything between £240 and £2,100 to prisoners serving multiple life sentences for involvement and facilitation of deadly acts of terrorism, including suicide bombings. The longer the time in prison, the higher the salary. To put it crudely, the more horrific the terrorist activity and the more Israelis who are killed, the larger the salary. In total, the PA is paying salaries totalling approximately £3 million each month to 5,500 Palestinian terrorists in Israeli prisons.**

I was shocked to learn that those payments are part funded by the British taxpayer. Indeed, the payments come from the PA’s general budget, into which the UK contributes more than £30 million each year. I am unaware of any known safeguards in place preventing the use of UK aid to that end. Previous attempts by my parliamentary colleagues from all parts of the House to raise that issue have been met with apparent denial and a declaration that the payments are simply “social welfare payments to the families of prisoners.”

I wholeheartedly believe that dependent spouses or children should not be held responsible for the crimes of family members, and I doubt that any of my colleagues here today would disagree with me. None the less, **PA legislation repeatedly refers to “salaries”—or ratib in Arabic—and not “social assistance” or “welfare payments”. Crucially, that legislation stipulates that a prisoner is not obligated to give his salary to his family. Unmarried prisoners also receive the same basic salary as those who are married and have children. Finally, a small stipend for wives and children paid to prisoners is received separately from the standard salaries.”**

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): “I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. As he is aware, numerous questions have been asked of our Government in relation to those payments. Time and again, we have been told that they are salaries and not social assistance. However, **in December 2012, a Palestinian Authority statement, which was released through its official news service, explicitly stated otherwise. That statement, which is made in the name of the Palestinian Minister responsible for prisoners’ affairs, Issa Karake, announced that those payments were salaries and not social assistance. It went further by stating that any talk of social assistance was incorrect rumour.** How can my hon. Friend square that issue with the denials made by our own Government?”

Gordon Henderson: “I cannot—I have to ask my hon. Friend to put his question to the Government, because I cannot answer for them. However, since these payments are not explicitly given to those in need, it seems logical to assume that they are given as a form of reward for prisoners’ terror acts; to me, that is quite logical.

As I have shown today, those are the very same acts of terror that are all too frequently praised by the Palestinian Authority. I have no doubt that the Minister will have been in contact with his colleagues at the Department for International Development about this issue. However, can he tell me what discussions he has had with his Palestinian and Israeli counterparts on this issue? Furthermore, what assessment has he made of this very serious matter?

In conclusion, the PA’s failure to deliver on their commitment to end incitement explicitly undermines the principles and conditions on which the peace process is built. That incitement highlights the extent to which Palestinian society has not publicly begun to absorb the changes needed for a practical and genuinely peaceful co-existence with Israel. I contend that incitement is a form of abuse of Palestinian children. We must remember that those children are the next generation of peacemakers and state-builders. Simply put, no peace agreement will be able to guarantee peace in the medium to long term if a generation of Palestinians is growing up indoctrinated to hate Israel, Jews and the West.

I am reassured that this is an issue that the Government are starting to regard with increased seriousness. Indeed, the Prime Minister made his position clear at a United Jewish Israel Appeal dinner late last year, when he said:

'Britain will never support anyone who sponsors a football tournament named after a suicide bomber who killed 20 Israelis in a restaurant. We will not tolerate incitement to terrorism.'

The Government rightly hold Israel to account when Israeli policies stand in the way of peace in the region. By the same reasoning, it is important that they adopt a similar policy with regard to the Palestinians. The Palestinians will take any British silence as a green light to continue this practice. We must insist, as a policy, that the PA end the indoctrination of its youth with views that jeopardise a future of peaceful co-existence.

To that end, I ask the Minister to give me an assurance that the Government will make, and will continue to make, representations to the PA that incitement against Israel is unacceptable and in contravention of the Oslo agreement. Widespread PA-endorsed incitement has gone unchallenged for too long. The PA are clearly not making any effort to educate their people in peace and co-existence with Israel. As we move forward into this "year of peace", the need to abandon all messages of incitement is more important than ever."

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

(Alistair Burt): "I echo the pleasure of other Members in serving under your chairmanship, Mr Dobbin; as long-established friends, it is particularly good to start in such a way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sittingbourne and Sheppey (Gordon Henderson) has secured an important and timely debate, and I appreciate his courtesy in sending me a copy of his speech earlier this afternoon. I welcome this opportunity to reiterate the Government's position on incitement. We oppose, in all circumstances, the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. We deplore incitement on either side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including any comments that could stir up hatred and prejudice in a region that, perhaps more than any other, needs a culture of peace and mutual respect, as my hon. Friend and other hon. Members made clear.

We do not hesitate to raise instances of incitement with both the Palestinian Authority and Israel whenever we feel that it is appropriate to do so. I am in regular contact with our colleagues in the consulate general in Jerusalem, and in answer to my hon. Friend's questions, I can say that we have a regular dialogue with both the PA and the Government of Israel, in which we reiterate the need for both sides to prepare their populations for peaceful co-existence, and we take some of the specific issues that he has raised directly to Palestinian sources through our colleagues in Jerusalem.

By opening my response in this way, I emphasise my concern, which I know the House understands, about incitement, but I will not provide a commentary on all such allegations, not all of which we can verify, and nor can the UK be held responsible for them. As I will make clear, and as my hon. Friend made clear in his remarks, it is not possible to deal with this in isolation from the backdrop of the ongoing issues between the Palestinians and Israel that have beset the region for too long.

I do not fully share the bleakness of the rhetoric with which my hon. Friend began his remarks, particularly his comment that Palestinians have been consistently and unremittingly taught to hate Jews, Israel and the West. I genuinely find that far too wide an expression to cover all Palestinians everywhere in the region. I also feel that to neglect any sense of any activity that may have been perpetrated by Israelis during the occupation as any part of popular anger against Israel misses an important part of the context. That is not to minimise the damage done by incitement, but not to mention that and not to feel that it is part of the context is, in my view, simply wrong.

On the PA's leadership, it is important to stress that we consider that the track record of President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad shows their genuine commitment to non-violence and a negotiated two-state solution. To quote the words of Israeli President Shimon Peres last April:

'President Abbas is constant in his announced position—for peace, against terror, and for a two-state solution. I think we have never had a wider basis to conclude peace than under his leadership.'

The Israeli Government have repeatedly praised the strength of the co-operation between the Palestinian and Israeli security forces in improving security and preventing violence, including violence against Israel. It is for these reasons that we firmly believe that the PA, under President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad, are indeed firm partners for peace."

Andrew Percy: "I am a little alarmed at that statement by the Minister, because there are many examples—example after example, indeed—**of senior Palestinian officials at the very top levels attending sporting competitions named in honour of people who have murdered innocent Israelis, or of their attending ceremonies to rename squares and streets after people who have murdered innocent Israelis. So while they may say one thing to the West, they may be saying something slightly different in Arabic.**"

Alistair Burt: "The Prime Minister was clear in his denunciation of those who set up sporting tournaments or who support activities named in memory of the so-called martyrs and the suicide bombers. Of course, that is the clear position of the UK Government.

Again, however, to neglect the context in which people see the position of prisoners and those who have been engaged in activities against Israel is to fail to understand the context of the issues that we are discussing. It does not make the glorification right—it is not right—but not to understand how that operates in the occupied territories is to miss something fundamental. To place it all in terms of the rhetoric and not to understand the wider context will not help us to get to where we need to be, in our encouragement for all engaged in this issue to find a solution, which—as my hon. Friend made clear—has prime importance this year in particular."

Gordon Henderson: "May I make it clear that I understand the context in which the incitement takes place?"

Alistair Burt: “You did not say it.”

Gordon Henderson: “I used this debate today particularly to refer to that incitement. I mentioned the fact that Israelis are not blameless in this situation—I understand that—but what is wrong, under any circumstances whatsoever, is some of the practices that have taken place to incite hatred against Israel and Jews, and there is no condoning of those practices whatsoever.”

Alistair Burt: “I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his clarification, and given time—in the next eight minutes—I am happy to make our position even clearer. However, he did not spell out the context in his speech as clearly as he has just done, and that is vital. We will condemn the incitement and the naming of events after the so-called martyrs, but not to understand the context is to miss something, and I appreciate what he has just said.”

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) rose—

Alistair Burt: “This is perhaps the last intervention that I will take, and then I must deal with some of the issues that have been raised.”

Mr Hollobone: “I appreciate that the Minister condemns the glorification of violence, but the point is that—in effect—that glorification is being part-funded by the UK taxpayer, because British taxpayers are paying £30 million a year to the general budget of the Palestinian Authority, and the state TV and radio broadcaster is pouring out some of this hatred, as shown in some of the evidence that the Minister has heard today. Unless the UK Government get cross about that incitement, it will not stop.”

Alistair Burt: “The Government’s memorandum of understanding with the Palestinian Authority makes it clear that our aid to the PA is intended to contribute towards a peaceful and prosperous Palestinian state and society, by improving fiscal sustainability, improving public satisfaction and lowering fiduciary risk. The memorandum of understanding makes it clear that all funds must be used to deliver against those agreed outcomes.

We engage closely with the PA to ensure our money has maximum effect on achieving the intended goals of the project. We have a number of safeguards in place to ensure that our money is spent as intended—we keep them under constant review—including safeguards to ensure that UK money does not support Hamas or other terrorist organisations, either directly or indirectly.

I am well aware of the allegations surrounding PA financing to Palestinian prisoners, including to those convicted of acts of terrorism. The PA Prime Minister has made it clear, both in public and to the UK Government, that payments to families are intended to sustain families whose primary breadwinner has been imprisoned, while payments to prisoners in Israeli jails are made at the request of Israeli authorities to meet basic living conditions. We have discussed these issues

with the PA at the highest levels in recent months, and continue to encourage the PA to ensure that these payments are more transparent, needs-based and affordable. I assure hon. Members that these discussions are current and ongoing.

Although there are genuine issues with nomenclature and translation, it is still vital to make certain that correct payments are being made, which we believe, up to now, have been appropriate. But it is essential to be clear about this. I note the strength of feeling among hon. Members. I will give an assurance that we will continue to press the PA in relation to this issue, and I expect colleagues to raise it in due course.

The issue of textbooks comes up on occasion. There was a recent US-funded study into Palestinian and Israeli textbooks. Allegations of methodological flaws have been raised. I am not sure that they are sufficient to deal with the underlying results of the study, which we have only just been able to glance at. Our sense is that it is in line with previous studies, which have found that incitement and extreme negative characterisations are very rare in both Israeli and Palestinian textbooks. However, also in line with previous studies, the report found a profound need for textbooks on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to do more to promote a positive portrayal of each other, reflecting the principles of co-existence, tolerance, justice and human dignity. We will continue to engage both the Palestinian Authority and Israeli authorities in relation to the background of that report.

My hon. Friend has a number of issues in his back pocket. I had a briefing on some of the material some weeks ago, through Palestinian Media Watch. There are some tough examples. I think that I was expected to be shocked, but I was not. Hon. Members should not mistake me. Some material was shocking and offensive. It has no place in any political or historical discourse in which any credible democratic authority has a part. But my deep and genuine worry is that this incitement is not simply a cause of separation between peoples and hatred; I am afraid that it is a symptom of it.

My overwhelming feeling in looking at some issues, particularly in relation to children, was sadness that those on both sides of the divide who wish to emphasise difference and separateness are steadily winning that battle. One example, which my hon. Friend may be aware of, is **a little girl of about seven years of age reciting with pride a poem about a suicide bomber, or so-called martyr**. If we see a child reciting a poem about such a thing, instead of what ought to be filling her mind, how do we react? Anger towards her is clearly not appropriate. Whoever's fault it is, it is not hers. I felt sadness for her, but anger that those who possess the ability to take down some of the barriers between Palestinians and Israelis simply do not do so, but continue actions that perpetuate the hatred.

The Palestinians should not praise the so-called martyrs and the suicide bombers, and we will rightly condemn this, but progress in the Middle East peace process, perhaps, will play an even more effective part in ensuring that what we all wish to see—the growing together of people, without these barriers—comes to pass. Israel must examine its own actions in the occupied territories, to ensure that it does not allow an opportunity to fuel popular anger about Israel,

which has not come about solely because of exposure to the media, but by the experiences of occupation of too many in those territories. To neglect that is to miss something of considerable importance.

Accordingly, we believe that the only way to combat violence and incitement is to reach a comprehensive two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are urgently working with both the US and the European Union to start the peace process. This was a major subject for discussion in talks between my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State Kerry yesterday in London. That is the most important way forward. Incitement on either side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unacceptable and worthy of the condemnation of the House. If we do not get progress in 2013 on the Middle East peace process, the context in which incitement and violence takes root will not be truly dealt with. I urge all hon. Members to focus the same determination on that issue as on their rightful condemnation of incitement where they see it.”