

MAARIV News Paper (Friday, January 8)

“We will not let up”: Chairman of the “Im Tirtzu” Movement Goes on the Offensive, and Says This is Just the Beginning.



Left wing organizations, the Israeli Supreme Court, the media. “Im Tirtzu” is marking targets, and its Chairman, Matan Peleg, assures us that they won’t miss. Special interview following the controversial “Embedded” campaign.

Sara Leibowitz-Dar/ 08:19, January 9, 2016.

“We’re not great geniuses, the “Embedded” campaign wouldn’t have succeeded the way it did if Israeli society had not enlisted to help us.” It’s already plain and obvious that the campaign is an overwhelming success. It has reached everywhere, and it seems that there is not one person in the country who has not run into it. The essence of the campaign is more hotly debated.

The viral video which pointed a finger at several extreme left wing activists, saying they provided aid to terrorists, raised a proper storm in the last few weeks. Several of the responses were harsh. There were those who suggested removing the billboard signs from Tel Aviv, and a complaint for incitement was filed with the police.

Peleg looked out over the storm with satisfaction. “I was astounded from the amounts of support; this is a campaign where even the elders of the tribe said that they never received such support. 27,000 people signed the petition against the “embedded” agents, we had hundreds of thousands of views on Facebook, millions viewed our ads. They’re even talking about it in the Jewish communities around the globe.

Members of Knesset signed a bill carrying the name of our campaign, the Prime Minister expressed himself on the issues which we created. This was worth it all, but it would not have succeeded without the support from the public. We were successful mainly because Israeli society cooperated with us.

The goal was achieved, in its entirety. Many more people now are aware of this phenomenon and are thinking of ways of how to deal with it. The rest of the Zionist movement is like the Boy Scouts, while we are a tenacious group, and we’re not afraid to sink our teeth into something and get a good grip. We will not let up, we will continue to safeguard the State of Israel and the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. It will only increase. Until the end.”



The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) came out against the campaign. Others called your campaign despicable and a disgrace to Zionism.

"The Anti-Defamation League has its own considerations. They are located in a certain geopolitical space; they don't understand what it's like to live in a society born out of terror. I respect them, let them think whatever they wish to think."

The idea for a video clip coming out against foreign funding of Israeli organizations and intending to promote the advancement of a bill calling to mark organizations receiving funding from foreign governments actually came from the left. "It started with the Shatil organization. We looked at this Shatil, and began playing around with it, brainstorming. We saw a video on YouTube and we talked it over, and eventually you crack the code and realize that there are organizations who actually plant foreign agendas."

There are organizations, much like you, fanning the flames?

"We are not fanning the flames, we did nothing more than explain that the human rights organizations are self-righteous organizations who are hurting the State of Israel. This was not a violent campaign, this was a very revealing campaign. There are those who benefit from our actions. The entire national camp should be thanking us. We gathered the national voices. We are an army of good people. Our purpose is just, we are individuals standing against 50 propaganda organizations."

Where Is the Money From

The "Embedded" campaign went live after several failed attempts and much after their initial success with the New Israel Fund (NIF). "Following Operation "Protective Edge", we released a report titled

"Prepare for Diplomatic Terrorism" and no one had even heard of it," says Peleg. "We saw how a Palestinian foundation based in Ramallah maintains close ties with Israeli organizations and the Israeli society doesn't know about it. No one had heard of these reports. Officers complaining about "Breaking the Silence" don't get 30 seconds on the radio.

We felt that someone had to go out, with all their strength, and say these things. We don't just write position papers, we go to battle over the idea. The campaign was born out of frustration. We saw that there was a difficulty in Israeli society, understanding that it is all merely one phenomenon. Organizations which receive money from Europe will defend terrorists in court, and other organizations will protect them during the police investigations. The terrorists are being provided services. We said to ourselves that Israeli society needs to know exactly who is operating against it from the inside, and who is providing the funding."



Aren't you afraid that following your campaign, some hotheads will try to murder one of the activists whom you pointed out as providing aid to terrorists?

"If a grown, mature adult decides to come out against the State of Israel, don't come complaining to me that I make it known. I don't accept this attitude of shooting and then crying. You incite against Israeli society and then come complaining when someone criticizes you? You're a big boy, deal with it. These people appear in the Israeli and the international media, they chose to be on display, so that makes them open to criticism. It is the right of the public to know that the European Union is financing "B'tselem" and "Breaking the Silence". The Israeli public gave Meretz four seats in the Knesset, the European Union now comes along and tries to change the equation. Why?"

And why do politicians from the right wing receive foreign funding?

“The millionaires who provide donations to politicians do not have the power that foreign governments do. Is Sheldon Adelson a member of NATO like some members of the European Union are? No millionaire can be as globally influential as the government of Germany, for example.”

You yourselves received donations in the past from Pastor John Hagee who said that the Holocaust took place because the Jews rebelled and denied the one true God, and that Hitler was merely fulfilling God’s will.

“Hagee is not a government, he is an individual person. He is not the European Union, which has political power and the ability to influence.”

Could it be that your campaign was intended to raise donations? The income from your activity dropped in the past year.

“This is not a fundraising campaign. If we were trying to raise money, we’d talk about it openly. “Breaking the Silence” has more money than we do, but if the European Union were to offer us a donation we wouldn’t accept it.”

Towards the end of the campaign, billboards featuring pictures of left wing activists, "enemies of the state," could be seen throughout Tel Aviv. “We saw from the surveys that many people support outlawing “Breaking the Silence”, when we realized that the entire country supported the idea, we brought the billboard signs to Tel Aviv. Rothschild Boulevard is a brand, and if you have limited resources, you put a billboard up on Rothschild and everyone knows what you are talking about. Now, that the campaign was successful, we’ll gradually remove the billboards and continue with parlor meetings and lectures.”

Where and when does a campaign like this end? When there won’t be any more organizations who think differently from you?

“The campaign will end when the power of certain influences will return to its natural dimensions. If the European Union would support these organizations less, we wouldn’t be doing anything.”



Sights on the President

Luck played into the hands of the members of “Im Tirtzu”, when [Israeli President Rubi] Rivlin spoke at a convention hosted by the “Ha’aretz” newspaper in the United States, alongside a representative from “Breaking the Silence”. The event, which inflamed passions, drew the public’s attention to the campaign by “Im Tirtzu”. “You’re the president of the Jewish state, why are you taking part in a convention alongside organizations who are de-legitimizing their own country?”, said Peleg.

Maybe because he believes in freedom of expression.

“It’s freedom of incitement. It’s a cynical abuse of a good society. The President could have come and said that he will not take part in this convention.”

Would you want to live in a society where the President is ruled by the “Embedded” campaign?

“We are doing the Israeli society a service. Someone must stand up and say that “The Emperor is wearing nothing at all!” Today, the situation has reached an extreme point, and we’re trying to balance it. I wish we could reach the opposite situation. In a balanced society, we would have no reason to exist.”

Why is it that you so strenuously object to “Breaking the Silence”? Isn’t it better that injustices be exposed so that it will be possible to fix them?

“I myself published a book made up of soldier’s testimonies, but when you put the things within their proper context, it looks different. I see that Israeli society is suffering from terrorism, violence and a war

that creates nothing but tragedy. We are trying to create cooperative partnerships. Zionism is a cooperative partnership.”

A campaign that presents Avner Gvanyahu from “Breaking the Silence” as a supporter of terrorists is not working on cooperation.

“I don’t believe in selective propaganda against Israel. They selective take testimonies, and with that they receive funding. We are slowly losing Israel from the inside. Unlike “Breaking the Silence”, I am open to criticism. “Breaking the Silence” made two videos on me, they said I am an inciter, I even pressed “Like” on one of the videos.”

“Breaking the Silence” is an organization of combat soldiers. Ronen Shoal, the founder of “Im Tirtzu”, served in the Kirya [Israel Defense Forces Headquarters] when he was in the IDF.

“I didn’t serve in the Kirya”.

Pulling the Strings?

Peleg (35), who lives in Ksalon, and is married with two children, was made Chairman of “Im Tirtzu” approximately a year ago. He grew up in Kiryat Bialik, and served in the IDF Armored Corps. “I was in the withdrawal from Lebanon, I was in the last tank to leave Lebanon, I was in Jenin during Operation “Defensive Shield”, it was a very significant event in my life, where I realized that war is a bad thing, it’s not just pushing a button. People die in wars.”

Couldn’t your campaign lead to wars instead of to reconciliation?

“We’re dealing with education and exposure and not wars. There is something known as the least of all evils. There is a difference between a righteous person and a self-righteous person. The human rights organizations are self-righteous organizations who are actively harming the State of Israel. Our country is an asset to mankind and to human rights, and we need to protect it.”

Matan joined “Im Tirtzu” seven years ago, he founded the movement’s chapter at the University of Haifa, was head of the Northern district of “Im Tirtzu”, and like was mentioned above, approximately a year ago was appointed as Chairman. “Shortly before the wedding, my wife and I spoke about how special it is that the people of Israel make a territorial oath at weddings. The groom doesn’t swear how much he loves his wife, rather he announces that he will never forget Jerusalem. That’s when we decided that we would take that as a lifetime’s work for the good of the Jewish society. That was a formative discussion, and the rest is history which led me specifically to “Im Tirtzu”, because I didn’t want to be played with by politicians, I wanted to strengthen the Israeli society without playing political games.”

Ronen Shoal, the founder of “Im Tirtzu”, ran in the primary elections for the Jewish Home party. They say that Moshe Klughaft, Naftali Bennett’s strategic advisor, assisted you in the “Embedded” campaign. Wouldn’t you call that playing political games?

“Ronen did not round up votes for his Jewish Home campaign through us. Klughaft has known “Im Tirtzu” for many years, I asked him for advice, I didn’t seek advice from many people. We don’t receive orders from any party, and no one asks us to join them, because in the political system it’s known that we are not a part of the political game.”

Against the Agents of Change

The “Embedded” campaign was Peleg’s first [as Chairman], though not the first campaign run by “Im Tirtzu”. The movement was founded following the Second Lebanon War in order to strengthen the “values of Zionism”, and a large part of its activity is dedicated to exposing what they call anti-Zionist bias in Israel’s universities. Among others, they claimed that the Department of Politics and Government at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev was in part anti-Zionist, and called for the dismissal of a Teacher’s Assistant at the Tel-Hai Academic College after he called on IDF soldiers to refuse to carry out orders during Operation “Protective Edge”. They are also the ones that started the blatant campaign against the New Israel Fund (NIF), of whom it has been repeatedly argued that it finances pro-Palestinian organizations. “If you want to teach that Zionism is colonialism, teach that, alongside other things”, says Peleg. “There are lecturers who say that Zionism is racism and it is an occupier. We say be fifty-fifty.”

But how can you tell a lecturer what to think and what to teach?

“It’s my right as a tax paying citizen to demand from a university lecturer that he be fair. All opinions are legitimate, but it is not legitimate to be an agent of change. The lecturer has great influence over his students, even when he expresses himself off the University campus. The lecturer is a man of education who should show responsibility. Why is a student who served in the IDF Reserves afraid to say that he was in the IDF Reserves in Judea and Samaria, and instead tells his lecturer that he was overseas?”

You’re actually requiring from Universities to teach what you want to hear.

“Yes, why not, let them teach at least 50% of the time things that we also believe in. I don’t want Israel to be North Korea, but I’m not the United Nations, I’m not neutral. Everything is on full power with me. Other opinions are legitimate, but be fair. Israeli students don’t learn about the Zionist society. No one at the university talks about Moses and how he was the first Jewish revolutionary. He [Moses] carried out a national rebellion, he convinced a slave population to rebel against the king and leave Egypt, but he wasn’t Che Guevara, so no one talks about him. In Israel, cynicism beat out Zionism until “Im Tirtzu” came along. They are taking over the country, slowly but surely, teaching you that you are an occupier.”

We really are occupiers.

“We are not occupiers. The Jews returned to their land, the tragedy was created here because of Palestinian recalcitrance. If after the Disengagement Gaza had turned into Switzerland, we would have left the territories. To say that we are occupiers is self-righteous and disconnected.”

You demanded that funds intended for a gallery in Jerusalem presenting an exhibit describing life in the eastern part of the city be frozen. Senator Joseph McCarthy tried to do something similar in the United States, and eventually he failed.

“Let them hold an exhibit and plays on the Jewish settlement in Hebron. I don’t want to pay for exhibits that portray life in the eastern part of the city.”

Persecuting artists isn’t an original idea of yours. Andrei Zhdanov did something similar in the former Soviet Union.

"In my opinion, you are taking things out of context. If we had seen pro-Israeli and pro-Zionist plays, we wouldn't have to protest. When was there a movie here on the life of Avshalom Feinberg? There are dozens of pro-Zionist artists who are frustrated, who say to me "Listen, if I was against Israel I'd receive funding." In culture, all you see is that we are racists and that we are occupiers. Where can you get something else?"

Europe Is Not Here

One of the targets of "Im Tirtzu" is the Israeli Supreme Court, which receives a large amount of criticism from the right. "The judicial activism damages the principle of Separation of Powers. It is essential that someone seriously criticize this issue", explains Peleg. "This isn't Iran and the Chief Justice of the Israeli Supreme Court is not the High Priest. It is because of the judicial activism that the simple citizen has given up hope on the Israeli Supreme Court, but if we were talking about judicial activism, no one would be interested in what we have to say. When you want to capture the attention of the public, you say "judicial dictatorship".

And in the meantime, you try to tattoo the Israeli Supreme Court

"I don't want to tattoo anyone, but the democratic approach of the Israeli Supreme Court is European and is not suitable for Israel. In the European approach they talk of a Utopian world where everyone is the same, everyone is absorbed, brotherhood and peace, like in the song "Imagine" by John Lennon. In Judaism we talk about "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb." Everyone maintains their identity and everyone lives together. This is a much more natural approach. Everyone wants an identity. The Israeli Supreme Court advocates the European approach. Not all of the Justices see their role as historical judges. Once they wanted to give benefits at the University of Haifa only to IDF Reservists. The "Adalah" organization appealed against the decision and won. Why? Give benefits to those who serve in the IDF. This is a positive thing and needs to be encouraged."

Yehuda Glick, one of the symbols of the ascent to Temple Mount, received an award from you. Is the ascent to Temple Mount not a surefire recipe for bloodshed?

"Your existence in Tel Aviv is also a surefire recipe for bloodshed. There will be a war here, because this is an area prone to wars. What did Yehuda Glick really ask for? To go up to the Temple Mount? That seems like a legitimate desire to me. What is the Temple Mount? That is where all synagogues face, it is the Holy of Holies. If the Temple Mount is in our hands, why shouldn't there be equal rights for Jews? Who is the sovereign over the Temple Mount? We are. The arrangement with the Waqf is wrong.

The hero of your book, "Between Rishikesh and The Temple Mount", says that he would shoot a shell at the Temple Mount and score a direct hit on the Dome of the Rock.

"But in the end he doesn't shoot. The purpose of this book is to touch all the most sensitive points of the Israeli society and to show how much the Israeli society is actually very tolerant, when the dust is all settled."

What will a Utopian society look like in your eyes?

"Our aspiration is to create a Zionist elite throughout all levels, create a society where the people are connected to the history, believe in the righteousness of their path, I don't expect them to stand in formation and wave the flag every morning, but I do expect them to talk about Herzl in school, where

the teachers will be much more connected to the historical story. If the country goes down this path, that would be great, it would be more nationalist, more Jewish and more democratic. For instance, we assist Bedouins and Christians who want to serve in the Israel Defense Forces. I go all the way to the Negev in order to give lectures to Bedouins.”

Now, when the entire Arab world around us is falling apart, isn't it time that we tone it down a little with the threats to our security?

“The lack of stability creates a lack of stability, and the enemies continue to pursue you.”

Translation –from Hebrew "im Tirtzu"