

Letter to the Toronto Star

(April 7, 2010)

Blaming the Jews: everything old is new again

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Robert Fowler deserves the respect and compassion of all Canadians for his long service to our country, and for surviving four months in captivity by al-Qaeda kidnappers in the Nigerian desert. However, the above have not earned him the right to spread a false view of reality and blame Israel for all the ills besetting the world today. He presents a distorted point of view which is unfair, imbalanced and serves only to exacerbate hatred and instability. This is not to say that criticism of Israeli policies or governments is antisemitic, but that the single mindedness with which Israel is condemned not only by the very leaders responsible for murder and human rights abuses in their own countries, but by a man of Fowler's stature, leads me to wonder where the true prejudice lies. Consider the following:

1. Mr. Fowler speaks of the "iron clad link" between "non-peace" and the continuing turmoil in the Middle East, and the rise of international terrorism "inflaming Islamic diasporas" throughout the world. He believes this to be a "blindingly obvious" connection that politicians are afraid to mention for fear of being labeled antisemitic. This is a brilliant semantic maneuver which has the effect of cutting off all debate about these views and lays the blame for every major human rights transgression in the world on the Jews. In effect, Israeli policies are, according to Mr. Fowler, the cause of international Islamic terrorism. From Afghani bombings to Nigerian massacres, Israel – and not the monsters committing these atrocities – bears the responsibility. From time immemorial Jews have been blamed for organ snatching, killing children for their blood to make matzo and for conspiring to rule the world. Now terrorism has been added to the list. This is the type of thinking that has led to countless episodes of murdering Jews including pogroms, inquisitions and the Holocaust. Declaring that Jews shoulder the responsibility for radical Islamic terrorism takes antisemitism to a new level of outrage.
2. Terrorism is not a product of Israel- a state which has tried to live in peace with 300 million hostile neighbors since its inception. Indeed, the tactics of terror have a long history: Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by a suicide bomber in 1881. Similar horrific strategies have been employed by Sri Lankans since the 1950s, Japanese Kamikaze pilots during WWII and, most recently, Chechen terrorists. A campaign of terror against the indigenous Jewish population of pre-1948 British Palestine resulted in the mass slaughter of Jews in many cities including Hebron

and Jerusalem in 1929; terrorism today, whether bombings in Russia, Karachi or Iraq is not fueled by hatred of Israeli policies, but by nationalistic disputes within these countries.

3. Mr. Fowler is concerned that the "scramble to lock up the Jewish vote" has led politicians on both sides of the House to sell out Canada's reputation for fairness. This is patently ridiculous. Jews –including those too young to vote - number just over one percent of Canada's population. The Conservatives and Liberals are supporting Israel because of a principled approach. They see Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East and understand that standing up to hate and intolerance is perfectly Canadian. As Michael Ignatieff said in my office several months ago, "Israel is a non-partisan issue."
4. Mr. Fowler laments the Liberal party is today different than the one he served for so long, and the one to which his father was so proud to belong. This was also the party of the infamous "none is too many" policy regarding Jewish immigration to Canada during WWII. Is this the Liberal decency for which he pines? I think not. The Liberal party of today is much more focused on a principled approach of support for Israel while promoting justice and human rights.
5. Mr. Fowler is quick to accuse Israel of inspiring violence throughout the Middle East and Africa, but says nothing at all about those who actually commit these horrific terrorist acts. Hamas, Hezbollah and their ilk receive not so much as a slap on the wrist in his diatribe. Why?

One final thought: It has often been said that if Israel were to lay down its defenses tomorrow it would be annihilated by its neighbours and cease to exist. If the reverse occurred and the Palestinians laid down their arms and accepted the presence of a Jewish state in the region, peace between the two peoples would flourish. Perhaps after 60 years of hostilities against Israel it is time for the Arab world to try something new and give peace a chance. This is the reality that all Canadians should support.