

Colleagues:

Assistant Secretary Bill Russo spoke to Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs Deputy Director General Emmanuel Nahshon and his team this morning about our common public diplomacy challenges in the post-October 7 environment.

Nahshon disagreed with Russo's assertion that the United States and Israel faced a major credibility problem as a result of the unpopular war in Gaza. The Israelis seemed oblivious to the fact that they are facing major, possibly generational, damage to their reputation not just in the region but elsewhere in the world. They made the following three main counterpoints to this argument:

- Israel's main challenge, according to Nahshon, is "power projection."
- Young people have turned against Israel in large part because the TikTok algorithm favors pro-Palestinian content.
- Public opinion polling shows there is a "silent majority" of people who continue to support Israel, especially in Europe and the United States. The "silver lining" of October 7 is that it now allows Israel to see who its real friends are.

The conversation then veered off into a more technical discussion on how to use social media effectively to counter fake news (like "massacre denial") and break up echo chambers. They touted their prolific posting on social media sites ("500 times more posts than the State Department!"), their significant paid advertising budget of \$2.5 million, and their use of influencers. However, they admitted that they have only been targeting friendlier countries (Europe and the United States) and did not offer evidence of effectiveness. They did mention that they are planning a future campaign in Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf that should launch soon.

The Israelis welcomed a working group to discuss ways to cooperate on the use of Artificial Intelligence, digital messaging writ large, and research/analytics. We said we would support a continued conversation on the working level that we can continue via the Israeli Embassy.

While we would support this working group, we are concerned that the Israelis are missing the forest for the trees and are making a major strategic error in writing off their reputational damage. We recommend continuing to press the Israelis on this issue at the highest levels. If we move forward with this working group, we hope this can be a place for open and candid conversations along these lines.