**Diplomacy has no place for Norris' skewed world view**

Faulty judgment and anti-Israel bias mean David Norris is unfit to stand for Ireland's presidency, says Bruce Arnold

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David Norris is not a suitable person to stand for election to the office of president of Ireland. He has poor judgment. He has not been completely upfront about his personal relationship with his one-time lover, Ezra Nawi.

His errors have become a woeful embarrassment, compounded by his determination to continue campaigning. The Republic's electorate has shown a singular blindness about him, including the extraordinary arguments put forward in support of consensual sexual activity between older men and boys.

Poor judgment, however, is of much more serious remit. It concerns, in particular, the serious set of world problems that have as their axis and focus the Middle East conflict between Israel and the surrounding Muslim Palestinian people.

The Republic's involvement in Israeli issues is disproportionate. Human rights issues should be more evenly spread. Israel - a democracy surrounded by dictatorships - should be less Ireland's concern than Syria, Saudi Arabia or Libya.

The relief campaigns for Gaza are part of active support for human rights campaigning and are specific to countries opposed to Israel. By adopting this approach, Ireland has become a tool of Left-wing agitation. A major contributor to the disproportion is Senator David Norris. His partisanship borders on the disgraceful by demonising Israel and defending Israel's neighbours.

At the joint Oireachtas committee on foreign affairs (October 8, 2009), Norris gave a misleading account of Hamas rockets into Israel having ceased. They had not.

At the committee's November 13 meeting, Norris described Operation Cast Lead (the Israeli military move into Gaza) as falsely justified. Hamas rocket attacks on Israel had "all but ceased'' at the end of the previous year, he said.

Yet in the 44 days between November 5 and December 18, Hamas launched 203 rockets and 133 mortars at southern Israel, eight attacks per day, escalated up to Christmas Eve to 66 rockets and 81 mortars, 18 attacks per day. Israeli went into Gaza on December 27.

Norris was recorded last November, in a private note, describing Gaza as "not the Warsaw Ghetto, but there are some parallels to the Warsaw Ghetto''. It is unthinkable that such a biased view of this most intractable and long-lasting of world problems should become the official and highly public view of the Republic's head of state.

This consistent and disproportionate view of Israel's place in the Middle East can be better understood now that we know more about Norris's former partner, Nawi.

The mention of Nawi by Norris at the last meeting of the foreign affairs committee was a gratuitous one. He told members: "Mr Ezra Yitzhak Nawi is in jail at the moment. It is his birthday today. He will be in for a few days, but he is well. He has been in contact with me and he appreciates the support of this committee.'' It was as if Nawi had gone on holiday.

Norris could have told more about Nawi and, in so doing, made plain his own views on this man - important then, but much more important now, given his presidential aspirations.

Nawi's life and career remains a singular example of Norris's lack of judgment. Nawi took the law into his own hands on the issue of consent in under-age sexual acts.

Norris is an honourable man. His record is honourable on the issue of adult same-sex relationships, playing a significant part in the decriminalisation of adult homosexuality in the Republic.

There is, however, a degree of self-obsession that relates directly to his own sexuality. Presented overtly in interviews, statements and speeches, it raises questions about the suitability of his candidacy.

Two exceptional presidencies - Mary Robinson's and Mary McAleese's - have extended the role's political remit. This cannot be withdrawn.

The Republic's constitution is very restrictive, requiring government approval for presidential statements. But custom and practice have changed things.

How will Norris respond to restraint over his tongue?

And does Ireland really want personal sexuality and an arguably very biased interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict added to the presidential agenda?

I think not.

Read more: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/news-analysis/diplomacy-has-no-place-for-norris-skewed-world-view-16031038.html#ixzz1Zi6LYP6G>