

# Sacred Mantras

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THE PALESTINIANS are planning something thoroughly obnoxious: they intend to apply to the UN for statehood.

Why obnoxious? Any Israeli spokesman (not to mention spokeswoman) will tell you readily: because it is a “unilateral” move. How dare they proclaim a state unilaterally? How dare they do so without the consent of the other party to the conflict - us?

A stickler for detail might ask at this point: “But was the State of Israel not proclaimed unilaterally?” Our state, it may be remembered, was declared by David Ben-Gurion and his colleagues on May 14, 1948, without asking anyone.

But who would dare to compare?

Furthermore, these dastardly Palestinians are going to the UN General Assembly, trying to circumvent the UN Security Council where the US can block them with its veto. Dirty trick!

But just a moment! Was the State of Israel not proclaimed on the basis of a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly? To be precise: resolution 181 of November 29, 1947, on the partition of Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state?

As a matter of fact, this resolution is still in force. It served as the centerpiece of Israel’s Declaration of Independence, and serves now as a basis for the Palestinian demand that the State of Palestine be accepted as a full-fledged member of the United Nations.

But again, how can one compare?

IN SHORT, the Palestinians must be condemned for their impertinent effort to resort to “unilateral” action. Binyamin Netanyahu says so. Barack Obama says so. Hillary Clinton says so. Angela Merkel says so. It has become a mantra.

One more mantra. It might have been thought that the Israeli-Palestinian arena is so full of mantras, that there is no room for more. But there always is.

Shlomo Avineri, a much respected Zionist professor, has dredged up one of the oldest. In a recent article entitled “Narratives and Truth” he claimed that there are two narratives about our conflict, but only one truth. The truth consists of incontestable facts.

For example: there are several narratives about the UN partition resolution, but only one truth. As it so happens, this truth coincides with the Israeli narrative, which has become a sacred mantra.

It goes like this: in 1947, the Zionist leadership accepted the UN partition plan, and the Palestinian Arabs rejected it. Instead, they attacked the Jewish community in the country and were later joined by the regular armies of the neighboring Arab states. They wanted to throw us into the sea. They lost the war and paid the price.

Facts? Incontestable? Well. . .

IT IS indeed a fact that the Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan – formally. Many Zionist leaders objected, but

were persuaded by David Ben-Gurion to agree to the official acceptance. However, in several secret meetings Ben-Gurion made it clear that the partition borders were unacceptable and must be rectified at the first opportunity. The minutes of these meetings are there for all to read.

The other side of the mantra – “the Palestinian Arabs rejected” – is more complex. There was no democratically elected Palestinian Arab leadership. In the 1936-39 Arab revolt, the Arab leadership – such as it was - was destroyed, partly by the British but mostly by the foremost Palestinian leader, the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husseini. He had most of his competitors killed off.

During World War II, Hajj Amin fled to Nazi Germany and the rest of the “leaders” were deported by the British. After the war, the discredited Hajj stayed abroad. A distant relative of his headed the so-called “Arab Higher Committee”, which was unelected and had shallow roots among the population. There was no effective Palestinian leadership in existence.

No one asked the Arab Palestinians whether to accept or reject anything. If they had been asked, they would probably have rejected partition, since – in their view - it gave a large part of their historical homeland to foreigners. The more so, since the Jews, who at the time constituted a third of the population, were allotted 55% of the territory – and even there the Arabs constituted 40% of the population.

The governments of the Arab states rejected partition, but they certainly did not represent the Palestinian Arabs, who were at the time still under British rule (as were we).

As a matter of fact, during the war there was no effective united Palestinian Arab leadership, nor was there anything even remotely resembling a united Palestinian fighting force.

One can interpret these facts as one wishes – but they certainly do not paint a clear picture of “the Zionists accepted, the Palestinians rejected”.

Yet this mantra is being repeated endlessly in newspaper articles, TV talk-shows and political speeches as self-evident truth. Prof. Avineri is only one of a legion of Israeli propagandists to repeat it.

ANOTHER MANTRA parading as the incontestable truth is that the 750,000 original Palestinian refugees left their homes in 1948 voluntarily, after being requested by the Arab leadership to do so, “in order to clear the way for the advancing Arab armies”.

Any thoughtful person hearing this must come to the conclusion that it is utter nonsense. No advancing army would want to remove a friendly population. Quite the contrary. Needless to say, not a shred of evidence for this contention has ever been discovered. (There may be some doubts about local events during the conquest of the Arab parts of Haifa, but they do not change the broad picture.)

This mantra is compounded by the idea that in war, all the

people on the losing side forfeit their country, their homes and their property. This may have been so in Biblical times, but in modern times it does not reflect international law or common morality.

There may be many different opinions about how to put an end to this tragedy. The Palestine refugee population has grown to over five million. The landscape has changed completely. Very few people, even among Palestinians, believe in a mass return of refugees. But this does not change the fact that the mantra sounds hollow. It is not even good propaganda anymore.

A NEW mantra is now gaining ground. Binyamin Netanyahu put it in simple words: “the Conflict is Insoluble”.

Many respected figures, including prominent university professors, now repeat it daily.

I am reminded of a late friend of mine, Samuel Merlin, a member of the first Knesset, who once took part in a public debate with Professor Yehoshafat Harkabi, a former chief of army intelligence. At the time – the era of euphoria between the 1967 and the 1973 wars – Harkabi was a raving Arab-hater (after 1973 he repented and became a determined peace activist).

When his turn came to answer Harkabi’s arguments, Merlin said: “I respect Professor Harkabi very much, but in order to utter such views you don’t need to be a professor, you can be anyone on the street.”