

Israel and the Reconquista of Language

For quite some time, now, Israel has been out of the headlines. There's been so much else going on in the Middle East and in the wonderful world of Islam. Among the dizzying vicissitudes, in Iraq and Syria we've had nonstop news about many different little wars, involving Sunnis and Shi'a, and regime supporters and regime overthrowers, and various endangered minorities (non-Muslim or non-Arab) – Christians and Alawites and Kurds and Yazidis in the mix, and everyone, including insufficiently-fanatical Sunnis, under attack by ISIS, while ISIS itself attracts hundreds of thousands of foreign volunteers to its not-inconsiderable caliphate carved out of northwestern Iraq and southeastern Syria, and that caliphate still stands, despite repeated hopeful predictions from Washington of its imminent demise. In Egypt, Mubarak was toppled and replaced by Muslim-Brotherhood Morsi, who in turn was toppled by a *secularisant* Al-Sisi, and during these ups and downs, Egypt's Copts have endured levels of torment that varied directly with the level of Islam in the government. In Libya, Qaddafi was overthrown with Western help, but instead of becoming a peaceable kingdom, the country he once ruled with an iron fist then descended into a chaos of warfare among different factions and militias, some based on their city of origin (Misrata, Benghazi, Zintan), others distinguished according to tribe or politico-religious ideology, and to this tripolitanian *tohu-va-bohu*, with two different "Libyan governments" now sitting in Tobruk and Tripoli, can be added the Islamic State, which has just opened a branch office in Sirte.

The fact of so much other news driving Israel from the front pages does not mean that the war against Israel has disappeared. The Slow Jihadists of the Palestine Authority

(*quondam* PLO) continue to be supported by the U.N, and by the E.U., while the Fast Jihadists of Hamas have both Iran and the Islamic State in their corner. Jews are still attacked – more than two dozen Jewish civilians have been stabbed to death in the last few months – and just the other day, Hamas promised a new campaign of putting bombs on Egged busses. But without minimizing this continued violence, the Arab threat Israelis now face is simply not at the same level as was that posed by the massed might of several Arab armies – the most important were always those of Egypt and Syria – that in 1973 and 1967 and 1948 made war on the Jews of Israel. Israel is not at the moment facing that kind of danger: the Syrian military has, after four years of civil war, simply deliquesced, and the Egyptian army is more interested in destroying Hamas tunnels than in going to war against Israel, for Al-Sisi's men understandably have little appetite for sacrificing Egyptian men, money, and materiel yet again for an "Arab" cause.

While Israel has a breathing spell, it should work to improve its *hasbara* – public diplomacy, public relations, propaganda. It has to be more vigilant about the terms of the debate. The first phrase to go should be "Palestinian people." Prior to the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War, no Arab leader, diplomat, intellectual, anywhere used that phrase; they always spoke about "Arab refugees." It only began to be employed after the military defeat in June 1967, when it became clear that the Arabs would, before attempting another military assault, have to soften up Israel, isolating it diplomatically, and making the world forget that the Arabs started that war, and the one in 1948, long before the "Palestinian people" came into existence. From 1967 on, Arab propagandists have been involved in the "construction-of-the-Palestinian-identity" project, creating a "people" by promoting a word from geographic adjective ("Palestinian"Arab) to ethnic noun ("Palestinian"). This sleight-of-word contributed mightily to the invention of the "Palestinian people" – a "people struggling for its legitimate rights" and doing it "in Palestine, where it lived

since time immemorial." To start with, in its counter-campaign, Israel should use every occasion to bring up Zuhair Mohsain's admission to the Dutch newspaper "Trouw" in 1974 about the propagandistic value of this fictive "Palestinian people":

The Palestinian people does not exist. The creation of a Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel for our Arab unity. In reality today there is no difference between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese. Only for political and tactical reasons do we speak today about the existence of a Palestinian people, since Arab national interests demand that we posit the existence of a distinct "Palestinian people" to oppose Zionism.

And Netanyahu, who is sensitive to language, should make it known that from now on, the Israeli government will officially refer not to the "Palestinian people" (as it has so heedlessly done in the past) but only to the "Palestinian Arabs." And that will remind the world that the "Palestinians" are just one part of the Arab people, the people more generously endowed than any other, possessing 22 states and 14 million square miles of territory. But Israel won't achieve that desirable result unless its own leaders and diplomats and journalists agree among themselves to stop using the phrase "Palestinian people." Make clear that that phrase is not neutral but highly tendentious.

Second, Israel should hold up the word "Occupied" – as used in the phrase "occupied West Bank" or "occupied territories" or still worse, "occupied Arab lands" – for inspection. For the word "occupied" is being used to suggest that Israel has no claim to the "West Bank" or Gaza other than the temporary one of being military occupant. One thinks in this regard of "Occupied Berlin," "Occupied Vienna," "Occupied Paris," "Occupied Japan" – in these designations, the territory in question is under the control of an outside power or powers,

that control has been won through military conquest, and the claim to that territory is understood to be temporary, based solely on that military occupation. But Israel's claim to Gaza and the "West Bank" is not based on the fact of military occupation. These territories are properly thought of as unallocated parts of the Palestine Mandate, and the provisions of that League of Nations' Mandate still apply. The Mandate for Palestine was created by the League of Nations for the sole and express purpose of creating the conditions for the establishment of the Jewish National Home; the territory assigned to that Mandate included Gaza and what would later be called the "West Bank." The fact that the Jews did not end up in possession of Gaza and the "West Bank" at the end of the 1948-49 war did not change the legal status of those territories; Israel's claim to them rests on the Mandate itself (and let's not forget that there were other Mandates leading to the creation of Arab states, a British mandate for Iraq, a French mandate for Syria and Lebanon); that legal claim was not extinguished but remained, and Israel's military conquest of those territories in the Six-Day War *did not create a new claim, but did allow Israel, coming into possession by force of arms, to finally exercise that prior claim to those territories based on the Mandate.* And when Israel voluntarily gave up its claim to Gaza – for reasons of intelligent self-interest – that had no bearing on Israel's continued claim to the "West Bank."

Instead of continuing to accept this use of the word "Occupied," the Israeli government ought to make a fuss every time that word is used by others – foreign leaders or diplomats, U.N. personnel, BBC announcers and New York Times columnists – but a well-informed fuss, a fuss that will remind people of the provisions of the Mandate for Palestine, which undergird the Israeli claim to the territories it won in 1967. Eventually, by dint of repetition, some will begin to grasp the point being made, and others, who may still refuse to accept the point, at least will be forced to discuss the

issue of what the word “occupied” means and why Israel has a point about its misapplication that cannot be easily dismissed. Force others to look at, to study, to discuss, the terms of the Mandate for Palestine. And that discussion will, for Israel, constitute at least a partial victory.

Third, and finally, the Israelis should make sure always to use the word “Jihad” to describe the war that has been made on them even before the Jewish state was declared in 1948. In the past, it may have made some sense not to use that word. Two major Muslim powers – Turkey and Iran, that is Kemalist Turkey, and Iran of the secularizing Shah – were unofficial allies of Israel. There was an intelligent capitalizing on anti-Arab feeling among both Turks and Persians. Why needlessly antagonize these regimes, the Israelis felt, or cause them trouble in maintaining their covert alliances with Israel, by reminding their Muslim subjects of the duty of “Jihad”? But the situation now is different. Turkey’s Kemalists are out and Erdogan’s real Muslims are in, and in Iran the Shah’s secularist *ancien regime* has been replaced by Khomeini’s epigones, fanatical Shi’ites all. There is nothing to be gained by not starkly presenting the war against Israel, truthfully, as a “Jihad.” And since some (not all, not even most, but some) Europeans have become sufficiently alarmed at their own situation, that is, the internal threat from their own burgeoning Muslim population, to have undertaken the study of Islam on their own (their governments being of no help in this matter), and have to recognize that a “Jihad” is being waged against them, too, anything that can be done to further the understanding of a commonality of interest and a sharing of the threat, between Europe and Israel, or among Europe, Israel, and the rest of the Infidel world, because they are all engaged in the same war of self-defense, against the same enemy, making war on them for the same reasons – can only be salutary.

This Reconquista of the lexical battlefield will be long and

arduous. But for Israel, and for Infidels everywhere, there is no other choice. And now I've listed – correctly, I hope – a few places to start.

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