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## Nakba myth stands in the way of peace

Thursday, 26 May 2011

According to the standard mythology of the Arab-Israeli conflict, found in most university campuses, on the pages of the New York Times and the Globe and Mail, and in diplomatic talk-shops, settlements are the major obstacles to peace. End the post-1967 "occupation" and create an instant Palestinian state, say these all-knowing analysts, and the conflict will be over.



Gerald Steinberg

In contrast, every year, on May 15, the Palestinians and numerous allies send the world exactly the opposite message. This date marks the end of the British occupation in 1948, the founding of the modern State of Israel, and the invasion by five Arab armies marking the start of the War of Independence, in which 6,000 Jews – one per cent of the entire pre-state population – were killed.

In other words, it's not the 1967 war and its consequences that are the prime causes of the conflict, but the continued Arab rejection of Israel, after 63 years. Therefore, it would appear that all of the eager peace makers and negotiators that begin (and end) with the scenario of creating a Palestinian state and forcing Israel back to the pre-1967 (actually post-1948) armistice lines are wasting their time.

The word "nakba" is Arabic for catastrophe, and in the Arab/Palestinian narrative, Jewish sovereign equality in the Land of Israel was and remains a disaster. In the nakba fabrication, 4,000 years of Jewish history in this land are erased and replaced with a Europe and western conspiracy to settle Jews in "Arab/Muslim Palestine." The Jews, aided by the West, stole the land and evicted the Arab inhabitants.

The Arab rejection of the UN Partition Plan (the 1947 version of the "two-state solution"), and the wars designed to push the Jews into the sea are also removed from the nakba tale. Instead, the artificial images of hundreds of thousands of innocent refugees being forced to leave their land, and a non-existent "right of return," remain firmly implanted among Arabs, adding fuel to the conflict. (The fact that an approximately equal number of Jews in Arab nations were forced out and absorbed successfully into Israel is also erased in the fictitious history.)

The United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNRWA), ostensibly designed to help settle the refugees after the 1948 war, perpetuates both their miserable status and the rejectionism that sustains the violence. In addition, a number of European-government funded non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as Badil, as well as radical church groups, such as Sabeel and Kairos, are among the main promoters of this fictitious history. The goal of these "right of return" organizations, which were also supported for many years by Liberal Canadian governments, is to force Israel to accept millions of people claiming to be descendants of the refugees, thereby replacing the Jewish majority with Arab domination.

The nakba myth provides the foundation for the recent violence that took place across Israel, and in many ways, mimicked the Arab attacks on all fronts 63 years ago. In the north, along the Lebanese and Syrian borders, Palestinian sought violent confrontations with Israeli forces. Similarly, along the southern border with Gaza, Hamas members sought to use the cover of "demonstrations" to deploy explosive devices for use against Israeli defence forces. (The Jordanian border remained quiet, demonstrating Amman's understanding that friction with Israel would result in unacceptable instability in Jordan.)

And the recent terror attack in Tel Aviv – using a truck as a weapon – reminded Israelis, and any outsiders capable of overcoming the conventional wisdom, that this incitement results in murderous attacks.

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For all of these reasons, it's clear that a realistic peace process must first tackle the nakba mythology, which has been allowed to fester and expand for so long. Instead of continuing to fund the destructive 1948 myths purveyed by UNRWA and Badil, negotiators and diplomats need to channel these resources into constructive education programs for Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims.

In particular, this means teaching of basic facts – that the Jewish people have an undisputed historic connection with this territory – with the right to an independent state – and that the violent Arab rejection of compromise and the two-state solution in 1947/8, as well as the later wars, were responsible for the “suffering of the refugees.”

Israelis have shown that when these principles are accepted, they will be ready to make the difficult compromises for a real peace agreement.

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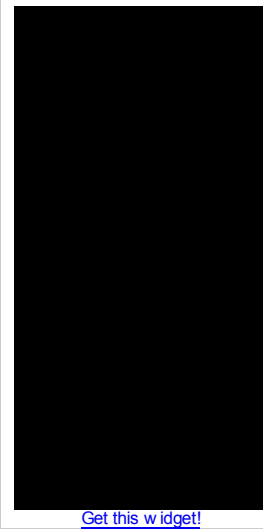
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