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THE MEANING OF WORDS

SOME INTELLECTUAL satisfaction may perhaps be derived from the failure of one's adversaries in debate to sustain their argument by truth, and their consequent recourse to semantic obfuscation, factual omission and distortion, and downright fabrication. We are confronted, as a constant example, by the fantastic myths of the Arabs on their relationship to Palestine. Recent reports of a possible second appearance by Yasser Arafat at the United Nations recall – for example – his outrageous first performance there nine years ago.

Speaking of Palestine – a country laid bare and waste under the indifferent rule of a series of Moslem empires and largely denuded of population until the modern Zionist revival – Arafat said *inter alia*:

“Arab people were engaged in farming, spreading culture throughout the land for thousands of years, setting an example in the practice of freedom of worship, acting as the faithful guardians of the holy places of all religions.” Every word a separate lie.

King Hussein of Jordan is no better. Some years ago (as one example) he recorded a talk for distribution among Christian churchmen abroad, warning them of the dangers of Israeli rule to their Holy Places in Jerusalem – which, he said, Jordan had guarded faithfully for hundreds of years. (A note for innocent readers: “Jordan,” itself born in 1946, had control of the Holy Places during its illegal 19-year occupation of East Jerusalem.)

Unfortunately, intellectual satisfaction is small recompense for the manifest success enjoyed by myths and lies when they are sufficiently persistent and skillfully presented.

NOR IS THERE much pleasure in exposing the hollowness of the subtle semantics with which some Israeli intellectuals and academics bolster the foundations of the Arab myths. The latest example was provided last week in an article in *The Jerusalem Post* (November 30), where the writer proposes “joint rule” with Jordan on the “West Bank.” The “West Bank” being disputed territory, and the rights and wrongs of the dispute being grounded in history, the author does indeed invoke history to support his proposal.

What is the history of the “West Bank” – and of Jordan? The forces of the eastern Palestinian Kingdom invaded Western Palestine in 1948 (financed, armed and trained by Britain and led by British officers) in an unprovoked act of aggression frankly aimed (in concert with the other Arab states) at achieving the extinction of then new-born Israel. Israel survived; but Samaria and Judea (including east Jerusalem) were occupied by Transjordan, which then proceeded to annex the territory (and renamed itself Jordan). The annexation naturally did not confer any proprietary rights on Jordan.

In 1967, King Hussein, using Judea and Samaria as a springboard, launched a new aggression in combination with the other Arab States. It was preceded by the noise of exhilarant celebration in the streets of all the Arab capitals, where the people had been promised that the destruction of the infidel Jewish State was at hand. Hussein's attack was preceded also by fervent pleas from the Israeli government not to join in the war.

Faced with the threat to its existence, Israel succeeded in thwarting the declared, and obvious, Arab purpose. It repelled the Jordanian (and other) forces and put an end to Jordan's illegal occupation.

This famous history is encapsulated by the author of the *Post* article in the following statement:

“Since Israel seized the West Bank from Jordan in June 1967, logic and law require that the fate of the region be determined in conjunction with Jordan.”

THE PICTURE THUS conveyed of an unaccountable (and unprovoked) seizure of Jordanian territory by a presumably predatory Israel, which harmonizes with the central theme of Arab propaganda, is made the more explicit by the use of “West Bank” as though that were the name of Judea and Samaria.

“West Bank” is the political term applied by the Transjordanians in order to erase the Jewish relationship with the provinces they had raped.

There are notable historic precedents for this ploy. Judea was “abolished” by the Roman Emperor Hadrian and renamed Palestina after he had crushed the Bar-Kochba rebellion in 135 C.E. Austria was renamed Ostland by Hitler when he snuffed out its independence in 1938.

THE ARTICLE IN the *Post* goes beyond the mere use of the term West Bank. It flaunts its implicit disinformation. It refers to “the West Bank of the Jordan River (or Judea and Samaria, as the Israelis call the region).”

As Israelis call the region? Are these not the time-hallowed names of these provinces in Eretz Yisrael, known to all, just as Galilee is Galilee, the Sharon is the Sharon, and Jericho is Jericho – or, if you will, just as Professor Yoram Dinstein, the author of the article, is Yoram Dinstein and not an anonymous rector of Tel Aviv University.

As Israelis call the region? Was Antoninus Palacentinos in the sixth century an “Israeli,” or Henry Baker Tristram in the nineteenth, or Ronald Storrs, “Governor of Jerusalem and Judea” in the twentieth? The editors of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the world's geographers, the British mandatory government, the United Nations Commission – indeed everybody before the Arab aggression of 1948 – all Israelis?

Admittedly many people, innocent of motive, use the term West Bank out of sheer ignorance or because, having fallen into error, are afraid to admit it. The rest however use it precisely for its political connotation – to emphasize their support and to encourage support of Jordan's claim to “rights.”

SO MUCH FOR the semantics of obfuscation and misdirection. They provide the underpinnings for Dinstein's central assumption – that “the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the disposition of the West Bank of the Jordan River.”

How can this possibly be? The Arab states attacked Israel in 1967 when the “West Bank” of the Jordan River was in their own hands and had been since 1948. During the 19 years the Arab states, including Jordan, had maintained a thorough economic and diplomatic war against Israel, fuelled by a campaign of vicious propaganda, laced with anti-Semitic themes – in their newspapers and their literature, in their schools and

universities, and throughout the world. This “cold” war was punctuated by repeated acts of local violence on all Israel’s borders.

And 1948 itself – when the Arabs, offered the “West Bank” and more, refused to accept the partition and launched annihilatory war on new-born minuscule Israel?

Of course the disposition of Judea and Samaria is *not* the core of the conflict. Its core is the disposition of the whole of Western Palestine which the Arabs hoped in 1948 and 1967 and hope no less today to wrest from the Jews – by eliminating the sovereign State of Israel. The core of the conflict is their refusal to recognize the Jewish State’s existence in any shape.

Before 1967, Professor Bernard Lewis summed up the Arab attitude: “They [the Arabs] are agreed that Israel must be destroyed, but not on how this should be accomplished. The official Arab demand is no longer for immediate destruction of Israel, but for its reduction to the frontiers laid down in the 1947 partition proposals – obviously as a first step towards its disappearance” (*The Middle East and the West*, 1964, p. 125).

Only, now the “first step” would have to be the “disposition of the West Bank of the River Jordan.

THERE ARE, it is true, moderates among the Arab leaders and thinkers. They are the ones who envisage peace – but with *the Jews of Israel*. Not with the State of Israel – which must disappear, while the Jews will be accepted as a religious minority, perhaps with some form of autonomy, within the Arab polity. Articulate exponents of this view are, for example, Dr. Butros Ghali (Egyptian Minister of State) and former Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil. Khalil actually gave expression to it in a lecture *at Tel Aviv University* four years ago.

Significantly these moderates insist that they do not want war with Israel but hope and expect the “change” in Israel to come from within – evidently through Israel’s giving up its sovereignty and the adoption by Israeli Jews of the Arab view of their “proper place” in the Arab world.

But – first of all – let the Jews delude themselves that they will have peace (and retain sovereignty) if only they will agree now to the “disposition of the West Bank of the Jordan” to its Arab “owners.”