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UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Distr.
GENERAL

A/33/543
21 December 1978

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-third session
Agenda items 30, 77 and 100

THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979

Letter dated 20 December 1978 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to my letter of 16 November 1978 (A/33/376) in which I registered my Government's strong objection to the release of a United Nations Secretariat publication entitled The Origins and Evolution of the Palestinian Problem, Part I: 1917-1947 (ST/SG/SER.F/1). 1/ At that time, I expressed regret that the United Nations had been drawn into the pattern, so characteristic of certain régimes, of rewriting history according to the transient interests of a political body.

Since submitting that letter, the second part of the publication in question, covering the period 1947-1977, 2/ has been released (with the same document symbol as Part I). It is no less objectionable. Taken in conjunction with the first part, it is clear that this pseudo-scientific "study" is designed to give currency, under the emblem of the United Nations, to a completely misleading version of the history of the Arab-Israel conflict.

Put briefly, that version has it that the League of Nations Mandate over Palestine was illegal, and all subsequent events, including the establishment of the State of Israel, are null and void. This wholly distorted view is set out in almost as many words in article 20 of the so-called PLO's basic document, the "National Covenant", and it forms the underlying thesis of the United Nations Secretariat publication in question. It completely ignores the Jewish people's inalienable rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in its homeland, the land of Israel.

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.I.19.

2/ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.78.I.20.

Thus, what purports to be a scholarly study, supported by what appears to be a scientific apparatus, is no more than a crude piece of propaganda. In a systematic way, it is marked by deliberate distortions of fact, by the inclusion of selective and tendentious material and by the use of techniques, including semantic devices and highly slanted terminology, foreign to the accepted norms of serious historical writing, but well known to the art of propaganda. It seeks to achieve its purposes as much by what it consciously omits as by what it actually says.

I attach a schedule of illustrations to substantiate these charges. The illustrations are in no sense exhaustive, because every page of the study is replete with methodological deficiencies. But the conclusion is inescapable: the means and machinery of the United Nations have once again been misused, in this case to produce a totally unhistorical work for the purpose of political warfare against a Member State.

This propaganda, prepared by a unit within the Secretariat, is being disseminated by the United Nations, to propagate the views of a murderous organization engaged in international terror, while masquerading under the banner of a national liberation movement. Thus, by producing this publication, the United Nations is serving the cause of international terror, not the cause of international peace. In the process, it has misused international funds, compromised the integrity of the Secretariat and exposed the Organization to severe criticism.

I have the honour to request that this letter and the attached schedule be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda items 30, 77 and 100.

(Signed) Yehuda Z. BLUM
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Israel
to the United Nations

ANNEX

Schedule of illustrations

A. Deliberate distortions of fact

1. In part II of the "study" (p. 45) it is stated that:

> "During the months preceding the end of the Mandate /in 1948/, Jewish forces had moved to occupy key cities and areas in the territory designated for the Arab State ..."

David Ben Gurion is quoted in such a way as to imply that Tiberias, Haifa and Safad were cities "designated for the Arab State" under General Assembly resolution 181 (II).

They were not.

2. On page 4 of part I, it is alleged that "millions of Palestinians" were "forced into exile" as a result of the Arab-Israel wars since 1948.

This is a blatant distortion of fact.

The United Nations estimate for Palestine refugees in 1948 is 726,000 (United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, final report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East, 1949, (part 1, p. 22). The United Nations figure for persons displaced in 1967 is 525,000. a/ Those figures are generally regarded as grossly inflated, but even if they are accepted for the sake of argument, it cannot be asserted that "millions of Palestinians" were "forced into exile". (The statement is also highly tendentious on other grounds - see below.)

3. On page 54 of part II, it is stated that in 1967 "the great majority of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were made refugees".

This is patently false.

According to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 1967-1968, b/ an estimated 400,000 persons are said to have crossed from the West Bank into Jordan. The same report indicated that "between 40,000 and 45,000 registered refugees are believed to have left Gaza since the (1967) hostilities".

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a/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-third Session, Supplement No. 13 (A/7213), p. 1.

b/ Ibid., pp. 2-8.

This gives a total of 445,000 persons at the most. Again, this figure is generally regarded as grossly inflated, and, for example, Israel's best estimate of the total number of persons who left the West Bank during and after the 1967 hostilities is less than 250,000. However, even if the United Nations figure is accepted, also for the sake of argument, the assertion on page 54 of the "study" is demonstrably false, since in the next paragraph on the same page the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip prior to the 1967 war is given as 1,400,000. By no stretch of the imagination can even 445,000 be termed as "the great majority".

4. On page 56 of part II, Security Council resolution 242 (1967) of 22 November 1967 is said to call "on Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 war borders".

This is a deliberate falsification.

Paragraph 1 (i) of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) affirms that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East should include the application of two principles, the first of which is "withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict". As is well known, the resolution consciously avoids calling for withdrawal from "the territories", or "all the territories".

As it happens, the complete text of 242 (1967) is quoted on pages 55 and 56. To assert two paragraphs later that Israel was required to withdraw "to the pre-1967 war borders" cannot be an act of negligence. It can only be a crude attempt at fraud.

5. The same device is used on page 50 of part II, where paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948 is quoted:

> "The refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date."

In the very next paragraph this becomes the "specific establishment" of "the right of peaceful return of the Palestinians" to their homes.

B. Selective and tendentious material

1. The overwhelming opinion of international lawyers has always endorsed the validity of the Mandate system in general and the Palestine Mandate in particular. None the less, the so-called study asserts the opposite on the strength of only two authors. One of them is Henry Cattan, who is quoted at length (part I, pp. 35-37). The publication does not disclose his credentials as an Arab lawyer from Jerusalem who in the 1930s and 1940s was a member of the Palestine Higher Arab Committee, which was led by the notorious Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, wanted after the Second World War as a war criminal for his active collaboration with the Nazis.

Cattan, as a member of the Palestine Higher Arab Committee, presented the Arab case to the United Nations in 1947. It would have been understandable if he had been cited as representing one side to the conflict. But to present him as an impartial authority on international law, and to give him the final word on the validity of the Palestine Mandate, is sheer intellectual hypocrisy. The publication brings just one other authority: W. T. Mallison, long known for his anti-Zionist and anti-Israel views and for his advocacy of the Arab cause. Not by accident it was he who penned the introduction to Cattan's book, Palestine and International Law (1973).

2. On page 80 of part I, it is claimed that 56,000 Jews lived in Palestine in 1918. A careful observer will note that this is also the critical date used by PLO. The reason is simple: during the First World War, many thousands of Palestinian Jews were expelled or starved, reducing the Jewish population by over one third, from about 85,000 in 1914 to 56,000 in 1918. The anonymous authors of this publication clearly found it more convenient to cite the latter figure.

3. Similarly, on page 71 of part II, Jewish-owned land is said to have accounted in 1917 for 2 1/2 per cent of the total land area of Palestine, and in 1947 for 6.2 per cent. The unstated implication is that as late as 1947, some 94 per cent of the land was Arab-owned. However, since half the land was, in fact, state-owned, passing from the Ottoman to the Mandatory authority, the implication is false.

4. With seeming neutrality, the introduction to part I observes that the "partition plan (of 1947) did not bring peace to Palestine" and "the Palestinian Arab state envisaged in the partition plan never appeared on the world's map" (p. 3). Similarly, in part II, the reader is informed that "the United Nations partition resolution did not provide a solution to the Palestine problem, and violence increased" (p. 39).

This is the height of tendentiousness, since the authors remain studiously silent about who torpedoed the partition plan, and why "violence increased". The fact is that all the States members of the Arab League in 1947 categorically rejected General Assembly resolution 181 (II). Those States formally reserved their complete freedom of action and then set out to destroy that resolution by the illegal use of force from the moment of its adoption. On 5 March 1948, on 1 April 1948 and again on 17 April 1948, the Security Council appealed for an end to the acts of violence in Palestine. The Arabs, within and without Palestine, openly defied those resolutions.

With the termination of the British Mandate over Palestine on 14 May 1948, the armies of seven Arab States illegally crossed the international boundaries of Mandated Palestine, in clear violation of the Charter of the United Nations and in breach of general international law.

The United Nations documentation of these historical events is unequivocal - see the annex of the letter of 12 December 1978 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the Secretary-General (A/33/488-S/12966).

5. On page 47 of part II, it is alleged that "the Israeli forces /in 1948/ were well manned and well trained ... they were well equipped with arms ...".

Arab pride may have necessitated this explanation of how the infant Israel Defence Forces could have routed the combined attacks of seven Arab armies aided by several Arab guerrilla and terrorist groups, but it is not history. The armament of the Israel side during the first months of the 1948 war was pitiful and at certain points and in certain areas the Israel forces reached the verge of collapse. What is true is that they were well motivated, fighting for the very life of the Jewish community and for the existence of their State. It is also true that the Jewish community benefited from their military experience during the Second World War, having fought in the Allied ranks, while large parts of the Arab community in Palestine sympathized - and not always passively - with the Nazis.

6. On page 48 of part II, naive mention is made of the United Nations Mediator's call in the summer of 1948 for "another indefinite truce, which was ordered by the Security Council on 15 July". The terms of Security Council resolution 54 (1948) of 15 July 1948 are conveniently not spelled out. The reason is that that resolution cited Israel's readiness to prolong the truce, and noted that "the States members of the Arab League have rejected successive appeals of the United Nations Mediator, and of the Security Council in its resolution 53 (1948) of 7 July 1948". The resolution determined that "the situation in Palestine constitutes a threat to peace within the meaning of Article 39 of the Charter of the United Nations", ordered the Governments and authorities concerned to desist from further military action, and declared that failure to comply would require immediate consideration by the Security Council with a view to such further action under Chapter VII of the Charter as may be decided upon by the Council.

7. On page 4 of part I, it is asserted "from 1948 there have been wars and destruction, forcing millions of Palestinians into exile".

This sweeping statement already mentioned in section A above as factually incorrect, is also tendentious on at least three grounds. A less biased history would have pointed out:

(a) Since 1948 there have not merely been "wars", but a series of wars of aggression launched by Arab States against Israel.

(b) As a result of those wars, Arabs in Palestine as well as a similar number of Jews in Arab lands left their homes.

(c) Since the Arabs launched the wars, they must bear the responsibility for the consequences, including the creation of two refugee problems, one Arab and one Jewish.

8. On page 53 of part II, there is a tortuous description of Israel's admission as a Member of the United Nations, the implication being that it was conditional on the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 181 (II) of 29 November 1947 and

194 (III) of 11 December 1948. This old canard is a leaf straight out of the Arab propaganda manual. However, as is well known, there is nothing in the Charter of the United Nations about "conditional membership", and hence the implication is completely unwarranted and does not merit serious consideration.

Moreover, the description of Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1949 is deliberately misleading on three further counts. First, it attempts to claim legal benefits deriving from General Assembly resolution 181 (II). Since, however, that resolution was overtaken by the events of 1947-1948 and effectively frustrated by the Arabs at that time, they are precluded from invoking in any form its benefits - see letters of 22 November 1978 and 12 December 1978 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the Secretary-General (A/33/386-S/12933 and A/33/488-S/12966).

Secondly, it is suggested through some obscure form of logic that the reference to General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in the resolution admitting Israel to membership of the United Nations, "carried implications of the Israeli acknowledgement of the continuing existence of a Palestinian Arab entity". This is sheer nonsense. Israel could not acknowledge the existence of a non-existent Palestinian Arab entity, whose creation under the terms of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) the Arabs had formally rejected and prevented by the illegal use of arms. Moreover, General Assembly resolution 194 (III) is an integral whole, made up of 15 operative paragraphs, of which paragraph 11 provides that "the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date ...". The same resolution also called upon "the Governments and authorities concerned ... to seek agreement by negotiations ... with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them". Hence, individual repatriation was subject to three conditions: (1) practicability, (2) a willingness to "live at peace", and (3) the recognition that the settlement of the refugee problem constitutes part of the "final settlement of all questions outstanding" between the Arab States and Israel.

Thirdly, in the same passage on Israel's admission to the United Nations, General Assembly resolution 194 (III) is said to have "preserved the right of return of Palestinian refugees ...". However, the resolution mentions neither a "right of return" nor "Palestinians". As shown above, it merely indicates the conditions under which some refugees may be permitted to return, without prejudice to Israel's rights as a sovereign State.

9. On page 50 of part II, the "main provisions" of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) are listed as calls to establish the Palestine Conciliation Commission, to have Security Council action for the demilitarization of Jerusalem, and to have the refugee problem dealt with in terms of paragraph 11 of the resolution.

Again this information is both selective and tendentious.

Most historians would agree that another of the resolution's "main provisions" was, as mentioned above, its call in paragraph 5 upon the Governments and

authorities concerned "to seek agreement by negotiations ... with a view to the final settlement of all questions outstanding between them".

Similarly, impartial historians would surely have seen fit to inform the reader that the Arab States unanimously voted against General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Once again the "study" is faithful to the Arab position of trying somewhat belatedly to derive advantage from certain provisions in General Assembly resolution 194 (III), taken in isolation and out of context from a 15-paragraph resolution which they opposed at the time of its adoption.

C. Unhistorical techniques

One of the prime characteristics of spurious historiography is the backwards projection of events, ideas and phenomena in an attempt to bolster a predetermined conclusion. A gross example of this illegitimate technique occurs on page 71 of part II where it is alleged that "in 1917 there existed a Palestinian entity possessing two of the major attributes of a nation -- a people rooted for centuries in a defined territory". In simple terms, this is meant to suggest that in 1917 a Palestinian people and a country of Palestine existed, and these are two of the unspoken assumptions throughout the entire study. Both are utterly false.

(a) In 1917 there was no such thing as a separate "Palestinian people". The Arab nationalist movement had barely begun, and particularist national movements in the Arab provinces of the former Ottoman Empire were virtually unknown. The dominant view among local Arabs at the end of the First World War was that the Arabs living in Palestine were part of the Syrian people and the greater Arab nation. Indeed, in 1919 and 1920, Arabs in Palestine objected to the Palestine Mandate, inter alia, on the grounds that they should not be separated from their brethren outside the area of the Mandate.

On 2 July 1919, the General Syrian Congress adopted 10 resolutions, of which the eighth stated:

> "We ask that there should be no separation of the Southern part of Syria, known as Palestine, nor of the littoral western zone which includes Lebanon, from the Syrian country. We desire that the unity of the country should be guaranteed against partition under whatever circumstances." (King Crane Commission Report in Foreign Relations of the United States: Paris Peace Conference 1919, vol. 12, p. 781)

On 31 May 1956, Ahmed Shukairy, then a Saudi Arabia delegate to the United Nations and later head of the so-called PLO, told the Security Council:

> "It is common knowledge that Palestine is nothing but southern Syria." (S/PV.724, para. 44)

In March of 1974, President Assad of Syria stated:

"Palestine is a basic part of Southern Syria." (The New York Times, 9 March 1974)

Last year, Zuhair Muhsin, head of the PLO's so-called Military Operations Department, told the Dutch daily newspaper Trouw:

> "There are no differences between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese ... We are one people. Only for political reasons do we carefully underline our Palestinian identity. For it is of national interest for the Arabs to encourage the existence of the Palestinians against Zionism. Yes, the existence of a separate Palestinian identity is there only for tactical reasons. The establishment of a Palestinian state is a new expedient to continue the fight against Zionism and for Arab unity." (James Dorsey, quoting Zuhair Muhsin in Trouw, 31 March 1977)

Likewise, as recently as 17 November 1978, Yassir Arafat said at a rally held at Beirut by the Lebanese Ba'ath Party that "al-Assad said that Palestine is the southern part of Syria. I told him that Palestine is southern Syria and Syria is northern Palestine". (Voice of Palestine, 18 November 1978)

(b) The reason why the Arabs in Palestine thought in these terms is that a political entity called Palestine had never existed. The term "Palestine" (Falastin in Arabic) was used throughout the centuries for a geographical area of uncertain limits, and not for a "defined territory". Under the Ottomans the area went through a bewildering series of administrative redivisions, and for the most part was governed from Damascus.

(c) It is also false to claim that Arabs in Palestine in 1917 were "a people rooted for centuries" in that country. A good part of the Arab population was made up of recently settled Bebouin from east of the River Jordan. Egyptians who came to Palestine in the nineteenth century in the wake of Ibrahim Pasha were also a significant element. Others could trace their not very distant roots to Morocco, and still others were recent arrivals from the Balkans, the Hauran and even Czarist Russia (Circassians) who came in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It is interesting to note in this connexion that Circassian is still spoken in some "Arab" villages in the north of Israel.

Moreover, far from being "deeply rooted", sizable numbers of Arabs were leaving Palestine by the end of the nineteenth century, in common with others from the region, and the problem of emigration was discussed by the "First Arab Congress", held in Paris in 1913.

D. Semantic devices and highly slanted terminology

1. Unrestrained use is made throughout the study of such devices and terminology for the purpose of guiding readers to the desired conclusion.

2. Thus, for example, there is much talk of Palestinian "resistance", "rebellions" and "uprisings". On the other hand, the "study" knows only of Jewish "violence" and "terrorism".

The tone is set in the introduction to part I (p. 3):

> "The result was mounting resistance to the Mandate by the Palestinian Arabs, followed by resort to violence by the Jewish community as the Second World War drew to a close."

So, in 1947, when the Arabs in Palestine refused to co-operate with the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), and the Jews did so willingly, it was, according to the publication, "the Zionist terrorist groups" who assured UNSCOP of safety (part II, p. 10)!

3. References to the Jewish case are carefully qualified. Again, the tone is set in the introduction to part I (p. 3), where the Zionist leaders during the First World War are said to have

> "pressed on a claim of 'historical connexion' /sic/ since their ancestors had lived in Palestine two thousand years earlier before dispersing in the 'diaspora' /sic/".

4. By contrast, emotive formulations, such as "the Palestinian resistance ... to foreign colonization" are never put in quotations.

5. A consistent and fraudulent attempt is made, with obvious intent, to portray Arab-Jewish differences as a confrontation between an "indigenous" Palestinian people and an external force called zionism. Yet again, the tone is set in the introduction to part I (p. 3).

6. One of the more remarkable formulations in the "study" is to be found on page 54 of part II, where figures (of dubious accuracy) are given for the Palestinian Arabs in 1967 in "Palestine", which is said to include "the areas controlled by Israel". In its context, this phrase can only mean territories which have been under the sovereignty of the State of Israel since 1948.

E. Conscious omissions

1. Part I of the "study" deals with the period of the British Mandate. It is accompanied by four maps. But one vital map is missing. It is the map of Palestine under the British Mandate, which until 1946 included the territory now called Jordan. The map is omitted because it would have shown that an Arab State,

indeed, a Palestinian Arab State, has already been in existence for 32 years, covering almost four fifths of the area of mandated Palestine. To avoid this minor inconvenience, the expedient was adopted of suppressing an essential map.

2. Much of the first part of the "study" is devoted to an attempt to show that the Balfour Declaration, in which the British Government expressed its support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people", was issued over the heads of the Arabs and in violation of promises made to them, particularly by Sir Henry McMahon to Sherif Hussein of Mecca. Despite the extensive treatment of this dubious theme, one crucial letter, written by McMahon himself and published in The Times (London) on 23 July 1937, is ignored, because it would of necessity have undermined the authors' propaganda purpose.

In that letter, McMahon wrote:

> "Many references have been made in the Palestine Royal Commission Report and in the course of the recent debates in both Houses of Parliament to the 'McMahon Pledge', especially to that portion of the pledge which concerns Palestine and of which one interpretation has been claimed by the Jews and another by the Arabs.
>
> "It has been suggested to me that continued silence on the part of the giver of the pledge may itself be misunderstood.
>
> "I feel, therefore, called upon to make some statement on the subject, but I will confine myself in doing so to the point now at issue - i.e., whether that portion of Syria, now known as Palestine, was or was not intended to be included in the territories in which the independence of the Arabs was guaranteed in my pledge.
>
> "I feel it my duty to state, and I do so definitely and emphatically, that it was not intended by me in giving this pledge to King Hussein to include Palestine in the area in which Arab independence was promised.
>
> "I also had every reason to believe at the time that the fact that Palestine was not included in my pledge was well understood by King Hussein."

3. In the year 1919 the Emir Faisal, representing the Arab national aspirations at that time, signed an Agreement of understanding and co-operation with Dr. Chaim Weizmann, then representing the Zionist movement and later the first President of Israel. In the preamble to that Agreement the parties gave expression to their conviction that:

> "the surest means of working out the consummation of their national aspirations is through the closest possible collaboration in the development of the Arab State and Palestine".

The first article stated:

> "The Arab State and Palestine in all their relations and undertakings shall be controlled by the most cordial goodwill and understanding, and to this end Arab and Jewish duly accredited agents shall be established and maintained in the respective territories."

In other words, the Arab leader of the period, who represented the Arabs at the Peace Conference of Versailles, spoke of an Arab State on the one hand, and of Palestine - as a Jewish State - on the other. Since the contents of this Agreement were apparently unpalatable to the authors of the "study", it is not mentioned, except for one obscure foot-note in the back of part I, questioning the authenticity of the Agreement (p. 82, note 7).

4. On page 48 of part I, there is what purports to be a description of "the revolt of 1929". The reader is informed that "the clashes between Palestinians (sic) and Jews resulted in 220 dead and 520 injured on both sides". However, no mention is made of one of the central events of 1929, namely, the unprovoked Arab massacre of the Jewish community of Hebron, in which scores of defenceless Jewish theological students were murdered and dismembered, while many others were tortured and maimed.

5. On pages 55 to 56 of part I, the Peel Commission report of 1937 is quoted at length with regard to the Arab case. What is entirely omitted is the equally lengthy section of the Peel report on zionism and Jewish rights, which in the original document extended over three closely printed pages. Inter alia, the report explained:

> "While the Jews had thus been dispersed over the world, they had never forgotten Palestine. If Christians have become familiar through the Bible with the physiognomy of the country and its place-names and events that happened more than two thousand years ago, the link which binds the Jews to Palestine and its past history is to them far closer and more intimate. Judaism and its ritual are rooted in those memories. Among countless illustrations it is enough to cite the fact that Jews, wherever they may be, still pray for rain at the season it is needed in Palestine. And the same devotion to the Land of Israel, Eretz Israel, the same sense of exile from it, permeates Jewish secular thought. Some of the finest Hebrew poetry written in the Diaspora has been inspired, like the Psalms of the Captivity, by the longing to return to Zion.
>
> "Nor has the link been merely spiritual or intellectual. Always or almost always since the fall of the Jewish State, some Jews have been living in Palestine. Under Arab rule there were substantial Jewish communities in the chief towns." (Peel report, pp. 8-9)

None of this appears in the so-called "study".
