

Palestinian Authority President Flunks History

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has reiterated that he won't recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and he's claiming support for that position from an unlikely quarter: former U.S. President Harry Truman. But a closer look reveals that Truman's words are being misrepresented.

In a Feb. 3 interview with the *New York Times*, Abbas was asked about recognizing Israel as a Jewish state—something both the Israeli government and President Barack Obama have said the Palestinian Authority needs to do.

"This is out of the question," Abbas said.

To justify that position, Abbas handed the *Times* interviewer a packet of documents, the first of which was a statement by Truman from 1948 in which the words "Jewish state" were crossed out and replaced by "state of Israel."

Someone who didn't know better might think Abbas had scored a point. But in fact, the document in question does not provide evidence of American opposition to a Jewish state.

Here's how that cross-out came about.

On May 15, 1948, just before David Ben-Gurion announced the establishment of the state of Israel, Truman decided he would extend U.S. recognition to the state as soon as it was proclaimed. A senior aide to the president, Clark Clifford, telephoned Eliahu Epstein (Elath), who was the state-to-be's chief representative in Washington. Clifford told Elath to submit a formal request for recognition as soon as possible.

Elath wrote up the request during the minutes before the state was proclaimed. He did not yet know what its name would be. So

he typed "the Jewish state." He gave the document to his assistant, Zvi Zinder, who ran outside to get a taxi to the White House.

Moments after Zinder left, Elath's secretary rushed in to say she had just heard on their shortwave radio that the state had been declared, and it would be called the state of Israel. Elath sent his secretary after Zinder and caught up to him at the gates to the White House.

Elath didn't want to delay recognition by having Zinder return and retype the letter. So he had instructed his secretary to make the correction by hand. Hence the famous cross-out to which Abbas referred. It was not a political or ideological statement; it was the equivalent of a typographical correction.

But none of this is a secret. Ambassador Elath described it in his book *The Struggle for Statehood: Washington 1945-1948*, which was published back in 1979, and it has appeared in other books since then. It's required reading for scholars and diplomats who have a serious interest in America-Israel relations. It's difficult to believe that Abbas and the PA aides who helped assemble his packet of clippings are unfamiliar with these well-known facts.

On the other hand, history has never been Mr. Abbas' strong suit.

Last year, he told a Lebanese television station that David Ben-Gurion and the Zionist movement collaborated with the Nazis.

"I challenge anyone to deny the relationship between Zionism and Nazism before World War II," he said. He claimed to have authored 70 books on the topic.

So far, only one of those 70 books has been published. That 1983 book, based on Abbas' Ph.D. dissertation at Moscow's

Oriental College, argued that fewer than 1 million Jews were killed by the Nazis—and that those Jews were the victims of a secret partnership that Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders formed with the Nazis in order to have a basis for demanding a state.

“Since Zionism was not a fighting partner, it had no escape but to offer up human beings, under any name, to raise the number of victims, which they could then boast of at the moment of accounting,” Abbas wrote. “Having more victims meant greater rights and stronger privilege to join the negotiation table for dividing the spoils of war once it was over.”

The historical record can play an important role in addressing the conflicting claims by Arabs and Israelis about territories, refugees and other issues. But that record is ill-served when Holocaust history and American history are twisted into political cannon fodder by those who are less interested in the facts than in scoring points against Israel.

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