

Shattering Israeli myths

Two books on Israel have recently appeared that are "must" reading for those interested in the complex Mideast. Particularly so for Jewish readers, who will find the works both enlightening, disturbing and even frightening.

The first is *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, (Pantheon Books) by Simha Flapan, who died in 1987 just after his book was completed. Flapan was national director and later chief of Arab affairs for Israel's socialist Mapam party.

For readers who have been brought up to see the Arab-Israeli struggle as a simplistic cowboys and Indians battle of good Jews vs. evil Arabs, Flapan's book will be a bombshell. A welcome one, at that. It's time the utterly false view of the Mideast promoted by Leon Uris in that turgid piece of propaganda, *Exodus*, and the racist *Haj*, be demolished by the truth.

Flapan tackles head on what he calls the the key myths that have been promoted about the founding of Israel: 1) That Israel accepted and the Arabs rejected the original UN peace plan; 2) that Palestinians fled voluntarily from their homes; 3) that Arab states united to expel the Jews from Palestine and that the Arabs, until now, have refused to seek peace.

The author details the campaign in which many Palestinians were purposely driven into exile. Equally interesting, he reveals the long record of secret collaboration between Israel and Jordan. Both conspired to prevent a Palestinian state. Flapan makes the intriguing assertion that in 1956, when Israel, France and Britain were secretly plotting to invade Egypt, David Ben Gurion proposed that Israel partition Jordan with Iraq and annex southern Lebanon.

Flapan carefully reviews Zionist policy in the 1940s. He shows how Zionist leaders first agreed to settle for a smaller state than they wanted, and then use salami tactics to get more and so create a larger Israel. This is, of course, precisely what has happened. Ironically, Israel is now unwilling

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to deal with the PLO because current Israeli leaders fear the Arabs will use the same strategy as Israel — taking a slice at a time.

Flapan's book challenges almost every notion popular with partisans of Israel. Those in the Canadian Jewish community who read this seminal work will find it hard to return to their comfortable old thinking. Some of Flapan's claims may well be questionable, or unproven. Still, his book is one of the most important on Israel in the last decade.

Note also Flapan's reference to Toronto's own Ben Dunkelman, who, as an Israeli officer in the 1948 war, courageously refused army orders to drive the Arab civil population out of Nazareth.

The second book, *Israel's Fateful Hour* (Harper & Row) is by Prof. Yehoshafat Harkabi, a scholar I have met on two occasions. Harkabi was also chief of Israeli military intelligence and a general. Formerly a hawkish adviser to Menachem Begin, Harkabi had the intellectual guts to change his mind.

The former general is no quivering liberal or a lover of the Arabs. But Harkabi insists that Israel is quickly heading toward "national suicide" unless it gives up the West Bank and Gaza. If not, Harkabi predicts Israel may have to adopt apartheid and live in a state of increasing strife and brutality. There is no way Israel can escape the surging Arab birthrate which will, in 12 years, make Jews a minority in greater Israel.

Many other Israelis make these same arguments. Coming from a former hawk and head of military intelligence, however, they have added weight.

Harkabi has told me forcefully there will be war unless Israel pulls out of the occupied lands.

For me, the most interesting part of Harkabi's book is the section on Begin and Yitzhak Shamir's right-wing Likud alliance. Most North American Jews are happily unaware of the religious and racist fanaticism that seethes in the parties of Israel's far right — the ones who hold a powerful grip on the present government.

Judaism in Israel, says Harkabi, has been dangerously radicalized: "Politically, in supporting extreme nationalism and annexation of the West Bank; socially, in fostering hostility to Gentiles in general and Arabs in particular."

Friends of Israel will find Harkabi's description of the extreme right most troubling.

Harkabi asserts that Israel and the Arabs have switched roles. The Arabs are now becoming more reasonable and realistic while the Jews are becoming radical and unrealistic.

More writing on the wall from a man who ought to know. More required reading for people interested in the real Mideast.

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