Lies, libels and the justification of terror

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Nov. 29 marked the 75th anniversary of United Nations Resolution 181, which called for the creation of two states, a Jewish state of Israel and an Arab state of Palestine. The Jewish community accepted those terms, and declared the State of Israel, while the Arab community refused, and launched a war that they then lost. Over time, however, Palestinians developed their own version of the ‘big lie’ in the form of the ‘*nakba*’ myth, a retelling of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war in which the would-be genocidal Arab armies that failed in their mission to eliminate the Jewish state are reimagined as the helpless victims of a horrible catastrophe (or ‘nakba,’ in Arabic) of destruction and displacement. The legend of the nakba is at the heart of much of modern anti-Zionism.

Right on cue, on Nov. 30 the United Nations General Assembly voted to officially commemorate the founding of the State of Israel as a nakba. U.N. resolutions are not legally or morally binding, and they obviously cannot create truths. But they do lend a sheen of credibility to an otherwise ridiculous claim. Such a resolution makes it easier for the big lie to spread, because people can rely on and appeal to the GA’s ‘authority’ on the matter without having to defend or even care about the details of such a heinous accusation. And once a lie has become officially acceptable to speak in the halls of power, it is only a matter of time before it gets picked up and amplified by popular culture. This one certainly did not take long.

On Thursday, Netflix began streaming the Jordanian film ‘Farha,’ which purports to focus on the experiences of a young girl during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The hero watches as Israeli soldiers, portrayed as inhumanly cruel, brutally and graphically murder innocent Palestinian families, including children. While the film claims to be ‘based on’ true events, the director has admitted that it is not factual, and that these scenes did not actually occur. But that does not mean they will not have a very real-world effect on anti-Jewish hate and violence, because many will watch the movie, and few will read the disclaimer.

There are two reasons to publicly correct the record on the nakba. First, it is simply not true. There are primary sources, from the Jordanian side, attesting to the fact that the vast majority of Arabs who left their homes did so voluntarily, or under orders from the *invading Arab armies*, not the invaded Israelis. Many left confident that the combined armies of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt would quickly overwhelm the tiny Jewish state. As the Jordanian newspaper *Filastin* reported, ‘The Arab States encouraged the Palestine Arabs to leave their homes temporarily in order to be out of the way of the Arab invasion armies.’ But as another refugee quoted in another Jordanian newspaper, Ad Difaa, explained that ‘The Arab government told us: Get out so that we can get in. So we got out, but they did not get in.’

Second, it is incredibly dangerous. In 1976, Mahmoud Abbas said that ‘The Arab armies entered Palestine to protect the Palestinians from the Zionist tyranny but, instead, they abandoned them, *forced them to emigrate and to leave their homeland,* and threw them into prisons similar to the ghettos in which the Jews used to live’ (emphasis added).

By 2011 his recollection had changed in direct proportion to the rising popularity of the nakba, so that he now claimed ‘Zionist forces expelled Palestinian Arabs to ensure a decisive Jewish majority in the future state of Israel, and Arab armies intervened.’

This year, he went so far as to use the commemoration of the nakba—the same commemoration the United Nations has now embraced, as an excuse to reaffirm his government’s ongoing commitment to ‘pay for slay’: The Palestinian Authority policy under which terrorists who kill Israeli or American citizens are celebrated as heroes and monetarily rewarded.

Last week, two bomb attacks in Israel killed one 16-year-old boy, Aryeh Shechopek, and wounded 14 other people. This week, the terrorist and his family will begin receiving their murder-stipend from Abbas’ government—the same government that pushed for the U.N. resolution.

In a world of rising antisemitism, demonstrably tied to anti-Zionism, it is dangerous for the United Nations to give continued credibility to lies. It is also disheartening for Netflix to give a propaganda film like this a platform to spread inciteful misinformation under the guise of historical fiction. Fake news can have real consequences, and facts do matter — even when the country that is being lied about is Israel, and even when the people who end up getting hurt are Jews.