Um-Shmum Revisited

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Um-Shmum. This is the first thing that came to my mind when I received the following text message from a friend yesterday: “Have I ever mentioned that I have contempt for Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations?” Of course, he was referring to [yet another statement from the UN blaming Israel](http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-un-stoking-terror-while-palestinians-want-to-destroy-us/) for the horrific terror attacks that we are suffering. Terror attacks which, over the past four months, have claimed an innocent life every four days. Innocents like [Dafna Meir](http://www.timesofisrael.com/slain-mother-dafna-meir-lauded-for-heroics-fighting-off-stabber/), a mother of six, slaughtered in her own home, in front of her children. Innocents like [Shlomit Krigman](http://www.timesofisrael.com/slain-woman-23-remembered-as-beloved-sweet-and-full-of-light/), a beautiful young woman, just starting out in life, butchered while shopping in a supermarket near her grandparents’ house. Innocents like my father, [Richard Lakin](http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/teaching-as-an-act-of-love/), a retired elementary school principal, civil rights activist and grandfather of eight who was brutally shot and stabbed while riding a public bus home from a doctor’s appointment.

Um-Shmum (where um is the Hebrew acronymic pronunciation for “U.N.”, and the “shm“-prefix signifies dismissal, contempt or irony) is a phrase coined by the Israeli Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion sixty years ago as a response to Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, who had stated in the previous cabinet session that if it hadn’t been for the UN resolution of 1947, the State of Israel would not have been founded. According to Sharett’s account in his diary, Ben-Gurion shouted: “Not at all! Only the daring of the Jews founded this country, and not some Um-Shmum resolution.”

A month later, on Israel’s 7th Independence Day, Ben-Gurion gave a speech during the main event of the IDF parade which he concluded with the famous phrase: “Our future does not depend on what the goyim [i.e., the international community] will say, but rather on what the Jews [i.e., the Israelis] will do.”

Well, Ben-Gurion was wrong; dead wrong. Actions are important, very important, but they only make up half of the story. Words have meaning too; and words can kill. Words are being used to incite to hatred, violence and terror. Words are being used to indoctrinate, radicalize, encourage and instruct young people to kill.

When the Secretary General of the United Nations justifies the vicious murder of innocent civilians, chalking it up to “Palestinian frustration,” we need to be worried about his words, very worried. It would be a grave mistake to dismiss them with a simple Um-Shmum.