



Dehumanizing the Other: Muslim Arab Antisemitism Today¹

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Antisemitism in Arab societies and in Iran is the most potent and menacing form of hostility to Jews that exists anywhere in the contemporary world. It has become thoroughly embedded in recent decades (especially since 2000) in the body politic of Islam. The reams of hate literature against the Jews constantly appearing in mainstream Arab newspapers and magazines and the anti-Semitic propaganda pervading Middle Eastern TV channels has reached staggering proportions. Anti-Semitic discourse is prevalent in the speeches of important government officials, rampant in religious sermons, in radio broadcasts, on Islamic websites, and has a massive presence in caricatures across the Arab world. Such visual depictions invariably deform and dehumanize Jews, who are continually presented as dirty, hook-nosed, money-grubbing, vindictive, scheming, and cruel. The extremely hostile visual and verbal stereotyping so common in Arabic newspapers, magazines, and books today has undoubtedly helped to poison public opinion throughout the Middle East in a dangerous and alarming way.

This is especially true when it comes to the grotesque representation of Israeli and American Jews, to whom the ugly character traits of trickery, greed, brutality, and inhumanity are almost universally applied. In recent decades, the practice of presenting Israelis in particular as the incarnation of malignant evil – as aggressors, usurpers, sadistic occupiers, corrupters, infidels, murderers and barbarians, has indeed become standard.

The Jewish state is not merely a “colonialist” entity, another face of Western racism or (more malevolently) a Siamese twin of Nazism – its crimes far surpass all the atrocities produced by the Third Reich. The endlessly repetitive demonization of Israeli Jews as “Nazis” has rammed home a vicious hate message to millions of Arabs in the Middle East. Hence it is hardly surprising that the sentiment produced by such crass caricatures should result in a popular song entitled “I Hate Israel,” which only a few years ago was a smash hit in Cairo, Damascus, and East Jerusalem.

It has become “normal” over the past four decades to see Israeli leaders from Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan to Ariel Sharon, Ehud Barak, and Ehud Olmert stigmatized as monsters in Nazi

¹ A shorter and slightly different version of this article appeared in the ADL site and can be found in this address: http://www.adl.org/main_Arab_World/Analysis.htm.

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regalia, hands dripping in blood or bathed in a halo of swastikas. Popular and influential mass media bring this kind of incendiary incitement daily into countless Arab homes; TV stations, including Al-Jazeera, reinforce it on a regular basis the image of a demonic Israel that not only criminally murders defenseless Arab children, but deliberately spreads drugs, deadly viruses, vice, and prostitution into the Arab world or tries to poison Palestinian food and water.

The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the most notorious anti-Semitic fabrication in history, has long been a best seller in the Arab world. In 2002 it was “dramatized” for Egyptian television in a multimillion-dollar blockbuster series, *Horseman without a Horse* that was screened during Ramadan. No less appalling, a year later, was the hideously anti-Semitic Syro-Lebanese TV series *Al-Shattat* (the Diaspora) which included revolting scenes reconstructing the “blood libel” calumny as if it were a normal Jewish ritual practice. Indeed, the medieval European myth that Jews murder Christian children and use their victims’ blood for Passover matzot is extensively propagated and widely believed in the Arab world. No less sinister is the growing trend towards Holocaust denial, which has even been elevated by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the equivalent of a State doctrine. It is worth recalling that Iran’s ally, Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, in welcoming the late Pope John Paul II to Damascus five years ago, publicly vilified Israelis and Jews for killing “all the principles of divine faiths [inspired by] the same mentality of betraying Jesus Christ and torturing Him, just as they had tried to commit treachery against the Prophet Muhammad.”

Such anti-Jewish toxins are not merely a by-product of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They derive from traditional Islamic sources as well as bathing in longstanding anti-Semitic stereotypes, images, and accusations of European Christian origin. The tone is particularly vicious, scurrilous, and often blood-curdling in its incitement to violence. The following words of the prominent Saudi Sheikh Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sudayyis, imam at the Ka’aba mosque in Mecca (the most important shrine in the Muslim world), are representative of thousands of such sermons regularly broadcast across the Arab world: “the Jews of today [are] evil offspring, infidels, distorters, of [God’s] words, calf-worshippers, prophet-murderers...the scum of the human race whom Allah cursed and turned into apes and pigs...”

Neither peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, nor the Oslo agreements with the Palestinian Authority have seriously modified the scale, intensity, or the unmatched malevolence of these anti-Semitic images, motifs, and libels. They indicate that the Arab world has still not reconciled itself to the existence of Israel, almost sixty years after its birth. More than that, to judge by the sheer volume of such venomous anti-Semitic manifestations (especially in Egypt) we can



say that levels of hostility have *increased* rather than diminished over time. Particularly sobering is the fact that Arab theologians, intellectuals, artists, and professional people are so prominent in promoting racist stereotypes of this kind. One finds editors-in-chief of establishment newspapers, authors of best-selling books, deans of university faculties, and other academic “experts” on Israel, Judaism, and the Jews at the forefront of such bigotry. In other words, Arab Antisemitism is not only a matter of government manipulation, Islamist demagogy, organized propaganda, social backwardness, or raw, primitive hatred – though all of these elements are indeed present. It has cultural and intellectual legitimacy. Moreover, the ubiquity of the hate and prejudice exemplified by this hard-core Antisemitism undoubtedly exceeds the demonization of earlier historical periods – whether the Christian Middle Ages,



the Spanish Inquisition, the Dreyfus Affair in France, or the Judeophobia of Tsarist Russia. The only comparable example would be that of Nazi Germany in which we can also speak of an “eliminationist Antisemitism” of genocidal dimensions, which ultimately culminated in the Holocaust.

Both Nazi and Arab Antisemitism have an eliminationist element – the Nazis focused on race and the Arab anti-Semitic propaganda on the state and nation. The similarities between Nazi and Arab Antisemitism (especially but not only the Islamist variety) are indeed striking. In both cases, the aim is to eliminate the Jews – whether as a race, a nation, a state, or a collectivity of any kind. There is the same fanaticism, paranoia, and belief in an all-embracing Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. This parallel is less than surprising when we recall that modern Arab nationalism and Islamism historically coincided with the rise of the Nazis to power in the 1930s. It is often overlooked that the Arab world already seventy years ago, was deeply infected by the Nazi anti-Semitic poison. In Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine, Hitler’s example was widely admired, and Arab identification as well as collaboration with German National Socialism was extensive. One important example of such influence was the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. Another notorious case was that of the Palestinian Arab national movement, led by Haj Amin al-Husseini – a close ally of Hitler and a rabid anti-Semite.



Today the poisoned fruit of this Nazified Arab Antisemitism has fully ripened in societies as different from one another as Iran, Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and such diverse terrorist organizations as the Palestinian Hamas, Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad, or Al-Qaeda. In all these cases, the jihad, an organized death-cult, totalitarian methods and hatred of the West (especially America) are inextricably linked to radical Antisemitism. The Islamists, in particular, are bent on a “final solution” that would eradicate the Jewish-Israeli “cancer” from the Middle East. This time it is not merely a command of the Führer, but of Allah himself, to be implemented by a never-ending jihad (holy war) to destroy Israel, Christianity, and the “infidel” Judeo-Christian West. Only Israel’s deterrent power (reinforced by that of the United States) holds these genocidal ambitions in check for the present. But, for how long?

Arab caricatures, it should be said, are especially revealing in this respect. Even more than with their Nazi models, the visual demonization of the Jews creates the preconditions for exterminating an “inhuman” world enemy. The cartoons, unabashedly stoke the flames of fear and hatred against Israel and the Jews (as well as the United States), suggesting that the extermination of these devils in human form would be moral and just. An in-depth analysis shows that the crudely graphic portrayal of sinister, furtive, bloodthirsty Jews is, like the Nazi if anything, more explicitly anti-Semitic than the anti-Semitic demonization regularly featured in the Nazi rag-*Der Stürmer* before 1945. The fact that the images of Jews are nowadays always wrapped in swastikas has heightened the repulsive effect – making them the embodiment of absolute evil.



Such unholy hatred which relentlessly strives for the elimination of Israel is all too apparent in Iran. President Ahmadinejad in December 2006 prophesied that “the Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated.” The Iranian leadership has not even attempted to disguise its “annihilationist” aims. When linked to the accelerating drive for nuclear weapons, the promotion of global terror, jihad, and martyrdom open up some frighteningly apocalyptic perspectives. The Iranian media no less than their Arab counterparts, systematically whip up Antisemitism, envisaging Israel’s demise as part of a major world conflagration over the destiny of mankind resulting in the victory of Islam. As in the Arab world, the Nazi Holocaust is simultaneously denied and evoked as a source of encouragement and motivation for wiping out the Jewish state.

What makes possible the combination of such illogical and seemingly irrational viewpoints is the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that has become so deeply rooted in the minds of millions of Muslims. Since the successful Iranian Revolution of 1979 led by the Ayatollah Khomeini, it has become an axiom of Shia Islam in Iran that the Jews control America and are aiming to destroy Muslims as part of their secret goal of world conquest. No less than in the predominantly Sunni Arab world, this paranoid vision feeds an intransigently ideological anti-Semitism which is organically tied to the Holy War against Israel and the West. The war against the supposed domination of the world by political Zionism becomes the cornerstone of an apocalyptic Arab and Muslim scenario that threatens to make mutual annihilation a self-fulfilling prophecy.