# The University of the Holocaust: On Anti-Semitism Now

For the Israelis, anti-Semitism is merely a nightmare. For the Palestinians, it's a catastrophe. If you believe, as I do, that the Palestinians' cause is just, nothing could be more depressing than to hear them spout the very stuff that guarantees they will never get an even break. The mad idea that the Jews have no right to exist is a potent intensifier of the almost equally mad idea that the State of Israel can somehow be eliminated. I say "almost" because a friend of mine in Australia recently presented me with a plausible case that the Middle East would probably be a more peaceful area if the State of Israel had never been founded. Like her argument that the Aborigines would have been a lot happier if the Europeans had never shown up, this contention was hard to rebut, except by rudely pointing out that we were both sitting in an Italian restaurant in Melbourne, history having happened.

But history might have happened otherwise, although in the case of the Jewish presence in Palestine you would have to go back beyond the 1850s (when the Jews were already a majority in Jerusalem) to somewhere near the beginning of the Old Testament, and equip the Canaanites with grenade launchers. To the perfect madness of the first idea, however — the idea that the Jews are candidates for extermination — no concessions are possible. Anti-Semitism is so obviously insane that no refutation of it should be necessary, and indeed after the Holocaust the feeling was widespread throughout the world that the whole demented notion had at last become an historical back number, like phlogiston or the belief that mirrors could leak lightning. Throughout the world: but not, alas, throughout the Arab world.

Why this should have been so is hard to unscramble at this distance, but briefly, and without too much distortion, it can be said that the Arab nations never studied at the University of the Holocaust. Their interests lay, not in Europe, but in the area containing the nagging presence which was already threatening to become a Jewish state. The Arab nations on the whole concurred with the British mandate's lethal reluctance to admit Jewish refugees into Palestine, and several of the Arab leaders saw nothing wrong with Hitler's determination that as many potential colonists as possible should be dealt with at source. One of the leaders, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, spent time in Berlin urging Hitler to get on with it. We should hasten to remember that another of the leaders, King Abdullah of Tansjordan — grandfather of the future King Hussein — was always a model of far-sighted tolerance, and quite saw the possibility of fruitful coexistence with the infidel incursion. But we should also remember that Abdullah paid for his liberalism with his life, in an early version of the price exacted from Anwar Sadat for even entertaining the idea of peace. It was the choleric Grand Mufti who set the tone. He had been reading the same Koran as Abdullah, but had reached different conclusions. Our own best conclusion should be that the Koran was not the book to blame. There were other books, borrowed from abroad, and one of them was that putrid old Tsarist forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

Remember the name, because it goes on cropping up throughout the bloody history of the area. (In Egypt, supposedly the most enlightened of the Arab nations, the state television system recently dramatised it as a TV serial.) The historian Golo Mann once said that Nazi-style anti-Semitism was a crime encouraged by bad literature, and literature doesn't get any more bad than The Protocols. But before we get to the written word, we should look at more substantive phenomena that might account for intransigence among Israel's enemies. There are plenty to consider. A year before he declared the Israeli state, David Ben Gurion was ready to accept a partition of Palestine: even though his resulting portion would be tiny, at least it would be independent. But when he realised that the Arab states would not recognize a Jewish state even if it were the size of a tennis court, he was ready for what was bound to happen when he made his unilateral announcement. The State of Israel was declared, and the Arab nations immediately combined to attack it.

One of the consequences was the flight of the Palestinians. In fairness to them, we should not mince words: the flight was an expulsion. The instrument of expulsion was terror. The nascent Israeli state already had an unfortunate heritage of terror, much of it due to the initiatives of Menachem Begin, a University of the Holocaust alumnus armed with the inflexible conviction that the only answer to the threat of overwhelming violence was to get your retaliation in first. When the tiny new state was attacked from all sides, his brainchild, the Irgun, teamed up with the Stern Gang to massacre almost 300 Arabs at Deir Yassin, and the exodus of the Palestinians understandably ensued. Though their disappearance suited Ben Gurion's purposes — already embattled on half a dozen external fronts, he would probably have lost the war if he had been forced to fight on an internal front as well — the Jews were suitably sorry at the time. But the Palestinians were sorry forever. We should not forget their grief.

The Arab nations, alas, forgot it immediately. With the honourable exception of Jordan, every one of them turned the Palestinians away, and not even Jordan has ever given them much beyond citizenship. There is enough oil money in the Arab nations to give every refugee a hotel suite with 24-hour room service. Instead, far too many of them have been obliged to remain in camps that are really display cases, so that they can testify with their desperation to Jewish inhumanity. The inhumanity was thought to be endemic in the Jewish race. Arab theorists believed that there was scientific literature to lend this contention weight. The Jewish leaders had already been startled to discover, as early as 1949, that The Protocols had been officially translated and printed in the Arab nations. With the rise to power of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, the bad literature became a driving force. As Amos Elon reveals in his invaluable book A Blood-Dimmed Tide, Nasser discovered in The Protocols a proof "beyond all doubt that 300 Zionists, each knowing the others, control the fate of the European continent and elect their successors from among themselves." He didn't say how successfully they had controlled the fate of the European continent when Adolf Eichmann was in charge of the train timetables, but what he did say is recorded in the official collection of Nasser's Speeches and Press Interviews. If Nasser was not precisely a madman, he was certainly no model of detached judgment when he sucked Hussein of Jordan into the 1967 war, thereby laying the West Bank open for occupation and the Palestinians to the second stage of their suffering.

The suffering might have been worse. If Israel, between 1967 and 1973, was fatally slow to realise that the Palestinians had fair nationalist aspirations, one of the reasons was that they seemed to be doing fairly well. Arabs in the Occupied Territories, as Arabs have always done within Israel itself, prospered economically to an extent that might have made the leaders of the Arab nations wonder why their own poor were quite so destitute. Luckily the anomaly could be put down to the continuing efficacy of the infinitely subtle international Zionist plot. Israel came so near to losing the 1973 war that Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan both had to resign in apology. It was the end of the old Labour Alignment's preponderance in government. Begin was at last allowed into the Knesset from which he had previously been excluded as if infected — which indeed he was — and the inexorable rise of the hardliners began. But even then, the settlement movement might have been slower to start if a bunch of PLO "moderates" had not attacked a defenceless school containing nobody except 22 Jewish religious students and murdered them all.

It was a crime encouraged by bad literature. The crime has gone on until this day, and it will continue to be a crime even if the Jews prepare a counter-crime of their own. Some would say they already have. On one occasion, a single Jew walked into a mosque and killed thirty helpless Arabs before his weapons could be disentangled from his ultra-orthodox beard. But no Israeli government, however keen on reprisals against terror, has yet proclaimed the desirability of killing any Arab it can reach. Hezbollah and Hamas both proclaim the desirability of killing any Jew, and there is nothing novel in the proclamation. For a quarter of a century before 1988, when Yasser Arafat finally recognized the state of Israel, it was the founding objective of the PLO to "liquidate" it. Losing people at a crippling rate for a country with such a small population, the Israelis had no reason to doubt that the word "liquidate" was meant in the Stalinist sense. In the last five years of suicidal attacks, Israel has lost almost half the number of people that died in the World Trade Centre. To inflict proportionate damage, Al Qa'eda would have had to burn down Brooklyn. Nearly all of the dead Jews were non-combatants going about their everyday lives, and no doubt that was what made them targets. Any Jew, anywhere. Hezbollah has killed Jews in that well-known centre of the world Zionist conspiracy, Buenos Aires. Where next? Reykjavik?

A week ago, shortly after Hamas' spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin finally met his rocket, some of our media representatives were impressed when one of his supporters promised that the Gates of Hell would now be open. For the Jews, those same gates have been open for a long time. People who hold the understandable belief that Jewish reprisals will create more Arab terror should be equally prepared to consider whether more Arab terror might not produce an effect on the Jewish side that we have not previously had to contemplate because they have so far been able to keep their own maniacs chained up. Out on the extreme, far beyond Ariel Sharon and even beyond Benjamin Netanyahu, there are ultras who would like to see every Arab dead. Yitzhak Rabin, the lost hero of Israel, was murdered by the Jewish equivalent of the Arab fanatic who killed Sadat, the lost hero of Egypt. Rabin always believed that the loudly racist Gush Emunim settlers on the West Bank were a threat to democracy. Sharon couldn't see it. By now he can, and those who loathe his ruthlessness might come to bless it when the time arrives for Jews to shoot Jews — as well it might, on the inevitable day when the last settlers are ordered out of the Occupied Territories. It wouldn't be the first time Jews had shot Jews. In 1948, when Ben Gurion ordered the Irgun to disarm, their response was to run a fresh supply of guns into Tel Aviv. Ben Gurion ordered that the ship should be attacked. Twenty of the Irgun were killed, and Begin ended up swimming in the harbour. Some optimists believed he had learned his lesson.

The University of the Holocaust had as many dumb graduates as clever ones. Nazi anti-Semitism was so awful in its irrationality that any contrary force is likely to be irrational as well. The only rational contrary force is called democracy, which conquers extremism by containing it. In answer to those who think Mel Gibson, lonely creator of The Passion of the Christ, might be Hitler reborn with a more photogenic hairstyle, it should be said that if he had wanted to produce a truly anti-Semitic film, he would have had the Jews on screen whispering in Hebrew about setting up a world conspiracy with money swindled from the Romans. Authentic Jew-baiters don't equivocate. In its classic form, anti-Semitism did indeed emerge as a by-product of Christianity. None of the abuse recently heaped on world Jewry by the ex-Prime Minister of Malaysia and the top Imam of Australia was not first heaped by Martin Luther. But Christianity finally got over it, mainly because the democratic states deprived Christianity of political power. In a democratic state, the passion of the Mel, whatever it might happen to be, must be tempered for rational ears if it is to open big on the first weekend.

The Mel's passion aside, however, we really do have fanatics of our own, preaching versions of The Protocols that differ from it only by substituting America as the source of all the world's evil — including, of course, the depredations of the Israeli state, which generate such universal anger that a bunch of young head-cases in Bali are moved to blow up a night club. In reality, they blew up the night club because they didn't like the way young Australians dance. I don't much like it either, but I don't think blowing their legs off is an appropriate cure. My opinion, which I assume most of the readers of this newspaper share, was not transmitted to me by a sacred text, although I suppose the teachings of Jesus were in on the start of it. In the world of today, any reasonable and widely shared opinion is the result of a long and complicated history of enlightenment culminating in liberal institutions, which we should be proud of and teach our children to revere, instead of favouring the fantastic theory that a regard for civilized values somehow exacerbates a conspiracy against the wretched of the earth.

It shouldn't need pointing out that the Bali bombers knew no more about the history of the Middle East than I know about quantum mechanics. But it does need pointing out, because so many Western intellectuals are incapable of reasoning their way to any conclusion that does not suit their prejudices. There are limits, however, to what they can say unopposed, and very definite limits to what they can do without legal sanction. With Islamic fanaticism as we now face it, no such restrictions apply. This is bad news for Islam in general, and for the Palestinians it is beyond bad news. There are many Palestinians who know this to be true. In the week after Sheik Ahmed Yassin's death, the Palestinian Authority issued an appeal for passive resistance that amounted to a repudiation of the suicide bombing. The question remains, however, of how much authority the Palestinian Authority exercises over the fanatics. Our own absolutist half-wits need to realise two things. Al Qa'eda would go an attacking the democracies even if the Palestinians achieved justice tomorrow. And the Palestinians will never achieve justice if they go on attacking Israel. Both crimes are abetted by bad literature, and to produce bad literature of our own adds fuel to the fire. To that extent, the seductive idea that we are all guilty is exactly right.

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