

Antisemitism, Historical and Contemporary

Why did Nazi Germany start World War II? There is a broad consensus among historians that the war broke out because the Nazi leadership wanted to gain control over Europe, and it believed that in order to do that it needed the supply of food and raw materials that could only be gained for Germany if it conquered the Ukraine and the Caucasus, after eliminating Poland and removing the threat of a two-front war by defeating Britain and France. There was little pragmatic logic behind this, because it is clear that they could have got all that by ordinary trade with the USSR – Stalin was eager to avoid war, and was willing to supply Germany with everything it needed. The real reason was ideological: Hitler and his followers believed that in order to control Europe, and beyond that, the danger of Bolshevism had to be removed. In the only memorandum he ever wrote himself, in August, 1936, directed to Göring and not intended for publication, Hitler laid out the economic conditions for a war within four years. That was essential, he wrote, because otherwise Bolshevism would conquer Germany and annihilate the German people (sic!). Bolshevism, he said, had as its aim the replacement of all the leading strata of human society with International Jewry. Bolshevism was, as he had said elsewhere, a Jewish project, and it was allied to the Jewish plutocracy that ruled America and the West, as he later said in his famous speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939. Clearly, then, World War II was motivated by an ideology at whose core was the belief in a world Jewish conspiracy. In other words, the war, with its 35 million dead in Europe alone, was in no small degree the product of an antisemitic ideology. To put it bluntly: 29 million non-Jews died, in part, because of antisemitism. That would appear to be a good enough reason to fight it today, seventy years after.

Since 1945, there have been four waves of antisemitism. The approximate dates are 1958-1960, 1968-1972, 1987-1992, and 2000 to the present. Analysis has shown that the motivations were different in each case, and in the third, the one starting in 1987, and the fourth, economic motivation was/is largely absent. That means that our traditional explanations that modern antisemitism always has something to do with economic downturns

are inaccurate. Political, economic, or theological crises can all be causes of a phenomenon that cannot be explained monocausally. Why is there antisemitism? Basically, because the Jews produced a civilization that differed in some central aspects from the civilizations around them. Monotheism may have been invented by the Egyptians during the times of Akh-en-aton, the Sabbath may originate in Babylon (the name shabbat-sabbatu is Babylonian), others may have tried to limit or abolish slavery, Hebrew social legislation may have precedents elsewhere, but only the Jews combined all these elements in a religious-ethnic-social civilization that developed over a long period of time. On that basis there developed a way of life, with changing, but clearly defined customs that solidified into laws sacralized by religious belief. Jews were/are certainly no better or worse than others, but they are/were different in the way they conducted their lives. Had they stayed in their hilly land, they would have been another peculiar oddity; but they spread. Everywhere the Jews went they carried their distinctive civilization with them, which marked them off against their environment. Crises of whatever source could cause this basically defenseless, well-known yet strange, minority, to be seen as the reason for the crisis, and therefore they were often subject to discrimination or attack, although, contrary to accepted wisdom, in most places at most times this did not happen and they were not persecuted. However, Jew-hatred is the oldest group hatred that exists, preceding racism; thus, Blacks who acknowledged Roman gods and were free men, could become Roman citizens. Jews refused to acknowledge other gods, they would not share in the food of their neighbors, and on the whole they kept themselves separate. This solidified in the theological dispute with Christianity and Islam. Economic stresses came later, and contrary to Marxist interpretations, they were the result of the theological tensions, not the other way round.

This Christian theological basis for antisemitism is today slowly eroding. Vatican II in 1965 was a first step, acknowledging the baselessness of the deicide accusation. Christian Churches are slowly developing the idea that there may be several ways to serve God, and that theirs may not be the only one. Theological antisemitism is not dead, but it is weakening, and in the struggle against contemporary antisemitism the Christian Churches are often allies, not opponents.

However, many hundreds of years of an antisemitic culture have had their result in the formation of an underlying latency of antisemitism that waits to explode when aroused by some outside crisis. In the post-1945 era this has been complicated by two major events of a political and cultural nature: the impact of the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. The Holocaust created an unease about the Jews, especially of course in Europe, where people have to live with close to six million ghosts, created by a deadly mutation of European culture. As the famous saying goes – the Europeans cannot forgive the Jews for Auschwitz. Periods of self-accusation and beating of breasts alternate with periods in which everything is done to turn the Jews into perpetrators, nowadays even Nazis, in order to liberate the heirs of European culture from the burden of genocide. The establishment of Israel caused a widespread feeling of relief on the one hand: we don't have to bother about the Jews anymore, they have made good, they will create a new Christianity for us, or a new socialism – a humanistic, idealistic society that will bring salvation to a sick world. The kibbutz, the Weitzmann Institute of Science, the Hebrew University, and Itzhak Perlmann took the place of the Christian Savior, or provided an alternative to Stalin's Communism. On the other hand, antisemites turned the victims into perpetrators, David into Goliath, and when occasion arose, everything was and is done to identify Israel with evil. In both cases, Israel is singled out, a collective deity or an evil force. Jews as a collective entity are never equal to others. That is antisemitism.

The Israeli-Palestinian confrontation provides ample material for an antisemitism that sees itself as anti-Zionist, and not anti-Jewish. Indeed, one can be, in theory at least, anti-Zionist without being antisemitic, but only if one says that all national movements are evil, and all national states should be abolished. But if one says that the Fijians have a right to independence, and so do the Malays or the Bolivians, but the Jews have no such right, or that that right should be revoked, then one is anti-Jewish, i.e. antisemitic. The UN and its Commissions and Committees often single out Israel as a pariah nation, and the status of the collective Jew, i.e. Israel, becomes akin to the status of the individual Jew in the Middle Ages.

Israel is locked in a bitter struggle with Palestinian nationalism, which is no less legitimate than the Jewish one is. Israeli policies on the West Bank and the Gaza strip may be mainly reactive to terrorism which has been branded as crime, but they cause serious violations of human rights, and result in terrible suffering of the local population. Compromises that were suggested, failed, and seem currently impossible of achievement as both sides are ruled by elites that oppose any compromise that would be acceptable to the other side. However, antisemitic latency in the West latches on to that tragic dispute in order to brand the Jews as mass murderers and Nazis, in order to solve the social psychological problem caused by the Holocaust. Facts do not matter there – the total number of Palestinian victims of the second Intifada, since September 2000, until today, is slightly over 6500 (and about 1000 Israelis, including Israeli Arabs, almost all of them civilians, were killed by Palestinians in the same period), which is about one half of the daily number of Jews shipped to Auschwitz from Hungary in the spring of 1944. Any kind of simplistic comparison becomes totally ridiculous – e.g. to the Kashmiri or Sri Lankan or Sudanese situations, never mind World War II. The reason for the vile attacks on Jews in the West is not based on facts, but on a basic cultural trend that latches itself onto real events which it distorts: *antisemitism is not a prejudice but a basic cultural phenomenon*. A realistic approach would sharply criticize Israel in the context of its justified defense against terrorist suicidal homicide, and seek a compromise between two national movements fighting over a very small piece of real estate. But we are not talking about a realistic approach; we are talking about antisemitism.

It appears that the present, fourth wave of antisemitism, in the West, is a basically upper middle class, intellectual phenomenon. It is widespread in the media, in universities, and in well-manicured circles. Typical is the statement of the French ambassador to Britain at a cocktail party, later reported in the British Press, referring to Israel, with diplomatic finesse, as that “shitty little country.” What is important here is not the statement itself, but the fact that that gentleman felt perfectly at ease making it in an environment he was sure would understand and appreciate it. Students at Western universities identify with the Palestinian struggle without really knowing the facts of the situation. I am also pro-Palestinian, as I believe that Palestinians

deserve independence and equality, but I also believe that the armed struggle of Hamas and Islamic Jihad consists largely of acts of barbarity and inhumanity that in turn provoke inexcusable Israeli behavior. It is easy to cross the line from criticism of a government policy to antisemitism. The US, even after Obama's election, and Israel, are the world's evil forces, and in any case the US is governed by Jewish interests - another well-worn antisemitic myth. In addition, many Europeans have not forgiven the Americans for having liberated them, first from Hitler, and then from Stalin.

One should not generalize: many Europeans (and most Americans), especially of the working and middle classes, but also among the elites, are opposed to these antisemitic trends. It is my view that this wave will pass in time, and of course if a compromise in the Mideast conflict were found, the situation would ease, but unless one deals with the root causes, it will reappear again later. The conflict did not cause today's antisemitism, but it partly triggered it, and certainly enhanced it. Yet on the whole, it is not Western antisemitism that causes me to worry, but something else: Islamic radicalism.

On May 7, 2002, a program was broadcast on the Egyptian TV station IQRAA, financed by Saudi money. The program was directed at Moslem women. A charming TV personality, Ms. Doua Amer, asked little Basmallah, a 3 ½ year old girl – 'Do you know who the Jews are?' 'Yes'. 'Do you like them?' 'No.' 'Why?' ' Because they are monkeys and swine...and also because they tried to poison the wife of our prophet.'

A whole world is being influenced by such teachings. There are today some 1.3 billion Moslems in the world. Radical Islam is the ideology of only a minority of Moslems, but it is spreading. It is that ideology that fuels international terrorism. The usual response to it, in the US but also in some other places, including Israel, is that it should be fought by armed force. Is that the correct answer? No, because you cannot fight an ideology by force only.

Islam and radical Islam are not the same thing. Literal interpretation of Islam may lead to radicalism, but that can be said of Christianity and Judaism and other religions as well. Islam is as capable of developing a more liberal, non-literal, milder religious approach, that will recognize the validity, or at least partial validity, of other belief systems, as others are. Thus, for instance, there

is the very large Sufi movement, a pietistic, peace-loving Islamic direction; there are moderate Moslems in the West, and some very courageous liberals in the Moslem world itself.

What does the Sunni version of radical Islam believe in? The central element is the conviction that Western civilization has passed its peak, and that the future lies with (radical) Islam. The final aim is the conquest not just of the Middle East or Asia, but ultimately, by conversion or force, of the world. The second element is the desire to abolish politics as such. God-Allah has told the world, through his prophet, the Hadith traditions and the Shari'a, how men (women don't count) should govern themselves, and what laws they should follow. Any human intervention, through parliamentary democracy or any type of autocracy is blasphemy, because it means that men decide what they should do, whereas God has already decreed what should be done. The world should be run by men trained in Islamic law, and national and territorial boundaries should be simply a matter of convenience. Hence also comes the third point: radical Islam aspires to the abolition of national states, first and foremost Arab national states. Thus, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine do not demand a Palestinian national state, but an Islamic state of Palestine, which would be almost as anti-Christian as anti-Jewish: Christians, and those Jews who will survive the genocide that is planned for Israeli Jews, will be subject peoples in Islamic Palestine, with no political rights whatsoever. Lastly, Islamism is a utopian ideology. It promises a wonderful, peaceful world, ruled by God Himself, and thus aspires to the end of history as we know it – there can be no history after the establishment of the rule of God. I have said it many times, with an apology to Lord Acton: all utopias kill, and radical, universalistic and apocalyptic utopias kill radically and massively.

Modern radical Islam was founded by Hassan el-Banna in Egypt in 1928 (the Moslem Brotherhood), and developed as a result of its social policies into a major force in Egyptian society. Many Moslem governments were and are incapable of providing basic necessities to a population that is growing by leaps and bounds. The resulting destitution and despair was answered in Egypt by the Brotherhood establishing village clinics, building sewage systems and schools, the famous madrassas. They got the money by reinstating a major principle of religious social policy, the tithe. Even the

poorest were asked to give a few pennies each week for the upkeep of these institutions, and of course richer members of the Brotherhood had to chip in with substantial sums. The same principle is followed today by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza. In return, children and adults are being taught to accept the literal interpretation of Islam and the anti-American and anti-Jewish phobias developed by the radicals.

What are the sources of radical Islam? Moslem civilization, which was the main world culture in the early Middle Ages, did not develop parallel to the West because it did not develop individualism and a middle class that would struggle for supremacy against the forces of conservatism and feudalism. Islamic religious ideology preached opposition to change. In the Moslem countries, autocratic regimes could therefore rely on a reactionary clergy that had a mass basis in the population, and fought successfully against Moslem intellectuals and entrepreneurs that sought to change Moslem society. Today, radicals in Moslem society have to contend not only with the West, but with the industrialized Far Eastern countries as well, which is why the struggle has become global. Radical Islam is fighting not just against the West, but against civilization as such, and when you read what they have to say about Hindus, for instance, you realize that here you have a megalomaniac intention of elimination of all pagan beliefs, such as those of the Hindus and the Buddhists.

I would go further than that. We have seen three major ideologies emerging during the twentieth century, and in many ways continuing into the present: Soviet Communism, National Socialism, and Islamism. There are of course vast differences between them, but there are also some parallels. All three aspired to world supremacy. Belief in radically exclusivist religious or quasi-religious ideologies led/lead to the establishment of dictatorial regimes that would suppress all other belief systems. Their utopias were/are designed to establish a classless society in which historical dialectics will no longer be operative, and an end of time will come. In a utopia you don't need laws, or parliaments that make laws. In all three cases, nationalism was or is to be opposed, in favor of a universalist totalitarianism.

All three ideologies saw or see the Jews as a main enemy. We all know about National Socialism. Stalin's state saw the Jews as the spearhead

of Western imperialism, and apparently wanted to deport all the Soviet Jews to Siberia, where most of them would have perished. Radical Islam says, basically, the same thing: the Jews are the spearhead of Western civilization, and they are traditionally the enemies of Islam.

Anti-Jewish ideology has been a part of the development of radical Islam since the late twenties of the last century. The chief ideologue of the movement was Sayid Qutb, an Egyptian official who spent some years in New York and became convinced that the West is decadent and dying. In 1950 and the following years he wrote a number of brochures that are, to this day, the guiding texts of radical Islam. One of them was devoted to the Jews – two years after the establishment of Israel. Traditional Kor’anic elements became intermingled with the legacy of European, and chiefly Nazi, antisemitism. In the Kor’an, Jews are called apes and swine. They are also branded (wrongly) as the most determined opponents of Islam. However, there is more than that – in line with European antisemitism, Jews are seen as the actual rulers of the West, especially of the US, through the media supposedly controlled by them, and through political influence. Thus, Islamistic antisemitism sees the fight against the Jews as a central piece in its program, paralleled only by their desire to eliminate the present corrupt Sunni Moslem governments, and replace them with Islamic states. The language used by the media in some (by no means all) Moslem countries is clearly and unmistakably genocidal. Radical Islam wants to annihilate the Jews, contrary to the medieval Islamic principle of seeing them as the People of the Book, who were granted an inferior, but guaranteed status in Islam. Nazi ideology which led to the Holocaust is repeated here, albeit dressed up differently.

How far is this antisemitic ideology influenced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Sayid Qutb, writing two years after the establishment of Israel, saw the occupation of a piece of land ‘liberated’ for Islam by its original conquest in the seventh century, and its successful defense against the Crusaders later on, as a blasphemy, especially as the despised Jews did it. In 1967 came another, terrible, defeat that could only be reversed by the total annihilation of the offending people; the Jews had rebelled not only against the stable order of things as established in Islamic tradition, but theirs was a rebellion against God himself.

A compromise reached with the Palestinians would undoubtedly reduce the rhetoric and with it the danger, but it would not eliminate it. However, a compromise is prevented, at the moment, by the ruling elites on both sides. The maximum each side would be willing to offer falls far short of the minimum demanded by the other.

Radical Islam is of Egyptian inspiration. Sayid Qutb was executed by the Nasserist regime in 1966, because Qutb's anti-nationalist ideology was viewed as a great danger by the Nasserist regime. Qutb was followed by other Egyptian Brotherhood members – Sheikh Yussuf Karad'awi, who preaches in Qatar, Mohamed Salih al 'Awa in Egypt, and Osama Bin Laden's ideologue and deputy, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, an Egyptian pediatrician. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder of Hamas, had been a member of the Brotherhood. The outstanding non-Egyptian figures were Abul 'Alah el-Maududi, a Pakistani who died in 1979, and Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian.

There is no way of estimating the strength of the radicals in the Moslem world. What we know is that in countries such as Pakistan, Egypt and Syria there is a growth of radical sentiment which finds its expression in official media outlets, sermons that are broadcast by radio and TV, and a great deal of literature. There are also opposing trends of a more liberal, or moderate, or open kind, but they appear to be a distinct minority. And there is a violent, often murderous, enmity between the Sunni and the Shi'a versions of Islamic radicalism.

This, then, is the major danger that confronts us, as defenders of a universalist civilization guided by the belief that groups of people are entitled to develop their specificity in the context of some kind of democratic world order. We are faced with a genocidal threat to the Jewish people, and then quite explicitly to others: Christians, secularists, Hindus, Buddhists, animists, Confucians, and anyone who does not accept Islam. One of the characteristics that differentiate radical Islam from Nazism and Communism is the lack of a centralized structure and, Bin Laden apart, the absence of a uniting charismatic figure that would combine ideological leadership with political authority. Radical Islamic movements are many and varied, though the differences between them are minuscule. They aid and support each other, quarrelling over local leadership and tactics, but are united in purpose.

It is much more difficult to combat a movement like that than it was to face a centralized hostile bureaucracy.

There is a threatening background to all that. Sayid Qutb was not totally mistaken – the West indeed is faced with problems of decadence and regression. The populations of Europe are declining. The 23 million Moslems in Europe today are not, most of them, radicals – yet. But they do not integrate culturally. The number of Jews in the world is static, below the 13 million mark, and is destined to decline markedly in the next half century. Radical Islam does have a chance, and world civilization must defend itself against that threat. To repeat – the threat is genocidal, and we have been in that scenario before. We must not repeat past mistakes.