

## Nations We Love to Hate: Israel, America and the New Antisemitism\*

Josef Joffe

Classical antisemitism is a fire that has burnt out in the West; this best news in a millennium. Classical, or “operational,” antisemitism was the variant that made Spain and England *judenrein* for centuries, that led to persecution, expulsion and the Holocaust. Throughout the West, Jews at last have become citizens—and without the kind of assimilation that demanded the sacrifice of identity.

And the not-so-good news? During the 2003 World Economic Forum in Davos, a demonstrator wearing the mask of Donald Rumsfeld and an outsized yellow Star of David with “Sheriff” inscribed) was driven forward by a cudgel-wielding likeness of Ariel Sharon, both being followed by a huge rendition of the Golden Calf.<sup>1</sup> The message? America is in thrall to the Jews/Israelis, and both are the acolytes of Mammon and the avant-garde of pernicious global capitalism.

Let’s call this “conceptual” or “neo-antisemitism.” This variant lacks the eliminationism of the classical type, but it is rife with its most ancient *motifs*: greed, manipulation, worship of false gods, sheer evil. What is new? It is the projection of old fantasies on two new targets: Israel and America. Indeed, the United States is an antisemitic fantasy come true, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in living color. Don’t Jews, their first loyalty to Israel, control the Congress, the Pentagon, the banks, the universities, and the media? This time, the conspirator is not “World Jewry,” but Israel. Having captured the “hyperpower,” Jews *qua* Israelis finally do rule the world. It is Israel as the *Über-Jew*, and America as its slave.

Yet the issue is more complicated than a reconditioned old myth. Every critic of those two nations will vehemently reject the charge of antisemitism or anti-Americanism. Since there is plenty to decry—say, Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians or America’s interventionism—complaints by no means add up to “anti-ism.” What is the difference? What is critique, what is loathing? What is “anti-Sharonism,” what is “anti-Israelism” or simply bad old antisemitism? Or as applied to the United States: What is “anti-Bushism,” what is “anti-Americanism?” Are these separate phenomena, or does the loathing of leaders and policies actually mask a deeper dislike for the countries, indeed, the very cultures they represent? Finally, do anti-Israelism, anti-Americanism, and antisemitism travel together? And if they do, why?

---

\* This article is based on a (much shorter) lecture delivered at the Center for German Studies at Ben Gurion University in the Spring of 2004

<sup>1</sup> Photo: AP Worldwide, reproduced in Daniel J. Goldhagen, “The Globalization of Anti-Semitism,” *Forward*, 2 May 2003.

These questions are so tricky because, in the post-Holocaust Western world at least, antisemitism is encased by a most powerful taboo. Tabooization makes for sublimation, Dr. Freud has taught us, and for the return of the repressed. When something is a taboo, “we often conceal it even from ourselves.”<sup>2</sup>

Whatever the target, perfervid dislike surely provides an initial pointer: why the hatred, why not frame the issue critically, but calmly, e.g., “Mr. Sharon’s (Bush’s) policies are wrong because of x, y, and z?” At any rate, no other leader in our time, not even Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il, has attracted similar opprobrium. And why is it, as an EU-wide poll in late 2003 showed, that Europeans regard Israel and America as the two greatest threats to peace? All these questions raise a prior, more general one: what is the basic structure of antisemitism or, indeed, any “anti-ism?”

### The Five Ways of “Anti-Isim”

“Anti-ism” consists—at all times and in all places—of five elements. One is *stereotypization*, a set of general statements attributing certain negative qualities to the target group. Closely related is *denigration*, the ascription of moral inferiority all the way to an irreducibly evil nature. *Demonization* is the third step, moving from what the target group *is* to what it *does* or intends to do. The key theme is conspiracy. Thus, Jews (or x) want to sully racial purity or subvert sacred traditions; above all, they seek domination—over their country and the world. A fourth feature is *obsession*—the *idée fixe* that Jews (or x) are omnipresent and omnicausal, hence the invisible force that explains all misery, whether dying cattle or failing businesses. As in all cases of obsession, the belief is compulsive and consuming; that is, it springs to mind reflexively and expands to leave no room for alternative explanations, let alone falsification. The final step is *elimination*, be it by exclusion, assimilation, or annihilation. This is where “anti-ism” assumes a quasi-religious quality: Get rid of those who torment us, and salvation will be ours.

This last motif in the “theology” of antisemitism is no longer manifest in the West. “Operational antisemitism”—ghettoization, expulsion, murder—that has run through Western history for almost 2000 years has disappeared from the post-Holocaust Western mind-set. Nor do Jews suffer from the lesser forms of extrusion like social and professional discrimination. France has had Jewish prime ministers (Pierre Mendès-France and Laurent Fabius) as well as countless Jewish cabinet members. Britain, a country that was judenrein for 400 years, has had Jewish defense and treasury secretaries. The current leader of the Tory opposition, Michael Howard, is a Jew. In the United States, the ironic twist is that the best universities now impose informal quotas not against heavily overrepresented Jews, but against Asians. In the late 1990’s, the U.S.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hillel Halkin, “The Return of Anti-Semitism,” *Commentary* (Feb. 2002): 32. See also Josef Joffe “The Demons of Europe”, in *Commentary* (January 2004) an earlier and substantially shorter version of the present paper.

Senate had enough Jews (liberally defined) to form a minyan, a prayer quorum of ten, as Senator Joe Lieberman, a practicing Jew, once joked.

The bad news is that classical antisemitism has migrated from the West to the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup> A classic of demonization is blood-libel as short-hand for irremediable evil; it runs from the Gulf to Syria, from Saudi-Arabia to Egypt.

The only new twist is that non-Jewish blood is said to be harvested not just for Passover mazzot, but also for Purim pastries. A second theme is subversion, for instance: “The Jews are the decision-makers and the owners of the media in most of the world’s capitals: London, Paris, Berlin, Athens, and finally Russia.”<sup>4</sup> A third ancient theme is the quest for world domination, the most recent example being two series based on the Protocol of the Elders of Zion aired on Egyptian and Syrian TV in 2003. The obsessive part is reflected in the relentless and repetitive harping on these themes throughout the Arab media.

But to note the emigration of classical antisemitism from the Occident to the Orient is not to dispose of the issue in the contemporary Western imagination, or more precisely, fixation. What do we make of a cartoon in the New Zealand Herald (13 June 2003) that depicts a devastated Palestinian cityscape, with “APARTHEID!” smeared across one wall? What of a sticker that recently showed up in Berlin, stating: “I love Jews, but I will not buy Israeli goods”? Does this new twist on the theme of “some of my best friends are Jews, but...” betray a hidden, sinister reality? This is a sensible question because of the powerful, post-Holocaust taboo against antisemitism already noted.

In polite Western society, it is simply *infra dig* to say: “Yes, I hate the Jews.” But one is a thousand times more likely to hear “I hate Sharon” or “Israelis behave like Nazis.” At this juncture, Uncle Sigmund would begin to muse about “displacement,” about the human habit to clobber one object or person, but actually target another that is protected by fearsome power—be it a taboo or real clout. Lashing out against an Israeli leader doesn’t risk the raised eyebrows that demonizing his people, let alone Jews as such, would do. In a post-racist age, collectives are protected, individuals are not.

What is the difference between anti-ism and criticism, between the rabid and the reasonable? There are two quick tests. One is language, the other is selectivity. As to language, take this argument: “Demolishing the houses of the families of terrorists is morally wrong because it construes guilt by association, and it is politically wrong because it pushes more people into the arms of Hamas.” Or: “The fence being constructed by the Sharon government is pernicious because it prejudices the peace process.” Such claims would be neither anti-Israeli nor antisemitic; they might even be correct. By contrast, an

---

<sup>3</sup> For countless examples, see the website of Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), [Memri.org](http://Memri.org).

<sup>4</sup> Unsigned article in the Palestinian weekly *Al Sha’ab*, 28 Sept. 1998, quoted in “MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 7,” 5 Oct. 1998.

assertion such as “the Israelis are latter-day Nazis who want to drive the Palestinians from their land in order to realize an imperialist biblical dream” would have a very different psychological status.

So does a disquisition on Israeli policy by a French ambassador to the Court of St. James who called Israel a “shitty little country.”<sup>5</sup>

Why? Such statements carry a strong emotional charge; they transport not arguments, but accusations. They ascribe loathsomeness to an entire collective, which is one classic of anti-ism. Second, the equation between Israelis and Nazis betrays an obsessive need for moral denigration, which is another classic. In the post-Holocaust age, “Nazi” stands for boundless evil. To apply that label to Jews *qua* Israelis is to inflict maximal moral damage on both and thus to strengthen the antisemitic hypothesis.

The mechanism of denigration and demonization (as opposed to policy critique) also applies to the U.S. case. To claim that the Bush administration defied international law in the 2003 war against Iraq may be true or false; it certainly is not anti-American. But to attribute the war to inbred American imperialism (“look what they did to the Indians”), American capitalism (“blood for oil”) or to religious bigotry (“they claim divine guidance”) surely transcends policy criticism. Such statements condemn the country and the culture, denouncing not the policy, but the polity. As such, they deliver good *prima facie* evidence for what more generally might be called “anti-ism.”

The second test plumbs for selectivity. We may suspect an unconscious or hidden agenda when censure singles out the United States or Israel, but ignores, say, Russia’s war in Chechnya, China’s deadly oppression of Tibet, the genocide of Christians in Sudan, or state-organized terror against white farmers in Zimbabwe. To take note of selectivity is not to claim that one wrong detracts from another, but it does highlight a double standard that smells of “anti-ism.” Selective condemnation is a convenient way to hide bigotry from oneself and others.

Another flag is the selective demonization of American or Israeli leaders. Take Ariel Sharon. Twenty years after Sabra and Shatila, and after his victory in a libel suit against *Time Magazine*, Sharon is still routinely apostrophized as “Butcher of Beirut.” Yet virtually unheard are references to the Falangist who led the massacre in the two Palestinian camps and then went on to serve as a minister in various Beirut cabinets. Nor is Yasir Arafat routinely identified with the Maalot or Munich massacres in Western media.

Yet another flag is selective representation. In the European media as well as on the public stage, prizes and publicity go overwhelmingly to Americans and Israelis who serve as crown witnesses against their own governments and nations. The author Gore Vidal is a classic in this role; more recently the American filmmaker Michael Moore and literary critic Susan Sontag have

---

<sup>5</sup> As quoted in Barbara Amiel, “Islamists overplay their hand but London salons don’t see it,” *The Telegraph*, 17 Dec. 2001.

stepped forward. Among Israelis, it is the post- or anti-Zionist academics and pro-Palestinian journalists. Their critique may range from the moderate to the malicious, but their main function, one suspects, is to render legitimate what the audience (rightly) fears is not, given the taboo encasing all forms of explicit anti-ism. The defense mechanism is simple enough: “After all, *they* are saying this, too; so how can we be accused of bigotry?”

Is anti-Israelism the same as antisemitism? This is another difficult question that allows only for suggestive answers. It so happens that Israel isn’t just one state out of the world’s two hundred. It is the country of the Jews that harbors almost one-half of world Jewry. It sees itself as haven for Jews and proclaims an explicitly Jewish identity. To profess intense dislike for Israel while sparing the Jews rings hollow because, given the peculiar character of Israel, it requires strenuous verbal acrobatics to distinguish between Israel and Jews, between state and people. Certainly, it would be odd to proclaim: “I hate Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, Jordan..., but not Muslims,” when all Arab states obey Islam as state religion and enshrine an explicitly Islamic identity in their constitutions.

Undoubtedly, Israel has assumed a special place in the contemporary demonology. At the more extreme end, Israelis have been demonized as oppressors and colonizers, as arrogant settlers and crazed ultra-Orthodox, as Nazi-like killers of women and children who seek a Greater Israel from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. A cartoon in the Norwegian press made the point in all its baldness. It depicts Yasir Arafat behind barbed wire and dressed in concentration camp stripes. Over him towers a huge Sharon in black SS-type uniform who screams: “*Mütze ab!* (“Hat off!” in German). To complete the tableau, there is a tiny figure of George W. Bush stuck behind Sharon’s belt, right next to a Star of David (*Dagbladet*, 16 Jan. 2002).

Israel has become an obsession (a classic of anti-ism) that cannot be wholly explained by recourse to anti-colonialism, which is a standard fixture of the post-1960s Western mind. Siding with the underdog cannot explain why Russian atrocities in Chechnya attract only perfunctory condemnation, and French interventions in Africa almost none, while an Israeli incursion into Jenin in 2002 was branded instantly as “massacre” of “thousands” before the facts were in. The facts are that 24 Israeli soldiers died along with 52 Palestinians, mostly combatants.<sup>6</sup> As in all cases of “anti-ism,” it was the prejudice that selected the facts, not the facts that informed the judgment.

Nor can the opprobrium be explained in terms of the Palestinians’ noble cause—liberation and statehood. For neither the means nor the end are noble, considering that Palestinian terrorism seeks inflict maximal murder on civilians while the cause, even among so-called moderates like the late PLO leader Faisal Husseini, when expressed before a friendly audience in Tehran, is articulated in “staticidal” terms. Militarily, the Palestinians clearly are the

---

<sup>6</sup> For an exhaustive analysis of the Jenin incursion, see Yagil Henkin, “Urban Warfare and the Lessons of Jenin,” *Azure* (Summer 2003): 33–69.

weaker party, but their ultimate objective remains a total one: the elimination of Israel. This goal is articulated directly by Hamas and Islamic Jihad or indirectly by PLO officials. Camp David 2000 failed because Yasir Arafat insisted on a sacred “right of return” that implies the demographic conquest of Israel by way of sheer numbers and superior birth rates. Elsewhere, again before friendly audiences, as in a South African mosque, Arafat has spoken of a “two-stage solution”: Gaza and the West Bank first, Israel proper will come second, adding that the Quran allows the breaking of contracts with infidels. That these cold facts are virtually ignored in the European discourse is puzzling—as are some of its obsessive elements that echo the old “operational” antisemitism.

The obsession might be called “elimination lite.” The antisemitism of yore saw redemption-in-extrusion: get rid of the Jews, either physically or by complete assimilation, and trouble will yield to transcendence. The “lite” version sees Israel or its occupation-*cum*-settlements as root cause of “the” Mideast conflict. And thus the prescription: If we could only weaken and push back Israel, if we could only pressure Jerusalem by cutting those billions in subsidies, Israel will be forced to retract and peace will return.

Less reductionism, that is, fixation on single causes, would reveal a larger set of problems. A wider tally of “root causes” would include the many dysfunctionalities of Arab political culture that are unrelated to the Palestinian issue, to wit: hegemonial strife among changing contenders, barely suppressed civil war between believers and secularists, and between one sort of believer (Shiites) and others (Sunni), failed economies that offer no future to the millions of young, minimal economic interaction that sharpens stagnation (only 10 % of trade is intra-Arab trade), severely rationed political participation, a culture inhospitable to introspection, blatant inequalities between genders, sects, and classes. These are not talking points of anti-Arab propaganda, but the themes of two UNDP reports authored by Arab authors in 2002 and 2003.

Is all of this Israel’s fault? A standard Arab argument accepted all too willingly by Western, and above all European, audiences is the claim that “we cannot reform ourselves as long as Israel occupies Arab lands.”<sup>7</sup> This might be true for the Palestinians living under the Israeli gun, though it isn’t quite clear how much the occupation contributes to the corruption running through the Palestinian Authority. But Egypt? The occupation of the Sinai has been replaced by a peace treaty, and yet there is neither democracy nor development along the Nile. Proximity to the “Zionist entity” and the dynamics of enmity might explain the dynastic dictatorship of Syria; it cannot explain the religious despotism of Saudi-Arabia, let alone the mayhem in faraway Algeria.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Thus an Arab participant in the panel discussion “Tracking the Hegemon,” World Economic Forum, Davos, 24 Jan. 2004.

<sup>8</sup> For a sober analysis of the systemic pathologies of Saudi Arabia, see Lawrence Wright, “Kingdom of Silence,” *New Yorker*, 5 Jan. 2004, 48–73.

Nor can the dialectics of enmity explain why Jordan, which shares the longest border with Israel, has been moving toward constitutional monarchy. Yet Israel is reflexively blamed as the *Ur*-cause of all despair, including Islamic terrorism that has swept the world since 9/11.

How to explain such obsessions that recall the *idées fixes* of classical antisemitism? Adducing Israelis behavior in the occupied territories, often brutal and oblivious to civilian suffering, offers but a partial explanation. For it cannot explicate the sheer hatred directed against leaders like Ariel Sharon, nor the selective moral indignation, nor the reflexively one-sided apportionment of blame when there is so much to pass around.

If Israel isn't a "shitty little country," it is somehow inherently guilty—as Jews were seen throughout ages. Hence, terror against civilians inside Israel, even if briefly condemned, is placed in the context of "root causes"—Israeli conquest and oppression. Yet even condemnation carries a perverse "side-letter." The major reflex is to call for a "deeper" understanding of the act. And so, softly-softly, murder spells out its own moral justification. Are not the atrocities a response to the magnitude of injustice and despair? Nietzsche would clap his hands in delight over such "transvaluation of all values," for it ascribes, unwittingly or not, moral meaning to the massacre of innocents, the most reprehensible of deeds. In fact, the higher the toll of terror, the greater must have been the injustice inflicted on the killers and their kin. Since they are the true victims, it is "understandable" that they should claim exemption from the most basic norm of warfare, which is the inviolability of non-combatants (and to which Israel is held with unforgiving insistence). Tragedy, the horrifying clash of fears and rights, does not figure in this pseudo-moral calculus.

### **Derivative Anti-Semitism**

Why is Israel the source of all misery, why the denigration? The route to anti-ism is not a straight and narrow one. A cynical insight has been ascribed to the Israeli psychiatrist Zvi Rex: "The Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz," meaning that the survivors and the state of the Jews are constant reminders of the moral failure not only of Germany, but also of Europe.

The Germans did it, and Europe either connived or looked on—with some notable counter-examples like Denmark and those many individuals elsewhere who risked their lives for their Jewish compatriots. To consult Dr. Freud again, moral surrender creates an irrepressible urge to shift blame from the bystanders/perpetrators to the victims and their heirs. The psychic mechanism is simple enough: if the Jews behave like Nazis, they no longer have a special moral claim on us; if they are as bad as were our forefathers, we can unshoulder our inherited burden of guilt.

Add to this the culpability felt by the French over Vichy and colonial repression in Algeria, by the Belgians over their bloody reign in the Congo, by

the Spaniards, Italians, Portuguese, and Hungarians over their Fascist pasts, by the Dutch and Norwegians over their (carefully concealed) collaboration with the Nazis, by the Swedes and Swiss over their “pro-German neutrality,” and there are plenty of incubated guilt feelings to spread around. Continental Europe has to live down its moral failure in the (non-)confrontation with Nazi Germany. Resistance was brief, collaboration and cooperative neutrality was widespread. And moral failure persists as the “antisemitism without Jews” in Poland testifies. So does the renewed virulence of openly espoused antisemitism in Hungary and the timid official response to the return of “operational” antisemitism in France as perpetrated by local Muslims.

Evidently, Israel delivers an excellent canvas for the projection of blame. When Norbert Blüm, a former minister in Chancellor Kohl’s government, called Israel’s anti-terror strategy a “*Vernichtungsfeldzug*” (war of annihilation) against the Palestinians, the message of his subconscious rang out loud and clear. For that term is normally applied to the Nazi war against the Jews and other “subhumans” in the East. Thus are words forged into weapons of self-rehabilitation. One of the most brutally obvious examples of projection is a cartoon in the Greek *Ethnos* (7 Apr. 2002), that depicts two Israeli soldiers in Wehrmacht uniforms, slaughtering two Palestinians, with one saying to the other: “Don’t free guilty, my brother. We were not in Auschwitz and Dachau to suffer, but to learn.”

Projection, though, will not stop at the Nazi comparison. Even the oldest motifs of Christian anti-Semitism have appeared in the European press, such as a Norwegian cartoon that shows Arafat, Jesus-like, under a crown of thorns fashioned from barbed wire in the form of a Star of David.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise given to impeccably correct thinking, France’s *Libération* (26 Dec. 2001) shows Ariel Sharon next to a wooden cross, hammer in hand and nail in mouth. The caption reads: “No Christmas for Arafat, but he is welcome for Easter.” It is said that cartoons are drawn editorials. Surely they are also the shortest road to the subconscious.

These examples show that Germany, whence the *Schoah* radiated across Europe, is not the only player in this game. Much of the Continent has drawn its post-Holocaust identity from the rejection of the darkest part of the Europe’s proud history. The battle-cry of postwar Europe is “Never Again!,” as Alain Finkielkraut has put it, a “no” to Fuhrers, Duces and Caudillos, to colonialism, conquest and discrimination of the “Other.” To regain moral stature, Europeans have turned anti-Fascism into a worldly doctrine of transcendence, into a secular Decalogue that reads: Thou shalt not pray to the discredited gods of nationalism; thou shalt not practice power politics, thou shalt relinquish sovereignty and rejoice in cooperation. From there, it is but a short step to the darker side of redemption. Don’t the Israelis (and the

---

<sup>9</sup> As distributed by Norway’s A-Press in 2002, which supplies local newspapers with editorial content.

Americans) behave in the evil ways we have transcended? Aren't we better than those who are a grating reminder of our unworthy past?

Is this antisemitism? For the sake of accuracy, anti-Israelism should be labeled “neo-antisemitism” to distinguish it from the viciousness of the old. It is a derivative phenomenon—a paradoxical, if not bizarre reaction to the very “operational” variant that culminated in the genocide of the 20th century. The inherited moral burden cries out for projection, and Israel, fighting for its just cause with often-unjust means (though with far more restraint than Russia against the Chechens or Algeria against its Islamists), makes for a perfect target. Vilification spells moral relief because it evens out the moral score, and so the verdict against Israel has to be “guilty.”

Thus, the echoes of yesterday's antisemitism are difficult to dispel. Though derivative, “neo-antisemitism” does evoke two classic features of the old. One is obsession: the fixation on Israel as the prime cause of violence and terrorism. Hence the routine denunciation of Israeli anti-terror forays as “excessive.” Hence the standard interpretation of the second Intifada in terms of Ariel Sharon's Temple Mount excursion—as if the planning for the renewed intifada had not begun right after Yasir Arafat's return from Camp David in July 2000. Hence the unwillingness to grant to Israel what is granted so generously to the Palestinians: a quantum of moral credit due to those who resort to unjust means because they justly fear for their national survival.

The reflexive ascription of guilt evokes another old theme. It is the call for atonement (“raze the settlements”) and punishment (“stop the arms flow and the subsidies”). The demand for expiation (from retribution to expulsion) is a central motif in the history of antisemitism, which justified the atrocities committed against the Jews in terms of their inexhaustible culpability. Only the bill of indictment has changed over time—from the Jews' denial of Christ via their responsibility for capitalism and communism to Israel's starring role in “the” Middle East conflict. In fact, the Christ-killer theme is back, as the *Libération* cartoon cited above shows.

### **A Tale of Two Culprits: Israel and America**

Yet the story does not end here, nor is Israel its only protagonist. Those who detest (or devour) fast food, will recall that in 1999, Joseph Bové, a French foe of globalization, led a “deconstructivist” mob against a McDonald's in France to protest what America was doing to his country's culinary culture. In March 2002, he showed up in Ramallah, denouncing Israel and declaiming his support for Yasir Arafat, whose headquarters was being surrounded by Israeli tanks. Arafat's cause was Bové's cause, this *mise-en-scène* suggested—never mind that the Israeli army hadn't just dropped in for a little oppression, but in defense against mounting terrorist attacks. So here was a spokesman of the anti-globalization movement who was conflating globalization with Americanization and extending his loathing of both to Israel.

The routine pairing of Israel and America is the most interesting new motif in an old story. How to interpret it? A good start is to recall the structural similarities between antisemitism and anti-Israelism and to apply them to the American case. Again, one must beware of equating criticism with anti-Americanism and instead look for the classic telltale signs of any “anti-ism.”

*Stereotypization and Denigration.* The indictment of the United States comes in three parts. First, *America is morally flawed*: It executes its own people, and it likes to bomb others. It is the land of intolerant fundamentalist religion. Selfish and self-absorbed, it will not ratify climate conventions or the International Criminal Court. It is “Dirty Harry” and “Globocop” rolled into one—an irresponsible and arrogant citizen of the world.

Second, *America is socially retrograde*. It is the fountainhead of “predatory capitalism” that denies critical social services to those who need it most. Instead of bettering the lot of its dark-skinned minorities, it shunts millions of them off into prison. America accepts, nay, admires gross income inequalities and defies the claims of social justice.

Finally, *America is culturally inferior*. It gorges itself on fast food, wallows in tawdry mass entertainment, starves the arts and prays only to one God, which is Mammon. It sacrifices the best of culture to pap and pop. In matters sexual, America is both prurient and prudish. It is a society where Europe’s finest values—solidarity and community, taste and manners—are ground down by rampant individualism.

*Demonization and Obsession.* The best shorthand statement (that transcends its Arab origins) is a cartoon on the Jordanian website [www.mahjoob.com](http://www.mahjoob.com) (29 Apr. 2002). It shows a jeep-like SUV, a pack of cigarettes with a Marlboro design, a can of Coca-Cola and a hamburger—all dripping with blood. These, the cartoon insinuates, are the weapons that drive America’s quest for global domination. They are meant to seduce, and yet they drip with blood that symbolize violent imposition. Yield to the seduction, and the price will be the loss of your own culture, dignity and power.

Like any target of anti-ism, America is seen as omnipotent and omnicausal. America’s is the hand that pulls all strings. The United States is the cause of poverty, despotism, and exploitation in the Third World. Like the Jews who were blamed for both capitalism and bolshevism, the United States gets it coming and going: it is a threat to peace when it uses its fearsome power (Iraq) and a traitor to humanity when it doesn’t (Rwanda as well as Bosnia/Kosovo before the bombing campaign).

*Extrusion/Elimination.* The most murderous variant is that of Al-Qaida: Expel the new “crusaders” from Arabia, and our soil will be holy, and the umma whole again. “Seeking to kill Americans and Jews everywhere in the world,” Osama Bin Laden exhorted Muslims, “is one of the greatest duties, and the good deed most preferred by Allah.”<sup>10</sup>

Beyond Arabia, the impulse is not physical elimination, but pushback or “elimination-lite.” In the international arena, the watchword is “anti-hegemonism.” Accordingly, the rest of the world must resist the hyperpower-turned-empire by going for “self-assertion” and “multipolarity”—shibboleths for containing and de-fanging the American behemoth.

There is, of course, a rational (or *realpolitik*) part to this analysis. After the fall of the Soviet Union, American power is no longer contained and constrained by an equivalent counterweight; Gulliver, so to speak, has lost his ropes, and so he has been freed to use his military muscle in Afghanistan and Iraq without fear of resistance or retaliation by a co-equal power. But the rational search for a counter to untrammelled American power does not quite explain the dark icing on the *realpolitik* cake, for instance the idea that the true “axis of evil” is not Iraq, Iran and North Korea, but Messrs. Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld.

The Jews are not far behind. Rare are disquisitions on American foreign policy that do not quickly turn on the Jewish Duo of Doom, Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense, and Richard Perle, the chairman of the Pentagon’s Defense Policy Board until 2003. These two are said to be the powers behind the throne who are driving the new American imperialism even though the Bush administration, from the president down, is as Jewish as a Baptist revival meeting. In “collaboration” with the State of Israel, these “neo-cons” (a code word for “Jews”) have manipulated the U.S. government into fighting a war against Iraq that “serves no defensible definition of American self-interest.” Double-loyalty, conspiracy, betrayal of the nation’s interest, omnipotence—these are classic dogmas of the old antisemitic faith that have little to do with the legitimate question of whether the Iraq war of 2003 was wise, moral or legal.<sup>11</sup>

Domestically, America must be repelled because it is the identifiable cause of our unhappiness and loss of community. America is globalization that destroys jobs. It is capitalism that undermines the stability and social justice of our economic arrangements. America is also the great temptress who seduces our children into wolfing down fast food, watching Hollywood violence, and buying navel-exposing slut wear. America, in short, is the steamroller of

---

<sup>10</sup> “Bin Laden’s Sermon for the Feast of the Sacrifice,” quoted in MEMRI *Special Dispatch: Jihad and Terrorism Studies*, 5 Mar. 2003, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Such themes, it must be said, are sounded not only in Europe or Arabia. The words in quotation marks are from a paper delivered by Thomas Franck, professor of law at New York University, at a conference on unilateralism at Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School on Dec. 5, 2003.

modernity that flattens tradition and leaves behind a few rich winners and many poor losers. Hence, if we could only resist and restrain this enormous power, our better societal arrangements will at last prevail again.

This kind of *Kulturkritik* is a staple of anti-Americanism, and the structural similarities with antisemitism are hard to escape. Like Jews, Americans are selfish and arrogant. Like Jews, they are in thrall to an unforgiving religion that renders them self-righteous and dangerous. As classical antisemitism opposed the lovingkindness of the New Testament to the revengeful God of the Old, rapidly secularizing Europe likes to contrast its secular-humanist ethos with the harsh Calvinism of America. If the Jews bestride the world as the “Chosen People,” Americans claim to live in “God’s Own Country” while arrogating unto themselves, as a favorite anti-Bushism has it, a “divine mission.”

Another mainstay of the antisemitic faith is *Kapitalismuskritik*, a charge that has passed smoothly from the Jews to America. Like Jews, Americans are money-grubbers who know only the value of money, and the worth of nothing. Like Jews, they seek to reduce all relationships to exchange and money. Like them, Americans are motivated only by profit, and so they respect no tradition. Relentlessly competitive (“pushy”), they are the solvent of social justice. If the empire of international Jewry was built on finance and trade, America’s is “globalization” that exploits the hapless and kills jobs.

A third motif is conspiracy, the quest for ubiquitous power. This mantle is now America’s. Like the Jews, America is the mastermind extraordinaire; its hand is behind every conspiracy of note, even behind the immolation of the World Trade Center (in 2003, half a dozen books on this theme became bestsellers in France and Germany). Echoing a classic indictment of “World Jewry,” a poster during an anti-Bush demonstration in Berlin in 2002 read: “Stop Bush’s Grab for Global Power!”

### Why the Twain Go Together

So much for structural and psychological similarities between anti-Americanism and anti-Israelism. Yet structure is not sameness, and parallels are not proof. What *can* be affirmed with good cause is the striking family resemblance between these two anti-isms and their routine conjunction.

America as “Great Satan” and Israel as “Little Satan” (note the religious language) are metaphors as old as the Khomeini revolution of 1979 in Iran. But the pairing of the two “Satan” is no longer just an Islamic affair. Take the anti-Bush demonstrations in Berlin in May 2002 as *pars pro toto* (similar themes were sounded in rallies round the world, from Rome to Rio de Janeiro). When George W. Bush visited the German capital his father had helped to reunite, no posters were being held up against Russian or Chinese leaders, let alone against Saddam Hussein, but plenty against Ariel Sharon—as “oppressor,” “warmonger,” and “state terrorist.” Why trundle out Sharon unless to suggest that the enemy was both America and Israel?

Another regular conjunction is the application of Nazi imagery to America and Israel. During the German demonstrations against the Iraq war in February 2002, one poster showed an obviously Jewish figure setting the world aflame. Another proclaimed “*USA—Drittes Reich, Ihr seid so gleich*” (USA—Third Reich, Both Alike). Yet another stated “One Hitler Is Enough,” the unspoken message being “Bush equals Hitler.” To top them all, a placard made the Nazi-U.S. equation explicit: “Remember Nuremberg, Mr. Bush: Death by Hanging.” A German author and TV moderator, Franz Alt, denounced Bush as “greatest enemy of mankind,” which echoed the old Nazi slogan: “*Die Juden sind unser Unglück*”—the Jews are our ruin.

How to explain this uncanny resemblance between anti-Israelism, anti-Americanism, and antisemitism? What are the psychic compulsions that turn Israel and the United States into targets of hatred and contempt? The best answer is that these two outriggers of the Occident, like Jews throughout history, are different from the rest of the West, and differences, especially when flanked by assertion and achievement, do not for fondness make. These differences come in a foursome: power, identity, purpose, and position.

*Power.* Israel and the United States are the most advanced and powerful players in their respective neighborhoods—Israel in the regional arena, the United States on the global beat. Unbeaten in war, they possess armies unmatched by any of their rivals. America’s economy is the world’s largest, its technology the world’s most sophisticated. The Israeli economy outperforms those of its four Arab neighbors combined. In some technology sectors like avionics, Israel surpasses even the major powers of Europe. America’s top universities, drawing in ever more students who once sought out the Sorbonne and Göttingen, are the world’s best, and whereas Arabia boasts not a single true research university, Israel has six. If America is Gulliver Unbound, Israel is a constant and grating reminder of Arab failure. Power grates, and great power grates without end.

We need not invoke Dr. Freud to infer that success breeds envy and resentment. The indignation is compounded by the rampant modernity both countries epitomize. Relentless change, as inflicted from outside, does not sit well on European, let alone on Arab societies that obey a very different social contract. The European dispensation favors social and economic protection whereas the Arab model seems suspended between various reactionary utopias—from state socialism to Islamicism. The unconscious syllogism goes like this: modernization is Americanization, and both have found their most faithful disciple in Israel.

*Identity.* Compared to continental Europe, the United States and Israel stand out because of their strong sense of nationhood. For all their multiculturalism—indeed, both the United States and Israel are ethnic microcosms of the world—these two countries share a keen sense of self. They know who they are, and what they want to be. They define themselves in terms

not of ethnicity, but ideology—Zionism, *novus ordo seculorum*—that transcends tribe and class (though not, in Israel’s case, religion that still confers an automatic right of citizenship). Their nationhood is rooted in documents, be it the American or the Israeli Declaration of Independence. Their national myths are written in the language not of a glorious past, but of future salvation. And so, the Puritans consciously patterned their own flight from England on the Exodus, seeking to build the “New Jerusalem” in the “Promised Land” that abounds with placenames like Shiloh or New Canaan. They named their children after the Hebrew bible, from A, like Abraham, to Z, like Zachary. And so, America may be the most “Jewish” nation in the Christian world.

Compare this sense of nationhood to the mindset of Western Europe’s mature democracies. The politics extending from Italy via Germany and the Low Countries through Scandinavia already may have passed into post-nationalism. The European Union is fitfully undoing national sovereignty without providing its citizens with a common European identity. Europe still is a matter of practicality, not pride. As a work in progress, it lacks the underpinning of emotional attachment. Europeans become all wound up when their soccer teams win or lose, but the bloody-minded nationalism that used to drive millions into the trenches of two world wars has evaporated.

*Purpose.* Israel and the United States are still national societies, and so they do not hesitate to back up their interests with force. In fact, no Western nation has ever used force as frequently as have those two in the last fifty years, which can hardly endear them to those who will not or cannot resort to war. Post-national Europe cherishes its “civilian power,” its attachment to international regimes and institutions. European armies are no longer repositories of nationhood and career advancement, but organizations that have as much social status as the postal service. In Israel, generals like Yitzhak Rabin routinely advance to positions of political power; in the United States they can at least harbor political ambitions, as shown by Wesley Clark’s bid for the Presidency in 2004. But for European military leaders, the next step is retirement. Europeans pride themselves in having overcome the atavism of war in favor of compromise, cooperation, and institutionalism. This self-perception imbues them with a sense of moral superiority vis-à-vis those yahoos that are the United States and Israel.

Perhaps many Europeans resent unconsciously what they no longer have—all those qualities that once made them fierce and fearsome warriors who fought their way to Cairo and Capetown, Shanghai and Jakarta. So, perhaps, they resent those two nations in the Western family for doing what they no longer can—or dare—do. No wonder that Israel and America deliver an excellent canvas for the projection of self-redemption. Don’t the Americans and Israelis behave in the brutish ways we have at last unlearned? They are Hobbes and Machiavelli, we are Kant and Rousseau. They insist on war and domination, we on peace and community. Hence, Europe’s postwar *prise de*

*conscience*, forged in the cozy shelter of America's strategic might, abounds with reassurance: We have frog-leaped the barbarians and landed in history's moral avant-garde.

*Position.* Of course, strong currents of post-nationalism run through California's Silicon Valley as well as through Tel Aviv's Sheinkin Street and in the writings of Israel's "post-Zionists." And no wonder, for both countries are liberal-democratic polities that share with the rest of the West a life-style centered on individualism and self-fulfillment, values that do not mesh smoothly with such "pre-modern" virtues as honor, duty, or patriotism. Nonetheless, there is a critical difference between the United States and Israel, on one side, and the rest of the West, on the other, that transcends the abundant similarities of postmodern culture and psychology. For culture and consciousness are but two strands in this tangled tale of 21st-century anti-ism. A third difference, perhaps the most critical of them all, is Israel's and America's position in the international order.

Unlike Europe, these two outriggers are not ensconced in Kant Country, but in Hobbes' Hell. Israel will remain a threatened polity, and the United States the world's no. 1 power, hence a target of antipathy, for the rest of this century. So whatever insights we might cull from cultures and collective psyches, in the end, there are the raw and overwhelming facts of international politics. Ehud Barak and Bill Clinton had a better press than George W. Bush and Ariel Sharon—and their countries undoubtedly will regain part of their standing when ruled by leaders more sensitive to the needs and fears of their respective neighborhoods. But those friendly left-of-center leaders merely obscured some deeper realities—one of which was the presence of anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism prior to Messrs. Bush and Sharon. Indeed, the themes of contemporary anti-Americanism reach back all the way to the beginnings of the Republic, while Arab antisemitism and genocidal hatred long precede the conquest and the settling of the West Bank and of Gaza.<sup>12</sup>

The deepest difference is rooted in America's and Israel's role in the international order. Both countries remain targets not only for what they do, but also for *what* and *where* they are. What they do is sometimes unwise or mean; where they are in the international scheme of things, can be changed only by sacrificing their exceptionalism and the power marshaled to secure it. Without extraordinary strength and the willingness to use it, neither will Israel endure as state among those who deny it legitimacy, nor America as "Imperial Republic" (to recall Raymond Aron's term) that wants to remain the world's

---

<sup>12</sup> For an excellent overview, see James W. Ceaser, "The Genealogy of Anti-Americanism," *The Public Interest* (Summer 2003). As an interesting example, he quotes the novelist Henry de Montherlant who put the following statement in the mouth of one of his characters more than half a century ago: "One nation that manages to lower intelligence, morality, human quality on nearly all the surface of the earth, such a thing has never been seen before in the existence of the planet. I accuse the United States of being in a permanent state of crime against humankind." For a short history of Arab antisemitism, see Efraim Karsh, "Intifada II: The Long Trail of Arab Anti-Semitism," *Commentary* (Dec. 2000).

predominant power while seeking safety in the *juste milieu* of a democratizing world.

By dint of what they are and what they have, America and Israel will be both victims and warriors. By contrast, no West European country has been attacked since 1945. No wonder, then, that the martial instincts of the Europeans have faded along with their militaries in the course of seemingly perpetual peace. No wonder that they resent Israel and America as reprobate children of the West. But nations in harm's way will not soon evolve into a Sweden or Germany—not in the Hobbesian world of the Levant, not on the precarious perch of the “last remaining superpower.”

The anatomy of the international system, to borrow one last time from Dr. Freud, is destiny. Where you sit, is where you stand—post-nationalism, post-modernism, and all. America and Israel, to pick up on a current shibboleth, do not come from Mars whereas the Europeans are said to come from Venus. The correct image is that these two countries *live* on Mars, which the Europeans, too, inhabited during many centuries of ceaseless violence. Alas, a new life on Venus will not be the blessed fate of the United States and Israel. These two will have to persist on planets where force, unlike in post-1945 Europe, remains the ultimate currency of the realm. And so, by dint of power, purpose and position, America and Israel are and will be the outsiders. Such nations are sometimes envied, more often feared and always resented. They are never loved.

---

**Josef Joffe** is publisher and editor of the German weekly. *Die Zeit*. He also wears three academic hats: He is the Abramowitz Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, Distinguished Fellow at Stanford's Institute for International Studies, and visiting professor in the political science department.