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**Anti-Semitism, Anti-Americanism, Anti-Zionism:**

**Is There a Connection?**

By Per Ahlmark

For European non-Jew, to be invited by Yad Vashem is the greatest honor imaginable. To me this institution is a proof and symbol for how humanity, in an extremely dignified and knowledgeable way, could help us to commemorate and learn from the most appalling crime in the history of man. If being asked, “Is there a center somewhere in the world where you could feel the essence of our civilization?” - I would answer, yes. Yad Vashem is that center.

This place incarnates in a paradoxical way the very long struggle between the gigantic forces of murder and the power of freedom, between the disaster of totalitarianism and the liberation through democracy. That struggle is often, of course, the defining fate also of the country and the people that erected Yad Vashem. As the Holocaust remains an unprecedented catastrophe, the State of Israel is the only nation in history which has been constantly attacked by condemnations, terrorism, and wars which all aim at exterminating this country. And at the same time Israel has been the only nation ever to build and protect its democratic institutions under such horrible threats. I assume that both Jews and non-Jews could learn more about

the basic human condition by being here than by visiting any other place on earth. For this we should all, from the bottom of our hearts, thank the State of Israel and the leadership of Yad Vashem.

I have, though, a trivial problem today. I think it is pretentious to share the panel with Yehuda Bauer and Robert Wistrich, two of the greatest experts in the world on the Holocaust and current antisemitism. In books and lectures and through their friendship they have for a quarter of a century taught me more about genocide and anti-Jewish agitation than any others. I am a student of these two brilliant scholars and should listen today, not talk.

But as Yad Vashem insisted to have me, the solution is to extend my topic also to another plague, very popular now in Western Europe: anti-Americanism. Like antisemitism and anti-Zionism, anti-Americanism as we see it in this century is often an irrational world-view and a tool for extremists and the enemies of democracy. All this stuff that Bush and the US are the worst enemies of world peace etc. is to me totally absurd. Let me tell you something about my country.

I was born in Stockholm in 1939, just before the outbreak of WWII. Remember that Sweden has now lived in peace for almost 200 years. We happened to be spared by both Hitler and Stalin. Not because we defended ourselves – we did not, we were “neutral” – but because others did the job for us. Who are those “others”? The soldiers from the United States of America.

They defended us first from Nazism and later from Soviet Communism. The US saved us from slavery, torture and terror and

from being forced to live on the totalitarian planet. Thank you, America! Thank you for your idealism, your strength, your military, your leaders and your dedication to democracy, not only for your own country but for hundreds of millions of people in a large number of other nations, not least Israel. Thank you, America!

I know, gratitude is not the dominant force in European foreign policy today. But individuals are different and I belong to the species which some of you may think is facing extinction in Western Europe. But we are still there, millions of us who are convinced that contemporary politics should to a large extent be based on our gratitude to the democratic allies of WWII for rescuing so many of us and others from tyranny, even though the US troops arrived too late for the six million Jews.

Born in 1939 – at the beginning of the Holocaust, a privileged non-Jew in maybe the most privileged country on earth. Also sheltered from contacts with the real world, I did not meet a Jew until I was eighteen years old. That was still possible in Sweden in the 1940's and 50's. My first journey to Israel was sort of revelation.

I started to understand that antisemites of different centuries have always aimed at destroying the then center of Jewish existence. Hence, the Jewish religion was the target for a very long time. When Judaism did not surrender, Jews were expelled or killed. In the nineteenth century, when “race” became the word of the day, the Jews were attacked as an evil race.

And today, when the Jewish state has become a center of identity and a source of pride and protection for most Jews, Zionism is being slandered as a racist ideology. Naturally, I do not regard criticism of Israel as antisemitism. But anti-Zionism today has become very similar to antisemitism.

Anti-Zionists accept the right of other peoples to have national feelings and a defensible state. But they reject the right of the Jewish people to have its national consciousness expressed in the State of Israel and to make that state secure. Thus, they are not judging Israel by the values and norms used to judge other countries. Such discrimination against Jews is called antisemitism.

Also, they often exploit antisemitic stereotypes when condemning the Jewish state. Anti-Israeli incitement with anti-Jewish connotations is repeatedly expressed in the press, mosques, radio, television and textbooks in the Arab world. They very creatively borrow images from the Middle East conflict and give them a new twist or spin when illustrating why Jews can never be trusted. Jews conspire. They deceive other people and are cruel when it comes to both ends and means. Jews are strong in the art of bluffing and weak when it comes to character and truthfulness.

And, of course, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion are invoked to prove what Jewish strategy is about.

Anti-Zionists question the very existence of Israel. This means that Israel should disappear in one way or the other; that millions of Israeli Jews have to be fought and probably killed. Deliberately suggesting

mass murder of Jews – openly, disguised or in vague formulas – has always been the most extreme form of antisemitism. Anti-Zionists, who advocate the destruction of the Jewish state, should be put in a similar category.

Sometimes anti-Zionists claim that they are not against Jews but “only” against the Jewish state. Suppose that someone said: “I am only against the existence of Great Britain but I am not anti-British!” Or if somebody told me that, “I love Swedes, but Sweden should be abolished”. No one would take such statements seriously. It is hard to love or respect a people and hate their state.

The antisemites now focus on the collective Jew – the State of Israel. Such attacks then spark a chain reaction of assaults on individual Jews and on Jewish institutions.

We certainly could say that in the past the most dangerous antisemites were those who wanted to make the world Judenrein, free of Jews. Today the most dangerous antisemites might be those who want to make the world Judenstaatrein, free of a Jewish state.

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Explaining the links between antisemitism and anti-Americanism is a more complex task. We have to underline what scholars on hatred against the US have told us for many, many years. “Anti-Americanism”, as they use the word, has very little to do with serious criticism of the United States.

I refer to Professor Paul Hollander's definition in his book "Anti-Americanism" from 1992. He describes it as "a particular mindset, an attitude of distaste, aversion or intense hostility, the roots of which may be found in matters unrelated to the actual qualities or attributes of American society or the foreign policy of the United States. In short, as here used anti-Americanism refers to a negative predisposition, a type of bias, which is to varying degrees unfounded. I regard it as an attitude similar to its far more thoroughly explored counterparts... such as racism, sexism, or antisemitism".

In addition to that, I think anti-Americanism, as we experience it in the beginning of this new century, is also a kind of blindness in Western Europe in combination with a very strange mixture of alienation, guilt and fear toward both Israel and America. Let me develop this idea.

Millions of Europeans do not want to realize that Israel is a country fighting for its survival. Israel could not afford to lose one major war. Such a defeat would mean the end of the Jewish state.

The major obstacle here is of course that all Arab countries are non-democracies, never ruled by free speech and free elections. And it has never happened in human history that a democracy has gone to war against another democracy. So Israel's situation is problematic, to say the least. It cannot profit from this basic rule that today makes life fairly easy for almost all European democracies.

By not acknowledging this nucleus of the conflict you fail to understand the tragedy. Then you easily fall victim to TV images of

Israel as overwhelmingly strong while the Palestinians are always seen as the underdogs, oppressed by Israel.

Therefore huge numbers of Europeans feel there is something fundamentally wrong with the Israelis. They never compromise. They always seem to prefer military actions in order to solve political problems. And they always rely on the United States either in the Security Council of the UN or when it comes to maintaining the military upper hand.

Something similar is also the case in the European attitude to the United States. I very much believe in the relevance of Robert Kagan's great essay "On Power and Paradise". What we are fed with in Western Europe nowadays are pretentious self-portraits of the maturity of our own countries. Look at Europe today. They say we have eradicated wars, dangerous nationalism, and dictatorships. Our velvet revolution has created a peaceful European union with now 25 member states.

We do not go to war, the European rhetoric claims, we go to the negotiating table. We do not exhaust our resources by spending hundreds of billions of euros on weapons and soldiers. Now the rest of the planet should learn from us how to live together without terrorizing each other.

As a Swede I have heard this boasting all my life. And as we have not been at war for two centuries, it proves that Sweden is sort of a moral superpower. This type of bragging has now become part of the

EU ideology. We are the moral continent. In a way we now experience the Swedenization of European attitudes to other regions.

This is not a caricature of European self-glorification. And it is partly true. Yes, the European Union of today is a miraculous achievement for a continent where the two huge totalitarian movements of last century were born – Communism and Nazism – and where rivers of blood have drenched the soil for so many centuries.

But what Europe forgets are two other parts of our history. Without the US Army, Western Europe would not have been liberated in 1945. Without the Marshall Plan and Nato, it would not have taken off economically and politically. Without the policy of containment under the American umbrella, the Red Army would probably have strangled the dream of freedom in East Europe for maybe another century.

And West Europeans today especially forget that there are areas in the world where freedom has never been seen, where proliferation of doomsday weapons and torture chambers are the rules of the game. Any attempt to start negotiating the European way - without any military power to back up the diplomats - would be highly pathetic.

Instead of supporting those who fight international terrorism many Europeans try to blame the spread of terrorism on Israel and the US. If only the Jews and the Americans could show some respect for their adversaries, the latter would not have crossed the borderline to terrorism. That's a new European illusion. And the other one is the

Spanish lecture in modern day appeasement à la Munich. First, let the Islamic killing decide your election! And when elected, just accept the first demand of the killers: withdraw the Spanish troops from protecting Iraqi democratization.

Assume that Spain and Europe instead in unity had reacted the opposite way, declaring: “We hereby promise that because of the mass slaughter in Madrid we will double the support for stabilization in Iraq by sending twice as many troops, experts, engineers, teachers, policemen, doctors and billions of euros in support of allied forces and the new interim Iraqi government”. Had we said that the triumph of the terrorists would have been transformed into a triumph of the war on terror.

Try to answer this embarrassing question: which European country could you rely on if a similar tragedy happened there? Which nation would not appease the murderers? If the Eiffel Tower were destroyed – would Chirac unite his forces with Britain and America? If the new Reichstag building in Berlin one morning looked like being exposed to another Kristallnacht, this time carried out by foreign terrorists - would Schröder finally realize that Germany is part of the same struggle as Israel and America are already involved in?

I doubt it. My guess is: there might be just two European countries which, if attacked, would react cleverly and with responsibility: Britain and Poland.

But right now the urgent problem is that European self - glorification has led to a basic misunderstanding when tens of millions

of Europeans are judging the US. They think America is a huge, extremely powerful and imperial country, which does not cooperate in good faith with the rest of the world and has become obsessed by its own military might. Certainly the US was attacked on 9/11, but Europeans often think, American hubris was triggering these terrorist assaults.

Now, compare these images of Israel and America respectively! Then just turn on the distortion a little more - and you have the political climate for some very ugly bias. You have the Great Satan and the Small Satan. America wants to dominate the world, exactly the allegations made in traditional antisemitic rhetoric about the Jews. And in modern anti-Zionist propaganda: Israel wants to dominate the whole Middle East.

And suddenly these ideas are reflected in European opinions polls claiming that Israel and the United States are the most dangerous threats to world peace. "Bush and Sharon are the two Hitlers of the new century." But the serial mass murderers whom the US has defeated - the Taliban and Saddam Hussein - are not even mentioned.

Ian Buruma, the British writer, claims that this European rage against America and Israel has to do with guilt and fear. The two world wars led to such a catastrophic carnage that "never again" was interpreted as "welfare at home, non-intervention abroad". The problem with this concept is that it could only survive under the protection of the US. And Israel's struggle is being misinterpreted by numerous Europeans as a sort of repetition of their own colonial past.

The European fear, Buruma says, is that we will be dragged by Israel and the US “from our fool’s paradise into the nightmarish world we thought we had left for ever”.

And Mark Lilla has analyzed in *The New Republic* the crisis in Europe today regarding its ideas of “the nation state, and the related concepts of sovereignty and the use of force”. The European confusion here has profoundly changed its attitude to the Jewish state. “Once upon a time, the Jews were mocked for not having a nation-state. Now they are criticized for having one”.

Alvin Rosenfeld in his booklet, published by the American Jewish Committee, confirms how extreme anti-Americanism and anti-Israelism are actually merging. The so-called peace poster “Hitler Had Two Sons: Bush and Sharon”, displayed in European anti-war rallies, combines the trivialization of Nazism with the demonization of both the victims of Nazism and of those who defeated Nazism.

This is a repetition of the perverse Soviet propaganda parallel between the Nazis and the Israelis. It nowadays grows from a subconscious European guilt feeling related to the Holocaust. Now the victims, and children and grandchildren of the victims of the Holocaust, are doing to others what was done to them. By equating the murderer and the victim we wash our hands.

This pattern of anti-Israelism and anti-Americanism returns again and again. “The ugly Israeli” and “The ugly American” seem to have been born in the same family. “The ugly Jew” becomes the instrumental part of this defamation when the so-called neo-

conservatives in the US are blamed both for American militarism and Israeli brutalities, and then named: Wolfowitz, Perle, Abrams, Kristol etc. This is the new version of the old myth that Jews are ruling the United States.

We all remember that the then French ambassador to Britain, Daniel Bernard, described Israel as “that shitty little country”. Michael Gove in the *Times of London* has brilliantly summarized “Yankee-phobia” and “Judeophobia”: “Both America and Israel were founded by people who were refugees from prejudice in Europe. Europe’s tragedy is: that prejudice has now been given new life, in antipathy to both those states”.

And Andrei Markovits has reminded us that both America and Jews are seen by many Europeans as paragons of the modernity they dislike and distrust: “Money-driven, profit-hungry, urban, mobile, rootless, inauthentic and thus hostile to established traditions and values”. His conclusion is: “Anti-Americanism and antisemitism are the only major icons shared by the European extreme left and far right, including neo-Nazis”.

In the first issue of *Commentary* this year we could read a most subtle analysis by a great German publicist, the editor of *Die Zeit*, Josef Joffe. Like Jews, Americans are said to be selfish and arrogant. Like Jews, they are in thrall to a fundamentalist religion that renders them self-righteous and dangerous. Like Jews, Americans are moneygrubbers who know only the value of money, and the worth of nothing.

The summary of this worldview is, according to Joffe: “America and Israel are the outsiders – just as Jews have been all the way into the 21<sup>st</sup> century”.

So there is not only a connection, but several links today between antisemitism, anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism. In the long run they may further poison the foreign policy debate between the Middle East, Europe and America.

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My last point: I cannot resist the temptation to be Cassandra in another scary area: Iranian nuclear weapons. IAEA – the UN Agency supposed to prevent illegal production of atomic bombs – in late November last year made a sensational statement. We have been deceived by the Iranians for 18 years, El-Baradei wrote in an official report. During that time Iran has secretly built “a practically complete front end of nuclear cycle, including uranium mining and milling, conversion, enrichment, fuel fabrication, heavy water production...” etc.

The Israelis have for years tried to make us understand that this sophisticated Iranian uranium enrichment industry, with thousands of forbidden centrifuges in combination with their far-reaching and increasingly advanced missiles, constitute a deadly threat to Israel, to all nations in the Middle East and soon to certain parts of Europe. And in the hands of terrorists, close to the ayatollahs, it is a disaster scenario also for the United States.

I am not at all surprised that Iran successfully cheated the IAEA for 18 years, as this conspiracy happened to coincide with the period when a former colleague of mine was head of this UN agency, the Swede Hans Blix. He is one of the most easily gullible guys I ever met. He has never understood that a totalitarian regime could terrorize its own citizens and at the same time smilingly fool international inspectors.

I urge my American, European and Israeli friends: do not trust the new leadership of the IAEA even though they may be more ambitious than the previous one. They might fail again to find and dismantle the thousands of centrifuges that enrich uranium.

And don't believe that the Europeans, even when they are well meaning, will be strong enough to destroy the hidden nuclear factories in Iran. And, for heaven's sake, do not compare these many locations for centrifuges buried deep, deep down with the Osirak reactor which was openly displayed on the sand outside Baghdad, the reactor which was so successfully destroyed by Israel in June 1981.

Eventually the duty to prevent Iran from going nuclear might fall on the remaining superpower. And in spite of what I said about the disgusting lack of European gratitude, there still are tens of millions of Europeans who understand the risks that Israel has warned us about for so long. We share your fear when rogue states try to make their own atomic bombs.

And if the US has to intervene sometimes in the future in order to protect the human race from a unique catastrophe in Iran and from

Iran, we will again say to the world: Thank you, America! And also, thank you Israel! Thank you for always reminding us of the existential threats against so many nations that could emerge if Iran will be allowed to go nuclear.