



What's New About the New Antisemitism?

The current wave of antisemitism that has been rearing its head since the turn of the 21st Century is a noxious mix. Certainly more traditional European forms of Jew hatred play an important role in nourishing it. But they are no longer alone.

Antisemitism has been characterized as the longest hatred. Certainly ant-Jewish ideas and the demonization of the Jews have been around for a long time. They are present in the writings of early Roman historians and of the Church fathers. Tacitus, for example wrote, the practices “of the Jews are sinister and revolting, and have entrenched themselves by their very wickedness.” John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople in the early 5th century was particularly vitriolic in his polemical writings in favor of the Church and against the Synagogue. Chrysostom, like many Christian thinkers before and after, believed the Jews had failed in their role as God’s chosen people, and had been replaced by the Christians and were being punished by God. He called the synagogues “homes of idolatry and the devil,” and he declared, that if God hates the Jews it is the duty of all Christians to hate them too. During the Reformation period of the 16th century, Martin Luther also spared no malice when he wrote, *The Jews and their Lies*. He echoed Chrysostom in his attacks on the synagogue, and called Jews a “brood of vipers” and characterized them as children of the devil.

Modern antisemitism came on the scene in the 19th century, more than anything else as a backlash against the process that granted Jews equal rights in many European countries. A pantheon of antisemites coined phrases that remain familiar to every student



of Modern European and Modern Jewish history. Among the most infamous is German historian Heinrich Von Treitsche's trenchant slogan, "The Jews are our misfortune." The spread of *the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a forged document that purported to expose a Jewish plot to take over the world, added additional insidious ingredient to an already large canon of hateful beliefs; it built upon already existing stereotypes of Jewish religious, political and economic behavior. The advent of the doctrine of race, added a new twist to more traditional Jew-hatred. Jewish evil, according to the racists, was inherent in the Jews; it was born in their "blood."

All of these currents of Jew-hatred were extant when the Nazis came on the scene at the end of World War I. They co-opted these ideas, adding their own poisonous flavoring to them, and once they came to power in Germany in 1933, they began implementing them. Although they did not begin with murder, and indeed they had no set plans for murder when they first came into power, undeniably the murder of the Jews followed directly upon Nazi racist and antisemitic ideology.

In the wake of the defeat of Nazi Germany, and the unprecedented Holocaust they perpetrated upon the Jews, expressions of overt antisemitism remained unacceptable in Western Democratic Europe for five decades. In Eastern Europe, however, where the official stance did not acknowledge the Holocaust of the Jews, various forms of antisemitism remained much closer to the surface and all too frequently spewed forth. The wave of antisemitism in Poland, for example, in the later half of the 1960s engendered an exodus of much of the surviving Jewish community, among them, until that point, die-hard communists.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is another source of the current wave of antisemitism. Defenders of the Palestinians have harnessed many older antisemitic motifs to their cause. The broadcast in Egypt last year of the anti-Jewish series



Rider without a Horse and a soon to be broadcast series on Syrian television, both rest on ideas taken from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

To these images are added those taken from the Holocaust, but inverted. Israel is said to be Nazi-like, Sharon is a new Hitler, and Jews, it is claimed perpetrated a Genocide in Jenin, a year and a half ago. Of course all of these images do not hold up to scrutiny, but they are powerful and feed already existing hatred.

Traditional concepts in Islam, such as that Jews cannot possibly have sovereignty over territory considered to belong to Islam, like Jerusalem or all of Israel, for that matter, or the concept of the necessity of holy war, Jihad against non-Muslim Infidels, are melded into the arsenal wielded against Israel and Jews. Antisemitic ideas have become so entrenched in the Islamic world, that when former Malaysian Prime Minister Dr Mahathir Mohamed at the recent Islamic conference declared: "...today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them," his statement went unchallenged by the delegates from the 57 countries present. As Thomas Friedman of the New York Times pointed out many months ago, the man in the street in Muslim Pakistan fully believes the canard that Jews were behind the attack on the Twin Towers.

In the Western World, the media bears not a little responsibility for this situation. It has often reported events in the Middle East detached from their context and skewed against Israel. This is not to say all reporting about Israel is distorted or all criticism of Israel policies is unreasonable. Some newspapers, however, have featured blatantly Nazi like cartoons in their attacks on Sharon and the Israeli military. In the name of supposedly balanced reporting, equal time has been given to families of suicide bombers, whose houses were torn down because of their murderous actions, and the victims of the bombings. Given such coverage, it is not all that surprising that 59% of the European



public regard Israel as the world's greatest threat to peace, ahead of rogue states like North Korea or international terrorist organizations like Al-Quaida.

The new antisemitism has bred strange bedfellows. Neo-Nazis, far-left anti-American and anti-Globalization activists, and Islamic zealots, work together, or at least in parallel, at the same purpose of attacking Jews. Attacks, of course as we have seen, are not limited to verbal assaults. The setting afire of the Jewish school in Paris this week, shows once again, that we have gone far beyond mere hateful rhetoric. It is not yet clear who committed this act of arson, but it could just as well have been a French born neo-Nazi as an anti-Jewish immigrant from the Islamic world. The fact that Al-Quaida has taken responsibility for the bombing of two synagogues in Istanbul this past Sabbath clearly shows how forces from many angles are focusing their wrath on the Jews.

For Al-Quaida attacking Jews strikes a blow against the hated Israel, who they would say are occupying Islamic lands and oppressing the Palestinians. It is a blow against the United States, Western mores, and Crusader imperialism, since in the eyes of Al-Quaida Jews are the foremost agents of all of these. It is a blow against Judaism, which stubbornly refuses to accept Islam in its place.

What is new in the new antisemitism is also old. It is the fact that hateful ideas are being translated into acts of violence on a large scale. What is still different from the Holocaust era, at least in the western world, is that no government has adopted the new antisemitism as an ideology. What is most alarming is that international terrorist groups like Al-Quaida are involved up to their detonators in murderous acts against Jews. So far the world has done little if anything beyond paying lip service to root out violent antisemitism from its midst. During the Holocaust years, attitudes toward the Jews proved to be a litmus test for the moral health of our world. Today, attitudes toward the Jews again seem to be the dividing line between tolerance and intolerance, between freedom



and oppression, and between those who respect the sanctity of life and those who brutally disregard it. With Al-Quaida attacking Jews at prayer, the war on terror and the war on antisemitism have become one in the same.

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