

Anti-Zionism = Anti-Semitism: Fact or Fable?

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On November 10 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution defining Zionism as "a form of racism and racial discrimination." The vote was 72-35 with 32 abstentions. A week earlier Abba Eban had written in the *New York Times* that "there is...no difference whatever between anti-Semitism and the denial of Israel's statehood. Classical anti-Semitism denies the equal rights of Jews as citizens within society. Anti-Zionism denies the equal rights of the Jewish people to its lawful sovereignty within the community of nations. The common principle in the two cases is discrimination." Mr. Eban's words, coming as they did, not in the midst of a pro-Israel rally, but in a reflective column from a widely respected figure in the international community, a man who has not hesitated to criticize publicly aspects of his own government's policies toward the Arabs, must be accorded a special seriousness.

As one who has specialized in Christian/Jewish relations, I have on many occasions been confronted by Christian friends who claim that Jews tend to use the anti-Semitism label to stifle any criticism of Israeli policy. On some occasions, especially in more popular and emotional settings, the charge has some validity. I have been concerned for some time that many American Jews take a much less critical stance toward the Israeli Government than do the citizens of that state, and are not effectively in touch with the lively debate that goes on in Israel about governmental attitudes. In this context I especially welcome the resolution adopted by the recent Dallas biennial of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations urging "freedom of speech" about Israel within the American Jewish community, including the "sponsorship of open forums in which Israeli spokesmen of views which may differ from the established governmental policy may be heard." In some cases Jews themselves have

expressed hesitation to me about criticizing Israel for fear of being branded Jewish "self-haters." Some national Jewish organizations have occasionally attempted, perhaps with the encouragement of the Israeli Government, to curtail the number of public appearances that Israelis critical of their government make in this country.

Should Mr. Eban's words be relegated to the same category? Is he guilty of utilizing an anti-Semitic smokescreen to cover over the real issues in the Arab/Israeli conflict? I think not. And it is about time that non-Jews, especially those who identify themselves with the liberal Christian camp, stop pretending that anti-Semitism is not a central issue in Arab hostility toward Israel.

I want to make it clear I am not claiming that anti-Semitism is the *only* issue in the dispute. Certainly there is danger of falling too easily into the same rhetorical impasse in the anti-Zionism/anti-Semitism equation, an impasse that constitutes a serious obstacle to peace, which happens when Zionism is equated with racism. As I have written previously in *Worldview* (July/August, 1969, and October, 1974), there cannot be any lasting solution in the Middle East dilemma without some resolution of the just claims for statehood of the Palestinian Arabs. Israel did not "steal" the land from the Palestinians as Arab propaganda has frequently claimed, but neither is the "justice" picture as neat and clean as some pro-Israeli spokespersons would claim. The Arab/Israeli conflict is mired in the clash of two competing nationalistic, anticolonialist movements. Both are legitimate, but both have made serious mistakes in their dealings with one another. No recognition of the anti-Semitic component in the Arab opposition to Israel can ever be used as an excuse for evading the other facets of the problem. Yet to deny its influence is also to distort seriously the reality of Middle East politics today and to fail to understand why Jews so frequently raise the issue of "survival" in debates over Israel.

Abba Eban, in the quotation I have cited, directly links the classical anti-Semitic denial of equal citizen-

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ship with the anti-Zionist refusal to grant equal national sovereignty to Jews. He says the common principle in each case is discrimination. I am uneasy about this simple linkup, because the sources of anti-Semitism in the Arab world are quite complex. And the complexity must be understood before one can appreciate the depth of anti-Semitism in the Arab world, particularly as it applies to anti-Zionism.

A close scrutiny of Arab religious and political literature reveals two major strains of anti-Semitism. The *first* is what may be called the classical form of anti-Semitism. To some extent it constitutes a foreign intrusion from the West, France in particular. The notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are still widely circulated within the Muslim world. In fact not too long ago General Idi Amin distributed copies as gifts to guests at a diplomatic reception. And King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, shortly before his death, told a group of visiting Westerners he could not comprehend why they, as Christians, support Israel, since the Jews killed Christ and thereby relinquished any rights to a homeland of their own. The same Faisal, according to *al-Musawwar* (August 4, 1972), told the following story: "It happened that two years ago while I was in Paris on a visit, the police discovered five murdered children. Their blood had been drained, and it turned out that some Jews had murdered them in order to take their blood and mix it with the bread they eat on this day. This shows you what is the extent of their hatred and malice toward non-Jewish peoples." Here is a clear repetition of the historic blood libel against the Jews.

One of the difficulties in dealing with these instances of classical anti-Semitism is that Westerners are rarely exposed to the flood of such materials produced for the masses in the Arab world and broadcast over the airwaves. Arab leaders know quite well that such material would damage their cause in the West. But they use it quite freely for the home folks, and Jews sitting in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv can hear it any time they want. One must be aware of this widespread use of classical anti-Semitic materials within popular Arab culture to appreciate the so-called "paranoia" exhibited by Israelis. Their fears are not based solely on what happened to Jews in the past, but *also* on what is being said now to Arab audiences. I know many Western Christians who tend to dismiss all this as irrelevant to the Middle East conflict. But knowing something about mass psychology and how potent a force it remains in the Middle Eastern world, I think the naive dismissal of such anti-Semitic propaganda cannot be justified. It is precisely in this context that one must sympathize with the Israeli demand that, in exchange for its withdrawal from the administered areas, the Arab governments should put a stop to the dissemination of such materials and broadcasts and begin to turn the minds and hearts of their people if not toward reconciliation at least toward accommodation with Eretz Israel.

In terms of classical anti-Semitism we should also not lose sight of the effect the Nazi period had on the

Arab world. One hears constantly from pro-Arab sources that Arabs have had to pay the price for the Western world's anti-Semitism that culminated in Hitler, something in which they had no part. The picture is simply not that clear-cut. While the history of Arab-Jewish relations does not carry within it the centuries-long persecution of Jews that made European history a natural seedbed for the Holocaust, Arabs were not without an expressed admiration for the Nazi "Final Solution." President Sadat has never clearly repudiated his former affection for Hitler, and Idi Amin has made his continued admiration for the Führer quite plain.

Too many of us in the West tend to snicker at such admiration. I think it wrong to treat its possible influence too lightly. There is also the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who cooperated with the Nazi cause, a man who could tell Himmler: "I hope you will lend me Eichmann after the victory. He will be very useful to us, with his methods, for applying the Final Solution in Palestine." It would be a simple matter to write off the antics of the Grand Mufti as the lunacy of a single

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individual. Indeed this is the tack that Arab historians and propagandists have usually taken. The fact is that because of the activities of men like the Mufti and the widespread, profascist, anti-Jewish attitudes of Arab populations from the Maghreb to Yemen, Jews who might have escaped the bloodbath of the Holocaust were denied even temporary sanctuary in Arab lands. As the historian Saul S. Friedman has shown, at no time did any leader, party, or group in any Arab country protest the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews. Quite the contrary. Jewish refugees from Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and North Africa recall the vicious hostility of their neighbors once an Axis victory seemed imminent. In Palestine peasants were being told by their Mukhtars and Muezzins: "Now go and sell your land to the Jews and be quick about it, for in a month Hitler will be in Jerusalem and you will not only have your land back, but everything the Jews possess! Let the knives be sharpened! The great day is about to dawn!"

Jewish memories of the Middle East in the Hitler era

also include the "light pogrom" of 1933 in Aden, nitric acid burnings in Iraq in 1938, bombings of the Beirut synagogue in 1939 and that of Aleppo in 1945, 110 dead and 12,000 homes looted in the Baghdad pogrom of June, 1941, another 700 Jews massacred in Tripoli in May, 1942, and extensive riots in Damascus, Libya, Cairo, and Yemen before the end of World War II. The political and religious institutions of the West have taken concrete steps to wipe out the root causes of the Nazi horrors from their midst. Little or no remedies have been tried in the Arab world. Hence one must acknowledge that significant admiration for the policies of Hitler continues to cast its shadow and influence over the present-day Arab stance toward Israel.

The *second* form of anti-Semitism in the Muslim world is more subtle, yet in many ways far more directly relevant to the anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism equation. It has been fashionable to characterize Muslim treatment of Jews (in contrast to Christian-Jewish relations) as generally harmonious, with only occasional outbreaks of intolerance artificially created by unpopular Arab dynasties. Apologists for Islam often cite the prominent role Jews played in international commerce in Muslim lands in the Middle Ages, the extraordinary works Jews wrote in the Arabic language, or the vast nexus of autonomous institutions Jews developed in the Muslim world as evidence of the Muslim-Jewish symbiosis.

Honesty compels us to recall, however, that all these admittedly remarkable accomplishments belong to a relatively brief span of time (roughly three hundred years) during the thirteen hundred years of Muslim rule in the Middle East. It must be granted that Islam accepted the presence of Jews in its midst under conditions of subordination, while for the Christian churches the very presence of Jews and their continued existence constituted a provocation. Yet subordination, fiscal exploitation, and attacks on persons and property—all real elements of the historic situation of Jews under Muslim regimes—hardly invite a judgment of harmonious relations. Muslim history never approached the violence, demonic hatred, and religious intolerance that typified Christian Europe's attitude toward the Jew, but small riots and pillages were a frequent occurrence in Muslim lands at all times. In Yemen, for instance, Jews have been considered "impure" for centuries and subjected to repeated tribulations. The twelfth-century Muslim dynasty of the Almohades left in its path of conquest a trail of Jewish blood from the Sahara to central Spain. And attacks on the Jewish ghettos of North Africa were frequent.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, for any serious student of Islamic history to find any precedents exemplifying Arab-Jewish cooperation on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Wherever Arab-Jewish commercial partnerships and intellectual exchanges did exist they were never legitimated by Muslim leaders, either political or religious, as constituting an ideal mode of intergroup behavior.

Muslim hostility toward the Jews was woven into

the Koran itself. God has condemned Jews to "humiliation and wretchedness" for rejecting the prophecy of Mohammed (Sura II, 61; III, 112; LIV, 2-3). Jewish hostility is depicted as an indelible characteristic of the Jews and their religion (Sura V, 82), and Jewish opposition to Mohammed is explained by Jewish perversity and greed (Sura V, 96). As Muslim empires expanded and consolidated their hold on large segments of the Middle Eastern world, Muslim jurists devised a formula for ruling non-Muslims based on expediency and vague Muslim traditions. This formula, applicable to both Jews and Christians, came to be known as the Pact of Omar. Jews and Christians were accorded a special niche in the House of Islam, unlike all other nonbelievers who were to be forcibly converted to Islam or destroyed. Jews and Christians were to be allowed to persevere in their faith provided they adhered to the stipulations of this pact. The primary intention of the Pact of Omar was to assure that Jews were kept in an inferior position to Muslims at all times so that the superiority of the Muslims and their religion would be immediately apparent. While the

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stipulations designed to underscore Jewish inferiority and humiliation were not honored in all places at all times, it is interesting that Jews who attempted to circumvent them were either forced ultimately to convert to Islam or were subjected to the wrath of the Muslims.

The spirit of subordination that runs through the Pact of Omar is especially pertinent for an understanding of the current distinction being pushed by the Arab nations between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Yes, the Arabs say, they would be willing to accept Jews in a Palestinian state. They would grant a modicum of rights to Jews. They would not try to convert them to Islam, and would certainly not build gas chambers or ovens. But the independent State of Israel is the problem, because it is a continual, visible reminder of the equality of Jews and hence takes away from the superiority of Islam. As the emergence of the modern State of Israel in some way constituted a challenge to the traditional Christian notion of the meaning of the Christ Event, so the modern State of Israel insults

important facets of traditional Muslim belief. Muslims who insist they are willing to accept Jews in their midst but not Israel are not speaking merely from a response to political circumstances. Their attitude is shaped by traditional Muslim views about the Jews. Insofar as their attitude accepts Jews but never as equals, it can only be branded as anti-Semitism.

It is important to recognize that within Islam there has been no ecumenical movement equivalent to that found in the Christian world. A few individual Muslim professors are open to interreligious dialogue, but there are no decrees that in any way approach the spirit of Vatican II, or even the declarations of the World Council of Churches or various Protestant denominations. The traditional Muslim attitudes developed in the Koran and the Pact of Oman still hold strong sway over the Muslim masses.

Even on the theological level one finds evidences of a continuation of the traditional beliefs toward Jews. An Islamic conference convened at Cairo's Azhar University in September, 1971, devoted solely to Jews, Judaism, and Israel concluded that the destruction of the State of Israel remains a *religious* duty incumbent upon all Muslims. And as one Muslim participant in an interreligious seminar in Jerusalem told me a couple of years ago, the Son of Mohammed would one day return with Jesus and finally crush the false Jewish Messiah. There was little doubt in my mind that this theological belief profoundly influenced the way he thought about the State of Israel.

So I believe Abba Eban has raised a most important point in his *New York Times* essay. The roots of anti-Zionism run deep into traditional Islamic belief about Jews and Judaism. It is time that we in the West began to recognize this connection and to see it as a crucial element in the whole Middle East debate. It is about time we began to confront Arabs and pro-Arabs on this issue and not pretend that it is irrelevant to the political situation. If the price for Middle East peace is the acceptance by Jews of the "civil rights" accorded them in the Pact of Omar, then they are correct in rejecting any Arab attempt to dismantle the State of Israel. For such a situation would bring about the spiritual and cultural emasculation of Judaism, which would in time insure its slow but real death. The process would be much more humane than Hitler's, but in the last analysis the Final Solution would have been attained. Until the hold of traditional Islamic belief has been clearly broken and Islam produces its document on religious liberty, any suggestion that Jews accept a "secular, democratic state" in Palestine is ridiculous.

A word is in order about non-Arab anti-Zionism. It is not without relevance that many of the nations supporting the recent U.N. resolution equating Zionism with racism were situated in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Both these sections of the globe have historically exhibited strong anti-Semitic tendencies. An interesting recent statement from a Christian group in Eastern Europe, the Christian Peace Conference, issued in April, 1975, from Sofia, Bulgaria, supports the

continued existence of the State of Israel. But it accuses Zionism of misusing the biblical message to justify its aggressive policy. The State of Israel, the document insists, cannot in any way be considered the legitimate continuation of the Kingdom of David, for "according to the Gospel the promises made to the people of the Old Testament are accomplished in Jesus and Him alone for all peoples without distinction." This sounds very much like the "old theology," and it comes from a group that styles itself a part of the progressive peace forces of the earth.

At this point I must make it clear that the recognition of the link between present-day anti-Zionism and historic anti-Semitism in no way absolves Jews and non-Jewish supporters of Israel from asking some hard and penetrating questions about Zionism. It is difficult to ask them within the present climate of hostility now intensified by the recent U.N. resolution. While calm reflection will not be easy, I think it imperative to try to attain it.

Jews have frequently charged, not without validity, that Christians fail to understand the historic Jewish link to the land. But my widespread contact with the Jewish community leaves me with the distinct impression that Jews are not very clear about its meaning either. Once we acknowledge that a national homeland is necessary for Jewish physical, spiritual, and cultural survival at this juncture in history and that somehow

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this contemporary Jewish need is connected with the traditional Jewish longing for salvation in Zion, some hard questions remain.

First of all, how do those Jewish scholars committed to modern methods of biblical exegesis handle the biblical promises of land in relation to present-day Israel? Sometimes I feel that otherwise liberal Jews easily and uncritically lapse into a fundamentalist stance on the question of Israel. Secondly, there are some currents within contemporary Zionism with goals that must be questioned on the grounds of justice for the Palestinians. The claim on the part of a minority,

but a growing minority, of Zionists to an Israel beyond the pre-1967 borders cannot be defended. I am not as yet persuaded that these Zionists have the political muscle to block a peace treaty that would leave Israel pretty much as it was before 1967. Critics of such Zionism cannot be written off simply as anti-Semites.

Jews will also have to ask, and somehow answer, whether the land tradition in Judaism necessarily demands perpetual Jewish sovereignty over a piece of real estate in the Middle East. I am not suggesting the possibility of the disappearance of the present State of Israel for the foreseeable future. But at the level of ultimate questioning it is still necessary to ask whether the values that seem fundamental to the land tradition could be sustained by the presence of a Jewish community in the Middle East under some political arrangement other than the nation-state. In other words, is the nation-state *de fide* in Jewish theology? Put another way: Does the land tradition and authentic Zionism rule out all possibility of Jews entering into a regional form of government in the future should peace and trust finally come about among the peoples of the area?

Another question that must be faced is how Zionism relates to the more universalistic trend found in Second Temple Judaism that seemed to modify, in the eyes of certain Jewish scholars, the emphasis on a particular piece of territory as the locale of God's presence. And was the "universalistic" thrust of early Reform Judaism (and its consequent anti-Zionism) a natural development of this Second Temple tradition or an outright perversion of the authentic spirit of Judaism?

Finally, the whole question of non-Jewish minorities in the State of Israel has still not been handled adequately by Zionist ideology. The true picture is nothing like the tale of woe painted by many Arab spokespersons. But neither is it as idyllic as Mr. Eban and others imply. Basic civil and religious rights are guaranteed. But as the percentage of non-Jewish citizens increases in Israel, Zionism will have to grapple with the problem of better incorporating non-Jews into the mainstream of national life in Israel. Actually, were it not for the 1948 war, and if the Arabs had accepted the U.N. partition plan, Israel would have been faced with this problem long ago, for non-Jews might now be a majority.

In raising questions about Israel and Zionism there is always the danger of being called anti-Semitic. Jews must be careful not to make such a link too quickly lest the impact of the real connection

between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism be mitigated. A good rule of thumb might be the following. If the critic of Israeli policy makes it clear that he/she is still committed to the survival of the State, whatever its shortcomings, then whether the criticism is valid or not, the person cannot be termed anti-Semitic. But if, as is true in many cases, a criticism of Israeli policies leaves the distinct impression that Israel has forfeited its right to exist because of some policy failures, then the criticism might with good justification be placed in the anti-Semitic category.

A special word about the Law of Return that grants Jews everywhere automatic citizenship in Israel. This Law was utilized as an argument in favor of the resolution that equated Zionism with racism. And indeed one cannot understand this Law purely from a rational or legal perspective. Only a sensitivity to Jewish sufferings for centuries can throw genuine light on it. But I feel that, in the context of this debate, to focus on the Law of Return is to cloud the issue. The basic question is Israel's right to exist. It is its problem to figure out how it might accommodate all the Jews of the world should they decide to come to the State (though that is highly improbable). There is room for many more Jews within pre-1967 Israel. There is even room, under the conditions of peace, for the return of those Palestinian Arabs who can establish past residency claims and who wish to live in a nation with a pronounced Jewish ethos rather than in a Palestinian state. The Law of Return in no way interferes with the establishment of a Palestinian state, which is essential for the ultimate resolution of the Middle East conflict.

One final comment. While there is need to raise questions about some aspects of Zionism, it is just as crucial to raise questions about rights of religious and ethnic minorities in Islamic countries. Israel has not accorded perfect treatment to Muslims and other minorities. But Israel's record is far better in many respects than all of the Arab nations. Why are we in the West so reluctant to ask hard questions of the Arabs on this score? Are we not thereby subjecting Israel to a double standard of moral norms and, in fact, practicing a kind of paternalism toward the Arab nations ("you cannot expect any better from them; but Israel..."). We have achieved much in interreligious and intergroup harmony in the West. We have a right to ask questions as a result of our experience. But let these questions be applied equally to Zionism and Islamic nationalism. Otherwise we stand guilty of a serious injustice to Israel.