

# Islamic Anti-Semitism in Historical Perspective



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## I. Introduction

This report takes as a given the existence of widespread anti-Semitism throughout the Middle East. This anti-Semitism is endorsed or tolerated by governments, disseminated by the media, taught in schools and universities, preached in mosques. No segment of society is free of its taint. Not everyone makes anti-Semitism a part of his or her profession like the columnist in Egypt's largest newspaper who writes encomiums to Hitler every now and then. Individuals in the Middle East, like people everywhere, have other, more practical concerns in their daily lives. Some may reject anti-Semitism entirely. But to the extent that we are able to speak of an attitude or ideology permeating a society, informing the beliefs of the masses, the debates of the intelligentsia and the decisions of the leaders, the Middle East is permeated with anti-Semitism.

At the outset we must state that this anti-Semitism should not be confused with opposition, however impassioned, to Israeli policies and actions. Opposition and censure, the results of healthy debate and differing points of view, can hardly be condemned. But neither should we allow the terms of political opposition to be used to mask or legitimize hatred, bigotry, and paranoia. When "Zionist" becomes a curse-word and "Zionists" can be blamed, as if by reflex, for September 11, when Israelis are caricatured as *Ostjuden* and blood libel imagery applied to Israel's prime minister, we have clearly moved beyond opposition to concrete policies and actions, and entered the realm of chimerical anti-Semitism. In the contemporary Middle East, malevolence and betrayal are cast as parts of an essential "Jewish nature," endemic either to the Jewish "race" or to Judaism as a religion. Jews, whether Israeli or in the Diaspora, are behind the misfortunes that have befallen the Arab people; they are known to many as the "eternal enemies" of Islam and Allah.

## II. "Traditional" Muslim Anti-Judaism

The demonization of Jews was not a traditional component of Islam, and even today it must not be assumed to characterize Islam throughout the world. Islam as a religion has viewed Jews--and Christians for that matter--as the bearers of respective versions of Allah's truth, distorted by human agency, however, and superseded by Islam, the perfect expression of the one true religion. Described as *Ahl al-Kitab*, Jews and Christians were permitted to live in Muslim lands as tolerated, second-class minorities, subject, however, to the humiliations of their *dhimmi* status.

Jews in particular had to live with the legacy of Muhammad's historical interactions with their co-religionists from Medina; the ire he felt at their opposition to his expanding influence, recorded in the Qur'an, was followed by his triumph over them and their subjugation to his word. This presaged and set the tone for Islam's subsequent perspective on the Jews: the descendants of those who distorted God's truth and opposed His prophet, Jews would rightly be humbled before Muslims and live in second-class status.

Of course this theological perspective on the Jews varied from time to time and place to place. Not all Arab governments were equally anxious to impose strict interpretations of the dhimmi paradigm on their Jewish subjects, and many Arab societies, especially during the High Middle Ages (tenth to twelfth centuries), were suffused with a rare pre-modern cosmopolitan tolerance for Jews and other minorities. But even in these societies, alongside those Arabs who dealt with Jewish neighbors and associates with friendship and esteem there were those who stressed that the proper Islamic approach called for Jewish debasement.

### **The New Demonization**

Yet such debasement is far different from the abject vilification of Jews so prevalent today. A new theology of anti-Semitism and demonization of Jews has arisen. This theology was expressed most famously in the proceedings of the 1968 Al-Azhar Conference in Cairo and in the writings of the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966), which removed the ancient alleged Jewish distortion of Allah's initial revelation to them and the Jewish opposition to Muhammad from their legendary and historical contexts. Instead these two events were portrayed as describing an essential evil in Jewish nature.

Muhammad Azzah Darwaza wrote at the Al-Azhar conference that:

[The Qur'an reveals that the Jews of ancient times] coated what was right with what was wrong. The Jews were also stubborn in telling lies and contradicting the truth... They told lies about Allah and let people suspect their religion... They were notorious for covetousness, avarice and bad manners. They were not ashamed of embracing polytheism or performing the rites of paganism. They sometimes praised the idols and were in collusion with idolaters against monotheists. They displaced the words of Allah and disfigured the laws of Heaven and God's advice. They were hard-hearted and sinful, they committed unlawful and forbidden crimes....

It is extremely astonishing to see that the Jews of today are exactly a typical picture of those mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and they have the same bad manners and qualities of their forefathers although their environment, surroundings and positions are different from those of their ancestors. These bad manners and qualities of the Jews ascertain the Qur'anic statements about their deeply rooted instinct which they inherited from their fathers. All people feel this innate nature of the Jews everywhere and at all times.<sup>1</sup>

Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, a Muslim cleric who eventually became the Mufti of Egypt and Sheikh of the Al-Azhar University, described the Jews in his 1968 Doctoral Dissertation as follows:

Anyone who reads the Qur'an will clearly see that it attributes many negative moral qualities, ugly characteristics and malicious methods to the Children of

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in *Arab Theologians on Jews and Israel*, introduced and edited by D.F. Green, pg. 33.

Israel. It describes them in terms of unbelief, rejecting the truth, selfishness and arrogance, cowardice and lying, obstinacy and deceit, disobedience and transgression, hardness of heart, deviance of character, competing in sin and aggression, and wrongfully consuming people's wealth...[The Qur'an thus] firmly connects the morals and characteristics of those [Jews] who lived during the time of the Prophet [Muhammad] with the morals and characteristics of their first forefathers...to demonstrate that the sons' moral depravity, disobedience and opposition to Islam constituted a legacy of the deviant character inherited by later generations from earlier ones...[These characteristics] apply to them--as indeed we are witnessing--in all times and places, and the passage of time increases the deep-rootedness of these qualities in them....The Qur'an mentioned these [characteristics of the Jews] to...warn believers against their evils and abominations.<sup>2</sup>

Other negative Islamic traditions about Jews throughout the ages were venerated in darker hues and incorporated into a new narrative of Jewish malevolence towards Allah and to Muslims generally.<sup>3</sup> Even what had previously been positive Islamic traditions about Jews--as in the story of Samaw'al, a Jew who was held by Arabs as the paradigm of fidelity for his willingness to allow his son to be killed rather than surrender items entrusted to his safekeeping--were revised with an anti-Semitic animus: Samaw'al's action demonstrated merely that he loved money more than his son's life.<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, Jews came to be described as the "eternal" enemies of Allah and of Islam, a satanic, diabolical force, locked in a lethal struggle with Islam. Sayyid Qutb wrote that "the struggle between Islam and the Jews continues in force and will thus continue, because the Jews will be satisfied only with the destruction of this religion [of Islam].<sup>5</sup> In the same vein, the rector of al-Azhar University in Egypt, Shaykh Abd-al-Halim Mahmud, identified the Jews as Islam's worst enemies:

As for those who struggle against the faithful [Muslims], they struggle against the elimination of oppression and enmity. They struggle in the way of Satan. Allah commands the Muslims to fight the friends of Satan wherever they may be found. And among Satan's friends--indeed, his best friends in our age--are the Jews.<sup>6</sup>

One participant at the Al-Azhar conference, described Jews as "hostile to all human values in this world," and another, the Mufti of Tarsus in Syria, claimed that Jews "have always been a curse that spread among the nations and ... sought to ... extinguish all manifestations of civilization."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in "A Contemporary Construction of the Jews in the Qur'an," by Suha Taji-Farouki, in *Muslim-Jewish Encounters*, p. 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> See Nettler, pg. 83.

<sup>4</sup> See Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*, pg. 202.

<sup>5</sup> Nettler, pg. 85.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Bodansky, p. 84.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Moshe Ma'oz, *Current Anti-Jewishness*, p. 39.

Similarly the Imam of the main mosque in Amman blamed the Jews for all the evil in the world:

Jews are treacherous, ungrateful killers of their prophet... Wherever they went they generated disaster. They stand behind all conspiracies and corruption in the world. God protect us from their evil!<sup>8</sup>

### **Spreading the Message of Hate**

This new theological paradigm of Jews was adopted and promulgated by a variety of Islamist groups. The Muslim Brotherhood, the main Islamist pan-Arab grass-roots movement for most of the twentieth century, popularized the notion that Jews were the first and most dangerous of the "four horsemen of apocalypse." In a children's supplement to the Brotherhood's *al-Da'wa'* publication in October of 1980, an article entitled merely "The Jews" exhorted:

Brother Muslim Lion Cub, Have you ever wondered why God cursed the Jews in his Book? ...God grew weary of their lies.... They associated others with God, they were infidels.... Such are the Jews, my brother, Muslim lion cub, your enemies and the enemies of God....Such is their particular natural disposition, the corrupt doctrine that is there....they have never ceased to conspire against their main enemy, the Muslims. In one of their books they say: "We Jews are the masters of the world, its corrupters, those who foment sedition, its hangmen!" .... Muslim lion cub, annihilate their existence, those who seek to subjugate all humanity so as to force them to serve their satanic designs....<sup>9</sup>

Younger Islamist groups have also adopted this theological anti-Semitism, at least in their internal publications. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the spiritual mentor of the Hezbollah terrorist group, states that "The struggle against the Jewish state, in which the Muslims are engaged, is a continuation of the old struggle of the Muslims against the Jews' conspiracy against Islam." Hamas, which was founded in 1987, includes in its covenant its belief that history will end with a Manichean conflict between Muslims and Jews:

The resurrection of the dead will not come until Muslims will war with the Jews and kill them; until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry, "O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!"

This theology is echoed and reinforced every Friday in the sermons of radical *a'imma* and *'ulema* that are televised throughout the Middle East. One example comes to us from Palestinian television, which broadcast an *imam* preaching from a mosque in Mecca on October 24, 1997, proclaiming that "the Jews always set traps for the community of Muslims... The Koran repeatedly warns against the traps and plots of the 'People of the

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<sup>8</sup>Bodansky, 76.

<sup>9</sup>Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, first published as *Le prophete et Pharaon* (University of California Press: 1986), pg. 111.

Book.' They relentlessly scheme in all times and places and this is what they do today and tomorrow against the Muslim camp." A still more explicit example was broadcast on Saudi Arabia's TV1 television station on April 19, 2002, which featured Sheikh Abd Al-Rahman Al-Sudais preaching from the Al-Harram mosque in Mecca:

Read history and you will know that yesterday's Jews were bad predecessors and today's Jews are worse successors. They are killers of prophets and the scum of the earth. God hurled his curses and indignation on them and made them monkeys and pigs and worshippers of tyrants. These are the Jews, a continuous lineage of meanness, cunning, obstinacy, tyranny, evil, and corruption. They sow corruption on earth...

O Muslims, the Islamic nation today is at the peak of conflict with the enemies of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, with the grandsons of Bani-Quraydah, Al-Nadiri, and Qaynuqa [Jewish tribes in the early days of Islam]. May God's curses follow them until the Day of Judgment.... The conflict is exploding and magnifying, the exploitation and greed are increasing, and the indulgence in humbling Arabs and Muslims and their holy places has become very serious by the world rodents that have revoked pacts and agreements. Treachery, sabotage, and cunning dominate their minds and injustice and tyranny flow in their veins... They cannot but remain arrogant, reckless, corrupt, and harmful. Thus, they deserve the curse of God, His angels, and all people.

### **III. Western-Style Anti-Semitism**

Still, traditional Islamic images, however radicalized and distorted, do not nearly account for the variety of negative representations of Jews and Judaism, in the twentieth century Middle East and today. The use by Islamists of the ancient Muhammadian conflict with Jews as a model for their contemporary disaffection with modern Jews still does not turn naturally into the sort of satanic rhetoric commonly in use since the 1960s. To explain the demonization of contemporary Jews we must look not to the roots of Islam but to the West: the ancient blood libel, and charges of ritual murder and well-poisoning, as well as the belief that Jews are engaged in a fantastic world conspiracy.

#### **1. Blood Libel and Ritual Murder**

These charges are not indigenous to the Middle East. They originated in various parts of Europe in the medieval and early modern periods, and were imported to the Middle East by European traders, missionaries, and occasionally even government officials, in the Imperialist nineteenth century. The first major blood libel, for example, occurred in the famous Damascus Affair of 1840, in which Jews were blamed for the disappearance of a Capuchin friar and his Muslim servant. The accusation of ritual murder in the Damascus Affair, like the majority of some twenty charges of ritual murder in the Middle East before the twentieth century, was made by Christians. Indeed, since its genesis in the Middle Ages, the blood libel had been invested with christological significance and, like

the charge of Host Desecration, was inspired by an alleged Jewish desire to "continue" their millennia-old attack on Jesus Christ and his followers.

But in the twentieth century, the blood libel and the charge of ritual murder had been recast by Muslims as merely another part of the Jewish religion, directed against not only Christians but Muslims and any non-Jew as well. "The God of the Jews is not content with animal sacrifices," wrote the Egyptian 'Abdallah al-Tall in his 1964 book entitled *The Danger of World Jewry to Islam and Christianity*. "He must be appeased with human sacrifices. Hence the Jewish custom of slaughtering children and extracting their blood to mix it with their *matzot* on Passover."<sup>10</sup> By 1967 Israeli academic Y. Harkabi had identified eight Arabic books asserting that Jews perform ritual murder and / or drink the blood of non-Jews as part of their religion.<sup>11</sup> Although Harkabi himself noted at the time that such accusations form only a small part of the anti-Jewish rhetoric in the Middle East, they continued to appear in Arab media through the 1970s to today. Arabic mass-circulation newspapers in Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Jordan have reprinted similar claims about Jews and Israelis.<sup>12</sup>

In August 1972 King Faisal of Saudi Arabia reported in the Egyptian magazine *al-Musawar* that while he was in Paris "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 that they eat on that day."<sup>13</sup> Another instance of high-profile Arab personalities asserting the blood libel occurred in 1984, when Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass published a book *The Matzah of Zion* in which he returned to the Damascus Affair of 1840, claiming that the Jews had indeed murdered the Capuchin friar. In 2001 an Egyptian producer, Munir Radhi, announced that he was adapting Tlass' book into a movie. "It will be," he said, "the Arab answer to Schindler's List."

## 2. Conspiracy Theories and the *Protocols*

As the medieval world entered the early modern world era, the conspiratorial aspect of the ritual murder charge took on a life of its own. This tendency culminated in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a document purporting to be the notes of a secret meeting of Jewish leaders plotting to subvert Christianity, destroy modern civilization and enslave humankind. Though a contemporary Western reader of the *Protocols* will likely view them as an absurd caricature, they attained worldwide circulation after World War I and were taken seriously by many in those tumultuous times.

The *Protocols* were discredited in the West by the late 1920s, when the original text on which the *Protocols* were modeled--a tract from the 1860s attacking Napoleon III--was

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<sup>10</sup> Harkabi p. 273.

<sup>11</sup> Harkabi p. 270-276.

<sup>12</sup> See Arie Stav, 233-239.

<sup>13</sup> Efraim Karsh, "The Long Trail of Arab Anti-Semitism," online at [www.ajiac.org.au/review/200/263/essay263.html](http://www.ajiac.org.au/review/200/263/essay263.html)

discovered. Since then their influence has been limited to the extremist fringes in the West. But in the late 1920s the popularity of the book in the Arab world was only beginning, and their authenticity, according to historian Bernard Lewis, was not seriously questioned until the late 1970s.<sup>14</sup> As of 1967, Y. Harkaby had identified nine different complete Arabic translations of the *Protocols*, many of them published and republished by government presses in Egypt in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>15</sup> By all indications they are perennial bestsellers in the Middle East.

The seriousness with which they appear to be taken in the Middle East may be partly explained by the number of prominent Muslims who have endorsed them. Nasser endorsed the *Protocols* in 1958,<sup>16</sup> as did President Sadat, President Arif of Iraq, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Colonel Qaddafi of Libya, and others.<sup>17</sup> The *Protocols* form part of the worldview of extremist groups, as attested to by their mention by name in article 32 of the Covenant of the terrorist group Hamas in describing the aspirations of Israel:

The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" ("Brutukulat Hukama Sahyun" in the Arabic original), and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.

On the other extreme, excerpts from the Protocols have even appeared in the Jordanian school curriculum.<sup>18</sup>

Even today the *Protocols* continue to be cited by public figures and in the media in the Arab world. In December 1997 Mustafa Tlas, the Syrian Defense Minister, cited the *Protocols* as an explanation for the warm relations between Israel and Turkey.<sup>19</sup> On June 23, 2001, the Egyptian government daily *Al-Ahram* wrote:

What exactly do the Jews want? Read what the Ninth Protocol of "The Protocols of the elders of Zion" says: 'We have limitless ambitions, inexhaustible greed, merciless vengeance, and hatred beyond imagination. We are a secret army whose plans are impossible to understand by using honest methods. Cunning is our approach, mystery is our way. [The way] of the freemasons, in which we believe, cannot be understood by those among the gentiles who are stupid pigs... The ultimate goal of the freemasons is to destroy the world and to build it anew according to the Zionist policy so that the Jews can control the world ... and destroy the [world's] religions...'

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 209.

<sup>15</sup> Harkaby 229.

<sup>16</sup> Harkaby 235.

<sup>17</sup> Lewis 208.

<sup>18</sup> Harkaby 236.

<sup>19</sup> BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, December 13, 1997.

Barely two weeks after September 11, 2001, a columnist in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Wafd* wrote that the "Zionists" must have known in advance that the September 11 terrorist attacks were impending, but refused to share that information with the United States "in order to sow disputes and troubles" throughout the world. "Proof is found," he added, "in the Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion."<sup>20</sup>

Even where the *Protocols* are not mentioned by name, the theme they express--that Jews are engaged in secret machinations to "take over the world," or alternatively, that Jews already control the world--would, by the frequency of its expression by leaders, intelligentsia and media forums, appear to pervade the Arab worldview. A few examples will suffice:

*Al-Ahram*, November 14, 1998

"The Jews have been behind all the wars and their goal was corruption and destruction. This is their means of getting rich quick after wars."

*A-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, July 2, 1998

Everywhere, the Jews have been the subjects of hatred and disdain because they control most of the economic resources upon which the livelihoods of many people are dependent... There is no alternative but to say that the success of the Jews is not coincidental but rather the result of long years of planning and a great investment of effort in order to obtain their wretched control over the world's media...

*Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, November 6, 1997

We must act on the international level in the framework of a detailed information plan which will expose the Zionist-Colonist plot and its goals, which destroy not only our people but the entire world.

Damascus Radio, September 2, 1998

[Jewish] history is full of devising conspiracies, even against the countries in which they live, whose citizenship they bear and whose benefits they enjoy.... Anyone interested in documents from World War I can learn about the role German Jews played in organizing conspiracies to undermine Germany, harm its economy and weaken its capabilities, which deteriorated to the extent that it led to its defeat. Whoever studies these documents can also understand why the hatred of Jews consequently increased so severely.

### **3. Nazism and Holocaust Denial**

#### **What is Holocaust Denial? Why is it Anti-Semitic?**

One specific conspiracy theory which receives much play in the contemporary Arab press deserves special mention: Holocaust denial. Here, facts that are universally

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<sup>20</sup>BBC World Monitoring, September 24, 2001.

acknowledged throughout the rest of the world are questioned in the Arab world, and hinge on conspiracies of frightening scope.

Holocaust denial--the claim that approximately six million Jews were not methodically killed, many by poison gas, by the Nazis during World War II--now regularly occurs throughout the Middle East, in speeches and pronouncements by public figures, in articles and columns by journalists, and in the resolutions of professional organizations. While some voices oppose this denial or deliberate distortion of the historical record, the main tenet of Holocaust denial—that Jews invented the Holocaust story in an attempt to advance their own interests—appears to be an increasingly accepted belief for large numbers of people in Arab and Muslim states. Even as many Western countries have enacted legislation identifying Holocaust denial as a form of hate crime, the Middle East is one of the few regions in the world today where governments do not condemn, and sometimes even sponsor, such anti-Semitic propaganda.

Though some try to portray the deniers as "revisionists" conducting legitimate inquiry into the historical record, scratching the surface of their theories will demonstrate the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory they are really espousing. To make their claims credible, Holocaust deniers are forced to reject enormous volumes of historical evidence from World War II. In so doing they resort to fantastic conspiracy theories about Jews. Records from the period, including thousands of pages of evidence used immediately after the war in the Nuremberg trials, are dismissed as forged by a secret committee; survivors are rejected as greedy charlatans; American GI's who saw the death apparatus in the camps are told that they were duped by the American military itself, which was corrupted by Jewish concerns and also complicit in the conspiracy. As for a motive (for why would Jews claim that millions of their brethren were killed in WWII?): deniers claim that the Jews wanted to defraud the West of billions of dollars in reparations and other payments; to "purchase" world support for the creation of the state of Israel; to demoralize "Aryans" and the West so that the Jews could more easily take over the world.

### **Holocaust Denial Takes Root in the Middle East**

In the Middle East, in some cases, Holocaust denial is actively sponsored by national governments -- by Iran, for example, which has become a sanctuary for Western Holocaust deniers fleeing legal entanglements in their home countries, and whose leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, suggested in 2001 that the statistics of Jewish deaths during the Holocaust had been exaggerated. The numerous expressions of Holocaust denial that have appeared in *Teshreen*, Syria's main daily newspaper, which is owned and operated by the ruling Baath party, suggests that the Syrian government also condones the propaganda. The same holds true for the Palestinian Authority, whose newspaper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*, and television station have frequently denied basic facts of the Holocaust in their reporting.

In other Middle Eastern countries, however, denying or minimizing the extent of the killing of Jews during World War II has been adopted by opposition parties and dissident factions that oppose attempts at normalizing relations -- legal, diplomatic, economic --

with Israel or the United States. For these factions, Holocaust denial is a tool to discredit their government rivals, who have allegedly been "taken in" by Israeli Holocaust propaganda, and to increase popular hatred of Israel. This is true in Jordan, for example, where anti-normalization organizations sought to hold Holocaust-denial conferences in 2001 but were opposed by the Jordanian government. (Despite government opposition, the strongly anti-Zionist Jordanian Writers' Association was able to hold a conference; see below.) The Lebanese government also opposed the attempts of several foreign organizations to hold a Holocaust-denial conference in Beirut in 2001.

### **Early Examples**

In 1983, in an early public example of denial from an indigenous Middle Eastern source, a Palestinian named Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen) wrote *The Other Side: The Secret Relationship between Nazism and the Zionist Movement*. In the book, Abbas suggested that the six million figure was "peddled" by the Jews but that in fact "the Jewish victims may number six million or be far fewer, even fewer than one million." In 1995, reports of the book's existence reached the Western press, largely because of the public prominence that Abbas had attained as the chief PLO architect of the Oslo peace accords and cosigner of the 1993 Declaration of Principles in Washington. The California-based Simon Wiesenthal Center publicly called for Abbas to clarify his position on the Holocaust, but no clear statement was forthcoming. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv*, Abbas tried to frame the issue in terms of realpolitik. "When I wrote *The Other Side*...we were at war with Israel," Abbas said. "Today I would not have made such remarks...Today there is peace and what I write from now on must help advance the peace process."

Less equivocally, in the late 1980s a former Moroccan army officer, Ahmed Rami, began publicly to deny the Holocaust and to disseminate anti-Israel propaganda in Sweden. Rami had fled north after being sentenced to death in Morocco for his role in a 1972 coup attempt against King Hassan II. There he eventually founded "Radio Islam," an anti-Semitic program that also featured attacks on accepted Holocaust history. In October 1990, Swedish courts ruled that Rami and "Radio Islam" were guilty of incitement against Jews; Rami received six months in prison and Radio Islam was shut down. Two years later, Rami was a featured speaker at the annual conference of the Institute for Historical Review, the leading Holocaust-denying organization in the United States. He eventually reestablished Radio Islam as an Internet site, but was again prosecuted in Swedish courts on charges of inciting racial hatred, and was convicted and fined in October 2000. Radio Islam continues to maintain its Web presence from servers in the United States; though it no longer makes audio broadcasts, its site features an extensive collection of Holocaust-denial and other anti-Semitic documents.

Other attempts to undercut or minimize the history of the Holocaust date back to the early 1990s. According to David Bar-Illan ("The PLO Has Not Softened its Propaganda," *The Jerusalem Report*, May 31, 1996), for example, the PLO-affiliated Palestinian Red Crescent published an article in the July 1990 issue of its magazine, *Balsam*, which advanced the now de rigueur claim that Jews concocted "the lie concerning the gas chambers" to gain support for the establishment of Israel. The article also suggested that

the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals were set up by "Jews and their friends" for the purpose of establishing the Holocaust as historical fact. Bar-Illan claims that similar articles appeared in the Cyprus-based PLO journal, *El Istiqlal*.

### **In Recent Years, a Sharp Increase**

Since the mid-1990s, English-language reporting on the Arab-Israeli conflict and peace process has increased dramatically. Several independent organizations have begun to monitor peace-related developments throughout the region, including the statements, policies, and attitudes of regional governments, politicians and media. The close coverage provided by the Middle East monitoring organizations shows that Holocaust denial is popular in Arab media throughout the Middle East and the Palestinian Authority. This is true even in Egypt and Jordan, the two Arab countries that have taken steps to normalize relations with Israel. Among the newspapers that have consistently featured Holocaust denial are the Jordanian daily, *Al Arab Al-Yom*, the Syrian daily, *Teshreen*, the English-language Iranian *Tehran Times*, and the Palestinian Authority's *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*. Several noted religious leaders in the region have also rejected the facts of the Holocaust, including Sheikh Mohammad Mehdi Shamseddin of Lebanon, Sheik Ikrima Sabri of Jerusalem and Iranian religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

On July 4, 1998, for example, the establishment Jordanian newspaper *Al-Arab Al-Yom* told its readers that "most research prepared by objective researchers" has "proven in a manner beyond the shadow of a doubt" that the Holocaust is "a great lie and a myth that the Zionist mind spread in order to lead the world astray." Earlier that year (April 27, 1998), the same newspaper had published an article claiming that "there is no proof" that the Holocaust occurred, except for "the conflicting testimonies of a few Jewish 'survivors.'" On July 14, 1998, the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, stated that regarding the crematoria remaining at Buchenwald and Auschwitz, "even if these crematoria operated day and night, it would take dozens of years to burn six million people and not merely three years." A Lebanese politician, Dr. Issam Naaman wrote in a London-Arab newspaper on April 22, 1998, that "Israel prospers and exists by right of the Holocaust lie and the Israeli government's policy of intentional exaggeration."

### **Aid and Comfort for Western Deniers**

Several Holocaust deniers have turned to the Arab and Islamic world for help when facing prosecution in various countries for illegal activities. Wolfgang Fröhlich, an Austrian engineer who testified on behalf of Swiss denier Jurgen Graf in 1998 about the impossibility of Zyklon-B gas being used for executing humans, sought refuge in Iran in May 2000, claiming that his arrest by Austrian police was imminent. He reportedly still resides in that country. Graf himself, who was convicted of inciting racial hatred by promulgating Holocaust denial in Switzerland in 1998, also resides in Iran, to which he fled rather than face a 15-month jail term. According to the Institute for Historical Review, Graf is presently living in Tehran "as a guest of Iranian scholars." Since his arrival in Iran, Graf has authored an online book entitled *Holocaust Revisionism and its Political Consequences*. The relationship between either Fröhlich or Graf and the Iranian government is not clear.

The best known flare-up of Holocaust denial in the Middle East occurred in response to the trial of Roger Garaudy in France in 1998. Garaudy was charged with violating a 1990 French law that makes it illegal to deny historical events that have been designated as "crimes against humanity," and with inciting racial hatred. These charges stemmed from his 1995 book, *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel (Les mythes fondateurs de la politique israélienne)*, in which he stated that there was no Nazi program of genocide during World War II, and that Jews essentially fabricated the Holocaust for their financial and political gain. Garaudy was convicted on these charges in 1998.

Before, during and after the trial, he was hailed as a hero throughout the countries of the Middle East --the trial was covered by media from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Formerly Roman Catholic and Communist, Garaudy had converted to Islam in 1982, and married a Jerusalem-born Palestinian woman, but this alone did not explain the outpouring of support he received; the "revisionist" message of his book -- whose Arabic translation was a best-seller in many of the region's countries -- clearly resonated across the region. The former president of Iran, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, announced in a sermon on Radio Tehran that his personal scholarship on the subject had convinced him that "Hitler had only killed 20,000 Jews and not six million," and added that "Garaudy's crime derives from the doubt he cast on Zionist propaganda." The main establishment newspaper in Egypt, *Al-Ahram*, defended Garaudy in a March 14, 1998, article that argued that there is "no trace of the gas chambers" that are supposed to have existed in Germany, and that six million Jews could not have been killed in the Holocaust because "the Jews of Germany numbered less than two million" at the time. Numerous professional and social organizations throughout the region issued statements supporting Garaudy as well, including the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate, the Palestinian Writers Association, the Jordanian Arab Organization for Human Rights, the Qatar Women's Youth Organization, the Federation of Egyptian Writers and the Union of Arab Artists.

Support for Garaudy did not end merely with words. Seven members of the Beirut Bar Association volunteered to defend the writer in France, and Egypt's Arab Lawyers' Union also dispatched a five-man legal team to Paris in Garaudy's support. The United Arab Emirates daily, *Al-Haleej*, was inundated with contributions and messages of support for Garaudy after it published an appeal on his behalf. The most surprising contribution came from the wife of United Arab Emirates leader Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan al-Nahayan, who gave the equivalent of \$50,000, in cash, to cover the maximum fine that Garaudy would be required to pay if found guilty.

### **The Great Contradiction: Holocaust Denial and “Jews as Nazis”**

Of course the Arab perception of the Holocaust has never been monolithic, and has often been influenced by the vicissitudes of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The perception that the West created Israel out of guilt over the attempted genocide of the Jews during World War II is widespread in the Middle East; coupled with their hostility towards Israel, this leads many Arabs to complain that they are "paying" for the sins of the West. This opinion was especially widespread among Palestinian opinion-makers -- until the

breakdown of the 2000 Palestinian-Israeli peace process, when many came to view the recognition of any historical Jewish suffering as a political liability, and the Palestinian Authority-controlled media outlets increased their dissemination of Holocaust denial.

Another, more troubling approach to the Holocaust also exists in the Middle East. Hatred of Israel has led some Arabs to embrace Nazism itself, and to applaud its attempted genocide of the Jews. "[Give] thanks to Hitler," wrote columnist Ahmad Ragab recently in the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*. "He took revenge on the Israelis in advance, on behalf of the Palestinians. Our one complaint against him was that his revenge was not complete enough." Nazi-style anti-Semitism has in fact had a long history in the Middle East, beginning as early as 1937, when Nazi leaders conducted propaganda campaigns in the region.

The Mufti of Jerusalem during World War II, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, attempted to establish an alliance between Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Arab nationalists, for the ultimate purpose of conducting a Holy War of Islam against "international Jewry." Several Nazi-influenced political parties arose in the Middle East in the 1930s and 1940s, some of which went on to play important roles in shaping the leadership of Arab nations in the post-World War II period. Egypt, Syria and Iran are widely believed to have harbored Nazi war criminals, though they do not admit doing so. *Mein Kampf* has been published and republished in Arabic since 1963.

At the same time, the phenomenon of Arabs embracing Holocaust denial is in some respects puzzling, even perverse. Since the Six-Day War, Arab opinion makers have consistently used World War II-era associations in describing Israel and its actions. Israeli leaders have been compared with Hitler, and its army with the SS; Palestinian refugee camps have been dubbed "concentration camps." Associating Israel with Nazi Germany in general remains a standard rhetorical device. But, especially of late, propaganda demonizing Israel as "Nazi" competes in Arab media and politics with propaganda that denies the existence of the Nazi Holocaust.

An example of this contradiction -- condemning Israel with Nazi labels while denying the worst of the Nazi crimes -- can be found in the Syrian daily, *Teshreen*, on January 31, 2000. In the space of a single column, ("The Plague of the Third Millennium"), editorialist Muhammad Kheir Al-Wadi called on the international community to "adamantly oppose the new Nazi Plague that breeds in Israel," while claiming that Zionists "invented" the notion of a "Nazi Holocaust in which the Jews suffered." The intellectual bad faith underlying such a formulation appears to be irrelevant to many Middle Eastern writers.

#### **IV. Historical Perspective, and Looking to the Future**

We have seen the widespread existence of anti-Semitism in various forms throughout the Middle East. What led to the perversion of the traditional Islamic view of Jews into the hateful bigotry it has become? Why was the Arabian desert such fertile ground for imported Western anti-Semitic images?

The immediate answer: Israel. Well, yes, of course. But no, not really. The "new theology" was espoused by "Islamists" or "Islamic fundamentalists," men like Qutb, Hadawi, Tantawi, whose writings show that they were responding primarily not to an external Jewish enemy but to their perception that Islam had lost its way over the centuries of Ottoman rule. Their goal was to purify Islam, to search for the authentic voice of the Islamic religion and to urge their fellow Muslims to listen to that voice. Searching for authenticity they turned to the Qur'an and the history of *al-Rashidoon* (the "Rightly Guided Ones," the first four Caliphs after Muhammad) who ruled over a militant, ever-expanding, triumphant Muslim empire. Searching for relevance for their authentic traditions, they viewed the type of Muslim society presented therein as an eternal ideal.

Most of the efforts of the early fundamentalists were devoted to cleaning the houses of their own Arab governments. In the early twentieth century, most of the governments had been created and maintained by the imperialist West, and did not share the Islamic vision of the fundamentalists, who insisted on establishing *sharia* rule. Thus the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, established in 1928, was locked in conflict with the pro-British Egyptian government through the 1940s, and with Nasser's revolutionary socialist government in the 1950s. For the Brotherhood, a true Islamic state could not be run by outside imperialists, nor could it countenance an imported socialist program (despite the Islamic trappings draped thereon). In fact, it was in Nasser's prisons that Sayyid Qutb fully developed his thought.

In seeking to establish a *sharia* state, the fundamentalists also had to deal with the presence of Jews in their society. In the early twentieth century there were still many Jews living in Arab lands, but their status had changed significantly since the pre-Imperialist days of *dhimmi*-hood. Jews had generally embraced the Western newcomers to the Arab world in the nineteenth century. Under imperial protection they had cast off many of their traditional restrictions and humiliations, and had benefited from education opportunities offered by both Christian missionary schools and by the network of Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. In addition, Jews from many walks of life (though not all) were increasingly attracted to Zionism, a nationalist philosophy that supported Jewish settlement in Palestine. To the fundamentalists, *dhimmi* status was non-negotiable, and Zionism, which sought to subvert Palestine from *dar al-Islam*, was intolerable. Despite their long history of living in Arab lands, Jews increasingly came to be viewed as outsiders and imperialists by the Muslim majority. Violence against Jews rose alongside violence against imperial agents.

It was in this environment that Islamists first started extracting the story of Muhammad's conflicts with the Jews from its historical context. It provided them with a model on which to base their opposition to the changing Jewish role in their society and the Jewish identification with the infidel West. As Zionist aspirations for the Land of Israel grew and solidified, the universalization of the negative aspects of the Qur'anic view of the Jews became all the more attractive to the Islamists and their many sympathizers. The foundation of Israel in 1948, and worse, its triumph and expansion in 1967, helped the

Islamist paradigm find even greater appeal among a broad swath of Muslim society. It is no coincidence that the Al-Azhar conference, one of the most concentrated expressions of this Islamist anti-Jewish rhetoric, took place in 1968. The conference proceedings were full of references to the Israeli triumph over the Arabs as proof that Allah was expressing His displeasure with the lack of piety among Muslims.

The disposition of Islamists to view Jews in a negative, metahistorical fashion, and their tendency towards fundamentalism, literalism, and Manicheanism, likely made them prone to accepting the imported Western demonic anti-Semitic images. Islamism, in turn, found popular support, especially in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, with the decline, due to their corruption and defeat at the hands of Israel, of the leftist / secularist governments that ruled immediately following the retreat of the Western imperialist powers from the Middle East. Even among the masses of people who lacked exposure to or understanding of the finer points of the Islamist position, ethnic or religious identification with the Arab / Muslim *umma* was very strong. Israel was an affront either to their religious sensibilities (as the conqueror of land that had once been under Islamic control) or to their pan-Arabist ones (as the last outpost of the colonial West in the Middle East). The surviving secular governments in turn promulgated anti-Semitism to help draw support away from the Islamists (whose goal was still the overthrow of the secular governments to establish new Islamic regimes) and to deflect the blame for their own failures.

Does the presence of so much anti-Semitism in the Arab world mean that peace with Israel is impossible? Not necessarily. Some anti-Semitism is the result of political frustration, which can be defused through resolution of the underlying tensions. Even conspiratorial anti-Semitism, by nature the type of secular anti-Semitism least open to reasoned mediation, can subside when responsible governments make real efforts to be responsive to their constituencies, when the problems of underemployment and poverty can be resolved, and, most importantly, when those who hold these anti-Semitic views meet and come to know real Jews, not the demonic stereotypes in which they believe.

Anti-Semitism that bases itself on religion, however, is different. The constant trumpeting of the anti-Semitic Islamist paradigm since the late 1960s, and the apparent absence of an opposing, moderate voice of Islam emanating with any real force from the Middle East, suggests that this new, theologically based demonization of Jews is being accepted by masses of Muslims throughout the region. Weaving together a theological, metahistorical opposition to Jews with the worst of Western anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, today's anti-Semitism in the Middle East cannot be easily resolved. Religions are self-propagating, and theologies possess remarkable staying power across generations. A theologically based anti-Semitism gripped Christian Europe for hundreds of years; it took further centuries of reformation and revolution and an all-encompassing reordering of society for its domination to be broken. Even today its aftereffects linger. It would be prudent to not underestimate its potency.

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