

Defining Jew-Hatred Down

The curious response to Ahmadinejad at the U.N.

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It is a topsy-turvy world: At the United Nations--an organization born out of the struggle against Nazi Germany and intended to embody the lessons of the Holocaust--a head of state openly spouts anti-Semitic propaganda in an address before the General Assembly. Granted, he takes the trouble to denounce "Zionists" and avoid the word "Jew," but this dodge is transparent to any student of the Nazis. His speech is greeted with acclaim, and neither the U.N. secretary general nor any Western head of government bothers to object. The media are mostly silent.

It happened on September 23, and the speaker was Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. A familiar figure at the U.N., Ahmadinejad has a history of using his turn at the rostrum to sermonize about his yearning for the return of the Shia messiah. This time, he went further, drawing inspiration also from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The Zionists, he told the assembly, are the eternal enemy of "the dignity, integrity and rights of the American and European

people" (this is the English translation of his remarks on the U.N. website). Although they are few in number, the Zionists "have been dominating an important portion of the financial and monetary centers as well as the political decision-making centers of some European countries and the United States in a deceitful, complex and furtive manner."

Indeed, so influential are the Zionists around the world that even "some presidential or premier nominees in some big countries have to visit these people, take part in their gatherings, swear allegiance and commitment to their interests in order to attain financial or media support." In particular, even "the great people of America and various nations of Europe" are caught in the clutches of Jewish power: They "need to obey the demands and wishes of a small number of acquisitive and invasive people. These nations are spending their dignity and resources on the crimes and occupations and the threats of the Zionist network against their will."

Yet liberation is near. "Today," according to Ahmadinejad, "the Zionist regime is on a definite slope to collapse. There is no way for it to get out of the cesspool created by itself and its supporters."

For Ahmadinejad, of course, such talk is nothing new. Addressing the international Holocaust deniers' conference in Tehran in December 2006, he declared (in a speech translated by the Middle East Media Research Institute, MEMRI) that "the Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated"--freed, that is, from the "acquisitive and invasive" minority he "outed" in New

York as the real power behind Western governments. The sentiment is not so far from that expressed in a Nazi directive of 1943: "This war will end with anti-Semitic world revolution and with the extermination of Jewry throughout the world, both of which are the precondition for an enduring peace." Just as Hitler's utopia, his "German peace," required the extermination of the Jews, so the Iranian leadership's "Islamic peace" is conditioned on the elimination of Israel.

Ahmadinejad's performance elicited applause from his audience and a warm embrace from the president of the General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, a 75-year-old Catholic priest and holder of the Lenin Prize of the former Soviet Union. D'Escoto is a close friend of Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, in whose government he served as foreign minister from 1979 to 1990. This is the same Ortega who, four weeks after the Tehran Holocaust deniers' conference, joined President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela in welcoming Ahmadinejad to Latin America as a "a president willing to join with the Nicaraguan people in the great battle against poverty."

Equally noteworthy was the lack of reaction to Ahmadinejad's U.N. performance in Western capitals--with three exceptions. The German and French foreign ministers criticized Ahmadinejad's "blatant anti-Semitism," and Barack Obama expressed disappointment that the Iranian president had been given "a platform to air his hateful and anti-Semitic views." Otherwise Ahmadinejad's misuse of the U.N. to spread anti-Semitic propaganda didn't even register as a provocation.

On September 23, the very day of his speech, Ahmadinejad was Larry King's guest on CNN. King offered the Iranian president an hour-long opportunity to hold forth as he pleased.

The next day, in an article for *Salon*, the Iran specialist Juan Cole of the University of Michigan took Obama to task for his comments on Ahmadinejad. Cole quoted a single sentence from the U.N. speech--one in which Ahmadinejad criticized the United States--while ignoring the anti-Semitic passages. "Larry King got at the true Ahmadinejad," Cole insisted, whereas Obama "fell into the trap of declining to make a distinction between anti-Zionist views and anti-Semitic ones."

Then on September 25, Ahmadinejad visited the *New York Times*. In the interview published the next day, he rehearsed his anti-Semitic notions without protest from interviewer Neil MacFarquhar. "Zionism," Ahmadinejad explained, "is the root cause of insecurity and wars. ... What commitment forces the U.S. government to victimize itself in support of a regime that is basically a criminal one?"

This was in striking contrast to the *Times*'s outrage in 2003 when Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad of Malaysia delivered an anti-Semitic speech. Back then the *Times* wrote:

"It is hard to know what is more alarming--a toxic statement of hatred of Jews by the Malaysian prime minister at an Islamic summit meeting this week or the unanimous applause it engendered from the kings, presidents and emirs in the audience."

Not only that, but the *Times* concluded its editorial with a sharp rebuke to the European Union:

“The European Union was asked to include a condemnation of Mr. Mahathir's speech in its statement yesterday ending its own summit meeting. It chose not to, adding a worry that anti-Semitism displays are being met with inexcusable nonchalance.”

The *Times* is doing now what it so recently held to be "inexcusable."

Sixty-three years after Auschwitz, then, has anti-Semitism entered "acceptable" discourse? Or is the *New York Times* actually fooled by a rhetorical trick? Where Mahathir was crude enough to denounce the machinations of "the Jews," Ahmadinejad attacks only "the Zionists." He says, "Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world." He says "the Zionists" have for 60 years blackmailed "all Western governments." He says, "The Zionists have imposed themselves on a substantial portion of the banking, financial, cultural and media sectors." Perhaps this is why he is hailed as an anti-imperialist star.

But the Iranian president uses the term "Zionist" in precisely the way Hitler used the term "Jew": as the embodiment of evil. Even if the Iranian regime tolerates the presence of a Jewish community in Tehran, whoever holds Jews responsible for all the ills of the world--whether calling them "Judases" or "Zionists"--is propagating a potentially genocidal creed.

In fact, anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism have gone hand in hand for over 80 years, not only in the annals of Nazism but also in the intellectual foundations of the Iranian revolution.

In 1921, the future Nazi ideology chief Alfred Rosenberg published a book entitled *Zionism, Enemy of the State*. In 1925, Hitler likewise attacked Zionism in *Mein Kampf*, warning that "a Jewish state in Palestine" would only serve as an "organization centre for their international world-swindling, ... place of refuge for convicted scoundrels and a university for up-and-coming swindlers." Or does this reading of Hitler fall into Juan Cole's "trap of declining to make a distinction between anti-Zionist views and anti-Semitic ones"?

As a scholar who can read the writings of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the original, Cole is surely familiar with Khomeini's anti-Semitism. And yet he passes over this anti-Semitism in silence, just as he passed over the offensive passages of Ahmadinejad's speech. Up until the revolution of 1979, Khomeini was entirely open in his choice of words. "The Jews ... wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world," he wrote in 1970 in his major work, *Islamic Government*. "Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that ... they may one day achieve their goal." In September 1977, Khomeini declared: "The Jews have grasped the world with both hands and are devouring it with an insatiable appetite, they are devouring America and have now turned their attention to Iran and still they are not satisfied." The quotation comes from an official compilation of Khomeini's works published in Tehran in 1995.

Starting in 1979, however, Khomeini substituted the word "Zionist" for "Jew," while leaving the fundamental anti-Semitism unchanged. The mullahs' regime disseminated the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* throughout the world. In 2005, an English edition of the *Protocols* was displayed by Iranian booksellers at the Frankfurt Book Fair--the very year Khomeini's fervent admirer Ahmadinejad was elected president.

Today, the anti-Semitism of the Nazis is espoused in Tehran with all the zeal that fuels religious war. As Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani, one of the regime's leading religious authorities, declared in a statement published in 2005 by the official Iranian news agency, Fars (but quickly pulled from the Fars website, according to MEMRI): "One should fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam are met." What makes the Iranian nuclear program so dangerous is not the technology, but the religious and anti-Semitic mission that the regime would use it to pursue.

"Tehran ... is pregnant with tragedies," Israeli president Shimon Peres told the U.N. General Assembly the day after Ahmadinejad's appearance. "The General Assembly and the Security Council bear responsibility to prevent agonies before they take place." And not only the General Assembly and the Security Council--but Larry King, the *New York Times*, and the rest of us as well.

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