

The Roots of Ongoing Iranian Antisemitism and its Consequences

Lecture, delivered on behalf of „The Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP)” on March 11, 2014 at the Harvard Faculty Club, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

by Matthias Küntzel

The topic of my talk “Iranian antisemitism” is controversial in two respects. Some will say that this is a topic of the past, connected to former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad but not to his successor. Hassan Rouhani, the new Iranian president, seems to be quite friendly towards the Jews and less hostile to Israel. Later in my talk I will return to this objection.

Others might say that there is and was no Iranian antisemitism in the first place. Why? Because even former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sent Rosh Hashanah greetings to the Jews every year and stated: “We are friends with the Jewish people”. His self-image is that of an ardent anti-Zionist, not that of an antisemite. In addition, Jews have lived in Iran for more than 2,000 years and even today the 10,000 or so Jews in Iran represent the largest Jewish community in any Muslim country. Against this background – is there “Iranian antisemitism” at all?

My answer is “yes”. Ahmadinejad’s worldview was steeped in uncompromising antisemitism.

Firstly, he invested the word “Zionist” with exactly the same meaning Hitler poured into “Jew”: the incarnation of evil. And so, instead of saying the “Jews” are conspiring to rule the world, he says, “Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world,”¹ or “the Zionists have for the last sixty years blackmailed all Western governments”² or “the Zionists fund Western election propaganda [and thus] control their affairs” and that the Zionists were, among many other calamities, behind the mass murder in Norway, the 9/11 attacks, the Danish Muhammad cartoons and the destruction of Iraq’s Golden Mosque. Anyone who makes Jews — whether as “Judas” or as “Zionist” — responsible for all the ills of the world is obviously driven by antisemitism.

¹ Hooman Majd, “Mahmoud and Me,” New York Observer, 2 October 2006.

² MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, No. 1091, 14 February 2006.

Secondly, Ahmadinejad proudly denied the Holocaust. Holocaust denial, however, is antisemitism at its peak.

Whoever declares Auschwitz to be a “myth” implicitly portrays the Jews as the enemy of humankind, who for filthy lucre has been duping the rest of humanity for the past seventy years. Whoever talks of the “so-called” Holocaust suggests that over ninety percent of the world’s media and university professorships are controlled by Jews and thereby cut off from the “real” truth.

In this way, precisely the same sort of genocidal hatred gets incited that helped prepare the way for the Shoah. Every denial of the Holocaust thus tacitly contains an appeal to repeat it.

Ahmadinejad’s portrayal of the Shoah was neither a new nor a personal obsession but rather an intensification of themes long prominent in the Islamic Republic’s ideological discourse.

From the 1990s onward, Iran has gone further than any Arab country in hosting and officially endorsing Western Holocaust deniers who have been shunned in their home countries such as Jürgen Graf, Wolfgang Fröhlich and Fredrick Töben.

In 1998, President Mohammad Khatami grieved over the prosecution of French Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy; Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei even met Garaudy in person. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani voiced moral support for Holocaust deniers as well. As early as 2001, the Tehran Times called the findings of the Nuremberg trials about Auschwitz „the biggest lie in history“.³

After December 2005, the new Iranian President Ahmadinejad placed the denial of the Holocaust at the center of his rabble-rousing. Now, the Iranian regime established “exposure” of the “Holocaust Myth” as the new historiographical paradigm. The “lie about the Holocaust” became a regular topic of televised Friday sermons. Talk shows on public television featured a parade of historians mocking the “fairy tale about the gas chambers.” The Iranian state press agency developed into a platform for Holocaust deniers from all over the world.⁴

In December 2006, Iran’s foreign minister Manucher Mottaki opened the infamous Holocaust denier conference. This conference was special because of its purpose.

³ David Menashri, *Iran, The Jews And The Holocaust*, Reseach Paper, Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism, Tel Aviv 1997, p. 8.

⁴ Iranian Leader: Statements and Positions (Part I), in: The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Special Report, No. 39, 5 January 2006.

Previously, Holocaust deniers wanted to revise the past. With this conference, Iran wanted to shape the future. If “the official version of the Holocaust is called into question,” declared Mottaki in his opening speech, then “the nature and identity of Israel” must also be called into question.⁵ In his closing speech, Ahmadinejad promised the audience: “The life-curve of the Zionist regime has begun its descent, and it is now on a downward slope towards its fall. ... The Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated.”⁶

This sentiment – liberation through destruction – is the one for which the Holocaust historian Saul Friedlaender coined the term “redemptive antisemitism”. It is not so far from that expressed in a Nazi directive of 1943: “This war will end with antisemitic world revolution and with the extermination of Jewry throughout the world, both of which are the precondition for an enduring peace.”⁷

Ahmdinejad’s hatred of Jews resembled Hitler’s ideology in this aspect: Both have a utopian element. Just as Hitler’s “German peace” required the extermination of the Jews, so the Iranian leadership’s “Islamic peace” depends on the elimination of Israel.

I mentioned three aspects of Iranian antisemitism: Holocaust denial, demonization of Zionists or Jews and the wish to get rid of Israel. All three items are interwoven and belong together. They form what I call an ideological triangle.

Anyone who accepts the reality of the Holocaust can’t at the same time believe that the Jews are the rulers of the world. Anyone who accepts the Jews as they are, instead of demonizing them, can’t call into question the fact of the Holocaust. Anyone who accepts Israel’s right to a secure existence must repudiate antisemitism. Elimination of Israel, demonization of Jews and Holocaust denial – if any of the three sides of this ideological triangle is absent, the whole structure collapses.

Let me conclude: The Iranian regime pretends to struggle against Zionism, not against the Jews. This anti-Zionism, however, is just a Trojan horse under the cover of which the Islamic Republic tries to make its redemptive antisemitism respectable. It is the Iranian leadership’s special sense of mission—the mission to “liberate” the world—that propels them to propagate their blend of antisemitism and Holocaust denial all over the world: via the United Nations, via satellite TV channels, via the Internet.

⁵ Boris Kalnoky, “Iran versammelt die Holocaust-Leugner,” *Die Welt*, 12 December 2006.

⁶ Yigal Carmon, “The Role of Holocaust Denial in the Ideology and Strategy of the Iranian Regime,” in MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis Series*, No. 307, 15 December 2006.

⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda During World War II And The Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), p. 209.

Let us now proceed to the second part of my speech which is about

The roots of Iranian antisemitism

Many believe that Iranian antisemitism is caused by the Middle East conflict. But this is not true. No doubt Iranian antisemitism is whipped up by events in the Middle East; its roots, however, are older than the state of Israel. The first root is a religious one: Islamic anti-Judaism.

It is true that Jews and Non-Jews share a history that goes back some 2,700 years in Iran. This does not mean, however, that Jews have enjoyed equality under the Shiite rule that began in 1501.

On the contrary, in no other Islamic land were Jews so poorly treated and so brutally persecuted as in Persia. In 1830, 400 Jews in Tabriz had their throats slashed. In 1839, all the Jews in Mashhad were forced to convert to Islam. In 1910, following rumors of a ritual murder, 6,000 Jews in Shiraz were robbed of all their possessions: twelve were killed and another 50 wounded.⁸ "I do not know any more miserable, helpless, and pitiful individual on God's earth than the Jahudi in those countries," the Orientalist and voyager Arminius Vambéry wrote in 1905 following his return from Persia: "The poor Jew is despised, belabored and tortured ... he is the poorest of the poor."⁹

This inhuman treatment has to do with a particularity of the Shiite image of the Jew that has no counterpart in Sunni Islam. Only the Shiite established a system of "ritual purity," which bears similarities to the attitude of Hindus toward the Pariahs or "untouchables." According to it, whoever is not Muslim is *najas* or "impure." All contact with an unbeliever is considered a sort of poisoning. The paranoid fear of "infection" provoked periodic excesses and led to the development of a particular Shiite code of conduct, which especially affected Jews, since unlike the Armenian Christians and the small Zoroastrian community, the Jewish minority was present throughout the country. Its members had to live in ghettos and were not permitted to go out when it rained or snowed, in order to prevent their "impurity" from

⁸ David Littmann, "Jews Under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia", in: Wiener Library Bulletin, 1979, Vol. XXXII, New Series, Nos. 49/50, pp. 4 and 12.

⁹ Cited from David Menashri, "The Jews of Iran" in Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (Eds.), Antisemitism in Times of Crisis (New York: New York University, 1991), p. 354.

spreading and coming into contact with Muslims. For the same reason, they were prohibited from visiting public baths or having any contact with the food and drinks of Muslims.¹⁰

Officially, these rules were abolished when the Shah-Pahlavis came to power. But the orthodox clergy continued to insist on them. Thus, in 1962, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the future Supreme Leader of the Revolution, explicitly propagated the *najas* doctrine in a widely disseminated handbook titled "Clarification of the Problems: a Guide to Muslims in their Daily Life". "There are eleven things which make unclean," he noted: "1. urine; 2. faeces; 3. sperm; 4. carrion; 5. blood; 6. dog; 7. pig; 8. unbeliever; 9. wine; 10. beer; 11. the sweat of a camel which eats unclean things." In a gloss on number 8, he adds: "The entire body of the unbeliever is unclean; even his hair and nails and body moistures are unclean." There is, however, some hope: "When a non-Muslim man or woman is converted to Islam, their body, saliva, nasal secretions, and sweat are ritually clean. If, however, their clothes were in contact with their sweaty body before their conversion, these remain unclean."¹¹

There is a second root of Iranian Antisemitism and that is Nazi propaganda.

During World War II, European antisemitic ideology was brought to Tehran in the Farsi language via a Berlin-based short-wave propaganda radio station, called Radio Zeesen. This is a well-established, though rarely mentioned, fact.¹² I found documents in the archives of the German Foreign Office showing that the Nazis incited hatred of Jews among the Iranian population by fusing early Islamic Jew-hatred with the European myth of the Jewish world conspiracy. Let me quote the recommendations that Erwin Ettel, the German ambassador to Tehran, sent to the Foreign Office in Berlin in a letter of February 1941:

"The way to directly connect with Shiite ideas is through the treatment of the Jewish question, which the Muhammadan perceives in religious terms and which, precisely for this reason, makes him susceptible to National Socialism on religious grounds. A way to foster this (anti-Jewish) development would be to highlight Muhammad's struggle against the Jews in ancient times and that of the Führer in modern times," Ettel advised the Foreign Office. "Additionally, by identifying the British with the Jews, an exceptionally effective anti-English propaganda campaign can be conducted among the Shiite people."

Ettel even picked out the appropriate Koranic passages, such as sura 5, verse 82: "Truly you will find that the most implacable of men in their enmity to the faithful are the Jews and the

¹⁰ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 33ff, Menashri, op. cit., p. 356.

¹¹ *Risala-i Tawzih al-Masa'il* (Tehran, 1962), cited from Lewis, op. cit., p. 34.

¹² See: Matthias Küntzel, *National Socialism and Antisemitism in the Arab World*, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Spring 2005, and Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (Yale University Press, 2009).

pagans”; and the final sentence of chapter 2 of “Mein Kampf”: “In resisting the Jew, I do the work of the Lord.”

“By successfully bringing the country’s clergy under the sway of German propaganda, we can win over broad layers of the popular masses,” Ettel wrote in February 1941.¹³

Various testimonies from that period indicate that these broadcasts were widely heard. Iranian author Amir Cheheltan wrote that it was common for passers-by to stand on the sidewalks at the entrance of tea houses in Teheran listening to Radio Zeesen broadcasts on the progress of the German army. He wrote, ‘These broadcasts inspired the fantasy of the masses on the street. Each German victory represented a defeat of the colonial powers, the Soviet Union and Great Britain, which they applauded.’¹⁴

Radio Zeesen thus contributed to growing numbers of Persians viewing Jews and Zionists through the antisemitic perspective of the Germans.

Among the regular listeners to Nazi Germany’s radio propaganda was Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of Islamism in Iran, which brings me to the third root: Khomeini’s antisemitism.

During the reigns of Reza Shah (1925-1941) and his son Mohammed Reza Shah (1941-1979), Iranian Jews enjoyed political equality, cultural autonomy, and also an increasing level of economic security. Nonetheless, even if unofficial, Judeophobia continued to exist.

From 1963, Khomeini, the most important opponent of the Shah, recognized the mobilizing power of antisemitism and exploited it himself. “I know that you do not want Iran to be under the boot of the Jews,” he cried out to his supporters in April 1963.¹⁵ In the same year, he called the Shah a Jew in disguise and accused him of taking orders from Israel. The response was enormous: Khomeini had found his theme. Khomeini’s biographer Amir Taheri writes: “The Ayatollah was by now convinced that the central political theme of contemporary life was an elaborate and highly complex conspiracy by the Jews – ‘who controlled everything’ – to ‘emasculate Islam’ and dominate the world thanks to the natural

¹³ Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, ‘Deutsche Gesandtschaft Teheran an das AA Berlin, Teheran den 2. Februar 1941: Propagandistische Möglichkeiten unter der iranischen Bevölkerung im Hinblick auf die religiösen Erwartungen der Schiiten, p. 2., R 60690, Orient. Juden um Roosevelt.

¹⁴ Zit. nach Amir Hassan Cheheltan, Warten auf den Verborgenen Imam, in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ), 12. März 2008.

¹⁵ Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, Gott in Teheran: Irans Islamische Republik (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 260, footnote 26.

wealth of the Muslim nations.”¹⁶ From this point on, hatred of Jews – both in its atavistic Shiite form and in the form of modern antisemitism – would remain a central component of the Islamist ideology of Iran.

After the Six-Day-War of 1967, the antisemitic agitation, which did not differentiate between Jews and Israelis, intensified. “...[I]t was [the Jews] who first established anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems, and as you can see, this activity continues down to the present,” Khomeini wrote in 1970 in his main work *Islamic Government*.¹⁷ “...[T]he Jews... wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world,” he continued, “Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that... they may one day achieve their goal.”¹⁸ In September 1977, he finally 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.”¹⁹

Two years later, Khomeini was the unchallenged leader of the Iranian revolution. His antisemitic tirades found favor with the opponents of the Shah, both Leftists and Islamists. Khomeini’s antisemitism ran along the same lines as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which were re-published in Persian in the summer of 1978 and widely disseminated in order to serve as a weapon against the Shah, Israel and the Jews.

However, after the victory of the revolution in 1979, such rhetoric was toned down. Khomeini could ignore neither the signs of submission given by the Jewish community nor the precept of tolerance laid down in the Koran. In May 1979, he declared: “We distinguish between Jews and Zionists. Zionism has nothing to do with religion.”²⁰ From now on, Jews (like the Armenian Christians and Zoroastrians) were treated as *dhimmis*. The fundamental antisemitism, however, was left unchanged. Thus, in 2005, at the Iranian stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair, I was able to purchase an English edition of the “Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion,” published by the Islamic Propagation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

¹⁶ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini & the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Adler & Adler, 1986), p. 158.

¹⁷ Ayatollah Rouhollah Mousavi Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Division), p. 7. Page references are to the PDF version made available by the Iran Chamber Society at http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/ayatollah_khomeini.php.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹⁹ Kauthar – *An Anthology of the Speeches of Imam Khomeini (s.a.) 1962-1978*, (Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, International Affairs Division, Volume one, 1995), p. 370.

²⁰ Menashri, *op. cit.*, p. 363.

Other antisemitic literature, such as Henry Ford's "The International Jew," was also available.²¹

Let me summarize. It is true, that Ahmadinejad was the first president world-wide to make Holocaust denial a hallmark of a powerful state's foreign policy. Antisemitism is an inherent component of Khomeini's ideology which itself is deeply rooted in Islamic anti-Judaism as well as European antisemitism.

In September 2013, however, the new foreign minister of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif wished a 'Happy Rosh Hashanah' on his English-language Twitter account to Christine Pelosi, the daughter of U.S. representative Nancy Pelosi of California. Christine responded: "Thanks. The New Year would be even sweeter if you would end Iran's Holocaust denial, sir." To which Mr. Zarif responded: "Iran never denied it. The man who did is now gone. happy new year."²² This brings me to my third point:

What changed after Iran's new president Hassan Rouhani took power in August 2013?

Let us take a closer look at Mr. Zarif words. He claims: Iran never denied the Holocaust. This denial of the denial, however, is utterly misleading – as we have seen. Iran was the first and only country in the world to make Holocaust denial a central matter of foreign policy.

Mr. Zarif's second claim: "The man who was did is now gone" is partly true since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is fortunately no longer president. But what about Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic revolution, who has also ridiculed "the myth of the massacre of Jews known as the Holocaust"?²³

It is true, on the one hand, that the tone of Holocaust denial has changed since Rohani and Zarif entered office. Previously, denial of the Holocaust was the leitmotif of Iran's foreign policy. Today it is still an undisputed part of Iran's state ideology, but is no longer the centerpiece of its public diplomacy. On the other hand, even the internationally presentable Rohani is still far from acknowledging the real scope and nature of the Holocaust.

²¹ Matthias Küntzel, The Booksellers of Tehran, Wall Street Journal, October 28, 2005.

²² Rick Gladstone and Robert Mackey, Iran Signals an Eagerness to Overcome Old Impasses, in: New York Times (NYT), September 5, 2013.

²³ The Office of the Supreme Leader Sayyid Ali Khamenei, Leader Receives Air Force Serviceman, July 2, 2006.

Asked, for example, whether the Holocaust was real, Iran's new president responded: "I am not a historian. I'm a politician."²⁴ To pretend that the facts of the Holocaust are a matter of serious historical dispute and available only for historians is a classic rhetorical evasion. Later Rohani maintained that "a group of Jewish people" had been killed by the Nazis during WW II.²⁵ But again: Holocaust deniers commonly acknowledge that Jews were killed while insisting that the number of Jewish victims was relatively small and that a systematic effort to wipe them out did not place.

The mainstream thinking among Iran's rulers is even worse. They leave no doubt that the complete denial of the Holocaust remains an essential part of Iran's state ideology. Foreign Minister Zarif's twitter that Iran never denied it was met with a wave of angry protests.²⁶

Let me quote the chief editor of a newspaper *Kayhan* which is considered to be the mouthpiece of Iran's Supreme leader:

"The Holocaust is nothing but a myth created by the Zionists. ... There is not a shred of doubt that the story of the Holocaust is false." The author added that in this respect, Ahmadinejad still deserved praise: "Ahmadinejad crushed the false legitimacy of the Zionist regime, and for this he is worthy of esteem and praise."²⁷

There have not only been relevant statements in favor of Holocaust denial but also symbolic acts. Some examples:

Some weeks ago, Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, honored Roger Garaudy, the famous French Holocaust denier.²⁸

An Internet journal – close to the Iranian leadership – published an exhibition of so-called fake pictures of the Holocaust.²⁹

²⁴ Rohani: Atomstreit schnell beilegen, in: FAZ, September 27, 2013.

²⁵ Rick Gladstone, Iranian President Softens Condemnation of Holocaust, in: NYT, September 26, 2013.

²⁶ 70 Iranian Lawmakers Want Zarif to Explain Why He Said the Holocaust 'Should Not Happen Again', in: the algemeiner, February 16, 2014; Fars News: 'While the Iranian president did not recognize the Holocaust, the CNN aired a translation that contained several words and sentences not uttered by Rouhani', in: Iran Daily Brief, September 30, 2013.

²⁷ Middle East Media Research Institute MEMRI, Criticism In Iran Of Foreign Minister Zarif Tweet Claiming Iran Never Denied The Holocaust, Special Dispatch No. 5450, September 18, 2013.

²⁸ Ayatollah Khamenei Tweets Support for French Anti-Semite, in: the algemeiner, December 17, 2013.

²⁹ Holocaust Denial In Iran: Iranian Website Claims Holocaust Photos Are Forgeries, in: MEMRI, Special Dispatch No. 5571, December 20, 2013.

Fars news, the official state news agency, launched a condemnation of the UNESCO based “Aladdin project” which provides information about the Holocaust in Arabic and Persian. This project, Fars News states, “is fulfilling the goals of the Zionists.” Its purpose “is to persuade Muslim countries to recognize the Zionists’ fabricated narrative about the Holocaust.”³⁰

We can conclude that the tone of Holocaust denial may have changed, but that its substance has not.

But what about the rants against “international Zionism”? Have they at least vanished? Not at all.

Hassan Rouhani referred at his first press conference in August 2013 to unspecified “war-mongering pressure groups”. He accused those “war-mongering pressure groups” of confusing the White House at the behest of an unidentified country in order to sabotage the negotiations about Iran’s nuclear program. Guess which country he meant.

Let me quote the new Iranian president:

“Unfortunately, a pressure group in the US, which is a warmongering group and is against constructive talks, is [pursuing] the interests of a foreign country and mostly receives its orders from that foreign country. ... The interests of one foreign country and one group have been imposed on the members of the US Congress. And we can see that even the interests of the United States are not considered in such actions.”³¹

There are many UN Security Council resolutions about the Iranian nuclear program which were adopted unanimously or nearly unanimously and with the consent of all the veto-holding powers. The whole world wanted Iran to stop its weapon-related nuclear enterprise.

Rouhani however blames one country – Israel – for pulling the strings against the interests of the American people. He accuses Israel of giving orders to the Israellobby in the US: not for the sake of peace but for the sake of war; not in order to foster constructive talks but in order to prevent successful negotiations; not in favor of the American people but against American interests.

³⁰ www.projetaladin.org: Aladdin Project President tells President Rouhani to stop Iran’s policy of Holocaust denial, anti-Semitic statements in state-run media, Press Release, November 14, 20123.

³¹ Rouhani: US officials still do not fully grasp the Iran’s realities, in: Iran Daily Brief, August 9, 2013.

“The Jews are our misfortune” was the battle cry of the German antisemitic pamphlet, *Der Stürmer*, which helped to pave the road to Auschwitz. “Israel – the war-mongering Jew is our misfortune” – this is the gist of Rouhani’s remarks at his first press conference.

You might recall the 1994 bombing of a Jewish charities office in Argentina that killed 85 people and injured 300 – a crime obviously instigated by the Iranian leadership. The sole reason for this crime was the fact that the state of Argentina did not want to continue its nuclear co-operation with Iran. Who, however, was to blame and to punish for Argentina’s independent decision? The Jewish scapegoat, who else.

The Argentine example illustrates that the anti-Jewish paranoid pattern contains a call to kill. If the Jews of Argentina are responsible for the government’s decisions you have to kill them in revenge. If Israel is responsible for incitement and war, you have to wipe it out in order to secure peace in the world.

We must, therefore, once again conclude that Hossein Rohani, in this respect too, certainly differs from Ahmadinejad in tone, but not in substance.

Rohani has abandoned the most excessive antisemitic ranting and replaced it with somewhat more sober antisemitic ranting. Does that constitute an improvement? Yes, it does. And at the same time: No, it does not. For there is a disturbing tendency in the West to be satisfied or even relieved with everything less radical than Ahmadinejad.

While the totalitarian character of this regime has remained constant, the world’s media perception of the Islamic Republic of Iran has changed dramatically. Most politicians and journalists in the West have a good feeling about the new Iranian president. They do not want to spoil this feeling by looking too closely at what Rouhani or his boss Khamenei actually say and do.

They would rather allow themselves to be taken in by the new Iranian government’s public relations spin than to recognize the unchanging policy that underlies it.

Ahmadinejad was terrible but he did create a certain team spirit among the Western Powers and Israel. Rohani is not much better but seems to be succeeding in isolating Israel by luring the Western powers over to his side.

Let me give you a final example.

In November 2013, Ali Khamenei ranted and raved at the Jewish state, calling it a “sinister, unclean rabid dog” and added that “Israelis should not be called humans”.

Khamenei used this language just hours before negotiations about the nuclear program between Iran and the six world powers were set to resume in Geneva.

Previously, such ranting led Western diplomats to leave the conference room of the United Nation's General Assembly. Now, the Western powers did not even address Khamenei's inflammatory language during the talks at Geneva. The fact that the leader of an American dialog partner used language that recalls Nazi incitement went unheeded.³²

If the current Iranian regime really wants to get beyond the stupid notion of Holocaust denial it has to throw "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" overboard and recognize Israel. We look forward to the day when that happens.

So let me please conclude.

Yes, there is Iranian antisemitism. It is deeply rooted in history and has been part of the system since 1979.

Under Rohani, it has changed its appearance, but not its character. The Holocaust is still denied, "world Zionism" is still held responsible for the evil in the world and Israel's annihilation continues to be propagated – though in a less radical form.

The West, however, cherishes the delusory hope, that Iran's essential change already took place or became possible with Rouhani.

History shows the consequences of failing to take what antisemites say literally. It shows where the flight into illusion eventually leads – to total war. That is what we must bear in mind. That is what we must prevent. Thank you for your attention.

³² „The negotiations had not addressed the topic ... of inflammatory language used by Iranian officials against Israel“, maintained Marie Harf, deputy speaker of the State Department. See: Rebecca Shimoni Stoil, P5+1 talks on Iran's nukes to resume on Monday, The Times of Israel, December 7, 2013.