

Graffiti On History's Walls

By Mortimer B. Zuckerman

All the isms," an English wag once said, "are wasms." Well, not quite. In the 20th century, fascism came and went. Communism came and went. Socialism came and waned. But today several virulent "isms" inhabit the world still. Among the most pernicious are an atavistic anti-Semitism and its 20th-century version, anti-Zionism. These "isms" are graffiti on the wall of history, emblems of a poison still potent and raw, evidenced, most recently, by the remarks of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who said, "Today the Jews rule this world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them."



Mahathir's words were widely condemned. But such comments obscure a deeper truth about this new strain of anti-Semitism, which is not that it is directed at individual Jews or even at Judaism itself. It is directed, rather, against the Jewish collective, the modern State of Israel.

Just as historic anti-Semitism has denied individual Jews the right to live as equal members of society, anti-Zionism would deny the collective expression of the Jewish people, the State of Israel, the right to live as an equal member of the family of nations. Israel's policies are thus subjected to criticism that causes it to be singled out when others in similar circumstances escape any criticism at

all. Surely if any other country were bleeding from terrorism as Israel is today, there would be no question of its right to defend itself. But Israel's efforts merely to protect its own citizens are routinely portrayed as aggression.

To complain that such portrayals are unfair and illogical is not to dismiss all criticism of the Israeli government as anti-Semitic. A democracy must welcome critics, and Israel surely has its critics in spades--just look at the spirited Israeli press. "Jews," as one commentator put it, "are gold medalists in the art of self-criticism." But for many, recent criticism of Israel has become so perverse, so persistent, so divorced from reality that it can be seen only as emotional anti-Semitism hiding behind the insidious political mask of anti-Zionism.

The new anti-Semitism transcends boundaries, nationalities, politics, and social systems. Israel has become the object of envy and resentment in much the same way that the individual Jew was once the object of envy and resentment. Israel, in effect, is emerging as the collective Jew among nations. After more than half a century of Holocaust education, hundreds of courses in high schools and colleges, and thousands of books dedicated to exposing its evils, traditional anti-Semitism as a domestic issue had all but disappeared in much of the world. "The Jewish problem" was no longer defined by what happened to the Jews of Germany or France or Poland or Russia. Instead, in Europe and the Muslim world--even in Asia--traditional anti-Semitism has lately re-emerged as anti-Zionism, focused on the Jews of Israel, the role of Israel, and, for some, on Jews in the United States who support Israel.

This phenomenon has its origins in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Since then, the image of the Jew has been transformed. Shylock, suddenly, has been replaced by a new Jew, cartooned as an aggressive, all-powerful collective called Israel. "Rambo Jew," as the writer Daniel Goldhagen put it, "has largely supplanted Shylock in the anti-Semitic imagination." With the territories seized at the end of the war, the "plucky little Jewish state" was no more. In the years since, as it responded again and again to Arab attacks, sympathy for Israel eroded further still as the world's TVs broadcast images not of terrorists but of armed Israelis responding to terrorism. Only somehow the

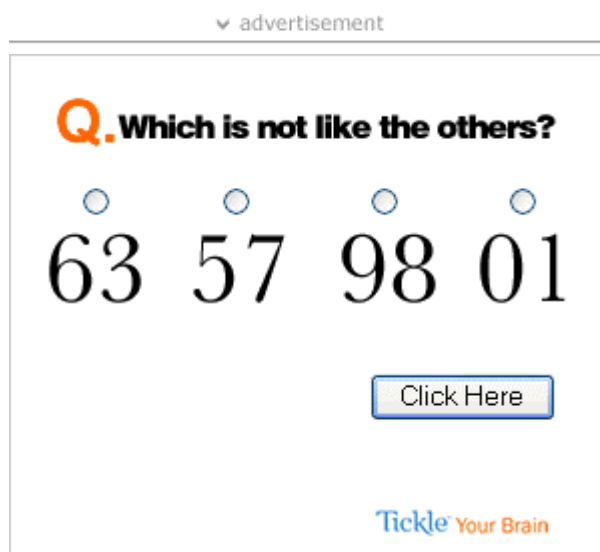
word "responding" too often got lost in the chaos. The TV pictures seemed to imply that the Israelis were guilty of a disproportionate use of force, for they were rarely accompanied by an understanding that a country with just 6 million in a sea of over 120 million Arabs could never fight a war of equal attrition.

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But no matter. It is as if the world somehow believes Israel must win the "moral man of the year" award in defending itself--as if responding to those who seek its destruction is morally wrong. Is there really no difference, then, between the violence of murderers who target innocents and the indispensable violence of lawful authorities? Are the arsonist and the firefighter truly moral equivalents? Is Israel's approach, which seeks to minimize civilian casualties, the same as that of the terrorists, who seek to maximize it?



Such questions are prompted by an unprecedented reversal of history: Arab terrorists, incredibly, have managed to inspire more sympathy than their victims. The Jews, having experienced the genocide of Europe, today stand accused of perpetrating genocide on the hard ground of the West Bank and Gaza. The vocabulary of the accusations presents the Jews as Nazis and their Arab enemies as helpless Jews. The worst crimes of anti-Semites in the past--racist and ethnic cleansing, attempted genocide, crimes against humanity--are now increasingly ascribed to Jews and to the Jewish state. The argument has become, if you are against Nazism, you must oppose Israel. Thus has Israeli self-defense been transmogrified as aggression.

As a consequence, the era of reconciliation that obtained between Israel and the world after the Holocaust is, tragically, no more. In much of the world's news media and in its elite communities, as a result, there is a pattern of delegitimization of Israel.

AMERICANS, WHO HAVE COME to take for granted the scurrilous anti-Semitism that routinely appears in the Arab press, might be amazed by what now appears in the sophisticated European press. In England, the *Guardian* wrote that "Israel has no right to exist." The *Observer* described Israeli settlements in the West Bank as "an affront to civilization." The *New Statesman* ran a story titled "A Kosher Conspiracy," illustrated by a cover showing the gold Star of David piercing the Union Jack. The story implies that a Zionist-Jewish cabal is attempting to sway the British press to the cause of Israel. In France, the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* published an extraordinary libel alleging that Israeli soldiers raped Palestinian women so that their relatives would kill them to preserve family honor. In Italy, the Vatican's *L'Osservatore Romano* spoke of Israel's "aggression that's turning into extermination," while the daily *La Stampa* ran a Page 1 cartoon of a tank emblazoned with the Jewish star pointing its big gun at the infant Jesus, who cries out, "Surely they don't want to kill me again."

Across Europe, the result has been not just verbal violence but physical. A report issued last year by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, titled "Fire and Broken Glass," describes the assaults on Jews and people presumed to be Jewish across Europe. Attackers, shouting racist slogans, throw stones at schoolchildren, at worshipers attending religious services, at rabbis. Jewish homes, schools, and synagogues are firebombed. Windows are smashed, Jewish cemeteries desecrated with anti-Jewish slogans. In just a few weeks in the spring of last year, French synagogues and Jewish schools, students, and homes were attacked and firebombed. A synagogue in Marseilles was burned to the ground. In Paris, Jews were attacked by groups of hooded men. According to police,

metropolitan Paris saw something like a dozen anti-Jewish incidents a day in the first several months after Easter.

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AND THE VIOLENCE CONTINUES. In Ukraine, skinheads attacked Jewish workers and assaulted the director of a Jewish school. In Holland, demonstrators carrying swastikas and photos of Israel chanted "Sieg heil!" and "Jews into the sea!" In Salonika, the Holocaust Memorial was defaced with pro-Palestinian graffiti. In Slovakia, Jewish cemeteries were firebombed. In Berlin, Jews were assaulted, swastikas daubed on Jewish memorials, and a synagogue spray-painted with the words "six million is not enough."

In the Muslim world, a culture of hatred of Jews permeates all forms of public communications--newspapers, videocassettes, sermons, books, the Internet, television, and

radio. The intensity of the anti-Jewish invective equals or surpasses that of Nazi Germany in its heyday. The public rhetoric combines the blood libel of medieval Christian Europe with cockeyed Nazi conspiracy theories that echo the famous forgery, the "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion," and the fanciful notion of a Jewish drive for world dominion. Throughout the Islamic world, one finds slanderous quotations about Jews as the sons of apes and donkeys. A leading Saudi newspaper has Jews using the blood of Christian and Muslim children to make their hamantaschen pastry for Purim and their matzo, the unleavened bread of Passover. In this fundamentalist religious culture, America and Israel are seen as twin Satanic forces, "The Great Satan" and "The Little Satan," as Iran's religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini used to refer to them.

The linkage of the two Satans has been emphasized even more intently since the beginning of the Palestinian intifada, in September 2000, and the attacks of September 11. Ever hear the story of the 4,000 Jews who worked at the World Trade Center being told to not show up for work on the morning of September 11? The story was planted on the Internet by Hezbollah under the cover of a Lebanese TV station. This urban legend has now taken root among Muslims the world over, calling to mind the words of W. B. Yeats: "We had fed the heart on fantasies. The heart's grown brutal from the fare."

Islamists see the fingerprints of their enemy everywhere--the fantasy that a secret and all-powerful Zionist lobby drains the lifeblood of Arabs and Muslims and incites Washington to war against Iraq, all the while carrying out its sinister plans for global control. In Egypt, a 41-part TV series was broadcast across the Arab world during Ramadan entitled *Horseman Without a Horse*. The theme of the series was that the Zionists have controlled the world of politics since the dawn of history and seek to control the Middle East-- a fantasy, as Prof. Robert Wistrich of Hebrew University pointed out, imported from the Germany of the 1930s.

It is difficult for westerners, unmarked by the searing memories of Jewish history, to realize the extent to which the survival of Israel remains an issue for Jews, who cannot dismiss the overheated Arab rhetoric that seeks to justify terrorism against innocent civilians by describing Israel's existence as illegitimate. That rhetoric is the product of a careful calculation by Arab political leaders who recognized the popular appeal of scapegoating Israel for their failure to provide for their own people while legitimizing their regimes.

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Not all Arab politicians, happily, indulge in such cynical calculations. Back in February, I participated in a remarkable meeting convened by President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. The group, which met in the city of Almaty, included the presidents from the central Asian republics of Kirgizstan and Tajikistan, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, and the deputy foreign minister of Turkey. The meeting was titled the Conference on Order and Tolerance. As we exchanged views, I found myself listening raptly to statesmen who spoke with feeling of their support for a dialogue between Muslims and Jews in an atmosphere of religious tolerance and understanding while denouncing in explicit terms extremism and terrorism. If one takes the number of Muslims among the countries represented in Almaty and adds the number of Muslims in moderate countries like India, the result is a huge swath of the Muslim world that rejects the extremism of the Arab leadership among Israel's neighbors.

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Such tolerance, sadly, is not to be found in the world body created to foster universal values and human ideals--the United Nations. Tragically, the growth of international hostility to Israel has found its most prominent expression in the operations of the U.N. It has, in fact, come a long

way from the legitimization and legalization of the existence of Israel and the right of the Jewish people to have their own state on their own land through its 1947 resolution proposing and approving a two-state solution. Since then, the U.N. has adopted an almost reflexively anti-Israeli stance canted to the anti-Israeli majority of its membership. The U.N. today is a regular forum for vicious anti-Israel attacks, conferring on the spurious and the hateful the false cloak of reason and legitimacy, and thus has become an organization for the conservation, not the reduction, of the Middle East conflict. Some U.N. actions simply defy belief. At the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, Israel--the only democracy in the Middle East committed to civil rights, the rule of law, and Arab participation in democratic government--was attacked by Arab and Third World nations and accused of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid. Then there is the Fourth Geneva Convention, drafted originally in response to the atrocities of the Nazi regime, to protect people like diplomats and visitors subjected to a military occupation. Last year, U.N. conferees met and, for the first time in the 52 years since its adoption, excoriated one country--Israel--for alleged violations. Not Cambodia and Rwanda, with their well-documented records of genocide. Not Zimbabwe, with its racist economic policies. Not the Balkan states, with their ethnic cleansing. Not even China, with its dismal record on Tibet. Only Israel was singled out. Similarly, the U.N. Commission on Human Rights, chaired on occasions by such notably enlightened states as Libya, has followed this same pattern, devoting much of its time, energy, and efforts to attacking Israel. The commission went so far as to affirm, last April 15, the legitimacy of suicide bombing against Israelis, or in judgment-free U.N.-speak, "all available means, including armed struggle."

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IN THE ARAB WORLD, Zionism is portrayed not as the Jewish response to a history of anti-Semitism in a world that culminated in the Holocaust but as a hyperaggressive variant of colonialism. But since this new anti-Semitism manifests itself so clearly now as political rejection of the Jewish state, it is worth examining the historical record for a moment. Fact: The majority of Jews came to Israel in the late 19th century and early 20th century not as conquering Europeans backed by a national army and treasury but as the wretched of the earth in search of respite from ceaseless persecution. They were not wealthy; they were young, poor, and desperate. The notion that the traditional position of the Arabs in Palestine was

jeopardized by Jewish settlements is belied by another fact: that when the Jews arrived, Palestine was a sparsely populated, poorly cultivated, and wildly neglected land of sandy deserts and malarial marshes. Mark Twain, in *The Innocents Abroad*, described it as a "desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given over wholly to weeds--a silent, mournful expanse. . . . We never saw a human being on the whole route. There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country."

Even people unsympathetic to the Zionist cause believed that Jewish immigrants had improved the condition of Palestinian Arabs. Consider the words of Sharif Hussein, the guardian of the Islamic holy places in Arabia, in 1918: "One of the most amazing things until recent times was that the Palestinian used to leave his country, wandering the high seas in every direction. His native soil could not retain a hold on him, though his ancestors had lived on it for 1,000 years. At the same time, we have seen the Jews from foreign countries streaming to Palestine. . . . They knew that the country was for its original sons. The return of these exiles to their homeland will prove materially and spiritually [to be] an experimental school for their brethren." Hussein understood then, as so many refuse to see now, that the regeneration of Palestine and the growth of its population came only after the Jews returned in significant numbers. As Winston Churchill, then the British colonial secretary, pointed out: "The land was not being taken away from the Arabs. The Arabs sold land to Jews only if they chose to do so."

The hope was that the Arabs would accept Israelis as their neighbors and, finally, recognize them as such. That hope died aborning. Even war, that grim final arbiter of international relations, has made no difference. The Arabs resisted from the outset a Jewish presence in the region. They expanded their war against Israel into an attack on the very idea of Israel. Zionism, the Jewish claim to a land of their own, was declared racist because the Arabs said it deprived them of their land. They substituted the homeless Palestinian for the homeless Jew. The Arabs, having rendered the Palestinians homeless by refusing to accept partition in 1948 and having kept many of the Palestinians who fled the battle homeless in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan by refusing to resettle them in their lands, now blame this homelessness on the Jews. They have consistently charged that it was the Jews who had driven the Arabs out of Palestine. But as the eminent Arabist Bernard Lewis has written, "the great majority, like countless millions of refugees elsewhere, left their homes amid the confusion of and panic of invasion and war--one more unhappy part of the vast movement of population which occurred in the aftermath of World War II."

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Even the foreign press, in regular contact with all sides during the conflict of 1948, wrote nothing to suggest that the flight of the Palestinians was not voluntary. Nor did Arab spokesmen, such as the Palestinian representative to the U.N., Jamal Hussein, or the secretary general of the Arab

League, blame the Jews contemporaneously with the 1948 war for the flight of Arabs and Palestinians. In fact, those who fled were urged to do so by other Arabs. As then Prime Minister of Iraq Nuri Said put it, "the Arabs should conduct their wives and children to safe areas until the fighting has died down." One Arab who fled encapsulated this thinking in the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Difaa*: "The Arab governments told us, 'Get out so that we can get in.' So we got out, but they did not get in." And a bad situation, impossibly, was allowed to get worse. Arabs and Palestinians displaced by the 1948 war were resettled in camps administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the only such agency established for any refugee group since the massive dislocations of World War II. The partition of India occurred at the same time as the conflict in Palestine, and millions of Hindus and Muslims were uprooted, but virtually nothing was done for them. Nothing was done in response to the Chinese occupation of Tibet, where a long-standing religious, social, and political culture was virtually destroyed.

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Yet 55 years after they were first established, the Arab refugee camps still exist. With the exception of Jordan, the Arab governments home to these camps have refused to grant citizenship to the refugees and opposed their resettlement. In Lebanon, 400,000 stateless Palestinians are not allowed to attend public school, own property, or even improve their housing stock. Three generations later, they continue to serve as political pawns of the Arab states, still hopeful of reversing the events of 1948. "The return of the refugees," as President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt said years later, "will mean the end of Israel."

The U.N., through its administration of the camps, has made a complicated problem infinitely more so. How? U.N. officials define refugees in the Middle East to include the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. In other parts of the world, descendants of refugees are not defined as refugees. The result of this unique treatment has been to increase the numbers of Arab refugees from roughly 700,000 to over 4 million, by including children, grandchildren, even great-grandchildren. As a former prime minister of Syria, Khaled al Azm, wrote in his memoirs, "It is we who demanded the return of the refugees while it is we who made them leave. We brought disaster upon them. [We] exploited them in executing crimes of murder and throwing bombs. All this in the service of political purposes." And so it goes, to this very day. At the time of the founding of the State of Israel, 900,000 Jewish refugees were forced out of neighboring Arab states in a coordinated effort. These refugees were absorbed into the new Israel. Yet the world was, and still is, untroubled by the plight of Jewish refugees from Arab lands.

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TO SINGLE OUT ISRAEL as the only state that must restore a refugee population is to hold the Jewish state to a different standard. Or, perhaps, the more accurate term is double standard. Against such a backdrop, with a history so cynically manipulated by its enemies, the distortions and outright untruths that characterize more recent relations between Israel and the Palestinians should probably come as no surprise. There are virtually countless examples from which to choose, but last year's "massacre" by Israeli forces at the Palestinian refugee camp of Jenin is particularly illustrative.

A Palestinian suicide bomber, on Passover eve, killed 29 people and injured 140 in the Israeli city of Netanya. It was the sixth

terrorist bombing that week. The Israelis responded by sending troops into the West Bank, including the refugee camp at Jenin, the principal home of the bomb makers. A 10-day battle ensued. The Palestinians, with support from U.N. representatives, alleged that the Israelis had massacred hundreds of innocents, carried out summary executions, refrigerated the corpses, and removed them. Saeb Erekat, a Palestinian spokesman, reiterated the claim of many hundreds killed. The media accepted his version. But subsequent news reports, and even Palestinian testimony and writings recently collated, established the fact that groups like Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad used women and children as shields during the fighting. The reports showed, conclusively, that there was no massacre of Palestinian civilians and documented that the Israelis exercised great restraint during the battle to minimize civilian casualties while suffering an inordinately high number of their own as a result.

Distortions and untruths, unsurprisingly, characterize the Palestinians' political dealings with Israel, as well. A critical moment in the relationship was the Oslo agreement of 1993. There, the negotiating principle was land for peace. What Israel received was no peace in return for its offer of land. The most generous Israeli offer of land for peace came at Camp David three years ago. Then Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Yasser Arafat 97 percent of the West Bank and Gaza, including the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. The Camp David offer was not only rejected by Arafat but used as a provocation to launch a campaign of violence and terrorism that continues to this day.

The notion of land for peace bears exploring. If it is taken to mean that Israel must turn over more land until peace is achieved and Arab belligerence ended, the incurious may be left with the conclusion that the lack of peace must be the result of Israel's failure to yield sufficient land. Nothing could be further from the truth. There have been thousands of terrorist attacks since the second intifada began, three years ago. The only way Israel has been able to reduce the number of suicide bombers is eliminating their sanctuary by controlling the West Bank through occupation and sealing off Gaza.

But the story is not one of occupation of the West Bank by Israel. If the term "occupation" had any relevance at all, it was lost three years ago with Arafat's rejection of Barak's proposal for a Palestinian state. The issue is Palestinian refusal to grant Israel the right to exist as a Jewish state. Israel's battle is not the battle of Jew against Muslim. It is a battle against the hatred of the Jews and their connection to the land of Israel. How else to comprehend the Palestinian rejection of Jerusalem as the sacred city of the Jews and the Western Wall as the Second Temple, except as a rejection of the Jewish presence there? "There was no temple in Jerusalem," Arafat said at Camp David. "It was only an obelisk." To question the core of the Jewish faith is hardly an indication of readiness to resolve the conflict.

Quite the contrary, the spiraling Palestinian violence evidences a single-minded determination to continue the conflict. The insight of Amos Oz, the liberal Israeli writer, is pertinent. He is haunted, he said, by the observation that before the Holocaust, European graffiti read, "Jews to Palestine," while today it has been changed, to "Jews out of Palestine." The message to Jews, Oz says, is simple: "Don't be here, and don't be there. That is, don't be."