

Events...

November 29-31

R. Noach Orlowek will speak at an
Oneg Shabbat on "The Key To Shalom Bayis" at the Grafstein's, 55 Bevshire, at
8:00pm. Motzei Shabbos he will speak on "Raising Roses Among The Thorns"
at Thornhill Talmud Torah (Ohr Somaych area of the BAYT) at 8:00pm.

Commentary...

Hatred's Roots: *On Hating the Jews* By Natan Sharansky
The inextricable link between anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism.

No hatred has as rich and as lethal a history as anti-Semitism--"the longest hatred," as the historian Robert Wistrich has dubbed it. Over the millennia, anti-Semitism has infected a multitude of peoples, religions and civilizations, in the process inflicting a host of terrors on its Jewish victims. But while there is no disputing the impressive reach of the phenomenon, there is surprisingly little agreement about its cause or causes.

Indeed, finding a single cause would seem too daunting a task--the incidence of anti-Semitism is too frequent, the time span too broad, the locales too numerous, the circumstances too varied. No doubt that is why some scholars have come to regard every outbreak as essentially unique, denying that a straight line can be drawn from the anti-Semitism of the ancient world to that of today. Whether it is the attack on the Jews of Alexandria in the year 38 or the ones that took place 200 years earlier in ancient Jerusalem, whether it is the Dreyfus affair in 1890s France or Kristallnacht in late-1930s Germany--each incident is seen as the outcome of a distinctive mix of political, social, economic, cultural and religious forces that preclude the possibility of a deeper or recurring cause.

A less extreme version of this same approach identifies certain patterns of anti-Semitism, but only within individual and discrete "eras." In particular, a distinction is drawn between the religiously based hatred of the Middle Ages and the racially based hatred of the modern era. Responsibility for the anti-Semitic waves that engulfed Europe from the age of Constantine to the dawn of the Enlightenment is laid largely at the foot of the church and its offshoots, while the convulsions that erupted over the course of the next three centuries are viewed as the byproduct of the rise of virulent nationalism.

Obviously, separating out incidents or eras has its advantages, enabling researchers to focus more intensively on specific circumstances and to examine individual outbreaks from start to finish. But what such analyses may gain in local explanatory power they sacrifice in comprehensiveness. Besides, if every incident or era of anti-Semitism is largely distinct from every other, how to explain the cumulative ferocity of the phenomenon?

As if in response to this question, some scholars have attempted to offer more sweeping, transhistorical explanations. Perhaps the two best known are the "scapegoat" theory, according to which tensions within society are regulated and released by blaming a weaker group, often the Jews, for whatever is troubling the majority, and the "demonization" theory, according to which Jews have been cast into the role of the "other" by the seemingly perennial need to reject those who are ethnically, religiously or racially different.

Clearly, in this sociological approach, anti-Semitism emerges as a Jewish phenomenon in name only. Rather, it is but one variant in a family of hatreds that include racism and xenophobia. Thus, the specifically anti-Jewish violence in Russia at the turn of the 20th century has as much in common with the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia at the turn of the 21st as it does with the massacres of Jews in the Ukraine in the mid-1600s. Taken to its logical conclusion, this theory would redefine the Holocaust--at the hands of some scholars, it *has* redefined the Holocaust--as humanity's most destructive act of racism rather than as the most murderous campaign ever directed against the Jews.

Reacting to such universalizing tendencies a half-century ago, Hannah Arendt cited a piece of dialogue from "a joke which was told after the first World War":

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by his family.

An anti-Semite claimed that the Jews had caused the war; the reply was: Yes, the Jews and the bicyclists. Why the bicyclists? asks the one. Why the Jews? asks the other.

George Orwell offered a similar observation in 1944: "However true the scapegoat theory may be in general terms, it does not explain why the Jews rather than some other minority group are picked on, nor does it make clear what they are the scapegoat for."

Whatever the shortcomings of these approaches may be, I have to admit that my own track record as a theorist is no better.

Three decades ago, as a young dissident in the Soviet Union, I compiled underground reports on anti-Semitism for foreign journalists and Western diplomats. At the time, I firmly believed that the cause of the "disease" was totalitarianism, and that democracy was the way to cure it. Once the Soviet regime came to be replaced by democratic rule, I figured, anti-Semitism was bound to wither away. In the struggle toward that goal, the free world, which in the aftermath of the Holocaust appeared to have inoculated itself against a recurrence of murderous anti-Jewish hatred, was our natural ally, the one political entity with both the means and the will to combat the great evil.

Today I know better. This year, following publication of a report by an Israeli government forum charged with addressing the issue of anti-Semitism, I invited to my office the ambassadors of the two countries that have outpaced all others in the frequency and intensity of anti-Jewish attacks within their borders. The emissaries were from France and Belgium--two mature democracies in the heart of Western Europe. It was in these ostensible bastions of enlightenment and tolerance that Jewish cemeteries were being desecrated, children assaulted, synagogues scorched.

To be sure, the anti-Semitism now pervasive in Western Europe is very different from the anti-Semitism I encountered a generation ago in the Soviet Union. In the latter, it was nurtured by systematic, government-imposed discrimination against Jews. In the former, it has largely been condemned

and opposed by governments (though far less vigilantly than it should be). But this only makes anti-Semitism in the democracies more disturbing, shattering the illusion--which was hardly mine alone--that representative governance is an infallible antidote to active hatred of Jews.

Another shattered illusion is even more pertinent to our search. Shocked by the visceral anti-Semitism he witnessed at the

Dreyfus trial in supposedly enlightened France, Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, became convinced that the primary cause of anti-Semitism was the anomalous condition of the Jews: a people without a polity of its own. In his seminal work, "The Jewish State" (1896), published two years after the trial, Herzl envisioned the creation of such a Jewish polity and predicted that a mass emigration to it of European Jews would spell the end of anti-Semitism.

Although his seemingly utopian political treatise would turn out to be one of the 20th century's most prescient books, on this point history has not been kind to Herzl: no one would seriously argue today that anti-Semitism came to a halt with the founding of the state of Israel. To the contrary, this particular illusion has come full circle: while Herzl and most Zionists after him believed that the emergence of a Jewish state would end anti-Semitism, an increasing number of people today, including some Jews, are convinced that anti-Semitism will end only with the *disappearance* of the Jewish state.

I first encountered this idea quite a long time ago, in the Soviet Union. In the period before, during, and after the Six Day War of June 1967--a time when I and many others were experiencing a heady reawakening of our Jewish identity--the Soviet press was filled with scathing attacks on Israel and Zionism, and a wave of official anti-Semitism was unleashed to accompany them. To quite a few Soviet Jews who had been trying their best to melt into Soviet life, Israel suddenly became a jarring reminder of their true status in the "workers' paradise": trapped in a world where they were free neither to live openly as Jews nor to escape the stigma of their Jewishness. To these Jews, Israel came to seem part of the problem, not (as it was for me and others) part of the solution. Expressing what was no doubt a shared sentiment, a distant relative of mine quipped: "If only Israel

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didn't exist, everything would be all right."

In the decades since, and especially over the past three years, the notion that Israel is one of the primary causes of anti-Semitism, if not *the* primary cause, has gained much wider currency. The world, we are told by friend and foe alike, increasingly hates Jews because it increasingly hates Israel. Surely this is what the Belgian ambassador had in mind when he informed me during his visit that anti-Semitism in his country would cease once Belgians no longer had to watch pictures on television of Israeli Jews oppressing Palestinian Arabs.

Obviously, the state of Israel cannot be the cause of a phenomenon that predates it by over 2,000 years. But might it be properly regarded as the cause of *contemporary* anti-Semitism? What is certain is that, everywhere one looks, the Jewish state does appear to be at the center of the anti-Semitic storm--and nowhere more so, of course, than in the Middle East.

The rise in viciously anti-Semitic content disseminated through state-run Arab media is quite staggering, and has been thoroughly documented. Arab propagandists, journalists, and scholars now regularly employ the methods and the vocabulary used to demonize European Jews for centuries--calling Jews Christ-killers, charging them with poisoning non-Jews, fabricating blood libels, and the like. In a region where the Christian faith has few adherents, a lurid and time-worn Christian anti-Semitism boasts an enormous following.

To take only one example: This past February, the Egyptian government, formally at peace with Israel, saw fit to broadcast on its state-run television a 41-part series based on the infamous Czarist forgery about a global Jewish conspiracy to dominate humanity, "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion." To ensure the highest ratings, the show was first aired, in prime time, just as millions of families were breaking their traditional Ramadan fast; Arab satellite television then rebroadcast the series to tens of millions more throughout the Middle East.

In Europe, the connection between Israel and anti-Semitism is equally conspicuous. For one thing, the timing and nature of the attacks on European Jews, whether physical or verbal, have all revolved around Israel, and the anti-Semitic wave itself, which began soon after the Palestinians launched their terrorist campaign against the Jewish state in September 2000, reached a peak (so far) when Israel initiated Operation Defensive Shield at the end of March 2002, a month in which 125 Israelis had been killed by terrorists.

Though most of the physical attacks in Europe were perpetrated by Muslims, most of the verbal and cultural assaults came from European elites. Thus, the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* published a cartoon of an infant Jesus lying at the foot of an Israeli tank, pleading, "Don't tell me they want to kill me again." The frequent comparisons of Ariel Sharon to Adolf Hitler, of Israelis to Nazis, and of Palestinians to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were not the work of hooligans spray-painting graffiti on the wall of a synagogue but of university educators and sophisticated columnists. As the Nobel Prize-winning author José Saramago declared of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians: "We can compare it with what happened at Auschwitz."

The centrality of Israel to the revival of a more generalized anti-Semitism is also evident in the international arena. Almost a year after the current round of Palestinian violence began, and after hundreds of Israelis had already been killed in buses, discos and pizzerias, a so-called World Conference against Racism was held under the auspices of the United Nations in Durban, South Africa. It turned into an anti-Semitic circus, with the Jewish state being accused of everything from racism and apartheid to crimes against humanity and genocide. In this theater of the absurd, the Jews themselves were turned into perpetrators of anti-Semitism, as Israel was denounced for its "Zionist practices against Semitism"--the Semitism, that is to say, of the Palestinian Arabs.

Naturally, then, in searching for the "root cause" of anti-Semitism, the Jewish state would appear to be the prime suspect. But Israel, it should be clear, is not guilty. The Jewish state is no more the cause of anti-Semitism today than the absence of a Jewish state was its cause a century ago.

To see why, we must first appreciate that the always specious line between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism has now become completely blurred: Israel has effectively become the world's Jew. From Middle Eastern mosques, the bloodcurdling cry is not "Death to the Israelis," but "Death to the Jews." In more civilized circles, a columnist for the *London Observer* proudly announces that he does not read published letters in support of Israel that are signed by Jews. (That the complaints commission for the British press found nothing amiss in this statement only goes to show how far things have changed since Orwell wrote of Britain in 1945 that "it is not at present possible, indeed, that anti-Semitism should become respectable.") When discussion at fashionable European dinner parties turns to the Middle East, the air, we have been reliably informed, turns blue with old-fashioned anti-Semitism.

No less revealing is what might be called the mechanics of the discussion. For centuries, a clear sign of the anti-Semitic impulse at work has been the use of the double standard: social behavior that in others passes without comment or with the mildest questioning becomes, when exhibited by Jews, a pretext for wholesale group denunciation. Such double standards are applied just as recklessly today to the Jewish state. It is democratic Israel, not any of the dozens of tyrannies represented in the United Nations General Assembly, that that body singles out for condemnation in over two dozen resolutions each year; it is against Israel--not Cuba, North Korea, China, or Iran--that the U.N. Human Rights Commission, chaired recently by a lily-pure Libya, directs nearly a third of its official ire; it is Israel whose alleged misbehavior provoked the only joint session ever held by the signatories to the Geneva Convention; it is Israel, alone among nations, that has lately been targeted by Western campaigns of divestment; it is Israel's Magen David Adom, alone among ambulance services

in the world, that is denied membership in the International Red Cross; it is Israeli scholars, alone among academics in the world, who are denied grants and prevented from publishing articles in prestigious journals. The list goes on and on.

The idea that Israel has become the world's Jew and that anti-Zionism is a substitute for anti-Semitism is certainly not new. Years ago, Norman Podhoretz observed that the Jewish state "has become the touchstone of attitudes toward the Jewish people, and anti-Zionism has become the most relevant form of anti-Semitism." And well before that, Martin Luther King was even more unequivocal:

You declare, my friend, that you do not hate the Jews, you are merely "anti-Zionist." And I say, let the truth ring forth from the high mountain tops, let it echo through the valleys of God's green earth; when people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews--this is God's own truth.

But if Israel is indeed nothing more than the world's Jew, then to say that the world increasingly hates Jews because the world increasingly hates Israel means as much, or as little, as saying that the world hates Jews because the world hates Jews. We still need to know: why?

This may be a good juncture to let the anti-Semites speak for themselves.

Here is the reasoning invoked by Haman, the infamous viceroy of Persia in the biblical book of Esther, to convince his king to order the annihilation of the Jews (emphasis added):

There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom, and *their laws are different* from those of other peoples, and the king's laws they do not keep, so that it is of no benefit for the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed.

This is hardly the only ancient source pointing to the Jews' incorrigible separateness, or their rejection of the majority's customs and moral concepts, as the reason for hostility toward them. Centuries after Hellenistic values had spread throughout and beyond the Mediterranean, the Roman historian Tacitus had this to say:

Among the Jews, all things are profane that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they regard as permissible what seems to us immoral. . . . The rest of the world they confront with the hatred reserved for enemies. They will not feed or intermarry with gentiles. . . . They have introduced circumcision to show that they are different from others. . . . It is a crime among them to kill any newly born infant.

Philostratus, a Greek writer who lived a century later, offered a similar analysis:

For the Jews have long been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against humanity; and a race that has made its own life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share with the rest of mankind in the pleasures of the table, nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices, are separated from ourselves by a greater gulf than divides us from Sura or Bactra of the more distant Indies.

Did the Jews actually reject the values that were dominant in the ancient world, or was this simply a fantasy of their enemies? While many of the allegations leveled at Jews were spurious--they did not ritually slaughter non-Jews, as the Greek writer Apion claimed--some were obviously based on true facts. The Jews did oppose intermarriage. They did refuse to sacrifice to foreign gods. And they did emphatically consider killing a newborn infant to be a crime.

Some, perhaps many, individual Jews in those days opted to join the (alluring) Hellenist stream; most did not. Even more important, the Jews were the only *people* seriously to challenge the moral system of the Greeks. They were not an "other" in the ancient world; they were *the* "other"--an other, moreover, steadfast in the conviction that Judaism represented not only a different way of life but, in a word, the truth. Jewish tradition claims that Abraham was chosen as the patriarch of what was to become the Jewish nation only after he had smashed the idols in his father's home. His descendants would continue to defy the pagan world around them, championing the idea of the one God and, unlike other peoples of antiquity, refusing to subordinate their beliefs to those of their conquerors.

The (by and large correct) perception of the Jews as rejecting the prevailing value system of the ancient world hardly justifies the anti-Semitism directed against them; but it does take anti-Semitism out of the realm of fantasy, turning it into a genuine clash of ideals and of values. With the arrival of Christianity on the world stage, that same clash, based once again on the charge of Jewish rejectionism, would intensify a thousandfold. The refusal of the people of the "old covenant" to accept the new came to be defined as a threat to the very legitimacy of Christianity, and one that required a mobilized response.

Branding the Jews "Christ killers" and "sons of devils," the church launched a systematic campaign to denigrate Christianity's parent religion and its adherents. Accusations of desecrating the host, ritual murder and poisoning wells would be added over the centuries, creating an ever larger powder keg of hatred. With the growing power of the church and the global spread of Christianity, these potentially explosive sentiments were carried to the far corners of the world, bringing anti-Semitism to places where no Jewish foot had ever trod.

According to some Christian thinkers, persecution of the powerless Jews was justified as a kind of divine payback for the Jewish rejection of

Jesus. This heavenly stamp of approval would be invoked many times through the centuries, especially by those who had tried and failed to convince the Jews to acknowledge the superior truth of Christianity. The most famous case may be that of Martin Luther: At first extremely friendly toward Jews--as a young man he had complained about their mistreatment by the Church--Luther turned into one of their bitterest enemies as soon as he realized that his efforts to woo them to his new form of Christianity would never bear fruit.

Nor was this pattern unique to the Christian religion. Mohammed, too, had hoped to attract the Jewish communities of Arabia, and to this end he initially incorporated elements of Judaism into his new faith (directing prayer toward Jerusalem, fasting on Yom Kippur and the like). When, however, the Jews refused to accept his code of law, Mohammed wheeled upon them with a vengeance, cursing them in words strikingly reminiscent of the early Church fathers: "Humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them, and they were visited with the wrath of Allah. That was because they disbelieved in Allah's revelation and slew the prophets wrongfully."

In these cases, too, we might ask whether the perception of Jewish rejectionism was accurate. Of course the Jews did not drain the blood of children, poison wells, attempt to mutilate the body of Christ, or commit any of the other wild crimes of which the church accused them. Moreover, since many teachings of Christianity and Islam stemmed directly from Jewish ones, Jews could hardly be said to have denied them. But if rejecting the Christian or Islamic world meant rejecting the Christian or Islamic creed, then Jews who clung to their own separate faith and way of life were, certainly, rejectionist.

This brings us to an apparent point of difference between premodern and modern anti-Semitism. For many Jews over the course of two millennia, there was, in theory at least, a way out of institutionalized discrimination and persecution: the Greco-Roman, Christian and Muslim worlds were only too happy to embrace converts to their way of life. In the modern era, this choice often proved illusory. Both assimilated and unassimilated Jews, both religious and secular Jews, were equally victimized by pogroms, persecutions and genocide. In fact, the terrors directed at the assimilated Jews of Western Europe have led some to conclude that far from ending anti-Semitism, assimilation actually contributed to arousing it.

What accounts for this? In the premodern world, Jews and Gentiles were largely in agreement as to what defined Jewish rejectionism, and therefore what would constitute a reprieve from it: It was mostly a matter of beliefs and moral concepts, and of the social behavior that flowed from them. In the modern world, although the question of whether a Jew ate the food or worshiped the God of his neighbors remained relevant, it was less relevant than before. Instead, the modern Jew was seen as being born into a Jewish nation or race whose collective values were deeply embedded in the very fabric of his being. Assimilation, with or without conversion to the majority faith, might succeed in masking this bedrock taint; it could not expunge it.

While such views were not entirely absent in earlier periods, the burden of proof faced by the modern Jew to convince others that he could transcend his "Jewishness" was much greater than the one faced by his forebears. Despite the increasing secularism and openness of European society, which should have smoothed the prospects of assimilation, many modern Jews would find it more difficult to become real Frenchmen or true Germans than their ancestors would have found it to become Greeks or Romans, Christians or Muslims.

The novelty of modern anti-Semitism is thus not that the Jews were seen as the enemies of mankind. Indeed, Hitler's observation in "Mein Kampf" that "wherever I went, I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity" sounds no different from the one penned by Philostratus 1,700 years earlier. No, the novelty of modern anti-Semitism is only that it was far more difficult--and sometimes impossible--for the Jew to *stop* being an enemy of mankind.

On closer inspection, then, modern anti-Semitism begins to look quite continuous with premodern anti-Semitism, only worse. Modern Jews may not have believed they were rejecting the prevailing order around them, but that did not necessarily mean their enemies agreed with them. When it came to the Jews, indeed, European nationalism of the blood-and-soil variety only added another and even more murderous layer of hatred to the foundation built by age-old religious prejudice. Just as in the ancient world, the Jews in the modern world remained *the* other--inveterate rejectionists, no matter how separate, no matter how assimilated.

Was there any kernel of factual truth to *this* charge? It is demeaning to have to point out that wherever and whenever they were given the chance, most modern Jews strove to become model citizens and showed, if anything, an exemplary talent for acculturation; the idea that by virtue of their birth, race or religion they were implacable enemies of the state or nation was preposterous. So, too, with other modern labels directed against the Jews, which displayed about as much or as little truth content as ancient ones. The Jews did not and do not control the banks. They did not and do not control the media of communication. They did not and do not control governments. And they are not plotting to take over anything.

What some of them have indeed done, in various places and under specific circumstances, is to demonstrate--with an ardor and tenacity redolent perhaps of their long national experience--an attachment to great causes of one stripe or another, including, at times, the cause of their own people. This has had the effect (not everywhere, of course, but notably in highly stratified and/or intolerant societies) of putting them in a visibly adversary position to prevailing values or ideologies, and thereby awakening the never dormant dragon of anti-

Semitism. Particularly instructive in this regard is the case of Soviet Jewry.

What makes the Soviet case instructive is, in no small measure, the fact that the professed purpose of communism was to *abolish* all nations, peoples and religions--those great engines of exclusion--on the road to the creation of a new world and a new man. As is well known, quite a few Jews, hoping to emancipate humanity and to "normalize" their own condition in the process, hitched their fates to this ideology and to the movements associated with it. After the Bolshevik revolution, these Jews proved to be among the most devoted servants of the Soviet regime.

Once again, however, the perception of ineradicable Jewish otherness proved as lethal as any reality. In the eyes of Stalin and his henchmen, the Jews, starting with the loyal communists among them, were always suspect--"ideological immigrants," in the telling phrase. But the animosity went beyond Jewish communists. The Soviet regime declared war on the over 100 nationalities and religions under its boot; whole peoples were deported, entire classes destroyed, millions starved to death, and tens of millions killed. Everybody suffered, not only Jews. But, decades later, long after Stalin's repression had given way to Khrushchev's "thaw," only one national language, Hebrew, was still banned in the Soviet Union; only one group, the Jews, was not permitted to establish schools for its children; only in the case of one group, the Jews, did the term "fifth line," referring to the space reserved for nationality on a Soviet citizen's identification papers, become a code for licensed discrimination.

Clearly, then, Jews were suspect in the Soviet Union as were no other group. Try as they might to conform, it turned out that joining the mainstream of humanity through the medium of the great socialist cause in the East was no easier than joining the nation-state in the West. But that is not the whole story, either. To scant the rest of it is not only to do an injustice to Soviet Jews as historical actors in their own right but to miss something essential about anti-Semitism, which, even as it operates in accordance with its own twisted definitions and its own mad logic, proceeds almost always by reference to some genuine quality in its chosen victims.

As it happens, although Jews were disproportionately represented in the ranks of the early Bolsheviks, the majority of Russian Jews were far from being Bolsheviks, or even Bolshevik sympathizers. More importantly, Jews would also, in time, come to play a disproportionate role in communism's demise. In the middle of the 1960s, by which time their overall share of the country's population had dwindled dramatically, Soviet Jews made up a significant element in the "democratic opposition." A visitor to the Gulag in those years would have discovered that Jews were also prominent among political dissidents and those convicted of so-called economic crimes. Even more revealing, in the 1970s the Jews were the first to challenge the Soviet regime as a national group, and to do so publicly, en masse, with tens of thousands openly demanding to leave the totalitarian state.

To that degree, then, the claim of Soviet anti-Semites that "Jewish thoughts" and "Jewish values" were in opposition to prevailing norms was not entirely unfounded. And, to that degree, Soviet anti-Semitism partook of the essential characteristic of all anti-Semitism. This hardly makes its expression any the less monstrous; it merely, once again, takes it out of the realm of fantasy.

And so we arrive back at today, and at the hatred that takes as its focus the state of Israel. That state--the world's Jew--has the distinction of challenging two separate political/moral orders simultaneously: the order of the Arab and Muslim Middle East, and the order that prevails in Western Europe. The Middle Eastern case is the easier to grasp; the Western European one may be the more ominous.

The values ascendant in today's Middle East are shaped by two forces: Islamic fundamentalism and state authoritarianism. In the eyes of the former, any non-Muslim sovereign power in the region--for that matter, any secular Muslim power--is anathema. Particularly galling is Jewish sovereignty in an area delineated as *dar al-Islam*, the realm where Islam is destined to enjoy exclusive dominance. Such a violation cannot be compromised with; nothing will suffice but its extirpation.

In the eyes of the secular Arab regimes, the Jews of Israel are similarly an affront, but not so much on theological grounds as on account of the society they have built: free, productive, democratic, a living rebuke to the corrupt, autocratic regimes surrounding it. In short, the Jewish state is the ultimate freedom fighter--an embodiment of the subversive liberties that threaten Islamic civilization and autocratic Arab rule alike. It is for this reason that in the state-controlled Arab media as in the mosques, Jews have been turned into a symbol of all that is menacing in the democratic, materialist West as a whole, and are confidently reputed to be the insidious force manipulating the United States into a confrontation with Islam.

The particular dynamic of anti-Semitism in the Middle East orbit today may help explain why--unlike, as we shall see, in Europe--there was no drop in the level of anti-Jewish incitement in the region after the inception of the Oslo peace process. Quite the contrary. And the reason is plain: To the degree that Oslo had succeeded in bringing about a real reconciliation with Israel or in facilitating the spread of political freedom, it would have frustrated the overarching aim of eradicating the Jewish "evil" from the heart of the Middle East and preserving the autocratic power of the Arab regimes.

And so, while in the 1990s the democratic world, including the democratic society of Israel, was (deludedly, as it turned out) celebrating

the promise of a new dawn in the Middle East, the schools in Gaza, the textbooks in Ramallah, the newspapers in Egypt and the television channels in Saudi Arabia were projecting a truer picture of the state of feeling in the Arab world. It should come as no surprise that, in Egypt, pirated copies of Shimon Peres's "A New Middle East," a book heralding a messianic era of free markets and free ideas, were printed with an introduction in Arabic claiming that what this bible of Middle East peacemaking proved was the veracity of everything written in "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion" about a Jewish plot to rule the world.

As for Western Europe, there the reputation of Israel and of the Jews has undergone ups and downs over the decades. Before 1967, the shadow of the Holocaust and the perception of Israel as a small state struggling for its existence in the face of Arab aggression combined to ensure, if not the favor of the European political classes, at least a certain dispensation from harsh criticism. But all this changed in June 1967, when the truncated Jewish state achieved a seemingly miraculous victory against its massed Arab enemies in the Six Day War, and the erstwhile victim was overnight transformed into an aggressor. A possibly apocryphal story about Jean-Paul Sartre encapsulates the shift in the European mood. Before the war, as Israel lay diplomatically isolated and Arab leaders were already trumpeting its certain demise, the famous French philosopher signed a statement in support of the Jewish state. After the war, he is said to have reproached the man who had solicited his signature: "But you assured me they would lose."

Decades before "occupation" became a household word, the mood in European chancelleries and on the left turned decidedly hostile. There were, to be sure, venal interests at stake, from the perceived need to curry favor with the oil-producing nations of the Arab world to, in later years, the perceived need to pander to the growing Muslim populations in Western Europe itself. But other currents were also at work, as anti-Western, anti-"imperialist," pacifist and pro-liberationist sentiments, fanned and often subsidized by the U.S.S.R., took over the advanced political culture both of Europe and of international diplomacy. Behind the new hostility to Israel lay the new ideological orthodoxy, according to whose categories the Jewish state had emerged on the world scene as a certified "colonial" and "imperialist" power, a "hegemon" and an "oppressor."

Before 1967, anti-Zionist resolutions sponsored by the Arabs and their Soviet patrons in the United Nations garnered little or no support among the democracies. After 1967, more and more Western countries joined the chorus of castigation. By 1974, Yasser Arafat, whose organization openly embraced both terrorism and the destruction of a U.N. member state, was invited to address the General Assembly. The next year, that same body passed the infamous "Zionism is racism" resolution. In 1981, Israel's strike against Iraq's nuclear reactor was condemned by the entire world, including the United States.

Then, in the 1990s, things began to change again. Despite the constant flow of biased U.N. resolutions, despite the continuing double standard, there were positive developments as well: The Zionism-is-racism resolution was repealed, and more than 65 member states either established or renewed diplomatic relations with Israel.

What had happened? Had Arab oil dried up? Had Muslims suddenly become a less potent political force on the European continent? Hardly. What changed was that, at Madrid and then at Oslo, Israel had agreed, first reluctantly and later with self-induced optimism, to conform to the ascendant ethos of international politics. Extending its hand to a terrorist organization still committed to its destruction, Israel agreed to the establishment of a dictatorial and repressive regime on its very doorstep, sustaining its commitment to the so-called peace process no matter how many innocent Jews were killed and wounded in its fraudulent name.

The rewards for thus conforming to the template of the world's moralizers, cosmetic and temporary though they proved to be, flowed predictably not just to Israel but to the Jewish people as a whole. Sure enough, worldwide indices of anti-Semitism in the 1990s dropped to their lowest point since the Holocaust. As the world's Jews benefited from the increasing tolerance extended to the world's Jew, Western organizations devoted to fighting the anti-Semitic scourge began cautiously to declare victory and to refocus their efforts on other parts of the Jewish communal agenda.

But of course it would not last. In the summer of 2000, at Camp David, Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians nearly everything their leadership was thought to be demanding. The offer was summarily rejected, Arafat started his "uprising," Israel undertook to defend itself--and Europe ceased to applaud. For many Jews at the time, this seemed utterly incomprehensible: had not Israel taken every last step for peace? But it was all too comprehensible. Europe was staying true to form; it was the world's Jew, by refusing to accept its share of blame for the "cycle of violence," that was out of line. And so were the world's Jews, who by definition, and whether they supported Israel or not, came rapidly to be associated with the Jewish state in its effrontery.

To Americans, the process I have been describing may sound eerily familiar. It should: Americans, too, have had numerous opportunities to see their nation in the dock of world opinion over recent years for the crime of rejecting the values of the so-called international community, and never more so than during the widespread hysteria that greeted President Bush's announced plan to dismantle the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein. In dozens of countries, protesters streamed into the streets to voice their fury at this refusal of the United States to conform to what "everybody" knew to be required of it. To judge from the placards on display at these rallies, President Bush, the leader of the free world, was a worse enemy of mankind than the butcher of Baghdad.

At first glance, this too must have seemed incomprehensible. Saddam Hussein was one of the world's most brutal dictators, a man who had gassed his own citizens, invaded his neighbors, defied Security Council resolutions, and was widely believed to possess weapons of mass destruction. But no matter: The protests were less about Iraqi virtue than about American vice, and the grievances aired by the assorted anticapitalists, antiglobalists, radical environmentalists, self-styled anti-imperialists, and many others who assembled to decry the war had little to do with the possible drawbacks of a military operation in Iraq. They had to do, rather, with a genuine clash of values.

Insofar as the clash is between the United States and Europe--there is a large "European" body of opinion within the U.S. as well--it has been well diagnosed by Robert Kagan in his best-selling book, "Of Paradise and Power." For our purposes, it is sufficient to remark on how quickly the initial "why do they hate us" debate in the wake of September 11, focusing on anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world, came to be overtaken by a "why do they hate us" debate centered on anti-American sentiment in "Old Europe." Generally, the two hatreds have been seen to emanate from divergent impulses, in the one case a perception of the threat posed by Western freedoms to Islamic civilization, in the other a perception of the threat posed by a self-confident and powerful America to the postmodern European idea of a world regulated not by force but by reason, compromise and nonjudgmentalism. In today's Europe--professedly pacifist, postnationalist, antihegemonic--an expression like "axis of evil" wins few friends, and the idea of actually confronting the axis of evil still fewer.

Despite the differences between them, however, anti-Americanism in the Islamic world and anti-Americanism in Europe are in fact linked, and both bear an uncanny resemblance to anti-Semitism. It is, after all, with some reason that the United States is loathed and feared by the despots and fundamentalists of the Islamic world as well as by many Europeans. Like Israel, but in a much more powerful way, America embodies a different--a nonconforming--idea of the good, and refuses to abandon its moral clarity about the objective worth of that idea or of the free habits and institutions to which it has given birth. To the contrary, in undertaking their war against the evil of terrorism, the American people have demonstrated their determination not only to fight to preserve the blessings of liberty for themselves and their posterity, but to carry them to regions of the world that have proved most resistant to their benign influence.

In this positive sense as well, Israel and the Jewish people share something essential with the United States. The Jews, after all, have long held that they were chosen to play a special role in history, to be what their prophets called "a light unto the nations." What precisely is meant by that phrase has always been a matter of debate, and I would be the last to deny the mischief that has sometimes been done, including to the best interests of the Jews, by some who have raised it as their banner. Nevertheless, over four millennia, the universal vision and moral precepts of the Jews have not only worked to secure the survival of the Jewish people themselves but have constituted a powerful force for good in the world, inspiring myriads to fight for the right even as in others they have aroused rivalry, enmity and unappeasable resentment.

It is similar with the United States--a nation that has long regarded itself as entrusted with a mission to be what John Winthrop in the 17th century called a "city on a hill" and Ronald Reagan in the 20th parsed as a "shining city on a hill." What precisely is meant by *that* phrase is likewise a matter of debate, but Americans who see their country in such terms certainly regard the advance of American values as central to American purpose. And, though the United States is still a very young nation, there can be no disputing that those values have likewise constituted an immense force for good in the world--even as they have earned America the enmity and resentment of many.

In resolving to face down enmity and hatred, an important source of strength is the lesson to be gained from contemplating the example of others. From Socrates to Churchill to Sakharov, there have been individuals whose voices and whose personal heroism have reinforced in others the resolve to stand firm for the good. But history has also been generous enough to offer, in the Jews, the example of an ancient people fired by the message of human freedom under God and, in the Americans, the example of a modern people who over the past century alone, acting in fidelity with their inmost beliefs, have confronted and defeated the greatest tyrannies ever known to man.

Fortunately for America, and fortunately for the world, the United States has been blessed by providence with the power to match its ideals. The Jewish state, by contrast, is a tiny island in an exceedingly dangerous sea, and its citizens will need every particle of strength they can muster for the trials ahead. It is their own people's astounding perseverance, despite centuries of suffering at the hands of faiths, ideologies, peoples, and individuals who have hated them and set out to do them in, that inspires one with confidence that the Jews will once again outlast their enemies.

The writer is Israel's minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs. This article draws in part on ideas presented at a conference on anti-Semitism in Paris in May and at the World Forum of the American Enterprise Institute in June. Ron Dermer contributed to this article. (Commentary Nov 2003)