



Harold Evans

The voice of hate

Virulent anti-Semitism permeates all levels of Muslim society. Insidiously propagated by school text books as well as by the Arab media, it threatens any hope of an enduring peace in the Middle East.

Just before he was given the boot by President Bush, Yasser Arafat made an extraordinary offer – extraordinary because it was not one of the specific demands Bush was about to make, extraordinary because Arafat acknowledged a hidden horror: the indoctrination of the delusional young people who carry out suicide bombings. In a six–page private memorandum he sent to President Bush and Arab capitals outlining his 100–day plan for reform, Arafat said he would "renounce fanaticism in the educational curricula and spread the spirit of democracy and enlightenment and openness".

There is a lot under the stone Arafat has lifted. Fanaticism has been bred into the suicide murderers and millions of young people throughout the Arab nations with scant attention by media, governments, academia and churches in the civilised world. The Palestinian schools, financed by Europe, are open sewers in terms of the hatred they seed not just of Israel, but all Jews and all their friends. Dr Ahmad Abu Halabiya, former rector of the Islamic University in Gaza speaks the message: "Wherever you are kill the Jews, the Americans who are like them and those who stand by them."

Arab leaders come to Washington and London and Geneva with formulas for peace while at home they feed their populations with similar incitements. It means that even if by some miracle there is agreement on the shape of a Palestinian state there will be no peace in the Middle East for a generation. The Israelis may find it in their heart to forget or forgive the suicide assassins; the Palestinians may find it possible to put behind them the humiliations of occupation. But the political conflict over Palestine is only one aspect of the fanaticism that has been fomented. It adds up to the dehumanisation of all Jews and it has been manufactured and propagated throughout the Middle East and South Asia on a scale and intensity that is utterly unprecedented. This is something relatively new in the Islamic world. There was more tolerance for Jews in the Islamic empire than ever there was in Christian Europe.

I was aware, as we all are, that the Palestinians hate the state of Israel. What has surprised me is the virulence of this new anti-Semitism throughout all the Muslim countries. It is frenzied, vociferous, paranoid, vicious and prolific, and is only incidentally connected to the Palestinian conflict. Hope, the familiar bromide, seems to have little to do with it. The moment of high hope following Camp David saw a surge, not a diminution, in the tide. It is a singular

phenomenon; there is nothing comparable to it in relation to Arabs or Muslims.

Everyone talking about Palestine or terrorism is talking in a vacuum, for nothing can be understood without a proper appreciation of the way minds have been poisoned. We all threw up our hands in horror about Le Pen – it is always satisfying to find fault with the French! – but the world turns a blind eye to worse. A single skinhead assault on a synagogue in Europe is news, but not the unremitting daily assault on Jews waged from Morocco to Cairo to Damascus, from Baghdad to Teheran, the Gaza Strip to Karachi.

The paradox is that the world is connected as never before in terms of the flow of current, but many of the wires are lethally bare. The culture of religious fanaticism that has spawned and condoned terrorism and drives the new anti-Semitism is insensible to reason. Jonathan Swift recognised our dilemma more than 200 years ago: "You cannot reason a person out of something he has not been reasoned into." The consequences of unreason are rather more severe than they were in Swift's time.

What we are up against is best illustrated by what the Jews did to the World Trade Center. Everyone in the Muslim world knows that 9/11 was a Jewish plot to pave the way for a joint Israeli-US military operation not just against Osama bin Laden and the Taliban but also Islamic militants in Palestine. On the day of the bombing, 4,000 Jews were absent from the World Trade Center; they had been tipped off not to go to work. I thought this *canard* had long ago vanished up its own orifice but it was being retailed with all sincerity by a Pakistani taxi driver last week in New York of all places – which proves nothing except that he happens to be an accurate representation of a now unshakeable Muslim conviction. Millions and millions and millions believe this rubbish, as a Gallup Poll has found after questioning people in nine predominantly Islamic countries: Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia representing about half the world's Muslim population.

Some 67 per cent found the attacks morally unjustified, which is something – why not 100 per cent – but they were also asked whether they believed reports that groups of Arabs carried out the bombings. Only in West-aligned Turkey was the answer Yes, but it was close, 46 per cent to 43 per cent. In all the other eight Islamic countries, the populations rejected the idea that Arabs or Al Qaeda were responsible. Repeat: that is a poll just a couple of months ago, after millions of words from reporters and exultant videos from the Osama bin Laden show. The majorities are overwhelming in Pakistan, Kuwait, Iran and Indonesia – in Pakistan only 4 per cent accept that the killers were Arabs. Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* reported last month from Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim state, that nobody has any doubt about the Mossad conspiracy.

Who could be crazy/malign/misguided enough to disseminate such fabrications? The effluent is from official sources and newspapers and television in Arab states, from schools and government-funded mosques, from Arab columnists and editorial writers, cartoonists, clerics and intellectuals, from websites that trail into an infinity of iniquity. The appearance of modernity in the Arab media is illusory. More important than the presence of the hardware is the absence of the software, the notion of a ruggedly independent self-critical free press. CNN will film US bomb damage in Afghanistan. Al-Jazeera and the Middle East stations would never dream of talking to the orphans and widows whose loved ones were blown apart by a

suicide bomber. An Arab critic of the USA and the coalition is always given the last word. How could people be so susceptible to misinformation? Well, conspiracy theories simplify a complex world. They have the advantage that the absence of evidence is itself proof of plot: missing records at Pearl Harbor, missing bullets in Dallas, missing bodies in Jenin. Preconceptions are outfitted in fantasy. Contradiction by authority is mere affirmation of the vastness of the plot: so he's in it, too. Conspiracy and rumour bloom especially where the flow of news and opinion is restricted and especially where illiteracy is high.

But there is another explanation for the potency of lies today. It is the aura of authenticity provided by technology, by the Internet. John Daniszewski of the *Los Angeles Times* asked an editor of the *Nation* in Islamabad, Ayesha Haroon, why they blamed Israel. "It is quite possible that there was deliberate malice in printing it," she admitted, but she went on: "I also think it has to do with the Internet. When you see something on a computer, you tend to believe it is true." Here in our new magic is a source of much misery. An Indonesian visiting the Islamic stronghold of Jogyakarta, according to Friedman, was alarmed by the tide running for jihad against Christians and Jews. Internet users are only 5 per cent of the population, but these 5 per cent spread rumours about Jews to everyone else. "They say, 'He got it from the Internet.' They think it's the Bible."

The smear that defiles the Jews who died in the World Trade Center, that millions perceive as reality, owes its original currency in September 2001 to one website. It is called InformationTimes.com, "an independent news and information service" whose address was given as the Press Building in Washington DC. So I thought it worth asking the editor in chief Syed Adeeb for the evidence. He was hard to find. Directory assistance had no entry for Information Times, Info Times or the editor in chief. Bryan Curtis of Slate was told they had no such tenant; email messages were bounced back. When I spoke to Curtis in May, he told me he had been bombarded by anti-Semitic responses. He also got a threatening legal letter but when Slate's lawyers tried to reply, the evanescent litigants were on the lam again. This week I did reach Adeeb in Virginia, so I asked him for his source. He told me it was television station Al Manar in the Lebanon. When I asked whether he had any qualms relying on Al Manar because it was a mouthpiece for the terrorist group Hezbollah that exists "to stage an effective psychological warfare with the Zionist enemy", Adeeb's reply was, "Well, it is a very popular station." He clearly believed his story; when I mentioned that there were names of Jews who died in the towers, he conceded that one or two might have died, but he found it sinister that nobody could tell him just how many Jews did die there. He volunteered that he was a US citizen, and that some of his best friends were Jews. Adeeb's approach to the world speaks for itself in his headlines:

- Israelis with bomb material arrested in Washington
- Israeli mafia controls US Congress
- Crazy Hindu terrorists threaten America
- FBI and CIA should investigate the Israeli lobby
- Barbarous Israeli soldiers rape and torture 86 women in Nablus, Palestine

I asked for the source of that rape story and was referred to the Labour MP for Birmingham Selly Oak, Lynne Jones. I checked. Jones did indeed put the atrocity in circulation, quoting an email from an Anthony Razook in Nablus but she was careful to say "this report has not been authenticated". Such qualifications evaporate in the endless laundering of information.

Once upon a time stories like this would circulate on smudged cyclostyled sheets that would never see the light of day. But now Wizards of Oz like Adeeb, with this spurious authenticity of electronic delivery, have a megaphone to a gullible world. In the 1930s, Cordell Hull complained of print and radio that a lie went half way round the world before truth had time to put its trousers on; nowadays it has been to Mars and back before anyone is half awake. At the end of the line of incendiary headlines and the careless propagation of email there is Danny Pearl, tortured and butchered because he was a Jew and a reporter.

Unfortunately, reporting and comment in the West all too often, for the best of motives, ingenuously reinforces the anti-Semitic mindset. Israel is supported, in Lenin's phrase, like a rope supports a hanging man. Equal weight is given to information from corrupt police states and proven liars as to information from a vigorous self-critical democracy. The pious but fatuous posture is that this is somehow fair, as if truth existed in a moral vacuum, something to be measured by the yard like calico. Five million Jews in Israel are a vulnerable minority surrounded by 300 million Muslims who, for the most part, are governed by authoritarian regimes, quasi-police states, that in more than 50 years have never ceased trying to wipe it out by war and terrorism. They muzzle dissent and critical reporting, they run vengeful penal systems and toxic schools, they have failed in almost every measure of social and political justice, they deflect the frustrations of their streets to the scapegoat of Zionism and they breed and finance international terrorism.

Yet it is Israel that is regarded with scepticism and sometimes hostility. Take the battle of Jenin. The presumption in the feeding frenzy in the best newspapers in Europe and in hours and hours of television was that the Palestinian stories of 3,000 killed and buried in secret mass graves must be true, though the main propagator of this story, Saeb Erekat, has been shown time and time again to be a liar. The *Guardian* was even moved to write the editorial opinion that Israel's attacks on Jenin were "every bit as repellent" as Osama bin Laden's attack on New York on 11 September.

Every bit? Every bit as repellent? Did we miss something? Was there some US provocation of Osama comparable to the continuous murder of Israeli women, children, the old and the sick – 19 victims at Passover? Was something going on in the World Trade Center as menacing as the making of bombs in Jenin, known proudly to Palestinians as Suicide Capital? In fact, there was no massacre, no mass graves. Human Rights Watch has since put the death toll at a total of 54, including, on their count, 22 civilians – the Israelis say three. Some Palestinian militants in fact claim Jenin as a victory in the killing of 23 Israeli soldiers.

Of course, the press certainly had a duty to report the Palestinians allegations of massacre; it was entitled to raise questions and express alarm in the editorial columns. But truth did not lie in the balance between competing statements, and it was ill-served by hysteria. Big stories like this demand special rigour in the reporting, restraint in the language, scrupulous care in the headlining, proper attribution of sources and, above all, a sense of responsibility: "Genocide" is too agonising when real for it to be devalued by its use as small change. To describe suicide bombers as "martyrs", as a recent British headline did, is to endorse a barbarity; Palestinians can call bombers martyrs if they like but it is a defamation of historic martyrs who gave their lives to save others, not to kill randomly and for financial reward for their families. Words, said Churchill, are the only things that last forever. We should all have as much

care with the explosive power of words as we expect airports to have with our luggage.

Let me reject the sophistry that to question such matters is to excuse everything done under the guise of protesting anti-Semitism. It is not anti-Semitic to raise questions about Jenin, no more than it is anti-press to raise questions about the reporting. It is not anti-Semitic to report and protest ill treatment of Palestinians. It is not anti-Semitic to consider whether Sharon's past belies his promises for the future. It is not anti-Semitic to deplore the long occupation, though originally brought about by Arab leaders in instigating and losing three wars.

It IS anti-Semitic to vilify the state of Israel as a diabolical abstraction, reserving tolerance for the individual Jew but not the collective Jew; it IS anti-Semitic to invent malignant outrages; it IS anti-Semitic consistently to condemn in Israel what you ignore or condone elsewhere; it is above all, anti-Semitic to de-humanise Judaism and the Jewish people such as to incite and justify their extermination. That is what we have seen thousands and thousands of times over on a preposterous scale.

The European Community recently voted more millions to the Palestinian Authority. Corrupt as it is, one sympathises with its claim on our sympathies for the relief of suffering and poverty, but should it not have been made a condition that the PA must cease using European money for racist propaganda through its schools, its mosques, on television and radio, in political rallies and summer camps? The fanaticism Arafat offers to renounce – as a bargaining chip, not a moral principle – is the fanaticism stimulated by his Palestinian Authority which, among other enlightenments, makes educational films of little girls singing their dedication to martyrdom. The degree of infection was manifest at Al-Najah University in the city of Nablus where the students put on an exhibition entitled "The Sbarro Cafe Exhibition".

The Sbarro Café was the pizza parlour where a Palestinian suicide bomber murdered 15 people taking a meal. The exhibit, according to the Associated Press and Israeli media, included an exhibit with pizza slices and body parts strewn across the room. The walls were painted red to represent scattered blood.

It is hard looking for sanity to put in the picture – even in the Department of Psychiatry at Ein Shams University in Cairo. Here is Dr Adel Sadeq who is also chairman of the Arab Psychiatrists' Association, on suicide bombings:

As a professional psychiatrist, I say that the height of bliss comes with the end of the countdown: ten, nine, eight, seven six, five, four three, two, one. When the martyr reaches 'one' and he explodes he has a sense of himself flying, because he knows for certain that he is not dead. It is a transition to another, more beautiful world. No one in the Western world sacrifices his life for his homeland. If his homeland is drowning, he is the first to jump ship. In our culture it is different... This is the only Arab weapon there is and anyone who says otherwise is a conspirator.

Next patient, please!

The Muslim world's relentless caricatures of the Jew are boringly on the same one note, Jews are always dirty, hook-nosed, money-grubbing, vindictive and scheming parasites. They are barbarians who deliberately spread vice, drugs and prostitution, and poison water. Among the fabrications:

- Israeli authorities infected by injection 300 Palestinian children with HIV virus during the years of the *intifada*.
- Israel poisoned Palestinians with uranium and nerve gas.
- Israel is giving out drug-laced chewing gum and candy intended to make women sexually corrupt.
- Jews use the blood of gentiles to make matzos for Passover (*Al Ahrām*, Cairo). This past April, state-funded San Francisco students put out a poster of a baby "slaughtered according to Jewish rites under American license".

Incredibly, the Arab and Muslim media, and behind them their states, have resurrected that notorious Bolshevik forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. This supposedly occult document, which reads like something discarded as too ridiculous for the script for Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, is the secret Zionist plan by which satanic Jews will gain world domination. It has had more scholarly stakes through its heart than the umpteen re-enactments of Dracula, but this bizarre counterfeit is common currency in the Muslim world. A multi-million 30-part series was produced in Egypt by Arab Radio and Television. With a cast of 400! And not as satire.

It is the Protocols that inspire Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, to teach their children that the Jews control the world's wealth and mass media. According to Hamas – and who will be there in the classroom or on the street to raise a question? – Jews deliberately instigated the French and Russian revolutions and World War I so that they could wipe out the Islamic caliphate, establish the League of Nations "in order to rule the world by their intermediary." When I checked on the website Palestine Watch, by the way, to report on what they were telling the world about Israeli propaganda, I drew a blank, but there it described Hamas as seeking nothing other than peace with dignity, forbearing to mention the small matter that Hamas is dedicated to the destruction of the state of Israel.

Apart from the volume and intensity of the multi-media global campaign, there has been an ominous change in political direction. Arab frustration with the recognition of the state of Israel after World War II has, for decades, been expressed as "why should the Arabs have to compensate the Jews for the Holocaust perpetrated by Europeans". Today the theme is that the Holocaust is a Zionist invention. It is expressed with a vehemence as astounding as the contempt for scholarship.

A typical columnist in *Al-Akhbar*, the Egyptian government daily on 29 April: "The entire matter (the Holocaust), as many French and British scientists have proven, is nothing more than a huge Israeli plot aimed at extorting the German government in particular and the European countries. I personally and in the light of this imaginary tale complain to Hitler, even saying to him, 'If only you had done it, brother, if only it had really happened, so that that the world could sigh in relief (without) their evil and sin'."

Hiri Manzour in the official Palestinian newspaper: "the figure of six million Jews cremated in the Nazi Auschwitz camps is a lie", a hoax promoted by Jews as part of their international "marketing operation".

Seif al-Al Jarawn in the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadeeda*: "They concocted horrible stories of gas chambers which Hitler, they claimed, used to burn them alive. The press overflowed with pictures of Jews being gunned down...or being pushed into gas chambers. The truth is that such malicious persecution was a malicious fabrication by the Jews."

Clearly here is a consistent attempt to undermine the moral foundations of the state of Israel and it is espoused by a number of supposedly moderate people. The former president of Iran, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani had this to say on Tehran Radio: "One atomic bomb would wipe out Israel without trace while the Islamic world would only be damaged rather than destroyed by Israeli nuclear retaliation."

The brilliance of the whole campaign of anti-Semitism is its stupefying perversity: the Arab and Muslim media and mosque depict Israelis as Nazis – even the conciliatory Barak and the hawkish Sharon are alike dressed up in swastikas with fangs dripping with blood – but media and mosque peddle the same Judeophobia that paved the way to Auschwitz. How can you talk to someone who conducts all discourse standing on his head screaming? People in the West who adopt the same murderous metaphor for Israel, and I heard it often on my recent visit to Europe, may be regarded as a joke in their own country but that is not where the action is. They are moral idiots but they lend credulity to malevolent liars in the Middle East.

By comparison with the phantasmagoria I have described, it seems a small matter that without exception Palestinian school textbooks supplied by the PA and funded by Europe, have no space in the maps for the sovereign state of Israel, no mention of its 5 million people, no recognition of the Jews' historic links to Jerusalem.

The Palestinian claim to a state is unanswerable and with wiser leadership would have been flourishing for years. It is tragic that the cause is now being so ruthlessly exploited with Jew as a code word for extremist incitement of hatred of the USA and the West. This is jihad. It is aimed at us at all, at Europeans who "look like" Americans because they believe in liberal democracy and are infected by US culture. But its first victims are the Palestinians and the frustrated masses of the Muslim world. Their leaders have led them into ignominy in three wars. They have failed to reform their corrupt and incompetent societies. It is convenient to deflect the despair and anger of the street to Israel and the Jews who supposedly control the West, but terror and hate have a way of poisoning every society that encourages or tolerates it. When Bernard Lewis observed 16 years ago that anti-Semitism was becoming part of Arab intellectual life "almost as much as happened in Nazi Germany", he added the comforting thought that it lacked the visceral quality of Central and East European anti-Semitism being "still largely political and ideological, intellectual and literary" lacking any deep personal animosity or popular resonance, something cynically exploited by Arab rulers and elites, a polemical weapon to be discarded when no longer required.

But that was before the current electronic efflorescence of hate, before the brainwashing I have sketched, before 9/11. Habits of mind tending to approve terror are becoming ingrained in the Muslim world, sanctioned by the lethargy and prejudice in Europe: those Palestinians who danced for joy on 9/11 and those students who staged the grisly exhibition of pizza parlour murders were not Al Qaeda, but their acceptance of terror as a substitute for politics does not auger well for the future of their country or the possibilities of peaceful

political dialogue in any of the Arab states.

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