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**ZIONISM AS A RACIST-COLONIALIST
CONSPIRACY: DECONSTRUCTING A MYTH**

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Zionism as a Racist-Colonialist Conspiracy: Deconstructing a Myth

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At the beginning of the 21st century it has once again become *bon ton* to equate Zionism with racism and to brand Israel as an “apartheid” state. Human rights organizations like Amnesty International, the United Nations, pro-Palestinian groups, all liberal and leftist mainstream opinion seize on every opportunity to accuse Israel of “racism,” when it seeks to protect itself from the ravages of Palestinian terrorism. Thus the “wall” or barrier constructed to keep Palestinian suicide bombers out of Israel, is invariably referred to as a “racist wall,” a “Berlin wall” or an apartheid-style act of racial separatism. Of course, such a barrier is ugly and causes inconvenience, not to say some hardship, to the Palestine Arabs. But “racist”? Hardly. The purpose of the fence is to make it harder for Palestinian bombers to indiscriminately murder Israeli civilians. It is not an ideological imperative but the logic of war and the need to combat a jihadi suicide terrorism that blows up women and children with impunity, which led to the construction of a barrier.

So, too, with the recent Israeli government decision to block (for now) Israeli citizenship from Palestinians who marry Israeli citizens. This new law resulted from the proven involvement of Palestinians who had married Israelis, in the preparation of suicide bombings. Once again, Israel’s security needs are ignored by critics, in order to level a bogus charge of “racism.” But the issue is not only one of security. Israel, like any other liberal democracy, has the sovereign right to choose to whom it wishes to extend the right of citizenship. There are many European democracies who adopt stringent immigrant restrictions on openly ethnic grounds, in order to protect their economic, political and national interests. They include Denmark, Germany and Britain – none of whom have been accused by the international community of behaving as “racist” nation-states. Only in the case of Israel are such protective measures automatically attacked as if the very idea of a Jewish State was somehow racist.

The widespread libel that Zionism is a “racist” ideology sounds, indeed, like a modern version of original sin. It taints those who support a Jewish homeland in Israel with the stigma of “crimes against humanity.” In the view of many of those condemning Zionism, colonialist Jews from Europe brutally displaced an indigenous Palestinian population, supposedly basing themselves on a racist outlook imported from the West. Although the accusation of Zionist racism is not new, it first became an insistent component in Arab, Islamic and Communist propaganda after 1967. It has been constantly used ever since by the Palestinians and their supporters to indicate Zionist contempt for the “natives.” The goal of Zionist ideology is defined by its adversaries as being the separation of Jew from non-Jew. In this perspective, Zionism is an *isolationist*, segregationist ideology which provokes and even encourages antisemitism to implement its aims. The State of Israel is itself depicted as based on a philosophy of racism discriminating between Jews and Arabs. The desire of Israel to be a “Jewish” state is seen as intrinsically racist, because the Jewish people are viewed as a religious group rather than as a nation. In practical terms, the Law of Return is attacked as being particularly “racist,” since it grants Jews from the Diaspora the rights of Israeli citizenship denied to exiled Palestinians. It is also

claimed that Israeli Arabs and “Oriental” Jews (*Mizrachiim*) suffer from racism within Israeli society. In addition, some left-wing anti-Zionists point to the supposedly “theocratic” character of the Israeli state, which by definition gives special privileges to Jews and prevents any integration into the Arab world.

This tissue of falsehoods, half-truths and tendentious distortions has taken the character of a self-evident proposition by dint of constant repetition. Worse still, this distorted image of Israel and Zionism has itself assimilated conspicuous features of European antisemitism. The idea that Zionism aims at racist supremacy or domination over the non-Jew has long been a classic focal point of Western anti-Jewish propaganda; the concept of the “chosen race” is a typically antisemitic, not a Jewish notion. The belief that the Jews seek to segregate, isolate or separate themselves from humanity is another antisemitic myth, fabricated in order to divert attention from a centuries-old Christian policy of enclosing Jews in ghettos. The Arab-Israel conflict is difficult enough, one might have thought, without the injection of deadly stereotypes from the arsenal of European antisemitism. Yet this is exactly what has been taking place with ever greater force during the last thirty-five years.

The modern myth of Zionist “racism,” like the older tradition of religious and nationalist antisemitism, prepares the ground for marginalising and ultimately eliminating the group identity of Israeli Jews. The Christian demonology of the Jew has been revived by Arab ideologues, with the focus of the attack now aimed at the Israeli Jewish nation-state in their midst. Arab accusations echo on a collective level (within the field of international relations) discriminatory principles which have long characterized classical antisemitism. Traditionally, European antisemites branded the Jews as an *alien* element which could not be integrated into civic society. Before and after legal emancipation, Jews were vilified as “Oriental” or “semi-Asiatic” hybrids in Western Christian culture, who were culturally, socially and politically unassimilable. In the Middle East today, the Zionists are similarly labelled “intruders” who cannot be absorbed into the framework of the Muslim Arab world unless they dissolve their State. The Jews, having achieved their national emancipation through the Zionist movement in 1948, are still branded as European “colonialist” strangers in the region despite the fact that the Sephardic majority of the Israeli population have deep roots in the area. Their exclusion is blamed on their own “racism,” just as the Jews in European society were formerly condemned by antisemites for their exclusivism and non-assimilation. The truth, of course, is that most Jews in pre-Hitler Europe like the Zionists in the Middle East ardently desired to integrate themselves in their non-Jewish environment, although (understandably) not at the price of abandoning their own identity. Violent antisemitism, culminating in Nazi efforts to totally obliterate the Jewish presence in European society, prevented this from happening. Muslim exclusivism and Arab rejectionism have similarly prevented Israel from cooperating with its neighbours in the Middle East.

In striking contrast to the prevailing myths, Zionism showed remarkable indifference to race as a factor in shaping the character and ethos of Israeli society. In contrast to white colonizing societies like South Africa, Australia, the United States or Rhodesia in the past, colour was never of importance in Israel as an indicator of social status. Nor was there any need to use “race” as a legitimizing ideology to exploit indigenous Arab labour. On the contrary, pioneering labour Zionist Jews came to Palestine to create their own working-class.

Unlike the South Africans and white Rhodesians under apartheid or the French colons in Algeria, Israelis since 1948 have been a *majority*, not a minority in their own state. They have never been attracted to mystical doctrines of race-purity (a typically antisemitic obsession) or believed in a hierarchy of “superior” and “inferior” races. Such doctrines which presuppose a belief in the existence of distinct and immutable races (especially in their hereditary qualities) or in the mystical qualities of the blood, are fundamentally alien to Judaism as well as to Zionism.

National Socialism did not invent the European race-thinking that postulated the purity and superiority of the Nordic, Germanic race. The Nazis inherited this fantasy from the writings of 19th-century pseudo-philosophers like Gobineau, Chamberlain, Wagner and Dühring who asserted that the “race” question was *the* key to history, and that “blood purity” determined the destiny of nations. Hitler’s politics were based on such *biological* foundations and objectives. In the name of Social Darwinist eugenics he ordered the elimination of Jews (and Gypsies) as well as the enslavement of millions of Slavs. Jews, in particular, were singled out for physical annihilation, not as prisoners of war, political opponents or resisters; not because of their opinions, behaviour or acts, but because they were deemed to be *a priori* “racially inferior,” a “world enemy” and a deadly virus. Their enslavement and destruction fulfilled no rational purpose or economic function. It was the outcome of a genocidal ideology which decreed the wiping out of biologically “inferior” entities as corresponding to the “laws of nature.”

Any honest analysis of Zionist ideology will quickly reveal that there is no racism in its mainstream. From Herzl to Jabotinsky, from Weizmann to Ben-Gurion and Berl Kaznelson, there is virtually no hint of racial superiority, no desire to dominate or enslave other peoples, no recourse to mythical-biological explanations of history, society or culture. As one of the last of the national-liberation movements to emerge in late 19th-century Europe, mainstream Zionism combined the humanist and universalist patriotism of the French Revolution with the messianic Jewish tradition of a return to Zion. Under the influence of Russian revolutionary doctrines of populism and socialism, it was to fuse a distinctive and original social vision with an enlightened version of Central European nationalism.

Unlike most national movements which arose among people already living in their own land, Zionism was in its origins a movement in search of a territory. It had to resolve a unique problem, the *homelessness* of the Jewish people – an extra-territorial minority which had lost its sovereignty over Palestine nearly 1900 years earlier and lacked any independent structure of *political* authority. The disastrous plight of the Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe in the last quarter of the 19th century – an almost defenceless population reeling from pogroms and discrimination – created an increasingly acute “Jewish problem” which required a political solution.

Zionism as the national liberation movement of the Jewish people sought to resolve this problem by territorial concentration. Zionists argued that the minority status of the Jews, the abnormal socio-economic position imposed upon them by the Tsarist autocracy and the rise of antisemitism in late 19th-century Europe made the collective assimilation of the Jews impossible. Far from being “racist,” the Zionist movement arose as an anguished response to the racist antisemitism that was

deliberately created by reactionary forces in European (and later Middle Eastern) societies. This massive external pressure (analogous to foreign domination over other oppressed peoples) was a major factor in driving Jews to seek their own path to auto-emancipation. Territorial concentration in Eretz Israel (the focus of Jewish national aspirations for two millennia) soon became the common platform of all Zionist groups across the political spectrum.

Zionism was part of a wider national awakening among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe seeking freedom, self-determination and the preservation of their cultural identity. But it was also about the *return* to Eretz Israel/Palestine – to the cradle of Hebrew culture and the sources of Jewish spiritual identity. In a speech in February 1923, during a visit to Palestine, the great physicist Albert Einstein commented: “This is a great age, the age of the liberation of the Jewish soul. And it has been accomplished through the Zionist movement, which has remained a spiritual movement, so that no one in the world will be able to destroy it.” Einstein made his speech at the foundation of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, recalling that the universities of Europe had become “the nurseries of chauvinism and of a blind intolerance of all things foreign. . . .” Jews, he observed, were “the principal sufferers, not only because they are thwarted in their desire for free participation and in their striving for education, but also because most Jews find themselves cramped in this spirit of narrow nationalism.”

Then, as now, the campuses in Europe and America had become a hotbed of anti-Semitic thinking and Jewish students were on the frontline in having to face the consequences of harassment. This phenomenon was a harbinger of the coming Nazi cataclysm and turned Albert Einstein, the cosmopolitan humanist, into a life-long supporter of the Zionist movement.

In the 1920s and 1930s, under Zionist auspices, Palestine did indeed become a refuge for the persecuted Jews of Europe. By the mid-1940s, the role of the Zionist movement mutated and it became a pioneer of the post-war process of decolonization and liberation of oppressed peoples. This was also the first time that Zionism emerged as a dominant trend in Jewish life. One of the main reasons for this development is that Zionism now corresponded to the reality of the Jewish condition in the post-war world, to the plight of a *homeless* people, survivors of the Holocaust who looked to Palestine as their last hope. It was not only the Nazi mass murder of Jews which vindicated the assumptions of Zionism. No less significant was the *continued* persecution and harassment of Jews, especially in the Arab and Communist world after 1945. The mass exodus of Jews from Russia, Eastern Europe, North Africa and the Levant since the Second World War would unequivocally expose the hollowness of Communist and Arab rhetoric about safeguarding the civic rights and security of their Jewish citizens.

In absorbing Jews from the Arab world, the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania and many other countries, Israel was able to fulfill one of the main goals for which it was established. This was made possible by the Law of Return, which has counterparts around the world from Germany to Greece and Armenia. Indeed, if the Palestinians finally establish a state of their own, one can be sure that they will also enact a Law of Return to gather in scattered Palestinians from their own Diaspora. No one is going to accuse them of “racism” for giving priority to Arab Palestinians. Yet

when Israel gives first place to Jews who wish to settle in their own national state this has been deemed to be exclusivist and racist. This is a good example of the hypocrisy, bad faith and double standards behind so much of the “anti-racist” rhetoric that still dominates the United Nations and other international bodies. It presupposes that only Jewish nationalism is *a priori* illegitimate and harmful to the human Rights of others. No such assumptions have ever been made about French, Polish, German, Russian, Chinese, African, Arab or Palestinian nationalisms. This discriminatory treatment of Zionism which has been systematic in the United Nations, unmistakably smacks of classic anti-Jewish prejudice.

Despite the reams of anti-Zionist propaganda it has invoked, the Israeli Law of Return has nothing to do with “racism.” On the contrary, it sought to provide a secure haven for the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution and other forms of oppression. The Jew who returns to Israel and acquires citizenship is exercising a natural human right to choose his or her destiny, without being under duress or being condemned, like his ancestors, to wander as a stranger from one exile to another. Anti-Zionists have deliberately erased the context of the Nazi mass murder of European Jewry (which produced the Law of Return) in order to create the legend of a uniquely “racist” piece of Israeli legislation.

Equally spurious are liberal and leftist allegations about the so-called “theocratic,” exclusivist character of the Jewish state, often contrasted to the Palestinian vision of a “secular, non-sectarian” democratic state. This is an inversion of reality. In fact, laws in the State of Israel, except those relating to personal status (i.e. marriage, burial, national affiliation) are based on secular, democratic principles. On the other hand, in virtually all Arab lands (including such “progressive” nations as Egypt, Syria or Algeria) Islam is the state religion. Islamic theocracy still reigns in countries like Iran and Sudan while a draconian Wahhabite fundamentalism dominates Saudi Arabia. Today, the more rarely used PLO formula of a “secular democratic State” seems like a remote utopia, especially as Islamic fundamentalism has penetrated ever more deeply in the Palestinian Authority. Israel, it should be added, remains the only functional democracy in the region, despite the state of siege under which it has lived since 1948 and the global *jihād* (Holy War) against which it has had to fight.

“Racism” has been perhaps the most persistent of the ideological myths fostered by Arab propaganda, by Communists, anti-globalists and the new Left. But a close rival is the claim that Zionism is a form of “colonialism,” organically linked to imperialism. Despite its tiny physical dimensions (in the most flagrant opposition to its “imperialist” ambitions) Israel itself is often defined as “imperialist” and as a “settler-colonialist state.” In the Marxist dispensation, this settler society allegedly plays the role of watchdog or American gendarme in the Middle East, with its armed forces pursuing an aggressive policy against Arab states in order to safeguard the sources of Western oil. Its presence serves as a bulwark to crush any revolutionary breakthrough in the Arab world and to frustrate the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian movement for national liberation. In the anti-Zionist mythology, Israel’s *raison d’être* is presented as if its prime aim is to seize Arab territory for the purpose of further colonization and to generally act as a bridgehead for American imperialism in the area. Arab rejectionism which categorically refused the UN partition plan of 1947, the Israeli peace proposals after 1967 and Prime Minister Barak’s offer to

withdraw from virtually all “occupied” territories, is, of course, ignored as if it did not exist at all.

Anti-Zionist thinking also deliberately blurs any distinction between colonialism and colonization. Many groups have migrated throughout history to other lands without thereby becoming “colonialists.” The “ascent” of Jews to Palestine (which had never ceased throughout the centuries) was certainly as legitimate as the migration of Europeans to colonise vast territories from North and South America, to Australia and New Zealand. The historic connection of Jews to Eretz Israel was extraordinarily intense. There was no such link of British or Dutch colonists to North America, or of the Spaniards to Mexico, Peru or Argentina; or between the Portuguese and Brazil, the Chinese and Singapore, the Russians in Siberia and Central Asia, not to mention Arabs in medieval Spain or in North Africa. Not one of these groups had a historical, national, cultural and religious attachment to the places they settled in – remotely comparable to that of the Jews with Palestine. The Jews were unique among “the colonizers” because they truly were the *aboriginal* people, *returning* to its place of origin, the cradle of its historic identity, the only “homeland” to which it had been spiritually and physically connected in a *continuous* way throughout history. It was precisely this connection, widely recognized by Anglo-Saxon and European Christian nations weaned on the Bible, which was a key element in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the League of Nations Mandate to establish a “Jewish National Home” in Palestine.

Zionists first came as agricultural immigrants at the end of the 19th century to a land then under Turkish suzerainty, in which there were only 300,000 Arabs, working about 10 per cent of the land. The first Jewish settlers came to a neglected province of the Ottoman Empire, to work and plough areas which were largely wasteland, to drain swamps and marshes, forest the dunes and water the desert. The land often had to be reclaimed by back-breaking labour in order to make it cultivable. It did not become private property but passed into collective ownership. The money for purchasing parts of Palestine – mainly bought from absentee Arab landowners and often at extortionate prices – did not come from wealthy Jewish capitalists or “colonialist” agencies. It was acquired by the Jewish National Fund, whose capital emanated from millions of petty Jewish artisans, shopkeepers, workers and professional people living in Central and Eastern Europe.

Zionist colonization of Palestine was, if anything, the antithesis of a “colonialist” enterprise, deliberately seeking to *avoid* the capitalist exploitation of indigenous labour and the acquisition of private property. It consciously repudiated the ideals of white settler colonialism as manifested in societies like apartheid South Africa, Rhodesia and what was formerly French Algeria. The unique social vision behind the activities of the early Zionist pioneers (*halutzim*) who came to Palestine lay in their will to create a new society and a new man inspired by constructivist revolutionary ideals. The typical *halutzim* were young middle-class Jews who in going to Palestine turned their backs both on the Diaspora and on bourgeois society. They were seeking personal and communal redemption by becoming workers or peasants. This was closer to the ideals espoused by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy than to the notions of Western colonialists.

Nothing could have been further removed from the typical colonial prejudices of white settlers in Africa and Asia, than the mental horizon of East European and Russian Jews arriving in Palestine at the turn of the 20th century. They were in revolt against all the social and national prejudices of their time. They had returned to Palestine to restore a lost homeland for a scattered people, to redeem themselves and the Jewish nation through manual labour. In the *kibbutzim*, these Jewish settlers hoped to sow the seed of a socialist society, based on the common ownership of the soil, economic equality and the abolition of wage-labour.

Of course, not all Zionists shared this utopian socialist vision. Nevertheless, a common denominator of Zionist ideology was the need to create a healthy economic and political structure for the regeneration of the Jewish people in Palestine. The General Confederation of Labour (the Histadrut) looked to the development of a self-sustaining peasantry and working-class as the most important social base of a renascent nation. This socialist ideal obviously had nothing at all in common with “colonialism.” Its aim was to create the conditions for a productive, non-exploitative society by renewing contact with the land – thereby facilitating the process of Jewish national liberation, which had been blocked in the Diaspora by lack of a territory. The men and women of the second *Aliyah* who dreamt of self-labour (*avodah atzmaït*) opposed the hiring of Arab labour for precisely this reason. They despised the classic European model of a colonial capitalist system in which Jews would have become employers exploiting cheap Arab workers. Only after 1967 could it be said that Israel began to resemble some aspects of this pattern in the “occupied territories.” It is certainly not inherent in the Zionist project.

Most of the land purchased before the establishment of Israel was in fact desolate and malaria-ridden. It did not therefore involve the displacement of Arab peasants. On the contrary, the success of Jewish settlers in reclaiming swamps and deserts, along with the prosperity of the Jewish economy under the British Mandate encouraged a very considerable Arab immigration into Palestine between 1925 and 1945. It has been estimated that there were at least 180,000 *illegal* Arab immigrants to Palestine in this period across the mainly unchecked land frontiers. This *foreign* Arab immigration partly accounts for the substantial growth in Arab population under British rule (there were 1,100,000 Arabs in Palestine in 1945). These Arab immigrants were no more “indigenous” to Palestine than the Jews.

Jewish settlement inspired a great deal of hostility from the Arab feudal class in Palestine, who regarded the Zionists as “Bolsheviks” rather than colonialists. There was also a broader Arab resentment at the modernisation of the country by the British and the Jews, the erosion of traditional customs and the incursion of a European population with a different culture, life-style and social attitudes. The democratic, socialist and egalitarian character of Jewish colonization was particularly alarming to the Arabs, producing already in the early 1920s a noticeably antisemitic reaction that borrowed the language of European conspiracy theories, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This literature presented Jewish colonists who arrived in Palestine as a group who had come to exploit, dominate, enslave and expropriate the indigenous Arab population. This was, of course, a grotesque caricature. Jews of the Third *Aliyah* came to work the land and to create an independent Jewish society inspired by revolutionary ideals. They did not seek special privileges, easy careers, guaranteed jobs and super-profits, but the restructuring of their national, social and

human existence as Jews. Like other Zionists, they hoped that their aims could be achieved by agreement and compromise with the rising Arab national movement which first began to crystallize after 1918. But while the Zionists accepted the Peel partition plan proposed by the British (1937) and then the compromise offered by the United Nations (1947), these proposals were totally rejected by the Palestinian side, who wanted all or nothing. The Palestinian tragedy is the direct outcome of this *either-or* attitude in which the conflict is seen as a zero-sum game.

The only “colonialists” in Palestine after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire were the British, who ruled over this territory for reasons of imperial self-interest connected with preserving their dominant role in the Middle East. Originally the Arab national movement, like the Zionists, welcomed the British conquest of Palestine, hoping to use it for their own national aims. The celebrated Feisal-Weizmann agreement of 1919 reflected this temporary coincidence of interests. Feisal, who regarded the Jews as “very close to the Arabs in blood” and who stressed that “there is no conflict of character between the two races,” considered Zionist claims to Palestine (including Transjordan) to be moderate and reasonable: In a letter to Professor Felix Frankfurter in March 1919, he wrote:

“The Jewish movement is national and not imperialist, and there is room in Syria for both of us. Indeed, I think that neither can be a real success without the other.”

During the next thirty years, however, Arab leaders intransigently rejected any Jewish right to self-determination in the land of Israel, systematically repulsing Zionist efforts at compromise or offers of a bi-national solution. They insisted that Palestine must be an *Arab state in its entirety*. This absolutist position was given a powerful boost by the British in 1939, with their White Paper that made future Jewish immigration to Palestine dependent on Arab acquiescence – in effect a repudiation of the Jewish National Home. Britain had abandoned the Zionists and did little to try and rescue the Jews of Europe from the Nazis, while blocking the path of those who sought to flee to Palestine.

With the brief exception of the period just before and after the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (issued in war-time to win Jews to the Allied Cause), Britain did not specially favour the Zionist cause. The history of the Mandate saw a progressive whittling-away of the promises contained in the Balfour Declaration. Even before then, British policy tended to favour the local Arab elites over the incoming Jewish settlers. In 1922, Britain rewarded the Hashemites by arbitrarily severing Transjordan from the Palestine Mandate, thereby dramatically reducing the size of the Jewish National Home. Jews were not permitted by the British to settle in what would subsequently become the Kingdom of Jordan.

The conflict between the Palestine Jewish *Yishuv* and the British Imperial power climaxed in a bitter, anti-colonialist struggle against their so-called “protectors” between 1945 and 1948. Even the more moderate Zionists now realized that they could only realize the goal of free Jewish immigration and developing the country, by obliging the British to withdraw from Palestine.

During this period that immediately succeeded the mass murder of six million Jews in Europe, the policy of Britain and America (with the partial exception of

President Truman) was particularly unfriendly to Zionism. Strategic, economic and political considerations – related to the Cold War – as well as a strong residue of anti-Jewish prejudice pervaded the British Foreign Office as well as the American State Department. One might even speak of a “secret war against the Jews” which continued for several decades and was particularly apparent in the Western intelligence services.

Western coolness towards the Jewish State (with the important exception of France between 1954 and 1962) was largely a matter of *Realpolitik*. Unlike the oil-producing states of the Arab world, Israel did not have any natural resources of great economic value to offer to the big Western capitalist monopolies. The United States had forged powerful ties of economic interest with Saudi Arabia, but had no comparable interest in Israel. Indeed, there was strong American opposition to the creation of the Jewish State in 1948 when the State Department, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Intelligence services opposed recognition of Israel but were overruled by President Harry S. Truman. Similar interests also influenced Britain to obstruct the creation of Israel in 1948. The invading Arab force was spearheaded by the Jordanian Arab Legion, then commanded by British officers, led by Sir John Glubb Pasha – a fierce anti-Zionist and anti-Semite.

The pro-Arab policy of the Soviet Union (especially after 1955) was no less determined by the economic and strategic importance of the Arab world, Cold War calculation and the need for establishing military bases in the Third World. The same considerations prompted France to reverse its earlier pro-Israel policy in favour of close economic, technical and military collaboration with the Arabs. De Gaulle’s pro-Arab and anti-Israeli policy after the end of the Algerian war, was an essential part of his strategy to reestablish French grandeur and influence in the Third World as a counter-weight to American hegemony. As in the case of the Soviet Union, this foreign policy choice had a certain influence in encouraging the revival of antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish “dual loyalties.”

The mythical picture in Europe and the Middle East of a “Zionist-imperialist conspiracy” ignores the *constant* nature of Great Power support for the Arabs and the much more limited help given to Israel. While anti-Zionist propagandists fantasize about an imaginary network of financial, banking and capitalist interests which supposedly backs Israel, they have always been remarkably silent about the very *real* penetration of the capitalist world by Arab oil interests. In the 1970s the Arab export of capital became a powerful new form of financial imperialism with major repercussions in the international money-markets and on the economies of the free world. Arab petro-dollar imperialism helped to sponsor and finance the Palestinian national movement and its terrorist atrocities, which it channelled primarily against Zionism. At the same time Saudi billions boosted the spread of anti-Western Islamic fundamentalism, jihadist terror and a particularly ugly form of antisemitism. One of the most reactionary regimes on the face of the earth, the Wahhabit Saudi kingdom, was nonetheless hailed by Western leaders as a force for “moderation.”

Israel, on the other hand, is a country lacking mineral resources or oil. Far from exploiting the Arab states, it had virtually no economic relationship with its neighbours, as a result of the discriminatory Arab boycott. What kind of “colonialism” is it then, that does not massively invest capital abroad or exploit the

raw materials and natural resources of its neighbours? The Zionist experiment had, in fact, to survive by its own efforts in an extremely hostile environment, within a tiny territory the size of Wales, while lacking even the most basic natural resources. Even the so-called “occupied” territories it acquired in a defensive war of survival in 1967 provide no more than the barest minimum necessary for Israel’s security. To label this tiny sliver of land in Judea and Samaria a colonial “Empire” makes a mockery of language, common sense and history. Nor does the fact that the United States has broadly supported Israel since 1967 (while also giving massive aid to Egypt) make the Jewish State “imperialist” or turn it into an American “puppet,” any more than Soviet backing for the Syrians, Iraqis or Palestinians before 1991 made them “progressive.” Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Iraq and Jordan have over many decades been far more closely tied to Western economic interests than Israel, which essentially stood and fought alone in virtually all its wars of survival.

After 1945, Zionists had to fight British obstruction as well as the invading Arab states and the Palestinians in order to secure Israeli Independence. Even in 1956, when Israel militarily cooperated with the British and especially with the French, their interests and motivations were very different. Moreover, a victorious Israel was obliged by the United States, under tremendous pressure, to vacate the captured Sinai Peninsula. Not for the first or the last time America acted against Israel in accordance with a wider strategic design in which the Arab states’ cooperation was deemed more essential. Similarly France (which in the 1950s had been Israel’s closest ally) became strongly pro-Arab by 1967 for reasons associated with the coldest and most cynical calculations of *Realpolitik*.

Until the recent intifada, it was primarily the influence of a pro-Israeli public opinion in the Western democracies which restrained this endemic pro-Arab bias of Western diplomacy. The widespread realization that the State of Israel, despite its imperfections, was the only genuinely democratic state in the Middle East, consolidated this early identification of Western opinion with the Zionist cause, especially in the United States. This was far less true, however, of the academy, elite opinion, the churches or the media, especially after 1967, when Arab and pro-Palestinian propaganda began to deliberately mask its “eliminationist” designs against Israel and develop a duplicitous rhetoric based upon a “politically correct” Human Rights agenda.

The Palestinian cause would re-emerge in the late 1960s as the spearhead of a new anti-Zionism, wrapped up in seductive formulas like the establishment of a “secular democratic State” in Palestine. The leader of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, did not however always disguise his true intent. Thus he stated on 16 December 1974: “We shall never stop until we can go back home and Israel is destroyed. . . . The goal of our struggle is the end of Israel, and there can be no compromises or mediations. We don’t want peace, we want victory. Peace for us means Israel’s destruction, and nothing else.” This was the real objective that Arafat and his Palestinian movement have stubbornly pursued for the last thirty years, while gullible Westerners and Israelis allowed themselves to be deceived by this doublespeak. However, there was no excuse for this blindness since Arafat’s goals were already spelled out in official documents like the Palestinian National Covenant.

Already in this Covenant, the PLO identified its aim to eliminate the “racist” State of Israel as part of an ongoing world struggle against Imperialism. Article 22 of the 1968 Palestinian Covenant, after denouncing Zionism as being “a racist and fanatical movement in its formation: aggressive, expansionist and colonialist in its aims, and Fascist and Nazi in its means” – goes on to state the following: “Israel is the tool of the Zionist Movement and a human and geographical base for world imperialism.”

Article 20 of the same Palestinian National Covenant makes it no less clear that Israel is to be viewed as a *non-nation* and that Jewish nationalism is a *false, artificial* and *reactionary* phenomenon. The same article goes on to say that “Judaism, in its character as a religion, is not a nationality with an independent existence.” In other words, the PLO from the outset denied the legitimacy of Zionism as a *national* movement as well as negating the statehood of Israel. Today, it is the powerful Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) which holds high the banner of negation of any Jewish presence in Palestine, except in a completely subordinate role to Muslims.

When Arafat spoke at the United Nations in 1974 of “one democratic State where Christian, Jew and Muslim live in justice, equality, fraternity and progress,” he was referring to Israelis merely as a *religious* group. The PLO always envisaged the so-called “secular” State as an *Arab* Palestine in which Islam would be the dominant faith and only Palestinian Arabs could possess *national* rights. Article 1 of the Palestinian National Covenant makes this stunningly clear: “Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian Arab period and an integral part of the great Arab homeland, and the people of Palestine is a part of the Arab nation.” This exclusivist pan-Arab vision of the Palestinians left no place at all for any independent Jewish presence or the exercise of Israeli sovereignty on the soil of the “homeland.” The modifications since then have been largely cosmetic.

Article 6 of the Covenant is even more extreme, since it is prepared to consider as “Palestinians” only those Jews who were physically present in the land before 1917 – a definition which would exclude virtually the entire Israeli Jewish population from any right to remain in their own country. In other words, the posture of the PLO (and its main branch, the Fatah) as the advocates of an open society, based on secular democratic principles, has presupposed from the beginning a *total denial* of the Jewish right to national self-determination. It is difficult to imagine a more exclusivist and racist denial of the rights of “the other.” Yet this rejectionism lies at the very root of the Palestinian and pan-Arab refusal to accept the State of Israel as the legitimate expression of the Jewish national liberation movement – the indispensable prerequisite for any meaningful peace agreement. This is the single most fundamental reason for the failure of all the countless peace plans and negotiations of the past 35 years.

The PLO Covenant reveals a mythic Palestinian structure of thought, an ideological fantasy which organically links Israel as a *symbol* of evil, aggression and enslavement to world Imperialism. Zionism is pictured as a *criminal conspiracy* and its dimensions are *global*. It is seen as the base from which the West tried to liquidate the Palestinian people, using Israel as its spearhead. Hence, the “colonialist-imperialist” bogey can only be destroyed by eliminating Israel, which is perceived as the weakest link in the imperialist chain. Zionism has thereby become the main

catharsis for the unleashing of Arab aggression, frustration and hatred against a “satanic evil,” supposedly threatening not only the Palestinians but the whole of humanity. In this way, mainstream Palestinian nationalism reproduces the thought-patterns of classical anti-Semitism, directing them against the “artificial” entity of Israel. Contrary to a widespread legend, this PLO Covenant has never been formally revoked by the Palestinians to this day. The Sacred Covenant of the fundamentalist Hamas (which dates back to 1988) is even more extreme and explicitly antisemitic in the tradition of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

The racist-imperialist stigma attached to Zionism by the Palestinians has been tremendously effective as propaganda but remains pure myth. Israel does not exploit any Arab countries or prevent any much-needed reforms from occurring outside its borders. The mythic mode of thought which brands six million Israelis as the “imperialist” oppressors of more than 300 million Arabs (with their enormous oil reserves and international bargaining power) has no connection with reality, logic, reason, the desire for dialogue or to create a more peaceful region. It is intended, on the contrary, to *eradicate* Israel – considered by millions of Arabs to be the incarnation of an “act of aggression” by the mere fact of its existence. This hatred of Israel was the endlessly repeated refrain in Gamal Abdul Nasser’s speeches in the 1950s and 1960s, which transformed him into a hero of the Arab masses. It remains to this day the opium of the Arab-Muslim world, a way for its rulers and elites to divert attention from the terrible failures of Arab social and human development.

By constructing the bogey of “Zionist-racist imperialism,” anti-Zionists have for more than fifty years deliberately *falsified* the true nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict. At its heart lies the obstinacy of Arab rejectionism, the refusal of the Arab nation as a whole and of the Palestinians in particular to accept that Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, of persecution in Arab lands or in the USSR and other places, had any right to the small sliver of land in the Eastern Mediterranean. This same “land of Israel” had once been ruled by Jewish kings and given voice to extraordinarily progressive legislation and prophecies well over a millennium before Islam had even appeared on the stage of history.

The ugly myth of “Zionist racism” is often accompanied by the totally mythical claim that before the advent of Zionism, Arabs and Jews always coexisted in idyllic harmony. None other than President Sadat of Egypt told the National Press Club in Washington in October 1975 that “. . . the Arab world never knew discrimination. . . . We never dealt with them [the Jews] like the Europeans. The Jews are okay. . . . But what Zionism brought to the area, bitterness, violence, hatred, killing, all this, all of us should be against. We are not against the Jews. But we are against Zionism.” At the same time without even perceiving the contradiction, Sadat immediately indulged in another classic piece of antisemitism, asserting: “All of our economy was in the hands of the Jews at that time [1950-52]. . . . They received orders from Zionism in Israel.” President Sadat did not, of course, inform his listeners how local Jews suffered from growing persecution and discriminatory measures, which led to their mass exodus from Egypt after 1956. In the past thirty years the fantasy of Arab “tolerance” to Jews has continued to prosper.

Before 1948 there were as many as 1,100,000 Jews in Arab lands, including North Africa. As a result of Arab nationalism, pogroms and harassment, a majority of

these Jews were driven to seek refuge in the newly created State of Israel where they have enjoyed full political rights and the prospect of cultural and economic mobility for the first time as a social group. 260,000 came from Morocco, 129,000 from Iraq, 56,000 from Tunisia, 50,000 from Yemen and Aden, 35,000 from Libya, 30,000 from Egypt. These so-called “Oriental” Jews like their brethren in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine were deeply rooted in the Middle East, where Jewish settlements had existed for over 2000 years. The Jewish physical presence in the region *pre-dated by centuries* the advent of the Arab conquerors from the desert. This crucial fact is conveniently ignored by those who seek to brand Israel with the stigma of being a Western colonialist state and falsely depict it as an “alien body” in the Arab world. In reality, *Israel is as much a Middle Eastern as a European phenomenon* – a product not only of European Christian, racist and Nazi persecution of Jews but of the intolerance of the Arab-Muslim world towards non-Muslims. It was not only the Russian pogroms and the ultimate horror of the German mass murders, but also Arab persecution of Sephardic Jews, which decisively forged the “Zionist” consciousness of what is half of the Israeli Jewish population.

The Arab perception of Israel is based on a skewed vision which proclaims that *European* colonialist Zionism is the root of all evil, *the* factor which upset a pastoral, idyllic Arab-Jewish harmony in the Middle East. This “alien” intrusion has been stigmatized and branded with every conceivable odium. It supposedly embodies all that Arabs currently consider threatening to their collective personality, political unity and cultural identity. Middle Eastern Jews may sometimes be seen (in the more benign accounts) as victims of this alien ideology. What the Arab narrative completely ignores is the strength of the visceral messianic attachment of “Oriental” Jews to the Land of the Israel and their unwillingness to ever again place their fate in Arab hands.

In the Arab version of the Palestine conflict there is no acknowledgement that the Sephardic Jews came to Israel in flight from an intolerant, chauvinist Muslim majority in Arab lands – not as “usurpers” – but as *victims* of dispossession and expropriation of the kind that occurred in Iraq on a massive scale in 1950-1. Nor is there any attempt to understand the significance of the renewal of an ancient Hebrew culture, of Hebrew literature and of a Semitic language (Hebrew) as the national tongue of Israelis. There is no recognition that as Hebrew-speaking Israelis, Jews were reconnecting with their millennial Jewish heritage in the Promised Land, with the traditions of distant “Semitic” ancestors.

More specifically, Zionism brought about a *revolution* in Jewish-Arab relationships, because it transformed a “protected people” (*dhimmis*) from a subordinate minority into a strong, self-confident majority controlling its own destiny in the Land of Israel. This auto-emancipation of Jewish *dhimmis* is one of the most unforgivable “original sins” of the Zionists and a profoundly subversive message to other non-Muslims (Armenians, Copts, Serbs, Maronites etc.) who have suffered persecution at Muslim hands.

While frequently misusing the accusation of “racism,” Arab leaders forget the ethnocentric premises of their own nationalism. Even their very conditional acceptance of Middle Eastern Jews (predicated on seeing them as a mirror of Arabic culture), pejoratively assumes them to have been misled *victims* of Zionist

brainwashing. Thus Mahmoud Ri'ad, then Secretary-General of the Arab League, declared in Cairo on June 3, 1975: "The Zionist movement started in Europe. It did not start among the Jews who live in the Arab world. It is the Europeans who came to Palestine with this theory of Zionism." This half-truth (frequently repeated in the overwhelmingly Eurocentric accounts of Zionism that dominate the literature) might seem harmless in itself. But it is ultimately pernicious as well as misleading because it is based on the idea that Arabs are innocent of any wrong-doing in their relations to Jews. Zionism was not "alien" to "Arab Jews" but the logical outcome of their intolerable situation.

The Franco-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi (who actively participated in the Arab nationalist movement for independence in North Africa) observed in his *Juifs et Arabes*, published in 1974:

"We would like to have been Arab Jews. If we abandoned the idea, it is because over the centuries the Muslim Arabs systematically prevented its realization by their contempt and cruelty. It is now too late for us to become Arab Jews. Not only were the homes of Jews in Germany and Poland torn down, scattered to the four winds, demolished, but our homes as well. Objectively speaking, there are no longer any Jewish communities in any Arab country, and you will not find a single Arab Jew (*Juif-Arabe*) who will agree to return to his native land."

Memmi's testimony, based on personal experience, strips bare the myth of a harmonious Jewish-Arab relationship in Muslim countries, undermined by so-called "Zionist racism." Jews were always at the mercy of Muslim rulers and at regular intervals an object of the wrath of the masses throughout the Islamic world in the centuries before European rule. They had to wear special clothing and might expect to be humiliated by any Muslim they happened to encounter as part of the traditional rituals underlining inferior status. As a threatened, insecure minority, Jews in North Africa and the Levant were periodically exposed to popular violence and "pogroms," in addition to the many arbitrary ordinances and fiscal extortion of the Muslim authorities. To quote Albert Memmi once again:

"Never, I repeat, never – with the possible exception of two or three very specific intervals such as the Andalusian, and not even then – did the Jews in Arab lands live in other than a humiliated state, vulnerable and periodically mistreated and murdered, so that they should clearly remember their place."

This condition of being "condemned to humiliation and misery" was briefly offset during the period of European colonial domination. The status of Jews and Christians improved as a result of European influence while that of the Muslim majority deteriorated. Muslim Arabs were certainly oppressed and colonized by the West. But with independence, Arab regimes became in their turn *oppressors* of their indigenous minorities, giving free vent to new winds of xenophobia and discrimination. Even in a relatively enlightened Arab country like Tunisia, the Jewish population was subject to gradual economic strangulation and at every crisis related to the Arab-Israel conflict, "the mob would go wild, setting fire to Jewish shops." Thus although Habib Bourguiba, the first President of independent Tunisia, was perhaps the most moderate of all Arab leaders since 1948, he could not restrain his own people. The process of liquidating Jewish communities which took place in neighbouring

Algeria and Morocco after independence was even more drastic, not to mention the violence and pogroms against Jews in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya or Yemen.

Paradoxically, by persecuting their Sephardi Jewish minorities, Arab leaders probably did more to realize Zionism than Israel's own supporters. In Syria, Iraq, Morocco and other Muslim lands, Jews were subjected in the 20th century to intensive harassment, expropriation, arbitrary arrests and expulsion. It was this well-founded fear of Arab fanaticism together with their visceral love of Zion which ultimately drove Jews from Muslim lands to immigrate *en masse* to the Jewish state. Yet the Middle East conflict has been so convoluted to the point that the only "refugee question" that is ever discussed is that of Palestinian Arabs. In reality there were *two* refugee waves created by the Arab attempt to wipe out Israel in 1948. One wave – that of Jewish refugees from Arab lands – was successfully integrated in Israel, France and other Western countries. The other wave – the Palestinian refugees – were left to rot in the UN refugee camps by their Arab brethren and fed with delusions about the "right of Return" which would finally wreck the Oslo "peace process" in 2000.

In the period between 1940 and 1960 the historic Jewish communities in the Middle East and North Africa were uprooted and approximately 850,000 Jews fled from Arab lands. The historical circumstances that produced this outcome included popular violence, religious fanaticism and political discrimination which was only partly connected to the Palestine conflict.

During World War II, under direct German rule in Tunisia, Vichy French control in Algeria and Morocco and Italian antisemitic legislation in Libya, Jews were subjected to severe deprivations and persecution. The Arab role in this story was by no means passive. There were some positive interventions from above such as those of the Bey of Tunis and the Sultan of Morocco to help their Jewish subjects against their Vichy and German overlords. There were even a few "righteous Gentiles" among ordinary Arabs. But there were also far more Arabs who personally participated in the persecution of Jews; who tracked down Jewish escapees from forced-labour camps; or who accompanied German soldiers, pointing out Jewish homes and property for confiscation. What is even sadder is that today such is the resistance of Arabs to accepting the reality of the Holocaust (even when it comes to recognizing Arabs who saved Jewish lives) that the taboo around such discussions seems impossible to break. Instead, the deniers – whether secular, Islamist or mainstream – continue to assert that the Holocaust never happened, or to reject its uniqueness or to transform present-day Jews into the barbaric "Nazis." The denial is all the more striking for ignoring the real nature of Arab admiration for National Socialism and collaboration with Hitler, especially among the pan-Arab nationalists of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine and the Maghreb.

Already in the last hours of the pro-Nazi regime of Rashid Ali el-Gailani in Iraq (1-2 June 1941) – seven years before the creation of Israel – the Jews of Baghdad suffered a devastating pogrom. 110 Jews were killed, 240 injured, 911 houses destroyed and 586 business premises ransacked. Within ten years the majority of the 130,000 Jews in Iraq (subjected to increasing vandalism, intimidation, extortion and loss of livelihood), had left the country. Interestingly enough, their transfer to Israel

was not prevented by the Iraqi government, which cynically and greedily benefited from their ruthless expropriation.

At the end of the Second World War, it was soon apparent that the Middle East was one of the major hotspots of anti-Jewish violence. In Libya, in 1945, a devastating pogrom caused 130 Jewish deaths. In Egypt and Syria, popular violence against the Jews erupted in November 1945 with riots and attacks on Jewish synagogues and shops. After 1956-7, the bulk of the Jews in Egypt emigrated, following the sequestration of their property, their subjection to arbitrary arrests and acts of intimidation. In December 1947 there were massacres of Jews in Aleppo and Aden. Most of these shocking events, often neglected even by Jewish historians and unknown to many in the West, *preceded* the establishment of Israel.

It is equally important to recall the damning and irrefutable evidence of widespread pro-Nazi sympathies in the Arab world. The Palestinian Arab leader Haj Amin el-Husseini (whose radical *negation* of Jewish national self-determination preceded that of Al-Fatah by forty years) along with the Iraqi leader Rashid Ali, actively served the Axis Powers from Berlin during the Second World War. In his broadcasts, Haj Amin (whom the British had foolishly elevated in the early 1920s to the position of Grand Mufti of Jerusalem) stressed the need for all Muslims to collaborate with Hitler to destroy the British Empire and “World Jewry.” The Mufti in a speech of 21 January 1944 observed that “National-Socialist Germany is fighting against world Jewry. The Koran says: ‘You will find that the Jews are the worst enemies of the Muslims’.” He added that “there are also considerable similarities between Islamic principles and those of National-Socialism. . . . All this brings our ideologies close together and facilitates co-operation.” The Mufti of Jerusalem fully endorsed the Nazi *extermination* of the Jews and petitioned German leaders (including Himmler and Eichmann) not to allow a single Jew to escape to Palestine.

The admiration for Nazi Germany shown by Arab nationalist leaders like Haj Amin was *not* an isolated phenomenon. It combined various motifs, including hatred of the British Empire, Islamic fanaticism, anti-Jewish feelings and a noticeable sympathy with the ideology of fascism. All these factors came together in the movement of Free Officers in Egypt in the early 1940s, which included Nasser and Sadat among its prominent leaders. Sadat had been pro-Nazi during the Second World War. In September 1953 he wrote a letter to Adolf Hitler (following reports that he was still alive) congratulating him from “the bottom of my heart” as the “immortal leader of Germany.” Sadat’s close friend, Anis Mansour, a leading Egyptian journalist, writing in *Al Akhbar* in February 1972 went even further, not only repeating the Christian libel that Jews mix non-Jewish blood with *matzos* on the Passover, but adding: “. . . The world is now aware . . . that Hitler was right, and that the cremation ovens were the appropriate means of punishing such contempt of human values, principles, religions and laws.” It is difficult to imagine anything more racist than such apologies for Hitler but they have become commonplace throughout the Arab world during the past thirty years. This does not, however, prevent countless Arab Judeophobes from simultaneously denying the Holocaust, demonizing Zionism and praising Hitler.

The depths of Arab antisemitism are revealed by the astonishingly extensive use made of the notorious Russian antisemitic forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of*

Zion. Already in 1958 President Nasser of Egypt warmly recommended it to the Indian journalist R.K. Karanja. It was under Nasser's rule that Egypt became a haven for Nazi war criminals, many of whom rose to high position in the secret police, the security apparatus, the counter-espionage and propaganda departments. They included a fair number of Nazi "racial experts" and specialists on "Jewish questions," including the notorious right-hand man of Goebbels, Johann von Leers (Omar Amin); other ex-Nazi "experts" included Louis Heiden (who translated *Mein Kampf* into Arabic), Dr. Werner Weitschale, Friedrich Karl Wesemann, Hans Appler, Franz Busche, Erich Bunz, Franz Bartel to name only the more prominent ones. The outpourings of antisemitic propaganda in Arabic before the Six Day War, all officially sponsored by the Egyptian and other government media and politicians, doubtless owed something of their racist tone to this undoubted Nazi influence. The vicious type of racism expressed in this literature (typical of German and Russian antisemitism at their worst) was most conspicuous in the grotesque cartoons reminiscent of *Der Stürmer*, regularly appearing in the Arab press. The openly racist style of Arab "anti-Zionism" was so unmistakable that it visibly embarrassed even the most dedicated apologists of the Arab cause in the West. In recent years such caricatures have become even more lurid but arouse only sporadic condemnation in European countries. More often than not, they are simply ignored.

The Nazi influence which had infected the Arab world since the 1930s, was reinforced by an indigenous tradition of neo-Islamic fanaticism which attributed an "incurable wickedness" to the Jews as a people. The proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Academy of Islamic Research, which took place in Cairo in the autumn of 1968, provided a disturbing insight into the nature of this specifically Muslim (rather than imported) antisemitism. The Islamic theologians and scholars assembled in Cairo at Nasser's request, unanimously agreed that Jews are the "enemies of God" and of humanity; that they have inherited the vices of their forefathers; that they do not constitute a true nation and that their cultural inheritance has always provoked justified hatred and persecution. Israel, the culmination of this "cultural depravity," reflected the immutable evils of Judaism, and must therefore be destroyed. The Arabs were called to triumph over Israel in battle in order to *purify* "the abode of Islam" (*Dar al-Islam*) and restore their divinely mandated Muslim hegemony.

The central ideas expounded at the 1968 Conference gave a *theological* underpinning to the Arab desire to liquidate Israel. They constituted a warrant for genocide in the true meaning of the word. A similar language was echoed by President Sadat of Egypt in 1972 when he said (on the anniversary of Mohammed's birth) that ". . . the most splendid thing our prophet Mohammed did was to evict them (the Jews) from the Arabian peninsula." Sadat went on to quote the Koran in support of the view that the Jews are "a mean and treacherous people." Already more than thirty years ago, such statements made a nonsense of reassuring Arab claims that they were only opposed to Zionism but not against Jews.

By branding Zionism as "racist" and equating it with the worst aberrations of Western society (especially Nazism and fascism) Arab states sought to divert attention from their own collaboration with the Nazis and their own criminal responsibility in uprooting the Jews from their original homes in the Middle East. The "Zionist imperialism" which they continuously execrate in their propaganda as a form

of Western-style “racism” is not merely a figment of imagination but a blatant evasion of Arab responsibilities for perpetuating the conflict. It was not Zionism which destroyed the supposedly idyllic relationship between Arabs and Jews, but rather the endemic failures of Muslim societies to modernize, adapt and reform themselves which created an irrational envy and Arab hatred towards Israel. The rampant antisemitism of the Arab-Muslim world has been the surest symptom of this *ressentiment* rooted in chronic backwardness.

It was thanks to Zionism that Middle Eastern Jews were able to rise from the status of a despised minority in the Arab world to achieve real social mobility. Middle Eastern Jews knew better than anyone from their own historical experience what it meant to live under *Arab* domination and Muslim hegemony. No less than their European co-religionists, they perceived Zionism as a lifeline of salvation – the survival doctrine of the Jewish nation in modern times – a direct consequence of the intransigent Arab enmity which they faced in a world of decolonisation.