

ISLAM vs. JEWS: More Than Just Politics

by Mitchell Bard

There are once again efforts under way in the Middle East to stimulate peace negotiations in the hope of achieving a political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. While it may be possible to achieve a settlement in the short-run, there can be no political solution because the conflict is not entirely political, it is emotional and religious. The following will describe the religious antagonism and suggest that there can be no peace between Jews and Moslems.

For two years after Muhammad came to Medina, he tried to persuade the Jews there to accept him as a prophet. He and his disciples observed the Sabbath, the Fast of Yom Kippur, and other Jewish traditions including facing Jerusalem during prayer. The Jews rejected Muhammad, however, in a subsequent revelation the Prophet was told to call on his followers to face Medina instead of Jerusalem. The Prophet's anger towards the Jews for their rejection led to the derision such as found in this verse: "You know of those of you who broke the Sabbath and how we said to them 'be you as apes despised and hated' and we made it as an example to their own and succeeding generations, and an admonition to the God fearing" (2:65). Another verse says that "when they (the people of Moses) took pride in that which they had been forbidden we said unto them 'be you apes, despised and loathed'" (7:166).

The Jews are the subject of vivification throughout the Koran: they are the enemies of Allah, of the Prophet, and of the angels (2:97-98); they have always been disobedient (5:78); they exercise unrighteousness (5:61-79); they try to introduce corruption (5:64); they are enemies of the believers (5:82); they have twisted the word of Allah (2:59, 75-79, 211); they lie against Allah (4:50); they are damned for their disobedience (2:88, 4:46, 52, 5:13, 60, 64, 78); they have killed the prophets of Allah (5:70); they will receive the punishment of hell-fire (59:3); and they are consigned to humiliation and wretchedness.

Despite the harshness of the Koranic language, Bernard Lewis argues, the Muslim attitude towards Jews was not Anti-Semitic; it was, rather, contemptuous. The feeling arose from the inability to understand how those who were given the opportunity to accept the "truth" could persist in their disbelief. As Scripturaries (People of the Book), however, the Jews were tolerated, giving rise to the myth of Moslem beneficence. In fact, Jews were treated as second-class citizens in Moslem countries. Jews and other *dhimmi*s (non-Moslem subjects of a Moslem state) were forced to pay poll taxes and prohibited from engaging in various activities such as riding on horseback, carrying weapons, or building new religious schools. In addition, they were required to wear distinctive clothing and badges similar to that

generally associated with Nazi Germany.

Since the rise of Nazi anti-Semitism, the Moslem attitude toward Jews has undergone a transformation. There has been a marked increase in the amount of vehemence of anti-Semitic literature in the Arab world, much of which has been disseminated by state publishing houses. For example, there are now more translations and editions of the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (the Russian forgery that purports to expose a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world) in Arabic than in any other language and is still required reading in some Arab university courses.

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Thus, contrary to claims that the conflict is political and that Arabs oppose only Zionists and not Jews, there is an indisputable religious component that underlies the Arab antagonism. This is particularly evident in the attitudes expressed by the leaders of Saudi Arabia.

After the Peel Commission recommended partition in 1937, King Ibn Saud complained that British support for Zionist aspirations would destroy Arab-English friendship for the sake of "an accused and stiffnecked race which has always bitten the hand of everyone who has helped it since the world began." If there was any doubt that Saud distinguished between Jews and Zionists it was quickly erased when he added: "Our hatred for the Jews dates from God's condemnation of them for their persecution and rejection of Isa (Jesus Christ) and their subsequent rejection later of His chosen Prophet." Moreover, he said

"the word of God teaches us...that for a Muslim to kill a Jew, or for him to be killed by a Jew ensures him an immediate entry into Heaven and into the august presence of God Almighty."

After World War II, the Saudi monarch did not soften his attitude, telling President Roosevelt (Feb 14, 1945) that "the Arabs and the Jews could never cooperate, neither in Palestine, nor in any other country...the Arabs would choose to die rather than yield their land to the Jews."

Thirty years later, little has changed. In 1975, a congressional committee went on a fact-finding tour to Saudi Arabia and Henry Waxman was denied a visa because of being Jewish. After the State Department intervened, Waxman obtained a visa and attended an audience with King Faisal during which he heard the King say that "the Jews have no business in Saudi Arabia...They are our enemies. Jews from America and around the world support Israel. Friends of our enemies are our enemies." He told the congressman that "there is no room for Jews even as visitors in Saudi Arabia" and that he wanted a Palestinian state in all of Israel. According to the King, there are no Jewish holy places in Jerusalem, only Moslem and Christian. Faisal also claimed that Zionism and Judaism were distinguishable. When Waxman asked why Jews were barred from Saudi Arabia if there was such a distinction, the King told him they were the same thing.

Faisal's anti-Semitism was also exhibited some years earlier when another Jew, Henry Kissinger, met with the King. Faisal told the U.S. Secretary of State that the Jews had led the 1917 Russian revolution and that the Jews all over the world "were putting themselves into positions of authority, and were trying to run the world, but that he would stop them with his oil weapon."

Since one of Faisal's favorite books was said to be the *Protocols*, this belief in

Jewish conspiracies should not be surprising, but the extent of his anti-Semitism extended even further. For example, Faisal was quoted in the newspaper *al-Mussawar* (Aug. 4, 1972) as saying that when he was in Paris the police discovered five murdered children whose blood had been drained by Jews who needed their blood to mix with the bread they eat on Passover. In repeating this "blood libel," Faisal explained that it showed "the extent of their hatred and malice toward non-Jewish peoples." The libel was repeated more recently (Dec. 1984) by the Saudi delegate to the UN, Dr. Ali-Dawalibi, who told a seminar on religious toleration and freedom: "If a Jew does not drink every year the blood of a non-Jewish man, then he will be damned for eternity."

In 1977, the congress enacted legislation to prohibit American firms from complying with the Arab boycott. Since then, Saudi Arabia has intensified its rhetoric against Israel calling for a *jihād*. The State Department tried to interpret *jihād* as meaning a demand for Israeli withdrawal rather than a call for a holy war, but the Saudis themselves provided their intended meaning when

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Crown Prince (now King) Fahd told the Riyadh Domestic Service: "What is meant by a *jihād* is a united, comprehensive, integrated Arab-Islamic confrontation in which we place all our resources and our spiritual, cultural, political, material and military potentials in a long and untiring *jihād*."

Why has there been no war against Israel if a *jihād* has

been declared? The answer is quite simple: the Arab forces are incapable of achieving victory. This too is rooted in Moslem thought which advises against going to war unless victory is assured. As Allah said to His Apostle: "O you who believe! be patient, and vie in patience, and be firm, and fear Allah, that you may be successful" (Q.III, 200; and Q.II, 149). The willingness to be patient is often expressed by Arab leaders who compare the fight against Israel to their eventual expulsion of the Crusaders. Many Arabs are convinced that time is on their side and that they need only wait for the balance of forces to tilt sufficiently in their favor.

It is for this reason that U.S. arms sales to the Arabs, over \$20 billion to Saudi Arabia alone in the last decade, are a long-term threat to Israel. On the other hand, unlike President Carter and others who have argued that the building of Israeli settlements on the West Bank are a threat to peace, this analysis suggests they may be just the opposite because they demonstrate to the Arabs that time may not be on their side. If the Arabs do not make peace before Israel annexes the occupied territories (as the Arabs believe Israel intends), then the chance of them regaining "their" land is reduced.

How could Egypt sign a peace treaty with Israel given the attitude of Moslems toward Jews? There are two possible answers. One possibility is that Egypt is unique among Arab states because it has a national consciousness that derives from thousands of years of Egyptian history. Unlike the other Arab states that achieved independence only in the last 50 years and were parts of larger empires for most of their histories, Egypt was a distinctive territorial entity for much of its history. Thus, Egypt could make peace with Israel if that act was seen to be in the best interest of Egyptians. Moreover, as the most powerful Arab nation and acknowledged leader of the Arab world, Egypt could not be intimidated by the protestations of its allies.

The more pessimistic view of the Egyptian willingness to make peace holds that they believe they will be able to achieve through peace what they could not accomplish through war by weakening Israel's ties to the diaspora, increasing the Arab proportion of the Israeli population, and softening U.S. support for Israel. Peace may also be seen as no more than a temporary suspension of the *jihād*, until the balance of forces is more favorable.

"Is a resurgent Islam prepared to tolerate a non-Islamic enclave, whether Jewish in Israel or Christian in Lebanon, in the heart of the Islamic world?" Bernard Lewis asked rhetorically. The answer, and it may be painful for many people to read, is that it is not likely. As a result, peace negotiations must take this previously neglected religious factor into account. ■

