The Greatest Threat to World Peace

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By Robbie Friedmann

This week a change of guard is taking place in Malaysia with the retirement of its antisemitic and anti-Western Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. This outgoing world leader left a dark residue of vitriol equal to that of pre-World War II-era Nazi propaganda and one that equals the same rhetoric emanating out of Arab/Islamic corners in the 21st Century ("Malaysian Leader Calls for Muslim Holy War against the Jews," ADL). But for those who followed his career these statements only reinforce positions he has long been articulating ("The Mahathir Affair: A Case Study In Mainstream Islamic Antisemitism," Manfred Gerstenfeld, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Jerusalem Viewpoints, No. 506, 2 November 2003).

The Mahathir phenomenon is important because the 9-11 atrocity was blamed on the victims (as if they perpetrated the acts against themselves) and because of the latest Iraqi charges that Israel is behind the suicide bombing in Baghdad. It points out that weaknesses in the Arab/Islamic world are exploited to find scapegoats to divert attention from any responsibility. Thus, by Muslims/Arabs presenting this conflict as a clash of religions (against simultaneous persistent Western attempts to pretend it not so; see "Deadly Denial," Daniel Pipes, Jewish World Review, 27 October 2003), they help create myths about the Jews and Westerners in an attempt to demonize "the other" and thus cope with their own predicament.

Therefore, "the importance of the Mahathir affair is that it has exposed in a short time and in a concentrated way the profound antisemitic thought present among major layers of both Muslim elites and society. There is no shame in publicly using the most vile antisemitic expressions...Mahathir has thus generated a wide-ranging demonstration of mainstream Islamic antisemitism. The Mahathir affair now serves as the core proof of this antisemitism, while the remainder of the abundant anti-Jewish material from the Islamic world serves as supporting evidence for this mainstream racism...Mahathir's words ... were applauded and later backed by many others. These reactions show that the Islamic world - in which hardly anybody is democratically elected - is dangerous not only for the Jews but for the rest of humanity as well. Beyond those extremist Muslims who preach genocide using the Arab expression *jihad*, the Mahathir affair has demonstrated how problematic the world of ideas of mainstream Islamic society is for the West."

In a sense, this modern antisemitism is genocidal in nature and is thus the obvious inheritor of Nazi legacy and it carries it to global scales previously unknown. This is not only the denial of the right of certain individual Jews to live in peace. It is an obvious attempt to strike at the collective existence of Jews as a nation by transforming classical antisemitism into anti-Israel strategy that aims at destroying Israel and thus Jews as a collective entity. Thus the persistent antisemitic efforts from these quarters have finally been recognized for what they are: The (old/new) writing on the wall ("Graffiti on History's Walls," Mortimer B. Zuckerman, *U.S. News and World Report*, 3 November 2003).

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

Like a snake out of his hole ready to bite, what was not permissible years ago in any discourse about the Middle East or the Jews (with the exception of the hallucinating extremes) is now becoming fashionable in many public, private, national and international circles ("Declarations," Martin Peretz, *The New Republic*, 24 October 2003). Some are trying to find a reasonable explanation for the emergence of this virulent antisemitism. They are found in the growing sentiments against "globalism" where Jews are seen as "responsible" for what is considered the "troubles" of the modern world ("Antiglobalism's Jewish Problem," Mark Strauss, *Foreign Policy*, (November/December 2003). Indeed, this suggests that it is the success of the Jews as a group (and later as a group that was able to establish a successful thriving state) that has drawn the envy and wrath of those who were left behind or simply wanted the Jews not to have anything, to disappear.

That is why even if peace ever comes to the Middle East (do not hold your breath) the conditions that underlie antisemitism (and in this sense anti-Americanism) are not going to go away. "The very existence of Israel offends those who view it as a colonialist aberration. Arab governments remain averse to serious economic and political reforms that would open their societies and lift their citizens out of poverty. War, terrorism and recession may periodically slow the pace of globalization, but the movement of people and money around the world continues unabated. The anxieties that accompany global integration the fear that nations are surrendering their cultural, political and economic sovereignty to shadowy outside forces will not simply disappear."

This very notion of wanting to "wish the Jews away" helps explain why no amount of charity and assistance (diplomatic, economic) that is given to poor or needy groups is going to change their hearts and minds. In fact, the notion that your success means the failure of the other explains this new anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments far beyond the organized demonstrations that creep up around the world and render Western assistance not merely a thankless job but one that even backfires - pun fully intended ("'Those Jews:' If only Israel and its Supporters Would Disappear," Victor David Hanson, *National Review*, 31 October 2003).

Ironically these negative sentiments are not those that bind Israel and the U.S. together. It is what binds them together that creates the negative sentiments against them ("Ties That Really Bind," Mortimer B. Zuckerman, *U.S. News and World Report*, 3 November 2003) and will do so for the foreseeable future. After all, how could one explain that of all the trouble sources in the world, Europeans (60%) see Israel as more of a threat to world peace than they see North Korea, Iran or Afghanistan. The U.S. was seen as wrong in the war on Iraq but was expected to pay for its

reconstruction ("European Poll Calls Israel a Big Threat to World Peace," Thomas Fuller,*International Herald Tribune*, 31 October 2003), which, of course, raises legitimate questions as to the value of European participation in any peace efforts in the Middle East ("European Commission Poll: Israel Is the Biggest Threat to World Peace. Voice Your Outrage Directly to European Commission President Romano Prodi," The Wiesenthal Center, 31 October 2003). Not to mention questioning European intentions towards the United States.

The transformation of classic anti-Jewish sentiments (namely antisemitism) into a "refined" anti-Zionism and anti-Israel sentiments is clearly targeted at eliminating the "undesirable." Israel is seen as either an anachronism ("'Jewish State' Has Become an Anachronism," Tony Judt, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 2003) and hence has no "right to exist" or as part of a revival of the notion of one bi-national state that would achieve the same effect of destroying Israel but without war ("Israel, Palestine, and the Return of the Bi-national Fantasy: What is Not to be Done," Leon Wieseltier, *The New Republic*, 24 October 2003).

No other state in the history of the world received so much negative attention prior to its establishment and certainly not after it was established as its existence has been permanently challenged, questioned and threatened ("The Controversy of Israel," Bret Stephens, *The Jerusalem Post*, 31 October 2003). Historically, when persistent negative attention was targeted at a state the result was its destruction such as in the case of Cartage.

That must be what guides some in Europe and NATO who are reported to have plans for Israel that do not include its continuation as a free standing nation ("Eurocrats and NATOcrats Plan Israel's Non-Future," DEBKAfile Exclusive Analysis, 28 October 2003). This gives additional credence to the notion that Friedman did not think of the idea of having Israel join NATO on his own but was fed this by NATO officials ("Expanding Club NATO," Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times*, 26 October 2003).

The Europeans seem rather eager to help the Iranians build their nuclear weapons and assist Syria (economically) with its terror campaign (although the Europeans would never admit it) the same way they preferred keeping Saddam Hussein in power to guarantee lucrative contracts with Iraq despite the horrible abuses of its people. Thus the Europeans become an active party to the increasing danger to Israel's future existence ("From Prague to London," Barry Rubin, *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 October 2003).

While dangers for Israel are looming from several quarters it appears that at least one danger has been minimized or at least postponed. The likelihood of establishing a Palestinian state has become somewhat more remote what with the continued Palestinian terror campaign and declining American involvement in what appeared only a few months ago as the best (Euro-American-Russian-U.N. Quartet) hope for peace in the area ("U.S. Slowly Scaling Back Role in Israel," Karin Laub, Associate Press, USAToday.com, 10 October 2003). Even if the U.S. apparent disengagement is not emanating out of Israeli interest (and it clearly is not) one could reasonably ask why should such efforts be promoted in the first place given Palestinian anti-U.S. positions, their desire to destroy Israel and their declarations that even after they have a state they would want to continue terrorism and maintain the "right of return" (to a country which is not theirs).

The perpetrators of terrorism are quick to blame everyone else for "violations of human rights" (they consider terrorism a human right...) but deep at the end of an article in a Palestinian newspaper there is an indirect admission that when Israeli soldiers entered a hospital in search of terrorists they not only had probable cause, they also found an armed (uninjured/un-hospitalized) terrorist who was hiding in the hospital ("Israeli Invasion of Hospitals Deplored," *The Palestinian Times*, 29 October 2003).

Why terrorists expect that their potential and actual victims would not try to defend themselves is beyond logic but it is abundantly clear that terrorists have grand and declared goals against the U.S. ("The PA's anti-US Message," Itamar Marcus, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, 28 October 2003). Specifically they state their opposition to the U.S. in Iraq, a position consistent with their support of Saddam Hussein prior to the war in 2003 and also in the Gulf War in 1991. They also state unequivocally their intentions to destroy Israel ("PA Daily: America must be Fought in Iraq - Israel Must be Destroyed," Itamar Marcus, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, 27 October 2003).

Palestinians depict Israel and the U.S. as parallel and prime enemies of the Arab world. If anything, it proves the point that the conflict in the Middle East is not merely between Israel and the Palestinians but it is with the Arab world. This is certainly not news for Israel but it should be a clear sign for anyone who believes that the conflict is "settle-able" by being nice to the Palestinians and granting them their "national aspirations" as if that will bring an end to the conflict. It will not.

Itamar Marcus of Palestinian Media Watch appeared recently in various media outlets. Probably his most important appearance was a U.S. Senate testimony about how the funding of the PA is used to produce hate indoctrination, socialization into violence and suicide attacks, the glorification of death and the obsession with murder (see movie clip Ask For Death) in the name of god and Palestine ("PMW Director Itamar Marcus Testifies at U.S. Senate Hearing - PMW Documentary Screened at the Hearing," 31 October 2003, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin).

The warped views emanating from the Middle East are further exemplified by the "victim-deserved it" syndrome which the Arabs have perfected into "the victim did it." Along the lines of blaming Israel and the CIA for the 9-11 atrocity, now Iraqis blame Israel (against all facts) for the suicide bombings in Baghdad ("Iraqis See Israel as Culprit in Bombings: They argue that the ensuing chaos would benefit the Jewish state and say that U.S. forces have a responsibility to provide security," Alissa J. Rubin, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 October 2003). All they have to do is view the web pages of al-Qaeda to find out who are the real perpetrators and what are their true intentions and designs ("2nd Issue of 'Voice of Jihad' al-Qaeda Online Magazine: Strategy to Avoid Clashes with Saudi Security Forces, Convert the World's Countries to Islam," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Jihad and Terrorism Studies, 31 October 2003, No. 601). Obviously, it is far easier to blame the victim.

The fact that terrorists are a source of trouble is obvious and not new. But it would have been far more difficult for them to carry out their acts without being sponsored (financially, physically and morally) by states whose interests they seem to serve so well. Among the states not often

associated with sponsoring terrorism, despite it dismal record of hateful rhetoric and behind-the-scenes meddling, is Egypt. A recent article calls attention to the trouble emanating from that front ("The Egyptian Underground: Rooting out the Terrorists," Jonathan Schanzer, *National Review*, 29 October 2003) but the article falls short of pinpointing Egypt as a culprit.

This support does not come only from the usual Arab suspects. The Europeans have embarked on a dangerous brinkmanship of overtly coddling Syria which is a known supporter of terrorism not only against Israel (see "Syria's antisemitic "Diaspora" to air each night of Ramadan," JPost.com Staff, 29 October 2003) but also against the U.S. in Iraq to an extent that European conduct is more than raising eyebrows in the U.S. ("With Us, or With the Terrorists," Editorial, *Washington Times*, 28 October 2003).

The Europeans would argue (and they do) that this is not appeasement but an attempt to achieve peaceful solutions to the conflict by utilizing diplomatic means. Indeed some are suggesting this is exactly the wrong approach to take in the fight against terrorism ("Defeat Terrorism," Uri Elitzur, *The Jerusalem Post*, 30 October 2003).

It is argued that "Terror is a first rate cause of political blindness and of the phenomenon of hallucinations and illusions. Terror distorts its victims' judgment, it makes them feel as if they share the guilt, develop dependency on the aggressor, and have baseless faith that a simple solution to the situation is hiding around the nearest corner. Every terrorist knows that, and all terrorism is built on that." Therefore "the idea that a political solution can appear instead of defeating terrorism is the illusion that keeps the political horizon infinitely distant...A political solution will come only after terror is defeated. . ."

In addition to Iran which is racing to develop nuclear weapons, it appears that Saudi Arabia is also getting closer to having nuclear capabilities through a signed deal with Pakistan ("Saudi Arabia - A New Player on the Nuclear Scene?" Ephraim Asculai, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, No. 90, 26 October 2003) thus increasing the odds that nuclear capabilities will be in the hands of irresponsible regimes. Even if one assumes the current House of Saud is responsible (a generous assumption hard to corroborate against facts that prove the opposite) it is likely that the current regime will not stay there for long and hence if it acquires nuclear capabilities it could fall into hands of radicals (as if the Saudis are moderate).

Mass media is not science (even if it utilizes scientific principles in its enterprise) neither is it based on "truth." Its content and display is characterized by purposeful presentation. That understanding needs to be made time and again and last week two British journalists made that exact point by offering severe criticism of the British media's unfair treatment of Israel ("UK Media Blasted over Israel," Lawrence Marzouk, *Barnet & Potters Bar Times*, 29 October 2003) to the extent that "The media bias against Israel and the Jewish community is at pre-Second World War levels."

A good example of this bad practice is found in Friedman's description of terrorists as a murderous band ("It's No Vietnam," Thomas L. Friedman, *The New York Times*, 30 October 2003). In our twisted world this constitutes "refreshing news" and perhaps even "innovation" when compared against those who describe them as "militants" or "freedom fighters." But to

suggest that targeting the Red Cross office in Baghdad is "hitting a new low" makes one want to believe the 9-11 atrocity only happened in movies and not in real life. "All civilizational norms were tossed aside" not only in targeting the Red Cross Baghdad office but in each and every terror attack that happened before (and after) the 9-11 atrocity. After all, what is exactly civilized about terrorism targeting defenseless civilians? The RC compound in Baghdad at least had some defense; the WTC had none.

So if respected columnists mis-characterize realities, why should we complain about European public opinion, or for that matter about Muslim/Arab public opinion? The poll's scientific value is highly questionable. Pollsters presented a list of 15 countries and asked: "Tell me if in your opinion it presents or not a threat to peace in the world." But we do not know - yet - the full list of the 15 and since Palestine is not yet a country one could only wonder what spot it might have occupied. Had Israel's name not been on the list the Europeans may have rated the countries differently. Nevertheless, Israel is clearly perceived by Europeans as a big threat and the U.S. as a big problem. Considering that North Korea, Iran and Afghanistan were ranked lower than Israel as threats to world peace, then something is warped in the European minds to place Israel as posing a higher threat than those countries. This perception would be equal to - and as ludicrous as - suggesting that the biggest promise for Nobel laureates in physics, chemistry, biology and medicine is more likely to come from Libya, Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt than from the US. Notice I did not mention the Nobel Peace Prize (Arafat is already laughing all the way to the bank).

In short, this proves that having a snapshot of public opinion is of very limited value. But it also points out how dangerous these perceptions are. Let's just hope - and make sure - that until Europeans come up with better poll results they are not relied upon in international affairs or jurisprudence. After all, we surely do not want to be with them as they embark on a journey returning to the medieval ages (defined as "barbaric, ignorant and backward") they had six centuries ago (and which they perfected only less than 60 years ago) and in which the Islamist radicals currently live. As Zuckerman aptly points out, the graffiti is already on the wall. We just need to see it and then quickly clean it up and arrest the culprits so it does not ever happen again.