

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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Jews unwelcome on campus

Giulio Meotti, YNet News opinion, 6 May 2012

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4225175,00.html>

From the outside, Western faculties appear as genteel oases of wisdom and knowledge. In truth, institutions of higher education are becoming brutal offspring of anti-Jew hatred. Famous faculties that have been an historical cradle of European civilization are sacrificing freedom and Israel to barbarism and obscurantism.

Even in America the gloves are coming off. The Institute for Jewish & Community Research in San Francisco recently published a report titled "Alone on the quad: Understanding Jewish Student Isolation on

Campus,” one of the most comprehensive surveys of its kind. More than 40% of students confirm anti-Semitism on their campus; some 41% of students have encountered anti-Israel remarks made in class by professors.

Numbers are also telling in Europe. While boasting large numbers of Muslim students and students from Arab countries, European universities count very few Jewish or pro-Israeli students among their population. Whereas 15-20% of young people matriculating in America’s top universities are Jewish, in Europe only a few faculties claim even a tenth of this figure.

Today, we are witnessing the worst wave of anti-Israel hatred since April 6, 2002, when 123 academicians signed an open letter, published in Britain’s *The Guardian*, calling for a moratorium on all cultural links with Israel.

Recently, the University of Paris VIII closed its doors for two days to avoid a harder stance about a planned conference against the Jewish State. Elsewhere, while septuagenarian Israeli novelist and Holocaust survivor Esther Orner has been banned from the University of Provence, Hezbollah officials spoke at the Sorbonne University.

Meanwhile, Rotterdam’s Erasmus University recently hosted events in which Israel was equated with South Africa’s apartheid regime.

'Israel absolute taboo in Europe'

But the case of Pieter van der Horst, the professor of Early Christian History and Judaism at Utrecht University, is emblematic of the fear and hatred dominating Dutch academia. The pioneering researcher wanted to argue in his valedictory lecture that “the Islamization of European anti-Semitism is one of the most frightening developments of the past decades.” However, his university’s chancellor prevented him from doing so by censoring the lecture in advance.

“It should have been my last lecture”, van der Horst told me. “In the Middle East of today, the demonization of Jews has reached unprecedented levels. Jews are accused of every evil under the sun, from cannibalism to the attacks on the Twin Towers, to causing the tsunami, the bird flu, AIDS and so on. The University’s committee claimed it was too dangerous to give the complete lecture because it might trigger violent reactions from ‘well-organized Muslim student groups.’ I decided to submit an expurgated text because I did not want to expose myself and others to potential danger.”

“I capitulated to self censorship,” he added. “In the country of Anne Frank we accept that today the Jews don’t walk in the streets with their religious symbols. We accept that in Holland synagogues are protected by the police. What will be the end of all this?”

Dozens of academicians just signed a petition condemning Liverpool University’s invitation to Israel’s deputy ambassador to the UK, Alon Roth-Snir. Meanwhile, students at Edinburgh University voted in favor of the boycott of Israeli goods. At Queen’s University in Belfast, Palestinian militants violently attacked Israeli attaché Solon Solomon.

Benny Morris, professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, was assaulted last year on a street by a group of Muslims before a conference at the London School of Economics. When Morris finished his lesson on Israel’s war of 1948, he was

unceremoniously bundled away through the back exit of the faculty, past the garbage cans, out of fear for his safety if he left the building in the normal manner.

“I felt like a Jew in Berlin in the ‘20s”, a shaken Morris told me. “Israel is an absolute taboo in Europe. At Cambridge, my class was canceled after intimidation by Islamist groups. And I think that it will only get worse.”

Matthias Küntzel, a German political scientist, was invited by Leeds University for three days of seminars. His lecture on “Hitler’s Legacy: Islamic Anti-Semitism in the Middle East” was expected to draw a large audience. But when Küntzel arrived at the British faculty, he was informed that his lecture had been cancelled “on security grounds.”

'Peace with Israel is a crime'

Last autumn, Israeli professor Ronen Cohen, whose “sin” is that of teaching at Ariel University, was expelled from a German academic conference in Berlin (he was later reinstated after a storm of protest.) Elsewhere, Spain’s Housing Ministry disqualified Ariel University from participating in the international competition on solar power because of its address in Samaria.

According to a poll commissioned by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 62% of university students say they do not want Jewish classmates. These numbers are as surprising as they are worrying: the most anti-Semitic people in Spain are supposedly the most educated.

A prominent figure in Belgium’s Jewish community, Jacques Brotchi, just resigned from the board of University of Brussels after denouncing grave anti-Semitic incidents within the campus. A study published by Professor Marc Elchardus of the Flemish University showed that 50% of Muslim students harbor anti-Semitic sentiments.

In Italy popular anti-Semitic websites called for the “blacklisting” of Jewish professors. An Israeli student at the University of Turin, Amit Peer, confessed to Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera that “the Jews here are hiding their own identity because they risk becoming a target”. Israeli attaché Shai Cohen has been prevented from speaking at Pisa University after a violent attack by students, who called him “butcher.” The Israeli ambassador, Ehud Gol, fled Florence University after a similar “protest.”

A shoe was hurled at Israeli ambassador Benny Dagan while he was giving a lecture at the Stockholm University and a Jewish student, Anja Savosnic, was forced to give up Hebrew studies at the University of Oslo due to anti-Semitic attacks from fellow students.

Harvard Professor Alan Dershowitz was banned from Norwegian universities because of his views on Israel. In an article titled “Judar, ta avstånd,” Stockholm University Professor of Philosophy Torbjörn Tännsjö argued that Jews should distance themselves from the State of Israel, or otherwise they might be subjected to anti-Semitism.

In 1936, at the beginning of a new wave of terrorism against the Jews, Zionist leader Berl Katznelson wrote: "We are called upon to defend ourselves not only from the physical marauders but also from the spiritual marauders." Today the new spiritual marauders are based in Western faculties. They want to bring the war to the home of every Jew. It's an academic final solution epitomized by a sign on the walls of London University: "Peace with Israel is a crime."

Iran's new opportunity to improve relations with Pakistan

Meir Javandanfar, ALMonitor, 25 May 2012

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/irans-pakistani-opportunity-in-a.html>

While eyes are on the nuclear talks, Iran is looking at new possibilities in Afghanistan. The majority of US and NATO forces are set to leave Afghanistan in 2014, and Afghanistan will be holding elections the same year. These events could provide the Islamic Republic of Iran with a new set of opportunities for its Afghanistan policy.

Post-revolution Iran has found Afghanistan to be a challenging place — not only because of its fractious political system and the ongoing war there, but also because of its rival, Pakistan. For years, Iran and Pakistan tried to undermine each other's influence in Afghanistan. Before the US invasion of 2001, they even fought proxy wars. Pakistan supported the Taliban government and the Iranian government backed its rival, the Northern Alliance, headed by the late Ahmad Shah Masoud. The two fought a bitter civil war which ended when the US invaded Afghanistan and beat the Taliban with the help of the Northern Alliance.

After the US invasion the two continued to undermine each other's political influence by forming political alliances against each other. When the Iranian government gave sacks containing hundreds of thousands of Euros to Hamid Karzai during his visit in October 2010, it wasn't just looking to pull him away from America's influence. The Iranians also wanted to pull him further away from the Pakistanis as well.

Now that America and NATO are slowly departing Afghanistan and leaving it in the hands of the Afghans, political instability could ensue. This could be especially true about the period after the 2014 elections. According to Afghan laws, Karzai won't be able to run for office for a third time and there is no guarantee that the current reconciliation talks with the Taliban will succeed. It's anybody's guess what could happen after the next elections. If history is to repeat itself, we could see more chaos and political infighting.

"This would provide Iran with an opportunity," states Alex Vatanka, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC. Vatanka, who is currently writing a book on Iran-Pakistan relations added that "Iran would be able to use the infighting to buy the

loyalty of different factions, especially Shiites and Persian-speaking groups such as the Tajiks. This would give Iran continued, if not increased, influence in Afghan politics”.

In fact this time round, Iran may find that promoting its interests in Afghanistan may be less challenging.

The dynamics of Iran's relations with its rival Pakistan have changed, much to Iran's favor.

These days, unlike the days when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan with Pakistan's help and attacked Iran's allies, Pakistan badly needs Iran's gas resources to produce energy at home. The Pakistani government has already determined that the imported natural gas from Iran would provide the cheapest and most suitable fuel for power generation. There is also the question of volume. Some analysts have estimated that gas from Iran could provide at least 20 percent of Pakistan's energy needs. Others have suggested 50 percent. With power outages lasting as long as 12 hours, Pakistan's economy and its population are badly suffering. The Iran-Pakistan pipeline is the best alternative which Pakistan has to import energy as Iran is ready and willing and has in fact constructed 900 km of the 1100 pipeline. The other alternative is the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline. However this option is years behind compared to the Iranian option. It's also far riskier. Which country would want to rely so much of its energy needs on a gas pipeline which runs through the notoriously insecure and unstable Afghan territory?

Pakistan's pipeline has faced much criticism and pressure from the American government who has spearheaded the sanctions campaign against Iran. However help may be at hand from Russia. Gazprom has already promised to help Pakistan build the pipeline from its border with Iran right into Pakistani territory.

With Vladimir Putin returning to the presidential office, it is expected that he'll follow a much less cooperative stance towards the US. In fact he has accepted an invitation to visit Pakistan this year, after he has taken his presidential oath. This would make him the first Russian president to make such a visit. The fact that Obama refused a bilateral meeting with his Pakistani counterpart, Asif Ali Zardari, during the recent NATO conference in Chicago speaks of the widening rift, which Putin will most probably will want to exploit.

Backing the pipeline deal could turn out to be his magic shot in deepening the current rift between Pakistan and the US, something which Tehran would welcome with open arms.

This is in addition to Iran's own efforts in pulling Pakistan away from the US. Sensing that the rift between Islamabad and Washington is increasing over Afghanistan, Iran's president has decided to use the opportunity to reach out to Pakistanis. “Pakistan's enemies will be considered as Enemy of Iran”, proclaimed Iran's president Ahmadinejad in a meeting with Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan, Federal Minister for Regulation & Services on May 20. His message was widely covered in the Pakistani press.

Responding positively to Iranian outreach could also prove to be a popular move for Pakistani president Zardari, as Iran's nuclear drive is popular with the Pakistani people. In a recent 21-nation Pew Global Attitudes survey, Pakistani people were the most favorable between all surveyed nations to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons (50 percent). They also ranked lowest among those surveyed who believe that a nuclear Iran would be a serious threat, with only 13 percent seeing it as a serious threat. In the same survey, 76 percent of Pakistanis give Iran a positive rating, higher than anyone else. Most interesting of all perhaps is the survey's finding that "about half of Pakistanis (47 percent) express a favorable opinion of Ahmadinejad, while just 6 percent give him an unfavorable rating (47 percent do not offer an opinion)." President Ahmadinejad could only dream of such high approval ratings at home.

The reason for such popularity seems to be related to increasingly anti-American sentiments between Pakistan's population. This is due to numerous reasons, among them the controversial US drone attacks inside their territory which recently killed more than 20 Pakistani soldiers. It seems that an increasing number of Pakistanis see the Iranian government as a victim and a possible ally to confront the US. This could explain why instead of them not wanting Iran to have nuclear weapons because it could become Pakistan's rival, 50 percent of them want the opposite, and in fact want Iran to have nuclear weapons.

By using its energy influence and political popularity in Pakistan as leverage, Iran may find that in the new Afghanistan, its old Pakistani rival may be more cooperative than before. Zardari will have to walk on a tight rope between Tehran and Washington, only this time, he will most probably find Iran's position more difficult to ignore.

Iran nuclear talks: Settling for confusion in Baghdad, hoping for clarity in Moscow

Julian Borger, The Guardian, 29 May 2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/julian-borger-global-security-blog/2012/may/29/iran-nuclear-talks-baghdad-moscow?INTCMP=SRCH>

The latest round of negotiations ended with agreement only to meet again next month in the Russian capital, but after that it will be hard to keep the talks going without results.

The reports which emerged hour by hour from the negotiating chamber in Baghdad last week spoke of proposals offered and spurned, then of counter-proposals and an improving ambience. In retrospect such reports more a reflection of the journalistic imperative to keep a conventional narrative going than actual developments inside the room.

Conversations with the participants since the two dusty days in Baghdad make it clear that they spent much of the time scratching their heads trying to understand what was being said. This was no reflection on the quality of the interpreting, but rather a symptom

of a cultural divide. The Iranian delegation led by Saeed Jalili did not represent the Iran of the bazaar, but the Iran of the Hawza, the Islamic seminary, and Jalili employed the abstract language of the theologian.

It was as if the major powers had come to Baghdad to sell a car only to be received with a mediation on the virtues of driving. The results sometimes bordered on farce with the diplomats and Iran experts from the US, UK, France, Germany, Russia, China and the EU forming a gaggle after each session with Jalili to parse what he had said.

The Iranian media reported during the talks that Jalili had demanded relief from impending oil sanctions, but he had not mentioned them in his opening remarks, nor in the later discussion. The international negotiators also heard from news reports that Jalili had presented a five-point proposal, in response to the package they had offered at the opening of the talks. However, on reviewing his actual words (there was no written proposal) it was hard to discern what all those points were. Some delegations counted three, others four and only a few claimed to have identified all five.

It seemed clear that Jalili's first point was that the fatwa of the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, declaring nuclear weapons forbidden under Islam would be 'operationalised', but he did elaborate how that would be done. The second point was that Iran's right to enrich uranium under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) had to be recognised by the major powers. The third involved a discussion of regional issues including Syria and Bahrain.

Some participants believed a fourth point was a hint that Tehran should be compensated in some way for making a agreement with the IAEA on future inspections. The IAEA director-general, Yukiya Amano, returned from a visit to Tehran last Monday saying he and Jalili had decided to reach agreement, triggering a flurry of mistaken reports that an agreement had indeed been reached. What appears to have happened instead is that Jalili left the IAEA issue unresolved so as to take it to Baghdad as a bargaining chip.

A few diplomats at the Baghdad talks identified Jalili's signal that Iran was ready to discuss its enrichment of uranium up to 20% purity, a cause of particular alarm in the West and in Israel, as a fifth point, although it only emerged in the course of discussion rather than in the Iranian negotiator's presentation. Jalili did not make clear whether Iran was willing to suspend 20%, and what it would demand in return if it did, but the head of the Iranian nuclear programme, Fereydoun Abbasi-Davani has since said that Iran had no need to suspend 20% enrichment.

After a brief flowering of optimism in the run-up to Baghdad, there is widespread anxiety over whether the diplomatic process can survive Moscow without more concrete achievements. None of the delegations from the EU or the six-nation negotiating group is willing to set a benchmark for Moscow, for fear of offering a hostage to fortune at a time when Israel is threateningly unilateral military action. But western diplomats are similarly agreed that there was to be some qualitative progress in Moscow on June 18 to justify keeping the talks going - if not a deal, at least the elements of a deal. Yet the US and the

western European states are adamant that there would be no concessions on sanctions or Iran's right to enrich without a dramatic reciprocal concession from Tehran. Now the plentiful dust of Baghdad has settled, it is hard to see where that progress might come from.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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