



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**

<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

1. *Elliot Abrams* Can Israel be a “Jewish State?”

The central issue which has stalled negotiations between Israel and the PLO is the Palestinian refusal to acknowledge Israel as a “Jewish state.”

2. *Martin Peretz* What explains fashionable hostility toward Israel?

Right-wing anti-Semitism in the USA is now fundamentally a bad memory, but left-wing anti-Semitism is now an advancing reality, one that traces its past to the *scheissjuden* of Karl Marx.

3. *Moshe Arens* Israel is facing a new wave of Arab aggression

As it has become clear that Israel is able to overcome military aggression, its enemies chose another direction: a worldwide campaign to delegitimize the state.

4. *Avirama Golan* The Jewish-Muslim sisterhood of the veil

Muslim and Jewish women who embrace orthodoxy have a sense of ethnic-moral supremacy, and feel that they are leading a revolution that will change society.

5. *Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere

Can Israel be a “Jewish State”?

By Elliot Abrams, CNN, July 14, 2011

<http://blogs.cfr.org/abrams/2011/07/14/can-israel-be-a-jewish-state/>

Negotiations between Israel and the PLO have been stalled for many reasons, but a central issue is the Palestinian refusal to acknowledge Israel as a “Jewish state.”

The whole idea behind the partition of the Palestine Mandate in 1947 was, in the words of U.N. General Assembly resolution 181, the creation of an “Arab state” and a “Jewish state.” The Arab rejection of Israel as a Jewish state is in fact at the heart of the Middle East conflict. It is based on the widespread refusal to accept Israel as a permanent presence in the region, but is usually couched in more acceptable terminology — indeed, the language of “rights.”

As one news story put it, “Palestinian negotiators have recognized Israel’s right to exist, but not as a Jewish state, which officials say would prejudice the right of return for refugees and violate the rights of Israel’s non-Jewish residents.”

In other words, the argument is that if Israel is a “Jewish state” it will certainly, unavoidably, necessarily discriminate against non-Jews. The problem with this debating point is that those who use it apply it only to Israel; none ever voices any concern about states based on Islam and discriminating in favor of Muslims.

There are actually four states whose very name contains a religious reference: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. But beyond those, in every Muslim-majority country the constitution asserts a special role for Islam. The Jordanian constitution says “Islam is the religion of the State” and of course “No person shall ascend the Throne unless he is a Moslem...of Moslem parents.” No converts!

But Jordan has a Christian minority that is five to eight percent of the population (Eastern Orthodox, Circassian, Melkite, and other sects).

Egypt is about ten or even fifteen percent Christian (Copts), but its current provisional constitution states that “Islam is the religion of the state....Principles of Islamic law (Shari’a) are the principal source of legislation.” Moreover, this is unlikely to change: presidential candidate Mohammad ElBaradei, viewed as a Westernized moderate, recently released his version of a new Egyptian constitution that similarly holds “Islam shall be the religion of the state....Sharia shall be the main source of legislation.”

The constitution of Malaysia states that “Islam is the religion of the Federation,” even though the country is only about sixty percent Muslim. It is roughly twenty percent Buddhist, ten percent Christian, and six percent Hindu, among other religions.

There are many similar examples. The religion of the state is Islam in Oman, Qatar, and Kuwait (where there are estimates that fifteen percent of the population is non-Muslim) - and one could lengthen the list. In Afghanistan, the constitution holds that “The sacred religion of Islam is the religion of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” and “No law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of the holy religion of Islam in Afghanistan.” The president must be a Muslim. The Saudis go one further, refusing even to have

a constitution: "The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a sovereign Arab Islamic state with Islam as its religion; God's Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet, God's prayers and peace be upon him, are its constitution...."

It is worth adding that Muslim states are not alone in their religious ties. The constitution of Denmark, for example, states that "The Evangelical Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and, as such, it shall be supported by the State," and unsurprisingly "The King shall be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church." Same for Norway: "The Evangelical-Lutheran religion shall remain the official religion of the State" and "The King shall at all times profess the Evangelical-Lutheran religion." And of course, the Queen of England is "Defender of the Faith," and the faith is Anglican Christianity.

So what?

So the usual arguments against the acknowledgement of Israel as a Jewish state are hypocritical and specious. Every Arab state is far more Islamic than the "Jewish state" of Israel is Jewish; as one example, Israel imposes no religious test for the offices of president or prime minister. Moreover, the treatment of religious minorities is far better than in the Muslim states, as the flat ban on building even a single church in Saudi Arabia and the repeated violence against Christians in Egypt and Pakistan remind us.

If some secular professor maintains that all states should be devoid of religious identity, fair enough; that is a principled argument. But when Arab political leaders say they will never acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state, that isn't an argument at all. It is a reminder of their continuing refusal to make peace with the Jewish state and with the very idea that the Jews can have a state in what they view as the Dar al-Islam.

Cambridge Journal: What explains fashionable hostility toward Israel?

Martin Peretz, The New Republic, 20 July 2011

<http://www.tnr.com/article/tel-aviv-journal/92285/israel-netanyahu-antisemitism-new-yorker>

We live in a world in which the contagion of anti-Semitism is spreading once again. Indeed, the profusion of hostility to Israel is the proof that hatred of Jews is now quite alright, thank you. But, whatever individual and isolated wrongs Israel commits, there are comparisons to be drawn. And the comparisons are to the Arab states and to Palestinian Arab society, in which oppression has flourished since the early years of the last century. And has not stopped flourishing yet.

There must be a certain *frisson* that attaches to the loathing of Jews and of Israel by the chic folk who express it and cotton to it, like those who carried around Mao's "Little Red Book" in a previous generation or wore a Che Guevara sweatshirt long after everyone knew he was a murderer. In the last few months and around the Cannes movie festival season, the world was treated to notable outbursts of malignance targeting the Jewish people and its polity. From the first generation of the new cinema to its most recent fashionable eminence came declarations of revulsion against the nation designated for hate: the first from Jean-Luc Godard and the last from Lars von Trier. At just about the same time, the idolized Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis pronounced his wisdom: "Everything that happens in the world today has to do with the Zionists," including the Greek financial catastrophe. And, of course, John Galliano, poor John Galliano who worked in the *schmata* trade. This is actually something of an epidemic. In Europe, the epidemic has also infected both the political and journalistic congregations - although in somewhat, but

only somewhat, less hateful language. Western Europe does not especially like Jews or Israelis, but it also doesn't want Arabs or Muslims as neighbors.

America is not alone in the world in its friendship for Israel or in its historical hospitality to Jews. Already, in the days of the early Jewish migration to the United States, the new arrivals grasped that this was *di goldene medinah*, the golden country. The American people are allies of the state of Israel, however much its prime minister irritates Barack Obama. More to the point: The relationship between America and Israel is about historic and strategic ties, not about whether Obama is offended by Bibi's rhetorical style. But why is he so offended? Is he as offended by President Chavez of Venezuela?

Right-wing anti-Semitism in the country is now fundamentally a bad memory. Yes, of course, Pat Buchanan! And who else? But left-wing anti-Semitism is now an advancing reality, one that traces its past to the *scheissjuden* of Karl Marx. Still, essential anti-Semitism is hard to express except in jokes about the garish Jewish rich, which itself is an expiring phenomenon. The timorous Jew no longer exists: He has been replaced by the skilled and defiant Israeli soldier. Perhaps because of this soldier, Israel has become the vehicle for anti-Semitism as well as its target. Some feel this soldier is more than a bit uppity, reversing the sacred cerebral role of the Jew in history ...

Not everyone on the left who is bothered by this is an anti-Semite. Many are simply Jews who cannot reconcile themselves to the notion of a strong Israel. Consider Roger Cohen, the *International Herald Tribune* columnist, who told us about the happy state of the Jews of Iran and who virtually non-stop tells us about the sins of the Jewish state, almost like I do about its virtues. He has also told us, poor man, that he was called a "Yid" at Westminster, "one of Britain's top private schools, an inspiring place hard by Westminster Abbey," and suffered other minor indignities that American Jews ordinarily do not. Anyway, he now fits in quite comfily, and, when he writes about Israel, he follows the model of *The Guardian*, which is known to, well, sort of improvise. He doesn't much appear in *The New York Times*, the IHT's blood relative. But this is hardly because the *Times* editors don't like his opinions, like the ones they turned down when Richard Goldstone wrote about the colossal errors of his own report. The judge's confession was subsequently published by *The Washington Post*.

In the same category, are some of the writers at *The New Yorker*. Frankly, I don't usually read the magazine (although it has come to me *gratis* for years), which sometimes makes me sit dumb-faced at Cambridge dinner parties where its opinions are the last word. And I've completely sworn off some of its writers ...

The thick-with-ads, oh-so gracefully written weekly is a model of fashionable views on Israel. David Remnick, its editor, whose work on Russia I do really greatly admire, recently published a spate of his own articles about Israel, which I read. My judgment is that he knows squat about Israel, maybe because the only reportage he seems to read about the Jewish state is from *Ha'aretz*, which is to Israel what *PM* used to be for the United States ... Let me confess: *Ha'aretz* is my home page. I am a masochist, and I like to see how far journalists can stray from the facts. Very far. Every day, actually.

Then, there is Rick Hertzberg, who was my student at Harvard. I made him editor of TNR twice. We are friends - I would even say loving friends - but with a deep undercurrent of testy ideological distrust. His hero is Mahatma Gandhi. Mine is George Washington. Maybe there's the difference in a nutshell, one a nutcase and a pretentious nutcase at that, the other a hard nut ...

Rick (has written) a "Talk of the Town" piece titled "O'Bama vs. Netanyahu." Maybe the placement and the headline are a tip-off that this is not serious. But Rick's frivolity - he is congenitally but congenially frivolous - doesn't disguise the fact that he is writing about deadly serious matters. One by one, he ticks off the rhetorical contentions between Israel and the Palestinians about which, he basically says, the Palestinians win hands down. I am afraid that the way he examines the first contention is so simple-minded that I'll have to repeat myself or send Rick back to school.

He quotes Netanyahu as saying in his speech to Congress that, in any agreement, "Israel will be 'required to give up parts of the ancestral Jewish homeland.'" So Rick responds on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas, "Yes, but the Palestinians have already been required to give up parts of an ancestral Arab homeland." Actually, the greatest part of Palestine is Jordan, where most Palestinians live. So, in a very real sense, they already have a country, except that it is ruled by an authoritarian monarchy that was imposed on them by the British. That the Arabs of eastern Palestine don't live under democratic rule is the fault of neither David Ben-Gurion nor Netanyahu. It is a result of a deeply ingrained, political and social structure that, across the huge swath of land from Morocco to Iraq, has been imposed, without a single exception, by dictators. Don't get me wrong: I don't want Israel to operate or control or, for heaven's sake, absorb the West Bank. Let the Arabs on the east and west banks of the Jordan River team up and see what they can make of their soon-to-be one country. I don't think it will be pretty. You do? Good luck.

I also don't believe that the Arabs of Palestine want to retire this conflict and certainly not in a reasonable way. A reasonable way means no right of return, and it also means that Israel needs, for its own elementary security, for its densest population strip to be wider than ten miles. So it demands with the insistent backing of the citizenry - except some (and only some) of the local Arabs and Remnick's coterie of friends at *Ha'aretz* - that border adjustments in its favor be made. Please do remember that Israel also won two wars to turn back invasions of its tiny turf, which many, most Palestinians would deny it. With the Arab world in tumultuous flux, and the tumult now spreading and intensifying in Jordan, it is possible, even likely that the kingdom will be no longer. And then, you will have perhaps 75 percent to 80 percent of historic Palestine under Palestinian control. A civil society it will not be.

Hertzberg goes tit for tat. Netanyahu: "Israel will be 'required to give up parts of the ancestral Jewish homeland.'" And now, for Abbas: "Yes, but the Palestinians have already been required to give up parts of an ancestral Arab homeland." Actually, the core ancestral Arab homeland centers on the Arabian Desert where various tribes converted to Islam. The Arabs claim from Morocco to Babylon as their ancestral homeland. There is no room for compromise, as the Berbers and Kurds know. The Jews - who lived in Baghdad for more than two-and-a-half millennia and were thrown out after 1948 as part of the conflict over the partition of Palestine - constituted a plurality and maybe a majority of the city. Should they be demanding "return" or, maybe, as a compromise gesture, financial compensation?

Hertzberg accuses Netanyahu of having, in his speech, "laid down maximal demands." This first of these is a precondition: "recognition of Israel as a Jewish state." This goes back to November 29, 1947, when the General Assembly passed the Partition Plan for Palestine for a "Jewish state" and an "Arab state." The Jewish Agency, which was the democratically elected proto-government of Zionism in Palestine, accepted partition, even though the territory allotted to the new state was tiny and not contiguous. (By the way, Obama promised the Palestinians contiguity. Nifty. So how, then, will Israel remain contiguous? Oh, so finicky and so careless, Mr. President. During the campaign, I testified in Florida day after day to Obama's savvy about and commitment to Israel's security. I no longer think he cares much. And contiguity would only deepen the ongoing civil war between Fatah and Hamas, with which the administration will surely soon begin talks, like the drawn-out talks with Syria of which doubtless the president is proud and unrepentant. Oops! As of last week, the president and Hillary Clinton no longer think Assad possesses legitimacy.)

Each for their own geographical interests, five Arab states began a war on May 14, 1948, the morrow of Jewish independence. And the Palestinians? Some few of them joined up with the certified Nazi, Haj Amin al-Husseini who, from Cairo, called for resistance. Most of the fighters (and they weren't legion) teamed up with Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, which had their own categorical territorial designs, none of which translated into an independent Palestine. The Palestinian Arab fighters were not fighting for an Arab Palestine. In the end, what they won was the West Bank for Jordan and the Gaza Strip for Egypt. This is a national history of which to be proud, is it not?

"Nearly as appalling as Netanyahu's intransigence was the mindlessness of the senators and representatives, Republican and Democratic, who rewarded him with ovation after ovation." Rick

attributes this response to “certain Jewish and evangelical constituencies.” Of course, why didn't I think of this? After all, the Jewish population of the United States ranges from 1.4 percent to 2.5 percent, depending on who does the counting. But all Jews are rich. So that balances out their small numbers. And they are also covert and crafty. Besides, given their cunning, they've teamed up with evangelicals who are certainly not covert and crafty but frank and folksy. It's an unbeatable combination, these two ends of the social structure. One thing Rick knows from his own experience is that the widespread, but much exaggerated, ownership of the media by Jews does not explain America's support for Israel. Take his own magazine, owned by the Newhouse family. Hardly a kind word has been printed about Israel since 1963, when Hannah Arendt assailed the Jewish state for putting Adolf Eichmann on trial. And what about *The New York Times*? Nuf said. Anyway, it's now owned by its creditors.

Let me go back to those senators and congressmen who so offended Hertzberg. And how dare they so offend Obama! One conclusion I draw is that J-Street is a flop, a complete flop. It has spent millions of dollars - much of it George Soros's, I presume - and can't get more than a handful of politicians to sit on their hands as all of their other colleagues rise to enthusiasm and applause.

But there is this persistent coterie, influential among the elites, and especially the smart-ass Jewish elites, who do not rise and are not enthusiastic. And so, despite all the true evil in the world, the designated target of the chic progressives, including alienated Jews, is the Jewish state. There are many predecessors of the type in history.

Israel facing new wave of Arab aggression

Moshe Arens, Haaretz, 20 July 2011

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/israel-facing-new-wave-of-arab-aggression-1.374151>

Three waves of aggression have been launched against Israel during the last 63 years, in attempts by Israel's enemies to destroy the Jewish state. The first wave, an attempt to defeat the Israeli army on the battlefield, began in 1948 and continued, with interruptions, until 1973. The Yom Kippur War, which was launched with simultaneous assaults by Syria and Egypt, from the north and the south, respectively, caught Israel by surprise, before it had a chance to mobilize its army reserves, and these armies initially made substantial advances on both fronts. However, this was to be the last Arab attempt to challenge Israel on the battlefield. Within three weeks the IDF, having called up its reserve units, crossed the Suez Canal, cut off the Egyptian Third Army and stood 101 kilometers from Cairo; in the north, Israeli forces were within artillery range of Damascus.

At this stage, both Egypt and Syria began pleading for a cease-fire to be put in place. After launching the war under optimal conditions and being totally defeated within three weeks, it had become clear to Israel's enemies that beating the IDF on the battlefield was not an option. Throughout the 38 years that have elapsed since, Israeli deterrence has been effective.

With the deployment of their armies no longer a viable option, Israel's enemies decided to use the weapon of terror. That was the second wave of aggression against Israel. The terror weapon was twofold: rockets launched from a distance against Israeli population centers, and suicide bombers. With the arrival of the suicide bombers - a precision weapon that the terrorist intent on suicide was able to place in buses, restaurants and wedding halls - the terror weapon, which until then had not been considered a major threat to Israel's existence, began to tear away at the fabric of Israeli society.

The terrorists claimed that what could not be achieved on the battlefield could be achieved in the streets of Israel's cities. Many in Israel insisted that terrorism could not be defeated militarily. The IDF and the security services proved them wrong with Operation Defensive Shield, in April 2002, when the army entered Palestinian cities and suppressed the terrorist menace. The terror-rocket threat, from Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, has not been eliminated but Israel is capable of dealing with it at a time of its choosing.

As it became clear that Israel had overcome both waves of aggression, its enemies chose another direction. This time it was a worldwide campaign to delegitimize the State of Israel, an attempt to make Israel an outcast among the nations, subjecting it to boycotts, disinvestment and sanctions. This campaign is gaining momentum.

The first wave of aggression naturally had the support of the Arab world. The second wave was also supported by Europe's far left and various fringe terror organizations. But the global campaign for the delegitimization of Israel will need much broader support if it is to succeed. It is not very difficult to mobilize such support, starting with the UNO. Nearly one third of UN member states are Muslim countries, assuring an automatic majority for any anti-Israel resolution at the General Assembly. Any of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council can veto a resolution by the council; Russia and China are disinclined to veto anti-Israeli resolutions, each for its own political and economic reasons.

The Quartet, a relatively new forum consisting of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the UN, has become another source of pressure against Israel. Add to all these the many Muslims living in Western Europe, the well-meaning "liberals" who are convinced that they know more about what is good for Israel than the democratically elected government of the state - a pressure group that includes a good number of Jews and even Israelis - and it is clear that a formidable coalition against Israel already exists. Although not all of the components of this coalition seek the destruction of the State of Israel, its more extreme elements have everyone else in tow.

Fortunately, Israel has grown strong economically and militarily over the years and should be able to overcome this third wave of aggression, as it has the first two.

The Jewish-Muslim sisterhood of the veil

Avirama Golan, Haaretz, 20 July 2011

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-jewish-muslim-sisterhood-of-the-veil-1.374154>

A few weeks ago a rather slim book was published in French that is already causing a firestorm, as would be expected considering its title, which translates as "Islam Pride: Behind the Veil."

The volume's author, Hele Beji, is a Tunisian intellectual and writer and the founder of the International College of Tunis. Her tract is another in a long line of similar books by Muslim women from North Africa and France, but it presents an innovative stance of importance beyond its geographic location

Beji's book opens with a confession. As a committed secularist, she cannot stand veils, burkas or any of the other head coverings that have been spreading like wildfire in recent years.

Beji's style is sharp and beautiful, the revulsion she expresses at the beginning of the book so deep and her cultural reasoning so daring that it arouses suspicion that this is a little book that yet again presents the enlightened West versus a purportedly backward Islam.

But in the second chapter, Beji goes on to deconstruct her feelings and analyze the complexity of the background behind the dizzying triumph of the veil.

The phenomenon does not constitute a retreat of hundreds of years, Beji says in taking issue with French feminism. It is not (only) male oppression or false consciousness on the part of women, misled by a world of chauvinistic-religious values, returning them to submissive status and relegating them to dealing with the kitchen and the children.

Instead it is an up-to-date expression of contemporary culture and its consequences, and involves stretching the feminist-liberal interpretation to its limits.

Young Tunisian women, like their counterparts in France and elsewhere, oppose secularism because the decision to cover oneself up to the eyes and strictly conform to the commandments of the Koran embodies a choice made freely. You women are such liberals, mocks her female relative, who received the same broad Western education she did, if you don't understand that the decision to oppose liberalism is actually the height of liberalism!

Beji's text faithfully represents the cultural conflict to which the secular West turns its back and of which it is so horrified. The author fondly recalls that mythological moment in which her uncle, former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba, lifted an amazed young woman's veil and told her: Look squarely at the world and it will look squarely at you.

But Beji thereby recognizes that the eradication of religiosity in her country was also violent, and that Bourguiba, like Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, who influenced the Tunisian leader, was an autocrat.

Bourguiba imposed a process that another one of Ataturk's admirers, David Ben-Gurion, didn't dare or didn't want to carry out, even though his administration was the closest to an autocracy. The result in both cultures was similar, however.

The religious element that was suppressed, or gave in, is bursting forth with renewed vigor. Beji makes clear it is a mistake to view this as a return to the past. The veil is an external characteristic, a trademark, shaping identity in the spirit of the times. It is Islam pride.

Secular Israelis have a hard time deciphering the religious revolution taking place before their eyes because they are used to quarreling with ultra-Orthodox Jews who represent a stable and conservative form of religiosity.

They are confused by nationalist ultra-Orthodox Jews, also known by their Hebrew acronym Hardal. In many respects, the new national ultra-Orthodox Jewish woman, educated career women who grew up with a moderate religious education and chose to be more extreme in the hallmarks of their religiosity, are amazingly similar to the new Muslim women. This includes the Jewish women's comprehensive acceptance of rabbinical authority, an increased birthrate and stricter modesty.

Both groups of women, Muslim and Jewish, have a sense of ethnic-moral supremacy. Both feel that they are leading a revolution that will change society as a whole, including the government.

Beji, who does a good job analyzing the fundamental weakness of the secular liberal and consumerist-globalized West in the face of religious influence, proposes a gentle form of a culture war. Showing

understanding for extremist motives, she seeks to open religiosity to renewed discussion that will render insularity unnecessary.

Such a brave step, however, will require that society deal with all of its demons and repressed issues and here secular people will be asked to resolutely define their identities, and not as a frightened counter-reaction, in the face of the hazy concept of the "Jewish State."

It is doubtful if Israelis will demonstrate the power to do that. In the interim, it appears, they would be inclined to give in entirely to the national ultra-Orthodox.

***Bits and Pieces* Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere**

ICEJ, 19 July 2011: The Iranian Foreign Ministry announced on Tuesday that the Islamic Republic has entered a new stage in its renegade nuclear program, installing new uranium enrichment machines aimed at speeding up its ability to produce the material needed for atomic weapons. "By installing the new centrifuges progress is being made with more speed and better quality," boasted Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast, adding that his announcement proved Iran was achieving success in its "peaceful nuclear activity."

ICEJ, 19 July 2011: Demonstrating Israel's ongoing commitment to improving the quality of people's lives worldwide, a discovery made by researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev will enable doctors to prevent the drastic overuse of antibiotics, and will reduce the constant need for developing new ones. A multidisciplinary team, headed by Prof. Robert Marks of the University's department of biotechnology engineering and the National Institute for Biotechnology in the Negev (NIBN) made the discovery that can quickly and accurately distinguish between bacterial and viral infections, which will enable better diagnostics in addition to the reduction in improper use of antibiotics.

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