No, it's not anti-semitic
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Profoundly anti-Israel views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities. Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-semitic in their effect if not their intent.

Lawrence Summers, 17 September 2002

When the president of Harvard University declared that to criticise Israel at this time and to call on universities to divest from Israel are 'actions that are anti-semitic in their effect, if not their intent', he introduced a distinction between effective and intentional anti-semitism that is controversial at best. The counter-charge has been that in making his statement, Summers has struck a blow against academic freedom, in effect, if not in intent. Although he insisted that he meant nothing censorious by his remarks, and that he is in favour of Israeli policy being 'debated freely and civilly', his words have had a chilling effect on political discourse. Among those actions which he called 'effectively anti-semitic' were European boycotts of Israel, anti-globalisation rallies at which criticisms of Israel were voiced, and fund-raising efforts for organisations of 'questionable political provenance'. Of local concern to him, however, was a divestment petition drafted by MIT and Harvard faculty members who oppose Israel's current occupation and its treatment of Palestinians. Summers asked why Israel was being 'singled out . . . among all nations' for a divestment campaign, suggesting that the singling out was evidence of anti-semitic intentions. And though he claimed that aspects of Israel's 'foreign and defence' policy 'can be and should be vigorously challenged', it was unclear how such challenges could or would take place without being construed as anti-Israel, and why these policy issues, which include occupation, ought not to be vigorously challenged through a divestment campaign. It would seem that calling for divestment is something other than a legitimately 'vigorous challenge', but we are not given any criteria by which to adjudicate between vigorous challenges that should be articulated, and those which carry the 'effective' force of anti-semitism.

Summers is right to voice concern about rising anti-semitism, and every progressive person ought to challenge anti-semitism vigorously wherever it occurs. It seems, though, that historically we have now reached a position in which Jews cannot legitimately be understood always and only as presumptive victims. Sometimes we surely are, but sometimes we surely are not. No political ethics can start from the assumption that Jews monopolise the position of victim. 'Victim' is a quickly transposable term: it can shift from minute to minute, from the Jew killed by suicide bombers on a bus to the Palestinian child killed by Israeli gunfire. The public sphere needs to be one in which both kinds of violence are challenged insistently and in the name of justice.

If we think that to criticise Israeli violence, or to call for economic pressure to be put on the Israeli state to change its policies, is to be 'effectively anti-semitic', we will fail to voice our opposition for fear of being named as part of an anti-semitic enterprise. No label could be worse for a Jew, who knows that, ethically and politically, the position with which it would be unbearable to identify is that of the anti-semite. The ethical framework within which most progressive Jews operate takes the form of the following question: will we be silent (and thereby collaborate with illegitimately violent power), or will we make our voices heard (and be counted among those who did what they could to stop that violence), even if speaking poses a risk? The current Jewish critique of Israel is often portrayed as insensitive to Jewish suffering, past as well as present, yet its ethic is based on the experience of suffering, in order that suffering might stop.

Summers uses the 'anti-semitic' charge to quell public criticism of Israel, even as he explicitly distances himself from the overt operations of censorship. He writes, for instance, that 'the only antidote to dangerous ideas is strong alternatives vigorously advocated.' But how does one vigorously advocate the idea that the Israeli occupation is brutal and wrong, and Palestinian self-determination a necessary good, if the voicing of those views calls down the charge of anti-semitism?

To understand Summers's claim, we have to be able to conceive of an effective anti-semitism, one that pertains to certain speech acts. Either it follows on certain utterances, or it structures them, even if that is not the conscious intention of those making them. His view assumes that such utterances will be taken by others as anti-semitic, or received within a given context as anti-semitic. So we have to ask what context Summers has in mind when he makes his claim; in what context is it the case that any criticism of Israel will be taken to be anti-semitic?

It may be that what Summers was effectively saying is that the only way a criticism of Israel can be heard is through a certain acoustic frame, such that the criticism, whether it is of the West Bank settlements, the closing of Birzeit and Bethlehem University, the demolition of homes in Ramallah or Jenin, or the killing of numerous children and civilians, can only be interpreted as showing hatred for Jews. We are asked to conjure a listener who attributes an intention to the speaker: so-and-so has made a public statement against the Israeli occupation, and this must mean that so-and-so hates Jews or is willing to fuel those who do. The criticism is thus given a hidden meaning, one that is at odds with its explicit claim. The criticism of Israel is nothing more than a cloak for that hatred, or a cover for a call for discriminatory action against Jews. In other words, the only way to understand effective anti-semitism is to presuppose intentional anti-semitism; the effective anti-semitism of any criticism turns out to reside in the intention of the speaker as retrospectively attributed by the listener.

It may be that Summers has something else in mind; namely, that the criticism will be exploited by those who want to see not only the destruction of Israel but the degradation or devaluation of Jewish people in general. There is always that risk, but to claim that such criticism of Israel can be taken only as criticism of Jews is to attribute to that particular interpretation the power to monopolise the field of reception. The argument

against letting criticism of Israel into the public sphere would be that it gives fodder to those with anti-semitic intentions, who will successfully co-opt the criticism. Here again, a statement can become effectively anti-semitic only if there is, somewhere, an intention to use it for anti-semitic purposes. Indeed, even if one believed that criticisms of Israel are by and large heard as anti-semitic (by Jews, anti-semites, or people who could be described as neither), it would become the responsibility of all of us to change the conditions of reception so that the public might begin to distinguish between criticism of Israel and a hatred of Jews.

Summers made his statement as president of an institution which is a symbol of academic prestige in the United States, and although he claimed he was speaking not as president of the university but as a 'member of our community', his speech carried weight in the press precisely because he was exercising the authority of his office. If the president of Harvard is letting the public know that he will take any criticism of Israel to be effectively anti-semitic, then he is saying that public discourse itself ought to be so constrained that such statements are not uttered, and that those who utter them will be understood as engaging in anti-semitic speech, even hate speech.

Here, it is important to distinguish between anti-semitic speech which, say, produces a hostile and threatening environment for Jewish students – racist speech which any university administrator would be obliged to oppose and regulate – and speech which makes a student uncomfortable because it opposes a particular state or set of state policies that he or she may defend. The latter is a political debate, and if we say that the case of Israel is different, that any criticism of it is considered as an attack on Israelis, or Jews in general, then we have singled out this political allegiance from all other allegiances that are open to public debate. We have engaged in the most outrageous form of 'effective' censorship.

The point is not only that Summers's distinction between effective and intentional anti-semitism cannot hold, but that the way it collapses in his formulation is precisely what produces the conditions under which certain public views are taken to be hate speech, in effect if not in intent. Summers didn't say that anything that Israel does in the name of self-defence is legitimate and ought not to be questioned. I don't know whether he approves of all Israeli policies, but let's imagine, for the sake of argument, that he doesn't. And I don't know whether he has views about, for instance, the destruction of homes and the killings of children in Jenin which attracted the attention of the United Nations last year but was not investigated as a human rights violation because Israel refused to open its borders to an investigative team. If he objects to those actions, and they are among the 'foreign policy' issues he believes ought to be 'vigorously challenged', he would be compelled, under his formulation, not to voice his disapproval, believing, as he does, that that would be construed, effectively, as anti-semitism. And if he thinks it possible to voice disapproval, he hasn't shown us how to do it in such a way as to avert the allegation of anti-semitism.

Summers's logic suggests that certain actions of the Israeli state must be allowed to go on unimpeded by public protest, for fear that any protest would be tantamount to anti-

semitism, if not anti-semitism itself. Now, all forms of anti-semitism must be opposed, but we have here a set of serious confusions about the forms anti-semitism takes. Indeed, if the charge of anti-semitism is used to defend Israel at all costs, then its power when used against those who do discriminate against Jews – who do violence to synagogues in Europe, wave Nazi flags or support anti-semitic organisations – is radically diluted. Many critics of Israel now dismiss all claims of anti-semitism as 'trumped up', having been exposed to their use as a way of censoring political speech.

Summers doesn't tell us why divestment campaigns or other forms of public protest are anti-semitic. According to him, some forms of anti-semitism are characterised as such retroactively, which means that nothing should be said or done that will then be taken to be anti-semitic by others. But what if those others are wrong? If we take one form of anti-semitism to be defined retroactively, what is left of the possibility of legitimate protest against a state, either by its own population or anyone else? If we say that every time the word 'Israel' is spoken, the speaker really means 'Jews', then we have foreclosed in advance the possibility that the speaker really means 'Israel'. If, on the other hand, we distinguish between anti-semitism and forms of protest against the Israeli state (or right-wing settlers who sometimes act independently of the state), acknowledging that sometimes they do, disturbingly, work together, then we stand a chance of understanding that world Jewry does not see itself as one with Israel in its present form and practice, and that Jews in Israel do not necessarily see themselves as one with the state. In other words, the possibility of a substantive Jewish peace movement depends on our observing a productive and critical distance from the state of Israel (which can be coupled with a profound investment in its future course).

Summers's view seems to imply that criticism of Israel is 'anti-Israel' in the sense that it is understood to challenge the right of Israel to exist. A criticism of Israel is not the same, however, as a challenge to Israel's existence, even if there are conditions under which it would be possible to say that one leads to the other. A challenge to the right of Israel to exist can be construed as a challenge to the existence of the Jewish people only if one believes that Israel alone keeps the Jewish people alive or that all Jews invest their sense of perpetuity in the state of Israel in its current or traditional forms. One could argue, however, that those polities which safeguard the right to criticise them stand a better chance of surviving than those that don't. For a criticism of Israel to be taken as a challenge to the survival of the Jews, we would have to assume not only that 'Israel' cannot change in response to legitimate criticism, but that a more radically democratic Israel would be bad for Jews. This would be to suppose that criticism is not a Jewish value, which clearly flies in the face not only of long traditions of Talmudic disputation, but of all the religious and cultural sources that have been part of Jewish life for centuries.

What are we to make of Jews who disidentify with Israel or, at least, with the Israeli state? Or Jews who identify with Israel, but do not condone some of its practices? There is a wide range here: those who are silently ambivalent about the way Israel handles itself; those who only half articulate their doubts about the occupation; those who are strongly opposed to the occupation, but within a Zionist framework; those who would

like to see Zionism rethought or, indeed, abandoned. Jews may hold any of these opinions, but voice them only to their family, or only to their friends; or voice them in public but then face an angry reception at home. Given this Jewish ambivalence, ought we not to be suspicious of any effort to equate Jews with Israel? The argument that all Jews have a heartfelt investment in the state of Israel is untrue. Some have a heartfelt investment in corned beef sandwiches or in certain Talmudic tales, religious rituals and liturgy, in memories of their grandmother, the taste of borscht or the sounds of the old Yiddish theatre. Others have an investment in historical and cultural archives from Eastern Europe or from the Holocaust, or in forms of labour activism, civil rights struggles and social justice that are thoroughly secular, and exist in relative independence from the question of Israel.

What do we make of Jews such as myself, who are emotionally invested in the state of Israel, critical of its current form, and call for a radical restructuring of its economic and juridical basis precisely because we are invested in it? It is always possible to say that such Jews have turned against their own Jewishness. But what if one criticises Israel in the name of one's Jewishness, in the name of justice, precisely because such criticisms seem 'best for the Jews'? Why wouldn't it always be 'best for the Jews' to embrace forms of democracy that extend what is 'best' to everyone, Jewish or not? I signed a petition framed in these terms, an 'Open Letter from American Jews', in which 3700 American Jews opposed the Israeli occupation, though in my view it was not nearly strong enough: it did not call for the end of Zionism, or for the reallocation of arable land, for rethinking the Jewish right of return or for the fair distribution of water and medicine to Palestinians, and it did not call for the reorganisation of the Israeli state on a more radically egalitarian basis. It was, nevertheless, an overt criticism of Israel.

Many of those who signed that petition will have felt what might reasonably be called heartache at taking a public stand against Israeli policy, at the thought that Israel, by subjecting 3.5 million Palestinians to military occupation, represents the Jews in a way that these petitioners find not only objectionable, but terrible to endure, as Jews; it is as Jews that they assert their disidentification with that policy, that they seek to widen the rift between the state of Israel and the Jewish people in order to produce an alternative vision of the future. The petitioners exercised a democratic right to voice criticism, and sought to get economic pressure put on Israel by the US and other countries, to implement rights for Palestinians otherwise deprived of basic conditions of self-determination, to end the occupation, to secure an independent Palestinian state or to re-establish the basis of the Israeli state without regard to religion so that Jewishness would constitute only one cultural and religious reality, and be protected by the same laws that protect the rights of others.

Identifying Israel with Jewry obscures the existence of the small but important post-Zionist movement in Israel, including the philosophers Adi Ophir and Anat Biletzki, the sociologist Uri Ram, the professor of theatre Avraham Oz and the poet Yitzhak Laor. Are we to say that Israelis who are critical of Israeli policy are self-hating Jews, or insensitive to the ways in which criticism may fan the flames of anti-semitism? What of the new Brit Tzedek organisation in the US, numbering close to 20,000 members at the last count,

which seeks to offer a critical alternative to the American Israel Political Action Committee, opposing the current occupation and working for a two-state solution? What of Jewish Voices for Peace, Jews against the Occupation, Jews for Peace in the Middle East, the Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Tikkun, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Women in Black or, indeed, Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salam, the only village collectively governed by both Jews and Arabs in the state of Israel? What do we make of B'Tselem, the Israeli organisation that monitors human rights abuses in the West Bank and Gaza, or Gush Shalom, an Israeli organisation opposing the occupation, or Yesh Gvul, which represents the Israeli soldiers who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories? And what of Ta'ayush, a Jewish-Arab coalition against policies that lead to isolation, poor medical care, house arrest, the destruction of educational institutions, and lack of water and food for Palestinians?

It will not do to equate Jews with Zionists or Jewishness with Zionism. There were debates among Jews throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries as to whether Zionism ought to become the basis of a state, whether the Jews had any right to lay claim to land inhabited by Palestinians for centuries, and as to the future for a Jewish political project based on a violent expropriation of land. There were those who sought to make Zionism compatible with peaceful co-existence with Arabs, and those who used it as an excuse for military aggression, and continue to do so. There were those who thought, and still think, that Zionism is not a legitimate basis for a democratic state in a situation where a diverse population must be assumed to practise different religions, and that no group ought to be excluded from any right accorded to citizens in general on the basis of their ethnic or religious views. And there are those who maintain that the violent appropriation of Palestinian land, and the dislocation of 700,000 Palestinians, was an unsuitable foundation on which to build a state. Yet Israel is now repeating its founding gesture in the containment and dehumanisation of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Indeed, the wall now being built threatens to leave 95,000 Palestinians homeless. These are questions about Zionism that should and must be asked in a public domain, and universities are surely one place where we might expect critical reflections on Zionism to take place. Instead, we are being asked, by Summers and others, to treat any critical approach to Zionism as effective anti-semitism and, hence, to rule it out as a topic for legitimate disagreement.

Many important distinctions are elided by the mainstream press when it assumes that there are only two possible positions on the Middle East, the 'pro-Israel' and the 'pro-Palestinian'. The assumption is that these are discrete views, internally homogeneous, non-overlapping, that if one is 'pro-Israel' then anything Israel does is all right, or if 'pro-Palestinian' then anything Palestinians do is all right. But few people's political views occupy such extremes. One can, for instance, be in favour of Palestinian self-determination, but condemn suicide bombings, and find others who share both those views but differ on the form self-determination ought to take. One can be in favour of Israel's right to exist, but still ask what is the most legitimate and democratic form that existence ought to take. If one questions the present form, is one anti-Israel? If one holds out for a truly democratic Israel-Palestine, is one anti-Israel? Or is one trying to find a better form for this polity, one that may well involve any number of possibilities: a

revised version of Zionism, a post-Zionist Israel, a self-determining Palestine, or an amalgamation of Israel into a greater Israel-Palestine where all racially and religiously based qualifications on rights and entitlements would be eliminated?

What is ironic is that in equating Zionism with Jewishness, Summers is adopting the very tactic favoured by anti-semites. At the time of his speech, I found myself on a listserv on which a number of individuals opposed to the current policies of the state of Israel, and sometimes to Zionism, started to engage in this same slippage, sometimes opposing what they called 'Zionism' and at other times what they called 'Jewish' interests. Whenever this occurred, there were objections, and several people withdrew from the group. Mona Baker, the academic in Manchester who dismissed two Israeli colleagues from the board of her academic journal in an effort to boycott Israeli institutions, argued that there was no way to distinguish between individuals and institutions. In dismissing these individuals, she claimed, she was treating them as emblematic of the Israeli state, since they were citizens of that country. But citizens are not the same as states: the very possibility of significant dissent depends on recognising the difference between them. Baker's response to subsequent criticism was to submit e-mails to the 'academicsforjustice' listserv complaining about 'Jewish' newspapers and labelling as 'pressure' the opportunity that some of these newspapers offered to discuss the issue in print with the colleagues she had dismissed. She refused to do this and seemed now to be fighting against 'Jews', identified as a lobby that pressures people, a lobby that had put pressure on her. The criticism that I made of Summers's view thus applies to Baker as well: it is one thing to oppose Israel in its current form and practices or, indeed, to have critical questions about Zionism itself, but it is quite another to oppose 'Jews' or assume that all 'Jews' have the same view, that they are all in favour of Israel, identified with Israel or represented by Israel. Oddly, and painfully, it has to be said that on this point Mona Baker and Lawrence Summers agree: Jews are the same as Israel. In the one instance, the premise works in the service of an argument against anti-semitism; in the second, it works as the effect of anti-semitism itself. One aspect of anti-semitism or, indeed, of any form of racism is that an entire people is falsely and summarily equated with a particular position, view or disposition. To say that all Jews hold a given view on Israel or are adequately represented by Israel or, conversely, that the acts of Israel, the state, adequately stand for the acts of all Jews, is to conflate Jews with Israel and, thereby, to commit an anti-semitic reduction of Jewishness.

In holding out for a distinction to be made between Israel and Jews, I am calling for a space for dissent for Jews, and non-Jews, who have criticisms of Israel to articulate; but I am also opposing anti-semitic reductions of Jewishness to Israeli interests. The 'Jew' is no more defined by Israel than by anti-semitism. The 'Jew' exceeds both determinations, and is to be found, substantively, as a historically and culturally changing identity that takes no single form and has no single telos. Once the distinction is made, discussion of both Zionism and anti-semitism can begin, since it will be as important to understand the legacy of Zionism and to debate its future as to oppose anti-semitism wherever we find it.

What is needed is a public space in which such issues might be thoughtfully debated, and to prevent that space being defined by certain kinds of exclusion and censorship. If one

can’t voice an objection to violence done by Israel without attracting a charge of anti-semitism, then that charge works to circumscribe the publicly acceptable domain of speech, and to immunise Israeli violence against criticism. One is threatened with the label ‘anti-semitic’ in the same way that one is threatened with being called a ‘traitor’ if one opposes the most recent US war. Such threats aim to define the limits of the public sphere by setting limits on the speakable. The world of public discourse would then be one from which critical perspectives would be excluded, and the public would come to understand itself as one that does not speak out in the face of obvious and illegitimate violence.

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How to Talk About Israel
By IAN BURUMA

The Jewish Problem pops up in the strangest places. In the winter of 1991, at the height of the first gulf war, I asked a right-wing Japanese politician who still wields considerable power in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party to explain the Japanese role in the Middle Eastern conflict. After clearing his throat with some perfunctory remarks about oil supplies and United States-Japan relations, he suddenly stopped midsentence, gave me a shrewd look and said: "Look, we Japanese aren't stupid. We saw Henry Kissinger on TV. We know how America operates. We're perfectly well aware that this war is not about Kuwait. It's about Jewish interests. It's all about Israel."

Perhaps he had read too many books about Jewish conspiracies (Roosevelt was a Jew, Churchill was a Jew, Rockefeller was a Jew, etc.), for which the Japanese market seems to have an insatiable appetite. He was, in any case, not known for his intellectual finesse. But the idea that Israel or Jewish interests are somehow at the center of world events or, at the very least, at the center of American foreign policy in the Middle East is widely held, and not only outside the United States. No matter what the current American administration does to save the tattered "road map" toward an end to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, sinister motives are still bound to be imputed.

Earlier this year, Representative James Moran, a Democrat, said that "if it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this." In Britain, Tam Dalyell, a longstanding Labor member of Parliament, expressed a similar view. Tony Blair, he opined, was listening too much to a "cabal" of Jews around President Bush that included Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz; an under secretary of defense, Douglas Feith; Richard Perle, a member of the Defense Policy Board; Elliott Abrams, director of Middle East Affairs in the White House; and the former presidential spokesman Ari Fleischer. "Those people drive this policy," Dalyell said.

Dalyell was "worried about my country being led up the garden path on a Likudnik-Sharon agenda" by British Jews close to Blair. He included among them Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, a Christian, whose rather distant Jewish family connections are very unlikely to make him a Likudnik.

The fact that James Moran had to apologize immediately, while the British M.P. was under no compulsion to do so, shows a profound difference between the United States and Europe, or indeed anywhere else in the world. Although Moran's opinion may be shared by other Americans, it is not something mainstream politicians can vocalize. Even legitimate criticism of Israel, or of Zionism, is often quickly denounced as anti-Semitism by various watchdogs. In European political discourse, not only is anti-Zionism quite acceptable, but so are vague allegations of too much Jewish influence in public life, especially across the Atlantic. And in the non-Western world, it's not even necessary to keep such allegations vague.

Rarely can such a tiny country as Israel, and such a relatively small minority as the diaspora Jews, have been assumed to exercise so much influence in world affairs. The special relationship between Israel and the United States, and the supposed dominance of "Jewish interests" in Washington, is by now encrusted with so many layers of mythology and bad faith that it has become very difficult to discuss Israel's role in American politics critically and dispassionately. Yet not to talk about it invites only more conspiracy theories.

There are several myths to be considered. The first is the idea that the American or the British government is dominated or manipulated by Jews. In fact, none of President Bush's cabinet members are Jewish, and the last time individual Jews played a prominent part in any British government was under John Major. Straw, moreover, has spent more time and energy courting Iran than Israel. The well-being of Israel is not Blair's main concern either. In fact, an equitable deal for the Palestinians is more important to the British leader, who badly needs to rebuild his bridges with other European governments. That is why he wants Washington to push the Israelis harder to make peace with the Palestinians.

There is no doubt that Israeli lobby groups are well organized and well financed and have considerable clout in Washington. But then so do other lobbies. That is how the game is played. There was a time not so long ago when hefty books were written about the United States government falling into the hands of scheming Japanese lobbies. It is true that some people in the Pentagon, as well as influential organizations like the American Enterprise Institute and the Project for the New American Century, have close relations with the Likud Party, and especially with Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is much more in tune with American neoconservatism than Prime Minister Ariel Sharon is. Douglas Feith and Richard Perle advised Netanyahu, who was prime minister in 1996, to make "a clean break" from the Oslo accords with the Palestinians. They also argued that Israeli security would be served best by regime change in surrounding countries. Despite the current mess in Iraq, this is still a commonplace in Washington. In Paul Wolfowitz's words, "The road to peace in the Middle East goes through Baghdad." It has indeed become an article of faith (literally in some cases) in Washington that American and Israeli interests are identical, but this was not always so, and "Jewish interests" are not the main reason for it now.

Indeed, Israel enjoys a zealous following among some gentiles, particularly Christian fundamentalists. (In electoral terms, Christian fundamentalists are more important to the Republican Party than Jews -- there are many more of them, the Christian Coalition is highly efficient and most Jews still vote for the Democrats anyway.) Even though Israel is often described as the only democracy in the Middle East, the Christian right's remarkable devotion to Israel is not necessarily driven by democratic principles. The "Christian Zionists" are convinced by a literal reading of the Bible that Christ will reappear only once the Jews have repossessed the Holy Land. Their other conviction, that Jews will either die in an apocalypse or be converted to Christianity, is not so reassuring. Still, the Rev. Jerry Falwell declared on "60 Minutes" that evangelical Christians would

make sure no American president would ever do anything to harm Israel. At a conference of the Christian Coalition held in Washington last year, there were more Stars of David than crucifixes.

Then there are the foreign-policy hawks for whom Israel has been a strategic inspiration. The notions of "pre-emptive" war and "regime change" were exemplified, if not exactly pioneered, by Israel. The Six-Day War of 1967 was launched by Israel in self-protection, admittedly in the face of far greater provocation than Iraq ever gave the United States. And the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was part of an Israeli effort to install a more friendly government in Beirut. Both actions, deplored by critics of Israel all over the world, were seen as marks of admirable resolve by friends of Israel in the United States.

What we see, then, is not a Jewish conspiracy, but a peculiar alliance of evangelical Christians, foreign-policy hard-liners, lobbyists for the Israeli government and neoconservatives, a number of whom happen to be Jewish. But the Jews among them -- Perle, Wolfowitz, William Kristol, editor of The Weekly Standard, et al. -- are more likely to speak about freedom and democracy than about Halakha (Jewish law). What unites this alliance of convenience is a shared vision of American destiny and the conviction that American force and a tough Israeli line on the Arabs are the best ways to make the United States strong, Israel safe and the world a better place.

Not all Americans agree with this hard line, to be sure: a recent campaign by American Jews to press Sharon into accepting a two-state solution shows this. In fact, he now accepts it in principle. Whether he will comply with American pressure to stop building a barrier to keep the Palestinians more or less imprisoned inside the occupied territories is doubtful, especially when Palestinian suicide bombers continue to blow up buses -- and the Israeli government continues to kill Hamas leaders. And there is no sign that President Bush will make a serious effort to make the Israelis dismantle, or at least stop building, Jewish settlements in the Palestinian areas. The idea that Israeli and American interests, as defined by evangelical Christians, neocons and Likudniks, converge, as if by force of nature, is not seriously challenged in the United States.

To judge from much of the world's media, especially in Europe and the Middle East, this was always true. In fact, it was not. The turning point was the Six-Day War. It was then that many Europeans took up the Palestinian cause and Israel could count, for the first time, on the almost unconditional support of the United States. In 1947, President Harry S. Truman did join the Soviet Union in backing the United Nations resolution that gave Jews the right to found a state in Palestine. But he did so against the advice of State Department officials, who worried about antagonizing the oil-rich Arab nations. When Israelis fought for the survival of their state in 1948, the United States did nothing to help them. Both the Americans and the Soviets would later have good reasons for discretion about their respective attitudes at Israel's difficult birth.

In 1956, during the Suez crisis, the United States actively opposed Israel's interests. It was an interesting little war in light of today's fashionable clichés about dovish anti-Zionist Europeans and hawkish pro-Israeli Americans. Israel's biggest supporter and arms

supplier in the 1950's was not the United States, but France. That is how Israel got its nuclear bomb. Britain was more ambivalent and tended to lean toward the Arabs. But when President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, often depicted in the European press as an Arab Hitler, nationalized the Suez Canal, thus cutting out the British and French corporate owners, the British joined the French in an attempt to grab it back. They enlisted the Israelis in this enterprise by encouraging them to attack Egyptian "terrorists" in the Sinai, after which Britain and France would order both sides to withdraw from Suez. The inevitable Egyptian refusal would then be followed by a short, sharp conflict and possibly even a "regime change" in Cairo. All went well until the Soviets threatened to intervene on behalf of the Egyptians and President Dwight D. Eisenhower forced France and Britain to back off and the Israelis to get out of the Sinai.

The French remained Israel's staunchest allies until 1967, when Gen. Charles de Gaulle decided to withdraw his favors. Having only just divested France of its last colonial possessions in North Africa, de Gaulle decided to cultivate the Arabs. He called the Israelis a "domineering" people and warned them against going to war. As he put it to the Israeli foreign minister, Abba Eban: "You will be considered the aggressor by the world, and by me. You will cause the Soviet Union to penetrate more deeply into the Middle East, and Israel will suffer the consequences. You will create a Palestinian nationalism, and you will never get rid of it." De Gaulle was not totally wrong on any of these counts.

Until 1967, Israel was a great liberal European cause. Almost everyone on the left supported it. The promised land of kibbutzim and open-shirted pioneers represented, after all, a socialist dream. Conservatives supported Israel, too, especially the type of people who thought that Jews were all very well as long as they stuck to their own kind. This attitude was not new. Arthur Balfour, the British foreign secretary whose famous declaration in 1917 opened Palestine to Jewish immigration, was against Jewish immigration to Britain and told Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader, that he shared the "anti-Semitic postulates" of certain well-known Jew-baiters.

Guilt, too, had a great deal to do with European good will toward Israel in the 50's and early 60's. This was a time when Jewish characters in German novels took on a saintly air and anti-Semitic remarks (in public) were treated as a kind of blasphemy. Anti-Semitism didn't disappear, of course, but open expressions of it were frowned upon, at least in Western Europe. If the word "Jew" had to be uttered at all, people lowered their voices, as if embarrassed by the very sound of it. Britain, never having been under Nazi occupation, was less vexed. Having grown up in guilt-ridden Holland, I can remember how shocked I was, sometime in the mid-60's, to hear a young lawyer in London make disparaging remarks about Jews.

Philo-Semitism is better than pogroms, to be sure, but there was something unreal, and even a little unsettling, about this dutiful sense of collective guilt. It was as if Jews, including Israeli Jews, once again were not treated in the same way as other human beings, which can quickly lead to resentment, not among Jews so much as among gentiles. Zvi Rex, an Israeli psychoanalyst, once put his finger right on this sorest of points. "The Germans," he said, "will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz." This harsh

analysis applies to some extent to non-Jews all over the European continent. Nobody likes to be made to feel guilty, especially for the sins of his father.

So it was with a certain sense of relief, in the aftermath of the 1967 war, that the European left, led by Communist publications like L'Humanité in France, could point its finger at Israelis and conclude that Jews, far from being saintly, were behaving just as badly as everyone else and, indeed, perhaps worse. Once it became clear that the Israelis were not going to give back their conquered territories, the Palestinians became the prime victims to be protected from persecution, and the Jews became the Nazis. Here is L'Humanité on July 20, 1967: "Six million Jews were not slaughtered by the Nazis so that young sabras could on occasion behave like young Hitlerites."

In fact, Europeans, especially on the left, had a double guilt complex. One complex concerned the widespread collaboration in the destruction of European Jewry; the other was about the colonial past. France's war in Algeria ended only in 1962, after eight years of torture, terrorism and a near civil war in France. Israel had backed France in this last stand for European colonial rule. Taking up the cause of Palestinians, Vietnamese and other postcolonial peoples fighting for their "liberation" was a way to atone for past European sins. And because Western imperialism, since the late 60's, was largely associated with Israel and the United States, anti-Zionism and anti-Americanism came to mean the same thing. In this respect, if in little else, the editors of L'Humanité and General de Gaulle were entirely on the same wavelength.

The United States, meanwhile, began supplying Israel with fighter jets in 1968 and became an ever more reliable friend. But Zionist lobbies were not the main reason. It was the politics of the cold war that paved Washington's road to Jerusalem. Even though President Lyndon Johnson liked the macho Israelis, some of his closest advisers, including Vietnam hawks like Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow, a national security adviser, argued against supporting Israel's 1967 war. But Johnson decided that the United States had to stand by Israel to thwart Soviet designs on the Middle East.

If American Jews had anything to do with this, it was because many of them criticized the war in Vietnam, and Johnson needed something to appease these loyal Democratic voters. Since Israel, by then, was becoming a primary focus of Jewish identification -- as religion, Yiddish and other Old World memories were fading -- American support for Israel was a popular move among Jews. And besides that, Israel was not only more democratic than America's client states in Southeast Asia but a much brighter military success to boot.

The steady alignment of American interests with Israel made it possible for American Jews to be good Jews, good Democrats and good American patriots too. This same period gave birth to neoconservatism, in which Israel played a major role. The career of Norman Podhoretz might serve as an illustration. He was once a man of the left who wondered, when "thinking about the Jews," whether "their survival as a distinct group was worth one hair on the head of a single infant." But, as he explained in a speech on the occasion of his retirement as editor of Commentary in 1995, he began to change his mind in the 60's,

when he became "much more aggressive in defense of Jewish interests in general and of Israel in particular." One reason was a sense of shock when defeat in Vietnam threatened to turn the United States into a demoralized, enervated, even isolationist power, which would no longer stand up for good against evil in the world.

The other came roughly at the same time. Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories made radical leftists in the United States as receptive as Europeans to Arab and Soviet depictions of the Zionists as neo-Nazis. Disgust with this kind of "liberalism," as well as with a perception of American weakness, pushed former leftists, like Podhoretz and Irving Kristol, managing editor of Commentary, to the right. Convinced of "the inextricable connection between the survival of Israel and American military strength," Podhoretz began to see American dovishness in foreign affairs as a direct threat to Israeli survival. This feeling may be shared by some European Jews too, but without the swagger that goes with being a superpower citizen. Ruth Wisse, a professor of Yiddish literature at Harvard, remarked about Podhoretz that "because of the national confidence that America nurtured in him, he is immune to the self-doubt and apologetics that eat up so many of his co-religionists from inside."

This confidence is what Podhoretz and other neoconservatives sought to save from the wreckage of Vietnam. One of their most powerful political allies in this enterprise was Senator Henry (Scoop) Jackson, mentor of Richard Perle, among others. Jackson, a gentile, a Democrat and a staunch cold warrior, was the perfect bridge on which former leftists could cross over to the right, without actually joining the Republican Party. Henry Jackson was a founder of the America-Israel Friendship League. Israel, to him, was not a sentimental issue but an essential part of his vision of the United States as a nation destined to free the world from tyranny. Arab nationalism and Soviet Communism were seen as equally dangerous in this rather Manichaean view of a worldwide battle between good and evil.

It goes with Manichaeism (which is, of course, what appeals to Christian fundamentalists too) that battles are not only strategic but also existential. And this, in the eyes of many neocons, is what puts Israel and the United States in the same boat. Podhoretz again: "Just as the fervent wish of the Arab world to wipe the Jewish state off the map derives not from anything Israel has done or failed to do, but rather from its existence alone, so we" -- the United States -- "are hated not because of our policies but because of who and what we are."

The roots of neoconservative disillusion with liberalism and the almost obsessive promotion of American power go deeper than Vietnam, however. In Podhoretz's case it goes back to his childhood experiences on a school playground in Brooklyn, where he was bullied by his black schoolmates. Blacks, he had always been told, in good liberal fashion, were poor and persecuted, while Jews were rich and powerful. Neither rich, nor powerful, young Norman grew to hate the boys that beat him up with such ease. As he explained in a famous essay, "My Negro Problem -- and Ours," he hated them, but also admired them, for "they were tough; beautifully, enviably tough, not giving a damn for anyone or anything. To hell with the teacher, the truant officer, the cop; to hell with the

whole of the adult world that held us in its grip and that we never had the courage to rebel against."

This is highly revealing. What Henry Jackson, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, Ariel Sharon, Benjamin Netanyahu and George W. Bush have in common is that they enabled bookish men to feel tough, beautifully, enviably tough. Too much can be made of the connection between the Chicago philosopher Leo Strauss and officials in the current Pentagon, but one aspect of Strauss appears to have rubbed off on them. Born in Germany, Strauss was a liberal rationalist in his youth. He had hoped, he said, that anti-Semitism would end with Jewish assimilation in a liberal democracy. The Nazis taught him otherwise. By the 1920's he began to regard liberals as weaklings, powerless to stop the violent mob. If one thing ties neoconservatives, Likudniks, and post-cold-war hawks together, it is the conviction that liberalism is strictly for sissies.

By the time Israel was attacked by Egypt and Syria in October 1973, it could no longer be doubted which side the United States stood on, but the size of American largess increased enormously. Before the Yom Kippur War, Congress agreed to an annual loan to Israel of more than $500 million. After the war, this was increased to $2.1 billion in loans and grants, much of which went into purchasing American military hardware. Again, the influence of Jewish lobbies can be easily exaggerated. President Nixon was not known for his warm feelings toward Jews, and most Jews did not vote for him, but he saw Israel as a vital pawn in the great game with the Soviets, especially when they were supplying Egypt with arms.

Once Egypt made peace with Israel in 1979, and switched patrons from Moscow to Washington, challenging the Soviets was no longer a major American concern. But the revolution in Iran, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, produced another enemy to confront. And this new confrontation outlasted the cold war. For Khomeini's brand of revolutionary Islam inspired others. Among the Palestinians, who had always been relatively secular, Islamist extremism gradually merged with Palestinian nationalism. The intifadas began with throwing stones, but degenerated into suicide attacks on Israeli citizens, organized by Palestinians with support from parts of the Arab world. Seen from a particular perspective in America, then, especially after 9/11, Israel and the United States, bound together by cold-war concerns in the 60's and 70's, were now thrown together in an existential "war against terrorism." This shaped a climate in which it is not just potentially anti-Semitic to be critical of Israeli policies, but downright unpatriotic, too.

If political perspectives have become muddled in the United States by an identification with Israel that is too rarely critically examined, non-Americans are mostly incapable of separating what they think of Israel from what they think of the United States. That is why the Japanese politician I interviewed during the first gulf war automatically identified American policy with "Jewish interests." Japan, like much of the modern world, feels uncomfortably dependent on American economic and military power. When people need to invent a malevolent face for this overwhelming might, they often reach for the prejudices of a hateful past. The Japanese politician may never have heard of the

19th-century Russian forgery "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," but it was widely read in prewar Japan and is enjoying a popular revival in the Middle East today.

It is perfectly possible, of course, to take a critical view of Israeli policies, and of their support in Washington, without being anti-Semitic. It is equally possible to be critical of American policies without being irrationally and emotionally anti-American. Just so, you can be opposed to capitalism, or "globalization," without wishing to unleash or condone suicide attacks on Manhattan. What is disturbing, however, is the way these views now increasingly come together in a hostile cocktail. Most mass demonstrations in Europe, and elsewhere, against the war in Iraq contained banners in support of the Palestinians, even the religious extremists of Hamas, and against the global symbols of capitalism. For some people on the left, being opposed to Israel, or Zionism, goes beyond specific policies in Gaza or the West Bank; Israel is seen as the colonial Western presence in an Arab world, an American client state locked into global capitalism. Even if the Israelis treated the Palestinians with the most scrupulous generosity -- which they do not -- this impression would persist.

Not every demonstrator against Ariel Sharon's government or American imperialism is an anti-Semite, to be sure, but the ready identification of Jewish interests with the United States or, in the past, with Britain is old and loaded with prejudice. Since the early 19th century, many Europeans associated the City of London, as Wall Street is today, with financial power, materialist greed and economic imperialism. To ethnic nationalists in Germany and elsewhere, Britain and France, with their relative openness to immigrants, were seen as mongrel nations, where citizenship could be bought for a crock of gold.

This is what Hitler meant when he called France, Britain and the United States "Jewified." He took the view, popularized by all manner of third-rate scribblers, that a Jewish cabal was manipulating Western powers behind the scenes. French universalism and Anglo-Saxon capitalism, so it was believed, threatened the unique values of culture and race. And behind all this were the Jews, pulling strings in their cosmopolitan network of banks, newspapers and movie companies.

The United States is now the biggest capitalist power in the world. To the extent that it is an empire, it is driven by economic interests, but also, these days, by a mission to spread "American values," as if they were universal. Hollywood is seen in the outside world as part of this, and so are Wall Street, the Pentagon and the International Monetary Fund. This, alas, is precisely the kind of thing anti-Semites have always associated with Jewish conspiracies. And since Israel is America's most favored ally in the Middle East, and the Palestinian cause has become the universal litmus test of liberal credentials, the idea that Jewish interests are driving American foreign policy is even more widely believed, if not always openly stated. American foreign policy and ancient prejudices are reinforcing each other in a vicious circle.

For Israel, the American embrace is an ambiguous advantage. Although perhaps vital for the nation's survival, it also makes Israel the hub of global hostility toward the United States. It is, in any case, doubtful that the fate of Israel is best served by its dependence

on an alliance with Christian fundamentalists and people on a mission to liberate the world with military force. It may well be that Israel's interests coincide with those of the United States for the moment, but this should not be a given, never to be examined or reassessed.

The first condition for a reasoned examination would be to disentangle Israel's politics from all the anti-Semitic myths and other leftovers of a murderous past. This is not so easily done, since Israeli leaders have too often abused history themselves. The Israeli bomb attack on an Iraqi nuclear installation in 1981 might have been justified in many legitimate ways, but to say, as Prime Minister Menachem Begin did, that it was to protect "the children of Israel," asking foreign reporters, "Haven't you heard of one and a half million little children who were thrown into gas chambers?" is to dangerously confuse the issue. The same was true when Prime Minister Sharon warned the United States last year not to repeat the mistakes of 1938 and sell out Israel like Czechoslovakia. Such false analogies serve only to invite equally odious comparisons from Israel's critics.

Disentangling American and Israeli interests and government actions is, if anything, even harder. To see Israel as nothing but a cat's paw of American imperialism in the Middle East is a crude distortion. And to hold Washington responsible for every Israeli action against the Palestinians is equally misguided. But it is neither anti-Semitic nor blindly anti-American to point out that the United States could have done much more to stop Israel from humiliating the Palestinians by turning the occupied territories into a kind of Wild East of gunslinging settlers and hounded natives.

Finally, the politics of the Middle East may be murderous, but it is not helpful to see them as an existential battle between good and evil. As long as such a view persists, among zealots in Washington, Jerusalem and Nablus, the struggle between Jews and Arabs will be forever obscured by a fog of noxious myths and fantasies. Religious fanaticism is confounding the politics of Israel, as well as that of its enemies. And its influence is felt in the United States as well. Americans are right to support Israel's right to exist in peace, but criticism of Israeli policies should not be stifled by Christian visions of Armageddon, right-wing zealotry or memories of the culture wars in Brooklyn. This would not be good for America, and it is certainly not good for the Jews.

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