

Confronting International Anti-Semitism An Agenda for the New Administration

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Background

This decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in anti-Semitism, primarily in Europe but elsewhere as well. Even as it has diminished somewhat, observers are nervous that the current global financial crisis may result in yet another wave—still one more reason to be vigilant.

Initially, this anti-Semitism was fueled by extremist media from the Arab world and those who exploited the breakdown of the Middle East peace process and the second *intifada*. Attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions in France, Belgium and other Western European countries surged. The attackers themselves were mostly Arab and Muslim youth, but governments initially sought to downplay their severity or dismiss their acts as mere vandalism. In September 2001 the UN World Conference Against Racism became a forum for reviving the “Zionism is racism” canard and challenged Israel’s very legitimacy. An openly anti-Semitic atmosphere led the US delegation to return home in protest. The demonization of Israel, itself a form of anti-Semitism, became increasingly prevalent in the European media leaving Jewish communities anxious and uncertain.

The new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, eager for American support in their bid for NATO membership, were pressed to confront their Holocaust-era past. Many of these countries, under Soviet domination since the end of the war, had never critically examined the role of their own citizens in collaborating with the Nazis. Some even reached back to their own fascist leaders of that era in seeking symbols for a nationalist revival. In a rather brief period these nations were asked to review this history and to return stolen Jewish property that had been seized by the Nazis and nationalized by the Communists. Viewing this as a price for NATO admission most governments complied, but popular resentment grew stronger. Anti-Semitic literature including reprints of *Mein Kampf* and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* proliferated, and even well-meaning political leaders were unable to address the problem.

Surprisingly, a new source for this “old” anti-Semitism could be found in the Arab world. Anti-Israel sentiments were long-standing and widespread, but these were easily conflated into anti-Jewish pronouncements. Arabic translations of Nazi propaganda could be readily found. *Der Stürmer*-like cartoons were a regular feature in the Arab press, and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories of blood libel and world Jewish domination gained remarkable currency. Not only did this infect the

population of countries which had comparatively good histories of Jewish –Arab coexistence, but these anti-Semitic materials were being exported to Muslim communities in Europe further exacerbating the situation there.

Despite these new and ominous manifestations, the “traditional” sources of anti-Semitism still remain a very real problem. It is very much part of the agenda of neo-Nazi and skinhead groups in both “old” and “new” Europe. Populist and ultra-nationalist parties find it a convenient and time-tested theme. Their anti-immigrant rhetoric is a common feature, and while the targeted immigrant group will vary from country to country, hatred of Jews remains the constant across borders.

Recent Developments in Countering Anti-Semitism

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

Although known for its cold war origins and its profile in mounting election observers throughout Europe and the former Soviet Union, the OSCE has become a central venue for addressing the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe, largely due to the active role of the United States. Combating anti-Semitism is a basic human rights concern, and the OSCE held its first conference on anti-Semitism (and the first conference by any international organization devoted exclusively to the subject) in June 2003. This in turn led to an important follow-up conference the following year in Berlin, hosted by the German Foreign Minister. At that event all OSCE members endorsed a “Berlin Declaration” which called for increased government action in the areas of monitoring and legislation and which led to a new department within the Office of Democratic Institution and Human Rights (ODIHR) to focus on the problem and on related issues of intolerance. The declaration noted that anti-Semitism had taken on “new forms and manifestations,” a reference to the growing demonization of Israel in the public discourse, and it stated that events in Israel and the Middle East can never justify anti-Semitism—a clear rebuke to some European leaders who had suggested otherwise. In subsequent years the OSCE approved the appointment of a Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair to focus on combating anti-Semitism. (Two other representatives were also designated to focus on anti-Muslim activities and on other forms of discrimination.)

Perhaps the most innovative project to emerge from the OSCE was the establishment of the Law Enforcement Officers Program (LEOP) which established a training team of senior police officials from several countries led by a veteran American officer to teach European national police departments how to identify, investigate and prosecute hate crimes. Over a dozen European governments confronting growing problems with anti-Semitic violence and attacks on other minorities invited the LEOP team to train their own police forces. (At the moment lacking sufficient funds, the LEOP program is on hold.)

[For a detailed description of the LEOP program and its curriculum, see: □ HYPERLINK

"http://www.osce.org/publications/odihr/2006/09/20673_676_en.pdf"

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European Monitoring Centre (now the EU Fundamental Rights Agency)

Responding (albeit belatedly) to the problem of anti-Semitism, in 2004 the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) issued its first analysis of the 15 member states. Drawing on available survey data from governments and NGOs it documented the increase in anti-Semitism in many of those countries. Through personal interviews conducted with European Jewish leaders it revealed a level of fearfulness and discomfort that was shocking. Some of the respondents were survivors of the Holocaust. They questioned the wisdom of rebuilding their lives in Europe and wondered openly if there would be a future for their children.

In presenting its report, the EUMC revealed that half of its country monitors operated with no definition of anti-Semitism, and of those who did no two definitions were alike. With the active involvement of key NGOs the EUMC in January 2005 adopted a "working definition" of anti-Semitism, with the expectation that it would be used by its own monitors and by governments and NGOs in their work. It offers a clear and concise definition of the phenomenon together with concrete examples. Importantly it describes the situation where anti-Israel invective becomes a new form of anti-Semitism. The working definition has been adopted by ODIHR and it is a part of the LEOP training material.

[Note: For the full text of the working definition see: □ HYPERLINK "<http://eumc.europa.eu/eumc/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf>"

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Additionally, the European Forum on Anti-Semitism offers translations of the working definition in over thirty languages: □ HYPERLINK "<http://www.european-forum-on-antisemitism.org/working-definition-of-antisemitism/#c89>"

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State Department Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism

In 2004 Congress enacted legislation that called on the State Department to prepare a world-wide report on the problem and also to appoint a special envoy with responsibility for addressing the problem internationally. The previous Administration waited almost two years before filling this post. In the limited time since the Special Envoy has visited a number of countries to discuss the problem and has issued in March 2008 a report titled, *Contemporary Global Anti-Semitism*. [See: □ HYPERLINK "<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102301.pdf>"

□ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/102301.pdf> □] Although the report did not offer a country-by-country survey of the problem, it did highlight

some of the worst examples. It drew from the EUMC definition not only as a framework for its analysis but also to condemn anti-Zionism and other examples of anti-Semitism related to the Jewish State. It paid special attention to these manifestations in the public discourse at the United Nations and at other international forums.

Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues

This position was created following the December 1998 Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets organized by the State Department and the office of Under Secretary Stuart Eizenstat. A variety of issues were addressed at this conference ranging from looted Nazi-era art to the restitution of Jewish communal property to questions about dormant bank accounts and unpaid insurance claims. It does not automatically follow that the work of this Special Envoy should encompass the problem of anti-Semitism. But for many Central and Eastern European countries the unwillingness to confront Holocaust-era history critically and directly also contributed to an anti-Semitic atmosphere. Small Jewish communities, faint shadows of their prewar life, had gladly said good-bye to the state-sponsored anti-Semitism of Communist days only to be confronted with new populists and demagogues and fellow-citizens who knew very little of their own Holocaust history. Not only did the Special Envoy press governments to reconstitute former Jewish property (essential if these reviving communities are to achieve stability and self-sufficiency) but he was also able to promote Holocaust education and remembrance.

Targeted Initiatives

Responding to a significant increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the UK, a non-partisan group of lawmakers formed the Parliamentary Committee Against Anti-Semitism in 2005, and launched their own official inquiry. Their report not only described the nature of the problem but offered specific recommendations to the British Government and others to deal with it. Parliamentary leaders in the UK have proposed that their example be replicated in other countries. [For a copy of the full report see: □ HYPERLINK "<http://thepcaa.org/Report.pdf>" □ <http://thepcaa.org/Report.pdf> □]

In Germany Professor Gert Weisskirchen, a Member of the Bundestag and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office, has annually convened his own seminar in Berlin with experts and other Bundestag leaders to examine the nature of the problem inside Germany, which focuses significantly on the activity of neo-Nazis and political extremists. This year the German Chancellor opened the seminar.

Agenda for a New Administration

- **Re-engage with the OSCE.** In recent years the US Government has grown inattentive to the special opportunities made possible by the OSCE. The Obama Administration should restore extra-budgetary

support for the pioneering police training program of ODIHR and appoint an ambassador with the skills to rebuild a consensus among the 56 member states to continue the fight against anti-Semitism.

- **Examine the Office of the State Department Special Envoy for Combating Anti-Semitism.** Whatever his own personal efforts the outgoing Special Envoy functioned as only a slight and distant appendage of US diplomacy. Either through a new envoy or via other means the Obama Administration must make clear that the fight against anti-Semitism is an integral element of America's message abroad. US embassy personnel must be trained to identify and monitor anti-Semitism in their host countries. Where problems are acute the Secretary of State and other senior diplomats must raise the subject in their bilateral discussions with foreign leaders. Using the annual Human Rights report as an example, regular world-wide reporting of anti-Semitism must be country specific.
- **Address the Arab World.** Efforts to promote democracy and find a lasting solution to the Middle East conflict continue to be worthy goals, however difficult they may be to achieve. But they should not eclipse the need to promote tolerance and combat anti-Semitism within Arab society. The Obama Administration is already being welcomed in much of the Arab world. It should seize on this opportunity to press for the elimination of anti-Jewish invective in textbooks and in the media, much of which is government controlled. It should foster nascent efforts, such as those in Egypt, which seek to preserve and showcase the legacy of Jewish heritage that was once a part of much of the Arab world.
- **Encourage the Use of the Working Definition.** When he was challenged on the resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe during a visit to Washington in 2002, the EU High Representative Javier Solana replied, "I do not see it." It was a sincere if problematic response. European governments lacked any definition; incidents were not monitored or if monitored not recorded. Even with good intentions, the lack of a common understanding of what constituted anti-Semitism made data collection in European countries difficult and comparison impossible. The EUMC "working definition" has now been endorsed by various governmental bodies in the UK, Germany, the United States and elsewhere. The United States Government, in its diplomatic work, should make increased reference to the definition and should encourage other governments to adopt and use it.
- **Confront Anti-Semitism in the International Arena.** The UN-sponsored World Conference and its companion NGO-forum in Durban in 2001 were sabotaged. A conference intended to confront racism instead became a platform for anti-Jewish invective and intimidation. The

demonization of Israel figured prominently in Durban, where it was labeled a “racist” and “Nazi” state. The UN Human Rights Council is now engaged in planning for a review conference (sometimes referred to as Durban II) which will take place in Geneva next April. Observers fear it will be a repeat performance. Some countries (e.g., Canada and Israel) have already signaled their intention not to go. French President Nicolas Sarkozy speaking on behalf of the EU warned the organizers not to cross certain “red lines.” The new Administration must quickly take stock of the Durban II plans and in consultation with European allies determine if it is salvageable or if they should pull out of the conference.

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