

## **The Arab World / Dr. Esther Webman**

The year 2014 witnessed an increase in antisemitic manifestations, especially since the middle of the year following the kidnapping and murder of three teenagers at the bus/hitchhiking stop at Alon Shvut in Gush Etzion on June 12; Operation Protective Edge between July 8 and August 26; and the terror attack at the Kehilat Bnei Torah synagogue, in the Har Nof neighborhood of Jerusalem on November 18. This review deals with these three events in three distinct areas: Arab countries and North Africa, Turkey and Iran. Blaming Israel and the Jews for causing all the ills of the world, especially in the Arab and Muslim world, while using the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the blood libel and Nazi imagery continued unabated. Since the outbreak of the "Arab Spring" in 2011, another dominant phenomenon of the antisemitic discourse was the usage of the term "Jew" as a curse directed at Arabs and Muslims from rival camps to prove their evil. Confirmation of the rising antisemitism was the Anti-Defamation League's largest-ever worldwide survey of antisemitic attitudes held in the beginning of May, which included 53,000 people who were surveyed in 102 countries and territories representing 88 percent of the world's adult population. According to the survey, about 49 percent of Muslims worldwide and 74 percent in the Middle East and North Africa harbor antisemitic views while the West Bank and Gaza ranked at the first place with 93 percent.

### **The Kidnapping and Murder of Three Teenagers and its Aftermath**

On June 12, 2014, three Israeli teenagers, Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer and Eyal Yifrah, were kidnapped and murdered by two Hamas terrorists and after 18 days their bodies were found not far from where they were kidnapped. The kidnapping and murder were followed by harsh Israeli measures against Hamas in the West Bank. In response, Hamas opened rocket fire on Israel, leading to an Israeli military action in Gaza, known as Operation Protective Edge, which lasted from July 8 to August 26. As a result, antisemitic incidents increased as well as racial incidents and 'Price Tag' actions by Israeli citizens, which included the murder and burning alive of Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khudayr by three Israelis on July 2. This aroused unrest among Palestinians in Jerusalem and bitter reactions, which invoked comparisons with the Holocaust and Nazi deeds. In discussing the situation, at a meeting of the Palestinian leadership held on July 9, PA chairman Mahmud 'Abbas wondered "shall we recall Auschwitz?". In his daily column in *al-Hayat* on July 5, Jihad al-Khazin claimed that Israel's PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, is a war criminal who seeks to kill all Palestinians, and since he does not have gas chambers like the Nazis, he performs a gradual ethnic cleansing. Another aspect was the blood libel, as journalist Wisam 'Afifa pointed out in his editorial in Hamas's daily *al-Risalah* on July 3, in which he claimed that the murder reminds him of the Jewish ritual of mixing human blood in baking their matzos in Passover. On July 12 in *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, columnist Yahya Rabah invoked the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, contending that they teach Jews that their God wants "Matzah made from the blood of our children."

The murder and burning of Abu Khudayr was also depicted in numerous caricatures in the Arab media, in two main categories: comparing it to the burning in the Holocaust and presenting the Jews as bloodthirsty. PA's semi-official daily *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, for instance, published a caricature on July 6, in which two fires were burning, one symbolizing the

Holocaust and the other Jerusalem. The Jerusalem fire was ignited by an orthodox Jew and a child was in it. On July 3, PA daily *al-Ayyam* published, a caricature titled "Blood revenge?!!", depicting a Jew with bat wings firing a submachine gun.

### **Operation Protective Edge**

In response to Operation Protective Edge, Israel was compared throughout the Arab media to the Nazis and was accused of implementing their crimes. For example, on July 9, PA President Mahmud 'Abbas accused Israel of committing genocide against the Palestinians, and in his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 26, he described Israel as the "apex of human evil" and declared that Israel should pay the price for its war crimes. Usama al-Qawasmi, Fatah's spokesman, said on July 20 that the criminal Israeli government surpassed the Nazis with their genocide against the Palestinians and Khalid Mash'al, head of Hamas' political arm, also argued that Israel is "replicating what Hitler did years ago" and perpetrating a Holocaust, in his interview with the Turkish news agency on August 21. On July 15, Jihad al-Khazin wrote that the Israeli enemy is the new Nazi wearing Nazi victims' clothes and in another comparison of Israel to the Nazis, activists from the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees wore striped clothes in Ramallah and Beit Lehem symbolizing the Nazi Jewish victims, claiming that Israel is committing war crimes like the Nazis. On July 17, Egyptian daily *al-Tahrir* published a photographic report on "Israel and Nazi Germany - two sides of the same coin" in which it presented images of Nazi brutality facing Jews and Israeli brutality against Palestinians.

The blood libel arose in an interview aired on the Lebanese Al-Quds TV channel, in which Hamas official Usama Hamdan stated that the Jewish ritual of slaughtering Christians in order to mix their blood in their holy matzos is a fact. The Israeli addiction to the killing of women and children, he added, is rooted in the historical Zionist and Jewish mentality. A similar remark was made in a Friday sermon by Jordanian Senate Member and former minister, Shaykh Bassan 'Ammush, in which he accused Jews of slaughtering children as a form of worship. Qatari Shaykh Tariq al-Hawwas called upon God to demonstrate His might and kill the Jews "to the very last one... [and] freeze the blood in their veins". In addition to such statements and articles, Arab and Muslim clerics throughout the world prayed and called for the annihilation of Jews. Such was Berlin's Imam Abu Bilal Ismail's statement, describing the Jews as slayers of prophets who conspired against the people in Gaza and calling Allah to destroy "the Zionist Jews". The Simon Wiesenthal Center protested to the Mayor of Berlin over failure to take action against the Imam. Nonetheless, there were voices critical to Hamas' behavior and intransigence which wrought disaster on the people of Gaza.

In response to the **terror attack at the Kehilat Bnei Torah synagogue at Jerusalem** on November 18, in which four worshippers were killed, numerous reactions were heard throughout the Arab media. Some condemned the attack, for example PA Chairman Mahmud 'Abbas, who said on November 18 in Lebanese al-Quds TV that attacks on civilians are not acceptable. Hassan al-Batal referred to the attack in his article in Palestinian daily *al-Ayyam* on November 19, as a dangerous and illegitimate act. In contrast 'Adli Sadiq in his column in daily *al-Hayat al-Jadida* on November 19, justified the attack, stating that the murderers are not evil like those they killed and described the Rabbis as "wearing the robes of Satan".

According to the Israeli blog Shawarma News, book fairs held in April in Iraq, Kuwait, PA and Abu Dhabi featured numerous antisemitic books from various publishers which included different versions of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Holocaust conspiracy theories, *Mein Kampf* and books regarding the Talmud. Cairodar, the "education and knowledge" online portal of Egyptian privately-owned daily, *al-Youm al-Sabi'*, also published in April and May several antisemitic articles presenting the content of the book and the malicious intentions of the Jews. In another case British Islamist Refi Shafi, known as Abu Rumaysah, accused the Jews of being corrupted and corrupters by nature, invoked the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and also encouraged listeners to look to it as proof of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, citing Hitler as the only person who was aware of this evil doctrine and did something to stop it. Other conspiracy accusations were included in an article published by As'ad al-'Azzuni in the Jordanian site jo24.net on March 25. 'Azzuni, a Jordanian columnist known for his viral antisemitism, accused Israel of sending wild pigs and white mice to Jordan in order to ruin its fields, and claimed that Israel aims to sabotage Jordan's agriculture and ultimately the economy of all the Arab states that have a peace treaty with it. Another common argument often heard was blaming ISIS of being a Jewish group and its leader a Jew and a Mossad agent. According to the Egyptian website al-Fagr, the Secretary-General of the Union of Sufis in Egypt, 'Abdallah al-Nasir Hilmy, claimed on July 1, that this is the reason why ISIS refused to engage in killing Jews and only kill Muslims. On September 9, Iraqi al-Iraqiyya TV aired a promo to a new series in which the devil and a Jewish woman gave birth to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

## **Iran**

In the wake of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, *al-Hayat* published an editorial, examining the positive developments in the Arab world regarding the Holocaust, and particularly in Iran since the election of Hassan Rouhani as the new president. The internal disagreements between the Iranian president, who is considered moderate, and the conservative Supreme Leader, 'Ali Khamenei, are also reflected on the issue of antisemitism, with the clear distinction between Israel as the Zionist enemy and the Jews as a religious minority who deserve respect. Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, referred to the Holocaust as a "barbaric tragedy that should not happen again" at the Munich Security Conference, on February 3, and pointed out that the Iranians have nothing against the Jews. On May 6, Zarif refuted what he termed as the Zionists' allegations regarding Iran's Holocaust denial and asserted that Iran will not allow the Zionist propaganda machine to invent lies. Khamenei, in contrast, delivered a speech on the occasion of the Persian New Year in Mashhad on March 21, in which he questioned the Holocaust and argued that no one dares to talk about it because western countries limit the freedom of speech and draw red lines concerning it. On July 20 and 21, Khamenei's bureau posted numerous tweets, in which Israel was described as a cancerous tumor, a fake regime and a fake nation. On July 23, two days before Quds Day, he called for the annihilation of Israel, stressing that he is not referring to the Jews. Few days later he posted a message on his official Facebook page titled "why should & how can Israel be eliminated?". Iran held an international Gaza cartoon exhibit from August 12 - 28, at the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran. The exhibit included about 100 cartoons invoking classic antisemitic themes such as the depiction of Israel and Israelis as blood-sucking insects or animals attacking Palestinian children. Iran also announced an International Cartoon and Caricature contest "From Adolf Netanyahu to

Benjamin Hitler,” that will award prizes for the best depiction of Israel’s military offensive against Hamas targets in Gaza. The cartoon section theme focuses on four categories: "silence of media and international Associations, Genocide and Killing Baby in Gaza, Treason and Accompany of Arab League, and the Great Satan (USA)." The caricature section theme refers to ten leaders: Adolf Netanyahu!; Benjamin Hitler!; Shimon Peres; Ehud Olmert; Barack Obama; Abdullah of Saudi Arabia; Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa (King of Bahrain); Francois Hollande; David Cameron; and Angela Merkel (<http://www.irancartoon.com/international-gaza-cartoon-caricature-contest-2014/#>). It is important to note that the Jewish community in Iran admitted that they feel more secure under President Rouhani, as reported in *Haaretz* on November 27.

## **Turkey**

The antisemitic atmosphere that emerged in Turkey since the establishment in 2002 of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government headed by Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has increased over 2014. On February 10, Arutz Sheva published an email by a Turkish Jewish businessman who was insulted and attacked along with his partner in the northwestern Turkish town of Babaeski. The two came into a restaurant and the owner refused to serve them food, and attempted to attack them with a doner kebab blade, while cursing the Jews. Following the Soma coalmine accident in May, in which 301 miners were killed, Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdoğan yelled an anti-Jewish slur at a Turkish protester, referring to him as an "Israeli sperm" – apparently a popular slur which can be understood in different ways. In response to Operation Protective Edge, Erdoğan accused Israel of committing systematic genocide against the Palestinians, and of being a terrorist state, surpassing Hitler’s barbarism. Although Erdoğan clarified that his criticism relates only to Israel and not to the Jews of Turkey, the Jewish community felt uncomfortable. Former Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, and Ankara’s Mayor, Melih Gökçek, also accused Israel of crimes against humanity describing Israel’s deeds as despicable murders that are 100 times more murderous than Hitler. In addition, violent demonstrations broke out on July 17 against the Israeli embassy in Ankara and its consulate in Istanbul, during which demonstrators threw rocks, broke windows and hoisted the Palestinian flag. Other antisemitic incidents included an attack on Israeli soccer players by Turkish pro-Palestinian protesters during a football match in Austria; a warning from the head of the IHH, Bulent Yildirim, who was also behind the Mavi Marmara Flotilla in June 2010, that Turkish Jews will pay dearly for Israel’s actions; and a sign on a shop in central Istanbul, featuring a photo of an Israeli tank and saying: "Jew dogs are not permitted entry". The governor of the Turkish city Edirne, Dursun Sahin, threatened on November 21 to turn a century-old synagogue into a museum as punishment for Israel’s alleged actions against the Al-Aqsa Mosque. After a harsh criticism against his statement, Sahin apologized and expressed deep sadness that his words were distorted.

The situation of the remaining Jews in the Arab countries continues to be problematic. On April 30, Beit El synagogue in Sfax, Tunisia, was ransacked by unidentified individuals who littered the floor with prayer books and Jewish prayer shawls (tallitot). The synagogue was damaged also in August 2011 and December 2012.

In response to Operation Protective Edge, the Rabbi of the Jewish community in Casablanca, Rabbi Moshe Ohayon, was beaten near a synagogue after the evening services. According to the Rabbi, the assailant said during the attack that this is a "revenge for what the Jews are doing in Gaza". On July 18 the Jewish community in Sana'a, Yemen, received warnings to leave the area as soon as possible before the invasion of the Houthi, the rebel tribe in the north that was advancing toward the capital. On November 23, the Facebook page "Tmanyik Algerien", Algerian humor, published a photo of two young men desecrating a Jewish grave by opening the coffin, standing on the corpse and taking a photo. The picture appeared with a caption "the Jewish cemetery of Annaba".

### **Opposing Antisemitism**

Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the spread of antisemitism, there are also other voices condemning the phenomenon and fighting it. For example, in June an event titled "national meeting on tolerance towards a national strategy to promote tolerance" was held in Rabat, Morocco, in order to discuss all forms of discrimination including antisemitism and ways to combat them. In the same month, fifteen Turkish academics participated in a seminar about teaching the Holocaust which was held in the Yad Vashem International School. In response to the rising antisemitism in Turkey, The Radical Democrat - a group believing in equality, freedom for justice, organized in November a "Say stop to antisemitism" protest. Sinem Tezyapar, a columnist, peace activist and an executive producer at a Turkish TV network, contended that antisemitism creates an impression in world public opinion. Tezyapar published an article in February in *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, urging Muslim leaders to stop using antisemitic slogans, either for political reasons or out of ignorance. Kuwaiti columnist Nasir Badr al-Aydan published an article in daily *al-Rai* in September calling to recognize the important role of the Jews in Kuwait's history and highlighting their contribution in the fields of trade, arts and science.