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Debunking Anti-Iran Propaganda: The Myth of the “New Holocaust”

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In a pattern of propaganda now well-established in the mainstream media, fear-mongering against Iran is reaching an all-time peak. A case in point includes ongoing accusations that Iran is in violation of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, despite statements to the contrary from U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta as well as a number of American intelligence officials[1].

In addition, claims that Iran is involved in terrorist activities were released by the Obama administration, fabricating an Iranian conspiracy with the goal to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the U.S.

(For details, see: <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=27094>)

Most recently, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accused Iran of having planned terrorist attacks in India, Georgia and Thailand.

(For details, see: <http://globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=29320>)

As it stands, the intensification of propaganda is fuelling an anti-Iranian proxy conflict in Syria and creating the serious danger of aggression against Iran in the coming months by Israel's extremist government and/or the Obama administration. These media fabrications also do not question why the prospect of a nuclear-armed Iran would increase worldwide tensions so much more than the hyper-developed nuclear weapons programs of countries like Israel and the United States. (Notwithstanding the fact that there is no existing proof that suggests that Iran is doing anything other than developing a peaceful civilian atomic program.)

Opponents of possible armed aggression against Iran are regularly accused of repeating the mistakes from the period prior to World War II, namely of not taking seriously the purportedly dangerous eliminatory “anti-Semitism” of the Iranian regime. This charge is echoed by the Anti-Defamation League, one of the biggest pro-Zionist U.S. groups, who is lobbying for taking any “necessary” measures in order to overthrow the Iranian government and its president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad:

“Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s anti-Semitic and anti-Israel views place him and the Iranian regime among the foremost threats to Jews and the state of Israel.”[2]

Moreover, Israeli President Shimon Peres called Iran a “danger to the entire world” while addressing the German Bundestag in a speech marking Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2010.

The symbolism of such actions is clear: whoever refuses to participate in the campaign against Iran is neglecting the threat of a new Holocaust, the insinuation being that if Iran were to get nuclear weapons, it would use them against the state of Israel.

First of all, suggesting that the current situation in Iran is even remotely comparable to the crimes committed by the Nazis inexcusably downplays the suffering of Jews, Roma, Communists, Slavic nations and other victims of Fascism.

In addition, while the strategic motivation behind arguments made by Israeli decision-makers is clear, the facts are not. In fact, the alleged statements made by Ahmadinejad calling for Israel to be “wiped of the map” were proven to be fake thanks to a false translation from Farsi into English. (See: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/jun/14/post155>) This has been well known already for some time, although it does not seem to faze the war propagandists.

The other question that should be asked by anyone investigating accusations against the Iranian government of being the “foremost threat against Jews” is how do Jews actually live in Iran? If the Iranian president is supposed to be some kind of reborn Hitler, would that not be reflected in imposed anti-Jewish legislature in his country, calls for pogroms, etc.?

The evidence on Jewish life in Iran, from various sources, including Jewish and American mainstream is revealing. For example, a website belonging to the Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture (FASSAC) acknowledges that:

“While Jewish communities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Egypt, Morocco and Algeria have all but vanished, Iran is home to 25,000 – some here say 35,000 – Jews.”[3]

This makes Iran’s Jewish community the *largest* in the Middle East, outside of Israel. Furthermore, many Iranian Jews show pride in their mixed Jewish-Iranian heritage and would not consider emigration:

“Jewish leaders say their community has far stronger roots in Iran than other Middle East Jewish communities, which were virtually eradicated by massive immigration to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s. Esther, the biblical Jewish queen who saved her people from persecution in the fifth century B.C., is reputed to be buried in Hamadan, in western Iran. The grave of the Old Testament prophet

Daniel lies in southwestern Iran.”

As we see, Jewish roots in Iran date back to biblical times: “The Jews trace their heritage in Iran to the Babylonian Exile of the 6th century BC...”[4]. Indeed, several Persian kings enjoy a positive reputation in the Old Testament because of their friendly attitude towards the Hebrew people.

Today, Jewish religion and culture is still present in everyday life in Iran:

“Tehran has 11 functioning synagogues, many of them with Hebrew schools. It has two kosher restaurants, and a Jewish hospital, an old-age home and a cemetery. There is a Jewish representative in the Iranian parliament. There is a Jewish library with 20,000 titles...”

It can't be denied that there must have been considerable concern among Iranian Jews in the time following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, as it was hard to predict how things would develop under the new radically anti-Zionist leadership, and many chose to emigrate on this account. Nonetheless:

“Khomeini [the spiritual leader of the Islamic Revolution] met with the Jewish community upon his return from exile in Paris and issued a “fatwa” decreeing that the Jews were to be protected. Similar edicts also protect Iran's tiny Christian minority.”

The Iranian leadership seems to draw a clear line between Zionism as a political ideology (inspired by Western European colonialist ideas in the 19th century), and Judaism. This conclusion can be underlined by several statements President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has made throughout recent years. In a Christmas message to the people of Great Britain, broadcast by Channel Four, Ahmadinejad started his speech with the following lines:

“Upon the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, Son of Mary, the Word of God, the Messenger of mercy, I would like to congratulate the followers of Abrahamic faiths, especially the followers of Jesus Christ, and the people of Britain.”

The religious pathos might not be to everybody's taste, but the more relevant question would be whether these could realistically be the lines of a fanatical preacher of hate, as he is portrayed by mainstream media in the West. In fact, by addressing the “followers of Abrahamic faith”, president Ahmadinejad expresses his respect for the three religions of the book: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Critics might argue that a conciliatory message prepared for a Western audience might serve the purpose of leaving the people outside Iran in the dark about its real hidden agenda. Thanks to the Internet, it is not necessary to speak Farsi to get an impression of what Ahmadinejad is saying in front of an audience in his own country. In a speech delivered in May 2007 in the city of Esfahan (available on YouTube with English subtitles), he explains to the crowd what his response is to people who accuse him of being anti-Semitic on account of his heavy criticism of the Israeli regime:

“Some officials from that country (USA)... said all kinds of things. One of them was: “They [the Israeli leaders] are Jewish, why are you anti-Jewish?” I said: I am not anti-Jewish at all... But they are lying. They are not Jewish, but a bunch of corrupt criminals abusing the name of Judaism.”[5]

In May 2006, the *National Post* published an article claiming that the Iranian parliament had passed a sumptuary law forcing religious minorities, Jews included, to follow a specific dress code:

“It also envisages separate dress codes for religious minorities, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians, who will have to adopt distinct colour schemes to make them identifiable in public. The new codes would enable Muslims to easily recognize non-Muslims so that they can avoid shaking hands with them by mistake, and thus becoming najis (unclean).”[6]

However, the story turned out to be a hoax and the *National Post* issued an apology by its editor-in-chief[7]. But the intention of this falsification is obvious: it was meant to remind people of the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear in Nazi Germany, and thereby create fears of similar events happening in Iran that might lead to some kind of new Holocaust.

One of the particularly critical Jewish responses to this provocation came from Iran's Jewish Member of Parliament, Moris Motamed. (It should be noted that Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians all have their own guaranteed seat in the Iranian Parliament (Majilis), which is one of the results of Khomeini's *fatwa* calling for the protection of these religious minorities). As Motamed outlined in an interview with *Counterpunch*:

“Unfortunately, this was fake news published in a Canadian newspaper. I considered this news a big insult to the religious minorities of Iran. I refuted the story vigorously, to the point that the source of the news and the Canadian government officially apologized to the Iranian government.”[8]

The same Motamed, who officially represents the Iranian Jewish community, does not criticize Iran's nuclear program, unlike many foreigners who claim to act in favour of Judaism by encouraging “strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities”:

“As a Jewish Iranian, I consider enrichment of peaceful nuclear technology the obvious right of Iranian society. What is sad here — and I'm so sorry about it — is that before the Islamic Revolution, we witnessed... western Europe and America pressuring Iran to obtain nuclear technology and establish a nuclear power plant. Now the idea is brought up: “Why do you want nuclear technology? What is the point of nuclear technology for you when you have rich resources like fuel and gas and oil?” My question here is why at that earlier time, the problem of natural resources was not brought up?”

In further demonizing the Iranian state, Western media and pro-Zionist lobbyists accuse Ahmadinejad of making ambiguous statements about the Holocaust. Clearly, however, holocaust denial does not represent the official position of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Otherwise it couldn't be explained why in 2007 the Iranian state television broadcast a series emphasising the suffering of Europe's Jews in the Second World War, in what can be likened to an Iranian version of “Schindler's List”:

“The central character is an Iranian diplomat, who provides false Iranian passports to enable Jews to flee the Nazi-occupied France, a sort of Iranian Schindler. He even has a love affair with a Jewish woman.”[9]

This Iranian diplomat saving Iranian Jews, named Abdol Hossein Sardari, actually existed in real life and has been honoured in past decades by Jewish organisations, including the Simon Wiesenthal Centre.[10]

It should not be the goal of this article to make a final judgement on Jewish life in Iran, because this would be an almost impossible enterprise without having the personal experience of how life looks when belonging to a religious minority in a very religious country. But it is important to put

the collected information into perspective. It is apparent Iranian Jews have the right to freely practice their religion and to maintain their culture and traditions. Jewish institutions such as synagogues, Jewish libraries, hospitals and restaurants are well-established across the country.

By contrast, the impression we get from one of America's closest Middle Eastern allies, the totalitarian Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (a rival of Iran), looks very different. Neither Jewish nor Christian worship is allowed, and Saudi school textbooks spread hateful messages such as the following, according to *Daily Mail*:

"In one, for ninth-graders, students are taught the annihilation of the Jewish people is imperative. One text reads in part: "The hour (of judgment) will not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them. There is a Jew behind me come and kill him."^[11]

This is not the first time that the U.S. government is fighting alongside extremists against states that they perceive as barriers to the proliferation of their economic, geopolitical and imperial agendas, while at the same time pretending to combat "terrorism", "ethnic cleansing" and other crimes against humanity.

All things considered, the hypocrisy is plainly clear. It is therefore not only necessary but also imperative to oppose the dangerous propaganda and warmongering spread by the most aggressive factions within the U.S. and Israeli establishments, and ensure that truth prevails over rampant militarization.

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Notes

- [1] <http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/story/2012-01-08/iran-nuclear-weapons/52451620/1>.
- [2] http://www.adl.org/main_International_Affairs/ahmadinejad_words.htm.
- [3] <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/iran.html>.
- [4] <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293359/Iran>.
- [5] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEDqygQMoZ8&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL77FD8F72F884C7F8.
- [6] Original article: <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=398274b5-9210-43e4-ba59-fa24f4c66ad4&k=28534&p=1>.
- [7] <http://www.canada.com/nationalpost/news/story.html?id=6df3e493-f350-4b53-bc16-53262b49a4f7>
- [8] <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/07/14/talking-to-iran-s-only-jewish-member-of-parliament>.
- [9] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7119474.stm>.
- [10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdol_Hosseini_Sardari.
- [11] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2077658/The-Arabic-textbooks-children-chop-hands-feet-Sharia-law.html>.

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