

UNHOLY HATREDS: HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND ANTISEMITISM IN IRAN

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Never before has a head of state called into question the reality of the Holocaust so vociferously as the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. A provisional high point in his campaign was reached with the conference “Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision,” hosted by the Iranian regime on 11-12 December 2006 in Teheran. The more than 60 participants from thirty different countries included the former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke, the nutty followers of the Jewish sect *Neturei Karta*, officials of Germany’s neo-Nazi German National Party (NPD), as well as the usual crowd of Holocaust deniers. Fredrick Toeben delivered a lecture entitled “The Holocaust — A Murder Weapon,” Robert Faurisson referred to the Shoah as a “fairytale,” while his colleague Veronika Clarke from the United States explained that “the Jews made money in Auschwitz.” A certain Professor McNalley declared that regarding the Holocaust as a fact is as ludicrous as believing in “magicians and witches,” whilst the Belgian Leonardo Clerici offered the following explanation in his capacity as a Muslim: “I believe that the value of metaphysics is greater than the value of history.”¹

Had such a gathering taken place in a pub somewhere in Melbourne, hardly anyone would have paid any attention. The gathering took on historical significance only because it happened by invitation and on the premises of the Iranian foreign ministry: hosted by the government of a country that disposes of the world’s largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia and the largest natural gas reserves after Russia. In this setting, even the most delusional phantasms did not provoke laughter, but attentive nodding and applause. On the walls, there hung photos of corpses with the caption “myth,” as well as photos of laughing concentration camp survivors with the caption “truth.”

The Teheran deniers conference marks a turning point because for the first time the leadership of a large and important state has put Holocaust denial at the center of its foreign policy agenda. The founding conception of the United Nations, created in the 1940s as a response to the massacres of the Second World War, has never been challenged in a more provocative fashion. It is clear that this is precisely the point of the exercise for the Iranian elites. Mohammed Ali Ramin, one of Ahmadinejad’s closest advisors who was charged with the preparation of the Holocaust conference, compared this “second historical conference, that took place in Teheran” with the famous Teheran Conference of the WWII Allied Powers in 1943. Just like the first

¹ These quotes are taken from the most comprehensive documentation of the conference to date, translated (into German) and published by the Iran research section of Honestly-Concerned.org, 14 Dec. 2006 under the title “Die staatlich organisierte Teheraner Hasspropagandakonferenz...”
<http://www.honestlyconcerned.info/bin/articles.cgi?ID=IR4306&Category=ir&Subcategory=19>

Teheran Conference, so too the second would “change the face of the world,” he enthused.²

But the Teheran deniers conference marks a turning point not only because of its state sponsorship, but also because of its purpose. Up until now, Holocaust deniers wanted to revise the past. Today, Iran wants to shape the future: to prepare the next Holocaust. In his opening speech to the conference, Iranian Foreign Minister Manucher Mottaki left no doubt that the aim is the destruction of Israel: if “the official version of the Holocaust is called into question,” Mottaki said, then “the nature and identity of Israel” must also be called into question.³ By denying the particularity of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, a central motive for the establishment of the State of Israel is debased. Consideration of Auschwitz is delegitimized in order to prepare a second anti-Jewish genocide. If, however, the Holocaust did occur after all, then — per Ahmadinejad’s rhetoric — Israel has even less of a reason to be in Palestine, but should be transplanted instead to Europe. One way or another, the result is the same: Israel must vanish.

This was the sole reason for Iran attaching so much importance to the participation of the delegation from the Jewish sect, *Neturei Karta*. Although *Neturei Karta* does not deny the Holocaust, it welcomes the abolition of Israel. This objective was the common denominator uniting all the participants in the conference. In his closing speech, Ahmadinejad formulated his aim with unmistakable clarity: “The life-curve of the Zionist regime has begun its descent, and it is now on a downward slope towards its fall. ... The Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated.”⁴

HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND THE NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Just as Hitler sought to “liberate” humanity by murdering the Jews, so Ahmadinejad believes that he can “liberate” humanity through the violent eradication of Israel. The deniers conference as an instrument for propagating this project is intimately linked to the nuclear program as an instrument for realizing it.

The nuclear program is already being celebrated in Iran as otherwise only the 12th Imam has been celebrated before: as a sort of divine apparition that will drive all injustice from the earth. Thus, in April 2006, in a cult-like ceremony, Ahmadinejad unveiled two metal containers in which were to be found Iran’s first independently enriched uranium. Choirs thundered “*Allahu Akbar*” as exotically clad dancers whirled ecstatically around the containers and lifted them heroically toward the sky in the style of Maoist opera.

² Interview with the conservative Iranian website “Baztab,” 27 Dec. 2006 (www.baztab.ir/news/56550.php). Cited from the (German) translation of the Iran Research Section of Honestly Concerned: “Interview mit Mohammad Ali Ramin”, 7 January 2007.

³ Boris Kalnoky, “Iran versammelt die Holocaust-Leugner,” *Die Welt*, 12 Dec. 2006.

⁴ Yigal Carmon, “The Role of Holocaust Denial in the Ideology and Strategy of the Iranian Regime,” Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) Inquiry and Analysis Series, no. 307, 15 Dec. 2006.

Five years ago, in December 2001, the former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani first boasted that “the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything,” whereas the damage to the Islamic world of a potential nuclear retaliatory attack could be limited. “It is not irrational to contemplate such an eventuality,” he said.⁵ While the Islamic world could sacrifice hundreds of thousands of “martyrs” in an Israeli riposte without disappearing — thus the logic of Rafsanjani’s calculation — Israel would be relegated to history after the first bomb. It is precisely this suicidal mentality that distinguishes the Iranian nuclear weapons program from the programs of all other countries and that makes it particularly dangerous.

The ideology of martyrdom is the most important heritage that the Ayatollah Khomeini bequeathed to his successors. Life was always regarded by him as valueless and death rather as the beginning of true life. “The natural world,” Khomeini explained in October 1980, “is the lowest element, the scum of creation.” What is decisive is the beyond: the “divine world that is eternal.”⁶ This latter world is accessible to martyrs. Their death is no death, but merely the transition from this world to the world beyond, where they will live on eternally and in splendor. Whether the warrior wins the battle or loses it and dies a martyr, in both cases, his victory is assured: either a mundane victory or a spiritual one.

It is only against the background of these theological convictions that we can comprehend the readiness of Khomeini and some of his followers even to sacrifice Iran itself, if necessary, in order to wipe out Israel. In 1980, Khomeini summed up this mentality as follows: “We do not worship Iran, we worship Allah. For patriotism is another name for paganism. I say let this land [Iran] burn. I say let this land go up in smoke, provided Islam emerges triumphant in the rest of the world.”⁷

Whereas the majority of Iranians and even a large part of the clerical elite would presumably reject such a scenario, the radical Islamist camp appears precisely to be preparing for it. A recent statement by Mohammad Hassan Rahimian, representative of the Iranian revolutionary guide Ali Khamenei, makes this unmistakably clear. On 16 November 2006, Rahimian explained: “The Jew” — not the Zionist, but the Jew! — “is the most obstinate enemy of the devout. And the main war will determine the destiny of mankind.... The reappearance of the twelfth Imam will lead to a war between Israel and the Shia.”⁸

⁵ Quoted in MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, no. 324, 3 Jan. 2002.

⁶ Cited in Daniel Brumberg, “Khomeini’s Legacy: Islamic Rule and Islamic Social Justice,” in *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamental Leaders of the Middle East*, ed. R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 56.

⁷ From *A Selection of the Imam’s Speeches*, vol. 3 (Teheran 1981), 109; quoted in Amir Taheri, *Nest of Spies: America’s Journey to Disaster in Iran* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 269.

⁸ *ISNA*, 16 Nov. 2006, <http://isna.ir/Main/NewsViews.aspx?ID=News-825902>, translated and quoted by the Iran research section of *Honestly-Concerned.org*, 17 Nov. 2006.

Iran, the first country to make Holocaust denial a matter of foreign policy, is likewise the first openly to threaten another UN member state with annihilation. In light of this objective, however, why would those in power in Teheran call into doubt Hitler's Holocaust, rather than praising it? After all, in the Arab world, where Ahmadinejad's campaign has enjoyed the most enthusiastic reception, Hitler is admired and he is admired not for building highways or conquering Paris, but precisely for murdering Jews. Why should Holocaust-denial be most widespread in a region where admiration for Hitler remains to this day commonplace? How do Holocaust denial and admiration for Hitler go together? The key to the resolution of this paradox is to be found in the peculiarities of the antisemitic mind-set.

“BROTHER HITLER,” “EICHMANN, THE MARTYR”

Holocaust denial is an extreme form of antisemitism. Whoever declares Auschwitz to be a “myth” implicitly portrays the Jews as the enemy of humankind, who for filthy lucre has been duping the rest of humanity for the past sixty years. Whoever talks of the “so-called” Holocaust suggests that over ninety percent of the world's media and university professorships are controlled by Jews and thereby cut off from the “real” truth. In this way, precisely that sort of genocidal hatred gets incited that helped prepare the way for the Shoah. Every denial of the Holocaust thus tacitly contains an appeal to repeat it.

In April 2002, an Egyptian columnist for the state-controlled newspaper *Al Akhbar*, Egypt's second-largest daily, wrote:

The entire matter [the Holocaust], as many French and British scientists and researchers have proven, is nothing more than a huge Israeli plot aimed at extorting the German government in particular and the European countries in general. But I, personally and in light of this imaginary tale, complain to Hitler, even saying to him from the bottom of my heart, “If only you had done it, brother, if only it had really happened, so that the world could sigh in relief [without] their evil and sin.”⁹

The citation illustrates how the Holocaust can be denied and celebrated at the same time.

Often, however, the enthusiasm for the Shoah is expressed without reservations. In 1961, at a time when the trial of Adolf Eichmann dominated the headlines, this became evident for the first time. The Jordanian *Jerusalem Times* published an “Open Letter to Eichmann,” which stated: “By liquidating six millions you have...conferred a real blessing on humanity... But the brave Eichmann finds solace in the fact that this trial will one day culminate in the liquidation of the remaining six million to avenge your blood.”¹⁰ Arab writers such as Abdallah al-Tall eulogized “the martyr

⁹ Quoted in MEMRI, Report no. 375, 3 May 2002.

¹⁰ *Jerusalem Times*, 24 Apr. 1961, quoted in Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 279.

Eichmann,” “who fell in the Holy War.”¹¹ In her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt summarized the mood in the Arab world as follows:

The newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not conceal either their sympathy for Eichmann nor their regret that he “did not finish the job”; a radio broadcast from Cairo on the opening day of the trial even included a little sideswipe at the Germans, reproaching them for the fact that “in the last war, no German plane had ever flown over and bombed a Jewish settlement.”¹²

This heartfelt desire to see all Jews exterminated was reiterated in the Egyptian daily *Al-Akbbar* in April 2001 by the columnist Achmad Ragab: “[Give] thanks to Hitler. He took revenge on the Israelis in advance, on behalf of the Palestinians. Our one complaint against him was that his revenge was not complete enough.”¹³

It is obvious that from a logical point of view, such enthusiasm for the Holocaust is incompatible with its denial. Logic, however, is beside the point. Antisemitism builds upon an emotional infrastructure that substitutes for logic and reason an ephemeral combination of mutually exclusive attributions, whose only common denominator is the exterminatory hatred of everything Jewish. Thus all the different and contradictory versions of an anti-Jewish interpretation of the Holocaust can be deployed simultaneously: first, the enthusiastic “Hurrah!” for the millionfold extermination; second, the indignant “proof” that this millionfold extermination is an invention of the Zionists; third, the allegation of a Jewish conspiracy against Germany that Hitler effectively thwarted and punished; fourth, the certainty that the Holocaust was the product of a joint enterprise between the Zionists and Nazis; fifth, the accusation that the very same Zionists exaggerated the murder of the Jews with their “Holocaust industry” for obvious reasons; sixth, the accusation that Israeli actions against the Palestinians represent the “true” Holocaust—and so on and so forth.

We are dealing here with a phantasmagoric parallel universe in which the reality principle is constantly ignored and blatantly contradictory notions about Jews all have their place so long as they serve to confirm the antisemitic paranoia and hatred: a universe from which the laws of reason have been excluded and all mental energy is harnessed for the cause of antisemitism.

For all its confusion, this universe is characterized by two constants: firstly, by the refusal to come to terms with the facts of the Holocaust as it actually took place; secondly, by the willingness to see in the Holocaust — however much refracted — a source of encouragement and inspiration: a kind of precedent that proves that it is possible to murder Jews by the millions. This is why the exact wording of

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Munich 1986), 81.

¹³ Ragab in *Al-Akbbar*, 20 Apr. 2001. He repeated the remark in *Al-Akbbar*, 25 Apr. 2001 and 27 May 2001. See also Anti-Defamation League, “Holocaust Denial in the Middle East: The Latest Anti-Israel Propaganda Theme” (New York 2001), http://www.adl.org/holocaust/denial_ME/hdme_genocide_denial.asp

Ahmadinejad's Holocaust tirades is not the issue. He is obsessed with the subject because he is fascinated by the possibility of a second Holocaust.

Why, then, did Ahmadinejad demonstratively embrace the ultra-Orthodox Jews at the deniers conference? Why did he personally greet every Jew present and say that "Zionism should be strictly separated from the Jewish faith"? Is it perhaps true, as Baham Nirumand, the best-known and influential Iranian exile in Germany, has written, that Ahmadinejad's call to eliminate Israel and his Holocaust denial have "little to do" with antisemitism? "In Iran," Nirumand has written, "there would no basis for this, since Iranian Jews lived here for 2,000 years with persons of other faiths. Even in the Islamic state they are fully accepted as a community of faith and represented in the parliament by elected representatives. Up to now, Ahmadinejad has never criticized Jews as such, but above all the 'Zionist occupation power,' Israel."¹⁴ The following review of the history of the relationship between Jews and Shiites in Iran will answer this question.

NAJAS: THE SHIITE DOGMA OF THE "IMPURITY" OF THE JEWS

It is indeed true the Jews and Muslims share a history going back some 2,700 years in Iran. This does not mean, however, that Jews have enjoyed equality under the Shiite rule that began in 1501. On the contrary, in no other Islamic land were Jews so poorly treated and so brutally persecuted as in Persia. Thus Bernard Lewis, the dean of historians of Islam, writes, "Expulsion, forced conversion, and massacre—all three of rare occurrence in the Sunni lands—were features of life in Iran up to the nineteenth century."¹⁵ In 1830, 400 Jews in Tabriz had their throats slashed. In 1839, all the Jews in Mashhad were forced to convert to Islam. In 1910, following rumors of a ritual murder, 6,000 Jews in Shiraz were robbed of all their possessions: twelve were killed and another fifty wounded.¹⁶ "I do not know any more miserable, helpless, and pitiful individual on God's earth than the *Yabudi* in those countries," the Orientalist scholar Arminius Vambéry wrote in 1905 following his return from Persia: "The poor Jew is despised, belabored and tortured.... [H]e is the poorest of the poor."¹⁷

This inhuman treatment has to do with a particularity of the Shiite image of the Jew that has no counterpart in Sunni Islam. Only the Shiites established a system of "ritual purity," which bears similarities to the attitude of Hindus toward the Pariahs or "untouchables." This system draws on the Zoroastrianism that was the state religion in Persia before Islam.¹⁸ According to it, whoever is not Muslim is *najas* or

¹⁴ Baham Nirumand, "Der Verrückte aus Teheran," *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*, 23 June 2006.

¹⁵ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 40.

¹⁶ David Littmann, "Jews Under Muslim Rule: The Case of Persia," *The Wiener Library Bulletin* (ed. Robert S. Wistrich) 32, n.s. nos. 49/50 (1979): 4 and 12.

¹⁷ Cited from David Menashri, "The Jews of Iran," in *Antisemitism in Times of Crisis*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 354.

¹⁸ Founded by the ancient Iranian priest and prophet Zoroaster (630–553 BC), Zoroastrianism interprets world history as a struggle between the "spirit of good" (*Ako Mainyu*) and the "principle of

“impure.” All contact with a Najas is considered a sort of poisoning. The paranoid fear of “infection” provoked periodic excesses and led to the development of a particular Shiite code of conduct, which especially affected Jews, since unlike the Armenian Christians and the small Zoroastrian community, the Jewish minority was present throughout the country. Its members had to live in ghettos and were not permitted to go out when it rained or snowed, in order to prevent their “impurity” from spreading and coming into contact with Muslims. For the same reason, they were prohibited from visiting public baths or having any contact with the food and drink of Muslims.¹⁹

Officially, these rules were abolished when the Pahlavi dynasty came to power. But the orthodox clergy continued to insist on them. Thus, in 1962, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, later the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, explicitly propagated the *najas* doctrine in a widely disseminated handbook titled “Clarification of the Problems: a Guide to Muslims in their Daily Life.” He noted:

There are eleven things which make unclean: 1. urine; 2. faeces; 3. sperm; 4. carrion; 5. blood; 6. dog; 7. pig; 8. unbeliever; 9. wine; 10. beer; 11. the sweat of a camel which eats unclean things.

In a gloss on number 8, he adds: “The entire body of the unbeliever is unclean; even his hair and nails and body moistures are unclean.” There is, however, some hope: “When a non-Muslim man or woman is converted to Islam, their body, saliva, nasal secretions, and sweat are ritually clean. If, however, their clothes were in contact with their sweaty body before their conversion, these remain unclean.”²⁰

These prescriptions demonstrate the Manichaeism of Shiite Islam: unmitigated image of the absolute enemy, the conviction that the Shiites are the true successors of Mohammed and messianic belief in the return of the “Twelfth Imam.” The image of the enemy even has biological connotations and is distinguished by a distinctly physical disgust. Nonetheless, there is an important difference between this Shiite conception and that of the Nazis since the option of conversion did not exist in the delirious, racially-structured universe of the National Socialists.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Khomeini did not officially require the application of the *najas* doctrine. Nonetheless, it was discreetly practiced. Thus, for example, Eliz Sanasarian writes of a beverage factory in which the employment of Armenian Christians was prohibited, such that “impure” non-Muslims would not come into contact with the liquids that Muslims would consume or the bottles that contained them.²¹ Roya Hakakian recalls that in the mid-1980s, the water fountains

evil” (*Abriman*). In this dualistic system, *Abriman* is regarded as “the source of everything that is bad and impure, a murderer and destroyer, and the cause of 9,999 diseases.” See Gerhard J. Bellinger, *Knaurs Grosser Religionsführer* (München: Droemer, 1986), 420.

¹⁹ Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 33ff, Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 356.

²⁰ *Risala-i Tawziḥ al-Masa’il* (Teheran 1962), cited in Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 34.

²¹ Eliz Sanasarian, cited in Andrew G. Bostom, “The Ayatollahs’ Final Solution?”

FrontPageMagazine.com, 5 July 2004 www.frontpagemag.com/articles/Printable.asp?ID=14071

and restrooms in her school in Teheran bore signs reading “For Muslims Only.”²² Asked about non-Muslims in the late 1980s, a Sheik named Murtesa from the religious center of Qum gave the following symptomatic response: “[They] are impure in two important areas. 1) They are physically impure as they don’t keep *taharat* (cleanness).... 2) Since they do not believe in Islam, their breath is *haram* (unclean).... If I had to shake hands with (such) a man...I would then take a shower and wash my entire body as soon as I could get to my hotel room.”²³

Up till today, Jews living in Iran continue to feel the aftereffects of the *najas* tradition. Still more massive, however, are the effects of the antisemitic campaigns unleashed by Khomeini in the 1960s that would help to bring him to power in 1979.

KHOMEINI’S ANTISEMITISM

During the reigns of Reza Shah (1925–1941) and of his son Mohammed Reza Shah (1941–1979), Iranian Jews enjoyed political equality, cultural autonomy, and also an increasing level of economic security. Nonetheless, even if unofficial, Judeophobia continued to exist. David Menashri, himself an Iranian Jew who lived through this period, writes: “On many occasions (mainly in small towns, or in the bazaars), they were even threatened, and sometimes insulted and beaten up. There were numerous anti-Jewish articles and even more so anti-Jewish remarks and expressions (in speeches, media reports, cartoons, etc.).”²⁴

From 1963 onward, Khomeini, the most important opponent of the Shah, recognized the mobilizing power of antisemitism and exploited it himself. “I know that you do not want Iran to be under the boot of the Jews,” he cried out to his supporters on 13 April 1963.²⁵ In the same year, he called the Shah a Jew in disguise and accused him of taking orders from Israel.²⁶ The response was enormous: Khomeini had found his theme. Khomeini’s biographer Amir Taheri writes:

The Ayatollah was by now convinced that the central political theme of contemporary life was an elaborate and highly complex conspiracy by the Jews—“who controlled everything”—to “emasculate Islam” and dominate the world thanks to the natural wealth of the Muslim nations.²⁷

From this point on, hatred of Jews—both in its atavistic Shiite form and in the form of modern antisemitism — would remain a central component of the Islamist ideology of Iran.

²² Roya Hakakian, “Reading the Holocaust Cartoons in Tehren,” *New York Times*, 2 Sept. 2006.

²³ Tahmoores Sarraf, *Cry of a Nation: The Saga of the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 111ff.

²⁴ Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 359.

²⁵ Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, *Gott in Teheran: Irans Islamische Republik* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 260, n. 26.

²⁶ Amir Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini & the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Adler and Adler, 1986), 131ff.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

When in June 1963 thousands of Khomeini-influenced theology students set off to Teheran for a demonstration and were brutally stopped by the Shah's security forces, Khomeini channeled all the anger toward foreign Jews:

Israel does not want the Koran to survive in this country.... It is destroying us. It is destroying you and the nation. It wants to take possession of the economy. It wants to demolish our trade and agriculture. It wants to grab the wealth of the country.²⁸

After the Six-Day War of 1967, the antisemitic agitation, which did not differentiate between Jews and Israelis, intensified. “[I]t was [the Jews] who first established anti-Islamic propaganda and engaged in various stratagems, and as you can see, this activity continues down to the present,” Khomeini wrote in 1970 in his main work *Islamic Government*.²⁹ “[T]he Jews...wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world,” he continued, “Since they are a cunning and resourceful group of people, I fear that...they may one day achieve their goal.”³⁰ In September 1977, he declared finally: “The Jews have grasped the world with both hands and are devouring it with an insatiable appetite, they are devouring America and have now turned their attention to Iran and still they are not satisfied.”³¹

Two years later, Khomeini was the unchallenged leader of the Iranian revolution. His antisemitic tirades found favor with the opponents of the Shah, both Leftists and Islamists. Khomeini's antisemitism ran along the same lines as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which were republished in Persian in the summer of 1978 and widely disseminated in order to serve as a weapon against the Shah, Israel, and the Jews.

During the revolutionary period, between September 1977 and February 1979, the situation of Jews in Iran was highly precarious. David Menashri cites the threats circulated by the National Front of Young Iranian Muslims in 1978:

O bloodthirsty people, who suck the blood of each one of us Muslims.... Now your golden dreams have come to an end. You are hereby warned that you must leave the country as soon as possible, otherwise we shall massacre all the Jews from the youngest to the oldest. Every age needs its Hitler to take care of the people of deceit and eradicate the offspring of the Jews from the earth, so that our brothers in religion in the Arab countries will live in peace.³²

²⁸ Henner Fürtig, “Die Bedeutung der iranischen Revolution von 1979 als Ausgangspunkt für eine antijüdisch orientierte Islamisierung,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 12 (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 77.

²⁹ Ayatollah Rouhollah Mousavi Khomeini, *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist* (Teheran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, International Affairs Division), 7. Page references are to the PDF version made available by the Iran Chamber Society at http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/ayatollah_khomeini.php

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

³¹ *Kautbar—An Anthology of the Speeches of Imam Khomeini (s.a.) 1962–1978* (Teheran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, International Affairs Division, vol. 1, 1995), 370.

³² Cited in Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 360.

Khomeini did not mince words either, as Meir Litvak shows: “Pointing to the ‘most noble messenger’ as his model, he reminds his readers that when the Jewish tribe of Banu Qurayza, who were a troublesome group, ‘caused corruption among the Muslims,’ the Prophet eliminated them.”³³

After the victory of the revolution in 1979, such rhetoric was toned down. Khomeini could ignore neither the signs of submission given by the Jewish community nor the precept of tolerance laid down in the Koran. In May 1979, he declared: “We distinguish between Jews and Zionists. Zionism has nothing to do with religion.”³⁴ From then on, Jews (like the Armenian Christians and Zoroastrians) were treated as wards of a traditional Islamic state—*Dhimmi*—according to the “principles of Islamic justice.” According to Article 14 of the Iranian constitution, “this principle is applied to everyone who does not participate in activities or conspiracies directed against Islam or the Islamic Republic of Iran.” In order to discourage such “conspiracies,” several Jewish leaders, including the former chair of the Jewish community, Habib Alqanayan, were sentenced to death and executed. The sole reason given was that they had ties to Israel and Zionism.

THE JEWS IN IRAN

From among the approximately 100,000 Jews who lived in Iran under the Shah, some 25,000 remained in Iran after Khomeini took power. The majority (around 15,000) live in Teheran; the rest, in Isfahan, Schiraz, and Hamedan. They thereby represent the largest Jewish community in any Muslim country. Jews were permitted to move out of their residential quarters and to some degree enter the Iranian mainstream. They are free to observe their religious traditions, relatively undisturbed, in over 100 synagogues across the country. At the same time, Jews in Iran are made clearly to feel their subordinate *Dhimmi* status. Thus, for example, they are excluded from “sensitive” senior posts in the military and judiciary. Jewish schools are required to have Muslim principals. They are forced to remain open on the Sabbath and Hebrew lessons are not permitted outside prayer time. Prayer books are printed in Farsi instead of Hebrew, as a means of controlling what is studied.³⁵

Again and again, the Iranian media and leadership attack Jews in general. They cite the anti-Jewish passages from the Sunna and the Koran, and they equate the alleged behavior of Israel with that of the Jewish tribes of Medina in the time of the Prophet.³⁶ It is suggested that there is a contemporary “Jewish threat” to Iran as well. The example of the Grand Ayatollah Noori Hamadani, for whom the redemption of

³³ Meir Litvak, “The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust: Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism,” *Journal of Israeli History* 25, no. 1 (Mar. 2006): 271.

³⁴ Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 363.

³⁵ Rachel Silverman, “It’s not the best place for Jews, but Iran’s home to a sizeable community,” *Jewish Telegraph Agency* (JTA), 4 June 2006; Ewen MacAskill, Simon Tisdall, and Robert Tait, “Iran’s Jews learn to live with Ahmadinejad,” *The Guardian*, 27 June 2006.

³⁶ Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 365f.

Muslims is tied to victory over “the Jews,” is instructive. “One should explain in the clearest terms the danger the Jews pose to the [Iranian] people and to the Muslims,” Noori Hamadani insisted in April 2005: “One should fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam [the Shiite Messiah] be met.” At the same, he praised Mohammed’s anti-Jewish massacre in 627 as a “step towards strengthening Islam, in order to crush the bastion of the global arrogance, and...to eradicate this cancerous tumor.”³⁷

Tolerance of the Jewish community in Iran is combined with the massive dissemination of antisemitic literature. Thus, in 1984, the newspaper *Imam*, published by the Iranian embassy in London, reprinted excerpts from the *Protocols*.³⁸ Somewhat later, the periodical *Eslami* serialized the *Protocols* under the title “The Smell of Blood: Jewish Conspiracies.”

Just two years ago, in 2005, at the Iranian stand at the Frankfurt Book Fair, I was readily able to purchase an English edition of the *Protocols* published by the Islamic Propagation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Other antisemitic literature was also available, such as Henry Ford’s *The International Jew*, and Mohammad Taqi Taqipour’s screed, *Tale of the “Chosen People” and the Legend of “Historical Right.”* The cover illustration on the latter volume had caught my eye: a red Star of David superimposed over a grey skull and a yellow map of the world.³⁹ Obviously, even after the death of Khomeini in 1989, the worldwide dissemination of antisemitism by Iran did not come to an end.

David Menashri is undoubtedly justified when he takes such propaganda as an indication of the regime’s real attitude toward Jews and points to the provisional nature and fragility of the tolerance that is, for the moment, still accorded to the Iranian Jewish community.⁴⁰ By virtue of the mixture of incitement and restraint practiced by the Iranian regime, the Jewish community has been kept in a permanent state of uncertainty since 1979 and this uncertainty has only increased since the election of Ahmadinejad. Whereas, on the one hand, the Iranian President cites the presence of a Jewish community for the media as proof of his lack of prejudice, at the same time he lets one of his closest advisors, Mohammed Ali Ramin, threaten Iranian Jews by invoking the *najas* doctrine. Thus, in June 2006, Ramin said: “Jews are a dirty people. That is why one has accused them throughout history of being responsible for the spread of deadly diseases and plagues.”⁴¹

³⁷ Litvak, “Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holocaust,” 272; and MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 897, 22 Apr. 2005. In 627, all the men (comprising some 600–900 individuals) in the last remaining Jewish tribe in Medina were killed by decapitation and all the women and children were sold into slavery.

³⁸ Robert Wistrich, *Der antisemitische Wahn* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1987), 320f.

³⁹ See <http://www.trans-int.com/news/archives/60-The-Protocols-of-the-Elders-of-Zion-at-the.html>

⁴⁰ Menashri, “Jews of Iran,” 364.

⁴¹ Ynet, 8 June 2006, cited from *Newsletter der israelischen Botschaft in Berlin*, 8 June 2006.

It is hardly any wonder, then, that the leaders of the Iranian Jewish community outdo themselves in offering gestures of subservience toward the regime. When, in June 1999, thirteen Iranian Jews were arrested for allegedly spying on behalf of Israel, the Jewish community found itself constrained to praise the Iranian government. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has demonstrated to the world," it declared in a statement, "that it has treated the Jewish community...well; ...the arrest and charges against a number of Iranian Jews has nothing to do with their religion."⁴² The community's statements from 2006 are similarly abject. Thus it congratulated the regime on the progress made in the Iranian nuclear program; it celebrated the martyrs of the war against Iraq; it expressed solidarity with the "Lebanese resistance" in its fight against Israel and it called on Jews the world over to condemn the "Israeli attacks" and an Israeli policy that "tramples upon the humane tenets of the Jewish tradition."⁴³

Today, the Jewish community serves Ahmadinejad not only as an alibi in his power game, but also increasingly as a deterrent: in the event of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, the community would find itself held hostage and vulnerable to acts of reprisal. Irrespective of the latitude that Ahmadinejad has for the time being left the Iranian Jews, his rhetoric is steeped in an antisemitism that is unprecedented for a head of state after the Second World War.

AHMADINEJAD'S ANTISEMITISM

What thoughts crossed the mind of the Iranian President as he embraced the Jews of the *Neturei Karta* sect at the deniers conference in Teheran? Was his first thought "so nice of you to help me!"? Or did he think rather "You idiots! You'll soon be next!"? We do not know. And we do not know either whether he had a shower after the meeting.

Ahmadinejad is not a racist Social Darwinist, who, like Hitler, wants to eliminate every last trace of "Jewish blood." He does not attack "the Jews," but rather "the Zionists." He claims, "Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world."⁴⁴ He says, "The Zionists" have for the last sixty years blackmailed "all western governments."⁴⁵ "The Zionists have imposed themselves on a substantial portion of the banking, financial, cultural and media sectors."⁴⁶ "The Zionists" fabricated the Danish Muhammad cartoons. "The Zionists" are responsible for the destruction of the dome of the Golden Mosque in Iraq.⁴⁷ But he invests the word "Zionist" with exactly the same sense as that with which Hitler once invested the word "Jew":

⁴² Andrew G. Bostom, "The Ayatollahs' Final Solution?," *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 5 July 2004.

⁴³ See the homepage of the "Teheran Jewish Committee," www.iranjewish.com

⁴⁴ Hooman Majd, "Mahmoud and Me," *New York Observer*, 2 Oct. 2006.

⁴⁵ MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 1091, 14 Feb. 2006.

⁴⁶ From "Letter to the Noble Americans," available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/11/29/ahmadinejad.letter/>

⁴⁷ *WorldNetDaily*, 11 Feb. 2006.

namely, that of being the incarnation of all evil. Even if the regime tolerates the Jewish community of Teheran, by making Jews responsible for all the ills of the world—whether as “Judases” or “Zionists”—it gives vent to antisemitism of a genocidal nature. Demonization of Jews, Holocaust denial, and the will to eliminate Israel—these are three elements of an ideological constellation that collapses as soon as one of the pillars is removed.

The morbid fantasies of Ahmadinejad and his supporters are impervious to reality. Consider, for example, the case of the Iranian historian who on Iranian television touted his “discovery” that in 1883 French Jews murdered 150 Christian children in the suburbs of Paris, to use their blood in the baking of matzah bread. The actual revelation, however, was not supposed to be the alleged murder, but rather the fact that while the memory of the murder had lived on in the souls of Europeans, “the incident is, regrettably, never mentioned—due to the growing influence of the Zionist lobby in Europe—or, more precisely, the influence of the Jews.”⁴⁸ Could there be any clearer proof of how helpless Europe is in the face of the Zionists and their media empires?

Circular reasoning such as the foregoing is not susceptible of refutation. The louder the liberal West protests against Iran’s Holocaust denial or threats to destroy Israel, the clearer is the proof of Zionist domination. In a conversation with the editors of the German news weekly *Spiegel*, the Iranian President reacted as follows to the remark that Israel’s right to exist is not questioned by the magazine: “I am glad that you are honest people and say that you are required to support the Zionists.”⁴⁹ Only if the West finally realized that the Holocaust is a Jewish lie and only if it wanted to annihilate Israel, would Ahmadinejad be convinced that we are “scientifically” credible and politically free. It is this maddening circularity that characterizes contemporary Iranian Holocaust denial and that makes the revolutionary mission of the Iranian leadership so dangerous.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL AS LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Whoever denies the Holocaust kills the victims a second time. To destroy the memory of the victims completes the work of their extermination. This has nothing to do with freedom of opinion in the sense of human rights protections: Article 17 of the European Human Rights Convention lays down that there is no right to undermine the rights and freedoms that the convention is meant to protect.⁵⁰ And Holocaust denial has absolutely nothing to do with science: there is no other crime in history that has been so precisely described by perpetrators, victims, and external

⁴⁸ “Iranian TV Blood Libel: Jewish Rabbis killed Hundreds of European Children to use Their Blood for Passover Holiday,” MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 1053, 22 Dec. 2005.

⁴⁹ “Wir sind entschlossen,” Interview with Mahmud Ahmadinejad, *Spiegel* 22/2006, 29 May 2006.

⁵⁰ Article 17 of the European Convention on Human Rights reads: “Nothing in this Convention may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or perform any act aimed at the destruction on any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.”

observers. Whereas serious research on the Holocaust may modify previous findings on the basis of established facts, Holocaust deniers only acknowledge those facts that fit their antisemitic worldview.

The novelty of Ahmadinejad consists in his fusing Holocaust denial with the historical claim of Shiite Islam to be the religion of the politically dispossessed. Ahmadinejad is the first to celebrate the intellectual and moral crime of Holocaust denial in adopting the stance of a freedom fighter. Until now, Holocaust denial has been a marginal addition to the traditional antisemitic arsenal, serving the struggle to reduce alleged Jewish influence. Integrating antisemitism into his discourse of global populism, Ahmadinejad has inserted it within the opposition between freedom and enslavement. "They are allowed to study anything except for the Holocaust myth," Ahmadinejad said of Europeans in February 2006: "Are these not medieval methods?... On the face of it, the technology has changed, but the culture and the way of thinking remain medieval."⁵¹

In this way, Ahmadinejad has managed to make Holocaust denial a mark of progressiveness and to place the Teheran conference under the sign of "freedom of thought." "It would be good for Mr. Blair to participate in the Holocaust seminar in Teheran," the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Hamid Reza Asefi, explained, since at the conference Blair would be able to "say the kind of things he cannot say in London."⁵² But who was it that suppressed freedom of opinion at 10 Downing Street? In this connection as well, Ahmadinejad had a ready answer: "The pillaging Zionist regime has managed, for 60 years, to extort all Western governments on the basis of this myth [of the Holocaust].... They are hostages in the hands of the Zionists."⁵³

Since December 2005, the Iranian President has placed the denial of the Holocaust at the center of his agitation. During this time, the Iranian regime has spared no effort to establish the "exposure" of the "Holocaust Myth" as a new historiographical paradigm. Thus the "lie about the Holocaust" has become a regular topic of televised Friday sermons.⁵⁴ Talk shows on public television feature a parade of historians who mock the "fairy tale about the gas chambers." The Iranian state press agency has developed into a platform for Holocaust deniers from all over the world.

⁵¹ MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 1091, 14 Feb. 2006

<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP109106>

⁵² "Iran Sends Blair Invitation to Holocaust Conference," Deutsche Welle, 18 Jan. 2006.

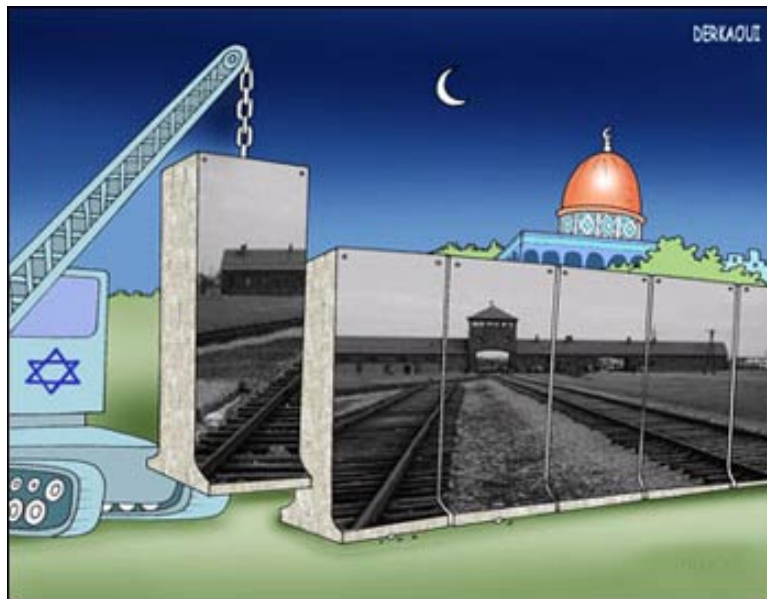
⁵³ MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 1091, 14 Feb. 2006

<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP109106>

⁵⁴ MEMRI, Special Report, no. 39, 5 Jan. 2006

<http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sr&ID=SR3906>

THE “HOLOCAUST INTERNATIONAL CARTOON CONTEST”



First Prize: Derkaoui Abdellah (Morocco)



Special Prize: Naji Benaji (Morocco)



Special Prize: Casso (Brazil)



Special Prize: Mahmoud Nazari (Iran)

The “Holocaust International Cartoon Contest” announced by the Iranian newspaper *Hamshabri* in February 2006 revealed the new style of Iranian Holocaust denial: creative, modern, unrestrained, and self-assertive. *Hamshabri* has the largest circulation of any paper in Iran and it is publicly owned by the city of Teheran. “Whether or not there was a Holocaust, that is up to the cartoonists to decide,” Achmed Kasemi, one of the organizers of the contest, said.⁵⁵ The newspaper received over 1000 submissions from 62 countries. In fall 2006, a selection of 200 cartoons was exhibited in the Palestine Museum in Teheran. This will undoubtedly have been the first internationally publicized exhibition of antisemitic art since 1945. The exhibit was opened by Saffar Harandi, the Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. The ambassador of Lebanon and the representative of the Palestinian territories figured among the foreign dignitaries present.⁵⁶ The first prize of \$12,000 went to a cartoon by a Moroccan that drew parallels between Israel’s controversial security barrier and Auschwitz. The second and third prizes went to cartoons that present the Holocaust as a crude fabrication. The former depicts a stage backdrop that has been knocked over and that is meant to represent a gas chamber and crematorium: “Who knocked that down?” one Jew asks; “Faurrison,” replies another. The latter shows two grinning soldiers above a freshly dug mass grave in which they are placing not real corpses, but merely paper cut-outs. There appear, then, not to have been real victims.⁵⁷

Up to 2006, we associated Holocaust denial with the self-styled “expert” opinions of individual cranks in various countries or with the small disparate band of neo-Nazis. Ostracized by society as obscurantists, the Holocaust deniers had to struggle for every millimeter of respectability they could muster. Now, Ahmadinejad has reversed the customary roles: it is not the Holocaust denier who has to justify himself—but the non-denier. It is not the denier who must struggle for his freedom; it is rather the non-deniers—like Tony Blair, for example—who are not free. Such inversions suggest that Iranian Holocaust deniers are after more than just disseminating anti-Israeli propaganda. For them, the rewriting of history is an inherent part of a global Islamist mission.

“HISTORICAL WAR”

In his first speech on the guiding principles of his politics, Ahmadinejad made this clear. “We are in the process of an historical war,... and this war has been going on for hundreds of years,” he declared in October 2005. This is a war, then, that has nothing to do originally with the Middle East conflict and that will be far from over even when Israel has been eliminated. He continued: “We have to understand the depth of the disgrace of the enemy, until our holy hatred expands continuously and

⁵⁵ Matthias Küntzel, “Die zweite Spaltung der Welt,” *Internationale Politik* (Apr. 2006): 75.

⁵⁶ Baham Nirumand, “Holocaust-Ausstellung in Teheran,” *Tageszeitung (taz)*, 16 Aug. 2006.

⁵⁷ See <http://www.irancartoon.com/120/holocaust>

strikes like a wave.”⁵⁸ This “holy hatred” is boundless and unconditional. It will not be mitigated by any form of Jewish or non-Jewish conduct—other than subordination under the Sharia or Koran.

In his letter to George W. Bush, the Iranian President described the objective of his mission: “Those with insights can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems.” We are also told in this letter just how he thinks the liberal democracies will be shattered. Even here, if albeit in slightly diluted form, the ideology of martyrdom—*you love life, we love death*—is propagated: “A bad ending belongs only to those who have chosen the life of this world.... A good land and eternal paradise belong to those servants who fear His majesty and do not follow their lascivious selves.”

In the Shiite version of Islamism, we are confronted with an opponent who combats the achievements of modernity as Satan’s deed, who denounces the system of international relations that was created after 1945 as a “Jewish-Christian conspiracy,” and who therefore wishes to overturn the accepted historiography of this system. At the start of the deniers conference, Foreign Minister Mottaki explained that the problem is that the “wording of historical occurrences and their analysis [are written from] the perspective of the West.”⁵⁹ As against this “Western” historiography, Islamism seeks to create a new historical “truth,” in which the Holocaust is declared a myth, while the Twelfth Imam is deemed to be real. Whereas the delusional system of Holocaust denial is elevated to the norm, any divergence from the latter is denounced as a symptom of “Jewish domination.”

Even as he is conducting his religious war, Ahmadinejad also plays the role of a global populist. His speeches are addressed to all the world’s “oppressed.” He cultivates good relations with Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez and ingratiates himself with the Western Left by employing anti-American rhetoric. His use of the word “Zionist” is particularly relevant in this connection as well. It is the Trojan horse under cover of which he makes his antisemitism respectable: allowing him to be all at once antisemite and Holocaust denier, on the one hand, and spokesman of the so-called “oppressed nations,” on the other.

This is why the Iranian leadership vehemently denies the charges of antisemitism as well as all sympathy for Nazism. Islam, Mottaki explained in his opening address, “stands in clear contradiction to racist and Nazi ideology.” “I say to you unequivocally,” he continued, “that Judeophobia is a western phenomenon that only concerns western States. There has never been such a thing in the Islamic states.”⁶⁰ Ahmadinejad’s highly publicized embrace of the Jews present at the deniers conference—who were later even accorded a special audience with the President—

⁵⁸ Quoted in MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series, no. 1013, 28 Oct. 2005.

⁵⁹ Iran Research of Honestly-Concerned.org, “Die staatlich organisierte Teheraner Hasspropagandakonferenz...,”

<http://www.honestlyconcerned.info/bin/articles.cgi?ID=IR4306&Category=ir&Subcategory=19>

⁶⁰ Honestly Concerned, Iran Research section.

was meant to support this claim and to demonstrate to the world that while Iran fights Zionism as a political movement, it respects Jews as representatives of a religion. The pictures of anti-Israel Jews with their broad-brimmed hats amicably exchanging business cards with the equally anti-Israel Muslim clergy were beamed around the world: pictures of brotherhood and harmony that create the impression that it is indeed first in a “world without Zionism” that perpetual peace will break out. In keeping with this image, four weeks after the deniers conference, Ahmadinejad was greeted by Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who praised him as a “fighter for just causes, a revolutionary and a brother,” and then warmly received by yet another icon of the Left, Nicaragua’s president Daniel Ortega.⁶¹

Although Holocaust denial is not a popular theme for the Iranian population and has drawn criticism even from within the ranks of the Mullah’s regime,⁶² Ahmadinejad and his allies persist in their campaign. There are plans to make the cartoon contest and exhibition yearly events. “We will continue until the destruction of Israel,” the curator of the 2006 version of the exhibit insisted.⁶³ This appears also to be the motto of the organizer of the deniers conference, Mohammad Ali Ramin. Thus in January 2007, he explained:

The participants in the Holocaust conference have created the “World Foundation for Holocaust Research” and I will be the director of this foundation. The headquarters of the foundation is for the moment in Teheran. If, however, at some point the European governments—Germany, for example—are prepared to guarantee the freedom of opinion of independent researchers, we will move the headquarters from Teheran to Berlin.⁶⁴

Iranian historians have already made queries in Poland as to whether they might undertake certain “calculations” in Auschwitz. In this case, however, their request fell on deaf ears. It “goes beyond every imaginable norm to call into question this matter, to discuss it, or to negotiate about it,” then Polish Foreign Minister Stefan Meller remarked.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, on January 8, 2007, the Iranian government filed a complaint with the UN Human Rights Council against those who do *not* deny the Holocaust. “History cannot be rewritten as it pleases the Israeli regime,” Alireza Moayera, Iran’s representative to the Council, wrote in his letter to its president, Luis Alfonso de Alba: “It cannot be manipulated and hand-picked selectively... based on the political agenda or historical ambitions of this regime.”

Translated from German by John Rosenthal

⁶¹ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 Jan. 2007.

⁶² Criticism of Teheran Holocaust Denial Conference in Arab and Iranian Media, in MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, no. 1425, 16 Jan. 2007.

⁶³ “Iran: Moroccan Wins Holocaust Cartoon Contest,” *New York Times*, 2 Nov. 2006.

⁶⁴ Honestly Concerned, Iran Research section, Interview with Mohammad Ali Ramin, 7 Jan. 2007.

⁶⁵ Spiegel-Online, 17 Feb. 2006.