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Bush's America and the New Exceptionalism: anti-Americanism, the Holocaust and the transatlantic rift

DAVID B MACDONALD

ABSTRACT *This article examines how the USA's growing 'Holocaust consciousness' has impacted on conservative interpretations of the transatlantic rift. Presenting the Holocaust as an antipode to US national identity has helped signal a moral divergence between the USA and Europe. The instrumentalisation of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism has allowed US conservatives to reframe norms of self-defence, victimisation, and liberation in justifying the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In the wake of Iraq claiming anti-Semitism as a 'European disease', and anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism as 'twin brothers', helps delegitimize European criticism of the war on terror. A new form of exceptionalism portrays the USA not only as the liberator of death camps and the protector of the Jewish people but, after 11 September, as a victim itself.*

In this article I critically examine how America's growing 'Holocaust consciousness' has affected conservative interpretations of the transatlantic rift. Presenting the Holocaust as an antipode to US national identity has helped conservatives signal a moral divergence between the USA and Europe. As the liberator of European Jews, the protector of Israel and the enemy of anti-Semitism and terrorism, the USA presents itself as a redeemer, allied with the 20th century's most prominent victims. While the USA is currently subject to anti-Americanism from various quarters, conservatives define this phenomenon narrowly, presenting it purely as an irrational and *offensive* prejudice, sometimes likened to anti-Semitism.

I begin with a general discussion of the transatlantic gap, before moving to US exceptionalism. I follow this with an overview of the Holocaust Americanisation process. Conservative instrumentalisation of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism deserves detailed scrutiny. Its purpose is to decontextualise criticisms of the USA's conservative turn since 2000. I conclude by asking

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whether conservatives are engaging in 'anti-Europeanism', a prejudice potentially as irrational as the one they claim to be combating.

Norms of self-defence, victimisation and liberation

Situating this article within constructivist IR scholarship, I argue that many US conservatives have promoted a discourse of victimisation through what Campbell has dubbed 'narrativising', a process of ordering and interpreting 'facts' to tell a story, complete with a 'cast of characters' both good and evil, and with 'lessons for the future'.¹ I take it that, while states respond to the international system and rely to some extent on 'facts', foreign and domestic policy is also consciously constructed by policy makers based on their interpretation of social reality. There is a distinction between "brute facts" about the world, which remain independent of human action, and "social facts" which depend for their existence on socially established conventions.²

Norms are particularly important. These can be defined as 'shared expectations about appropriate social behavior held by a community of actors',³ or as 'social rule[s] that do not depend on government for either promulgation or enforcement'.⁴ In constructivist accounts states 'learn' what constitutes proper behaviour from actors in the international system. They undergo a process of socialisation, first, through 'the emulation of other, successful states'; second, through 'praise by states and other actors for conformity'; third, by 'ridicule for deviation'; and finally by 'diplomatic and economic pressure'. This process is designed to 'induce norm breakers to become norm followers'. Compliance brings 'social worth' and enhances national 'esteem'.⁵

Yet state actors have differing ideas about norms and what they signify. Indeed, 'normative contestation is in large part what politics is all about: competing values and understandings of what is good, desirable and appropriate in our collective, communal life'.⁶ In the context of this article the Bush administration has faced problems justifying its doctrine of pre-emption (2002) and subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 without a UN Security Council mandate. This violates seven of the 10 'basic procedural norms of the global covenant' laid out by in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.⁷

In justifying its behaviour, the USA has invoked three norms of its own—those of 'self-defence', 'victimisation', and 'liberation'. One might contextualise the first norm as follows: 'If a state has reasonable grounds for believing itself to be in danger of being the victim of aggression, it has the right to act in self-defense'.⁸ Further, 'the defensive reaction must be proportionate to the danger, should not sacrifice others to minimize one's own risk, and cannot serve as a reprisal'. It should also be 'restricted to protection, not excessive or punitive measures aimed at redressing injuries'.⁹

This seems to fly in the face of the Bush administration's 'doctrine of pre-emption', which, as the president stated in 2002, is based on the notion that 'our best defense is a good offense'.¹⁰ While acting pre-emptively is legitimate if the state is faced with an obvious and immediate threat to its security, preventative or anticipatory war has been roundly condemned as

illegitimate.¹¹ The doctrine runs counter to long-held ‘norms of self-restraint and international law’.¹² It constitutes an ‘inauspicious precedent, undermining normative restraints on when and how states may use military force’.¹³

How then does one recoup a sense of lost legitimacy, a decrease in international ‘esteem’ as a result of norm violation, not to mention deliberate abrogation of international law? As Shannon explains: ‘To engage in norm violation without pangs of guilt, the mind must justify the act . . . If one sees another as a threatening enemy, the actor may conclude that the use of force is not a violation of a norm but an exercise in “self-defense”’.¹⁴ This is where an emphasis on victimisation becomes useful. As Kecmanovic argues, claims of victimisation can give the injured party ‘the moral and material right to reprisal’, since ‘everyone seems to expect the victim to settle accounts sooner or later, to return tit for tat, and to punish those who have made them a victim’. Being a victim thus gives one a special status—‘a moral and psychological advantage’. Indeed, victimhood can be used instrumentally to excuse preparations for war, even preventative strikes against a perceived enemy.¹⁵

A tertiary norm is also present—that of ‘liberating’ oppressed people from systematic abuse, torture, even genocide. This norm became popular after the Holocaust, and during the US occupation of Germany and Japan, where it dealt more with creating democratic institutions than with actually liberating oppressed people. In Iraq it was a mixture of the two. The Iraqi people were to be liberated from decades of systematic cruelty, while being taught democracy and de-Ba’athised.¹⁶ Promoting ‘liberation’ became increasingly important once weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were not found by the occupying forces. Thus, ‘the administration shifted its claims for war from the threat posed by WMD . . . to an inherently moral cause, the illegitimacy of the Ba’ath Party regime’.¹⁷

Norms of self-defence, victimisation and liberation have been marshalled to dampen European criticism of the war on terror. Here the USA has claimed to be defending itself against European manifestations of anti-Americanism, while similarly defending Israel and Diaspora Jews from a rise in European anti-Semitism. Such discourse casts the rift as a struggle between a virtuous USA and a morally bankrupt Europe. Through such a lens Europe can contribute little to any serious debate about US foreign policy. This is a novel stance. As theorists of Critical Discourse Analysis know well, racism and ethnocentrism as discursively expressed in society usually target weaker or marginalised members of that society.¹⁸ To have the world’s only superpower claim victim status and frame its foreign policy in such terms is unprecedented.

Structural characteristics of the rift

As Halper and Clarke rightly argue, America’s most effective weapon in the 20th century has been its moral authority, ‘the sense that America was a force for good in the world’.¹⁹ Yet this perception has been sharply eroded since

2000. In a now famous poll in June 2003 the Pew Global Attitudes Project revealed a wide-ranging negative reaction to the USA. Majorities of French, German and Spanish respondents held unfavourable views of the USA, with lower percentages in Britain and Italy. A majority of French, Germans and British were critical of the diffusion of 'American ideas and customs', as well as of American democracy.²⁰ Another recent Pew survey revealed that the USA is the most religious 'rich country'. Fifty-nine percent of Americans said religion was a very important part of their lives, with European totals considerably lower. Fifty-eight percent of American respondents also claimed that 'it's necessary to believe in God in order to be a moral, good person'. Western Europeans overwhelmingly rejected the idea.²¹

Americans and Europeans also diverged in their views of the Middle East. Western Europe is more economically and geographically tied to the region, and relies heavily on it for its oil and natural gas. The USA, by contrast, has its own reserves, and imports most of its oil from Canada, Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela.²² With a Moslem population of nearly 15 million, Europe tends to be more pro-Arab. In recent polls Europeans expressed more sympathy with Palestinians than Israelis, by a factor of 2:1. The opposite view pertained on the other side of the Atlantic, with four times as many Americans sympathetic to Israelis over Palestinians.²³

Despite these differences, the transatlantic gap has only become significant since 2000. Pew's project director is clear that 'Low esteem for President Bush is the single variable most highly correlated with the unfavorable image of the United States'.²⁴ It was not an inevitable rift, however. After the al-Qaida attacks of 11 September, Europeans expressed support for the American people and their president. European leaders invoked Article 5 of the NATO Charter, and backed the USA in its efforts to invade Afghanistan and unseat the Taliban regime. Iraq has been different. Deep fissures began to appear in the Atlantic alliance as many Western European states, backed up by Canada and New Zealand, opposed the USA's proposal for a UN resolution to allow for the invasion of Iraq. While France, Germany and Russia pushed to give weapons inspectors time to complete their work, Bush would have none of it.²⁵ The ill-advised invasion of Iraq went ahead.

European anti-Semitism

Since many conservatives endorse Bush administration policies and find little wrong with his forthright manner, anti-American rhetoric and actions are studied in near isolation. Viewing the USA through the lens of traditional and new forms of exceptionalism, America is a victim of irrational prejudice. By tapping into US support for Israel, and America's active commemoration of the Holocaust, conservatives play a trump card—the USA is being victimised because of its goodness—because it helped support those whom Europeans sought to exterminate.

Undeniably Western Europe witnessed a brief surge in anti-Semitism. From 2001 European Jews were subject to worrying levels of discrimination, with cemeteries, synagogues and other buildings the focus of anti-Semitic

violence. In 2002 there were 924 anti-Jewish incidents reported to the French police, a six-fold increase from the year before. In Germany there were 1594 reported incidents.²⁶ In a recent survey, 59% of Europeans argued that they viewed Israel as the greatest menace to world peace, 'ahead of Iran, North Korea, the United States, Iraq, Pakistan and India'.²⁷

Fortunately anti-Semitic violence tapered off in late 2002, especially in France, after President Chirac cracked down heavily on it. Indeed, despite the spike in anti-Semitic activity, French anti-Semitism has been steadily dropping since 1945.²⁸ One must contextualise the rising level of anti-Semitism amid a more generalised backlash against 'foreigners'. Indeed, as a 2002 EU report revealed, anti-Muslim attacks were far greater in frequency and number.²⁹ In a Sofres poll, French youth perceived the main targets of racism to be North Africans, then Gypsies and Africans, with Jews a distant fourth.³⁰ In Germany a 2002 opinion survey by the American Jewish Committee reported that anti-Semitism was low in comparison with racism against Arabs and Africans.³¹

The above discussion should not mitigate the problems of anti-Semitism in Europe. Any manifestation of anti-Semitism or racism should be vigorously condemned. Germany killed six million Jews. France and other European countries wilfully collaborated in that effort. Yet one must remain critical of attempts by the American right to use anti-Semitism as a means of casting the USA as an *ahistorical victim*. Here anti-Americanism is provided with an ancient pedigree when represented through contemporary understandings of anti-Semitism. Bush administration policies can then be dismissed as relatively unimportant. Attacking Bush is simply a convenient means of attacking the USA itself—the real target of anti-American hatred.

American exceptionalism and the 'good war'

Traditionally the belief that the USA has been a benign actor in world affairs goes back to the early Puritan traditions of England, transplanted in the American colonies. 'The early Americans', Lefever argues, 'felt they were chosen by Providence—a concept rooted in the Old Testament view of Israel as a chosen people—for a divine mission. Americans were obligated to not only proclaim liberty throughout the land but to serve as an example for others.'³² As McEvoy-Levy notes, exceptionalism implies the USA's 'moral superiority as well as the uniqueness of its origins, political system, social organization and values and cultural and religious characteristics'.³³ To this Monten adds the belief that Americans are 'an elect nation guided by a "special providence" to demonstrate the viability and spread of the democratic institutions and values that inform the American experiment'.³⁴

The USA's involvement in World War II has been scripted as a shining example of goodness and heroism. As the 'good war' it has become the 'mythic summit of national virtue', as well as a 'ready-made body of wartime analogies'.³⁵ The USA's role during the war allows for a clear Manichean presentation of events: good Americans versus evil Germans, US democracy versus Nazi genocide. Such 'prophetic dualisms', Hoogland Noon tells us,

‘externalize “evil” and preserve the belief that the global commitments of the United States have always been crafted with an eye toward extending and fortifying the sphere of liberty’.³⁶ The president has promoted these views of World War II, linking them in his State of the Union address in 2006 to the conflict in Iraq: ‘We are the nation that saved liberty in Europe, and liberated death camps, and helped raise up democracies, and faced down an evil empire. Once again, we accept the call of history to deliver the oppressed and move this world toward peace.’³⁷

The view that the USA entered the war to save European Jews is contestable, but reinforces the belief that the USA is a country devoted to spreading freedom and liberating oppressed peoples. World War II served to encourage a rallying behind the president, a willingness to sacrifice, and a dampening of criticism. At the same time it projected a view of Europe as both a villain and a victim. The USA’s role was to defeat and punish German and Italian villains; save victimised states such as Britain, France and Belgium; and liberate oppressed peoples like the Jews. Seen through this lens, the transatlantic rift could be interpreted in one of two ways—either as an ungrateful snub by those the USA saved (read France) or as a dangerous normalisation of perpetrator history by killers who have not fully come to terms with their own evil past (Germany).

US exceptionalist rhetoric also stems from the ‘Americanisation’ of the Holocaust. While largely dormant in public discussions of the war in the 1950s, the Holocaust as a unique historical event came into its own during the 1960s. Events in Israel such as the Eichmann trial (1961) and the Six Day War (1967) unleashed a flood of survivor memories and promoted public discussion.³⁸ During the 1970s the USA’s national identity was increasingly tied to representations of its own past as the antithesis of Nazi Germany. Such perceptions helped reinforce American goodness, replacing narrower ideals of Anglo-Saxon superiority. This new twist to an old exceptionalist story was necessary in the wake of the Vietnam war, when the nation suffered from a form of ‘national trauma’, horrified by the actions it had committed against and endured at the hands of the Vietnamese.³⁹

In a speech in 1978 President Carter suggested that the Holocaust was becoming a crucial aspect of the USA’s national identity. First, the Holocaust could be promoted as a positive image of US exceptionalism. Americans had helped liberate the camps, and could claim some credit for ending the genocide. Further, the USA was a haven for large numbers of survivors. Third, the Holocaust embodied all that a democratic, pluralist America was not. But the Holocaust also had important moral lessons to convey. As a bystander nation which did little to prevent the Holocaust, the USA now had a special mission to spread democracy and freedom, in the name of other victims of totalitarian systems.⁴⁰

During the Reagan years Christian Right support for Israel greatly increased. For many Christians Jewish return to Israel was a significant event heralding Christ’s Second Coming.⁴¹ 1993 has been dubbed ‘the year of the Holocaust’, the year in which the Holocaust was institutionalised as a key aspect of American identity. In 1993 *Schindler’s List* was screened, while the

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) opened its doors in Washington, DC. The Museum Council made clear that, 'America is the enemy of racism and its ultimate expression, genocide . . . in act and word the Nazis denied the deepest tenets of the American people'.⁴² The Holocaust was thus interpreted as 'the most un-American of crimes and the very antithesis of American values'.⁴³

Anti-Americanism

That the USA could be victimised by an irrational hatred similar to anti-Semitism was suggested in the 1990s and after. Hollander in 1992 was one of the first to view anti-Americanism as an irrational prejudice, 'a negative predisposition . . . an attitude similar to its far more thoroughly explored counterparts, hostile predispositions such as racism, sexism and anti-Semitism . . . born of a scapegoating impulse fueled by a variety of frustrations and grievances'.⁴⁴ Yet 'America-as-victim' was not a popular image until after 9/11, when stories of Holocaust survival helped make sense of American vulnerability and anger. Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* was widely promoted as a means of helping 9/11 survivors deal with their harrowing experiences.⁴⁵ Alice Greenwald, one of the creators of the USHMM, was named director of the World Trade Center Memorial Museum, tasked with designing another 'living memorial'—a 'sacred place' to remember the 3000 victims of the attack.⁴⁶

Anti-Americanism does certainly exist in world politics, and has recently become a topic for detailed study. Meunier provides a clear definition, seeing it as 'an unfavorable predisposition towards the United States, which leads individuals to interpret American actions through negative stereotypes'. She divides it into three categories: against Americans as individuals, against American society, culture and economy, and against American politics with an emphasis on foreign policy.⁴⁷ Further, Keohane and Katzenstein have created an immanently usable taxonomy of anti-Americanisms. This includes 'Liberal', 'Sovereignty-nationalist', 'Radical', 'Cultural' and 'Legacy' types. Such academic work does not moralise the term and instead allows scholars to understand the polyvalence of the phenomenon. Keohane and Katzenstein also take into account the important role of the Bush administration in stirring up temporary negative *opinion* against the USA versus a more hardened *bias* which can result if the underlying causes of anti-Americanism are not understood and addressed.⁴⁸

Within these rather open-ended and impartial studies, many conservatives promote its irrational aspects and narrow their definitions as a result. As Rosenfeld explains, anti-Americanism 'expresses a sharp distrust and dislike not just of what America sometimes does but of what it is alleged to be—a mighty but willful, arrogant, self-righteous, domineering, and dangerously threatening power'.⁴⁹ For Foot, it is a 'superstition', akin to 'a new form of virulent anti-Semitism' in that it targets everything about the USA, 'its values, its founding fathers, its policies past and present, its very being'.⁵⁰

Is anti-Americanism tied to the Bush administration and its policies? Clearly this is so to a large extent, yet a number of US conservatives have attempted to decontextualise it, presenting it as an historic hatred, ‘actually even older, than the United States itself’.⁵¹ Ceaser’s ‘A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism’ offers a systematic analysis of anti-American myths which have been carefully nurtured by ‘some of the greatest European minds of the past two centuries’. His five major themes run chronologically from the 18th century onwards, including ‘degeneracy’; ‘dull materialism’; the ‘specter of racial impurity’; ‘unrestrained industrial expansion’, and finally ‘soullessness and rampant consumerism’.⁵² While one can certainly find earlier anti-American elements in European thought, Ceaser offers a narrow, highly selective sampling. His work focuses on countries which have recently criticised the USA, ignoring those who joined the Coalition of the Willing. As such there is a double selection bias here—negative perceptions are picked while positive ones are ignored, and some countries currently seen to be opponents of Bush-era policies have their histories scrutinised for traces of bias, while other countries do not.

France and Germany are particularly singled out in this literature. Mead, for example traces French anti-Americanism to the 18th century when, after the revolution, America began to side with Britain to ban European powers from the Americas. The conflict between France and the USA is thus little more than a replay of an historic enmity, a new ‘anti-Anglo-Saxonism’.⁵³ German anti-Americanism has an equally old pedigree, stretching back at least two centuries. Rosenfeld sees American attributes such as ‘urbanization, commercialization, secularization, social mobility, mass culture, meritocracy, democracy, feminism’ as the subject of German denunciation, cobbled together with an unhealthy dose of anti-Semitism. He further traces strong linkages between anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism to the post-World War I era, when the USA was categorised as a ‘state of Jews’.⁵⁴

Since the USA has not actually done anything wrong, anti-Americanism is *ipso facto* blamed on malignant biases or psychological conditions on the part of the accuser. Clearly it is an *offensive* form of hatred, which targets an *innocent* America. In discussions of European anti-Americanism from the 18th to the early 20th century this assessment is accurate, although it ignores the role US businesses played in promoting Nazi Germany, from Henry Ford’s stark anti-Semitism to IBM’s complicity in creating systems to organise the rounding up and transportation of the Jews.⁵⁵

Further, such writings decontextualise American provocations that might have given rise to negative attitudes. Berman, for example, notes how ‘shocked’ US leaders were at the ‘outbreak of anti-Americanism in Latin America between 1958 and 1966’, yet offers no reason why such an ‘outbreak’ might have occurred. It seemed to come out of the blue, and was doubly painful since it came from ‘an unexpected quarter—a “neighbor”’.⁵⁶ Berman’s view is itself surprising, considering the destructiveness of US foreign policy towards its ‘neighbours’ at that time. This conservative understanding of exceptionalism seems to imply that the USA may do what it feels is ‘necessary’ in the national interest, then may justifiably condemn

any negative reactions towards its policies as irrational, inexplicable prejudice.

Anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism

Anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism have been compared in the wake of 9/11. That Israel and the USA are innocent of any wrongdoing, and possess special unique characteristics, is taken for granted.⁵⁷ Yet both the USA and Israel are subject to irrational forms of hatred, which can even be paired as 'twin brothers'. The new European anti-Semitism, Markovits concludes, 'is an epiphenomenon of anti-Americanism'.⁵⁸ The USA is demonised for its support of Israel, while Jews are demonised for Israeli policies, as well as for US policies. They have become a lightning rod for attack whenever the USA is perceived to be at fault.⁵⁹

How can we compare these prejudices? In both cases there is a visceral hatred of the target group: 'a dislike for the American as well as the Jewish essence, character, way of life, symbols, and people'.⁶⁰ Yet the reasons are not entirely irrational. Rosenfeld sees both hatreds working 'as a convenient focus for discontents of many different kinds and a ready-made explanation of internal weaknesses, disappointments, and failures'. Both are both global and irrational prejudices which move 'well beyond principled disagreements with American or Israeli policies and into the realm of the fantastic'.⁶¹

The upshot of these arguments is that the USA can now rightfully present itself as a victim of history. This is not so much because of 9/11 (a symptom of this hatred) but because of the world's antipathy and envy afterwards. The view is typified by Berman's belief that Europeans took 9/11 'as an invitation to disclose previously concealed attitudes of hostility'.⁶² Americans and Jews are not only paired, but are now virtually interchangeable. 'During the Nazi period', Rosenfeld remarks, 'a popular slogan clearly identified the source of Germany's troubles: "The Jews are our misfortune." Today it is the Americans who are the focus of such an exaggerated grievance'. Further, 'They have become intimately bound up with one another, so much so that it sometimes seems that the growing hatred of America is but another form of Judeophobia—and vice versa'.⁶³

Why are they against us? It's part of their culture

The idea of anti-Semitism as a 'European disease' was much in evidence at a conference dinner in 2004, when the US ambassador to the EU declared contemporary European anti-Semitism to be almost as bad as it had been during the 1930s. For Gerstenfeld, who cites this view approvingly, Europe has serious problems with anti-Semitism. Indeed, like 'classical ballet', anti-Semitism is 'integral to European culture', making it therefore a 'deep-seated irrational attitude' impossible to erase.⁶⁴ Many US commentators see France as a major purveyor of anti-Semitism. Raab is content to label France 'the most actively antisemitic country in Western Europe'.⁶⁵ Others credit a leftist

'hatred of modernity' and the French need to see Jews as harbingers of capitalism. French government support for the PLO is emblematic of its 'pathological national illness'.⁶⁶

Then we have the Germans, who seem to revel in both anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism. Rosenfeld rightly sees Schroeder's re-election in September 2002 as in part premised on his demonisation of Bush and his policies. And certainly Schroeder's justice minister displayed a gross ignorance of history when he compared Bush's tactics toward Iraq to those of Hitler.⁶⁷ Yet this is not simply opportunism, but reflects a larger movement at work in German society—an attempt to free Germany from Holocaust guilt, relativising the Holocaust by comparing it with atrocities suffered by Germans during World War II.⁶⁸ German youth are also refusing to confront the past, embracing instead 'a smoothed-over national idea, an unruffled wishful thinking in which Auschwitz's only function is the disruptive one of making waves'.⁶⁹

Europe's decline

Europe's decline, spiritually, economically and militarily, is touted as another factor explaining the rise of anti-American and anti-Semitic hatred. According to this account, Europe has serious structural problems which make its elites deeply critical of the USA. This can be reduced to envy and psychological projection. The USA is a success, Europe a failure. Part of this has to do with Europe's lack of enough Christian morality to help guide it to correct decisions. This theme is strongly conveyed in Kagan's *Paradise & Power*. Americans can see issues clearly in black and white, while Europeans are hampered by moral relativism and secularism; they 'see a more complex picture'.⁷⁰ European military weakness has led European leaders to condemn any manifestation of military force, however justified. Europeans favour 'soft power' because they are scared of war. Weak-willed free riders like France and Germany have no legitimacy to dictate moral lessons to America.⁷¹

At yet another level Europe is in economic decline. A US emphasis on autonomy and free markets is the only way to achieve material success and progress. Government social programmes are wasteful, and a holdover from socialism. As Ferguson would have it, Europeans are too obsessed with 'excessive leisure' and propping up their bloated welfare states.⁷² Europe is faced with a choice: either it must recognise its weakness and stop criticising the USA or it must strengthen itself, by abandoning some of its social programmes, while spending more on defence. With their comparatively smaller incomes, 'anti-Americanism begins to look very much like basic human greed and envy'.⁷³

The European identity crisis

At the same time a coherent European identity is well nigh impossible, making the need for a threatening 'other' crucial. Since Europeans patently

have little in common culturally or linguistically, uniting against the USA is the only way to accomplish further unification. Noting the enormous protests in February 2003, Gerstenfeld concludes that only 'counter-values' can help Europe unite: 'America is "un-Europe" or Europe's "other". Its function is to help create a common political European identity.'⁷⁴

Hating the other is of course an ideal method of banishing uncertainty and envy. Europeans are really bitter against their own governments and look to the USA as a scapegoat. Dassault has been lauded by the American right for his recent essay admitting that his people, the French, 'don't really know anymore who they are or where they are going ... Anti-Americanism provides them with some last-ditch creed with which to identify'.⁷⁵ Yet ironically, despite this powerful 'other', Europe has not successfully united. The failure of the European constitution, the 'last gasp of European socialism', heralds a major setback for European elites seeking to counter American power.⁷⁶

Why are they against us? The Moslems

Anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism can both conveniently be blamed in part on Europe's Moslem populations, making the EU what Krauthammer has gleefully described as a 'wholly owned subsidiary of the Arab League'.⁷⁷ Europe's Moslem 'problem' is the result of a declining birthrate, making the need for new immigrants acute. As Ferguson suggests: 'A youthful Muslim society to the south and east of the Mediterranean is poised to colonize—the term is not too strong—a senescent Europe'. The future is bleak—an anti-American 'Eurabia' in the heartland of the West.⁷⁸

Others see Europe in a 'crisis of civilisational morale'. The demographics indicate that 'Europe is dying', Wiegel tells us. Bored by the lack of 'mystery, passion, and adventure of life itself', Europeans are not reproducing, while lazily opening the floodgates to the Islamic world. Once Europe has 'depopulated itself out of boredom and culturally disarmed itself in the process', Islamic immigration will make Europe little more than 'a cultural and political extension of the Arab-Islamic world'.⁷⁹ Needless to say, such commentators are hardly worried by the prospect of being tainted by Said's 'orientalist' brush. Distrust of Moslems is reasonable, since Islam constitutes a major threat to the West. In conservative eyes Islam can only bring a return to traditionalism and intolerance. It will cut off Europe from its Christian roots, with disastrous geopolitical consequences.

The 'new anti-Semitism'

Does Europe have double standards when it focuses on Israel for special opprobrium, while ignoring other countries? As Dershowitz has argued generally: 'those who single out Israel for unique criticism not directed against countries with far worse human rights records are themselves guilty of international bigotry'.⁸⁰ Claims of a double standard are important. Russians, Serbs and Saudis seem to get away with much more than Israelis.

This can only stem from two causes. First, that Europeans are anti-Semitic and attack Israel because it is a Jewish state. Second, Israel is attacked because it is perceived as a puppet of the USA, or vice versa—‘the Jewish lobby in Washington’ controls the USA and dictates its foreign policies.⁸¹

The so-called ‘new anti-Semitism’ is anti-Zionism, which challenges not only Israeli policies but Israel’s very existence.⁸² Commentators chart Western European sympathy for Israel from 1948 to 1967, a period during which ‘the shadow of the Holocaust’ and the appearance of Israeli weakness helped shield it from harsh criticism. However, 1967 brought about a sea-change in European public opinion. Israel was ‘overnight transformed into an aggressor’, a ‘certified “colonial” and “imperialist” power, a “hegemon” and an “oppressor”’.⁸³ 1967 transformed the dominant ‘Shylock’ image of the Jew to one ‘cartooned as an aggressive, excessive, brutal collective’. By contrast, the European left came to perceive Palestinians as ‘the poster child for third-world victimization’.⁸⁴ Today, while it is not acceptable to hate Jews as ‘Shylock’, it is acceptable to criticise Israel and denounce Jews as ‘Rambo’.⁸⁵

While the European Union pays lip service to legislation against anti-Semitism, it is in fact ‘double-handed’. Its ‘inflammatory anti-Israeli declarations’ cast the EU in the role of ‘arsonist’, while in its denunciations of anti-Semitism it performs the role of ‘fireman’, ‘by trying . . . to quench the flames of classic anti-Semitism’.⁸⁶ Why not then protest at Rambo’s aggression? It seems a human impulse to want to protect the weak and condemn the strong and aggressive. Yet Markovits argues that ‘Rambo’ (despite appearances) is in fact still ‘Shylock’. Israelis are still vulnerable and are under constant attack by Palestinian terrorists. Europeans are deluding themselves by believing Palestinians to be victims. Or worse, their interest lies in humiliating and denouncing Israel. Making Israel appear as Nazis allows Europeans, particularly Germans, to overcome their historical baggage, to rail against their former victims from a position of self-righteous indignation.

Some tentative reflections

Arguably the threat posed by Europe is overrated, as are the irrational dangers of anti-Americanism. Much of it reflects a deep frustration not with US power *per se*, but with how that power is currently being wielded. The USA’s obsession with remaining a unipolar hegemon is at the root of the problem. Pew summed it up best in their 2005 survey, when they paraphrased European concerns. The USA ‘is too quick to act unilaterally, it doesn’t do a good job of addressing the world’s problems, and it widens the global gulf between rich and poor’.⁸⁷

Europe’s proximity to the Middle East means that it will feel the consequences of US foreign policy first, both from Islamic countries in the region and internally from its own citizens.⁸⁸ Some European leaders cynically promote Palestinian interests, ignoring the Palestinian targeting of

Israeli civilians. Yet US leaders often do the opposite by uncritically promoting Likud's policies while ignoring its mistreatment of Palestinians. While Israeli Defence Force (IDF) assassinations of Hamas leaders and their followers are a lesser evil than Palestinian suicide bombers targeting civilians, both activities are morally questionable.

Is it truly anti-Semitic to single out Israel for 'unique criticism not directed against countries with far worse human rights'?⁸⁹ Certainly anti-Semites do target Israel—accusing Israeli leaders of 'Nazi-like' horrors, while sometimes denying the Holocaust. Such people need to be denounced. Yet Israel is in a unique position. Zionism was a political project largely created in Europe by European Jews. As conceptualised by Herzl, Israel was to be a secular European-style nation-state. Israel today is a Western-style democracy with regular elections, political parties and a relatively free media. It is a predominantly white, European, affluent country with an advanced industrial economy. This accounts in part for why it *is* being criticised. Markovits cries foul when Israel is denounced, but not Saudi Arabia or Russia. This smacks of unfair persecution.⁹⁰

Yet neither of those countries is seen to be a Western, modern, European-style country. Both Saudi Arabia and Russia are held to a lower standard. Not much is expected of them, except that within the context of their 'easterness' they are expected to observe a minimal standard of behavior. One can argue that these greater expectations signal anti-Semitism, but they might also express the greater hopes that Europeans have had for Israel, seeing Israelis very much as people like themselves.

Markovits recognises this when he links the fact that 'Israel is perceived as a strong, highly developed, militarily "overpowering," and (above all) Western country using its power on a daily basis against a non-Western population perceived as weak and underdeveloped'.⁹¹ Further, Israel is seen to be 'playing according to political rules that Europeans ... have allegedly long since abandoned'.⁹² This may be true, but is it morally suspect, and if so why? As Western countries, should Israel and the USA not be held to a standard higher than, say, Russia or Saudi Arabia? Should we not expect Israel as a European country to abide by the same rules of the game? Is the problem perhaps that Israel is seen to be too much like Europe rather than too much an 'other'?

Anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism

Today we interpret the evilness of anti-Semitism through its most extreme manifestation—the Holocaust. Even 'mild' versions of anti-Semitism, the tacit acceptance of racial stereotypes, the unwillingness to protest at the escalation of anti-Jewish racism, allowed Germany to commit the worst genocide in modern European history, against a defenceless, largely assimilated people. Anti-Semites, and those who refused to recognise that the slaughter of Jews was taking place, bear some measure of responsibility. Yet there is no fear of the USA being subjected to genocide in the near future.

To his credit Markovits has noted crucial differences between the two hatreds. First: 'Anti-Semitism has killed millions of people, while European anti-Americanism has only murdered a few. There were never any pogroms against Americans . . . There has never been a blood libel about Americans.' Another major difference is that the USA is powerful while Jews during the Holocaust were not: 'The Jews only had power in the warped imagination of their enemies'.⁹³ Markovits' demerit is tacitly to dismiss these differences as trivial. Arguably the significance of the Holocaust is largely premised on these very facts—the systematised mass killing of the Jews and their utter defencelessness while this slaughter was taking place. These and other aspects of the Final Solution are unique to the Holocaust—uniquely horrible forms of terror. How can one seriously suggest that these two hatreds are 'twin brothers', when the victims, and the methods and levels of virulence by which these hatred are manifested, are so utterly different? How can it be reasonable to compare the world's most powerful country to one of the 20th century's most tragically vulnerable people?

Is Europe in decline?

Currently there is more evidence to support a US economic decline than a European one.⁹⁴ A myriad of statistics prove that the USA's financial and civic health is in decline. The USA is the most unequal Western country in terms of wealth distribution, ranking close to Mexico and Russia.⁹⁵ Life expectancy is also the lowest of any major industrialised country, while literacy scores and the quality of the educational system are consistently ranked at the bottom of surveys of Western countries.⁹⁶ By contrast, European society is relatively affluent, secure and stable, despite racial problems and a rapidly aging population.⁹⁷ One might easily counter the conservative warnings of European decline and envy by concluding that the reverse is true—that the USA's civil society and its economy face serious structural problems.

Conclusion

In 2003 Garton Ash observed that, if any sort 'anti-Europeanism' existed, it was primarily based on 'irritation mixed with contempt', or a 'mildly benign indifference, mixed with impressive ignorance'. He went on to suggest the possibility of a historical but relatively mild version of anti-Europeanism, stretching back to the revolution.⁹⁸ While it may be somewhat milder than anti-Americanism, US conservatives have engaged in their own stereotyping and xenophobia. 'Euro-bashing' can be as destructive to transatlantic dialogue as anything that has come out of Paris or Berlin. It is also by its nature irrational, attacking the very essence of what Europe is and represents. On this matter van Ham raises an intriguing proposition, namely that 'The EU, by its very existence, opens the possibility of a totally different model which downplays force and realpolitik, and upgrades the role of law and trust'.⁹⁹

Fortunately there is little to suggest that 'anti-Europeanism' is anything more than a rightwing elite phenomenon. There is little popular animus against Europe and, indeed, little US media coverage of European politics, in sharp contrast to Europe's coverage of almost every aspect of American life.¹⁰⁰ In any event much of the current rift has narrowed in the waning days of the Bush administration. Few Republican or Democrat candidates see Bush's agenda and manner as something to emulate. As such the rift will be rightly seen as a historical snapshot, a rising moment of anger against a largely unaccountable president. However, the rift and the US conservative backlash against it demonstrates clearly that the USA, more than ever, needs the ability to engage rationally with its critics without hiding behind its own national mythology, or, worse, behind the genocide of an altogether different people from a different historical era.

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