

## Reflections on the Holocaust

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*(The text of the speech delivered on Sunday 27 April, 2014, on the occasion of the Yom Ha'Shoah)*

We have reflected on the Holocaust. Why should it have happened? Afterwards any right-thinking person might think the bestiality and horrors that occurred would be sufficient to end anti-Semitism. Sadly this has not proved to be the case.

The Holocaust, being the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people, is a unique historical event. It was the first time in modern history that a State made the extermination of a people, as a race and not an ethnic group, policy, as a war aim and, as part of its strategy, sought to carry it out, deliberately using its resources in weaponry and material to do so. Why was this possible in the twentieth century?

We know that anti-Semitism originally was based on religious hatred of the Jews as being rejecters of Jesus Christ as the son of God and the Messiah. The concept of the trilogy is an unbridgeable divide between the two religions. The Catholic and Orthodox churches demonised Jews as such, supported by Mediaeval and Renaissance art and literature. The Christian religion was seen as having supplanted Judaism. This and economic repression had resulted in multiple expulsions since the 13th Century from countries in Western Europe, the first from England in 1290. There was forcible separation from the Gentile population by confining Jews to Ghettos. Jews were forced to wear identifying garments or badges precursors to the identifying yellow stars that they were compelled to wear by the Nazis. This form of religious anti-Semitism was ingrained in the Gentile population through the centuries. This continued in Eastern Europe where religious practice and superstition remained strong into the twentieth century, although separation into Ghettos had ceased.

The German States before the Wars of Unification, between 1864 to 1866, had been split between those dominated by the Holy Roman Empire, subsequently Austria/Hungary or the North that were Protestant/Lutheran. Jews were regarded by both churches as 'Christ killers'. Christian states in Western Europe. Martin Luther who led the Reformation in Germany was violently anti-Semitic. He preached that Jews should be put to death by the sword or fire and Synagogues burned. In short his preaching formed the prescient framework for what transpired during the Holocaust.

The Jewish religion, thus Jews were demonised and alienated amongst the Gentiles with whom they lived.

Yet, following emancipation, wherever Jews lived in Europe including Russia, they sought not only to support their fellow Jews, but also when opportunity presented itself to contribute as much as they could to the Gentile society amongst whom they lived. It is of course this wish to contribute that caused its own problems.

In Western European countries Jews, disproportionately to their numbers and percentage of the overall population entered the professions, particularly medicine and Law, scientific research, and teaching at all levels. This of course caused resentment amongst many and served to feed the propaganda about Jewish power and domination, fuelling latent prejudice.

In truth, when given the opportunity, since the "Age of Enlightenment", at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Jews when allowed to emerge from Ghettos and emancipated, within the laws of the countries in which they lived, absorbed the advantages presented to them of secular education, particularly in Central Europe.

Germany and Austria in the early twentieth century had become cultural centres in the Arts and Music with Universities and Gymnasias being leading teaching institutions.

By 1933, approximately one-third of the doctors and lawyers practising in Berlin were Jews. They were also prominent in publishing as well as education. Throughout Central and Western Europe, Jews appeared as an emergent well-educated and financially successful, disproportionately so compared to the Gentile population.

They were particularly conspicuous, amongst the Gentiles who had seen them within the previous 150 years being a forcibly separated alien community and different from them in language. Jews speaking Yiddish or Ladino, performing in the Gentile view denigrated and out-dated religious practices, thus renouncing "the true Christian religion", in dress and custom. This view was not allowed to die by the Church following assimilation.

Despite the fact that this new educated and emergent Jewish class dressed no differently than their neighbours, many no longer practising their religion according to Orthodox practice, no longer speaking Yiddish and priding themselves on the citizenship, the majority did not seek to deny their ethnic and cultural heritage, describing themselves, when required, in ethnicity and religion, as Jews.

This immediately distinguished them from their Gentile neighbours with whom many had become friends, not only at work but also socially. It meant also when it came to the Final Solution making them readily identifiable to their Oppressors and collaborators, either through state documents or by betrayal to the Police and Gestapo.

The progress and condition of Jews in Eastern Europe was not the same. The great majority of European Jewry lived in the 'Pale of Settlement', a vast area consisting of the Eastern part of Poland as it was created after the First World War and what had become the Western States of the USSR, formerly Imperial Russia. Within this area by 1939 lived up to 5 million Jews, many of whom were impoverished, like their gentile neighbours, relying upon subsistence living. They formed substantial minorities in the big cities of Poland, such as Warsaw, Cracow, Lodz and Vilnius (then part of Poland formerly, and now Lithuania) and the Baltic. However in many of the towns and villages of Byelorussia, the Ukraine and the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia they were the majority, speaking Yiddish, still a recognised as an official language in parts of the Soviet Union until the late 1930's. Persecution

of Jews in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Imperial Russia and until the Revolution was state policy.

Nicholas II, the last Czar of Russia, was a virulent anti-Semite, supported and encouraged by the Russian Orthodox Church of which the Procurator of the Holy Synod was enormously powerful. The pogroms, state and Orthodox Church sponsored, had led thousands of Jews to emigrate from Russia until 1914.

Ironically, despite the persecution it was in Eastern Europe that Orthodox Jewry remained dominant and from the seventeenth century where the seats of great religious learning, that now flourishes in the United States, Western Europe and Israel and from where Chassidism originates.

The political and industrial revolutions that transformed European society in the nineteenth century provided Jews with opportunities in education, industry and political thought as well as practical politics, opportunities that were taken advantage of and exploited much to the benefit of the non-Jewish public. As seen above this did not necessarily lead to tolerance, but gave rise to a more sophisticated form of anti-Semitism, emanating from what was to become Greater Germany.

German Intellectuals in the nineteenth century struggled to identify the place of Jews within their Society. As Gideon Hausner in his book, 'Justice in Jerusalem' wrote, "In the Nineteenth century loathing of the Jews was very fashionable in German intellectual quarters. Important names were associated with it. Freidrich Hegel, the philosopher regarded the Old Testament, the creation of the Jewish genius as the embodiment of "a demon of hatred in opposition to Hellenic beauty and virtue" Jews were described as Germany's misfortune by Heinrich von Treitdchke.

A Professor at Heidelberg University, Jacob Fries wrote that Jews should be wiped off the map accusing them of being as being bacilli that should be destroyed like cancer-germs. It is not surprising therefore that 'The Anti-Semitic League' founded in 1879 by intellectuals had gained some popularity by the end of the century. It expounded that "Semitism" is the exact antinomy of "Germanism". Jews were thus categorised as strangers to German society the opposite of what being a German is.

Anti-Semitism was thus endemic within Central Europe, and amongst the establishment within Germany respectable and overt, from Kaiser Wilhelm II downwards. It was not excluded from the performing arts, academia. Wagner, later Hitler's favourite composer and his son-in law Houston Stuart Chamberlain, a virulent anti-Semite, and some of the press whose caricatures of Jews featured therein pre-dated and predicated the excesses of the Nazi Press.

The last quarter of the Nineteenth Century saw the rise of nationalism and imperialism typified by the formation of societies glorifying in the expression of national and racial grandeur such as the Pan German League. Those who were not seen as German living amongst Germans were characterised as alien and inferior, particularly the Jews who were described as the worse form of the Semitic race.

Eugenics which by the first quarter of the Twentieth Century had become a popular and important scientific study permitted, in its perverted and now discredited form, for the purpose of perfecting the human race the classification of races or ethnic types as superior or inferior. This, Nazi scientists used to give support to their racial theories in classifying Jews, Gypsies and Slavs as inferior and an underclass not worthy of preservation. In the case of Jews they were likened to pests whose presence was plaguing and infecting the Aryan race of which those of Germanic origin were the perfect example. Thus the only way to rid society of this vermin was to eliminate them from the societies that were corrupted by their presence; a truly horrific, and on the face of it, surprising progression accepted by those ruled by the Nazis without any substantial dissent to the end. However public dissent did end the Euthanasia programme perpetrated on those with mental disability, or young persons found to be socially deviant.

It is within the environment described, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, that the future Nazi leaders and the Wehrmacht Generals were born and then reached maturity and power in the 1930's, both within Austria and Germany. They also lived through the First World War, like Hitler and Goring having serving in armed forces during it and absorbing the shared indignity, as it was seen of the "stab in the back. It was the Socialists, communists and Jews that were blamed for the revolution that deposed the Kaiser, leading to the Armistice of November 1918.

They were accused following the Armistice of forcing Germany to agree the humiliating terms imposed by the victors, and creating the hated Weimar Republic. Walther Rathenau a Jew, the Foreign Minister, was assassinated for having been a member of the War Government that agreed the Armistice terms, despite in reality having been the member of the war government and being responsible during the war for financing the German war effort as the Minister for Finance, and having founded AEG, the electronics company.

The protagonists were disaffected former Officers and soldiers supported by right wing students, virulently anti-Semitic. They formed themselves into militant groups, the "Freikorps", of which the NASDP (The National Socialist German Workers' Party, known as the Nazi Party) was one. The Freikorps ignored the fact that by November 1918 the German army was on the verge of refusing to fight any further at the time of the Armistice being sought. Field Marshal Ludendorff, later a member of the Freikorps had advised the German Government to seek armistice terms from the Allies rather than seeing Germany invaded and occupied by the Allies the German Army having been defeated in the field.

For the former Officers of the Armed Forces trained in the Prussian military tradition the humiliation was particularly acute. For the average German middle class and worker the terms of the Versailles treaty, particularly the reparations demanded by the victors, led to the collapse of the German economy, their impoverishment, unemployment amongst them, particularly the middle and working classes with consequential discontent intensified by the collapse of the western economies following the "Wall Street Crash" of 1929.

Adolf Hitler emerged as the leader of the NSDAP by 1920. He was a charismatic speaker glorifying the Germanic peoples, promulgating hatred of Bolshevism/Judaism, in his mind the two being indivisible. During his imprisonment, following the 'Munich Putsch' 1923, Hitler wrote '*Mein Kampf*' ('My Struggle') which clearly set out his programme for the future. He regarded the Jews since his days as an art student in Vienna as responsible for all the ills in the world; their wealth and influence as he perceived it to be, he viewed as parasitic and poisoning the Germanic peoples.

Although '*Mein Kampf*', after publication, was little read or taken seriously, it gave notice of Hitler's beliefs and predicted a programme of what was to come should Hitler achieve power. It gave a clear insight as to the consequences of handing power to a person whose ideas were warped and whose intent was to align himself and the German people as one.

After 1929 right wing politics, especially that of the Nazi Party with promises of resurgence of prosperity, fierce Nationalism, supported by brilliant stage-managed propaganda, the work of Joseph Goebbels, the thuggery of the Brown Shirts, fear of Communism, explicit racial propaganda directed at Jews and Communists through its own publications, especially "Der Sturmer" ensured by 1933 the party had gained popularity and a controlling position in the Reichstag, enabling Hitler to promote his racial policies, that amongst other things demonised Jews as racial misfits, deviants and an underclass from which Germans and those classified as Aryans should be separated.

The Pan Germanic ideal and superiority of the Germanic peoples over other racial groups such as Slavs, and Gypsies appeared to be accepted, not only by the general population, but also by academics, lawyers and the medical profession. To the shame of the professions, not only did they stand by to see ex-colleagues expelled from academic institutions, schools and from practising their vocations, but the majority welcomed the racial policies directed at the Jews and participated in their persecution, the Commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* being lawyers and academics.

The Nazi Party under the iron grip of Adolf Hitler and his inner circle, took control of the Police, media, Germany thus renouncing acceptable norms of law, and the terms, both covertly and overtly, of the Versailles treaty and subsequent arms limitation treaties. They sought to reconstitute the German Armed forces. Hitler did this by pursuing massive state investment projects which gained enormous domestic support through the 1930's such that racial laws and media and physical ill-treatment of the Jews became acceptable and supported. The economic and political success of the Nazi domestic and foreign policy seemed in the mind of the populace to mask the immorality and illegality of the Nazi racial laws and the treatment of those who dissented from them or were alienated from German society by them.

The growth of power of the Nazi state, its apparent immunity from sanction by the remainder of the Western world as it promoted its foreign policy of German aggrandisement and elimination of opposition from within allowed the domination of the total state and its mores to pass to the diktat of Adolf Hitler to whom all owed allegiance, and importantly position, including the armed forces by personal

oath. Once that had occurred and was accepted by the populace, which by 1938 it had been in all aspects of life, including the testament of Jews as a subclass, not worthy of or in any way entitled to any basic human rights the German People, at the behest of Adolf Hitler were set on a course that inevitably was to lead to the meeting convened by Rudolf Heydrich at Wansee, a suburb of Berlin on 20th January 1942 at which the plans for the Final Solution of the Jewish question were agreed and actioned. Hitler had written the script, the Nazi Party provided the Directors and participants to carry it out, including the Wermacht (not only the SS). The State and its agencies became complicit in and committed mass murder (later given the name "Genocide") of a peoples whose only guilt was their religion or ethnic origin within the environment of total war.

Inherent anti-Semitism over the centuries, together with the manipulation of that prejudice by a slanderous blame culture, spurious science, the propaganda that sought to alienate the Jews from the societies in Europe to whom they had, following emancipation, contributed so much led to the crime of mass murder in which the majority of the population of Greater Germany and parts of occupied Europe was complicit.

The simple truth is the German population did not object to the Concentration camps in their midst: *Dachau, Belsen, Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Natzweiler* and in Austria, *Mauthausen* all of which treated their prisoners with gross cruelty, starvation and torture. The population of occupied Europe, with few exceptions, did not resist the deportations and mass executions that occurred. Were it not for this, and in many cases complicity, '*The Final Solution*' would have been much more difficult to bring about. Italy (until 1943) Bulgaria and Hungary (until 1944) and Finland throughout the war resisted deportation despite being members of the Axis. The Danes facilitated escape of virtually all their Jewish citizens to Sweden.

So far as the war against the Jews was concerned, even when the war turned against Germany, that war continued unabated and unchallenged by any arm of the State or by the people leaving the polity completely unrestrained.

The Final Solution could only be promulgated because of the overt anti-Semitism within Europe by 1939. Jews were stigmatised and disadvantaged in most of the European countries. Even in so-called liberal and democratic countries such as Britain, France, Holland, Italy and Belgium. Before 1939 Jews could only enter certain Universities and professions by quota. Jews were identified in cartoons and written articles by characteristics that could not be mistaken as being anything other than to show them as a people that sought to undermine and be different from their gentile neighbours, ultimately sub-human.

Even during the war when knowledge of the final solution was evident the Allies were not persuaded to take action to bomb Auschwitz/Birkenau, although air raids were made against the Chemical factories at Auschwitz III/Monowitz. Thus before the Gas chambers were destroyed by the Nazis themselves, in a desperate bid to hide the evidence before the Soviet troops arrived in January 1945 over 1 million Jews died in that camp by starvation, gassing and slave labour.

What was happening in Auschwitz and the other extermination camps in Poland; *Chelmno, Sobibor, Majdenek, Treblinka and Belzec* was known from 1943. Mass

murder of Jews in Poland from 1939 onwards by the SS troops and the Wehrmacht; and in the USSR, following the invasion by Germany from 20 June 1941 onwards was certainly known there, providing evidence to the allied Governments as to Germany's intentions towards the Jews, supported if further evidence was required, by the deportations from countries occupied by the Germans of Jews to Poland or, before to Concentration camps many of which were in the occupied countries, or in Greater Germany and served as transit camps to facilitate deportation to the Extermination camps.

The purport of twentieth century anti-Semitism, finely honed by the Nazis was to show the Jew as a supreme manipulator, seeking to take advantage of and to exploit his gentile neighbours through unfair and deliberately dishonest means. The "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" a fraudulent publication, claiming to have been produced in the early part of the twentieth Century by Jews, emanating from Russia espoused that the Jews sought to control the world, a central allegation of secular anti-Semitism. This picture of the Jew is still evident in cartoons and literature into the twenty-first century, not just in the Middle East where Egypt can produce a television programme showing the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" as truth, but something Western Media is not exempt from, to its shame.

Perversely modern anti-Semitism includes not only the seeds and elements of anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust, but has demonised Israel, the Jewish State as akin to and pursuing Nazi racist policies. This the accuser seeks to justify by trying to separate Zionism from Judaism, and thus differentiating anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism. Is that a merited distinction? Of course it is not. Whilst it may be legitimate to criticise the policies Israel may pursue. It is not only non-Jews that do. Nevertheless the accusation made completely ignores the Political legal and moral imperatives, together with a free press and media that regulate the functioning of the state. Furthermore the regular armed forces are numerically small, the fighting force being a citizen army that has to be maintained because the hostility of its neighbours towards the state and the constant threat of terrorism against its citizens coupled with the threat of extinction made by Iran, its clients Hezbollah and Hamas in Gaza.

It is a salutary lesson that unless the circumstances that led to the Holocaust are taught and understood and not repeated then Jews will, whether calling themselves Zionists or merely practising their religion, be at risk of history repeating itself, Jews must not be denied their humanity. They must not be demonised, stereotyped, again nor must the highly charged political situation in the Middle East be used as an excuse to disseminate, under the heading of anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israel may or may not be justified, but the defamation of the Jews that is displayed under the banner of anti-Zionism in its crude form as described above is dangerous. It shows that anti-Semitism thrives. The so-called Arab Spring has not brought an awakening of democracy, but has clearly shown the brutality that Muslims are prepared to show to other Muslims if not of the same sect as well as the treatment of Arab Christians, or in the case of Egypt the treatment of Coptic Christians. The prospect of a secular democratic Arab state will not be tolerated by the Muslim Brotherhood or Muslim fundamentalist organisations such as 'Al-Qaeda' the 'Taliban', 'Hezbollah' and 'Hamas'. There is a clear disregard by these fundamentalist organisations and its offshoots for ordinary civilians.

The civil war in Syria highlights the divisions that exist in the Middle East. The Assad regime now stands accused of using chemical weapons against its own citizens, supported by compelling evidence against the regime. The media pictures have portrayed to the world graphic images of the terror that has been inflicted on the Syrian population, following that of Iraq and Afghanistan and now also atrocities that are still occurring in Pakistan.

There is one unifying factor so far as the majority of the Muslim world can identify; that is their enmity towards Israel. Anti Semitic propaganda and demonization of Israel and its citizens by its neighbours to almost 4 generations of its citizens leaves little hope for tolerance or mercy to Israel's citizens. Seeing the level of brutality and treatment of Muslims towards other Muslims it is relevant to consider what might be done to Israeli citizens should its Muslim neighbours prevail in any future Middle East conflict? Would or could any other country, apart possibly from the United States, intervene? Even intervention by the United States under the present or future administrations cannot be guaranteed; and certainly not through the United Nations.

It remains to be seen whether, in the midst of a civil war Syria's Chemical weapons can really be put out of reach of the present regime, or others to whom they might otherwise be passed for use. Whoever used them against Syrian citizens were indeed Muslims. Would there be any qualms about using them against Jews? President Assad threatened reprisals if the United States had sought to intervene. He was not specific as to who reprisals were to be directed in the region. If not Israel then reprisals would be against neighbouring Arab states, widening a sectarian conflict and further alienation of Syria from them. The only reason it would not be Israel is because of that state's potential to retaliate and deter.

It is submitted, that other than by its own efforts the Jewish state cannot rely upon others to prevent another Holocaust? None of the Allies went to war in 1939 or 1941 because of the Nazi treatment of the Jews. That is the major lesson to be learned from the Holocaust.

Furthermore recent political events in this country and the United States show that the leading Western nations will find making the case for intervention very difficult. It is against history and the current rise of world-wide anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism that the question of whether the Holocaust could happen again has to be judged.

The irony of course is that the only country in which Muslims, in every sect of Islam can live in a democracy and where Christians and Bahai can practice their religion as well as Jews, without persecution or the fear of it, is Israel.

My friends, a professor of History once said that history can tell us where we have been, but not where we are going. That is correct, but we can only hope for the future, whatever that might be. What we must not do is forget.

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