

Who's the Dog Who's the Tail and the ADL

By Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom - 2006

I DON'T usually tell these stories, because they might give rise to the suspicion that I am paranoid.

For example: 27 years ago, I was invited to give a lecture-tour in 30 American universities, including all the most prestigious ones - Harvard, Yale, Princeton, MIT, Berkeley and so on. My host was the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a respected non-Jewish organization, but the lectures themselves were to be held under the auspices of the Jewish Bet-Hillel chaplains.

On arrival at the airport in New York I was met by one of the organizers. "There is a slight hitch," he told me, "29 of the Rabbis have cancelled your lecture."

In the end, all the lectures did take place, under the auspices of Christian chaplains. When we came to the lone Rabbi who had not cancelled my lecture, he told me the secret: the lectures had been forbidden in a confidential letter from the Anti-Defamation League, the thought-police of the Jewish establishment. The salient phrase has stuck to my memory: "While it cannot be said that Member of the Knesset Avnery is a traitor, yet..."

AND ANOTHER story from real life: a year later I went to Washington DC in order to "sell" the Two-State solution, which at the time was considered an outlandish, not to say crazy, idea. In the course of the visit, the Quakers were so kind as to arrange a press conference for me.

When I arrived, I was amazed. The hall was crammed full, practically all the important American media were represented. Many had come straight from a press conference held by Golda Meir, who was also in town. The event was to last an hour, as is usual, but the journalists did not let go. They bombarded me with questions for another two hours. Clearly, what I had to say was quite new to them and they were interested.

I was curious how this would be reported in the media. And indeed, the reaction was stunning: not a word appeared in any of the newspapers, on radio or TV. Not one single word.

By the way, three years ago I again held a press conference, this time on Capitol Hill in Washington. It was an exact replica of the last time: the crowd of reporters, their

obvious interest, the continuation of the conference well beyond the appointed time - and not a single word in the media.

I COULD tell some more stories like these, but the point is made. I recount them only in connection with the scandal recently caused by two American professors, Stephen Walt of Harvard and John Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago. They published a research paper on the influence of the Israel lobby in the United States. [for a pdf file of this paper, go to web.hks.harvard.edu]

In 80 pages, 40 of them footnotes and sources, the two show how the pro-Israel lobby exercises unbridled power in the US capital, how it terrorizes the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, how the White House dances to its tune (if indeed a house can dance), how the important media obey its orders and how the universities, too, live in fear of it.

The paper caused a storm. And I don't mean the predictable wild attacks by the "friends of Israel" - which means almost all politicians, journalists and professors. These pelted the authors with all the usual accusations: that they were anti-Semites, that they were resurrecting the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and so forth. There was something paradoxical in these attacks, since they only illustrated the authors' case.

But the debate that fascinates me is of a different nature. It broke out between senior intellectuals, from the legendary Noam Chomsky, the guru of the Left throughout the world (including Israel), to progressive websites everywhere. The bone of contention: the conclusion of the paper that the Jewish-Israeli lobby dominates US foreign policy and subjugates it to Israeli interests - in glaring contradiction to the national interest of the US itself. A case in point: the American assault on Iraq.

Chomsky and others rose up against this assertion. They do not deny the factual findings of the two professors, but object to their conclusions. In their view, it is not the Israel lobby that directs American policy, but the interests of the big corporations that dominate the American empire and exploit Israel for their own selfish aims.

Simply put: does the dog wag its tail, or does the tail wag its dog?

I AM NERVOUS about sticking my head into a debate between such illustrious intellectuals, but I feel obliged to express my view nevertheless.

I'll start with the Jew, who went to the Rabbi and complained about his neighbor. "You are right!" the Rabbi declared. Then came the neighbor and denounced the complainant. "You are right!" the Rabbi announced. "But how can that be," exclaimed the Rabbi's wife, "Only one of the two can be right!" "You are right, too," the Rabbi said.

I find myself in a similar situation. I think that both sides are right (and hope to be right, myself, too).

The findings of the two professors are right to the last detail. Every Senator and Congressman knows that criticizing the Israeli government is political suicide. Two of them, a Senator and a Congressman, tried - and were politically executed. The Jewish lobby was fully mobilized against them and hounded them out of office. This was done openly, to set a public example. If the Israeli government wanted a law tomorrow annulling the Ten Commandments, 95 Senators (at least) would sign the bill forthwith.

President Bush, for example, has withdrawn from all the established American positions regarding our conflict. He accepts automatically the positions of our government, be they as they may. Almost all the American media are closed to Palestinians and Israeli peace activists. As to professors - almost all of them know which side of their bread is peanut-buttered. If, in spite of that, somebody dares to open their mouth against the Israeli policy - as happens once every few years - they are smothered under a volley of denunciations: anti-Semite, Holocaust denier, neo-Nazi.

By the way, American guests in Israel, who know that at home it is forbidden to mention the influence of the Jewish-Israeli lobby, are dumbfounded to see that here the lobby does not hide its power in Washington but openly boasts of it.

The question, therefore, is not whether the two professors are right in their findings. The question is what conclusions can be drawn from them.

LET'S TAKE the Iraq affair. Who is the dog? Who the tail?

The Israeli government prayed for this attack, which has eliminated the strategic threat posed by Iraq. America was pushed into the war by a group of Neo- Conservatives, almost all of them Jews, who had a huge influence on the White House. In the past, some of them had acted as advisers to Binyamin Netanyahu.

On the face of it, a clear case. The pro-Israeli lobby pushed for the war, Israel is its main beneficiary. If the war ends in a disaster for America, Israel will undoubtedly be blamed.

Really? What about the American aim of getting their hands on the main oil reserves of the world, in order to dominate the world economy? What about the aim of placing an American garrison in the center of the main oil-producing area, on top of the Iraqi oil, between the oil of Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Caspian Sea? What about the immense influence of the big oil companies on the Bush family? What about the big multinational corporations, whose outstanding representative is Dick Cheney, that hoped to make hundreds of billions from the "reconstruction of Iraq"?

The lesson of the Iraq affair is that the American-Israeli connection is strongest when it seems that American interests and Israeli Interests are one (irrespective of whether that is really the case in the long run). The US uses Israel to dominate the Middle East, Israel uses the US to dominate Palestine.

But if something exceptional happens, such as the Jonathan Pollard espionage affair or the sale of an Israeli spy plane to China, and a gap opens between the interests of the two sides, America is quite capable of slapping Israel in the face.

AMERICAN-ISRAELI relations are indeed unique. It seems that they have no precedent in history. It is as if King Herod had given orders to Augustus Caesar and appointed the members of the Roman senate.

I don't think that this phenomenon can be wholly explained by economic interests. Even the most orthodox Marxist must recognize that it also has a spiritual dimension. It is no accident that American (as well as British) fundamentalist Christians invented the Zionist idea well before Theodor Herzl hit upon it. The evangelical lobby is no less important in today's Washington than the Zionist one. According to its ideology, the Jews must take possession of all the Holy Land in order to make the Second Coming of Christ possible (and then - the part they don't shout about - some Jews will become Christians and the rest will be annihilated at Armageddon, today's Meggido in Northern Israel).

At the basis of the phenomenon lies the uncanny similarity between the two national-religious stories, the American myth and the Israeli. In both, pioneers persecuted for their religion reached the shores of the Promised Land. They were forced to defend themselves against the "savage" natives, who were out to destroy them. They redeemed the land, made the desert bloom, created, with God's help, a flourishing, democratic and moral society.

Both societies live in a state of denial and unconscious guilt feelings - over there because of the genocide committed against the Native Americans and the horrifying slavery of the blacks, here because of the uprooting of half the Palestinian people and the oppression of the other half. Both here and there, people believe in an eternal war between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.

ANYHOW, THE American-Israeli symbiosis is unique and far too complex a phenomenon to be described as a simple conspiracy. I am sure that the two professors did not mean to do so.

The dog wags the tail and the tail wags the dog. They wag each other.

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