

Responding to Anti-Israel Rhetoric

On April 6, Great Britain's *The Guardian* published an appeal for a moratorium of European-Israeli academic and cultural ties. It was signed by 120 European academics. The full text of the letter appears below, followed by rebuttal letters by DAVID BERGER and MENACHEM KELLNER:

Despite widespread international condemnation for its policy of violent repression against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories, the Israeli government appears impervious to moral appeals from world leaders. The major potential source of effective criticism, the United States, seems reluctant to act.

However there are ways of exerting pressure from within Europe. Odd though it may appear, many national and European cultural and research institutions, including especially those funded from the EU and the European Science Foundation, regard Israel as a European state for the purposes of awarding grants and contracts. (No other Middle Eastern state is so regarded.)

Would it not therefore be timely if at both national and European level a moratorium was called upon any further such support unless and until Israel abide by UN resolutions and open serious peace negotiations with the Palestinians, along the lines proposed in many peace plans including most recently that sponsored by the Saudis and the Arab League.

DAVID BERGER (Broeklundian Professor of History, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York):

I AM a person who has often argued against the facile labeling of every position critical of Israel as anti-Semitic, and have previously proposed a rough criterion: Is the position in question rejected by a truly overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews on grounds of national security?

Very few Jews in Israel today, including those who supported far-reaching concessions, see an alternative to the current campaign. To use the term 'aggressor'—utilized by one of the signatories in a private communication and implicit in the reference to violent repression in the published appeal—to describe a country that acts to prevent the almost daily mass murder of its citizens is an offense to the language and to the most basic norms of ethical discourse. In March alone, Israel suffered twice as many deaths proportion-

ate to its population from suicide murders as the United States did on September 11th. These murders are part of a violent process initiated precisely as a result of extraordinary Israeli concessions at Camp David. For 18 months Israel refrained from this sort of invasion despite repeated provocation. As Natan Scharansky noted in his address at a Washington rally, it has now become a country in which places of entertainment are largely deserted, people are afraid to go to restaurants, hotels are mostly empty, people think ten times before purting their children on a bus, and married couples take care to say "I love you" before leaving the house in the morning lest they will not return. . . .

It is apparently your position that there is one country in the world that has no right to defend its citizens against unrelenting, incessant acts of mass murder by people aiming to destroy it entirely. That country also happens to be the only Jewish state in the world. Effectively, then, this is anti-Semitism, and of a far more horrific sort than the relatively benign conviction

that most Jews are thieves or pornographers. And it is anti-Semitism whose practitioners genuinely believe that they act and speak for a higher morality. The fact that this intifada was launched precisely in response to a peace offer more generous than anyone would have imagined six months before the offer was made does not prevent people from saying that the murderous violence against Israeli civilians results from an uncompromising occupation and/or a walk taken by Sharon on the Temple Mount when he was in the opposition.

AS a medievalist and historian of anti-Semitism, I say without hesitation that by taking this position you have placed yourselves squarely in the venerable European tradition of disdain for Jewish life. The next time you pat yourselves on the back for your moral sensitivity, keep in mind that the destruction of European synagogues and the throwing of stones at buses of French Jewish children is in large

TWO YEARS OF ENDLESS MURDER OF JEWS BY PALESTINIANS, TWO YEARS OF VIRULENT ANTI-SEMITIC PROPAGANDA BEING CHURNED OUT BY THE ARAB WORLD GENERALLY AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY IN PARTICULAR . . . TWO YEARS OF WATCHING EUROPEAN LEADERS CONDEMN ISRAEL TIME AND TIME AGAIN . . . HAVE LED ME TO THE RELUCTANT CONCLUSIONS THAT THE PALESTINIAN NATION APPARENTLY HAS THE LEADERSHIP IT DESERVES AND THAT THOSE EUROPEANS WHO LEND THAT LEADERSHIP THEIR SUPPORT ARE EITHER STUPID, OR IMMORAL, OR SIMPLY HATE JEWS.

measure the result of a climate of opinion created by European elites denouncing Jews as war criminals for doing what any people would do when faced with implacable enemies committing intolerable crimes. The only difference is that most other countries would react with far less concern for the civilian population of its enemies than Israel has shown.

MENACHEM KELLNER (Sir Isaac and Lady Edith Wolfson professor of Jewish Religious Thought, University of Haifa):

I WRITE as a person who has for years been identified with the "peace camp" in Israel, who had (and took) many opportunities to work for the improvement of the status of Arab students at the University of Haifa, and who was subject to not a little personal and social pressure and vilification because of his views and activities. I further belong to that group of Israelis who—two years ago—would have been willing, even happy, to withdraw from the land we occupied after the late King Hussein attacked us in 1967, redivide Jerusalem, and aid in the establishment of a Palestinian state. I am also confident that I have invested more in promoting peace in the Middle East than European academics who feel sure they hold the moral high ground, and by signing that disgraceful letter, take cheap shots at Israel in general and their Israeli colleagues in particular.

Two years of endless murder of Jews by Palestinians, two years of virulent anti-Semitic propaganda being churned out by the Arab world generally and the Palestinian Authority in particular, two years of watching the BBC report from the Middle East in a fashion which makes a mockery of any standard of journalistic objectivity, two years of watching European leaders condemn Israel time and time again while expressing sympathetic understanding for a regime that tolerates no dissent [and] lends spiritual support (at the very least) to the purposeful murderer of children, of

mothers, of grandmothers, have led me to the reluctant conclusions that the Palestinian nation apparently has the leadership it deserves and that those Europeans who lend that leadership their support are either stupid, or immoral, or simply hate Jews. The letter you signed speaks of the Israeli "policy of violent repression against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories" as if this "repression" takes place in a moral and political vacuum. . . . Were it not for the Arafat-inspired and -orchestrated Palestinian war on Israeli children, women, men, and only incidentally soldiers, Ehud Barak (an Israeli leader more to your taste, I assume—certainly he used to be more to my taste) would be Prime Minister of Israel. Need I further remind you that at Camp David and at Taba, Arafat had the option of saying to Barak: "No, but." Instead, he simply slammed the door, went home, and started killing Jews. . . .

MANY things puzzle me about the behavior of European "intellectuals," but I want to raise only one of them now. Even if the absurd and indubitably false claims were true that Israeli behavior in the West Bank and Gaza is as cruel, violent, and despicable as alleged by polished liars who appear regularly on international TV and radio and in the international press, would Israeli behavior be worse than that of Iraq? Is the suffering of Palestinians in the West Bank that much worse than the suffering of Palestinians in Kuwait after the Gulf War? Why go so far afield? A good case can be made that Great Britain has inflicted greater injustice and greater suffering on the Irish than a hundred Israels could have inflicted upon the Palestinians. Where are and were you and your colleagues? Were you organizing protests, calling for academic boycotts?

Perfidious Albion, or at least deeply hypocritical Albion, seems to be an appropriate commentary on the behavior of you and your colleagues.

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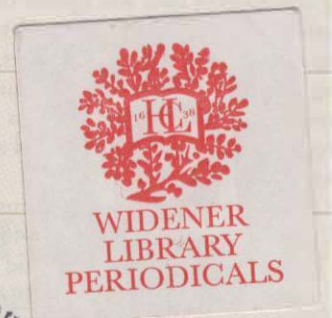
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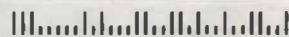
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