

## **Mahathir is right: Jews do rule the world**

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Just because you are paranoid it doesn't prove that they are not out to get you. Paranoid, to be sure, was Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's allegation that the "Jews rule this world by proxy" on October 16. Whether Dr Mahathir himself is paranoid, or whether he adapted his words to the paranoia of his audience makes little difference. Through the twisted prism of paranoia, the facts on the ground do indeed suggest that the Jews rule the world.

Europeans who turn up their noses at Malaysia's leader should recall that just 60 years ago, Europe's official ideology (under Nazi conquest) agreed with Mahathir's claim that the Jews "invented and successfully promoted socialism, communism, human rights and democracy". That is where Mahathir doubtless got the idea in the first place. Not only Adolf Hitler, but the highest circles of the Catholic Church believed that communism was a Jewish plot, as a Swiss priest, Father Martin Rhonheimer, documents in the November 2003 issue of First Things.

Not since Hitler has the leader of an important country claimed that democracy itself was a Jewish invention, at least in the modern period. Let us however not engage in what Leo Strauss called "reductio ad Hitlerum," rejecting ideas merely because Hitler invented them, and take Mahathir's claim at face value.

The Jews did indeed invent democracy, in its modern form, although not quite in the way he imagines.

Modern (as opposed to ancient Greek or Roman) democracy stems from the Protestant motto "solo scriptorum", "only the Bible", by which every man must interpret scripture for himself. To begin with, Protestantism was unimaginable without Jewish theologians (who exposed the incompatibilities of free will and original sin), not to mention Jewish bible translators. In such a world, congregations must elect their church elders (Presbyterians) or even their pastors (Congregationalists), rather than accept church hierarchy. If democracy rules ecclesiastical affairs, why not then secular affairs as well?

Only Anglo-Saxon Protestantism had the opportunity to take on a political form, thanks in large part to the colonization of America. America's so-called revolution was in fact a second English civil war, in which the Whigs supported the American rebels against the Tory government. England's democratic impulse came from the extreme wing of its Protestants, from such sects as the Separatists who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony, or the Quakers who founded Pennsylvania. Only on American soil did radical Protestantism flourish unimpeded by monarchy and established church.

America's founders set forth with messianic ambitions. They saw themselves as a new Israel setting out to found a new Jerusalem, as in John Winthrop's famous sermon "On Christian Charity". "We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when 10 of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory,

that men shall say of succeeding plantations, the Lord make it like that of New England. For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."

Jews played a small role in the creation of the American colonies, and a marginal role in the revolution, but American democracy stemmed from Jewish ideas. That is quite different from Mahathir's claim that Jews "invented" democracy. No conspiracy can invent democracy of the American kind. Massachusetts farmers formed a battle line against British regulars at Lexington and Concord in 1775 because self-governance was to them a matter of life and death. Such a sentiment is alien to Mahathir's world. His imagination does not encompass people like the radical Protestants of 18th century New England.

American democracy grew from a seed-crystal of representative institutions, beginning, as noted, with the election of church officials. Americans are used to governing their own affairs through a vast number of institutions at the capillary level of society. It astonished me to discover that the election of local school boards in American towns can excite more partisan passion than a presidential election. Unlike Europe, where education ministries dispense a centralized budget, American towns tax themselves for elementary and secondary education. Towns with better schools attract higher-income residents who can afford to pay for better education, in a virtuous cycle. Hospitals, public libraries and even the fire brigade draw on private resources and volunteer labor.

That brings us to the touchy matter of conspiracies. Mahathir's world is populated by conspiracies. They are as real and tangible to him as the chair on which he sits. In the rough-and-tumble of democratic governance, conspiracies help little, because all the important issues will come to light one way or another. What Bernard Lewis calls "consultative" governance in the Islamic world, however, only can exist through conspiracies.

There does not exist to my knowledge a self-governing school board, hospital committee or fire brigade anywhere in Arab countries. But the meanest peasant may approach the loftiest ruler for the privilege of a few moments' worth of whispered pleading. Beneficent and merciful rulers will take pity on their subjects. If one wishes to influence the ruler, numerous of his subjects must agree in advance what they shall whisper in his ear, that is, literally, to conspire.

That helps explain why Mahathir can account for the facts as he observes them by no means other than conspiracy. There is another dimension to this as well, namely the theological. If the constitution is the bone of American democracy, radical Protestant theology forms its bone marrow. What is the relationship between Islamic theology and government? Does it help explain why we encounter what Lewis calls "consultative" as opposed to "representative" forms of government in the Islamic world?

Imitatio dei, emulation of God, is the most important practical consequence of religion. Religious men act according to their conception of the attributes of the deity they worship. Let us tug a bit at this thread, and see where it leads us.

Remember that the Jewish God enjoys only a qualified sort of omnipotence. His sympathy with mankind, his creation, compels him to suffer along with his creatures. He cannot help but hear the cry of innocent blood, the complaint of the widow and orphan, the mistreated stranger and the oppressed slave (Professor James Kugel of Harvard makes his hoary argument in *The God of Old*). He is the God of the town meeting, of the popular assembly, of the democrats. With good reason, Friedrich Nietzsche labelled the Jewish deity a God of slaves. He permits the likes of Abraham and Moses to give him a hard time over such things as the destruction of Sodom, or exterminating the sinners among the Israelites.

When ancient Israel demanded that their leader, the prophet Samuel, appoint a king (I Samuel 8), God complained, "They have rejected me as their king." He tells Samuel to warn the people against kings. When the people demand a king nonetheless, God tells Samuel, "Give them a king." The Jews' God chose for his people a despised race of slaves. He humbles himself by sympathizing with the weak. The Christian God even came to earth and allowed himself to be crucified. He loves the poor and weak. Indeed, weakness ineluctably draws forth his love. Jewish and Christian theologians speak of "divine humility".

Not so Allah, the beneficent, the merciful. "For Islam, the notion that man's failings more powerfully awake God's love than man's merits is an absurd, indeed an impossible thought. Allah has pity upon human weaknesses, but the idea that he loves weakness more than strength is a form of divine humility that is foreign to the God of Mohammed," wrote the Jewish theologian Franz Rosenzweig.

Imitatio dei may explain why Americans and Muslims seek quite different attributes in their political leaders. More important than strength and intelligence in the character of an American presidential candidate is humility. Whatever one thinks of President George W Bush, he cultivates the same sort of folksy image that served former president Jimmy Carter so well. In this regard one thinks of Bill Clinton, who hid his intellectual arrogance so effectively, or Ronald Reagan, who cloaked his ideological fervor in self-deprecating humor.

More than anything else, Americans want their leaders to listen to them. A president had better be a better listener than a talker. That is what Americans expect from their God, after all, and all the more so from a president who is a mere human.

The sort of leader who evoked adulation in the Arab world, eg, a Gamal Abdel Nasser, produces only revulsion among Americans. The trouble is that the gap between American and Islamic views of the world may be unbridgeable. The more Americans learn about the Islamic world, the less they may be inclined to sympathize with the Islamic cause.

In November 2001, for example, 31 percent of Americans told an opinion poll that Islam had a great deal in common with their religion. Now, only 22 percent believe that this is the case. That is why Bush will not fire General William Boykin, who scandalized the news media by suggesting that the "war against terror" had a religious dimension. If barely a one-fifth of Americans see a commonality between Islam and their own religion, who can blame Boykin - who heads the hunt for Osama bin Laden - for stating what everyone believes?

Since September 11, 2001, the government of the US, its news media and its academic institutions have made extraordinary efforts to emphasize the common goals of Islam and the West. "Islam is a religion of peace," Bush has repeated countless times. Spokesmen for Islamic organizations in the US and abroad have enjoyed an unprecedented degree of access to the American media, and the American public has been exposed to the Islamic viewpoint to an extent never before imaginable.

The result appears to be precisely the opposite of what the government, news media and academia intended. Americans show less sympathy than before to Islam, and, correspondingly, more inclination to support the Israeli cause.

Why, Arabs (and many Europeans) ask themselves, should the greatest power in the world care about the fate of a few million leftovers from an ancient past, colonizing a corner of the Mediterranean in order to preserve their battered nationhood? Why would America make so many enemies and lose so many friends over the Jews? Can anything but a vast and insidious conspiracy explain such irrational behavior?

That is a fatal error. America may be a great power, but it is composed of individuals who consider themselves weak. They want the respect of their leaders and the protection of their laws even when they are weak, poor and despised. Their ancestors came to America in the hope of finding such a haven. Fairness and sympathy for the underdog are not merely a sentimental issue in the US; they are woven into the fabric of America's being. America is the political realization of the slave-religion, the cult of the creator of heaven and earth who cannot help but answer the cry of the widow, the fatherless, the poor, and the stranger. The more you tell Americans that they should abandon their friends in the interest of political advantage, the likelier they are to reach for their guns (and most of them own guns).

They want a Jewish sort of God who hears the prayer of the widow and the fatherless, and they want a government that protects the widow and the fatherless from the powerful and the arrogant. Through America's inherent sense of justice, Jews do rule the world, just as Mahathir believes, although not of course in the way he imagines it.

Mahathir, to be sure, has deplored the violent responses of some in the Islamic world, which merely repels potential friends. Yet he has done just as much damage to the image of Islam in the West. Merely by being himself, he contributed to the deep sense of unease that Americans have concerning the character of the Islamic world.

Great understanding among cultures does not always make things better. Sometimes it makes things worse. Adolf Eichmann, it should be recalled, studied Hebrew with a Berlin rabbi, the better to understand the Jews he wished to exterminate. The leaders of the Islamic terrorist organizations are not throwbacks to the 10th century, but Western-educated science students.

In his own paranoid fashion, Mahathir has advanced the cause of mutual understanding between the Islamic world and America. Mahathir has made clear that the Jews do, indeed, rule the world, at least in the sense that he and his compatriots understand the words "to rule". And he has made clear to Americans that the filter through which the Islamic world views America is a form of paranoia that cannot quickly be cured.

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