Guest Comment
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Jewish Guilt
Proponents of appeasing dictators also scapegoat Jews; so what else is new?

By Clifford D. May

What do Sen. Carl Levin, author Michael Lerner, activist Phyllis Bennis, opinion journalist Bruce Shapiro, and civil-rights advocate Michael Ratner have in common? All are among the veritable phalanx of liberal Jews who are at the forefront of the movement to stop President Bush from using military force to topple dictator Saddam Hussein.

So how is it that Rep. James Moran (D., Va.) can think, much less say: "If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this."?

Moran (who has since said he didn't mean to say what he said) is hardly alone. Pundit and perennial candidate Pat Buchanan has long been leveling similar charges. His most recent iteration is that "the neo-con vision is to conscript American blood to make the world safe for Israel." Columnist Robert Novak appears to agree. He recently insinuated that suspicions about Saudi financing of terrorism had been manufactured by Israel.

Former Sen. Gary Hart criticized "Americans who too often find it hard to distinguish their loyalties to their original homelands from their loyalties to America and its national interests." (Mr. Hart later protested that he wasn't singling out Jews. But if he was referring to Albanian Americans who lobbied Clinton to intervene in Kosovo he hasn't managed to set off much of a debate.)

And this past weekend, the New York Times's Bill Keller wrote a column headlined "Is It Good for the Jews?" Keller dismissed the new Jewish-conspiracy theories, but with so little energy and conviction that the net effect was to lend them legitimacy.

The allegation that any of this springs from anti-Semitism is probably unfair — although the result will be, without doubt, to fuel anti-Semitism's fires. Those flames today burn most hotly on the Left. One recent example: the banning of Michael Lerner as a speaker at an antiwar rally because, though dovish regarding Yassir Arafat and vitriolic toward Israel's Ariel Sharon, Lerner doesn't endorse the delegitimization and eventual annihilation of Israel, doesn't agree with such leftists as Kirkpatrick Sale who recently wrote that Israel "should be abandoned" because "there will continue to be violence as long as Israel exists." (You see the logic: No Israeli existence, no problem. We might call this the Left's "final solution" to the Jewish problem.)

But if raw anti-Semitism is not the primary cause of these peculiar views, what is? To a large extent, the views coming from Moran et al. probably arise from the frustration of the antiwar movement over its inability to gather a head of steam. In the March issue of Vanity Fair, culture critic James Wolcott writes on this theme in a piece entitled "What If They Gave a War and Nobody Cared." Wolcott, to his credit, does not descend to Jew-bashing to explain what he sees as "national apathy" about President's Bush determination to secure regime change in Iraq. Rather, he blames a campaign cleverly orchestrated by "Bush's hawks and their media pigeons." (In the interest of full disclosure, I am among the hawks he singles out, citing in particular my "sliming" of actor/activist Sean Penn in the pages of
It is worth pausing for a moment to ask what should be an obvious question: Why wouldn't American Jews support ending Saddam's tyranny? Jews ought to have a sharpened insight into the likely consequences of appeasing ruthless and expansionist dictators. Saddam also funds and encourages terrorism against Israelis. If he gets his hands on a biological bomb or nuclear weapon, he'll no doubt pace his palace floor trying to decide where to instruct his terrorist allies to deploy it. Are Moran, Buchanan, and the others so sure Saddam will decide on Tel Aviv — not New York or Washington? (And even if the answer is Tel Aviv — shouldn't that matter at least a teeny-tiny bit to Moran and Buchanan?)

American Jews also might be sympathetic to the suffering of the Iraqi people. Here, again, historical memory ought to kick in when hundreds of thousands of people are slaughtered, tortured, raped and ethnically cleansed by a brute who finds inspiration in Hitler's words and deeds.

Yes, it's true that if President Bush leads a successful war to defeat terrorism and the rogue dictators who collude with terrorists that will benefit Israel and it will be "good for the Jews." But that's not because the Jews picked a fight with Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. That's not because Sharon hopes to place his flag on the highest hill in Baghdad. It's because Saddam and bin Laden declared war on Jews — as well as on Christians and traditional, moderate Muslims.

And recall that way back in 1996 bin Laden published a "Declaration of War Against the Americans." (Note that he didn't declare war on "American Jews." ) As for Saddam, he clearly seeks vengeance against Americans, among other things for kicking him out of Kuwait (not a Jewish country last time I checked the World Almanac) and humiliating him in 1991. That's why he attempted to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush in 1993.

It is mind-boggling that Moran, Hart, and Buchanan — not to mention Levin, Lerner, Shapiro, Bennis, and so many others on the Left — fail to comprehend this. It is a mystery how so many people have managed to persuade themselves that Bush and Sharon — not Saddam and bin Laden and other self-proclaimed "jihadists" — are the problem. It is baffling that anyone would believe that the Iraqis are content under Saddam's jackboot, and that so many people who fancy themselves champions of human rights support — at least implicitly — the perpetuation of one of the world's bloodiest and most aggressive tyrannies, while turning a blind eye to Saddam's victims — Iraqi and Israeli, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian alike.

The puzzler is why so many otherwise intelligent people continue to believe that appeasement and scapegoating are ever an answer or can ever bring real peace.

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