



Christmas perverted

Western governments fund religious incitement as a political weapon against Israel

THIS CHRISTMAS, political warfare against Israel once again took on a religious dimension.

The assault, led by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), well-known charities and church groups, exploited heightened religious emotions during the holiday season to foment hatred against the Jewish state. In some instances, the rhetoric reflects anti-Semitic religious teachings such as comparing Israel to tyrannical 1st century Romans, portraying Israel as a modern day “Herod” persecuting Palestinian children and referring to Judaism’s “tribal god of retaliation.”

These attacks are made possible by the extensive governmental funding the NGOs receive from the EU, UK, Ireland, Belgium, France, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands and Spain, as well as from countries as friendly to Israel like the US and Canada.

The role of theology in fomenting anti-Jewish emotions has deep and lethal roots, dating back millennia. After the Holocaust, Christian theologians undertook a comprehensive reconsideration of Christianity’s attitudes toward Jews and Judaism. This led to the renunciation by major churches of teachings that incited anti-Jewish violence over the centuries.

But old traditions die hard.

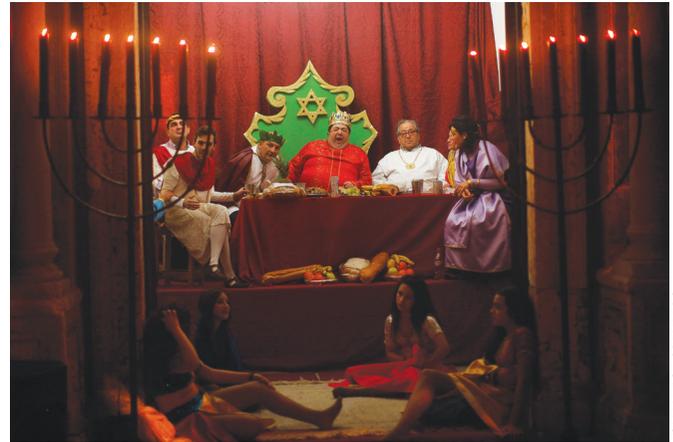
Take Kairos Palestine, a campaign to promote the 2009 “Kairos Palestine Document,” drafted by a small group of Palestinian Christian clergy. It calls for BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) against Israel and denies the Jewish religious and historical connection to any part of modern day Israel. It refers to Palestinian terrorism as “legal resistance” and denies the legitimacy of Judaism, by arguing that it was superseded by Jesus and Christianity.

No surprise, then, that this year Kairos Palestine released a 60-page “Christmas Alert,” containing an overtly anti-Semitic reference to “the Jewish lobby” that “intimidates us, cripples us and lulls us into a roaring silence, blocking our conscience into passive inaction.”

The “Christmas Alert” contains articles from anti-Israel NGOs such as Society of St. Yves (funded by Germany, Norway and the Netherlands), and Defense for Children International – Palestine Section (funded by the Netherlands, Switzerland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain and the EU).

The World Council of Churches, representing some 350 churches in 110 countries, also contributed to this document. The WCC actively and enthusiastically promotes Kairos Palestine and runs three major projects promoting Israel’s delegitimization: the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and the Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre. Some of the WCC’s funding comes from Norway, Germany, UK, Denmark and Finland.

A particularly odious example of festive season Israel-bashing comes from Wi’am, a Palestinian NGO funded by the US and Sweden. Wi’am issued a Christmas message describing Israel as a “tyranny” comparable to Rome and referring to Judaism’s “tribal god of retaliation.” In so doing, Wi’am echoes ancient teachings of con-



JON NAZCA / REUTERS

A man dressed as the tyrannical King Herod takes part in a reenactment of the nativity scene, in Arcos de la Frontera, near Cadiz, Spain, December 20

tempt for Jews.

The UK-based Amos Trust’s annual “Bethlehem Pack” promotes theologically-based advocacy against Israel such as, “Being a Jew living in Nazareth, Jesus would not be allowed by his own leadership to enter Bethlehem.” Ironically, if Jesus of Nazareth of modern day Israel went to Bethlehem, the Amos Trust and other NGOs would condemn him for being a “Jewish settler.”

Indoctrinating Sunday school children is also included in Amos Trust’s program. The “Bethlehem Pack would have them make a “replica of a house” and a piece of paper “representing a demolition order,” then act out the roles of “Palestinians who own the house; Israeli soldiers (to knock down the house); UK volunteers (a larger group) to rebuild the house.”

Christmas cards, products and events are also part of the broader campaign. UK-based War on Want’s Christmas card depicts the “Three Wise Men” digging under the security barrier to enter Bethlehem. Repeating this theme is the Bethlehem Bible College’s “Nativity set with separation wall.”

Let’s call this exploitation of the Christmas season what it is – religious incitement. Using theology to promote an anti-Israel political message cannot be seen any other way. Christian anti-Semitism – which has proven deadly to Jews in centuries past – is being revitalized as a political weapon against Israel. That this is funded by Western governments is a moral disgrace that must be brought to an immediate end. ■

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A UN peace resolution

Israel should enter negotiations with Europe and the US on language that would include essential components of a solution

AFTER THE Palestinians' narrow failure in late December to get a UN Security Council resolution setting a deadline for ending the conflict with Israel, it is only a matter of time before they try again.

It is too early to speculate on the precise language of a new draft, but like its predecessor, it will, in all probability, set a timetable for Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and call for the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. It will also probably call for a resumption of peace talks with Israel based on these principles.

With the changed composition of the council's non-permanent members – Australia, Rwanda, Luxembourg, South Korea and Argentina replaced by New Zealand, Angola, Spain, Malaysia and Venezuela – the Palestinians stand a better chance of getting the necessary nine votes for passage of the resolution.

The key question then will be whether or not the US chooses to exercise its veto power. Three European powers, France, Britain and Germany, hope to finesse the American dilemma. They share growing European frustration with the Israeli-Palestinian stalemate, including a tendency to blame Israel for the impasse and a readiness to pressure it to move toward a negotiated agreement with the Palestinians.

They are trying to formulate a compromise draft resolution that will be acceptable to the Palestinians, which the US will not feel obliged to veto and which will put pressure on Israel to reengage and move toward a conflict-ending peace deal.

So far, the Israeli government has responded to the Palestinian UN initiative in its usual knee-jerk fashion. It launched a wide-ranging diplomatic effort to prevent adoption of the Palestinian draft and vehemently attacked Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his "diplomatic terror." Israel is also staunchly opposed to the European move to formulate a more moderate resolution.

Assuming the Palestinians get the necessary nine votes next time, the Israeli holding game could have two possible results, neither of them good.

In the first scenario, America imposes a veto, partly because along with the administration's antipathy toward Netanyahu and his rejectionist policies, there is also deep anger at Abbas's conduct during the intensive 2013-14 US mediation effort.

In this case, both Israel and the US will again be exposed and embarrassed in their unsplendid isolation on the Palestinian issue. The EU countries will press for further steps against Israel and the delegitimization process will get an additional boost.

In the second scenario, a resolution more moderate than the Palestinian draft is passed. The US doesn't vote for it, but doesn't veto it either. Again Israeli and American isolation will be plain to see. More importantly, the resolution, which will have been passed in the teeth of unmitigated Israeli opposition, will provide terms of reference for any future Israeli-Palestinian negotiation.

It is abundantly clear why political forces in Israel opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state and Israeli withdrawal from most of



EDUARDO MUNO / REUTERS

It is only a matter of time before the Palestinians try the UN Security Council again

the West Bank are fighting tooth and nail against any Security Council draft. What is not clear is why political players – including the leaders of important political parties – who favor a Palestinian state and withdrawal from most of the West Bank and who see in this a paramount Israeli interest, essential to Israel's preservation as the democratic state of the Jewish people, fail to see the potentially positive aspects of a new UN Security Council resolution on the Palestinian issue.

The most common argument is that Israel cannot accept an imposed solution and that any deal must be the outcome of negotiations between the parties directly concerned.

The logical conclusion of this thinking, though, is that rather than ignoring the UN arena, Israel should enter negotiations with the European powers and the US on the language of a new Security Council resolution that would include components of a solution essential for the Palestinians – but also components essential for Israel.

The wording would, to a large extent, be based on Israeli-Palestinian negotiations over the past several years, including agreements reached, and would anchor in a single document the not inconsiderable progress achieved so far – and thereby circumvent the self-defeating Sisyphean practice under which every time negotiations restart, they begin again from scratch.

Even if the effort to achieve a draft of this kind fails, it would show Israeli goodwill and underline a genuine readiness to move toward a two-state solution. But to adopt this approach, Israeli politicians would have to start treating their proclamations of support for the two-state solution seriously.

And that, it seems, may be too much to ask. ■

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