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Israël. Hallelujah, the World is Against Us!

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A LOCAL TV station told us this week about a group of Israelis who adhere to conspiracy theories.

They believe that George W. Bush planned the destruction of the Twin Towers in order to further his wicked aims. They believe that the big pharmaceutical corporations spread the swine flue virus in order to sell their worthless vaccines. They believe that Barack Obama is a secret agent of the military-industrial complex. They believe that fluoride is put into drinking water to sterilize men, in order to reduce mankind by exactly two billion. And so on.

I wonder that they have not yet uncovered the most nefarious conspiracy of all: the one perpetrated by the gang of anti-Semites who have taken control of the government of Israel and are using it to destroy the Jewish State.

PROOF? NOTHING easier. One has only to read the papers.

The Foreign Minister, for example. Who but a diabolic anti-Semite could have appointed Avigdor Lieberman, of all people, to this post? The job of a foreign minister is to make friends and convince world opinion that we are right. Lieberman is working hard and skillfully to get Israel hated by one and all.

Or the Minister of the Interior. He works from morning to night to shock human rights defenders and supply ammunition to the worst enemies of Israel. Recently, he prevented two babies from entering Israel because their father is gay. He prevents women from joining their husbands in Israel. He deports children of foreign workers, who are building the state.

Or the Chief of Staff. He persuaded the government to boycott the UN commission for the investigation of the "Cast Lead" operation, thus abandoning the field to the accusers of the IDF. And since the publication of its report, he has been orchestrating a worldwide defamation campaign against the Jewish Zionist judge, Richard Goldstone.

Now the IDF has announced its determination to block the flotilla that plans to bring symbolic supplies to the besieged Gaza Strip. That will ensure live TV coverage, with the whole world following the small ships and having their attention drawn to the vicious blockade imposed for years upon a million and a half human beings. The dream of every Israel-hater.

The conspiracy reached its climax this week, when Professor Noam Chomsky was denied entry into the West Bank.

THIS AFFAIR has no credible explanation except a vicious anti-Semitic plot.

In the beginning I thought that it was just the usual mixture of ignorance and folly. But I have come to the conclusion that it can't be so. Even in our present government, stupidity cannot have reached such proportions.

Briefly, this is what happened: the 81-year old professor arrived at the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan River on his way from Amman to Birzeit University near Ramallah, where he was to deliver two lectures about US policy. The Israeli authorities of course knew well in advance about his coming. A young official asked him some questions, contacted his superiors at the Interior Ministry, returned to ask some more questions, contacted his superiors again, and then stamped his passport with the words: "Entry Denied".

And what were the questions? Why he does not lecture at an Israeli university. And why he has no Israeli passport.

The professor returned to Amman and delivered his lectures by video link. The incident was widely publicized all over the world, especially in the US. The Interior Ministry apologized half-heartedly, stating that the matter was not under its jurisdiction, that it was the responsibility of the military Coordinator for the (Occupied) Territories.

That is, of course, a mendacious excuse, since the ministry itself has recently denied entry to several personalities who profess sympathy with the Palestinians, including the most popular clown in Spain.

A PERSONAL memory of mine: a dozen years ago I took part in a heated public debate in London with Edward Said, the late Palestinian professor. He happened to mention that his friend, Noam Chomsky, was about to deliver a lecture at a local university.

I hastened there and saw the building surrounded by a dense crowd of young men and women. With great difficulty I pushed my way to the stairs which led up to the lecture hall, but was stopped by the ushers. I pleaded in vain that I was a friend of the lecturer and that I had come all the way from Israel just to hear him. They told me that even a needle could not be squeezed in. Such was his popularity even then.

Noam Chomsky is, perhaps, the most in-demand intellectual on earth. His reputation goes way beyond his academic specialty – linguistics – where he is considered a genius. He is the guru of millions around the planet. The world media treat him as a cerebral celebrity.

If so, what could have induced the Ministers of the Interior and/or Defense to hold this man for four hours and then send him back where he came from? Abysmal folly? Malice? Vengefulness? All of these? Or perhaps something else?

THIS AFFAIR has many wide-ranging implications.

First of all: it is a provocation against the Palestinian Authority, with whom Binyamin Netanyahu wants to have direct peace negotiations – or so he says. It's like spitting in their face.

Chomsky arrived as a guest of Mustafa Barghouti, a Palestinian leader who espouses non-violence and human rights. He came to give lectures at a Palestinian university.

How does that concern Israel? What Chutzpa is it to prevent Palestinian students from hearing a lecturer of their choosing?

And what does it tell us about Netanyahu's perorations about "Two States for Two Peoples"? What kind of a Palestinian state is this supposed to be, if Israel can decide who is allowed to enter, and who not? Especially in light of the Israeli demand to control all the border crossing of the new state!

SECOND, ALL over the world a campaign is in full swing to boycott all Israeli universities. Not only the self-styled "University Institute" at the Ariel settlement, and not only Bar-Ilan University, which helped to set it up. All of them.

Several associations of academics in the UK and other countries have adopted resolutions to impose this boycott, and other groups oppose it. It is an ongoing battle.

The opponents of the boycott raise the flag of academic freedom. Where shall we be if we boycott researchers and

thinkers because of their country of residence or opinions? The Italian writer Umberto Eco has written his colleagues an emotional letter against the boycott. I, too, oppose it.

And here comes the government of Israel and pulls the rug out from under our feet. No one suggests that Chomsky supports terrorism or is coming to spy. His entry was denied solely because of his views. This means that academic freedom is good only if it serves those who praise Israel, but is worth no more than a garlic's skin (as we say in Hebrew) when it is used by somebody who objects to the policies of the Israeli government.

That is a direct help for the boycotters. The more so since not a single Israel university or group of academics has raised its voice in protest.

THE ASSERTION that Chomsky is an enemy of Israel is ludicrous.

He bears an eminently Hebrew first name, and so does his daughter, Aviva, who accompanied him.

I met him for the first time in the 60s, when I visited him in his cramped quarters at MIT, one of the most respected academic institutions in the US and the world.

He spoke with some nostalgia about the kibbutz (Hazorea, of the leftist Zionist Hashomer Hatzair movement), where he had lived for a year in his youth. We exchanged opinions and agreed that the two-state idea was the only practical solution.

His first name was given to him by his parents, who were born in the Russian empire and emigrated to the US in their youth. The mother tongue of both was Yiddish, but they devoted their home to Hebrew culture, and Noam spoke Hebrew from early childhood. In the mental world of his youth, socialism and anarchism were mixed with Zionism. His doctoral thesis was about the Hebrew language.

I have been following his statements ever since. I never found any opposition to the existence of Israel. What I did find was sharp criticism of the Israeli government's policies – the same criticism levied by the Israeli peace forces. But he is far more critical of the successive US administrations, whose policies he considers to be the mother of all evils.

When the two professors, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, published their revolutionary expose supporting the claim that Israel controls US policy through the Israel lobby, Chomsky contradicted them and argued that the reverse was true: that it is the US which exploits Israel for its imperialist designs, contrary to real Israeli interests.

As for myself, I believe that both theses are right. Chomsky's assertion may be illustrated by the present American veto on a Fatah-Hamas reconciliation, as well as the American intervention that prevents the Gilad Shalit prisoners' swap.

So why, for God's sake, was this man denied entry into the country?

I HAVE a theory which would explain everything.

For many centuries, the Jews were persecuted in Christian Europe. Anti-Semitism turned their life into hell. They fell victim to pogroms, mass expulsions, confinement in ghettos, oppressive edicts and discriminatory laws. In the course

of time, they developed mental and practical defense mechanisms, methods of survival and routes of escape.

Since the Holocaust, the situation has changed radically. In the US the Jews now live in a paradise unparalleled since the Golden Age in Muslim Spain. When the State of Israel came into being, it attracted world-wide admiration and sympathy.

That was wonderful, but below the surface of the national consciousness – if one may generalize - a sense of unease, of disorientation, set in. The tried and trusted defense mechanisms, which had given the Jews a feeling of orientation and awareness of lurking dangers, disintegrated. They felt that something was out of order, that the well-known road signs were not working anymore. When the Gentiles laud the Jews or are ready to make alliances with them, that is suspicious. Clearly, something sinister must be behind it. Things are not as we knew them. That's frightening.

Since then, we have been working feverishly to bring the situation back to normal. Without being conscious of it, we do what we can to be hated again, to feel at home, on familiar ground.

If there is a conspiracy, it is a conspiracy of ourselves against ourselves. We shall not rest until the world is anti-Semitic again, and we know how to behave.

As the jolly song goes: "The entire world is against us, but what the hell..."

Post-scriptum :

May 22th 2010