



Will America continue to support Israel?

RECEIVED from a reader some while ago an article entitled, "Why Israel cannot always rely on America's helping hand", by Tony Judt, director of the Remarque Institute at New York University, and published in the *Financial Times* of 23 May 2006. Judt refers to the way in which over the past forty years there has been a gradual reduction in support across the world for the nation of Israel. At the time of the Six-Day War in June 1967, the Western world was largely sympathetic towards Israel, seen as a little nation trying to preserve itself from surrounding hostile Arab nations collectively many times its size. The Six-Day War itself was widely perceived as plucky Israel successfully defending itself against enormous odds.

It was, however, Israel's success in the Six-Day War that ultimately brought about growing hostility towards Israel. Israel's continued occupation of the territories conquered then from Jordan, Syria and Egypt resulted in the creation of the Palestinian movement, skilfully manipulated

by Yasser Arafat and others to attract the world's sympathy, despite the atrocities it has committed and its intransigence in peace talks. This is how Judt perceives it:

"Israel's actions in the West Bank and Gaza have magnified its shortcomings to a watching world. The routines of occupation and repression were once familiar only to an informed minority; today, computer terminals and satellite dishes put Israel's behaviour under daily global scrutiny. The result has been a complete transformation in the international view of Israel. The universal shorthand symbol for Israel, reproduced in political cartoons, is the Star of David emblazoned on a tank. Today the universal victims, the emblematic persecuted minority, are not Jews but Palestinians".

The recent Lebanese war has added force to this perception of Israel.

Tony Judt then goes on to say that Israel has been able to ignore all this hostile world opinion because of what he terms "the unquestioning support of the US". He points out, however, that, whereas Israel

has no choice but to look to the US for support, the US has the choice of whether or not to continue supporting Israel at all, and there are indications that things may change:

"The fact is that the disastrous Iraq invasion and its aftermath have set in train a sea-change in America's foreign-policy debate. It is becoming clear to prominent thinkers across the political spectrum . . . that in recent years the US has suffered a catastrophic loss of international influence and degradation of its image. There is much repair work ahead, above all in Washington's dealings with economically and strategically vital regions of the world. But this cannot succeed while US foreign policy is tied by an umbilical cord to the needs and interests of one small Middle Eastern country of little relevance to America's long-term concerns—a country that is . . . a strategic burden".

Judt suggests that a change in America's attitude towards Israel will drive her to make major concessions to the Palestinians and achieve peace, one way in which the dwelling

safely of Ezekiel 38 could be fulfilled, though there are other views as to what this means and how it will be fulfilled. One thing is sure, America's need for oil will prevent her abandoning the Middle East altogether, and so she will be still be there as part of the protesting Tarshish confederation when Gog invades the Middle East. However, some loosening of the ties that currently bind America to Israel is surely necessary, for it is unthinkable in the present situation for hostile forces to invade the Middle East and overrun Israel as prophecy demands. Will we see the situation in the days of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of old being replayed, with America as the latter-day Egypt who proves to be an unreliable ally?

Anti-Semitism in Edinburgh

THE growth in anti-Semitism is well illustrated by an article in *The Times* of 15 August, entitled, "Have you heard the one about the Jews?", and forwarded to me by a reader. The author, Jamie Glassman, apparently a Jew himself, is producer and writer for a television programme called *The Ali G Show*, apparently a satirical programme full of insulting jokes. Yet Glassman was appalled when he visited the Edinburgh Festival in August at the open anti-Semitism being expressed.

The Edinburgh Festival is the world's largest arts festival, and besides its mainstream cultural events is noted for what is known as 'The Fringe', a vast array of events which, if descriptions of what goes on are correct, are noted for the fact that 'anything goes', a good illustration of the wickedness and decadence of society today. Jamie Glassman,

who, it appears, normally revels in that sort of thing, professed himself particularly shocked by two events which he attended.

In one an Australian radical called Steve Hughes launched into an attack on America in violent and obscene language, particularly concentrating on Jews who occupy or have recently occupied prominent positions in the American Administration. What troubled Glassman was that half the audience clearly welcomed what he was saying. He comments, "Hughes represents a growing trend among left-thinking people in this country and around the world to accept as dogma that those on the Left should hate Bush, Blair, American imperialism, Israel, and, while we're at it, the Jews. It is a cultural trend that I've found increasingly evident, but never before has the Jew-hating element been so overt".

The other item was by an African-American comedian called Reginald D. Hunter. He claimed that it was acceptable to deny the Holocaust and make it the subject of satire. He was not openly anti-Semitic like Hughes, but Glassman comments: "While Hughes did little to hide his Jew hatred, in a way it is even more disheartening that Hunter is so keen to make the Holocaust fair game".

When the full horror of the Holocaust was revealed to the world it became unacceptable in the Western world to be anti-Jewish, but the effect of the Holocaust is now wearing off. Denying the Holocaust, and promoting the false idea that there is a Jewish conspiracy to rule the world (as stated in the 100-year-old forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*), are coming together to create a new anti-Semitism in the world.

The significance of the Israel-Hizbullah war

AN earlier article in *The Times* (2 August), which I was also sent, commented on the significance of the Israel-Hizbullah war under the title, "This is just the start of a showdown between the West and The Rest". The author, Amir Taheri, argues that the war was not just the latest outbreak of the hostility of the Arabs towards Israel, a hostility which would be removed by Israel returning the West Bank to the Arabs. He claims that in the twenty-first century, warfare in the wider Middle East has moved on from disputes about territory to conflicts of ideology. He says:

"Since 2001 the region has been turned into an ideological battleground between two rival camps with global ambitions. One camp, led by the United States, claims to represent the modern global system of open markets, free elections, religious freedoms and sexual equality. The other camp is represented by radical Islam, which regards the Western model as not only decadent but dangerous for the future of mankind. It hopes to unite the world under the banner of Islam, which it holds to be 'The Only True Faith'.

"In the Lebanese conflict [still going on when Taheri wrote the article] Israel and Hizbullah are the junior proxies for the rival camps. Israel is not fighting to hold or win more land; nor is Hizbullah. But both realise that they cannot live in security and prosper as long as the other is in a position to threaten their existence. A Middle

East dominated by Islamism could, in time, spell the death of Israel as a nation-state. A westernised, democratic Lebanon, on the other hand, could become the graveyard of Hizbullah and its messianic ideology”.

Taheri goes on to state that the war had a lot to do with who is going to lead Islam's fight against the West. Until recently militant Islam has been led by Sunnis (al Qaeda is a Sunni organisation), but now Shias, backed by Iran, have taken the lead (Hizbullah is a Shia group). In order to get the support of Sunni militants, Iran has made getting rid of Israel the priority. This seems to be working; al Qaeda is apparently now prepared to support Iran, Iran is forging links with Hamas (also Sunni) and prominent Sunni theologians have endorsed Sunnis allying with Shias.

There is now an arc of mainly Shia militarism across the north of the Middle East, running from Hizbullah in Lebanon, through Syria (ruled by members of a Shia sect) and Iraq (where the majority of the people are Shia), to Iran. If America is forced to leave Iraq then it is foreseeable that Shiites will come to control some if not all of the country. Teheri spells out an interesting result of this:

“Many in the Middle East are alarmed by these shifts of power and dread the prospect of the region entering a new dark age under radical Islamist regimes. For this reason, there seems to be much less hostility towards Israel in the wider Arab world than we might expect in the West. There may be no sympathy for Israel as such but many Arabs realise that the current war is over something bigger than a Jewish state with a

tiny territory of 10,000 square miles, less than 1 per cent of Saudi Arabia's land mass”.

At the time of writing this (early October) the Israeli press is running stories of a secret high-level meeting between representatives of the governments of Israel and Saudi Arabia, which supports the above reading of the situation.

What the above means is that the Middle East seems to be dividing north/south, with militant Islamists openly hostile to Israel dominating the north, and more moderate nations to the south being forced by these militant forces in the north into some sort of accommodation with Israel and the USA. This is a trend which fits well with our traditional understanding of how things will work out in the Middle East before Christ comes.

Russia resurgent

ONE of the most exciting features of recent years for students of our traditional views on prophecy is the resurgence of Russia under President Vladimir Putin. This was brought out most strikingly in an article from the *Daily Mail* of 10 July, entitled, “Stalin would be proud of him”, and written by Edward Lucas, Central and Eastern European correspondent of the *Economist*. It was published on the eve of the G8 summit (a grouping of the world's leading nations) in Moscow, hosted by Russia for the first time. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union fifteen years ago, Russia went into catastrophic decline under the incompetent rule of Boris Yeltsin, culminating in economic collapse eight years ago. Under President Putin, the situation has been reversed, aided by rising oil and gas prices. Here are some

of the striking points made in the article:

“Western leaders . . . are intensely aware that there is only one agenda on Mr Putin's mind: to increase his iron grip on his country and rebuild the once mighty Russian empire. America's vice-president Dick Cheney warned Russia in March to stop bullying and blackmailing those fledgling ex-Soviet states that were once part of its empire. Mr Putin was utterly contemptuous in response, warning in his state of the union speech days later that Russia would build up its economic and military might, so as to make his country immune to foreign pressure”;

“Russia is already developing and deploying ultra-modern nuclear missiles, such as the submarine-launched Bulava and the land-based Topol-M, that will be near-impossible for Western defences to counter. Spending on high-tech conventional weapons is soaring too. But military might is not the only weapon in Putin's arsenal—the other is economic power, and he is wielding it to devastating effect”;

“The message to the former empire is simple: abandon your dreams of joining the EU and Nato, and return to the iron embrace of your imperial master”;

“The truth is that, under Putin, Russia's lust for imperial expansion is stronger than it has ever been since the Cold War. But he wants to rebuild Stalin's empire using banks, pipelines and financial threats rather than tanks and barbed wire. With its monopoly supplies of gas

and oil, Russia has already forced the former captive nations to hand over their energy supply companies, thereby regaining a crucial foothold in the economies of the former Soviet bloc”;

“Putin’s long-term plan is to establish economic dominance also in the complacent and greedy countries of ‘old Europe’. The first thing is to sabotage any plans for diversifying gas supplies”;

“Putin is trying to recreate an empire reminiscent of the Soviet Union—feared by its own people, its neighbours and the West in equal measure. And the tragedy is that we in the West are letting it happen”.

More recently I have been passed cuttings from the *Observer* newspaper. On 3 September Richard Wachman, in the business section, commenting on the fact that Russia had acquired a five per cent stake in the Franco-German aerospace and defence giant EADS, said, “The growing ties between the Russian and European aviation industries tell us a great deal about the way the world is moving. Is this an emerging triple alliance between France, Germany and Russia that seeks to match the US as a global superpower? Almost certainly”.

In the same newspaper on 24 September, under the title, “Moscow makes its power play”, Oliver Morgan and Nick Mathieson commented on Russian efforts to gain control of her oil resources. After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, oil giants like Exxon, Shell and BP bought licences to develop oil and gas resources across the country. Russian government agencies are now using various pretexts to revoke these licences and hand

over the resources for Russia’s own energy giant Gazprom to develop. Under the heading, “Blair wades into Russia oil crisis”, the same authors comment on the way Britain, and also America, are standing up to Russia over this issue. It would appear from all this that, while France and Germany are cosyng up to Russia, Britain and America are not, just as we would expect, of course.

More recently, news has emerged that an agreement has been reached with Norway to supply Britain with natural gas, clear evidence of Britain’s desire to avoid ties with Russia.

Dubious miracles

ON an entirely different subject, a reader sent me an article from the *Daily Mail* of 26 August entitled, “Miracles or Madness?”, by Danny Penman. The article was stimulated by a book claiming that there was an increase in reports of miracles occurring today. It is hardly surprising that there are more such reports than there used to be, given the growth in the media and in the appetite for the sensational. However, it may also be the case that, despite the decline in religious belief and growth in rationalist, humanistic thinking, there is an appetite for the supposedly supernatural.

The article gives some very strange examples of so-called miracles, the weirdest of which is a fish that is said to have given apocalyptic warnings in Hebrew to a Jewish fishmonger in New York. More common are images of the Virgin Mary or of religious symbols seen in all kinds of ways, for example in sliced vegetables or clouds in the sky or reflections in a puddle. With a bit of imagination, it is, of

course, easy to see pictures in all sorts of objects. (Looking at the knots and streaks in the wood of our ecclesial platform, with a bit of effort I can make out a hawk moth, a moorhen and a goat!) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that superstitious people with a good imagination can make out all sorts of things. The question is, Why do people suppose that God would reveal Himself in such silly ways?

The article also gives examples of supposed miracles of healing. To what extent these ‘healings’ actually occurred is, of course, the first point that comes to mind, and in any case they are generally not claimed to be instantaneous healings but rather cases of people getting better from apparently incurable conditions. There are questions that ought to be asked by those who believe that such miracles have occurred and attribute them to divine action. How many cases are there where despite prayer there is no cure? Many more. And how many cases are there where inexplicable cures are experienced where there is no religious involvement? Quite a few, no doubt.

The question then is, Why should miracles be performed in such a random manner and not necessarily on religious people? It is all very different from the way miracles were performed by Christ and the apostles in the first century. There are many things in our world that still cannot be explained scientifically, and we must not diminish the ability and willingness of God to respond to prayer as He thinks fit, but we are not living in times like New Testament times, nor is there any reason to suppose we are living in an age of increasing miracles.

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