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They Hate Us Because They Hate Israel
By David Gelernter

There are two competing theories about the Sept. 11 massacres. The Israeli-connection theory holds that we were hit because we are Israel's only friend in the world. The Great Satan theory, on the other hand, deems the Israel connection to be only a sideshow. Mideast terrorists hate us for our own selves.

The Israel-connection idea has been put forward by Europeans and other shady characters who hope that America will take this occasion to turn her back on Israel, as Europe has long done. It is now being acted upon by the Bush administration, which hopes to win Arab friendship by backing a Palestinian state. I have tried to disbelieve this theory -- but I can't. The Israel theory is right. And when all is said and done, I'm not sorry it is.

There is no silver lining to the vicious murders. But if the attack came not merely because of who we are but because of noble things we did, it is better to acknowledge that fact with pride than to mistake or overlook it. Perhaps in the end, the Sept. 11 massacres will look to us the way Pearl Harbor did to our ambassador to Britain in 1941: "So tragic in itself and yet the final mistake that was to end the power of the Axis."

The Great Satan idea resembles another theory: that Hitler declared war on America four days after Pearl Harbor out of sheer obstinate, irrational hatred of the U.S. and all she stood for -- freedom, democracy, justice. Yes, the Adolf Hitlers and Osama bin Ladens do hate America and all she means. But Hitler had more concrete grounds for going to war.

The U.S. had supported Moscow with aggressive war-supply shipments ever since Germany's attack on the U.S.S.R. in June 1941. And in supporting Britain against the Nazis, the Roosevelt administration had pressed right to the brink of war -- with shipments of materiel, U.S. Navy help in patrolling the Atlantic for U-boats, and the joint British-American proclamation of the Atlantic Charter in August 1941. Privately,

Churchill quoted Roosevelt on the topic: "I shall never declare war; I shall make war." Yes, Hitler hated America; but America earned the Nazi declaration of war as a fighter against evil. Today, we ought to be proud of having earned the terrorists' hatred.

The analogy is rough. Britain once stood alone, except for her faithful friend, the U.S.; today Israel stands alone, except, again, for the U.S. But Israel's enemies do not control half the earth, and the U.S. has never tried to provoke terrorists into a confrontation. Still, the analogy is useful. Terrorists evidently control large segments of Arab opinion the way the Nazis once controlled Germany -- by swagger and lies, by dispensing a dangerous hallucinogenic ideology for losers, and by murdering opponents. It is a tragedy that so many Arabs seem to support terrorist groups; yet we have to remember that, in many parts of the Middle East today, it takes heroism to oppose them.

But isn't it true that Mideast terrorists hate Western civilization, and America as its most powerful representative, without bringing Israel into the picture? No doubt, but that hatred can't be the whole story.

If Osama bin Laden and his friends hate America because they hate freedom, democracy and the West, why don't they hate Britain, France and Italy just as much? Is it because we are the conspicuous intruders in the Middle East? But that's not true. Ever since the end of the 1960s, France has worked hard to be conspicuous in Arab lands, favoring the murderous regimes that terrorists love. But if these terrorists hate Western civilization in principle, surely France's cozying up to their favorite thug-governments ought to make them especially resentful of France. And of course France (unlike the U.S.) has an imperialist history in Arab lands -- in North Africa, Syria and Lebanon. But Mideast terrorists don't mind France. France is no friend of Israel.

Over the course of the past century, many European powers played the role of conspicuous alien in the Middle East, far more so than the U.S. does today. Italy held Libya. Spain had colonial possessions in northwest Africa. Britain controlled the Suez Canal and (jointly with Egypt) the Sudan. She also held decisive influence in Arabia, Jordan and Iraq, controlled Palestine under the League of Nations

mandate, and Iranian oil via the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. From roughly 1920 through the early 1950s, Britain was the Mideast superpower. Arab fighters took on colonial armies everywhere, but never hated Europe with anything approaching today's poisonous passion against the U.S. Arab nationalists launched no terrorist strikes against the people of London or Rome or Madrid.

Maybe that was because terrorism hadn't yet been invented? But it had been. In 1929, Arab terrorists murdered 60 Jews in Hebron. That same year they killed 45 Jews in Safed, and dozens more all over Palestine. This is the real theme of the Middle East. Not hatred of the West, but hatred of Jewish settlers and Israel. Fanatical hatred of the West is fairly new. Fanatical hatred of Jewish settlers is old.

In his history of Israel, Martin Gilbert cites a political leaflet in Jerusalem, 1929: "O Arab! Remember that the Jew is your strongest enemy and the enemy of your ancestors since olden times." The resolution of a 400-man meeting in Damascus, 1937: Britain must choose "between our friendship and the Jews'." A 1937 memo by Britain's foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, noted that Britain must abandon her promise to let Jews build a homeland in Palestine; otherwise she will incur "the permanent hostility of all the Arab and Moslem Powers in the Middle East."

Notice the "otherwise." Notice the "must choose." There was no question of automatic Arab enmity merely because Britain was a conspicuous Western superpower in the Middle East. To the extent Britain supported the Jews of Palestine (as she largely did during the 1920s and '30s), she incurred Arab hatred. To the extent she abandoned the Jews of Palestine (as she did in the late '30s), Arab hate-mongers found it easy to forgive her.

Of course, Arab thinking has changed, and terrorism has too. No doubt these terrorists do resent and loathe America for herself. No doubt they would even if Israel had never existed. But the evil that murders at random and then celebrates has the handprints of Jew-hatred all over it.

Why are these things important to say? Some people believe that to acknowledge the Israeli connection is to encourage the U.S. to back away from Israel. It would be far from irrational for the U.S. to do exactly

that. But it would be dishonorable, and the many dead in our many wars make it impossible to doubt that we stand on our honor and stand by our friends. When the U.S.S.R. backed Arab terrorist states in the '70s, U.S. support for Israel was a far more dangerous proposition than it is today. In 1973, it brought us within shouting distance of global war. We did not back off then and we will not today.

The Great Satan theory has been put forward by thoughtful people with irreproachable credentials. They could be right; but I can't help suspecting that in the end they fail, albeit unintentionally, to do America justice. The U.S. will strive to do what is right, and this is no empty promise. These are words imprinted in American blood across the whole 20th century, and now on the 21st too. A moment when we have suffered grievously for doing right is exactly the wrong moment to shrug our shoulders and blend into the crowd. New York and Washington were hit, not Paris and Rome.

This is equally a terrible time for Israel to make concessions to Yasser Arafat, and for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to suggest that the U.S. is not a trustworthy friend of Israel. Of course we are, and we have proved it so many times that there is nothing to discuss.

Now is the time to speak plainly to our allies, and inspire them to do right: to oppose terrorist murder not only when the victims are Americans but also when they are mere Jews, not only in New York and Washington but in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. If that happens, the terror gangs will have accomplished the last thing they ever wanted: to increase justice in the world.

Mr. Gelernter, a professor at Yale, is the author, most recently, of "Machine Beauty: Elegance and the Heart of Technology" (Basic Books, 1999).

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

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Countries; Mediterranean Countries; African
Countries; Africa; England; United Kingdom;
Europe; Western Europe; Palestine; Palestine;
Emerging Market Countries; North American
Countries; Western European Countries; European
Countries (ISR ISRAEL ML NME US USA
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