

Iran gets the Oscar for Chutzpah

In his amusing book *The Joys of Yiddish*, Leo Rosten defines the word “Chutzpah” as “gall, brazen nerve, effrontery.” The word is perfectly applicable to the Islamic state of Iran and its leaders with their extraordinary mockery of Western values and utterances of cynicism and barefaced prevarications.

This cynicism differs from the kind of utter stupidity paraded by Tawfiq Tirawi, leading member of the Palestinian Central Committee of Fatah. His breathtaking contributions to knowledge were that Israel was responsible for poisoning Yasser Arafat and, on January 16, 2016, that Adolf Hitler was not morally corrupt, he was daring.

The chutzpah of Iran is vastly more skilled and adroit than the idiocy of the Palestinian leader. It is a provocative and deliberate challenge to the West and ridiculing of Western values of free speech, norms, and ethics. That challenge, and its ultimate real objective was already evident in a declaration in June 1963 by the cleric who was to become Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini of the Islamic Republic. The future Supreme Leader said, “I know you do not want Iran to be under the boot of the Jews.” He issued a fatwa that Muslims could defend Islam by all means.

The hostility against Jews, sometimes couched as the response to the “Jewish conspiracy,” and the idea of the West as the enemy, continued after Khomeini’s death. Today, the present Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei aims to counter a “Western cultural invasion,” including by the little Satan Israel, of Iran that he believes seeks to destroy Islamic identity.

The world is now aware of the political success of Iran scored

in the nuclear deal that is supposed to curb its nuclear program in return for the relief from sanctions. Iran is now able to obtain frozen assets, worth billions of dollars. One can expect those funds will be used for destabilizing as well as positive activities. It is arguable, even improbable, that the nuclear deal will ensure the exclusively peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear program. All can agree that, as a result of the deal, Iran will be stronger, politically, militarily, and economically, and that its influence in the Middle East will increase.

On the issue of the deal, the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on January 19, 2016 in congratulating President Hassan Rouhani made clear his position. "I reiterate," he said, "the need to be vigilant about the deceit and treachery of arrogant countries, especially the United States in this, nuclear, issue and other issues. Iran showed its "vigilance" and belligerence by test-firing ballistic missiles in violation of United Nations resolutions, as well as by detaining ten American soldiers.

Deceit and treachery are familiar items in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was the former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, 2005-2013, perhaps on the borderline of dementia, who at the United Nations and elsewhere kept insisting that the Holocaust was a myth. But many other Iranians, while not specifically denying the Holocaust, called for a debate about it.

This became more pronounced as a result of the publication on September 30, 2005 by the satirical, anti-religious, Danish journal *Jyllands-Posten* of 12 editorial cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that Muslims found offensive and an insult to Muhammad and Islam. The result was protests, violent demonstrations, and riots in Muslim countries.

Defenders of *Jyllands-Posten* held that publication of the cartoons was a legitimate exercise of free expression,

regardless of its accuracy. The chutzpah of Iran became evident when its leaders held that the West was hypocritical in passing laws that punished Holocaust denial but allowing and defending freedom of speech and insults against Islam.

It is the height of irony and unequalled brazenness that Iran proclaims the desirability and necessity of free speech. We know the country censors books to ensure that Iranians are protected from Western "cultural onslaught." Iran prevents any expression or cartoon considered an insult of the Prophet. In January 2016, about two-thirds of the 12,000 candidates who applied to run in the February 2016 parliamentary election, were either disqualified by the Guardian Council or obliged to withdraw. The Guardian Council, which supervises elections and approves candidates, allows only one interpretation of Islamic values. Only 30 of the 3,000 supposedly reformists candidates were approved.

The Iranian cultural offensive against the West began in February 2006 with the International Holocaust Cartoon Contest sponsored by the Iranian newspaper Hamshahri. It was co-sponsored by Iran's Caricature House whose director was quoted as saying, in November 2006, after the Contest that "we will continue until the destruction of Israel."

The cartoons were supposed to discuss "the realities of the Holocaust." The organizers said they did not want to cause pain, but they did have "problems with Zionism." The theme of the contest was to compare the actions of Nazi Germany and the current activities of the Israeli government.

More than 1,200 cartoons were submitted, some from the U.S. and the UK. The winning cartoon, by a Moroccan artist, was of an Israeli crane constructing a wall around the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, with a concentration camp on the wall.

Terrorist events led to a second Cartoon Contest. On January

7, 2015 two terrorists, belonging to the al-Qaeda group in Yemen (AQAP) murdered 12 people and injured another 11 in and near the *Charlie Hebdo* building. The original CH building had already been firebombed because of the publication of one of CH's cartoons of Muhammad and other Islamic leaders. The new editors of the journal said they would continue to publish satirical cartoons about Islamic figures.

The Iranian response to this courageous advocacy of free speech was for official authorities to organize a second Holocaust Cartoon Contest. It was sponsored by the guild called the House of Cartoon, the municipality of Tehran, and the Sarcheshmeh Cultural Complex and held in April 2015. The guild equated Israel and Nazis, and put forward a modern day version of the blood label accusation. It informed the contestants that Israel was sucking blood, using insects and animals, from Palestinian children.

The Contest asked three questions. The most absurd of them, considering the thousands of publications about the Holocaust, was why didn't the West permit researchers and historians to consider the Holocaust. More to the point was that the theme of the cartoons was to be a link between Benjamin Netanyahu and Adolf Hitler. The first prize was \$12,000, and the second prize \$8,000. There were 839 cartoons submitted, and 312 artists listed. Among them were two Americans, John Leonard and Istvan Majoras.

To her credit, Irena Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO since 2009, was critical of this contest, and also of the inclusion of Palestinian-theme posters on UNESCO's world heritage register that she vetoed. Bokova declared that UNESCO would not associate itself with documents that went against UNRSCO values and fueled hatred and anti-Semitic perceptions. Instead, she attended, together with French President Francois Hollande, on July 27, 2014, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau 70 years earlier, a ceremony honoring the victims of the Holocaust.

The Iranian chutzpah is relentless It is now organizing a third Contest, with a first prize of \$50,000, to be held on July 2016. It expects cartoons from 50 countries, and 312 contributions from artists. President Barack Obama on January 17, 2016, commenting on the completed nuclear deal with Iran, said, "This is a good day...Iran will not get its hands on a nuclear bomb." The President should now say it would be an even better day if the third Holocaust Cartoon Contest was cancelled and if the vicious antisemitism of Iran came to an end.