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Antisemitism, Messianism and the Cult of Sacrifice: The Iranian Holy War

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Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

Since September 2007, since the Iranian President spoke here, for us in Europe the name of Columbia University has been indissolubly linked with that of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The words of Lee Bollinger, the University's President, also resonated throughout the world. We gasped in front of our computer screens as Professor Bollinger told the Iranian President to his face that he showed “all the signs of a petty and cruel dictator” and that his denial of the Holocaust was “either brazenly provocative or astonishingly uneducated”. It is under the impact of these words and with an awareness of the place where I am speaking that I have chosen my specific topic for this talk: the ideology behind the behavior of the Iranian leadership.

We know that ideologies can make monsters out of some human beings and smoke out of other, innocent, ones. The gas chambers in Auschwitz did not begin with the construction of the buildings, they began with antisemitic words pronounced by antisemitic ideologues.

Today, Iran is the first and only country to threaten another UN member state with annihilation. “With God's help, the countdown button for the destruction of the Zionist regime has been pushed”, announced the Iranian president. “By God's will, we will witness the destruction of this regime in the near future.” The shocking malice of such messages leads many people to suppress them or block them out. I think our task is to do the opposite: To take the Iranian leader's Weltanschauung seriously as a specific outlook with its own principles and history and to look inside Ahmadinejad's fantasy

world and seek to grasp the immanent logic behind his attacks, even if this involves insights which may send a shiver down the spine.

Our discomfort begins with the notion of holy war. Can a war ever be holy or the holy ever be a matter of war? The collocation seems to be taken from a historical movie. Continental Europe's last religious war took place 350 years ago. America has never experienced a war of this kind.

But what we are faced with right now is precisely a holy war. In his first major speech, in October 2005, the one that gained him notoriety, Ahmadinejad declared that the Zionist regime in Israel "must be eliminated from the pages of history." Many will recall this quote. But only very few people have read the rest of the speech and so understood the context of the threat. Let me please quote just three more sentences of this famous talk. In it, Ahmadinejad said: "We are in the process of a historical war between the World of Arrogance and the Islamic world, and this war has been going on for hundreds of years."

So as we can see, the roots of this "historical war" have nothing to do with Israel or the Middle East conflict. The speaker views the destruction of Israel as a stage in a war that started long before the foundation of Israel. But what is meant by "World of Arrogance"? I will come back to this point. He also said: "We have to understand the depth of the disgrace of the enemy, until our holy hatred expands continuously and strikes like a wave." Here a religiously inspired feeling of superiority is contrasted with the "depth of the disgrace of the enemy". But the notion of a "holy hatred" is also striking. This hatred is unconditional: it cannot be moderated through any kind of Western or Jewish behavior. It currently expresses itself in the first instance as hatred of a recalcitrant and rather pro-Western Iranian people that has to be silenced through stonings, public executions, mass arrests, torture and censorship. Above and beyond this, the expression of this "holy hatred" is destined to "expand continuously" to a global level and to overwhelm the world like a mighty tsunami.

Third and final quotation from the speech: "In this very grave war, many people are trying to scatter grains of desperation and hopelessness. They ask: 'Is it possible for us to witness a world without America and Zionism?'

But you had best know that this goal is attainable, and surely can be achieved.”

Imagine if the leader of a medium-sized Western country, for example Mr Berlusconi, the former Italian head of government, had made a speech in which he talked about a historical war against the Islamic world, denounced the “depth of the Islamic world’s disgrace”, summoned up Christianity’s “holy hatred” of Islam and finally pronounced the goal of erasing Saudi Arabia and Pakistan from the map realizable. We know what the justified consequences would be: angry demonstrations and critical headlines throughout the world, a special meeting of the UN Security Council, condemnation by the General Assembly and so on.

The fact that the statements I have cited aroused no anger in the West and, indeed, barely registered with Western governments, media and academics – despite the fact that MEMRI published them back in October 2005! – speaks, I think, volumes about the current condition of the Western world.

In Europe the basic reflex of non-recognition works like this: if Ahmadinejad were to have said something of the kind, then the Bush administration might feel vindicated. And since we don’t like Bush, Ahmadinejad didn’t say it – end of story. Here the perception of reality has been corrupted by political considerations. I know people who are afraid to write the truth about the Iranian regime because they are scared of immediately being placed in a political category where they do not belong.

“The theme of intellectual betrayal and the corrupting influence of political commitment” – to quote the British historian Elie Kedourie, is not my topic tonight. I would nonetheless like to stress that I, as a scholar with roots in the West European left, am not prepared to submit to any kind of politically motivated censorship. In my opinion, those who want to find rational grounds for criticising the political approach adopted by world leaders towards Iran must first adequately analyse the object in question, which presupposes an unflinching gaze.

I would therefore like to ask you, with me, to take a closer look at what I consider to be the four key characteristics of this “historical war”, to which I have affixed the following titles:¹ The world beyond is more important than

this one; 2 Reason is sin; 3 Revolutionary mission; 4 Liberation through annihilation.

The world beyond is more important than this one

During the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, the semi-official Iranian daily *Ettela'at* wrote the following:

"In the past, we had child-volunteers: 14-, 15-, and 16-year-olds. They went into the minefields. Their eyes saw nothing. Their ears heard nothing. And then, a few moments later, one saw clouds of dust. When the dust had settled again, there was nothing more to be seen of them. Somewhere, widely scattered in the landscape, there lay scraps of burnt flesh and pieces of bone." Such scenes could henceforth be avoided, *Ettela'at* assured its readers. "Before entering the mine fields, the children [now] wrap themselves in blankets and they roll on the ground, so that their body parts stay together after the explosion of the mines and one can carry them to the graves."¹

The children who thus rolled to their deaths formed part of the mass *Basij* movement that was called into being by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. They consisted of short-term volunteer militias and represented about 30 percent of the personnel on the battlefield. Most *Basij* members were between 12 and 18 years young. They went enthusiastically and by their thousands to their own destruction. Before every mission, a small plastic key would be hung around each of the children's necks. It was supposed to open for them the gates to paradise. "The young men cleared the mines with their own bodies," a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War has recalled, "It was sometimes like a race. Even without the commander's orders, everyone wanted to be first."² Several tens of thousand of Iranian children were sacrificed in these suicide units – a crime that the world has yet to really acknowledge. How was this mass suicide rendered palatable to the Iranians? Here Khomeini's theological worldview comes into play.

¹ Cited in Baham Nirumand, 'Krieg, Krieg, bis zum Sieg', in Anja Malanowski und Marianne Stern, *Iran-Irak. 'Bis die Gottlosen vernichtet sind'*, Reinbek (Rowohlt) 1987, pp. 95-6.

² Cited in Christiane Hoffmann, 'Vom elften Jahrhundert zum 11. September. Märtyrertum und Opferkultur sollen Iran als Staat festigen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 4, 2002.

According to his preaching, life is worthless and death is the beginning of genuine existence. "The natural world," Khomeini explained in October 1980, "is the lowest element, the scum of creation." What is decisive is the beyond: the "divine world - that is eternal."³ According to Khomeini's mindset, the martyrs' death is nothing but the transition from this world to the world beyond, where they will live on eternally and in splendor.

Before Khomeini, for a Muslim *deliberately* to be sent to *certain* death was considered sacrilege within Islam. Suicide bombing - the intentional mass murder of civilians and the well-organized suicide of Muslims were not seen in the first 1,360 years of Islam but were invented only 26 years ago.⁴ That is the reason why in Soviet occupied Afghanistan not a single suicide attack took place.

The *Basij* children, honored as martyrs to this day by Ahmadinejad and the Mullahs, were the model for the first Islamically-motivated suicide attack against Israel which took place in southern Lebanon as late as November 1982. The perpetrator was 15-year-old Ahmad Qusayr, a follower of Hezbollah. Khomeini personally consecrated his attack with a *fatwa*. Later, he had a memorial built for Ahmad Qusayr in Tehran.⁵ Following the lead of Hezbollah the Sunni Hamas likewise began to employ suicide bombings - but only from April 1993 onwards. Meanwhile, suicide murder has become the calling card of Islamist movements throughout the world.

In 2002, Iran's current Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, enthused: "A man, a youth, a boy, and a girl who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the interests of a nation and their religion is the symbol of the greatest pride, courage and bravery."⁶ Today, in Iran, far from being the subject of criticism, the sacrifice of the *Basiji* kids is celebrated and the so-called "sacred terror" propagated more than ever before. In one of his first television interviews, Ahmadinejad enthused: "Is there an art that is more beautiful,

³ Cited in Daniel Brumberg, 'Khomeini's Legacy. Islamic Rule and Islamic Social Justice', in Appleby, R. Scott, *Spokesmen for the Despised. Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, Chicago & London, University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 56.

⁴ The murders perpetrated by the Shia sect of the Assassins in the 11th century were exclusively directed at individuals of the ruling elite.

⁵ Joseph Croitoru, *Der Märtyrer als Waffe. Die historischen Wurzeln des Selbstmordattentats*, München (Hanser), 2003, p. 132.

⁶ Ali Alfoneh, 'Iran's Suicide Brigades Terrorism Resurgent', in *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2007.

more divine, more eternal than the art of the martyr's death?"⁷ Indeed, the “you love life, we love death” theme appears even in his letter to the President of the USA in May 2006, albeit in a somewhat watered down variant: “A bad ending belongs only to those who have chosen the life of this world. ... A good land and eternal paradise belong to those servants who fear His majesty and do not follow their lascivious selves.” In the same year 2006, the Revolutionary Guard Corps announced that 40,000 Iranians were ready to carry out suicide missions against 29 identified Western targets.

Let me summarize: the first and most important characteristic of the new religious war is the cult of sacrifice which is practiced in the form of suicide bombing today. Suicide bombing represents a horror George Orwell was not able to write about. But anyone who takes the world beyond more seriously than this one has a faulty relationship to earthly reality; and this brings us on to the second characteristic.

Reason as sin

The second characteristic of the holy war relates to Islamist epistemology. I must admit that it took me a long time to understand this aspect. For us, the employment of reason is the most self-evident thing in the world. For Islamists the use of reason – apart from in the natural sciences – is an expression of arrogance – hence our castigation as the “World of Arrogance” – and an offence against God. Their starting point is that the Koran must be interpreted and applied literally. But evidently, any kind of reason-based doubt undermines such an approach to the Koran. As a result, doubt and conjecture are opposed.

An example: No Islamist – academic or not - is in any doubt that the statement in the Koran that Allah changed Jews into apes and pigs is to be taken literally, since the Koran is the truth itself.⁸ “The transformation was actual”, we read for example in *Falastin Al-Muslima*, the theoretical monthly magazine of Hamas, “as it is not impossible that the omnipotent Allah, who created man in his human form, would be capable of changing the Jew from

⁷ MEMRI, *Special Dispatch* No. 945, July 29, 2005.

⁸ See: sura 5 verse 60

human into animal.”⁹ The only remaining problem confronting Islamic “theoreticians” in this respect is “whether the Jews who were changed into animals had offspring” or whether these strange creatures “lived for no more than three days,” since the Koran provides no answer to this question.¹⁰

For Islamist academics, the term "Western imperialism" refers not so much to economic aggression, but first and foremost to an "intellectual invasion" of the world of Islam. In the words of the Islamist Syed al-Attas, "The contemporary challenge of Western civilization...is the challenge of knowledge...which promotes scepticism, which has elevated doubt and conjecture to 'scientific status' in its methodology."¹¹ The primary goal of academic Islamism is to "de-westernize" the sciences, i.e. to free them from the principles of doubt and conjecture.

At Columbia Ahmadinejad clearly articulated his aversion to the Western concepts of “reason” and “reality”. According to him science is permitted only to the strict believer: “Science is the light which illuminates the hearts of those who have been selected by the Almighty. ... Science is the light and scientists must be pure and pious.” According to this conception, which professor at this university could aspire to tenure in Tehran? Ahmadinejad is here laying down the criteria to be followed in purging the teaching body of Iranian universities.

At the same time Ahmadinejad also showed in Columbia that he defines his notion of “reality” in religious terms. What is real is the message of the Koran, while “material desires place humans against the realities of the world.” And so, just as only the “pure and pious” can be a scientist, so only those who have fully subordinated themselves to the Koran can grasp what “reality” truly is. At Columbia Ahmadinejad said: “Corrupted independent human beings resist acceptance of reality and even if they do accept it, they do not obey it.”

⁹ According to Aluma Solnick, ‘Based on Koranic Verses, Interpretations and Traditions, Muslim Clerics State: The Jews Are the Descendants of Apes, Pigs, and Other Animal’, *MEMRI Special Report*, November 11, 2002, p. 7.

¹⁰ Aluma Solnick, op. cit., p. 8.

¹¹ Syed M. N. al-Attas, cited by Bassam Tibi, *Islamischer Fundamentalismus, moderne Wissenschaft und Technologie Frankfurt/Main (Suhrkamp) 1992*, p. 139.

We are dealing here with an Islamist Newspeak, in which words such as “reality”, “scholar” and “science” mean the exact opposite of what secular societies understand them to mean. This release from all the shackles of material reality explains how the Iranian rulers are able to dub the Holocaust a lie and at the same time believe the Twelfth Imam, who disappeared in the ninth century as a small child, to be a living reality. It is in any case not very reassuring to find people who have made plain their religious understanding of “reality” today in possession of long-range missiles and tomorrow perhaps of a nuclear bomb.

This rejection of human reason also affects how power is understood. The very word Islam means "submission", in the sense of subjection to God. If people cannot achieve knowledge through reason, all the less so are they capable of shaping and determining their own fate. While the secular answer to the question "can people rule themselves" is positive, from an Islamist point of view it is *a priori* negative: only God is the sovereign, only God can rule via the Caliphate. To sum up: the second characteristic of the new religious war is its goal: the replacement of individual and social self-determination by a sharia dictatorship.

Ahmadinejad stated the aim of his jihad – the defeat of freedom and democracy – with amazing clarity in his May 2006 letter to the American President: “Those with insight can already hear the sounds of the shattering and fall of the ideology and thoughts of the liberal democratic systems.” This brings me onto my third point: the apocalyptic nature and revolutionary scope of this jihad.

Revolutionary mission

It is the Iranian leadership’s special sense of mission that propels them along the course toward confrontation with the West. “Our nation’s important mission” Ahmadinejad enthused only some days ago, “is to introduce the Islamic Revolution to the whole of mankind.”¹² He owes this sense of mission to the myth of the Twelfth Imam, the Islamic Messiah who

¹² MEMRI Special Dispatch, No. 1854, February 29, 2008.

disappeared without a trace in the year 874. The Twelfth Imam was the last direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed. Shia doctrine is based on the belief that the Twelfth Imam will someday appear again from out of his "occlusion" and liberate the world from all evil. It is this sense of providence that leads the Iranian leadership to pursue its high-risk agenda with such evident satisfaction. They hold the firm conviction that their anti-Western and anti-Jewish struggle enjoys divine backing. For Ahmadinejad, preparing for the return of the Messiah is "our revolution's main mission."¹³ He is clearly predisposed toward apocalyptic thinking. He finances a research institute in Tehran whose sole purpose is to study and, if possible, accelerate the coming of the Imam. He raves that he has been chosen to pave the way for the Twelfth Imam and that he personally has been entrusted with this mission by providence.

However, a politics pursued in alliance with a supernatural force necessarily becomes unpredictable. Why should an Iranian President take into account the strategic reality of this world and the doctrine of nuclear deterrence when his assumption is that in three or four years the Savior will be taking over the controls in any case? Already today nuclear technology in Iran is not just regarded as a source of energy, but is fetishistically revered: "Iran's nuclearization ... is the beginning of a very great change in the world, since its nuclear activities are in the service of peace, justice and welfare for all the world's countries," declared Ahmadinejad in August 2007.¹⁴ So the purpose of this nuclear capability is not deterrence or self-defense, but the "liberation of the world".

So to sum up on point three: the orientation towards death that I presented at the beginning of this talk and the contempt for a this-worldly understanding of "reality" culminate in the fact that the most honored figure for the Iranian clerical elite is a boy who vanished 1,134 years ago but who is shortly to reappear as the Twelfth Imam and liberate the whole world from evil. This delusion is a driving force behind the Islamist global mission. For at least a part of Iran's clerical elite this mission is associated with

¹³ Paul Hughes, 'Iran President Paves the Way for Arabs' Imam Return', *Reuters*, November 17, 2005.

¹⁴ *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series*, No. 389, September 17 2008

apocalyptic ideas. Especially disturbing are statements tying together the coming of the Twelfth Imam and the destruction of Israel. As Ayatollah Nouri-Hamedani, one of the Iranian regime's leading religious authorities, declared: "One should fight the Jews and vanquish them so that the conditions for the advent of the Hidden Imam are met."¹⁵ In November 2006 Mohammad Hassan Rahimian, the representative of the Iranian Supreme Leader, who stands even higher in the Iranian hierarchy than Ahmadinejad, stated that, "the Jew is the most stubborn enemy of the believers. And the decisive war will decide the fate of humanity... The reappearance of the Twelfth Imam will usher in a war between Israel and the Shia."¹⁶ This brings me on to my final point: the specific type of antisemitism espoused by the Iranian leadership.

Liberation through annihilation

The Iranian leaders do not at all regard themselves as antisemites. "We are friends with the Jewish people", stated Ahmadinejad in Columbia. Moreover, the 25,000 or so Jews in Iran represent the largest Jewish community in any Muslim country.

Nonetheless, Ahmadinejad's rhetoric is steeped in an antisemitism not found in any state leader since World War II. Ahmadinejad does not say "Jews" are conspiring to rule the world. Instead he says, "Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world." Instead he says, "The Zionists" have for 60 years now blackmailed "all Western governments." "The Zionists have imposed themselves on a substantial portion of the banking, financial, cultural, and media sectors." "The Zionists" fabricated the Danish Muhammad cartoons. "The Zionists thrive on war and hatred," Ahmadinejad claims. "Everywhere they exist there is war."¹⁷ The pattern is familiar. He invests the word "Zionist" with exactly the same meaning Hitler poured into "Jew": the incarnation of evil. Anyone who makes Jews – whether as "Judas"

¹⁵ MEMRI Special Dispatch Series, No. 897, April 22, 2005.

¹⁶ ISNA, 16.11.2006, <http://isna.ir/Main/NewsViews.aspx?ID=News-825902>, cited from *Iran-Forschung. Übersetzung aus Iranischen Medien*, Berlin, 17. November 2006.

¹⁷ Press Conference, August 28, 2007, see *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series* – No. 389, September 17, 2007, p. 4.

or as “Zionist” - responsible for all the ills of the world is obviously driven by antisemitism. He *must* want to eliminate Israel, as the "germ of evil", in order to save the world. He *must* deny the truth of the Holocaust in order to pave the way for *his* "truth". The demonization of Jews, Holocaust denial, and the will to eliminate Israel – these are the three elements of an ideological constellation that collapses as soon as one of the elements is removed.

The louder the liberal West protests against Holocaust denial or the Islamists' demands for the destruction of Israel, the more convinced Ahmadinejad becomes of Zionist domination. In a conversation with the editors of the German newsweekly *Der Spiegel*, the Iranian president reacted as follows to the remark that the magazine does not question Israel's right to exist: "I am glad that you are honest people and say that you are required to support the Zionists." And this was how, back in Iran, the protests against his visit to Columbia were explained: “New York is the headquarter of Zionist Jews, and they have control over Columbia University”, claimed a member of the Iranian Parliament. The Iranian television broadcasts also showed video of the audience booing Mr. Ahmadinejad but added “that a protest was orchestrated by a Zionist lobby that had brought schoolchildren”. Nonetheless, in Columbia, the Iranian President “had triumphed over his adversarial hosts, whom the broadcast described as Zionist Jews.”¹⁸

While the suicide cult, the reverence for the Twelfth Imam and the contempt for democracy and reason are of Islamic provenance, this antisemitism, based on the notorious forgery, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and fantasies about a Jewish world conspiracy, has far more to do with Nazi ideology, an ideology that was very popular in Iran in the 30s and 40s. “The extermination of Jewry throughout the world”, declared a Nazi directive from 1943, is “the precondition for an enduring peace.”¹⁹ Liberation through annihilation. This is similar to the mission that Islamism has set out upon whose first target is Israel. As Mahmoud Ahmadinejad put it, “The Zionist

¹⁸ Nazila Fathi, ‘Iran’s Media Assail President’s Treatment’, New York Times, September 26, 2007.

¹⁹ Cited from Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, Cambridge MA and London (Harvard University Press) 2006, p. 209.

regime will be wiped out and humanity will be liberated.”²⁰ He reiterated this belief in his most recent speech at the United Nations in September 2007: “The age of darkness will end”, he enthused to the General Assembly and “the peoples in Europe and America will be liberated from the burdens the Zionists have inflicted on them”. So let me now sum up on this final point: There are other dictatorships in the world. But only in Iran are the fantasy-worlds of antisemitism and religious mission linked with technological megalomania and the physics of mass destruction. The specific danger presented by the Iranian nuclear option stems from the unique ideological atmosphere surrounding it - a mixture of holy war and high-tec, of antisemitism and weapons-grade uranium, of death-wish and missile research, of Shiite messianism and plutonium.

It is therefore problematic, to say the least, when the leading Iran expert at Columbia, Prof. Hamid Dabashi, downplays the role of the current Iranian leadership by calling Ahmadinejad “a weak demagogue” and an “irrelevant footnote”.²¹ In fact we are talking here about the leadership of a country that disposes of the world’s largest oil reserves after Saudi Arabia and the largest gas reserves after Russia.

Far more disturbing is the fact that the top Iran analyst at the Council on Foreign Affairs, Ray Takeyh, calls Iran of all nations “a status-quo power” and a power which “sees regional stability as in its interest”²² without mentioning the fact that Iran is providing “critical assistance, training, and technology to a surprising number of terrorist groups in Iraq and Afghanistan, and through Hezbollah, in Lebanon and Palestine, too.”²³ Takeyh also seems to have missed Ahmadinejad’s statement to the effect that “with respect to the needs of Islamic countries, we are ready to transfer nuclear know-how to these countries.”

²⁰ Yigal Carmon, ‘The Role of Holocaust Denial in the Ideology and Strategy of The Iranian Regime’, *The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Inquiry and Analysis Series*, No. 307, 15 December 2006.

²¹ Hamid Dabashi, ‘Of banality and Burden’, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 2007.

²² Vali Nasr and Ray Takeyh, ‘What We Can Learn From Britain About Iran’, *NYT*, April 5, 2007.

²³ Seymour M. Hersh, ‘Shifting Targets’, *The New Yorker*, October 2007.

And it is hard to understand how even Robert Gates, the American Secretary of Defense, can claim that the Iranian leadership views its nuclear capability “in the first instance as a deterrent” against Pakistan, Russia, Israel and the USA.²⁴ The notion that the Iranian President regards the security interests of his country as being under threat can only be entertained by those who refuse to take his declaration of war seriously.

“Wishful thinking” is also the reason why, during his last visit to New York, Ahmadinejad was the most sought after interlocutor among the assembled leaders. At that time I read the following sentence in the New York Times: “President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad held a friendly, even warm, exchange yesterday with Christian leaders from the United States and Canada convinced that dialogue is the only way to prevent war.” The organizers also acceded to Ahmadinejad’s condition that the Bahai religious movement, which is banned in Iran, should be kept away from this meeting.²⁵

It was encouraging therefore to hear Lee Bollinger loudly and clearly attacking the Iranian President for what he represents. But even so, in criticizing Ahmadinejad as “either brazenly provocative or astonishingly uneducated”, Lee Bollinger was overlooking an essential point, which is this: Ahmadinejad is no more “uneducated” than Adolf Eichmann and Rudolf Höss once were. The most recent Holocaust research demonstrated that their antisemitism was integrated into a pseudo-intellectual construction based on purportedly rational principles.²⁶ Moreover they also pursued their insane project smartly and with tactical skill, in line with the comment which Shakespeare once put into the mouth of Polonius: “Though this be madness, yet there is method in it.”

Ahmadinejad’s pronouncements are also not “brazenly provocative”. To the ears of reasonable people they do indeed seem deranged; nonetheless they remain logically consistent within the terms of his lunatic mindset. We are dealing here with a steel wall of fanaticism which has repelled every

²⁴ ‘Gates’ Shocking Thinking on Iran’, *Jerusalem Post*, December 6, 2006.

²⁵ *NYT*, 27 September 2007.

²⁶ See Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903-1989*, Bonn (Dietz Nachfolger) 1996, p. 284.

educational effort, every offer of negotiations and every political approach. Certainly this is the record of the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

The example of the 1938 Munich Agreement shows the consequences of failing to take what antisemites say literally. It shows where the flight into illusion eventually leads – to total war.

At that time only a tiny minority in Germany appreciated what Stefan Zweig noted shortly before he took his own life, namely, “that the greatest monstrosity is to be expected as a matter of course.”

Today more than ever the task of serious scholarship is to learn from the past in order to illuminate the present, soberly to analyze the sources and effects of religious and antisemitic delusions and to warn humanity. Thank you for your attention.