

# The good boy scout

## COMMENT



### URI AVNERY

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ment. Israeli leaders miss no opportunity to call on every occasion upon Jewish communities to drop everything and come to Israel. If there is a sign of anti-Semitism anywhere, this is an automatic response.

If there is a "misunderstanding", it is mutual. It could be called, in the vogue phrase, a "clash of civilisations": the French-European and the Israeli-Zionist.

In the French view, the French Jews are French. The republic is not based on religion or ethnic origin. The way the French see it, every citizen is a partner in the republic and French culture — whether Christian or Jew, Alsacien or Breton, North-African or Corsican. This is the basis of the République.

And along comes the Prime Minister of a foreign country and has the cheek — not to say chutzpa — to attack the very foundations of the republic and sow discord among its citizens. That is the gravest assault on France, barring an outright military attack.

In the Israeli view, it looks quite different. According to official doctrine, Israel is "the State of the Jewish People". The "Jewish People" consists of all the Jews in the world,

irrespective of whether they live in Brooklyn, Barcelona or Bratislava.

Every child here learns that all the Jews in the world will come to Israel sooner or later. They will have no choice, since the Goyim (Gentiles) hate the Jews, and so the anti-Semites will come to power in all countries in due course. Israel exists in order to offer them a haven when they are compelled to flee, once the inevitable comes about.

This explains the ambivalent reaction of the Israeli establishment to any anti-Semitic event anywhere. The natural reaction is, of course, one of anger and condemnation. But there is also another reaction, a hidden one that borders on satisfaction: Here, we told you so. Now it is happening. We were right all along.

Both reactions lead to the cry: Come, brothers, before it is too late! It rather resembles the good boy-scout in the joke, the one who helps the old lady to cross the road, whether she wants to or not.

So Chirac is furious, Sharon is obdurate and repeats his call, and in the middle stand the poor French Jews, who just want to be left alone.

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IN A DRAMATIC television broadcast, the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, called upon the million Russian emigrants in Israel to return at once to their homeland, in view of the growing danger to their security there.

That did not happen, of course. But it is easy to imagine what would have been the reaction in Israel if Putin had indeed made such an appeal. Or if the president of France, Jacques Chirac, had called upon the French-speakers in Israel, the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from France and North Africa, to move to France, where their life is not threatened by suicide bombers.

The Israeli media would have gone berserk. The Knesset, in an emergency session, would have denounced the outrageous anti-Semitic outburst of the president of Russia and/or France. The politicians would have tried to outdo each other in condemnations of the inadmissible interference in the internal affairs of Israel. The Foreign Office would have ordered the return of the ambassador in Moscow and/or Paris for "consultations".

What happened was, of course, the reverse. It was the Israeli Prime Minister who called on the French Jews to leave their homeland "as soon as possible" and come to Israel, in view of the — alleged — anti-Semitic wave in France. The French government and media reacted exactly as their Israeli counterparts would have done. One of every hundred Frenchman (and Frenchwoman) is Jewish.

"A deplorable misunderstanding," the official French spokesman intoned. Meaning, in non-diplomatic language: "Shut up, you bastard!"

Profound commentators all over the world tried to guess the hidden motive of Ariel Sharon. Was this a veiled warning to France not to vote in favour of the judgement of the International Court in the UN General Assembly? (France voted for it anyhow, compelling all of Europe to follow suit.) Was he doing a favour to President Bush, who detests Chirac?

The truth is much more simple. It is impossible to guess Sharon's intention, because he had none. It was an inconsequential speech before an inconsequential audience. Sharon wanted to say something that would give him five seconds on TV, and he got them. Everybody was satisfied: the TV stations, the Prime Minister, his audience and the general public. Everybody, that is, except the French.

In Israeli ears it was an unimportant, routine state-