



Israel Viewpoint

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Swedish Freedom of Speech

For some reason, Sweden has always evoked positive images: tall, blue-eyed, blond-haired, good-looking, fit inhabitants of Scandinavia; modern day Vikings; Nordic. But in addition to their good traits, ethnic Swedes are Aryans, the race that Hitler so admired, and they sometimes exhibit some of the qualities that Hitler encouraged in Germans.

In mid-August the largest Swedish newspaper, the left-leaning tabloid "Aftonbladet," splashed this headline: "They plunder the organs of our sons" in a featured article in its cultural section. Author Donald Boström, a purported anti-Semite, quotes Palestinian claims that young men from the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been seized by the Israel Defense Forces [IDF] and their bodies returned to the families

with missing organs. Relatives of the victims reportedly told Boström, "Our sons are used as involuntary organ donors." According to the Palestinians, the victims disappeared for a few days and were returned at night, dead and autopsied, he wrote. A large photo spread, showing a dead Palestinian with Frankenstein-like stitching on its body next to a picture of a New Jersey rabbi, accompanied the story.

Boström's article makes a link to the recent exposure of an alleged crime syndicate in New Jersey, in a further attempt to blacken the reputation of the IDF. (The syndicate includes several American rabbis, and Levy Izhak Rosenbaum, who faces charges of conspiring to broker the sale of human kidneys.) Swedish diplomats in Israel were quick to condemn the

article – as did many Swedish columnists and media figures – but the Swedish Embassy's website soon deleted its condemnation. Also, Swedish Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs Frank Belfrage refused to repudiate or even criticize what Israelis consider a blood libel. He explained to the Israeli government how Sweden's freedom of speech limits the ability of the government to respond to articles in the media.

Yet here's what Sweden did in September, 2007, after the publication of a caricature of Prophet Muhammad in a Swedish newspaper: Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt apologized to representatives of Sweden's Muslim community at Stockholm's mosque and Sweden's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Jan Thesleff apologized to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Israel expects a condemnation from the Swedish government,

which is much less harsh than an apology. It has received neither. Do I detect the stink of sanctimonious hypocrisy?

Blood libels against Jews, which have been circulated since antiquity, have caused pogroms against the Jews in Russia, Europe and in many Islamic countries. That a story reporting IDF harvesting of organs for sale – a blood libel – fails to motivate the Swedish government to condemn it is telling.

Historically, Sweden had a militaristic history dating from the time of the Vikings to the 18th century. But from the time of the Napoleonic Wars, when its military prowess had diminished, it declared its neutrality in every European conflict. Sweden adopted an introverted, passive attitude that was aimed at nonalignment with militaristic countries. By the beginning of WWII, the attitude of neutrality was ingrained in nearly all Swedes.

Despite Sweden's claim of neutrality, transport agreements between it and Germany began in April of 1940, with Germany's invasion of Norway. Germany was allowed to transport war materiel and soldiers on Swedish railroads to and from Norway, allowing Germany to mass troops there. Sweden also permitted German military aircraft to fly across its air space; it gave German ships preferential treatment by enabling them to enter its territorial waters; it sold the Germans trucks; it supplied them with war materiel via Swedish rail. In addition, Sweden's exports of iron ore, a crucial commodity for the Nazi war machine, peaked during the war. Within Sweden, the government enforced a pro-German attitude on the media through press censorship and careful control of the entertainment industry.

Clearly, Sweden was threatened by Germany and rather than fight, it compromised its neutrality. It used Germany's threats against Sweden as an excuse for its assistance to the Nazi regime.

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