

lion nest egg. In February 2009, Obama's Office of Management and Budget blocked the play and restored the pumped-up 2010 Pentagon budget to its original figure, a not inconsiderable \$527 billion, a \$12 billion increase over 2009. Not surprisingly, the big spenders are calling this an Obama defense budget "cut."

The Prime-the-Pump Scheme: Like Wall Street and its economist spinmeisters, the defense contractors and their Pentagon allies are jumping on the stimulus bandwagon, asking for \$30 billion. Of course, DOD spending generates jobs. Unfortunately, it does so more slowly, less efficiently, and with much more overhead than other government spending—or even tax cuts. We'd be hard-pressed to come up with a worse way of stimulating the economy than pouring extra dollars into outrageously expensive Pentagon programs already in trouble.

The Unforeseen-Emergency Scheme: The Gates Pentagon has yet to submit its money plan for war spending, as opposed to its plan for "normal" Pentagon spending, for the rest of 2009 and for 2010. Since the Vietnam War, these "emergency supplementals" have been hiding holes for superfluous spending unrelated to the wars, stuffed in by both the Pentagon and Congress. Will the Obama administration bring "change" to the hidden abuse of war funding?

The Unapproved-Wish-List Scheme: Each year for the last 15 or so, the military services have sent Congress a list of spending programs euphemistically called "unfunded requirements," amounting to tens of billions of dollars. None of these additional billions are reviewed by a secretary of defense or a president. They constitute an end-run by the military services for unapproved spending, with Congress acting as a willing enabler. It would

be a sign that the spigot overflow of 9/11 is indeed drying up if Gates puts an end to this flouting of his and the president's authority.

The unending proliferation of such schemes has rotted America's defenses to the core. We've had 45 years of reform initiatives, and each has fizzled. We'll know that the Obama administration has snipped this unbroken string of failures when Secretary Gates translates his rhetoric into actions that change the money

flow. And there's no better place to start than by axing a few of these Pentagon budget-busters—his own included. ■

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Burdening Israel

The weight of being the bulwark of civilization

By Brendan O'Neill

IT IS A "beleaguered, courageous little democratic upholder of freedom and enlightenment." It is defending "the modern world and its achievements" and "the very future of our species." It stands on "the side of morality, justice, and civilization," and anyone who criticizes it is a "fellow-traveller of barbarism." It is possessed of the "values that underscore the Judeo-Christian culture that fostered the Enlightenment" and is a beacon of "political liberty and freedom."

What could these commentators possibly be gushing about? A plucky new political movement that fights for democracy, liberty, and Truth with a capital T? A humanist journal that faces down the tidal wave of relativism and makes the case for Enlightenment values?

In fact, they're writing about Israel, that small, militaristic state in the Middle East, which has just executed a

bloody war in Gaza and is increasingly seen by culture warriors in the West as the final defense against barbarism; against the unenlightened hordes; against a one-eyed, militant, global conspiracy that would destroy the Western way of life forever.

There are major differences in the way Americans view Israel—most are generally favorable—and the way Europeans view Israel—many are increasingly hostile to the Jewish state. Yet what unites pro-Israel thinkers on both sides of the Atlantic is a view of Israel as a representative of everything progressive and decent. Across the West, more and more anti-relativist, pro-reason writers are projecting their fears for the future of civilization onto the Middle East, imagining that Israel, that last defender of old-fashioned national sovereignty, is fighting not only for its right

to exist but for the continued existence of the ideals of the Enlightenment itself.

This is a mad, bad, ill-informed fantasy. A hundred years ago, the German Socialist August Bebel coined the phrase “socialism of fools” to describe those left-wingers who blamed Jews for the ills of modern society. Today, in the elevation of Israel to the position of protector of “the very future of the human species,” we have an “Enlightenment of Fools”—a political posture that both obscures the true origins of anti-Enlightenment sentiments today and places an intolerable burden on the shoulders of the tiny Jewish state.

A new band of writers is continually infusing the squalid wars in the Middle East with a historic, end-of-days momentum. Where many of us recognize that the Israeli-Palestinian clash is a hangover from the national conflicts of the Cold War era, and one that has been exacerbated by the partitionist, divisive politics of the “peace process” instituted by Washington, the Israel-as-Enlightenment lobby sees it as a civilizational war in which Western values might be crushed by the enemies of progress.

During Israel’s attacks on Gaza, writer Ruth Dudley Edwards said Israel had “every right to bomb Hamas” because it is fundamentally fighting to “uphold freedom and enlightenment.” British journalist and author Julie Burchill, who describes herself as a “philosemite,” described Israel as “our Jews,” in the sense that if Israel were to be “wiped out,” then “we will be wiped out, too, all of the modern world and its achievements—swept back into the Dark Ages mulch from whence we came.” Burchill says Israel represents “mankind” and “the very future of our species.” Here, rather than seeing the conflict in the Middle East for what it is—a messy, complex clash over territory, sovereignty, and identity—pro-Israel writers reduce it to a simplistic, cartoon war

between progress and darkness, in which the fate of Israel gets dangerously tangled up with the fate of the entire modern world.

Earl Tilford writes in *Frontpage* magazine about the contrast between Israel, a product of the “Judeo-Christian culture that fostered the Enlightenment” and its neighboring states, which are possessed of a “medieval cultural ethos ... more reminiscent of tribalism than civilized society as the West knows it.” In his book *The Case for Israel*, Alan Dershowitz moves beyond making the case for a specifically Jewish homeland and instead transforms Israel into a civilization symbol. Israel “deserves to exist,” he says, “as a beacon of liberty and democracy in a sea of tyranny and hatred.” Mark Steyn argues that Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis came horribly to life in Israel’s fight against Gaza.

urgent defender of “morality, justice and civilization.” Of course, Israel has local enemies, but Hamas and Hezbollah, two increasingly weak and isolated movements, are hardly a “tyranny” that will “envelop” the world and cause Western civilization itself to “fall.” Yet again and again, Israel’s “enlightened” backers talk up the threat in the Middle East and present themselves and their own ways of life—their values—as also being under attack from the forces of “irrational hatred and genocidal hysteria” lined up against Israel. Indeed, they spread global conspiracy theories that sound similar to those spouted by anti-Semites, only this time it’s a cabal of anti-Jews that threatens the world.

Melanie Phillips, one of Europe’s most zealous supporters of Israel, who is now widely published in conservative, pro-Israel publications in the U.S., says, “The issue of Israel sits at the very apex

A NEW BAND OF WRITERS IS CONTINUALLY INFUSING THE SQUALID WARS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITH A HISTORIC, END-OF-DAYS MOMENTUM.

Where once Israel was seen by Republicans and some conservatives as a useful political ally of America, it is increasingly discussed as a cultural ally, even an existential one. In *The Objective Standard*, John David Lewis says Israel stands at “the front-line of the war between civilization and barbarism.” Echoing Eric Hoffer’s famous *Los Angeles Times* article of 1968, in which Hoffer argued that “should Israel perish, the holocaust will be upon us all,” another British “philosemite” claimed this year that Israel is at the “defensive frontline against a tyranny that wants to envelop us all. If Israel were to fall, the rest of us would not be far behind.”

Here we can glimpse the fantasy politics, even the conspiracy theory, that underpins the promotion of Israel as the

of the fight to defend civilization. Those who want to destroy Western civilization need to destroy the Jews, whose moral precepts formed its foundation stones.” From this mythic perspective, the ragtag militant groups that launch attacks against Israel are not motivated by local or political grievances but by a deep, hidden desire to kill off the Jews in order ultimately to finish off Western civilization. Phillips warns, “Unless people in the West understand that Israel’s fight is their own fight, they will be on the wrong side of the war to defend not just the West but civilization in general.”

What is going on here? How can a conflict that looks to many reasonable people like a long-running national and political clash be described as a grand

battle for mankind? In effect, Israel is cynically, and lazily, being turned into a proxy army for a faction in the Western Culture Wars that has lost its ability to defend Enlightenment values on their own terms or even to define and face up to the central problem of anti-Enlightenment tendencies today.

It is striking that many of the new-found, passionate defenders of Israel in the Western public debate are the same people who have raised legitimate concerns about the rise of relativism and the denigration of truth over the past ten to 15 years. *Frontpage* magazine, Mark Steyn, Melanie Phillips, Ruth Dudley Edwards, and numerous other right-leaning thinkers and writers have, in different ways and with varying degrees of success, tried to counter backward intellectual trends and made the case for rationalism, science, and excellence in the academy and the arts.

In debates about education, for example, they critiqued the trend toward “dumbing down” and “relevance” and defended a Plato-style communication of knowledge and rigorous training of the next generation’s minds. In the discussion about multiculturalism in Europe, or what one pro-Enlightenment, pro-Israel writer describes as “state-sanctioned sectarianism,” they attacked the move toward community separatism and the worship of all cultures as “equally valid.” They criticized the transformation of

national museums, products of the Enlightenment, into community outreach centers and for the most part stood up for free speech against the patronizing idea that certain words should be censored to protect the sensitivities of small communities or ethnic minorities.

All of this was—and is—an uphill struggle. It is hard work, in our Age of Relativism, to argue for the values of liberty, equality, and excellence. As the cliché goes, where the Right won the economic war, the cultural Left—with its innate hostility toward apparently oppressive and discriminatory “Western values” (always said with a sneer)—won the Culture War. Faced with the relentless denigration of intellectualism, the defenders of Enlightenment values became increasingly discombobulated and allowed their arguments to become shrill caricatures.

Over the past few years, since 9/11 in particular, they have opportunistically hitched their pro-civilization stance to the war against al-Qaeda, against myopic Islamic radicalism, against small groups of religious militants whom they depict as the greatest threat to the Western way of life. Their flagging, battered 1990s struggle to defend the Enlightenment was re-energized by the brutally simplistic war on terror. Eventually they came to see Islamic militancy as the great enemy of the Enlightenment and thus Israel—Public Enemy No. 1 of all Islamic militants—as its supreme defender.

This is a worrying development. It distorts the truth about the conflict in the Middle East. The Israel-as-Enlightenment lobby vastly exaggerates the threat posed by Israel’s enemies, which are not capable of destroying Israel, much less the “foundation stones” of Western civilization. It also exaggerates the coherence and vision of the Israeli state. Far from being an outpost for civilizational values, Israel is, in the words of one Israeli commentator, a collection of

“frightened people, wishing for someone strong and forceful, who will miraculously fend off the people’s enemies, real and imaginary.”

Worst of all, the “enlightened” pro-Israel lobby now presents the threat to Western values as a purely external one, emanating from the slums of Gaza or the towns of southern Lebanon or the radical mosques of Iran when, in truth, the Enlightenment is being corroded from within the West itself. In describing Israel’s wars with Palestine as a fight to defend “not just the West but civilization in general,” pro-Israel groupies are partaking in a political and theoretical displacement activity of historic proportion.

It is of course true that Jews have contributed enormously to history, literature, and culture. Yet as Richard S. Levy argues in his book *Anti-Semitism: A Historical Encyclopaedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, simple philosemitism, like anti-Semitism, also treats the Jews as “radically different or exceptional.” Only in this instance, they are looked upon as the saviors of mankind, the lone defenders of civilization rather than as society’s destroyers. Where anti-Semites project their frustrations with the world and their naked prejudices onto the Jews, and frequently onto Israel, too, the new philosemites project their desperation for political answers, for some clarity, for a return to Enlightenment values onto Israel and the Jews. Neither is a burden that the Jewish people can, or should, be expected to bear.

Anyone interested in breathing life back into the enlightened way of life and thinking should be prepared to have some hard arguments, alongside Jews, Muslims, and anyone else who wants to get involved, rather than pushing Israel forward as a kind of canary in the mine of collapsing Western civilization. ■

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Higher Law

Will states' rights go up in smoke?

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

THINGS SEEMED to be going very wrong for the state medical-marijuana movement. Two days after Barack Obama was sworn in, federal agents began a series of raids on licensed cannabis dispensaries and growers in California and Colorado—something Obama had suggested would not happen in his presidency.

Activists remembered that in 1999 candidate George W. Bush, when asked about state medical-marijuana efforts, declared, “I believe each state can choose that decision as they so choose.” He went on to crack down on doctors, dispensaries, farmers, and terminally ill patients who use marijuana according to their states’ laws.

Advocates felt fooled again. Just a year ago, campaigner Obama told the *Mail Tribune* in Oregon, “I think the basic concept that using medical marijuana in the same way, with the same controls as other drugs prescribed by doctors, I think that’s entirely appropriate. I would not punish doctors if it’s prescribed in a way that is appropriate; that may require some changes in federal law.” In August 2007, he was asked a similar question on the trail in Nashua, New Hampshire. “I would not have the Justice Department prosecuting and raiding medical marijuana users,” he said. “It’s not a good use of our resources.”

Indeed, more states have legalized medical marijuana in the last 13 years than at any time since the drug was outlawed in 1937. Even as Obama won the election, Michigan became the 13th state—the first in the Midwest—to pass a new policy. The measure won with 63 percent of the vote.

So is Obama a fair-weather friend? After a brief but carefully tuned White House statement on Feb. 9, advocates believe that the administration may have been just as surprised by the raids as they were. It is thought that the DEA might have been tending to some last-minute business before Obama fleshed out his new agenda, which includes a replacement for Michele Leonhart, a Bush appointee still serving as DEA acting administrator. “The President believes that federal resources should not be used to circumvent state laws, and as he continues to appoint senior leadership to fill out the ranks of the federal government, he expects them to review their policies with that in mind,” said White House spokesman Nick Shapiro.

Bruce Mirken of the Marijuana Policy Project, which in 2007 hired Libertarian Bob Barr as a lobbyist, says that his group is watching with “great interest how this unfolds.” “Given that the White House has reaffirmed the campaign promises he made,” Mirken says, “we are very hopeful.”

He’s no Pollyanna, however. Advocates see veteran “drug warriors” like White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, new Attorney General Eric Holder, and Vice President Joe Biden at the levers of power and know federal drug policy could turn on them in an instant. But if Obama’s first instincts for limited federal power over pot prevail, he could set in motion a series of unprecedented local and state reforms and perhaps give Congress enough cover to change federal law.

“This is wonderful news—if it happens. It means the states will be able to

make public-health decisions for people who are suffering or dying and for whom marijuana is a palliative treatment,” says Randy Barnett, a constitutional law professor at Georgetown who unsuccessfully argued for the plaintiffs in *Gonzales v. Raich* in 2005.

In that landmark case, the Supreme Court affirmed, in a 6-3 decision, that the Constitution’s commerce clause permitted Congress, via the federal Controlled Substances Act, to prohibit the use of marijuana for medicinal purposes. “It was a huge blow,” says Barnett. The three dissenters—then Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Sandra Day O’Connor and Clarence Thomas—balked at the majority for preventing “an express choice by some states, concerned for the lives and liberties of their people, to regulate medical marijuana differently.”

The two plaintiffs, Angel Raich, a brain-cancer patient, and Diane Munson, who suffered from chronic back pain following a car accident, had been arrested for cultivating and using—though not selling—marijuana under California law. Thomas took on the commerce clause argument directly: “[I]f the majority is to be taken seriously, the Federal Government may now regulate quilting bees, clothes drives and potluck suppers throughout the 50 states.”

Officials from Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana recognized a good federalist fight and weighed in with an amicus brief: “The question presented here is not whether vigorous enforcement of the Nation’s drug laws is good criminal policy. It most assuredly is. The question, rather, is whether the Constitution