

# Muslims and Jews in Europe Today

Dec 6, 2005



## Brief Analysis

**O**n November 28, 2005, Sir Jonathan Sacks, chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. The following is an edited transcript of his remarks. [Read \(http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=267\)](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=267) a full transcript of Rabbi Sacks's remarks.

"The suicide bombings in Madrid, in London on July 7, the riots in France, the tensions in Holland after the murder of Theo van Gogh have been very frightening, very scary. . . . There are tensions. And even in a very peaceful country like Britain, they are under the surface. . . .

"The nature of the issue at one level . . . is radical Islam. . . . So let me tell you [about] . . . the other side of the equation: . . . the state of European culture. . . . Let me just identify seven factors.

"(1) Despite twenty or thirty years of integration, today there is more segregation than there was thirty years ago. Muslims live in Muslim areas. . . . There is enormous ghettoization, in Britain's Midlands towns especially, but also in London and elsewhere. . . . And all those years of trying to make social and geographical and residential integration better have actually resulted in making it worse.

"(2) Multiculturalism, the great British experiment, has genuinely failed. . . . We got it wrong. . . . We now know that [multiculturalism] encourages people not to integrate, not to learn the history, language, customs, and culture of the host society. And, therefore, that policy, which was designed to generate social inclusion, has in fact created social exclusion.

"(3) . . . Rather than becoming a sort of multicultural society, we have become a community of diasporas. . . . It means that groups live here, but their minds and hearts are there. . . . And the result of that is . . . instead of . . . sending out a message of peace to the Middle East, what we are doing is importing the conflicts of the Middle East into Britain. . . .

"(4) [The] collapse of national identities. . . . When [I was] growing up, there was a genuine British identity. And, therefore, we were proud to be British. . . . We had something to integrate into. Today . . . there is no Britain anymore. . . . because now we are all supposed to be Europeans, and there is not a European identity because we are all supposed to be global. . . .

"(5) . . . If the watchword of the twenty-first century is, 'Think globally, act locally,' there are no organizations in the world better at doing this than religions. It is what Jews, Christians, and Muslims have done since the very beginning. The emergence of the great religions in a postpolitical age as the great movers in international relations should have been seen because that is what they do. . . .

"(6) How is one supposed to mount a defense of a culture if all the weapons you have left are relativism and postmodernism? You cannot do that. . . . And really today, to talk in terms of moral absolutes -- good or evil, right or wrong -- is politically impermissible. . . . And this makes it extremely difficult for people to take a stand. . . .

"(7) Finally, political correctness. . . . It was days after the suicide bombings of July 7 that the word . . . terrorist was

ruled permissible by the BBC, and it was many days before we actually heard the word Muslim. And, therefore, we are in a situation where European culture may well be in a situation of having all too few defenses against terror and all too few weapons in favor of national identity, belonging, and the concept of the common good. . . .

"So we have a complex problem. What are we doing within the Jewish community? As I have already told you, we have cultivated many friends . . . [among] Muslim leaders. . . ."

Interfaith Dialogue [from the question-and-answer session]

"We came up with a project called Respect, which invited every faith community in Britain to engage in some act of community service [or] kindness to others that took them across the boundary of their faith, because we know religion has enormous power to create communities. And that power, for all its positives, has also the negative thing of creating barriers between communities. So we said, let us extend the hand of friendship across the borders of faith. . . .

"We are doing what I call side-by-side dialogue rather than face-to-face dialogue. How can we work together or share insights into problems that are common to both of us rather than [debating] who was bound in the binding of Isaac? . . . Whereas, if you identify local problems and get all members of a faith to join in, that makes a difference. And we have been recipients of this. . . . Don't try and aim too high or . . . too elitist. Focus at the grassroots level. Focus on common problems. Focus on working side by side. . . ."

A New Paradigm of Assimilation [from the question-and-answer session]

"Is assimilation bad for Jewish life? Of course, it is. So here I am preaching national belonging, and in the meanwhile I am telling my community, 'Send your kids to Jewish schools.' . . . There's a conflict here -- right? -- between particularity and universality. . . . In order to resolve that conflict, I had to do a paradigm shift. . . . Here it is, if I can [say] it in one sentence: By being what only we are, we give what only we can give. . . .

"Nineteenth century Jewry made this horrendous either/or choice . . . [between] universalism and particularism. . . . I have to reframe so that people no longer have to make that choice. . . . I have to get [Jews] to see that by fighting for justice in the wider world, they are living out a Jewish value, and I have to change the paradigm. And I have to do that for Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus as well, because they are faced with the same problem. . . . There must be . . . a primary language of citizenship and a secondary language of identity and belonging. . . . We have to be bilingual. . . . Multiculturalism is good and it is important and it is valuable, but not if it fragments the concept of the common good. . . . And the mistake is to think either this or that is enough. . . ."

Resurgent Anti-Semitism [from the question-and-answer session]

"We now face a resurgence of anti-Semitism on a global scale. . . . So the fact that this new anti-Semitism has emerged . . . after sixty years of saying, 'Never again,' the speed with which this has emerged should be giving us trauma. . . . How did it happen? . . . It happened in . . . Durban one week before September 11 [at] the United Nations Conference Against Racism. . . . What became taboo after the Holocaust? Five things: racism, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, attempted genocide, and crimes against humanity. In Durban, all of those five accusations were leveled against Israel or the Jewish people.

"The new anti-Semitism, how does it affect government policy toward the Middle East? I hope and I believe it affects it not at all. But that would be the danger. . . . British foreign policy must be determined by the sole relevant question, 'What is in the interest of Britain?' not this group or that group. . . . And I have got to say that British politicians have shown no indication whatsoever that they are going to fall into this trap or that they are going to make certain pro-this, anti-that statements in order to win votes."

This report was prepared Michael Day.

## RECOMMENDED

---



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [The Ukraine Crisis Isn't Over: Russia Has Lied About Troop Withdrawals Before](#)

Feb 16, 2022

◆  
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/ukraine-crisis-isnt-over-russia-has-lied-about-troop-withdrawals)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

### [As China Thrives in the Post-9/11 Middle East, the US Must Counter](#)

Feb 16, 2022

◆  
Jay Solomon

(/policy-analysis/china-thrives-post-911-middle-east-us-must-counter)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

### [Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆  
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)