

Public Speech, December 22, 2004

Reflections on the New Anti-Semitism

Transcription

SPEAKER: *Erev Tov, bruchim ha-ba'im. Ani mivakesh mikol hanochichim lehakpid ulechabot et machshirei ha-telephon ha-cellularim.*

Mr. Ambassador, Mr. President, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen. The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem – whose president isn't here with us yet, but we hope that he'll join us in a couple of minutes – are just delighted to have you with us this evening. His Excellency the Ambassador of the United States to Israel, Mr. Dan Kurtzer, and Professor Lawrence Summers, president of Harvard University, and I will say a few words by way of introduction, before Professor Summers makes his address, but I would like first of all to ask Ambassador Kurtzer to say a few words to us all. Ambassador Kurtzer, please.

[applause]

Ambassador Kurtzer: *Erev Tov.* Good evening. It's a great honor, really, to be here tonight, in anticipation of what will be a stimulating and intellectually forceful presentation by Professor Lawrence Summers, president of Harvard University, who epitomizes and personifies all that is good about the United States. I can't say that about all of my countrymen *[laughter]*, but Professor Summers has basically done it all. For those of us who have admired him over the years, to be able to sit up here on this platform in anticipation of his speech is really quite exciting. The topic that he's been asked to address is also one of great moment for

all of us – for those in the United States and for, of course, you in Israel. The issue of anti-Semitism around the world, especially as it plays into issues that we have talked about publicly together. The legitimacy of the State of Israel in the world, that topic remains of great significance, and therefore, I'm sure we all look forward to hearing Professor Summers' views on that. The United States, of course, for our part, has, and continues to do whatever we can to combat anti-Semitism. Most recently, President Bush has signed into law a bill that, in fact, requires the administration to report openly and honestly on anti-Semitism around the world, and we are now in the process of submitting our input into what will be the first annual report of the United States on anti-Semitism, both in this region and elsewhere. So the issues that we're about to hear, the person who's about to address them, make this really quite an exciting evening. I also want to take this opportunity to thank Professor Summers for the other part of his public service, when he served in active public life in the administration of President Clinton, and for the extraordinary work he did as our Secretary of Treasury. So, once again, thank you for giving me the honor of joining you tonight. Professor Summers, I join this audience in expressing our admiration for you. Thank you all for your attendance here. Professor.

[applause]

Professor: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. It is a great privilege, really, for me to welcome Professor Lawrence Summers, president of Harvard University and fellow economist here tonight. I say 'fellow economist' because, as a fellow economist, I can attest to his achievements not only by reading his CV but by actually having read his contributions, and having learned some of his thinking about economics. Since the early 1980s, Professor

Summers has been one of the world's leading experts on capital theory, on public finance, and on processes of international finance and development. First, as professor of economics at Harvard University, which he now heads, and then as vice-president and chief economist of the World Bank, and then as Undersecretary and Deputy Secretary, and finally, Secretary of the Treasury of the United States of America, and now as president of Harvard University. His merits as economist, scholar, academic are many, and I could talk at length about them. But judging by the topic that he chose to speak about this evening, I think it is fair to guess that he's not so much as an academic here tonight, but more as a civic leader, as a man of conscience, and it is in this capacity that I want to say a few words. As civic leader, as man of conscience, Professor Summers' most noted trait, I think, has been his being outspoken, and I say that in the best sense of the word, 'outspoken'. I hope you join me on that. Professor Summers has never allowed political correctness to stop him from saying what he thought needed to be said. This was true at the World Bank, this was true at the Treasury, and now it has been true at his role as president of Harvard University. People everywhere, I think, have come to appreciate this straightforwardness very much, including, I think, here in Israel, as this turnout here this evening manifests, I think. Professor Summers is a member of the American National Academy of Sciences, so it is a special pleasure for me to introduce a member of our academy's older and illustrious sister here this evening. Professor Summers has chosen to speak about reflections on the new anti-Semitism, and I'd like to invite him to address us all right now. Thank you.

[applause]

Professor Summers: Manny, thank you very, very much for that overly kind introduction. As I tend to say on such occasions, I wish my parents had been here for that. *[laughter]* My father would have appreciated it, and my mother would have believed it. *[laughter]* And you, especially, Manny, know that one of the things I was a little bit worried about was the stories that you might tell. You see, Manny was over many years a frequent visitor to the University of Pennsylvania's Economics Department, where my parents taught. So I hesitate to think how young I was at the moment we first met, and I hesitate to think what stories about me my parents have shared with you. *[laughter]* And so, I want to thank you both for your kind words, and for your restraint with respect to what you did not say tonight. Manny, it's very good to be with you again. You know, all of us in economics at this moment, when there is so much interest in new theories of how people make decisions under uncertainty, and deal with situations where they face complex choices with probabilistic dimensions, are indebted to Manny's work, which opened up that topic many years ago, and is only now being rediscovered by others. It's also a privilege to be here with the US Ambassador to Israel. Ambassador Kurtzer's work I have come to know from talking to people, both in the State Department and here, in Israel. He is one who functions in the highest and best way of US ambassadors. He carries the message of our government strongly, vigorously and clearly, to the country to which he is assigned, Israel. And equally, he carries Israel's concerns and Israel's perspectives back to the United States, with great clarity. That is what the best ambassadors do. Those who understand only our position do not serve our country well, and those who go native and understand only the position of the country to which they have been assigned, do not

serve our country well. Ambassador Kurtzer in this assignment, as in others, serves our country extraordinarily well, by carrying those messages in both directions. I should also say, as a former Treasury official who knows of his work at his previous post, that in addition to this great, high purpose of carrying messages in both directions, he is absolutely ferocious in defense of the turf of the United States Department of State *[laughter]*, and that he performs those functions as well with extraordinary skill. It is a great privilege for me to be back in Israel. I have come, on and off, to visit your country for nearly 25 years. Now, since the first trip I took to Israel when I was a graduate student, when I visited with Professor Chuchinsky and his family, and had the experience that I will remember throughout my life, visiting one of your kibbutzim, we went out to pick cotton, or whatever it was we were picking, at six in the morning – it was the ritual of that kibbutz that one went out and picked beginning at six AM, and came back at nine AM, but nobody told me that. At 8:30 AM, it was clear to me that I didn't have more than another half hour in that sun in me, but for all I knew, the plan was that we were going to be picking cotton until six PM. *[laughter]* So, it is with a sense of relief unlike few that I have had in my life, that that visit ended. I also had a chance to visit here a number of times, as part of American cooperation with Israel, during my time at the Treasury. I'm glad to have this chance to come back as president of Harvard. I want to reflect, tonight, on what might be called the new anti-Semitism, and to continue my participation in a discussion that I first became involved in two years ago. I must say, this is not a subject that I ever expected that I would discuss in my professional life. In part, probably, Manny, because I never anticipated that my professional life would range from being an

economist to being what you were kind enough to call a civic leader. But, in part, also because as I grew up in the United States, as I made a career in the United States, questions of anti-Semitism were actually quite remote from my experience. While I was always identified as Jewish, I was hardly devout. The Holocaust did not touch my family in any close way. Growing up, I was aware of clubs and neighborhoods that seemed more friendly to some than to others, but those were not clubs and neighborhoods that anyone I knew had any great desire to join. Serving, becoming a professor, and going to school at MIT and Harvard, and joining the Harvard Economics Department, issues of religion did not impinge on my existence. I served in government under President Clinton on an economic team that, if one thinks about it, was made up, very substantially, of Jewish officials. But I must say, it was not something that any of us was very aware of at all, until there was a proposal that came down one day on Yom Kippur, that there was a desire for the President to have a photo op with the members of his economic team, and reflection revealed that there were almost no members of his economic team that would be able to attend [*laughter*] that photo op. And we all realized that there was this pattern, but what was really striking was that we had not realized it ourselves, and that others had not pointed it out to us in strong and vigorous ways – something that I suspect in the United States would have been very unlikely a half a century, or even a quarter of a century, earlier. And then, I had the defining honor in my life, in being chosen as Harvard's 27th president, the 7th one since the Civil War. Well, I dare say it would have been inconceivable a half-century ago, or perhaps even a quarter-century ago, that Harvard could have had a Jewish president. But I must also say that my appointment as president didn't

pass without comment, but the vast, vast, vast majority of that comment had nothing to do with the fact that I was Jewish. And so, questions of anti-Semitism seemed very remote from my life. And yet, in the period after September 11th, which was perhaps a period of greater political consciousness on my part, and greater international consciousness in the United States, one was struck by a variety of disturbing trends. The increased reports of virulent anti-Semitism in Europe, that manifested itself in synagogue burnings and destruction, created contexts where young Jewish children were advised not to go out in public, in any way where their Judaism would be clear. There are reports translated in to American websites of the basic textbooks and standard media presentations of state-owned media in the Arab world regarding Israel and regarding Judaism. The judgments expressed in various international conclaves, the UN might not still believe that Zionism is racism, but in 2002 its world conference on racism came very close to articulating such sentiments. Those were things that I was aware of, but they alone probably would not have caused me to say or do anything, had there not been a set of developments in academic communities that seemed to me very highly problematic. The efforts to exclude Israeli scholars from editorial positions on certain European scholarly journals, the efforts to petition authorities in Europe not to finance research done jointly with Israeli scholars, the shouting down of pro-Israeli speakers at universities – a small number of universities, but that it happened at all was striking – in the United States, and particularly in Canada, and the suggestion that universities instrumentalize themselves as political actors to seek to delegitimize and damage Israel through the mechanism of divesting their endowments. It seemed to me that all of this, taken together, and

particularly the resonance of the voices of the street in academic communities, represented a very real cause for concern. Not a suggestion that there was demonstrable proof that individuals in academic communities were anti-Semitic, not – as I was careful to suggest – an indication that a new Holocaust was upon us, but it did seem to me to suggest that serious and thoughtful people were advocating and taking actions that were anti-Semitic in their effect, if not their intent. It seemed so to me then, and it seems so to me now. Now, in ways that I anticipated to some degree, but frankly did not fully anticipate, these words did not go unnoticed. They probably did little to reject Mr. Yari's suggestion that I was outspoken. There were two aspects of the response that I found to be particularly interesting and surprising. The first was the suggestion that was made by Manny at the greatest length by the noted literary theorist, Judith Butler, who had been president of the Modern Language Association, in the London Review of Books, that it was wrong, that it was inconsistent with academic freedom, to use the term "anti-Semitism" in referring to these actions, because it was surely crucial and of great importance that there be space to criticize Israel and to criticize Israeli policy without the label "anti-Semitic" being applied. It seems to me that Ms. Butler and the many people who said things similar to what she said, doth protesteth too much. For it seems to me clear, first, that to suggest that certain actions were anti-Semitic in their effect, was hardly to suggest that there was anything inappropriate in a university community about criticizing either Israel or its leadership, or its policies. Indeed, and in an 800-word set of remarks, I was careful to point out at three separate occasions that no-one should ever be prevented from saying anything in a university community, and to go on to urge that Israeli policy, foreign

and defense policy, should be, will be and should be, vigorously challenged. So at one level, the suggestion that I was somehow trying to stifle speech on the question of Israeli policy, seemed to me to be quite misguided. It seemed to me that there was a second – in a second respect, it seemed to me misguided. Because it seemed to me that in contemporary life, in contemporary academic life, we need to be very clear about what academic freedom does and does not include. Academic freedom does and should include freedom from censorship. Stifling and preventing speech is never the right thing. The answer to wrong speech is more speech, showing why it is wrong. At the same time, no-one should ever suppose that academic freedom includes freedom from criticism. And when speech is wrong, when it is seen as potentially dangerous, it seems to me that it is imperative that that speech be criticized. And when that speech moves beyond expressions of opinion, to conscious political action to force changes in policies of universities, or to exclude scholars, it seems to me that those actions are even more fair ground for criticism. The second reaction to what I said was more surprising to me, and perhaps this reflects my naivete, or perhaps it says something important. I was not surprised that some people were opposed to what I said; I was not frankly surprised that some people were very enthusiastic about what I said. I was surprised at the number of people who complimented me on my courage in saying what I said, because I didn't feel very courageous at all. I felt like I was expressing an opinion in a secure environment, that some would agree with and some did not. And yet, what is my most lasting memory of the response to what I said, was the number of people who said to me that they were glad that I, as president of a prominent university, had said what I said, because they felt that now it would be

easier for them to say something similar. They felt that now it would be easier for them to resist the kinds of arguments and the kinds of positions that I was resisting. And if that is true, it does say something about a climate and an orthodoxy that may actually have been rather more established than I realized at the time when I spoke out. And if that is right, that is something that is very troubling indeed. Troubling for American universities, troubling, especially, in academic life, and I would suggest something that should be troubling to all of us. What does one make of all of this two years later? Reporting from my locale, I can tell you that while these tensions are by no means absent, they seem to have receded somewhat over the last two years. The clear and firm refusal of major universities in the United States to contemplate divestiture, has led to the drying up of the divestiture movement. The number of incidents of speakers being prevented from speaking, in various ways – in the United States, at least – appears to have declined somewhat. There has certainly been – and been entirely independent of anything I said or did – a wave of solidaristic expression towards Israeli academics in the wake of what happened. I was troubled to learn, in my visit to Hebrew University, that it is an infrequent, but by no means surprising or shocking event, for a routine request of a letter of reference for a scholar who's being considered for tenure, to be met with a response that indicates an unwillingness to participate in the academic review processes of an Israeli university. Such reactions seem to me to be unconscionable, and to call into question the academic ethics of those who choose not to participate. Still and all, from the perspective of American academic life, and perhaps even from the perspective of academic life more generally, it seems to me that some of the things I

was most worried about have receded somewhat. But if one looks at the broader picture, it seems to me that the situation is somewhat more problematic. The enormous service that is provided by those who translate textbooks, TV broadcasts, state-sponsored newspapers in the Arab world, into English, and provide that information on the web, is also a deeply disturbing service. I don't know where all of this is going to go. It seems to me that it points up, in a way that people don't usually note, the profound revolution in foreign affairs that is under way. There is what might be called the Westphalian theory of international relations. It goes back to the treaty of Westphalia. And what it basically holds is that relations between states are matters that go to their external relations, and not to what takes place within them. So, external aggression is a matter which can be negotiated about, attacks are a matter that can be negotiated about, international trade is a matter that can be negotiated about. But what happens within a country is that country's business. Language pointing in this direction is actually contained in the UN charter. And yet, we are witnessing attacks on that concept, and efforts by states to recognize that what goes on within other states is a matter of their direct security concern, on a number of levels. It is there in the world's recognition after Rwanda, that it had learned the lessons of the Holocaust less well than it thought it had. It is there in the recognition today on the part of some, that the lessons of Rwanda may have been learned less well, with respect to Darfur than many would have supposed those lessons would be learned. It is there in the discussion that President Bush has opened up in the last several years. And you can agree or disagree with his precise positions, and still recognize that in an age of nuclear weapons, and in an age in which weapons can be delivered by terrorists

who are not state actors, the traditional reliance on deterrence of monolithic states is insufficient as a basis for security strategy and security dialogue. And one cannot help but wonder whether it isn't appropriate for the foreign policy of nations and the relations between nations, to pay closer attention to what is being taught in their schools, or being propagated by their state-sponsored media, than has traditionally been the case. This has been recognized in recent agreements over the last decade in the Middle East, with the emphasis on the notion of incitement. We are on very much new ground here, we don't know when this becomes excessive intrusiveness. We don't know what the sanctions are, and the responses are, when agreements are not honored. But it seems to me that we make a great mistake if we fail to recognize that if one takes a long-term view of security, what a nation teaches its children goes to the question of whether it is or is not a threat, in just the same way that what weapons a nation purchases goes to the question of whether it is a threat. It seems to me that all of us in academic life have an obligation to be sensitive to what goes on elsewhere in academic life, and to pay close attention to what it is that we validate and honor in the practices of universities in the rest of the world. There is – that is, if you like, goes to the question of the old anti-Semitism, the traditional and vicious portrayal of those who are Jewish. There's a different phenomenon which many label as the new anti-Semitism, and perhaps that's the right name for it. It is what I would refer to as "Fabian anti-Israelism". It is the tendency in many communities, particularly on the left, prominently in Europe, but also in some academic communities, and on the part of many academics in the United States, to adopt positions that are profoundly anti-Israel. To equate Israeli policies with Nazi

policies, to suggest that Israeli policies are not just wrong, but somehow represent a violation of human rights that goes beyond and transcends any other violation of human rights that is going on in the world today. It seems to me that there is a debate one can have, but I actually think it is a relatively sterile debate, as to whether such rhetoric, whether such approaches, are best categorized as anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist, or anti-Semitic. And those who engage in such rhetoric will insist with great force that their position isn't anti-Semitic, it's merely anti-Zionist. Their position isn't anti-Zionist, it's merely anti-Israeli. I don't actually think that that is the important issue with respect to such rhetoric, and I don't think it's the important issue with respect to those who would urge institutions to act and demonize, based on such rhetoric. The important issue is that such rhetoric is wrong, and such rhetoric is dangerous, and that such rhetoric has to be confronted. I don't think one can look around the world today and see that rhetoric of that kind is in decline. And so, the question that confronts us is, what type of approaches are best in response? There are a range of different views. There is a view expressed by some, expressed by some conservative commentators in the United States, that might be called the apocalyptic view. A view that hears in this rhetoric the sound of breaking glass and insists on urgent and universal mobilization with respect to it. I don't yield to anyone in my opposition to anti-Semitism, but I wonder if it does not reduce the force of one's argument, to take the misguided and dangerous rantings of a certain number of writers in academic communities and suggest that the Nazis are upon us again. It seems to me that to elevate this threat to that level on the basis of it where it stands, is to generate a response that may be ineffective and unpersuasive to a vast majority that witnesses these

controversies. It seems to me that one needs to be extremely careful about confronting rhetorical escalation with rhetorical escalation on the other side. A second, and it seems to me, equally dangerous response, is the response of appeasement. The response that suggests that all conflict should be viewed symmetrically; the response that suggests that if there is so much antipathy towards Israel, or so much antipathy towards the United States, it must be the fault of the United States or the fault of Israel. That, it seems to me, is an equally dangerous approach – dangerous because it emboldens those who engage in such rhetoric, dangerous because it is not recognizing and telling the truth. It is one of the disturbing tendencies in modern academic life that there is a desire, on the part of many, in the name of open-mindedness, to fall into a kind of relativistic nihilism in which all positions are equally legitimate, all positions must be respected, and compromise must be entered into, no matter what the starting point or reasonableness of the two parties. It seems to me that Israel is right, its friends are right, moral people everywhere are right to resist this approach. In a way, these two approaches that I have described, misguided as they are, have the substantial virtue of being clear in what it is that they are. The proper approach, it seems to me, is a more balanced one. It is one that isn't adduced by a simple principle. One doesn't say, "The end is nigh, there is no issue more important," in response, nor does one heed what is wrong. It seems to me that the appropriate approach is to identify individual acts and particular ideas for what they are, to speak as clearly and as forcefully as one can about why they are wrong, to generalize with precision and care about their significance and weight, and to understand and think very carefully about the nature of the responses. It has been

said that the essence of diplomacy is the ability to distinguish degrees of evil. In that spirit, we all learn – in our own lives, and it is also true in the life of nations – that not every position that can be morally justified is a prudent one to take; and not every argument that can be made should be made; and that one needs to consider not just the idea of force, but the force of ideas; and that being right is only part of winning arguments. Finding ways for those who have lost arguments, for those who are on the wrong side, to change their beliefs and their positions, is the real way in which one wins arguments. And that counsels an approach that cannot be defined with great precision, an approach that is very much aware of the seriousness of the threat, but is also very much aware of the complexity that is involved in its reduction. I wish that I had some magic bullet to offer with respect to this new anti-Semitism. I wish even more that I could declare confidently that it was not a problem. I wish that all of this will prove – three years from now, or five years from now – to have been an alarmist overreaction. I certainly hope that that proves to be the case. But, because I don't think any of us can be certain that it will prove to be the case, it seems to me that these questions of anti-Semitism, of hostility towards Israel, of the bounds of appropriate debate, demand the continuing attention of the community of scholars. I will have served my purpose tonight, not if I have convinced you of any particular proposition, but if I have engaged you in contemplating these very important issues. Thank you very much.

[applause]

SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Professor Summers. Professor Summers has agreed to take a few questions from the audience, so I'll try to – I think there are a couple of microphones that we ask those asking questions to

use, both for the benefit of the audience so that we can all hear, and for the benefit of the recording. Please go ahead. If you could please identify yourself.

question: My name is ...

SPEAKER: Yes, here it is. Thank you.

question: I would like to ask a specific issue of the Islamic studies at Harvard Divinity School. And my two questions are – the first one is, why has it taken Harvard so long to refuse the donation from the racist, anti-Semitic ... ruler of the Arab Emirates, who had, who was to have ... anti-Semitic ... in his country. Secondly on the same issue, why has the battle which was won against the divinity school's intentions, and ... greatest intentions to keep the money – Why has the battle – was that battle carried by a single student, Rachel Fish, with so little help from ... university. *[noise from audience]*

Professor Summers: It's great to come to Israel. *[laughter and noise]* Let me tell you about the fact – let me tell you what happened, and, you know – Let me say, if anybody's unhappy with anything that happened, be unhappy with me, don't blame Dean Graham, who's a very good – who's a very, very, good man. The university, three years ago, before I was president, accepted a gift from the Zayed – from the Sheikh Zayed Center, named after Sheikh Zayed – in support of a professorship in Islamic studies. It is the university's long-standing policy not to inquire into the political beliefs of its donors, but rather to insist on the absolute separation of any decision-making with respect to our academic programs from its donors. It was brought to the attention of the university by the student you mentioned, in the spring of 2003, that the Sheikh Zayed Center was involved in the propagation of virulent anti-Semitic propaganda. I should

say, because it is worth just understanding all the facts, that while there was propaganda from the Sheikh Zayed Center of the most virulent sort, it was also the case that figures such as James Baker and Jacques Chirac and Jimmy Carter had spoken at the Sheikh Zayed Center *[laughter]*, and so, it would be a mistake to see the Sheikh Zayed Center as an illegitimate and fringe institution. We made the judgment – we made the judgment – I think we made just the right judgment, frankly – that in light of the continuing activities of the Sheikh Zayed Center, once we established the facts, we communicated to them that we wished to return the gift, as long as these activities were continuing, because we did not wish to have a professorship named at Harvard after a continuing source of such propaganda. At that point, and as a consequence of our action, that Center was closed. That website was turned off, and as best we can tell, it has not been restarted. We took the position – which I think was the right one – that in its aftermath, we could not fill that chair, and would not fill that chair, and would freeze that chair. I think that was the right decision. They made the judgment to ask for their funds back, and we were happy to meet their request, and to return their funds to them, find their way to another prominent American university *[laughter]* for a chair in Islamic studies. Should we have – did – would – did we accomplish something? I actually think the way we accomplished – the way we handled this – accomplished something fairly important. I think it contributed significantly to the removal of that website. I think it contributed something significantly to understanding the consequences – for them and for their legitimacy – of what was going on. Would an immediate turning back of the gift, without any negotiation, has been as effective? I rather doubt that it would have been effective. So, different

people can reach different judgments, but I believe we acted appropriately with the situation, to do – With the situation presenting itself again, I would operate in the same way. But if you're uncomfortable with the approach that was taken, please, please, do not blame Dean Graham.

SPEAKER: Thank you. Further questions? Yes.

question: ... My name is Abe Lorovich. There are those who provide anti-Semitism, especially in Europe, based on an anti-Semitism against the dead, versus an anti-Semitism against the living. Meaning that anti-Semitism against the dead is propagated mainly by skinheads and right-wingers, as opposed to anti-Semitism – meaning desecration of the cemeteries, et cetera – whereas anti-Semitism of the living is propagated mainly by Arabs and Moslems. Would you say that this definition would also represent, in general, anti-Semitism today in the United States, and in particular, anti-Semitism in American universities?

Professor Summers: Not sure I understand, precisely, the question. My reference to the Fabian tendency towards anti-Israelism was an attempt to address a similar issue. Nazi skinheads are not a significant force in American academic life. *[laughter]* And, so, in that sense, I think I would accept your distinction that the concerns that arise in American academic life are a rather different one from the Nazi, neo-Nazi militia anti-Semitism that exists in a different fringe of American life. I think this tendency on the left to include Israel – often with cartoons involving hooked noses and the like – in a sweeping critique of America, globalization, contemporary capitalism, international trade and finance, is a very, very disturbing tendency. And, as I tried to suggest, actually I don't think the most interesting argument about it is whether it's better called anti-Semitism or

whether it's better called something else. It is surely a very disturbing set of ideas, and a set of ideas that needs to be challenged and questioned.

Yes.

[end of cassette side A, continue on side B after overlap]

question: ... now in Tel-Aviv University in connection of legislation ... – legislation against racism, discrimination, ... et cetera, and we noticed the, well, very obvious difference between what is happening in this field in Europe, where during the last years, there is a tendency based on historic past of Europe, to ... the laws and to ... better enforcement. While in the United States, the First – sacred First Amendment is an impediment on the way to such legislation. Could it, perhaps because the United States doesn't have this ... past, but we see in Europe an attempt to stop on the word, while in the United States, the word is permitted, and they stop only on the action, and it's perhaps sometimes late. So, can there be, let's say, in a leading university such as Harvard and its law school, could there be some movement to improve this situation in other ways that would, let's say, limit this affect ... of the First Amendment?

Professor Summers: I think I'd have to respectfully disagree with the normative part of your question. As a matter of history and fact, I think what you say is quite accurate. That there is a substantially greater willingness in Europe, and within European universities, to inhibit free expression in the name of tolerance, than there is in the United States. I think the question is whether, in our tradition, that is wise. And whether any of us in universities should be given that power and authority. The record of how we've used it when we have arrogated it to ourselves is not such as to be enormously encouraging. It was one of my predecessors who famously observed , in 1952, that academic freedom was an absolute, except for

the great danger posed by the encroaching threat of world Communism. *[laughter]* And advocated and supported the idea that people who advocated Communist ideas, or who took the Fifth Amendment before US Congressional committees, should not be permitted to teach at our university. It was another of my predecessors who felt that it was essential and necessary to protect the basic morality of our student body, that gay students were removed from the university immediately and on suspicion. And, so, I hesitate to put anyone in the position of defining what kind of rhetoric is dangerous, and giving them that power – either by law in the United States, or even by the private law of what takes place within an academic community. I don't think that's where we need to go. I think where we do need to go, is there need to be much clearer recognition and expression by those who are in a position to have their words be heard and have influence, of what actions are wise and what actions are unwise, what words are prudent and decent and what words are imprudent and indecent. It seems to me that it is much safer to engage in that practice than it is to seek to engage in the suppression of speech. Because the suppression of speech gives power to censors who may not be wise. And because the suppression of speech is a cession of moral authority. It cedes moral authority, because when you suppress speech, you are saying that you cannot win the argument openly held. That is not a kind of lack of faith in my fellow citizens that I am prepared to have. It seems to me that the lessons of European history, the lessons of the gulag, are lessons not about the dangers of hate speech, they are lessons about the dangers of the suppression of dissent. And, so, very respectfully, and very much sharing your ends, I would come to a quite different position on what the right thing for the United States to do, and

what the right thing for leaders in American academic life to do is.

question: Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University. My question is a little bit tangential to what you said, but I am encouraged to ask it because of what you said about schoolbooks and what's being taught at schools and at ... and universities. Probably, we are about to enter a better and more hopeful stage of peaceful negotiations between us and the Palestinians. And my question is for your advice. In the last 10 or 15 years ... – it's very specific, it's very specifically academic here, I'm not trying to get to the truth ... – in the last 10 or 15 years, Israeli universities generally have been open to Palestinian spokesmen. There is ... university, there is an open debate in which Palestinians are able – from the West Bank and from Gaza – to express their views. However, Palestinian universities are totally closed to Israeli academics, with some exception to those who more or less agree with the Palestinian position. *[laughter]* Would you suggest that if negotiations start, if it would be a good idea on the part of the Israeli academic community, perhaps more than the government – I don't care for the government ... the academic community – to insist that free access to Palestinian universities should be a very important confidence-building measure, and should be put on the agenda very much at the top of the line? Thank you.

[applause]

Professor Summers: It's a terrific question, and you'll forgive me if I give a somewhat evasive answer. *[laughter]* As a confidence-building measure, I don't – my confidence in what was happening in the Palestinian areas would certainly be affected by their willingness to engage and invite Israeli speakers to Palestinian universities. My consciousness would be affected by what was being done, what was being taught, in elementary schools.

Where media is contained, my confidence would be influenced by what those state-run media do. I would – and that was what I tried to suggest when I made the remarks about the greater intrusiveness we all have with respect to each other's policies – I would qualify that enthusiasm, though, in two respects. One is, I think it is very dangerous to invite suppression of free speech. The Israeli government doesn't tell the History Department of Hebrew University who it should invite to speak. The president is making a little *[laughter]* – the president is expressing some doubt. So, let me speak about what I know about. *[laughter]* Let me speak about what I know about with confidence. The United States government doesn't tell Harvard who it should invite to speak. And if they did, we'd tell them where to take it. *[laughter]* And that's the right posture for us to have. If you're trying to build free societies, you want to be quite careful of taking the position that the Palestinian government needs to take responsibility for what happens in terms of the individual decisions of particular departments at Palestinian universities. Remember, we're trying to get the state out, we're trying to foment academic freedom, not trying to move in the other direction. So, one needs to be quite cautious, particularly, it seems to me, with respect to university life. When you're talking about state-sponsored radio, or textbooks in the elementary schools, the arguments I just made have much less force. The second question is a question of prudence, and is a question of judgment. The Israeli government will be, one hopes and trusts, engaged in a complex and multi-faceted negotiation with the Palestinian Authority. There will be many, many issues at stake. There will be many, many compromises reached. This is an important issue. There are many important issues. We would make a mistake as

academics if we thought the issues that involved us as academics were the only issues, or necessarily the most important issues. So, there's no question about what's right. What's right is that there be much more openness to dissent in Palestinian universities. Would it be worth blowing up an otherwise entirely viable and strong peace agreement to achieve those visits? I'm not sure it would be, and one has to rely on political officials in negotiation to make those kinds of judgments. But, as an aspiration? As a point to be pressed? As an indicator that would very much influence one's sense and confidence, I would go all the way there, with you.

[applause]

SPEAKER: ... One more?

Professor Summers: Sure.

SPEAKER: One more question ...

question: Your opening remarks, referring to September the 11th ... referring to September the 11th and the ... of the Twin Towers, and – as if that was like a turning point in the new anti-Semitism in the United States. In Europe, by contrast, the Fabian anti-Zionism, you're quite right to use Fabian, because it is an issue on the left, it's been going on for years. When I saw the towers collapsing, I thought, this is going to be very good for the Jews, and very good for Israel, because there will be a realization of just – the terror reaching out to other parts of the world, and not just us. And yet, the whole thing just seems to have backlashed. ... has backlashed, is September the 11th really the watershed that you were referring to? *[noise from the audience]*

Professor Summers: The only question on which I can be entirely authoritative is the question of my thinking. And that may not be a very interesting question,

but it is a question on which I can be authoritative. My reference to September 11th was to suggest something about the timing and the way in which these issues became something that I was very conscious of, and very much thinking about. I suspect and believe that you are probably right in your observation that the problematic Fabian view in these areas long antedates September 11th. If you go and you look at European positions towards Israel over many years – though not, one hastens to point out, for the first 20 years of Israel's history – one certainly finds what you say is there. I don't know that I would have known enough to have had a view, one way or the other, about what would happen after September 11th. I have been struck by the tendency, in the name of tolerance, in progressive circles, to seek to narrow the range of blame for what happened on September 11th, to an extent that may be excessive. I have been struck by the tendency, in some quarters, to demonize Israel, while urging acceptance in the name of different cultures of societies that regard women in ways that are entirely inconsistent with our traditions. I think it is something that is somewhat problematic. If one looked at all the scholars who studied the Soviet Union, and in the period of the Cold War, there were very few who were other than appalled when Ronald Reagan declared that the Soviet Union was an evil empire. And there were very few who didn't see the Cold War in terms of some symmetry, and focus on cooperation, rather than labeling the abominable abominable. Those few look rather prescient. I would hope that in the debate – those few like my Harvard colleague, Richard Pikes – and I would hope that in the debate over policy towards the Middle East, our understanding of what is taking place in the Arab world – I would hope that the academic world would make room – as it does, at many

universities – for many, many different views and perspectives, including perspectives that see some more systemic aspects of what takes place. Not because I would presume to judge that those perspectives are correct, but because I believe that in academic life, we make our greatest contribution if we are open to a very wide range of perspectives.

[applause]

SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

[applause]