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## **Denying a debate on the Middle East**

A St F.X. prof is unjustly vilified for attending an Iranian conference on the Holocaust

**By Stephen Kimber**  
**The Daily News**

Forget for a moment the knee-jerk need to be shocked and appalled that Shiraz Dossa, a St. Francis Xavier University political science professor, presented a paper at a "bizarre international conference." (CTV) Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who is, of course, "a lunatic and dangerous man" (Yvon Grenier, St. F.X. political science department chairwoman), organized the conference attended by 67 writers and researchers from 30 countries, "including some of the world's most notorious Holocaust deniers, Nazi sympathizers and racists." (CTV again) Among them, presumably, Shiraz Dossa.

"St. Francis Xavier should be wincing at the fact one of its own would be a key participant in so foul an exercise," harrumphed a *Globe and Mail* editorial. The university's chancellor quickly saw the *Globe's* "wincing" and raised it, pronouncing his entire campus "shocked."

While tepidly defending Dossa's academic freedom, two dozen St. F.X. professors signed a statement expressing themselves "profoundly embarrassed."

Not to be outdone, *Globe* columnist John Ibbitson bulldozed past any airy-fairy notions of academic freedom. "One hopes (the university) will decide to fire him." By week's end, St. F.X. officials announced they would meet with Dossa this week to discuss his "accountability."

Before we have the professor drawn, hanged, quartered and burned, we should take a closer look at exactly what he is saying.

The problem is that few of us - including those who seem to believe a few months in a Syrian torture chamber proper penance - have actually read the paper Dossa presented at the Tehran conference last week.

### *Dismissing the deniers*

What we know so far is based largely on a telephone interview Dossa did with the *Globe and Mail's* Doug Saunders. In it, Dossa explicitly dismissed Holocaust deniers as "hacks and lunatics ... I frankly wouldn't even shake hands with most of them."

He explained his paper was about "the war on terrorism and how the Holocaust plays into it."

Essentially, Dossa argues Western guilt over the Holocaust - "which, of course, is a reality," he was at pains to note - has influenced American and European policies in support of Israel since before the founding of the Jewish state. This pro-Israeli tilt has come at the expense of not only of Palestinians, who were turned into refugees, but also of Muslims generally, who are now the vilified "them" - the new Jews, if you like - in our you're-with-us-or-you're-a-terrorist New World Order.

The war on terrorism, Dossa believes, "is essentially a war on Islam."

While far from mainstream, Dossa's thesis is a long train ride from denying the Holocaust happened. And his argument is worth exploring.

### *Guilt over Holocaust*

Dossa, in effect, sees guilt over our complicity in the death of six million Jews as one way of explaining the obvious double standard the West still brings to its dealings with modern Israel and ... well, let's take Iran as our example du jour.

The United States and its allies now have their knickers in a knot over the possibility Iran might develop nuclear weapons. In a speech last spring to a pro-Israel lobby group, Vice-President Dick Cheney assured his audience the U.S. was "keeping all options on the table ... We will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon."

Compare and contrast that with this: As far back as 1968, the CIA knew Israel was a member of the nuclear-weapons club. Did the Americans threaten Israel with sanctions, or prepare to send in the troops unless Israel gave up its nuclear ambitions? Uh, no.

Since Israel refused to confirm or deny its nuclear capabilities, successive American administrations considered it unwise to inquire further.

Last week, even after Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, apparently inadvertently, confirmed his country's nuclear power status and went on to tell a German magazine he, too, ruled "nothing out," including an Israeli military strike against Tehran, the American State Department continued to dismiss reporters' questions about Israel's nuclear stockpile as irrelevant.

### *Mutual threat*

If Israel believes it needs nuclear weapons to defend itself from its Arab neighbours, surely one might understand why Iran might want a few of its own to protect itself from a threatening Israel?

What does any of this have to do with Holocaust denial? Nothing. But surely the role of the Holocaust as a "construct" - in Dossa's words - in the geopolitics of the modern Middle East is a legitimate subject for discussion at a conference with the title, *Review of the Holocaust: Global Vision*.

That so many find it unacceptable lends credence to Dossa's argument. As one of his former students noted in a letter to the *Globe*: "One needs only to mention the word 'Holocaust' and a barrier is erected that prohibits any serious debate."

Pity.

*www.stephenkimber.com*

*Stephen Kimber, the Rogers Communications Chair in Journalism at the University of King's College, is an award-winning author of five nonfiction books and a novel, Reparation*