

War motives: Gulf War: The Sequel

by [James M. Wall](#) in the [April 5, 2003](#) issue

Anti-Semitism is a very real and toxic plague in history and in modern life. The suffering of the Jews is a well-known and often-told story that must never be forgotten. Jews have a right, based on experience, to fear anti-Semitism. But it also must be said that to be opposed to the policies of a particular Israeli government need not be anti-Semitic. It could simply be smart politics.

The rhetorical blanket that covers all American discourse over the Middle East has a trap woven into it—the danger of being called anti-Semitic. Congressman James P. Moran Jr. (D., Va.), discovered this recently when he spoke at a rally opposing the war against Iraq (as reported in the *Washington Post*). Said Moran:

If it were not for the strong support of the Jewish community for this war with Iraq, we would not be doing this. The leaders of the Jewish community are influential enough that they could change the direction of where this is going, and I think they should.

The congressman left himself open to the allegation of anti-Semitism—which is not the same as *being* anti-Semitic—when he used the phrase “leaders of the Jewish community.” Moran’s colleagues in the Congress, as well as a White House spokesman, knew what he meant, and knew that the comment was not purposefully anti-Semitic. But the remark set off the predictable reaction that always follows public statements that should never have been made, especially on this subject with its toxic history.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Moran’s statement quickly drew the attention of Jewish organizations that denounced the comment as anti-Semitic. With that declaration, anti-Semitism was in play. Politicians and their eager media partners moved into high gear. Democratic Party leaders, eager to bolster their pro-Israel standing, and desperate to inoculate their party from Moran’s comment, quickly denounced their colleague with the sort of verbal lashing employed after Trent Lott forgot that Strom Thurmond was once a segregationist.

“Uncalled for, outrageous,” wailed Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D., S.D.) House Democratic Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) fired Moran from a minor House leadership post after condemning his remarks as “not only inappropriate, they were offensive.”

Too late. The toxin of religious emotions that plagues our public discourse had started its work. Speaking before a group of more than 150 Orthodox Jewish leaders from around the country, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R., Tex.) charged that the Democratic Party “appears to countenance remarks like those made by Representative Moran in the past few weeks.” Eric I. Cantor (D., Va.) delivered a charge that is inevitably used in battles like this. He told representatives of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America that Moran’s comments were “reminiscent of the accusations contained in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,” a notorious Czarist forgery that fomented pogroms against Jews in 19th-century Russia.

A *Los Angeles Times* story concluded: “On other occasions he [Moran] has been criticized for his views on the Mideast conflict. Moran says he unequivocally supports Israeli sovereignty. But some Jewish critics attack his record on Israel as spotty, saying he has used divisive rhetoric in describing his sympathies for Palestinian grievances.” Either no political colleagues were available or none were asked to defend Moran. The charge of anti-Semitism is so toxic that no one wants to be around the alleged guilty party. So the reporter’s vague terms such as “spotty,” “divisive rhetoric” and “sympathies” were left unchallenged.

The day the Moran story appeared, I spoke with Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, the retired and venerated Chicago Jewish leader known for his social activism. Wolf noted that the three most influential men behind Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s war fever are all Jewish: Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle and David Feith—“all men I know,” he added. More important, from his perspective, they are neoconservative ideologues who have been pushing for a war against Iraq since the early 1990s, advocating a strategy of Iraq first, followed by the other states in the Middle East that they feel must have regime changes.

This trio leads the Bush war party, and it is true that they are all Jewish. But they are not alone in their desire to use American military might to re-create the Middle East with leaders friendly to the West. They are joined by other ideologues, many of whom are politicians and journalists who are conservative Catholics and

fundamentalist Christians. There are a variety of motives for this drive toward war. The quest for control of oil, the hunt for sources of terrorism, and the long-term guarantee of Israeli security are all contributing to this dangerous moment when we are about to launch a crusade to build a U.S.-friendly Middle East empire.

Meanwhile *Gulf War: The Sequel* is expected to air soon on your favorite television news channel. When it does, the anti-Semitism story that surrounded Moran's folly will be forgotten by everyone except members of Congress, and they will take extra care in how they speak of the motives that drove the war party to take us into war. They will think twice before they suggest that it is in the best interest of Israel that this war go forward.