

The New Anti-Semitism's Threat to Israel's National Security: What Can be Done?

Brig.-Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser

ABSTRACT

The new anti-Semitism has created a paradox that is difficult for Israel to confront. It allows Western radicals and progressives, including Jews, to be anti-Semitic by rejecting Israel's existence while claiming that they are merely "legitimately criticizing" Israel.

The mainstreaming of delegitimization poses a national security threat to Israel, which needs international support to achieve the political, military, and economic freedoms to defend itself.

Though Israel practically and visibly contributes to the national security of the United States, Israelophobia, the new anti-Semitism, strives to present the opposite view. American public support for Israel is becoming more of a partisan issue, allowing extreme players to take center-stage, penetrating the hearts and minds of progressives and some liberals, and strengthening Islamic radicalism worldwide.

Recent political developments in Europe and the United States have underlined the lack of clarity on the issue of anti-Zionism as a manifestation of anti-Semitism. This issue has emerged as a particularly potent one. Increasingly, politicians and academics in the West have come to delegitimize Israel, the "collective Jew,"

and Zionism, the political expression of Jewish self-determination, just as individual Jews throughout history have been, and continue to be, excoriated and assaulted because they are Jews.

Ironically, both progressive and radical Islamic leaders and activists in the global campaign to delegitimize Israel and Zionism, such as the BDS movement, have cloaked their denunciations in universal values, such as justice and equality.¹ The anti-Israel and anti-Zionist polemics have attracted many supporters, particularly younger followers, on university campuses in the United States and Europe, who lack the critical skills and historical perspective to see the merging of classic anti-Semitism and anti-Zionist agitation. It is of crucial importance to provide the intellectual tools, moral clarity, and historical context with which to analyze and assess the convergence of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in the context of Jewish sovereignty and national security in the 21st Century.

One important tool in analyzing anti-Semitic statements is the U.S. State Department's definition of anti-Semitism, based on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition,² which links two types of anti-Semitism – the familiar, old kind, and the new kind, namely, anti-Zionism. Examination of statements by freshman U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar reveals them to be reiterations of old anti-Semitic tropes, as defined by the State Department in its 2010 definition of anti-Semitism.³ The new anti-Semitism meets the criteria of the “3D Test of anti-Semitism” – *delegitimization, demonization, and double standards* - applied to Israel, as first presented in 2004 by Natan Sharansky, former Deputy Prime Minister of Israel and Soviet “prisoner of Zion.”⁴

Sharansky's message is that the line separating anti-Semitism from anti-Zionism has faded over time, and it is clear that these two phenomena are one and the same. Leaders such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron, and British Prime Ministers Teresa May and Boris Johnson, have acknowledged the convergence of anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism and joined in the fight against it.

A differentiation between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is claimed by some groups – radical Islamists, Palestinians, and Western progressives – who had not been identified with the old anti-Semitism. These groups have advanced new anti-Semitic concepts and beliefs that have penetrated more mainstream liberal discourse.

Though many on the political Left are averse to identifying with classically defined anti-Semitic rhetoric and groups, some appear to have cornered themselves in an internal contradiction. On the one hand, they are willing to apply the “3D” anti-Semitism Test to adversaries of the Jewish State. On the other hand, as self-declared harsh critics of Israel, they oppose branding anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism to avoid being labeled anti-Semites themselves.⁵ This dissonance explains why many members of the U.S. Democratic Party refused to censure Omar's statements or vote to condemn them as anti-Semitic, in a controversial congressional resolution in early 2019.⁶

There is a direct connection between classic and new anti-Semitism. However, anti-Zionism as the latest incarnation of the new anti-Semitism has been more difficult to diagnose unless we recognize that the anti-Semitism phenomenon has morphed.

Prior to the emergence of this new form of anti-Semitism, Jews could not be anti-Semites, since as Jews, they could not identify with the accusation of Jewish deicide, and they rejected the claim

that Jews are a debased and inferior race. Yet, when it comes to defamations employing nationalistic and alleged human rights arguments, there are many Jews who have joined the ranks of the new anti-Semitism.

This new anti-Semitism created a new, painful, paradoxical reality, making it very difficult for Israel to confront. This new face of anti-Semitism allows Western radicals and progressives, including Jews, to be anti-Semitic for the first time while thinking that they are merely espousing “legitimate criticism” against Israel.

Today, more Jews, especially in the United States, cast doubt on the existence of a Jewish People (noteworthy in this context is the damage caused by Shlomo Sand’s book *The Invention of the Jewish People*) and espouse anti-Zionist theories out of ignorance. The new anti-Semitism’s attraction to some political progressives, and, especially, liberal-Left identifying Jews in the West, poses a national security challenge to Israel.

THE NEW ANTI-SEMITISM AND ISRAEL’S NATIONAL SECURITY

The new anti-Semitism threatens Israel’s national security in two operative ways. One relates to Israel’s destiny: the State of Israel is the realization of Zionism, the national movement of the Jewish people, and the nation-state’s goal is self-definition, self-preservation, and ensuring Jewish cultural and economic prosperity. Therefore, arguments against the very existence of the Jewish people and its ancestral right to a nation-state threaten the essence and identity of the State of Israel. Attempts to harm the Jewish people’s connection to their land are aimed at injuring the State of Israel.



Anti-Israel BDS protestors in London, England, 2018.

Photo: Tayfun Salci/Andalou Agency

The second national security challenge to Israel emanating from the new anti-Semitism relates to the State of Israel's ability to ensure the international support essential for achieving the political, military, and economic freedom it needs to defend itself. The extent to which some of the ideas and mantras of the new anti-Semitism are accepted, not only by the extreme margins, but also by the center of the political map in the West, affects Israel's national security. This is particularly the case in the United States, the most important support base for the State of Israel. If the Democratic Party in Congress fails to make a clear statement about the bias expressed by U.S. representatives such as Omar and Rashida Tlaib, Israel's national security is compromised.

American support for Israel is built in part on mutual respect for democratic values. If the notion of Omar's anti-Semitic statement takes hold, or no political price is paid by whoever makes such claims, it is a problematic development for Israel, whose historic relationship with both sides of the political aisle in the United States is critical to its national security.

In 2012, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy published a paper on Israel's contribution to the national security of the United States.⁷ The new anti-Semitism strives to present the opposite view – that American support for Israel is not only morally unjustified, but also undermines the national security of the United States. Israel saw the meeting of values and interests that underpin the special relationship with the Americans as self-evident and transcendent of any political debate in the United States. Yet this may not be the case, and American public support for Israel is becoming more of a partisan issue.

The Democratic Party finds itself mediating a fierce debate over the Jewish state within party ranks. Some progressive Democrats have adopted a more harshly critical, even hostile, approach to Israel than in past years, while liberal and centrist Democrats have assumed an increasingly critical, if still supportive, attitude. These liberals have engaged in demonization and double standards regarding Israel while claiming that they accept Israel's right to exist. This contradiction has allowed extreme moves to take center-stage. Matters reached a climax with Democratic President Barack Obama's decision to advance United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, which inaccurately determined Israel's ancient Western Wall to be "occupied Palestinian territory" and which generally lambasted Israel's positions in its conflict with the Palestinians.

These liberals may genuinely believe that their demonization is justified and necessary criticism that emanates from their love of Israel (or what they believe Israel should be) and their concern that Israel is bound to become an apartheid state if it sticks to its current policies. But, in fact, they fell prey, maybe unknowingly, to the unfounded progressive refrain that the current policy of Israel will inevitably lead to a one-state solution that will turn all of the Palestinians living in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 into residents or citizens of Israel. This forecast is baseless, but it is so often repeated by the progressives that it has become axiomatic to concerned liberals and even fuels their unintended delegitimization of Israel.

Israel's relationship with Europe is essential though less vital to its national security than its relationship with the United States. Europe is committed to Israel's secure existence. However, the intensity of its commitment may have eroded. Germany insists that the State of Israel's existence is part of German identity and *raison d'être*, yet it still does not consider Hizbullah a terrorist organization, despite the Iranian proxy's open declarations of anti-Semitism. Germany's president also sent greetings to the Iranian regime on the fortieth year of its radical Islamist revolution.

The new anti-Semitism also affects Israel's national security because it impacts the attitude of the Islamic world toward Israel by strengthening Islamic radicalism, which holds anti-Semitic perceptions worldwide –in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar's rhetoric echoes the ideologies of Islamic radicals. Omar has cooperated with CAIR, an organization that parrots Muslim Brotherhood messages in the United States.

To be clear, Israel has no problem with Islam or Muslims, but rather with radical Islam. Islamic radicals, and not Islamic pragmatists, are most active in the West. They have penetrated the hearts and minds of Western progressives and some liberals. U.S. Congresswoman Ilhan Omar spoke about American Jews' "loyalty to a foreign power" without mentioning Israel directly, notwithstanding her 2012 tweet, "Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel." Her approach to U.S. Jews indicated that she was also intent on weakening relations between the State of Israel and the United States.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

What actions must we take to address the new anti-Semitism? First, just as the IDF holds a session for the General Staff to determine the definition of a "victory" in the military context, the political echelon must define desired and attainable goals in the struggle against anti-Semitism and the most efficient tools and methods of action required to achieve them. Eradicating global anti-Semitism from people's hearts seems far-fetched.

A more realistic yet still challenging goal is to change Western perception and acceptability of anti-Zionism and classic anti-Semitism. This understanding forged the conception of the 2016 IHRA Working Definition of anti-Semitism and its goal, which we are moving toward achieving. Ironically, the new anti-Semites may help achieve this hoped-for shift in Western perceptions. For example, when Ilhan Omar references the old anti-Semitism, it is widely denounced as unacceptable. The problem remains, though, that under cover of legitimate criticism of Israel, there are still attempts to legitimize anti-Zionism.

This is a struggle. An article by journalist Nathan Thrall in *The Guardian*, for which I was interviewed, purported to present the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement objectives as a legitimate position. It sought to claim that anti-Zionism was not anti-Semitism and to legitimize the “progressive” approach to penetrate the ranks of the mainstream liberal camp. This was important to Thrall, who presented progressive views, which now permeate liberal discourse. *The Guardian* refused to publish my full response to the article. Instead, my rebuttal appeared in *Tablet* magazine. The *New York Times* later published its own take on BDS and anti-Semitism that was more balanced than Thrall’s *Guardian* story, though it contained several misstatements that presented BDS as more palatable for the *New York Times*’ readership.

Sharansky’s 3D’s should be employed to instill the understanding that anti-Zionism is a new form of anti-Semitism. Non-Jewish friends of Israel should also be welcomed to join the struggle to counter all forms of anti-Semitism. Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of U.S. House of Representatives, should be as clear on the House floor in her rejection of anti-Zionism as she is regarding anti-Semitism, which she and other Democratic speakers demonstrated at the 2019 AIPAC conference.⁸

WHERE ARE TODAY’S EMIL ZOLAS AND DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHANS?

Other Israelis, beyond government representatives, are needed for this battle. Israeli leaders such as Nitzan Horowitz, head of the left-wing Meretz party, should point out the new anti-Semitism’s threat to Israel’s national security. His voice may be more effective with liberal and progressive communities in the West than the

Israeli government's voice.

Where relevant, legislation against all forms of anti-Semitism should be advanced. It is not sufficient that the U.S. State Department adopted the IHRA definition. The U.S. Congress should adopt it, too. It is precisely against the backdrop of the statements made by a freshman representative and the awkwardness felt by Democrats following the feeble attempt to censure her that an opportunity is created. We must aim to reveal the connection and equivalence between the old and the new anti-Semitism at every opportunity.

House resolution 246 of July 2019 condemned the BDS movement but fell short of calling it anti-Semitic, and Congress has yet to adopt the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. The German Bundestag went a step further and declared, in May 2019, the BDS movement anti-Semitic, thereby stating that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism.

Perhaps even more critical, if the Democrats want to prove that they are not an anti-Jewish party, such legislation should include penalties for those who express themselves in a manner defined as anti-Semitic, according to the IHRA definition. Ilhan Omar still has not paid a political price for her anti-Semitic statements, and she still retains her membership on the Foreign Affairs Committee.

Such legislation would render the new anti-Semitism/anti-Zionism illegitimate, just as classic anti-Semitism is rejected by the West.

Besides legislation, education and outreach are also necessary. The Palestinian narrative, based on the negation of the existence of the Jewish People and the history of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel, is a form of delegitimization. This narrative

presents Zionists – read, Jews – as deplorables rejected by the West, to be violently eradicated without the privilege of self-defense, which contains both elements of demonization and double standards. The general public should be made aware of the cynical use of this narrative, that if carefully and objectively considered, exposes itself, proving that this new anti-Semitism is no different from the old anti-Semitism.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://bdsmovement.net/bnc>
- 2 <https://holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>
- 3 <https://www.state.gov/defining-anti-semitism/>
- 4 Natan Sharansky, 3D Test of Anti-Semitism: Demonization, Double Standards, Delegitimization, Jewish Political Studies Review, <http://jcpa.org/article/3d-test-of-anti-semitism-demonization-double-standards-delegitimization/>
- 5 Nathan Thrall discusses this dissonance in his article on the BDS movement, which appeared in the Guardian on August 14, 2018, and in a piece in the New York Times:
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/aug/14/bds-boycott-divestment-sanctions-movement-transformed-israeli-palestinian-debate>
- 6 <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/democrats-split-response-ilhan-omar-s-latest-israel-comments-n979651>
- 7 <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/asset-test-how-the-united-states-benefits-from-its-alliance-with-israel>
- 8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkLOmdiJpGU>



An anti-Israel protest at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, 2001.

Photo: Rajesh Jantilal/AFP