

A Never-ending Struggle: Challenging Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism

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ABSTRACT

The delegitimization of the State of Israel is the core of anti-Semitism today, since Israel and Jews will forever be psychologically associated, and since Israel expresses the essence of Jewish aspirations and behavior, making the “anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism” argument null and void.

Anti-Semitic ideas that led to the Holocaust have reappeared in restyled postmodern political garb. Israel's existence crushes the postmodern utopian illusion that opposes nationalism or ethnic particularism in any form.

The economic and cultural crisis in the West has invited the populist masses on both the Right and the Left to publicly express their frustration, misery, and ignorance in a moral subjectivism that manipulates the interpretation of history into an oversimplified narrative. In this distortion of history, good and bad are juxtaposed, violent political actors becoming legitimized by claiming corruption, imperialism, exploitation, and colonialism as the enemy.

The reaction to this damning rhetoric has been weak, apologetic, and confused. We must fight this ideology directly by acquiring a broader grasp of Jewish and modern Israeli history, gaining firsthand knowledge of the Jewish State, and using legal and legislative tools to fight BDS and the like.



An anti-Israel protester holds a placard reading “Who would say David is Goliath now?” in Mexico City, 2014.

Photo: Yuri Cortez/AFP

Jean-Paul Sartre said that anti-Semitism contains a strange kind of optimism that postulates that once the evil embodied by the Jewish people is eliminated, harmony will finally be re-established. This so-called “optimism” has never, in many incarnations, shown itself more explicitly than now in the tenets of the leftist anti-Zionist movement: when the Jewish State —the very essence of global Jewish life today—is destroyed, the world’s problems will be solved. The Middle East will be quiet and stable; the world will know a mythical universal peace between all religions; the Muslims will see the West in a positive light, terrorism will end, and the security and stability that the United Nations and the European Union have promised (yet have never obtained) will finally rest upon us.

Israel's existence crushes this postmodern utopian illusion. Anti-Semitism, therefore, has devoted its new struggle to the global strategy to destroy the Jewish State — which involves an elaborate media campaign to delegitimize the concept of “nation,” to view terrorist violence as “resistance,” and to package this calculation as “human rights.”

The delegitimization of the State of Israel is the core of any form of anti-Semitism today. Even the most traditional demonization of the Jews, with its blood libels and age-old anti-Semitic tropes, finds expression in the modern Israel-centered narrative. The international press reported that Israeli first responders - doctors, nurses, soldiers, firemen, and disaster-relief teams - fly afar to disaster zones to help wherever an earthquake, tsunami, or cyclone hits the local population, but with the purpose of stealing human organs for a profitable sale.¹

It is hard to imagine that a rational mind could believe these stories. Yet, in light of United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reports of the IDF activity on the Gaza border, depicting soldiers not as defending their fellow citizens from cruel terrorist attacks, but “attacking innocent bystanders and demonstrators” and “committing war crimes,” even while being attacked by violent Hamas operatives who try to invade their country, it is more understandable. This attitude is perpetuated by the UN, whose Human Rights Council dedicates about a quarter of its special resolutions to condemning Israel,² while fewer than ten percent deal with human rights violators such as Myanmar, Sudan, or Syria, a despotic regime that has killed some 400,000 of its own people.

The loaded terms “genocide,” “colonialism,” and “apartheid,” used in connection with the Palestinians, are the red flags of modern anti-Semitism. Jews are depicted as the new Nazis, making

their state morally corrupt and undeserving of existence. These modern demonizations stem from a belief that the Jews are “a cancer that must be eradicated,” in the words of Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.³ This new anti-Semitism has spread across Europe by refugees who were poisoned by anti-Semitism in their countries of origin. Their tainted views have been blindly adopted by the extreme left, and have been mainstreamed by gullible and misguided politicians and bureaucrats in the European elite.

In people’s minds, Israel and Jews will forever be connected: Israel is the Jewish homeland with a Jewish “soul,” expressing the essence of Jewish aspirations and behavior. There is no way of psychologically separating Israel from Jews, and this is why the argument “Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism” is null and void.

This kind of anti-Semitism has become pervasive. Ninety percent of European Jews who recently suffered violence, either verbal or physical,⁴ report that they have met with Holocaust inversion related to Zionism or Israel, clearly showing how anti-Semitic attacks now focus on Israel as the great “persecutor, murderer, ethnic cleanser, human-rights violator, and apartheid state”. It’s interesting to note that according to a CNN poll in 2018, about 30 percent of people interviewed in Europe knew virtually nothing about the Holocaust.⁵

But the anti-Semitic ideas and rhetoric that led to the Holocaust have reappeared in restyled political garb. If the Israelis are the new Nazis, and the Palestinians are then the new Jews, then worldwide Jewry are Nazi proxies and supporters, consequentially delegitimizing both Israel and diaspora Jews.⁶ In a twist on this theme, another anti-Semitic claim is that Israel exploits the memory of the Holocaust to gain advantage and whitewash its wrongdoings.

Several years ago, Natan Sharansky offered a guide for detecting anti-Semitism against Israel, which he termed “the 3Ds”: delegitimization, demonization, and double standards.⁷ European Union guidelines, by which trade and commerce with the so-called “occupied territories” are sanctioned, and its products labelled to discourage their purchase, illustrate double standards.⁸ This rationalizes diplomatic warfare against Israel, the main vehicle being the Boycott Divestment and Sanction movement. BDS cleverly conceals its intentions to eliminate Israel while presenting itself as a defender of human rights.

BDS has been conducting a campaign to delegitimize the existence of the State of Israel, while it has simultaneously functioned as a sophisticated political machine that legitimizes its own struggle. In the name of freedom of speech and criticism, European and American politicians on the extreme left have found their way to the microphones, to social media, and to other platforms in the democratic West. For example, an Israel-hater like British Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn was a step away from becoming prime minister of the United Kingdom. In the United States, for the first time in its history, a Democratic member of Congress, Ilhan Omar, declared contempt for Jews and Israel without receiving much moral or political censure, deflecting her accusers, by accusing them of Islamophobia directed against her.⁹ Omar used the old mantra: “Mine is a legitimate criticism, and anti-Semitism has nothing to do with what I said.”

The historical, social and cultural reasons for this new anti-Semitism are connected to a strange turn of events. The economic and cultural crisis in the West has invited the masses to publicly express their frustration, misery and, unfortunately, their ignorance.¹⁰ A new tribalism has invaded today’s popular culture



A protester in Mexico City holds a likeness of an Israeli flag with its Star of David replaced by a swastika, 2009.

Photo: Ronaldo Schemidt/AFP

in the form of moral subjectivism—an oblivion of the rules born in Judeo-Christian Western civilization, replaced by the norms of convenience. The populist masses on the right and left are the protagonists, manipulating the interpretation of history, telling their narrative in simplified language, and encouraging violence, where good and bad are juxtaposed. In these simplifications, violent political actors become legitimized by claiming corruption, imperialism, exploitation, and colonialism on the part of their supposed enemies.

It is incorrect to place the brunt of the blame for most of the anti-Semitism seen today on the political right. Nationalism in of itself is not anti-Semitic, nor are nationalists necessarily

anti-Semites. While white supremacists, neo-Nazis and neo-fascists are still active, they have little real influence. The far right does not have the moral authority or weight to sway the masses as do the far left, which riles up anti-Jewish hatred in rallies and marches decrying “the apartheid state” and “occupation,” providing cover to the murders and attacks in France, Belgium and other parts of Europe, and bolstering anti-Israel anti-Semitic incitement by the United Nations and by European Union bodies.

DUPLICITY AND DOUBLE STANDARDS

To the postmodern leftists, the contemporary forms of the Magna Carta, the old language of civil rights (as opposed to their new language of human rights) and good order become the enemy.¹¹ These become a matter-of-fact markers for a partisan struggle against violators real or imagined, very often ignoring the deeds of the real violators. The most blatant example of omission in this progressive agenda are the human rights crimes of the Muslim world, where women and LGBTQ people are oppressed, those who dare to have a major difference of opinion with their regime are punished with torture and death, and where terrorism is considered a fight for freedom. All of these human rights offenses are forgiven and forgotten, while the free, democratic nation state of the Jewish people, Israel, is condemned.

The West’s response to this damning rhetoric has been weak, apologetic, and confused. We must fight this ideology directly. Though there is a commendable effort in the educational and social arenas to keep the memory of the *Shoah* alive, by no means is it a solution to anti-Semitism or to the broader ignorance of Jewish history, including

the history of Israel. Israel is the center of the attack, not the memory of the Holocaust or the racist arguments that brought it about in the first place. The logical consequence is that all Jews are considered the fifth column of a criminal, colonialist country.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

To contain the wave of anti-Semitism, we must expand the acceptance of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism,¹² and implement legal measures against BDS. It's also important that governments appoint commissioners that check and combat anti-Semitism, to improve security measures and efforts to detect nests of anti-Semitic criminality on the Internet, as has been done in Germany.¹³

Yet all of these activities will remain ineffectual without the knowledge that defending the Jews begins with defending Israel, since, conversely, Israel is the ultimate defender of the Jews, providing them a national refuge. This must be felt deeply, by encouraging Jews and others to visit Israel as part of university courses, school trips, and conferences, in order to gain firsthand knowledge and a true image of Israel, its people, its army, its skills, and its challenges. This is particularly important for diaspora Jews. Why? Because today, Israel also serves as an international “shield” for diaspora Jews, ensuring that “never again” is not an empty phrase. However, it has become apparent that some diaspora Jews, while deriving greater security from the fact of Israel's existence, still appear to prefer their local interests over defending the Jewish State, which is still surrounded by enemies.

Those who delegitimize Israel, whether the Iranian regime, the Muslim world, the Palestinian leadership, their representatives in international institutions or NGOs, must be answered in turn, and they also must be exposed: their cultural values, their crimes against humanity, their attitudes and legislation regarding women, gays, and freedom of conscience, and their relations with extreme, terrorist groups and ideologies. They must be made to answer for themselves.

Additionally, nation-states that are interested in maintaining good relations with Israel must begin to defend their own Jewish citizens. There are some encouraging signs. In Hungary, the anti-Semitic political party Jobbik has been marginalized by Viktor Orbán's pro-Israel government,¹⁴ as has the far-right Holocaust denying party Golden Dawn in Greece.¹⁵ In Saudi Arabia, as in Kuwait and in the Gulf states, Sunni countries are interested in new diplomatic relations with Israel;¹⁶ Israeli athletes can now play "*Hatikvah*" when they win and stand on the podium in competitive sporting events in these locations.¹⁷

The struggle against anti-Semitism remains a major challenge. Anti-Semitism is a many-headed Hydra that disregards the past; it's still alive and kicking. Though it's commendable to keep teaching the history of Jewish persecutions in schools, including those of the Holocaust, we must focus on the next step.

Anti-Semitism must be pinpointed in the here and now —namely, in anti-Israel hatred and invective. A tough, well-aimed new campaign must be conceived to combat this, teaching proponents about anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli history and propaganda. As opposed to the Jews' vulnerable, fragile, and often tragic situation before the establishment of the Jewish State, now that Israel exists, Jews can and should counter anti-Semitism with action and strength. This will not obliterate anti-Semitism, but it will help to dispel the lies on the left and the right.

Endnotes

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- 3 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/khamenei-israel-a-cancerous-tumor-that-must-be-eradicated/>
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- 5 <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/europe/antisemitism-poll-2018-intl/>
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