



# DANGEROUS CONFLATION: ZIONISM, ISRAEL, AND ANTI-SEMITISM

WASHINGTON, DC

The Institute for Palestine Studies-USA is an independent 501(c)3 public charity dedicated to the documentation, preservation, and knowledge production on Palestinian Affairs. IPS-USA raises public awareness, informs policy, and engages with various constituencies on significant issues related to Palestine in the US and in the Middle East. IPS-USA is a sister organization of the larger IPS, founded in 1963 and headquartered in Beirut, Lebanon with an office also in Ramallah, Palestine.

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*An Immoral Dilemma: The Trap of Zionist Propaganda by Moshé Machover was first published in Journal of Palestine Studies issue 188. Shifting Sands: Zionism & American Jewry by Barry Trachtenberg and Kyle Stanton will be published in Journal of Palestine Studies issue 190.*

Cover image: Demonstrators take part in protests outside a meeting of the National Executive of Britain's Labour Party on September 4, 2018 in London, England. (Photo by Dan Kitwood/Getty Images)

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CURRENT ISSUES **IN DEPTH**

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**ZIONISM, ISRAEL,  
AND ANTI-SEMITISM**

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## INTRODUCTION

*by the Institute for Palestine Studies*

IS IT ANTI-SEMITIC to be critical of Israeli policies against the Palestinians, or of one-sided U.S. support for Israel, or of the Israel lobby? Does combating anti-Semitism necessitate embracing Zionism and defending it from any criticism? These questions are at the heart of a debate that has grown in intensity in the U.S. since Congresswoman Ilhan Omar criticized the influence of “a powerful lobby” regarding U.S. policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, asking why it was “okay for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country.”<sup>1</sup> This debate has come at a fraught moment marked by a resurgence of anti-Semitism, rising anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian sentiment, spreading white supremacy, and a complete derogation of U.S. commitment to a fair resolution of the conflict, but also by growing support for Palestinian rights in American political and intellectual life.

Manifestations of these circumstances include the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where neo-Nazi marchers chanted “Jews will not replace us;” the Pittsburgh synagogue massacre by a white supremacist; the rising number of states curtailing freedom of speech to shield Israel from the growing movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions; and the Trump administration’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocate the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, among other policy departures that have severely infringed on Palestinian rights.

Not surprisingly, Representative Omar’s remarks elicited a plethora of reactions from across the political spectrum, ranging from threats and slander to support and praise.

The negative responses led to a proposal that the House of Representatives rebuke Representative Omar through a resolution condemning anti-Semitism. However, the progressive wing of the Democratic Party challenged their leadership, warning against narrowly focusing on anti-Semitism at a time of rising bigotry, when many minority groups suffer from discrimination. Thus, the language of the resolution in question (H.R.183) was finally updated to condemn anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim discrimination and bigotry against minorities.

While the more neutral tone of the resolution is welcome, a crucial element of the debate warrants further inquiry: the conflation of criticism of Israel or Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Declaring that criticism of Israel and of Zionism is anti-Semitic has long been a means for

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1. This is the relevant section of Rep. Omar’s remarks: “What I’m fearful of — because Rashida [Tlaib] and I are Muslim — that a lot of our Jewish colleagues, a lot of our constituents, a lot of our allies, go to thinking that everything we say about Israel to be anti-Semitic because we are Muslim. And so, to me, it’s something that becomes designed to end the debate because you get in this space of — yes, I know what intolerance looks like and I’m sensitive when someone says, “The words you used, Ilhan, are resemblance [*sic*] of intolerance.” And I am cautious of that and I feel pained by that. But it’s almost as if, every single time we say something regardless of what it is we say that is supposed to be about foreign policy or engagement or advocacy about ending oppression or the freeing of every human life and wanting dignity, we get to be labeled something, and that ends the discussion. Because we end up defending that and nobody ever gets to have the broader debate of what is happening with Palestine. So, for me, I want to talk about the political influence in this country that says it is okay for people to push for allegiance to a foreign country. And I want to ask, why is it okay for me to talk about the influence of the NRA, of fossil fuel industries, or Big Pharma, and not talk about a powerful lobby?”



Israel's proponents to silence advocates for Palestinian human rights. Defamatory websites such as Campus Watch and Canary Mission employ this strategy in their campaigns to smear activists, academics and other public figures who support Palestinian rights as anti-Semites.

During the Obama administration, the U.S. Department of State issued a definition of anti-Semitism which had as many mentions of Israel as of Jewish people and was contested during congressional hearings on the subject. Later in 2017, the Department of State adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) working definition of anti-Semitism, which includes seven examples of anti-Semitism to which three more were added that effectively curtail criticism of Israel. In Congress, the Senate passed the Combatting BDS Act of 2019, while an Anti-Semitism Awareness Act has been introduced that seeks to adopt a definition of anti-Semitism for enforcement of federal anti-discrimination laws in education programs. While the final text of the act has not been released yet, the ACLU has criticized earlier versions of this act for "chilling free speech of students on college campuses by incorrectly equating criticism the Israeli government with anti-Semitism."

At this critical juncture, the Institute for Palestine Studies USA believes it is important to examine this trend. We are pleased to present this monograph, which contains two articles from the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. The articles tackle criticism of Israeli policies and of Zionism, and the conflation of the two with anti-Semitism.

The first article, "An Immoral Dilemma: The Trap of Zionist Propaganda," by Moshé Machover, an Israeli resident in Britain who was briefly expelled from the Labour Party for alleged anti-Semitism, explores the history of Zionism since the late 19th century. Machover argues that the Zionist settler colonial project is itself inherently anti-Semitic because it claims, without justification, to act on behalf of world Jewry. This is a claim that the examples of anti-Semitism from the IHRA's working definition would, unintentionally, define as anti-Semitic, illustrating the "logical tangle" of the conflation of criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism.

In the second article, "Shifting Sands: Zionism and American Jewry," Barry Trachtenberg and Kyle Stanton argue that Zionism in the U.S. has gone through three different stages during which Jewish support for Israel has increased. In the first stage, most American Jews were not supportive of Zionism, while a shift to greater acceptance of Zionism occurred during the second stage, where accusations of anti-Semitism became a tool to silence those who opposed Zionism and Israeli policies. In the third stage, the authors argue that major Jewish organizations and public figures have been willing to set aside combating white supremacy and bigotry if it means shielding Israel and Zionism from criticism.

As the 2020 presidential election looms, the debate around these burning topics is bound to continue. The articles in this monograph, which will be the first of at least two on the subject, provide much-needed context for a clear understanding of the issues involved.



# AN IMMORAL DILEMMA: THE TRAP OF ZIONIST PROPAGANDA

*Moshé Machover*

POLITICAL ZIONISM IS based on the fallacy that there exists a single nation encompassing all the world's Jews. How can Zionism claim that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people, since the only attribute shared by all Jews is Judaism, a religion and not an attribute of nationhood in any modern sense of the word? Jews can belong to various nations—a Jew may be French, American, Indian, Argentinian, and so forth—but being Jewish excludes other religious affiliations. Thus, this essay argues, the Zionist claim that all the world's Jews constitute a single distinct national entity is an ideological myth, invented as a misconceived way of dealing with the persecution and discrimination suffered by European Jews, in particular. Indeed, from its earliest iterations and up to the present day, Zionism—a colonizing project—has been fueled by an inverted form of anti-Semitism: if, as it claims, Israel acts on behalf of all Jews everywhere, then all Jews must be collectively held responsible for the actions of that state—clearly an anti-Semitic position.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Moshé Machover, born in Palestine in 1936, is an expatriate Israeli dissident and cofounder, in 1962, of the Socialist Organization in Israel, *Matzpen*.<sup>1</sup> He is a mathematician, professor emeritus at King's College London, and a socialist political activist.

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1. The Socialist Organization in Israel was founded in 1962 and commonly referred to by the name of its journal, *Matzpen* (Compass). The organization viewed Zionism as a colonizing project, and strove for Arab-Jewish socialist coexistence based on full equality. See <http://www.matzpen.org/english/>.



## AN IMMORAL DILEMMA: THE TRAP OF ZIONIST PROPAGANDA

### What Is Zionism?

ZIONISM—or to give it its full designation, political Zionism—is a movement that combines an ideology and a project. Like most political movements, it comprises a variety of currents and shades of opinion, which all share a common core.

The core of Zionist ideology is the belief that the Jews of all countries constitute a single national entity rather than a mere religious denomination; and that this national entity has a right to self-determination, which it is entitled to exercise by reclaiming its historical (or “God-given”) homeland, Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), which comprises—at a minimum—pre-1948 Palestine.

Let us see how Zionism is defined by its advocates. Here, for example, is an authoritative formulation: “Zionism is the national revival movement of the Jews. It holds that the Jews are a people and therefore have the right to self-determination in their own national home. It aims to secure and support a legally recognized national home for the Jews in their historical homeland, and to initiate and stimulate a revival of Jewish national life, culture and language.”<sup>2</sup>

However, this partisan definition begs a couple of questions. First, does the totality of Jews constitute a nation in the modern secular sense, to which the right of national self-determination is applicable? This claim of nationhood is at best extremely questionable, and has in fact been denied by many Jews, who assert cogently that Jewish identity is not national but primarily a matter of religious affiliation or background.

### Dangerous Doctrines

When Lucien Wolf, a distinguished journalist and leading member of the Conjoint Foreign Committee of British Jews, was confronted with Chaim Weizmann’s effort to obtain what was to be known as the Balfour Declaration, he wrote a worried letter to James de Rothschild, dated 31 August 1916.

*Dear Mr. James de Rothschild,*

*At the close of our conference with Dr. Weizmann on the 17th inst., you asked me to write you a letter defining my view. . . .*

*I have thought over very carefully the various statements made to me by Dr. Weizmann, and, with the best will in the world, I am afraid I must say that there are vital and irreconcilable differences of principles and method between us.*

*The question of principle is raised by Dr. Weizmann’s assertion of a Jewish nationality. The assertion has to be read in the light of the authoritative essay on “Zionism and the Jewish Future” recently published by Mr. Sacher, more especially those written by Dr. Weizmann himself and by Dr. Gaster. I understand from these essays that the Zionists do not merely propose to form and establish a Jewish nationality in Palestine, but that they claim all the Jews as forming at the present moment a separate and dispossessed nationality, for which it is necessary to find an organic*

2. “Zionism Definition – Zionism Defined,” Zionism on the Web, 2005–6, [http://www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism\\_definitions.html](http://www.zionismontheweb.org/zionism_definitions.html). For similar but briefer formulations, see for example, Jonathan Freedland, “Labour and the Left Have an Antisemitism Problem,” *The Guardian*, 18 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/18/labour-antisemitism-jews-jeremy-corbyn>; Eylon A. Levy, “Why Anti-Zionism Is Inherently Anti-Semitic,” *The Blogs, The Times of Israel*, 8 December 2013, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-trouble-with-anti-zionism/>.

*political centre, because they are and must always be aliens in the lands in which they now dwell (Weizmann p. 6), and, more especially, because it is "an absolute self delusion" to believe that any Jew can be at once." English by nationality and Jewish by faith" (Gaster pp. 92, 93). I have spent most of my life in combating these very doctrines, when presented to me in the form of anti-Semitism, and I can only regard them as the more dangerous when they come to me in the guise of Zionism. They constitute a capitulation to our enemies which has absolutely no justification in history, ethnology, or the facts of everyday life, and if they were admitted by the Jewish people as a whole, the result would only be that the terrible situation of our coreligionists in Russia and Romania would become the common lot of Jewry throughout the world.<sup>3</sup>*

And on 24 May 1917, as negotiations that were to lead to the Balfour Declaration were at an advanced stage, Alexander and Claude Montefiore, presidents respectively of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and of the Anglo-Jewish Association, wrote a letter to *The Times* in the name of the Conjoint Committee of these two bodies, protesting against the fallacies and dangers of political Zionism. After declaring their adherence to Wolf's position, the writers go on to say that "Establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine, founded on the theory of Jewish homelessness, must have the effect throughout the world of stamping the Jews as strangers in their native lands and of undermining their hard-won positions as citizens and nationals of those lands."

They point out that the theories of political Zionism undermined the religious basis of Jewry to which the only alternative would be "a secular Jewish nationality, recruited on some loose and obscure principle of race and of ethnographic peculiarity. But this would not be Jewish in any spiritual sense, and its establishment in Palestine would be a denial of all the ideals and hopes by which the survival of Jewish life in that country commends itself to the Jewish conscience and Jewish sympathy. On these grounds the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies and the Anglo-Jewish Association deprecates earnestly the national proposals of the Zionists."

Similar views were held by prominent Jews in other Western European countries. Thus, for example, Alfred Naquet, polemicizing in 1903 against the Zionist Bernard Lazare, pointed out that the claim that Jews are a separate nation was not very different from the preaching of leading anti-Semites such as Édouard Drumont, the founder of the Anti-Semitic League of France.

*If it pleased Bernard Lazare to consider himself a citizen of a separate nation, that is his affair; but I declare that, although I was born a Jew...I do not recognize Jewish nationality. I belong to no other nation but the French Are the Jews a nation? Although they were one in the remote past, my reply is a categorical negative. The concept nation implies certain conditions that do not exist in this case. A nation must have a territory on which to develop, and, in our time at least, until a world confederation has extended this basis, a nation must have a common language. And the Jews no longer have either a territory or a common language. Like myself, Bernard Lazare probably did not know a word of Hebrew, and would have found it no easy matter, if Zionism had achieved its purpose, to make himself understood to his counterparts [congénères] from other parts of the world. . . .*

*German and French Jews are quite unlike Polish and Russian Jews. The characteristic features of the Jews include nothing that bears the hallmark [empreinte] of nationality. If it were permissible to recognize the Jews as a nation, as Drumont does, it would be an artificial nation. The modern Jew is a product of the unnatural selection to which his forebears were subjected for nearly eighteen centuries.<sup>4</sup>*

These views reflected the actual situation in Western Europe, where Jews enjoyed equal civil rights and shared the national language and secular culture of the majority. (Indeed, similar views are held today by many Jews in Western Europe and especially in the United States.)

In the Russian Empire and its periphery, the situation at the time was different. Jews did not enjoy equal rights, and most of them spoke their own language, Yiddish; and by the nineteenth

3. Photocopy of typewritten original in Bejtullah D. Destani, ed., *The Zionist Movement and the Foundation of Israel, 1839–1972*, vol. 1 (Farnham Common: Archive Editions, 2004), p. 727. My emphasis.

4. Alfred Naquet, "Drumont et Bernard Lazare," *La Petite République*, 24 September 1903.



century a vibrant secular Yiddish culture had developed. Moreover, much of the Jewish population was concentrated in certain areas, where they constituted a large proportion, in some cases a majority, of the population. Thus they had the main attributes of a nation.<sup>5</sup> So the Jewish Bund, which was founded in the same year (1897) as the Zionist movement, and won far more support than the latter, had at that time reasonable grounds for asserting the existence of a Yiddish-speaking Jewish nation. While rejecting Zionism, the Bund demanded national-cultural autonomy for the Jews, to be exercised locally, where they actually lived. However, that Jewish nation, as conceptualized by the Bund, did not encompass all Jews around the world, but only the Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe.

In this connection let me mention that at present there also exists a “Jewish” nation, namely the Hebrew-speaking settler nation in Israel, widely referred to as “Israeli Jewish,”<sup>6</sup> but there is no single nation encompassing all the world’s Jews.

Indeed, it was as true 120 years ago as it is now that the only attribute shared by all Jews is Judaism, practiced by them or by their recent forebears. They do not share *any* of the essentially secular attributes of a nation in the modern sense of the word.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, a necessary and sufficient condition for a non-Jew to become Jewish is undergoing a religious conversion (*giyyur*). Jews can belong to various nations: a Jew may be French, American, Italian, Scottish, and so forth. But Jewishness excludes other religious affiliations: a Jew cannot be Muslim, Hindu, or Roman Catholic. Thus the Zionist claim that all the planet’s Jews constitute a single distinct national entity rather than a religion-based community is an ideological myth, invented as a misconceived way of dealing with the discrimination and persecution of Jews.

This myth, as was pointed out by Jewish opponents of Zionism such as those I have quoted above, is shared by the most virulent anti-Semites, albeit with the evil intent of *justifying* the exclusion, persecution, and eventual elimination of Jews.<sup>8</sup> An extreme illustration of this is the hypocritical statement by the arch-Nazi, SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, writing in the SS newspaper *Das Schwarze Korps* (26 September 1935):

*In the context of its Weltanschauung, National Socialism has no intention of attacking the Jewish people in any way. On the contrary, the recognition of Jewry as a racial community based on blood, and not as a religious one, leads the German government to guarantee the racial separateness of this community without any limitations. The government finds itself in complete agreement with the great spiritual movement within Jewry itself, the so-called Zionism, with its recognition of the solidarity of Jewry throughout the world and the rejection of all assimilationist ideas. On this basis, Germany undertakes measures that will surely play a significant role in the future in the handling of the Jewish problem around the world.<sup>9</sup>*

## A Colonizing Project

The second question begged by the propagandist definition of Zionism quoted above is the meaning of “self-determination.” Whatever group of people the right of national self-determination may apply to, it does not entitle them to pick and choose at will the territory over which they may exercise that right. Claims that the group’s alleged distant ancestors lived in the coveted territory many centuries ago, or that it was promised to them by a deity in whose existence many of them happen to believe, or that they have long wished to possess it, are simply not good enough. The right to self-determination certainly does not license any group to colonize a territory long inhabited by other people.

5. For a more detailed discussion, see my article “Zionist Myths—Hebrew versus Jewish Identity,” *Weekly Worker*, 16 May 2013, <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/962/zionist-myths-hebrew-versus-jewish-identity/>.

6. I use scare quotes because this designation for the Hebrew nation is ill fitting for reasons explained in my article “Zionist Myths” cited above.

7. See Moshé Machover, “Palestine and Hebrew Self-Determination,” *Weekly Worker*, 12 January 2017, <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1137/palestine-and-hebrew-self-determination/>.

8. A related present-day phenomenon is the enthusiasm for Israel of some anti-Semites in Europe and the United States.

9. Quoted by Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985). The “measures” mentioned by Heydrich refer to the infamous Nuremberg Laws, promulgated a few days earlier.

But the key fact about the Zionist project is precisely that it is a project of colonization of Palestine, an inhabited land; and it is precisely this essential fact that is conveniently omitted by the definition of Zionism offered by its present-day propagandists. They avoid the word “colonization” like the proverbial plague; it has become too compromising.

Earlier Zionist leaders and ideologues had no such qualms. Thus, for example, Vladimir Jabotinsky—the political and spiritual progenitor of five Israeli prime ministers, including Benjamin Netanyahu<sup>10</sup>—repeatedly and unselfconsciously used the term colonization in his seminal article “The Iron Wall” (1923) to describe the Zionist project:

*Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonised. That is what the Arabs in Palestine are doing, and what they will persist in doing as long as there remains a solitary spark of hope that they will be able to prevent the transformation of “Palestine” into the “Land of Israel.”...*

*Colonisation can have only one aim, and Palestine Arabs cannot accept this aim. It lies in the very nature of things, and in this particular regard nature cannot be changed....*

*Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.<sup>11</sup>*

So, whether or not the totality of Jews may be regarded as a national entity to which the right of national self-determination is applicable, the Zionist project cannot possibly be regarded as an implementation of such a right. As the Zionist historian Yigal Elam had to admit: “Zionism couldn’t appeal to the principle of self-determination and rely on it in Palestine. This principle worked clearly against it and in favour of the local Arab national movement. . . . From the viewpoint of national theory, Zionism needed a fiction that was incompatible with the accepted concepts of national theory. [It] needed a much broader conception than the simplistic one. In this other conception *referendum of the world’s Jews* superseded *referendum of the population of Palestine*.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The “Nation-State of the Jewish People” and the Hasbara Project**

Israel—a product of the Zionist project of colonization, as well as an instrument for its continuation and extension—claims to be the “nation-state of the Jewish people” (briefly, “NSJP”)\*. At the time of this writing, a Basic Law to this effect is in the process of being enacted by the Knesset<sup>13</sup> but the claim itself is not new, and an insistent demand for its international acceptance has been made explicitly and officially on numerous public occasions.<sup>14</sup> Note also that the NSJP claim is implied in the propagandist definition of Zionism I quoted at the beginning of this article; in fact, the claim and the definition are two parts of a single package.

In public political and journalistic discourse, the NSJP formulation is often misquoted in the abbreviated form, “Israel as a Jewish state”; and it is widely criticized as implying and sanctioning discrimination against Israel’s non-Jewish—particularly Palestinian—citizens (also known as Palestinian citizens of Israel or PCI). This is certainly *one* of the intended effects of the NSJP law. Indeed, a major reason for the long gestation of this law has been disagreement among its proponents in the Israeli government regarding the extent to which the law should override the alleged “democratic” character of the Israeli state and the individual civil and human rights of its

10. The others are Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Ariel Sharon (a late convert to the Jabotinskian wing of Zionism), and Ehud Olmert.

11. Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall” [O zheleznoi stene], published 4 November 1923 in the Russian-language journal *Rassvyet* [Dawn]; see <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-iron-wall-quot> for English translation.

12. Yigal Elam, “Hanahot hadashot leota tzionut” [New assumptions for the same Zionism], *Ot*, no. 2, Winter 1967; my translation (emphasis in original). *Ot* was an official theoretical journal of the Labor Alignment, which encompassed the then Labor Party.

13. Israel has no written constitution. Instead, it has Basic Laws, intended to be draft chapters of a constitution to be adopted sometime in the indefinite future. \*N.B. Israel passed the Nation State for the Jewish People Law on July 19, 2018 after this piece had been written.

14. See, for example, Peter Beaumont, “Netanyahu Pushes to Define Israel as Nation State of Jewish People Only,” *The Guardian*, 4 May 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/04/binyamin-netanyahu-israel-jewish-state>; Joel H. Golovensky, “The Nation State of the Jewish People,” *Jerusalem Post*, 14 May 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/The-nation-state-of-the-jewish-people-352302>. Israel’s envoys to the United Nations have repeatedly asserted that peace with the Palestinians must be built on Palestinian recognition that “Israel is the nation state of the Jewish people”; see, for example, “General Assembly Votes Overwhelmingly to Accord Palestine ‘Non-Member Observer State’ Status in United Nations,” United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, GA/11317, 29 November 2012, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>.

## “One of the main weapons in these ‘efforts to target foreign individuals and organizations’ that criticize Israel, especially those that support BDS, is to accuse them of anti-Semitism.”

non-Jewish citizens. But this actually *understates* the real intent of the law and the full implication of the NSJP formula. If nothing else, it renders the status of the PCI inferior not only to the status of their Jewish fellow citizens but also to that of Jewish people all round the world.

Here I would like to focus on the intended implication, and the actual use, of the NSJP formula to legitimize the colonizing Zionist regime and intimidate, persecute, and penalize robust criticism of the Israeli state and its actions. In recent years, the impulse to stage a worldwide campaign to this effect has been pressing itself on Israeli leaders in view of the growing critical trend in progressive public opinion around the world. This is reflected in the rapid growth of the global campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS), aiming to apply econom-

ic and political pressure on Israel to end its violations of international law. Of particular worry to the Zionist leadership is the growing disaffection with Israel by Jews—especially the younger generation—in many countries, evidenced by their participation in the BDS movement.

Faced with this serious damage to its image, the Israeli government has taken steps to attack and discredit its critics by a variety of means, fair and (mostly) foul. This has required a major extension of Israel’s hasbara (propaganda) machine abroad, providing it with teeth, and recruiting personnel from Israel’s secret services. Worldwide operations are orchestrated by the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Since 2015, this ministry is headed by cabinet member Gilad Erdan, who is also minister of internal security and information. Erdan himself is on record stating that his “achievements should be kept hush-hush.”<sup>15</sup> *The Guardian*, reporting on his secret meeting in London in September 2017 with disgraced Tory minister Priti Patel (following her return from a “holiday” in Israel), comments:

*Erdan’s ministry was asked in 2015 to “guide, coordinate and integrate the activities of all the ministers and the government and of civil entities in Israel and abroad on the subject of the struggle against attempts to delegitimise Israel and the boycott movement.”*

*Most controversially, Erdan has been put in charge of large-scale efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations, reportedly including staff recruited from the Mossad foreign intelligence agency, the Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency, and the military intelligence directorate.*<sup>16</sup>

One of the main weapons in these “efforts to target foreign individuals and organisations” that criticize Israel, especially those that support BDS, is to accuse them of anti-Semitism. In this campaign, Erdan’s operatives in foreign countries mobilize local pro-Israel lobbies. In a fascinating four-part television series on such activities in Britain, which aired in January 2017, Al Jazeera provided an exposé of undercover operative Shai Masot’s attempts to meddle in the Labour Party. The series is available online, and I urge readers to view it for their entertainment and education.<sup>17</sup>

Since then, the campaign in Britain, directed against the left wing of the Labour Party and personally against its leader, Jeremy Corbyn—a long-time supporter of Palestinian rights—has escalated to become a veritable hysteria. It is spearheaded by the pro-Israel lobby and blatantly aided by Corbyn’s right-wing and pro-Zionist enemies within the party, and by the media. A witch-hunt is being conducted against anti-Zionists and critics of Israel in the party, using accusations of anti-Semitism, the vast majority of which are simply false, conflating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. In all high-profile

15. Gilad Erdan’s Facebook page [in Hebrew], 7 August 2016,

<https://www.facebook.com/gilad.erdan/photos/a.225201850853267/1265886783451430/?type=3&theater>.

16. Peter Beaumont, “What Did Israel Hope to Gain from Priti Patel’s Secret Meetings?” *The Guardian*, 8 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/nov/08/priti-patel-israel-trip-analysis-uk-foreign-policy>.

17. See *The Lobby*, Al Jazeera, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/investigations/thelobby/>. An Al Jazeera exposé about the pro-Israel lobby in the United States has been filmed but has so far not screened, probably due to political pressure. See Asa Winstanley, “What’s in Al Jazeera’s Undercover Film on the U.S. Israel Lobby?” *Electronic Intifada*, 5 March 2018, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/whats-al-jazeeras-undercover-film-us-israel-lobby/23496>.

**In all high-profile cases in which insinuations of anti-Semitism have been made against Labour Party members, with the gleeful connivance of hostile media, no evidence of real anti-Semitism has so far been evinced.”**

cases in which insinuations of anti-Semitism have been made against Labour Party members, with the gleeful connivance of hostile media, no evidence of real anti-Semitism has so far been evinced. Some of the individuals concerned were eventually expelled on other, rather vague pretexts such as rudeness or “bringing the Party into disrepute.”<sup>18</sup>

In other cases (including my own), which were met with a groundswell of sol-

idarity and support within the party and beyond, no alternative pretext could be remotely justified and expulsions were rapidly rescinded.

The NSJP claim plays a central role in this campaign. It’s clear and clearly intended implication is that Israel represents the totality of all Jews and acts on their behalf; hence any robust opposition to Israel is automatically anti-Semitic.

### **Tangle and Dilemma**

An illustration of this paralogism is provided by the use made of the so-called “working definition of anti-Semitism” formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).<sup>19</sup> This definition is often accompanied by eleven “Examples” of what may constitute anti-Semitism (although the IHRA itself has not formally adopted them). I will not discuss in detail this definition, which various public and private bodies everywhere have been pressured to adopt. I refer the reader to authoritative analyses of the definition, and especially the Examples, by two legal experts, Queen’s Counsel Hugh Tomlinson<sup>20</sup> and emeritus Court of Appeal judge Sir Stephen Sedley.<sup>21</sup> They are highly recommended reading. Suffice it to say that most of the so-called Examples are not concerned with anti-Semitism as normally understood (feelings, expressions, and practices hostile to Jews as such) but with opposition to the State of Israel.

For the purpose of the present article, the most telling are the following two of the Examples provided.<sup>22</sup>

The seventh one states: *“Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”*

The logic of this statement is quite bizarre. To begin with, how does the second clause relate to the first? Surely, it is logically consistent to affirm that there exists a Jewish people and that it has a right to self-determination, but that it’s alleged implementation in and by the State of Israel is racist. Looking at this statement as a whole, it would only make sense as an instance of anti-Semitism if you accept the propagandist definition of Zionism, behind which lurks the NSJP claim, implying that Israel represents all Jews everywhere.

The tenth of the Examples listed by the IHRA states: *“Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.”*

18. See, for example, “Labour Activist Expelled after Remarks to MP at Anti-Semitism Event,” BBC, 27 April 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-43920227>.

19. See “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” news release, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 27 June 2016, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/stories/working-definition-antisemitism>.

20. Hugh Tomlinson QC, “In the Matter of the Adoption and Potential Application of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Anti-Semitism: Opinion,” 8 March 2017, <http://freespeechonisrael.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/TomlinsonGuidanceIHRA.pdf>.

21. See “Stephen Sedley Slams IHRA (Mis)definition,” covering the talk that Sedley delivered at a meeting in the House of Lords, 27 March 2017, Free Speech on Israel, <http://freespeechonisrael.org.uk/sedley-ihra/#respond>; see also, Stephen Sedley, “Defining Anti-Semitism,” London Review of Books 39, no. 9 (4 May 2017), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v39/n09/stephen-sedley/defining-anti-semitism>.

22. For the entire list, see Romanian Chairmanship 2016, press release, International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 26 May 2016, [https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press\\_release\\_document\\_antisemitism.pdf](https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/press_release_document_antisemitism.pdf).

Now, comparisons of this kind have in fact been made by Israeli scholars. As fairly recent examples, let me refer to two articles by Professor Daniel Blatman, a historian of holocaust and genocide at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,<sup>23</sup> and to a report about a pronouncement by Professor Ofer Cassif, who teaches politics and government at the same university.<sup>24</sup>

But look again at this Example. How is it supposed to be an instance of anti-Semitism? Let me concede for a moment that comparing contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis is an unjustified slur. But slur against what or whom? At worst, it could be a slur against a state, Israel; and as such it may well upset supporters of that state and those who still believe in it. But how can it possibly be a slur against the Jews, and hence anti-Semitic? Well, the *only* way in which it could bear such an interpretation is if we hold all Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel. Again, this presupposes that Israel acts on behalf of all Jews everywhere, which is the implicit message of the NSJP claim.

Curiously, the last example in the IHRA list states that the following position is anti-Semitic: *“Holding all Jews as collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.”*

This creates an interesting logical tangle.

You can only take Example 10 seriously as a genuine instance of anti-Semitism—rather than of outrage directed specifically at the Israeli state—if you hold all Jews collectively responsible for the actions of that state. But then you are guilty of anti-Semitism according to Example 11, which is *undoubtedly* an instance of real anti-Semitism. Thus the list of 11 Examples taken as a whole incriminates itself as anti-Semitic!

The paralogism of the Examples is clearly unintentional. But what is certainly intentional is the false choice implied by the package consisting of the NSJP claim and the propagandist definition of Zionism. Indeed, this is its very purpose. If you accept this package, then you find yourself impaled on the horns of an immoral dilemma:

*Either* you blame “the Jews” for the injustices inflicted by the Zionist colonizing project on the dispossessed indigenous people of Palestine and for the atrocities against them committed by the Israeli settler state. This choice is the anti-Zionism of fools.

*Or* you keep quiet about these injustices and atrocities; in fact you avoid mention of Zionism in any derogatory sense. This choice is the decent one—if you accept the false package.

Conclusion: the package is a deliberately constructed antipersonnel device, designed to terrorize decent people into silence.

The only way to make it harmless is to deconstruct it. So here is a moral health warning. If you wish to avoid the trap of an immoral dilemma:

- Reject the allegation that Jews outside Israel are aliens in their actual countries, but are members of a Jewish national entity whose homeland is elsewhere.
- Reject the self-serving justification of the Zionist colonization project and the Israeli settler state as implementing the self-determination of that alleged national entity.
- Reject the NSJP claim.

23. Daniel Blatman, “The Israeli Lawmaker Heralding Genocide against Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, 23 May 2017, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-israeli-mk-heralding-genocide-against-palestinians-1.5475561>.

24. Yocheved Lauren Laufer, “Hebrew U Professor: Israel Today Similar to Nazi Germany,” *Jerusalem Post*, 23 June 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Hebrew-U-professor-Todays-Israel-similar-to-Nazi-Germany-497731>.



## SHIFTING SANDS: ZIONISM & AMERICAN JEWRY

Barry Trachtenberg and Kyle Stanton

THE CURRENT WILLINGNESS of major American Jewish organizations and leaders to dismiss the threat from white supremacists in the name of supporting Israel represents a new stage in the shifting relationship of U.S. Jews toward Zionism. In the first stage, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the majority of U.S. Jews did not take to Zionism, as its goals seemed antithetical to their aspirations to join mainstream American society. In a second stage, attitudes toward Zionism grew more positive as conditions for European Jews worsened and Jewish settlement in Palestine grew substantially. Following Israeli statehood in 1948, U.S. Jews began gradually to support Israel. Jewish groups and leaders increasingly characterized criticism of Zionism as inherently anti-Semitic and attacked Israel's critics. In a third and most recent stage, many major Jewish organizations and leaders have subordinated the traditional U.S. Jewish interest in combatting white supremacy and bigotry when it comes into conflict with support for Israel and Zionism.

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## SHIFTING SANDS: ZIONISM & AMERICAN JEWRY

IN NOVEMBER 2017, the Judiciary Committee of the United States House of Representatives held a hearing to consider the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, a bill that would categorize speech that is critical of Israel as anti-Semitic under Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which addresses institutions that receive federal funding, such as universities. Gathered in support of the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act were leaders of major Jewish organizations and a Christian Zionist group who argued that mounting criticisms of Israel by pro-Palestinian student groups were creating an unsafe atmosphere for Jewish college students. Opposed to it stood professors of Jewish Studies and free speech advocates, who testified that backers of the bill were mischaracterizing the extent of anti-Semitism on college campuses and expressed fears that the legislation would suppress constitutionally protected speech and academic debate.<sup>1</sup> Although the issue of the rising physical threats to Jews from white supremacists was mentioned in the hearing, it was largely sidelined by the bill's supporters, who focused instead on the alleged danger posed by supporters of Palestinian rights.

This current willingness of major Jewish organizations in the United States—such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the American Jewish Committee (AJCommittee), and the Simon Wiesenthal Center—and leaders to overlook or dismiss white supremacy in the name of supporting Israel represents a new stage in the shifting relationship of U.S. Jews toward Zionism. In the first stage, that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the vast majority of Jews in the United States initially either ignored Zionism or reacted to it disparagingly, as its goals seemed antithetical to their aspirations to join mainstream American society. In the second stage, attitudes toward Zionism grew more positive after World War I, as conditions for Jews worsened in Europe and Jewish settlement in Palestine grew substantially. Following Israeli statehood in 1948, U.S. Jews first gradually and then wholeheartedly began to show their support for Israel. Over time, most Jewish groups and leaders began to characterize criticism of Zionism as intrinsically anti-Semitic, and successfully shored up U.S. support for Israel. In the third and most recent stage, we see a near inversion of the first, as many major Jewish organizations and leaders have subordinated the traditional American Jewish interest in combatting white supremacy and bigotry when it comes into conflict with demonstrating support for Israel and Zionism.

### **First Stage: Zionism and American Jewry at Odds**

In its formative period, Zionism was very much at odds with the aspirations of American Jewry. Zionism had begun at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe as part of an extensive and variegated shift toward nationalism among Jews who were responding to rising anti-Jewish violence across the continent. Its delayed emergence—in comparison to most other nationalist movements in Europe—was in part on account of Jews' wide dispersion across Europe, which resulted in the lack of any one territory that Jews identified as their "homeland" and any one common language that they shared. Although Jewish nationalism embodied many different ideological stances that were often in sharp conflict with one another, Zionists of all stripes were united in their rejection of Jews' assimilation into the national identities of the larger societies in which they lived, and favored a renewed assertion of Jewish self-determination. As anti-Semitism grew

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1. Among those testifying in opposition to the legislation was Barry Trachtenberg, coauthor of the present article.

in western Europe, increasing numbers of Jews began to embrace the Zionist vision put forward by Theodor Herzl, who advocated establishing a Jewish state at the first Zionist Congress in 1897. Following Herzl's death in 1904, the Zionist Congress movement that he founded united to pursue the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland in Ottoman-held Palestine.

In the United States, Jews came to Zionism later still. There, anti-Semitism was considerably weaker than in Europe during those same decades, which diminished Zionism's original *raison d'être*. The first significant wave of Jewish migrants to the United States arrived from German-speaking regions of Europe in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The preexisting legal, economic, and social divisions that separated whites from people of color provided opportunities for these Jews to find their place in the United States' then-majority white society. They quickly established themselves within the U.S. "mainstream," in part by taking deliberate steps to stress their allegiance to the country and by rejecting any forms of Jewish difference other than religious ones. A prominent example is the 1885 proclamation by rabbinical leaders affiliated with the Reform movement, which consciously rejected Jewish nationalism as antithetical to a Judaism that corresponded to the values of the modern world. The fifth point (of eight) states:

*We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state.*<sup>2</sup>

For the next half century, what became known as the Pittsburgh Platform remained a core principle of Reform Judaism and of many major Jewish organizations and leaders who believed, in the words of Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler, that the United States and Judaism together "spell[ed] the triumph of the world's two greatest principles and ideals, . . . the highest moral and spiritual and the highest political and social aim of humanity."<sup>3</sup> Their faith in the United States led most Jewish leaders to reject the Zionist movement as contrary to U.S. values of tolerance and pluralism. Rather, U.S. Jews focused much of their political energy on defending their place within the United States and safeguarding equal rights for all. This impulse is exemplified in the 1913 founding of the ADL, which was established amid the anti-Semitic trial (and subsequent extrajudicial lynching) of Leo Frank in Georgia. In its founding charter, the ADL proclaimed its primary goal as follows: "The immediate object of the League is to stop, by appeals to reason and conscience, and if necessary, by appeals to law, the defamation of the Jewish people. Its ultimate purpose is to secure justice and fair treatment to all citizens alike and to put an end forever to unjust and unfair discrimination against and ridicule of any sect or body of citizens."<sup>4</sup>

Zionism became a stronger force among Jews in Europe following the 1917 declaration by Lord Balfour in which Britain signaled its support for a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. In the decade after World War I, 120,000 European Jews migrated to Palestine—joining a Jewish population of 60,000—after it came under British control as a League of Nations mandate. This had the further effect of sharpening the goals of the Zionist movement in favor of achieving an independent Jewish homeland. The Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia and the post-war realignment of Europe drew more Jews to the Zionist cause. The movement grew in stature to such an extent that the Zionist Congress leadership (which was by then based primarily in London) sought to position itself as the representative of Jewish interests worldwide. Many major American Jewish leaders resisted these assertions, and sharp tensions at times rose between some American Jewish leaders and their counterparts in Europe.

However, the immigration of approximately two million Jews who had come to the United States since the 1880s changed the Jewish ideological landscape in the country considerably. Arriving from

2. Conference of Reform Rabbis, "The Pittsburgh Platform (1885)," in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 521–22.

3. Kaufmann Kohler, "The Concordance of Judaism and Americanism (1911)," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 525–26.

4. As quoted in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Encyclopedia of American Civil Liberties* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 69.

eastern Europe, and in much greater numbers than had German Jews a generation before, these newcomers tended to be slower to assimilate into white America. Like other migrants from southern and eastern Europe, they retained their ethnic and linguistic differences longer, settled in cities, and filled the ranks of the working classes. Many also brought with them political ideologies of socialism, communism, anarchism, and also Jewish nationalism. They tended to be closer to Jewish traditions and were less quick to focus their efforts on establishing themselves within the U.S. social framework. These two factors—the expanding Jewish quasi-state Palestine and a larger, more assertive American Jewish community—laid the groundwork for a reevaluation of the Zionist cause.

## **Second Stage: Zionism and U.S. Judaism United**

After Hitler's ascension to power in Germany in 1933, the Zionist movement grew stronger still. An additional 250,000 Jews settled in Palestine over the next six years on account of the worsening situation for Jews across Europe and tightening border restrictions in the United States and other countries of possible refuge. In the United States, a new generation of Jewish activists rose to the fore in response to the crisis facing German Jewry. Many new groups, most prominently the pro-Zionist American Jewish Congress, agitated for a more assertive U.S. stance against Nazi Germany and held street protests and public rallies, in part to force President Franklin Roosevelt's hand. This put them in opposition to more established Jewish organizations, such as the staid AJCommittee, which favored a less visible approach to lobbying out of concern for losing the limited access they had to the Roosevelt administration. By the later 1930s, support for Zionism, at least as a solution for endangered European Jews, had grown to such an extent that many of its former opponents now accepted its premises regarding the unity of Jewish peoplehood and the necessity for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. A 1937 gathering of Reform rabbis in Columbus repudiated the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform and agreed to a new set of principles, which included a significantly different fifth point (of nine):

*In all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.*

*Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. This is our Messianic goal.<sup>5</sup>*

This repudiation, known as the Columbus Platform, marked a major step in the consolidation of U.S. Judaism with the goals of Zionism. Another important moment occurred in the middle of World War II. In May 1942, an "extraordinary" meeting of world Zionist leaders gathered in New York's Biltmore Hotel, and in a repudiation of the 1939 British White Paper, which proposed new limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine, they called for the immediate establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. The Biltmore Program's near-singular focus on the immediate task of founding a Jewish state in Palestine was widely hailed by Jewish organizations and leaders in the United States as a necessary act to protect European Jewish lives. It was rejected by some Jewish leaders, such as Henrietta Szold, the founder of the women's Zionist group, Hadassah, and the Reform Jewish leader Judah Leon Magnes, who favored a binational solution for peaceful coexistence. In a sign of its continued ambivalence toward Zionism, the AJCommittee severed its relationship with an ad hoc umbrella group of major Jewish organizations known as the American Jewish Conference after the Conference proclaimed its allegiance to the Biltmore Program, criticizing "the subordination of other Jewish issues to the problem of the political structure of Palestine."<sup>6</sup>

5. Conference of Reform Rabbis, "The Columbus Platform (1937)," in *The Jew in the Modern World*, pp. 575–76.

6. "American Jewish Committee Leaves American Jewish Conference; Zionist Members Resign," Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 26 October 1943, <https://www.jta.org/1943/10/26/archive/american-jewish-committee-leaves-american-jewish-conference-zionist-members-resign>.

Following Israel's founding in 1948, U.S. Jews slowly but steadily grew to identify and align with Israel; and if they were not committed Zionists, they increasingly gave their financial and moral support to the nascent state. Many Jews who once opposed political Zionism, such as Magnes, switched their positions in favor of Israel—in spite of its ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs. For the next two decades, U.S. Jews viewed Israel sympathetically, if not enthusiastically. Most accepted it at minimum as a form of compensation to European Jews for the Holocaust, but not necessarily as relevant to their own lives. The persistent (if still mild, in comparison to Europe) anti-Semitism in the United States acted as a reminder of Jewish difference, and Israel existed for many as a potential safe haven should anti-Semitism emerge as a much more powerful force. By contrast, many Jewish organizations began to aggressively consolidate Jewish American opinion in favor of Zionism. Among the first to feel their wrath was the American Council for Judaism, an organization formed by Reform rabbis in the wake of the Biltmore Program with the goal of reasserting the spirit of the 1885 principles that had disavowed Jewish nationalism. After 1948, the Council effectively saw itself blacklisted from most major Jewish organizational gatherings and its leaders regularly marginalized within Jewish communities. By the late 1950s, the ADL began attacking universities hosting Arab speakers and Arab student groups critical of Israel, arguing that they were advancing Soviet propaganda and were incompatible with U.S. interests.<sup>7</sup>

The importance of Israel to U.S. Jews grew substantially in the 1960s as a younger generation began to reevaluate its relationship to Judaism. Domestic events—such as the civil rights movement and growing opposition to the war in Vietnam—and international ones—including the trial of the Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann, Israel's victory in the June 1967 war, and the crisis of Soviet Jewish refuseniks in the early 1970s—helped give rise to a reinvigorated Jewish American identity. However, most U.S. Jews had distanced themselves too far from traditional Jewish customs, practices, and languages to “return” to a religious Judaism. In its place, identifying with Israel and commemorating Jews who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust became central to renewed identities. For most Jews, the two went hand in hand: it was necessary to support and defend Israel because of the Holocaust, which was proof of the persistent threat of anti-Semitism. Over the next several decades, support for Israel became a central pillar of American Jewish communal identity, fundraising, and political activism. Although relatively few U.S. Jews immigrated to Israel, national, regional, and local organizations shored up financial and political support for Israel from both the American Jewish community and the government. Most Jewish groups, even the once-critical AJCommittee, became ardently pro-Zionist, leaving those Jewish organizations opposing Zionism and Israel increasingly marginalized.

Central to the consolidation of American Jewry's stance on Zionism has been its ability to smear critics of Israel with the accusation of anti-Semitism. As the logic goes, since Israel is essential for Jewish survival after the Holocaust, any criticisms of Israel—be they of its policies against Palestinians or of its establishment as a Jewish national state—are an attack on the right of Jewish self-determination, and therefore a form of anti-Semitism. Once Zionism became a cornerstone of American Jewish identity, criticisms of it became an attack on Judaism itself.

This strategy of instrumentalizing anti-Semitism as a means of countering criticism of Israel first appeared in the United States during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. In spite of a disproportionately high level of Jewish participation in civil rights activism during the early part of that decade (as many as two-thirds of white participants in the 1964 Freedom Summer project were Jews), a minority of Jewish intellectuals and leaders (mostly on the Right) were questioning whether this alliance was “good for the Jews,” since (they argued) Jewish Americans' interests more rationally aligned with those of other middle-class whites. By the later 1960s, as many civil rights leaders and groups began to espouse the more particularistic ideology of Black Power and argue for group remedies to bring equality to African Americans, increasing numbers of Jews distanced themselves from civil rights work. To justify their shifting stance, many Jewish leaders argued that civil rights groups were infused with anti-Semites, and they began to equate civil rights work with being anti-Semitic. When some civil rights leaders started linking the oppression of blacks in the United States to that of other peoples, including Palestinians living in the territories occupied

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7. See Geoffrey P. Levin, “Arab Students, American Jewish Insecurities, and the End of Pro-Arab Politics in Mainstream America, 1952–1973,” *Arab Studies Journal* 25, No. 1 (Spring 2017): pp. 30–58.



by Israel in the June 1967 war, it only seemed to confirm this equation. Jewish support for civil rights work waned (leading groups such as the ADL to oppose racial quotas and group remedies under Affirmative Action legislation in the 1970s and 1980s) and most Jewish political activity narrowed to what was perceived as being strictly in Jewish communal interests.<sup>8</sup>

In more recent decades, the accusation of anti-Semitism has proven to be a highly effective means to silence and punish critics of Israel. In particular, it has been levied against academics and civil rights activists calling attention to the plight of Palestinians. Setting aside First Amendment protections on political speech and standards of academic freedom, and in spite of the fact that a consistent majority of U.S. Jews have been critical of Israel's occupation of territories seized in 1967, major Jewish organizations in the United States regularly seek to squelch critical discussions of Israel. The scholars Norman Finkelstein and Stephen Salaita saw their academic careers ended on account of pressure by pro-Israel organizations and leaders who characterized their work as anti-Semitic. Other notable targets of intense criticism since 2000 include, among many others, Barnard College's Nadia Abu El-Haj, San Francisco State University's Rabab Abdulhadi,<sup>9</sup> and Columbia University's Joseph Massad. The political scientists John J. Mearsheimer (University of Chicago) and Stephen Walt (Harvard) faced a barrage of criticism for their study uncovering the role of the "Israel Lobby" in shaping the United States' Middle East policy. Also since 2000, a number of "watch lists," such as the early S.H.I.T. (Self-Hating and/or Israel-Threatening) List, the more recent Campus Watch of the Middle East Forum, and the ongoing Canary Mission website, track scholars whose work or activity on behalf of Palestinian human rights they deem to be anti-Semitic. Condemnations of Israel from within the Jewish community—in recent years by groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace, J Street, Open Hillel, and IfNotNow—are scorned as expressions of either self-hatred or disloyalty.

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### Third Stage: Zionism Trumping Jewish American Interests

As Israel has become increasingly isolated on the world stage and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has gone to unprecedented lengths to ensure a permanent Jewish majority in Israel, Jewish organizations in the United States have likewise taken unprecedented steps to ensure continuing U.S. support for Israel. This has resulted in the emergence of a third stage in the relationship of American Jewry to Zionism, one in which many major Jewish organizations and leaders have subordinated the historic interests of U.S. Jews to the defense of Israel.

After the launch of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2004, the campaign for Palestinian human rights gained substantial support among the U.S. peace community, including many Jewish activist organizations that had long resisted equating Zionism with

8. The authors thank Eric Morgenson of the University at Albany, SUNY, for sharing his ongoing dissertation research on this topic.

9. The attacks on Prof. Abdulhadi are ongoing and have been particularly vicious. As the target of a multiyear assault against her academic freedom by the Zionist Lawfare Project, Abdulhadi and San Francisco State University have been subjected to an ongoing legal attempt to silence her criticism of Israel. See Rabab Abdulhadi, "How and Why the Israel Lobby Is Suppressing Free Speech and Academic Freedom on College Campuses," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 37, no. 3 (May 2018): pp. 29–36, <https://www.wtrm.org/018-may/how-and-why-the-israel-lobby-is-suppressing-free-speech-and-academic-freedom-on-college-campuses.html>. Assisting in her defense have been several scholars in Jewish Studies, who filed an amicus curiae brief objecting to Lawfare's definition of anti-Semitism that is based in part upon a flawed definition adopted by the U.S. State Department. The State Department's definition, the scholars have argued, is overly expansive as it characterizes criticism of the State of Israel and its supporters as anti-Semitic. See "Prominent Jewish Studies Scholars Ask Court to Dismiss Case against SFSU and Prof. Abdulhadi," *Palestine Legal*, 7 June 2018, <https://palestinelegal.org/news/2018/6/7/jewish-scholars-court-dismiss>. For the full text of the amicus curiae brief, see: "Jewish Studies Scholars' Motion for Leave to File Amicus Curiae Brief: *Mandel v. Board of Trustees*," United States District Court, Northern District of California, Case No. 3:17-cv-03511-WHO, Jewish Studies Scholars, 18 May 2018, <http://tinyurl.com/y6wscb53>.

Judaism and anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism. Many scholarly organizations, labor unions, and religious organizations around the world have voiced support for BDS, and numerous artists, intellectuals, and political figures have endorsed the movement. Although BDS supports non-violent tactics and, at its core, calls for Israel to be compelled to adhere to international law, Israeli leaders, Zionist organizations, and their supporters have decried it as the most substantial existential threat to the Jewish state and a profound example of anti-Semitism.

**The decision by most major Jewish organizations to pay near-singular attention to combatting criticism of Israel has led them to be increasingly dismissive of threats to Jews and other minority groups from white supremacists, which have risen sharply since the 2016 U.S. presidential election.”**

Since Israel's supporters in the United States fear they are losing the battle over public opinion on a fair playing field of public debate, they have altered their tactics and are now trying to stop any debate from occurring at all. Rather than limit themselves to besmirching BDS as another form of anti-Semitism, groups such as the ADL, AIPAC, and the AJCommittee have embarked on a widespread campaign to enact legislation at the state and federal levels that would punish its supporters. As of January 2019, twenty-six of the fifty-two states had passed laws that either condemned the BDS movement or compelled states to “boycott” or “divest” from organizations and businesses that supported BDS. Several times, Congress has tried to pass the so-called Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, which would sanction schools if their students engaged in speech critical of Israel. These legislative initiatives have been denounced by civil rights organizations as violations of free speech protections under the U.S. Constitution, which gives strong protections to political boycotts. When newly elected congressional representative Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) questioned whether backers of these bills were truly working on behalf of U.S. interests, she too was attacked in the press as an anti-Semite.

The decision by most major Jewish organizations to pay near-singular attention to combatting criticism of Israel has led them to be increasingly dismissive of threats to Jews and other minority groups from white supremacists, which have risen sharply since the 2016 U.S. presidential election. As the *Washington Post* reported on 25 November 2018, “violence by white supremacists and other far-right attackers has been on the rise since Barack Obama’s presidency—and has surged since President Trump took office.”<sup>10</sup> Following the election of Donald Trump, who was elected to office as part of a global rise in right-wing populism and ethno-nationalism, U.S. Jews have been continually alarmed by the president’s willingness to engage in classic expressions of anti-Semitism. In his first year in office, Trump downplayed Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, refused to address attacks on Jewish cemeteries, and— following the August 2017 racial violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, in which one protester was murdered and Jewish worshippers in the city’s historic Beth Israel synagogue were menaced by white supremacists—placed equal blame on the racists who marched and those who stood to oppose them. Although one of the president’s closest advisers is his Orthodox Jewish son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and his own daughter has converted to Judaism, his initial chief strategist was Steve Bannon—a figure widely considered to have close ties to anti-Semitic groups in the United States. In response, the president has received only mild rebukes from major Jewish groups on account of his strong backing of Israel, which he has demonstrated by ending U.S. financial support for United Nations aid programs for Palestinian refugees, and by moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem in violation of international norms and prior government policy.

10. Wesley Lowery, Kimberly Kindy, and Andrew Ba Tran, “In the United States, Right-Wing Violence Is on the Rise,” *Washington Post*, 25 November 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-the-united-states-right-wing-violence-is-on-the-rise/2018/11/25/61f7f24a-deb4-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb\\_story.html?noredirect=on&cutm\\_term=.976d32d4126c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-the-united-states-right-wing-violence-is-on-the-rise/2018/11/25/61f7f24a-deb4-11e8-85df-7a6b4d25cfbb_story.html?noredirect=on&cutm_term=.976d32d4126c).

This acquiescence by major Jewish organizations in the United States to the demands of an extreme right-wing Israeli government reached what might be its most egregious expression in the days and weeks following the October 2018 massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in which eleven congregants were murdered and seven were wounded. They had been targeted by a gunman who objected to the synagogue's work on behalf of the refugee aid group HIAS, which has been supporting Central American migrants fleeing persecution and hoping to find sanctuary in the United States. After the shooting, Jews and their allies were in a state of shock and many suggested that Trump bore a measure of responsibility because of his persistent attacks on immigrants and his public criticisms of the philanthropist and Democratic Party supporter George Soros, who is Jewish and has provided substantial resources for refugee assistance. The massacre concluded a brutal week that began with the murder of two African American shoppers at a grocery store in Kentucky by a white supremacist who tried—unsuccessfully—to break into a black church. When he was thwarted, he went to hunt down African Americans wherever he could find them. A few days later, prominent Democratic Party leaders and activists—including Soros—received pipe bombs at their homes and offices.

Nevertheless, at vigils across the country, in press releases, and in speeches, the focus of most major Jewish organizations and many spiritual leaders was not to attack white supremacist violence and those in government who enable it, but instead to decry the BDS movement and its supporters. At the same time, countless elected officials across the country released statements denouncing the shooting and demonstrating their solidarity with U.S. Jews by pointing to their support of Israel and anti-BDS legislation. Two weeks after the shooting, both the prime minister and foreign minister of Israel restated their uncritical support of Trump, in spite of the fact that the president continued to make blatantly anti-Semitic comments about George Soros even after the Tree of Life shootings. Within weeks of the shooting, discussions of rising white supremacist activity among many leading Jewish organizations largely faded away and were replaced by attacks on leaders of the Women's March movement for their ties to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan and for their support of Palestinian human rights.

In this third and most insidious stage of the long relationship between Zionism and American Judaism, we have reached a moment when the tangible threats to Jewish safety that stem from white supremacists and their enablers in government are being dismissed or even excused in order to shore up Zionism and the State of Israel.

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