

A Relatively New Idea: 'Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism'

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The idea that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" has become a prominent and controversial assertion in modern political and academic discourse. While Zionism, the political movement advocating for a Jewish homeland, emerged in the late 19th century, opposition to it, termed anti-Zionism, developed alongside it. Historically, anti-Zionism was seen as a political position, distinct from antisemitism, which is rooted in prejudice and hostility toward Jews. However, as global debates over Israel's policies intensified, particularly after the Six-Day War in 1967, the boundaries between anti-Zionism and antisemitism began to blur. This paper traces the historical development of the concept, its institutionalization in the 21st century, and its controversial role in contemporary discussions about Israel, Palestine, and Jewish identity. By examining the rise of this argument and the criticisms it faces, we aim to shed light on the complexities of distinguishing legitimate political critique from harmful prejudice.

Keywords: Anti-Zionism, antisemitism, Zionism, Israel, Palestinian rights, IHRA, BDS movement, free speech, political discourse, Israel.

I. Introduction

A. Definition of Terms

1. Anti-Zionism

Anti-Zionism refers to the opposition to the ideology of Zionism, which is the political and nationalist movement advocating for the establishment and continued existence of a Jewish homeland in the historical region of Palestine, now recognized as the modern State of Israel. Zionism emerged in the late 19th century as a response to the widespread persecution and discrimination faced by Jews in Europe. The movement's goal was to create a safe, sovereign state where Jews could exercise self-determination.

Anti-Zionism encompasses a range of perspectives, including:

- **Political Opposition:** Some critics of Zionism argue that the establishment of a Jewish state was, and continues to be, unjust because it led to the displacement and disenfranchisement of the Palestinian Arab population. This view is often held by Palestinian advocates and sympathizers who see Zionism as inherently colonialist.
- **Religious Opposition:** Within certain Jewish communities, particularly ultra-Orthodox groups like the Neturei Karta, anti-Zionism is based on religious grounds. These groups argue that only the Messiah can re-establish a Jewish state and that Zionism is a violation of Jewish law.
- **Ideological and Leftist Critiques:** Many on the political left oppose Zionism as a form of nationalism that conflicts with ideals of international solidarity, human rights, and anti-imperialism. For these critics, Israel's policies toward Palestinians and the occupation of territories are the central issues.

It is crucial to differentiate between *anti-Zionism* (a political stance against the concept of a Jewish state or its policies) and *antisemitism* (a form of bigotry aimed at Jewish people) in the context of this debate.

2. Antisemitism

Antisemitism is the hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Jews as an ethnic, racial, or religious group. The term encompasses a broad spectrum of negative attitudes toward Jewish people, ranging from cultural and religious stereotyping to violence, exclusion, and systemic persecution. Historically, antisemitism has manifested in various ways, including:

- **Religious Antisemitism:** Rooted in Christian anti-Judaism, where Jews were historically scapegoated for the death of Jesus Christ, leading to centuries of persecution.
- **Racial Antisemitism:** Emerging in the 19th century, this form of antisemitism is based on pseudo-scientific theories of race that claim Jews are biologically inferior, resulting in extreme manifestations such as the Holocaust.
- **Modern Antisemitism:** In contemporary society, antisemitism can appear through conspiracy theories (e.g., claims that Jews control the media, finance, or world politics) or through acts of violence and discrimination against Jewish individuals or communities.

Antisemitism has evolved but remains one of the most persistent forms of hatred, exacerbated by periods of political instability, economic distress, or social upheaval. In the modern context, distinguishing between antisemitism and legitimate criticism of Israel and Zionism has become a complex issue that is central to the claim being examined in this paper.

B. Overview of the Statement

1. Introduction to the Claim

The statement "Anti-Zionism is antisemitism" has become increasingly prominent in recent decades. At its core, the claim asserts that opposing the political ideology of Zionism—particularly when this opposition involves denying the legitimacy of the State of Israel or its right to exist—constitutes a form of antisemitism. Proponents of this view argue that anti-Zionist rhetoric often employs age-old antisemitic stereotypes, scapegoats Jews for broader political issues, or delegitimizes the Jewish right to self-determination in ways that mirror traditional antisemitic ideas.

For example, supporters of this claim point to instances where anti-Zionist criticism crosses the line into antisemitic tropes, such as conspiratorial notions of Jewish global power or the portrayal of Israel as uniquely evil compared to other nations. They contend that while criticism of specific Israeli policies is legitimate, rejecting the entire premise of Jewish statehood in the land of Israel reveals underlying hostility toward Jews as a people.

2. Present the Central Question of the Paper

The central question explored in this paper is whether equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism is a relatively new concept or an evolving interpretation of political and social realities. Specifically, this paper will analyze how this argument has developed over time, tracing its origins and examining its institutionalization in contemporary political discourse.

Key issues to be addressed include:

- How and when did this conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism emerge?
- What historical, political, and social forces contributed to the rise of this idea?
- Is the claim universally accepted, or are there substantial counterarguments and criticisms from various perspectives?

By investigating these questions, the paper aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the modern discourse surrounding anti-Zionism and antisemitism. It will explore the implications of this framing for political debate, free speech, and the rights of various groups—including Jews, Palestinians, and critics of Israeli policies. Ultimately, the goal is to contextualize this claim within its broader historical and contemporary landscape, assessing whether it represents a new or a shifting boundary in the fight against antisemitism.

II. Historical Background of Zionism and Antisemitism

A. Origins of Zionism

1. Late 19th-Century Roots (Theodor Herzl and the Zionist Movement)

Zionism, as a political and ideological movement, formally began in the late 19th century, driven primarily by Jewish intellectuals and activists like Theodor Herzl. Herzl, a journalist and political thinker, is often regarded as the father of modern Zionism. His seminal work, *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State), published in 1896, outlined the vision of creating a sovereign Jewish state as a solution to the persistent problem of antisemitism in Europe. Herzl and his supporters believed that Jews, like other national groups, were entitled to self-determination and that establishing a state in their ancestral homeland in Palestine was the only way to guarantee safety, dignity, and autonomy for Jews.

Herzl's ideas gained traction in the context of the widespread antisemitic sentiments and policies prevalent across Europe. Herzl convened the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland, in 1897, which solidified the Zionist movement's goals of establishing a Jewish homeland. While not initially supported by all Jews, the movement grew, especially in Eastern Europe, where antisemitic pogroms were particularly violent.

2. The Context of European Antisemitism and the Desire for a Jewish Homeland

The rise of Zionism cannot be understood without examining the broader context of European antisemitism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Antisemitism in Europe during this period was both systemic and violent. Jews were often viewed as outsiders, accused of being disloyal, manipulative, and responsible for societal problems. Pogroms—violent attacks against Jewish communities—were widespread, particularly in Tsarist Russia, where Jews were subjected to discriminatory laws, forced relocations, and organized massacres.

In Western Europe, Jews faced different, more insidious forms of antisemitism. Despite partial integration into European society, Jews were often accused of dual loyalty or of being part of a conspiratorial elite. The infamous Dreyfus Affair in France (1894-1906), in which a Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus, was

wrongly convicted of treason, shocked European Jews and underscored the limits of assimilation. This event had a profound impact on Herzl, fueling his conviction that the only solution to Jewish persecution was a sovereign Jewish state.

Thus, Zionism emerged as both a nationalist movement and a response to the existential threat posed by European antisemitism. It sought to reclaim Jewish identity, not as a passive, persecuted minority but as an assertive and autonomous national group with a legitimate claim to statehood.

B. Antisemitism Before and After the Holocaust

1. Traditional Antisemitism in Europe: Religious, Racial, and Political Dimensions

Antisemitism in Europe has ancient roots, often tied to religious and cultural conflicts. During the medieval period, Jews were frequently scapegoated for societal ills and accused of deicide (the killing of Jesus Christ). This religious antisemitism led to systematic discrimination, expulsions, and violence against Jewish communities.

By the late 19th century, antisemitism took on new forms, influenced by the rise of racial and pseudoscientific theories. The belief in racial hierarchies, spurred by social Darwinism, redefined Jewish identity as a racial category. Jews were no longer seen simply as a religious group but as an inferior race that could not assimilate into European society. This racial antisemitism laid the ideological groundwork for the Holocaust. Political antisemitism also flourished, particularly in Eastern Europe, where nationalist movements often blamed Jews for economic and political instability.

2. The Post-Holocaust Shift in Global Perceptions of Jews and Antisemitism

The Holocaust, in which six million Jews were systematically murdered by Nazi Germany, marked a turning point in the history of antisemitism. The sheer scale and horror of the genocide shocked the world and led to a profound re-examination of antisemitic ideas and practices. In the post-Holocaust period, antisemitism was universally condemned, and there was a renewed commitment to protecting Jewish communities from further persecution.

In this context, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was seen by many as a necessary and just response to the Holocaust, providing a safe haven for Jews in a world where antisemitism had proven deadly. However, as Israel's existence became entangled in regional conflicts, particularly with its Arab neighbors, new forms of antisemitism emerged, often blending with political critiques of Israel.

The post-Holocaust era also saw a shift in the global Jewish diaspora's attitude toward Zionism. Before World War II, Zionism was not universally embraced by Jews, particularly in Western Europe and the United States. After the war, however, support for Israel grew, as the Jewish state became both a symbol of Jewish survival and a political necessity in the eyes of many.

C. Early Forms of Anti-Zionism

1. Arab and Islamic Opposition to Zionism (Both Religious and Geopolitical)

Arab and Islamic opposition to Zionism predates the establishment of Israel and is rooted in both religious and geopolitical concerns. As early as the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which Britain expressed support for a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, Arab leaders voiced strong objections. They argued that Zionism would lead to the displacement of the indigenous Arab population and was a form of European colonialism.

After the creation of Israel in 1948, Arab states and Palestinian leaders rejected the legitimacy of a Jewish state in the region, leading to multiple wars between Israel and its neighbors. For many Arab and Islamic leaders, opposition to Zionism was framed as a defense of Palestinian rights and sovereignty. They viewed Zionism as an extension of Western imperialism and an existential threat to Arab nationalism. This geopolitical opposition was reinforced by the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, an event known as the Nakba ("Catastrophe") in Arab discourse.

In the broader Islamic context, some religious scholars argued that Zionism violated the sanctity of Muslim lands, as Palestine was home to significant Islamic holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. This religious dimension intertwined with geopolitical opposition, fueling anti-Zionism across the Muslim world, which persists today.

2. **Marxist and Socialist Critiques of Zionism (as Nationalism)**

In the early to mid-20th century, anti-Zionism also found a strong footing among Marxist and socialist movements, both within Jewish communities and in the broader international left. Marxists and socialists typically opposed all forms of nationalism, viewing it as a divisive force that prevented the global working class from uniting against capitalist oppression. From this perspective, Zionism was seen as a nationalist ideology that privileged the interests of one ethnic group (Jews) at the expense of another (Palestinians), perpetuating imperialism and colonialism.

Many leftist critiques of Zionism focused on the idea that the movement created a bourgeois Jewish state that replicated the structures of capitalist society, rather than contributing to international socialism. The Soviet Union, which initially supported Israel's creation in 1948, later turned against Zionism during the Cold War, aligning itself with Arab socialist regimes. By the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union and its allies were vocal critics of Zionism, framing it as an agent of Western imperialism and capitalist exploitation in the Middle East. This critique influenced leftist and anti-imperialist movements across the globe.

3. **Jewish Opposition to Zionism (Religious and Assimilationist Reasons)**

Not all Jews supported Zionism in its early years, and various Jewish communities expressed opposition to the movement for both religious and ideological reasons.

- **Religious Opposition:** Some ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups rejected Zionism on theological grounds, believing that only the arrival of the Messiah could lead to the re-establishment of a Jewish state in the Holy Land. For these groups, Zionism was seen as a secular and even heretical movement that violated God's will. The Neturei Karta, a small but vocal anti-Zionist Jewish sect, remains an example of this religious opposition to the Zionist project.
- **Assimilationist Opposition:** In Western Europe and the United States, many Jews opposed Zionism because they believed in assimilation into their respective societies. They argued that Jews were not a separate nation but a religious group that could fully

integrate into the nations where they resided. These assimilationist Jews feared that Zionism would undermine their status as loyal citizens of their countries and exacerbate antisemitism by reinforcing the perception that Jews were a distinct, national group with divided loyalties.

In the early 20th century, prominent Jewish intellectuals and organizations, such as the American Jewish Committee, opposed Zionism for these reasons. They feared that the creation of a Jewish state would lead to accusations that Jews were more loyal to Israel than to the countries in which they lived, thereby worsening antisemitism.

Summary of Historical Background

This section highlights the diverse and complex origins of both Zionism and anti-Zionism, as well as the shifting nature of antisemitism before and after the Holocaust. Zionism developed as a nationalist response to widespread European antisemitism, seeking to provide Jews with safety and sovereignty through the establishment of a Jewish state. At the same time, various groups—both Jewish and non-Jewish—opposed Zionism for a variety of reasons, including geopolitical, religious, and ideological concerns. This historical context provides a foundation for understanding the modern claim that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism," as well as the nuanced and sometimes contentious debate over the relationship between these two concepts.

III. The Rise of the Idea: Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism

A. Post-1948: After the Creation of Israel

1. Changing Political Landscape After the Establishment of Israel

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a seismic shift in Jewish history and global geopolitics. For many Jews, Israel represented the fulfillment of Zionism's dream: a sovereign state where Jews could live in safety and self-determination, particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust. However, the creation of Israel also sparked long-standing tensions with the Arab world. The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, which followed Israel's declaration of independence, ended with significant territorial gains

for Israel, but it also resulted in the mass displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. This displacement created an enduring conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and the question of Palestinian rights became central to critiques of Israel.

In this period, critiques of Israel primarily focused on its policies and the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict, rather than on Jewish identity or Zionism itself. Arab states and Palestinian leaders opposed Israel's existence on the grounds that it was built on the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs. This form of anti-Zionism was framed in terms of national self-determination for the Palestinians, rather than as antisemitism directed toward Jews. Many Western governments, including the United States and much of Europe, supported Israel's right to exist, viewing the new state as a democratic ally in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes.

2. Early Critiques of Israeli Policies and How They Were Distinct from Antisemitism

In the 1950s and early 1960s, international critiques of Israeli policies were generally focused on specific geopolitical issues, such as Israel's military actions, its treatment of Palestinians, and its relationship with neighboring Arab states. These critiques, though often harsh, were not generally framed as antisemitic. They were seen as part of legitimate political discourse, especially regarding Israel's strategic decisions in conflicts with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon.

At this stage, most international critics distinguished between opposing specific Israeli policies and antisemitism. For example, anti-Zionist rhetoric from Arab leaders primarily centered on opposition to the state of Israel, rather than on Jews as a people. However, certain Arab propaganda, particularly during times of conflict, began to incorporate antisemitic themes, portraying Jews as a conspiratorial force. Nonetheless, the prevailing global discourse still treated anti-Zionism and antisemitism as largely separate.

B. The 1967 Six-Day War and its Aftermath

1. Israel's Military Success and Territorial Expansion

The 1967 Six-Day War was a transformative event in both Israeli and Middle Eastern history. Israel's stunning military victory against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria led to its occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem,

Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights. This territorial expansion fundamentally altered the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Palestinians and Arab nations, the occupation of these territories was seen as further evidence of Zionist expansionism and a deepening injustice toward the Palestinian people.

For Israel, the victory was seen as a critical defense against hostile neighbors and a means of securing its borders. However, the international community began to divide in its views of Israel's actions. While Israel's allies, particularly the United States, continued to support the country's right to defend itself, much of the global left and various non-aligned nations saw Israel's occupation as imperialistic and oppressive. The issue of Palestinian self-determination became central to the discourse, and opposition to Israeli policies became more pronounced, especially among leftist intellectuals and anti-colonial movements.

2. Global Shifts in Attitudes Toward Israel (Rise of Anti-Zionism in Leftist and Anti-Imperialist Circles)

Following the Six-Day War, anti-Zionism gained momentum in global leftist and anti-imperialist circles. Israel, once viewed by some on the left as a symbol of a people overcoming oppression, increasingly became seen as an occupier and a symbol of Western imperialism. This shift was particularly pronounced in the context of the Cold War, where the Soviet Union and its allies began to frame Zionism as part of a broader Western, capitalist project. Anti-Zionism became linked to anti-imperialist rhetoric, especially as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) emerged as the political face of the Palestinian resistance.

Anti-Zionism in these circles often criticized Israel's military occupation of Palestinian territories and its treatment of Palestinian refugees. However, this opposition to Zionism sometimes adopted antisemitic overtones, particularly in the use of old stereotypes about Jewish control and power. Conspiracy theories that portrayed Israel as the puppet master of Western governments or part of a global Jewish elite gained traction in some leftist circles, further blurring the lines between anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

3. The Intertwining of Anti-Zionism with Antisemitic Tropes

As anti-Zionist rhetoric intensified in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, it

began to intersect more frequently with traditional antisemitic tropes. Some critics of Zionism used age-old stereotypes about Jews, depicting them as greedy, manipulative, or secretly controlling global institutions. Zionism was sometimes portrayed as part of a broader Jewish plot for global domination, evoking the infamous *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* conspiracy theory.

In the Middle East, Arab propaganda often incorporated both anti-Zionist and antisemitic themes, portraying Israel as a malevolent force not just against Palestinians but against the entire Muslim world. In the West, some leftist and anti-imperialist movements adopted similarly charged rhetoric, framing Zionism as the vanguard of Western imperialism while sometimes employing antisemitic imagery.

C. The 1975 UN Resolution and the Growing Link

1. UN Resolution 3379: "Zionism is a Form of Racism"

In 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 3379, which declared that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." The resolution was backed by a coalition of Arab, Soviet, and non-aligned nations, and it marked a significant moment in the international discourse on Zionism and antisemitism. By equating Zionism with racism, the resolution suggested that Israel's very existence as a Jewish state was inherently discriminatory.

The resolution was deeply controversial, particularly in the West. Israel and its allies, including the United States, vehemently rejected the resolution, arguing that it delegitimized Israel's right to exist and distorted the nature of Zionism as a national liberation movement. For many, the resolution signaled the institutionalization of anti-Zionism on the global stage and reinforced the growing perception that anti-Zionism and antisemitism were becoming intertwined.

2. How This Resolution Influenced Discourse in Both the West and the Middle East

UN Resolution 3379 had far-reaching effects on both Western and Middle Eastern discourse. In the Arab world, the resolution provided additional legitimacy to longstanding anti-Zionist rhetoric, framing Israel's existence as a form of racial oppression akin to apartheid in South Africa. This further

solidified Arab states' opposition to Israel and deepened the divide between Israel and its neighbors.

In the West, particularly in the United States and Europe, the resolution provoked a backlash. Many Jewish organizations, along with Israel's political allies, argued that equating Zionism with racism was itself a form of antisemitism, as it denied the Jewish people's right to self-determination. This moment helped crystallize the argument that anti-Zionism was not merely opposition to Israeli policies but a form of antisemitic rhetoric that sought to undermine Jewish identity and nationhood.

3. Repeal of the Resolution in 1991 and Its Lasting Effects

In 1991, after the end of the Cold War and with changing geopolitical dynamics, the United Nations General Assembly voted to repeal Resolution 3379. The repeal was largely symbolic, signaling a shift in international attitudes toward Israel and Zionism, particularly as Israel engaged in peace talks with its Arab neighbors during the Madrid Conference.

Despite the repeal, the legacy of the 1975 resolution continues to influence the discourse on Zionism and antisemitism. The equation of Zionism with racism remains a central tenet of many anti-Zionist movements, particularly in parts of the Arab world and among certain leftist groups. On the other hand, the argument that anti-Zionism is inherently antisemitic has gained traction in Jewish and pro-Israel circles, as well as in some Western governments, further embedding this link into global political debates.

IV. Institutionalization of the Idea

A. The 21st Century Shift

1. The Impact of the Second Intifada and Growing Tensions Over Israel's Policies

The 21st century began with a significant escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the Second Intifada (2000-2005). This Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation was marked by intense violence, including suicide bombings, military operations, and civilian casualties on both sides. The Second Intifada reignited global debate over Israel's

policies, particularly regarding the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

During this period, anti-Zionism gained renewed prominence as a critique of Israel's military actions and its broader treatment of Palestinians. However, the violence and charged rhetoric of the conflict led to accusations that some of this criticism veered into antisemitism. Supporters of Israel argued that opposition to its right to exist or its portrayal as uniquely evil among nations often crossed the line into discriminatory attitudes toward Jews as a group. This period saw a gradual blending of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, particularly when criticism of Israeli policies became generalized attacks on Jews or employed antisemitic tropes, such as conspiracies of Jewish control over politics and media.

2. Rise of the BDS Movement and the Debate on Its Potential Antisemitism

One of the most visible manifestations of anti-Zionism in the 21st century has been the rise of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Founded in 2005, BDS calls for economic, academic, and cultural boycotts of Israel in protest of its policies toward Palestinians. The movement frames its goals as supporting Palestinian human rights and ending Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. However, BDS has been at the center of controversy, with supporters of Israel accusing the movement of being antisemitic.

Critics of BDS argue that its focus on delegitimizing Israel as a state, rather than just its policies, crosses the line into antisemitism. They claim that the movement seeks not to reform Israel's actions but to undermine its very existence as a Jewish state. The movement's supporters counter that BDS is a legitimate form of political protest against a state's policies and occupation, not against Jewish people or Judaism. This debate has contributed to the growing use of the phrase "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" in political and academic circles, as pro-Israel advocates assert that BDS and similar movements often fail to differentiate between opposition to Israeli policies and hostility toward Jews.

3. Increasing Use of "Anti-Zionism is Antisemitism" in Political and Academic Circles

Throughout the 21st century, the argument that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" has become increasingly prevalent in political discourse,

particularly in Western countries. Proponents of this view argue that while criticism of specific Israeli policies is valid, denying Israel's right to exist or singling out Israel for disproportionate criticism compared to other nations amounts to antisemitism. This framing has gained traction, particularly in response to the rise of the BDS movement, academic debates on Israel, and incidents where anti-Zionist rhetoric has overlapped with traditional antisemitic imagery or stereotypes.

In academic settings, the claim that anti-Zionism is antisemitism has been the subject of heated debates. Some academics argue that this conflation stifles legitimate criticism of Israel's policies, particularly in discussions about human rights and international law. Others, especially in Jewish and pro-Israel circles, maintain that the rise of anti-Zionist sentiment often leads to a hostile environment for Jewish students and scholars, making the claim of antisemitism necessary to address these concerns.

B. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Definition

1. The IHRA's Working Definition of Antisemitism and Its Inclusion of Criticism of Israel

One of the most significant developments in the institutionalization of the idea that anti-Zionism is antisemitism was the adoption of the *working definition of antisemitism* by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016. The IHRA definition includes a range of examples of antisemitism, including criticism of Israel that denies the Jewish people's right to self-determination or applies double standards to Israel that are not applied to other nations.

The inclusion of such examples in the IHRA definition was seen as a major step toward linking anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Supporters of the IHRA definition argue that it provides a comprehensive framework for identifying antisemitism, particularly in cases where criticism of Israel is used as a cover for hostility toward Jews. By recognizing that some forms of anti-Zionism can cross into antisemitism, the IHRA definition aims to protect Jewish communities from discrimination while acknowledging that legitimate criticism of Israel's policies is acceptable.

2. Controversy Over Whether This Conflates Legitimate Criticism of Israel with Antisemitism

The IHRA definition has been controversial, with critics arguing that it conflates legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, thereby suppressing free speech and political activism. They claim that the definition's examples related to Israel are too broad and can be used to silence dissent, particularly among activists and scholars who advocate for Palestinian rights. Critics also point out that the definition is being used to label opponents of Zionism as antisemites, even when their opposition is based on political or ethical considerations rather than hatred of Jews.

The debate over the IHRA definition highlights the broader challenge of balancing the need to combat antisemitism with the right to criticize states and governments, including Israel. The controversy continues to play out in legal, academic, and political arenas, where different groups grapple with how to define the boundaries between free speech, political critique, and hate speech.

C. Political Endorsements of the Concept

1. The Role of Western Governments (U.S., U.K., etc.) in Adopting the IHRA Definition

Several Western governments, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, have officially adopted the IHRA's working definition of antisemitism. These governments have embraced the definition as part of their efforts to combat rising antisemitism, particularly in the context of increased anti-Zionist rhetoric. By adopting the IHRA definition, these governments aim to ensure that antisemitism is comprehensively addressed, including instances where criticism of Israel veers into delegitimization of the Jewish state or the use of antisemitic tropes.

The adoption of the IHRA definition by Western governments has also had practical implications for how public institutions, including universities and political organizations, handle allegations of antisemitism. In some cases, this has led to the introduction of guidelines or policies that explicitly define certain forms of anti-Zionist rhetoric as antisemitic. This has sparked controversy, particularly in

academic settings, where some see it as an infringement on free speech and academic freedom.

2. Legal and Policy Implications for Free Speech and Criticism of Israel

The institutionalization of the idea that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" has significant legal and policy implications, especially regarding free speech. Critics of the IHRA definition and similar frameworks argue that they can be used to stifle political debate on Israel and Palestine, particularly in cases where individuals or organizations are accused of antisemitism for criticizing Israeli policies. This has raised concerns about the chilling effect such definitions may have on activism and discourse, particularly within progressive and academic circles.

On the other hand, proponents argue that these definitions and policies are necessary to protect Jewish communities from antisemitic abuse, especially given the rising number of antisemitic incidents globally. They emphasize that distinguishing between legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and antisemitic rhetoric is essential for maintaining open and fair discourse while combating discrimination. Legal battles in various countries have ensued over the application of these policies, reflecting the ongoing tension between free speech and the fight against hate speech.

V. Criticisms and Counterarguments

A. Distinguishing Anti-Zionism from Antisemitism

1. Arguments That Anti-Zionism is Political, Not Racial or Religious

One of the central arguments against the claim that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" is that anti-Zionism, at its core, is a political stance rather than a form of racial or religious bigotry. Critics argue that opposing Zionism or the policies of the Israeli government does not equate to hostility toward Jews as a people or a religious group. They contend that Zionism is a nationalist ideology, and like any political ideology, it is open to legitimate critique and opposition. Just as one can criticize nationalism in other countries (such as American or French nationalism), critics maintain

that it is possible to oppose Jewish nationalism (Zionism) without harboring antisemitic sentiments.

These critics argue that anti-Zionism can stem from a variety of political or ethical beliefs, such as opposition to nationalism in general, concerns about human rights violations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or a commitment to Palestinian self-determination. For them, anti-Zionism is primarily a political critique of the State of Israel's actions and policies, particularly regarding its treatment of Palestinians and the occupation of Palestinian territories.

2. **Historical Precedents of Anti-Zionism from Jewish Groups**

Historically, not all Jews have supported Zionism. In fact, several Jewish groups, both religious and secular, opposed the Zionist movement when it first emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These groups provide a key precedent for distinguishing anti-Zionism from antisemitism.

- **Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Opposition:** Groups such as Neturei Karta, a faction of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, have opposed Zionism on theological grounds, arguing that the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel is a violation of Jewish law, which holds that only the Messiah can lead the Jews back to the Holy Land. Neturei Karta and similar groups maintain their opposition to Zionism even today, viewing it as a secular, political movement that goes against God's will.
- **Jewish Socialist and Assimilationist Movements:** In the early 20th century, many Jewish socialist and Marxist movements rejected Zionism because they viewed it as a bourgeois, nationalist project that distracted from the global struggle for workers' rights. These Jewish movements believed in internationalism and integration, rather than the establishment of a separate Jewish state. Assimilationist Jews, particularly in Western Europe and the United States, also opposed Zionism because they saw it as unnecessary, believing Jews could fully integrate into the societies in which they lived.

These historical examples demonstrate that anti-Zionism has existed within Jewish communities for reasons unrelated to antisemitism, providing a counterargument to the claim that all anti-Zionism is inherently antisemitic.

B. Accusations of Silencing Criticism

1. How Critics Argue That Labeling Anti-Zionism as Antisemitism is Used to Shut Down Debate on Israeli Policies

One of the primary criticisms of the claim that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" is that it can be used as a tool to silence legitimate criticism of Israeli policies. Critics argue that this conflation delegitimizes political discourse on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, branding individuals who oppose Israeli government actions as bigots rather than engaging with their political arguments. This concern is particularly pronounced in the context of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, which calls for economic and cultural boycotts of Israel to protest its treatment of Palestinians. BDS supporters argue that labeling their movement as antisemitic undermines their right to protest and advocate for human rights.

This critique extends to discussions on university campuses and in activist circles, where critics of Israeli policies often face accusations of antisemitism. In these settings, opponents argue that equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism creates a chilling effect on free speech, making students and scholars hesitant to express their views for fear of being labeled antisemitic. They also contend that this conflation shifts the focus away from Israel's policies and human rights record and instead frames the debate in terms of identity politics, stifling meaningful discussion.

2. Implications for Free Speech, Especially in Academic and Activist Settings

The implications of labeling anti-Zionism as antisemitism for free speech have been particularly contentious in academic and activist settings. University campuses, often seen as hubs for political discourse, have become flashpoints in this debate. Pro-Israel groups sometimes argue that anti-Zionist activism creates a hostile environment for Jewish students, while Palestinian rights advocates claim that accusations of antisemitism

are used to prevent them from voicing legitimate criticisms of Israeli policies.

This tension has led to widespread debates about the boundaries of free speech, with some arguing that suppressing anti-Zionist viewpoints infringes on the right to protest and engage in political advocacy. Legal cases in the United States and Europe have emerged around this issue, as universities and governments grapple with how to balance free speech with the need to combat antisemitism. In some cases, policies designed to combat antisemitism, such as the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, have been seen as attempts to stifle debate on Israel and Palestine.

C. The Palestinian Question

1. The Centrality of Palestinian Rights and Opposition to Israeli Occupation in the Anti-Zionist Discourse

For many anti-Zionists, the question of Palestinian rights and opposition to Israeli occupation is at the heart of their critique. They argue that Zionism, as a nationalist project, resulted in the displacement and disenfranchisement of Palestinians and continues to sustain a system of occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. From this perspective, opposing Zionism is not about opposing Jews or Jewish identity, but about opposing a political system that denies Palestinians their right to self-determination.

Palestinian rights advocates argue that anti-Zionism is a legitimate political stance that seeks to address the ongoing injustices faced by Palestinians. They contend that Zionism, as a political movement, cannot be separated from the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that to oppose Zionism is to oppose the occupation, settlement expansion, and military control over Palestinian territories. For these critics, equating anti-Zionism with antisemitism erases the political and ethical motivations behind their opposition to Israeli policies.

2. Whether Equating Anti-Zionism with Antisemitism Erases Palestinian Narratives

Another key criticism of the "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" argument is that it risks erasing Palestinian narratives and silencing Palestinian voices. Palestinian rights advocates argue that by framing anti-Zionism as

antisemitic, the lived experiences and political struggles of Palestinians are marginalized or delegitimized. They contend that Palestinians have the right to oppose Zionism because it has directly affected their lives through displacement, occupation, and the denial of statehood.

Critics argue that this conflation reduces the complex political realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a binary choice between supporting or opposing Israel's right to exist, without acknowledging the nuanced perspectives of those who are critical of Zionism. By labeling all anti-Zionism as antisemitism, they argue, the legitimate grievances of Palestinians and their supporters are dismissed, and the broader debate over human rights, justice, and international law is sidelined.

This criticism underscores a broader concern about how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is framed in international discourse. For many Palestinians and their allies, the struggle is not about opposition to Jewish identity but about resistance to political and military occupation. They argue that the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism serves to silence their demands for justice and human rights, shifting the focus away from the realities of occupation and toward debates over identity and ideology.

VI. Conclusion: The Evolving Nature of the Concept

A. Summary of Key Points

The argument that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" has evolved significantly over the past century, emerging from the political landscape of Zionism's development and Israel's establishment as a state. Initially, anti-Zionism and antisemitism were considered distinct concepts. Anti-Zionism was understood as opposition to a political ideology advocating for a Jewish homeland, while antisemitism was hostility or prejudice directed at Jews based on their ethnicity or religion. Over time, particularly following Israel's creation in 1948, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict intensified, and critiques of Israel's policies began to merge with broader opposition to the Zionist project itself.

The Six-Day War of 1967 and Israel's subsequent territorial expansion marked a turning point, with Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories becoming central

to the discourse on anti-Zionism. Leftist and anti-imperialist movements increasingly viewed Israel as a colonial power, and this criticism began to overlap with antisemitic tropes, complicating the distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism. The 1975 UN Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism, further cemented the association between anti-Zionism and broader critiques of Jewish nationalism, although the resolution was later repealed in 1991.

In the 21st century, this argument has become more institutionalized, particularly with the adoption of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism, which includes some forms of anti-Zionist rhetoric as antisemitic. This institutionalization reflects a relatively recent development in global discourse, particularly in Western governments and academic circles, where accusations of antisemitism are frequently levied against critics of Israel's policies. The historical trajectory shows how this idea has gained prominence, but also how it remains deeply contested.

B. Implications for the Future

The framing of anti-Zionism as antisemitism carries significant implications for political discourse, academic freedom, and international relations. On the one hand, the adoption of this framing by governments, universities, and international organizations has been seen as a way to combat rising antisemitism, especially in the context of violent attacks and online hate speech directed toward Jewish communities. By recognizing that some forms of anti-Zionism veer into antisemitism, proponents argue that this framing protects Jewish people from discrimination while allowing for legitimate critique of Israeli policies.

On the other hand, this framing has sparked considerable controversy, particularly among activists, academics, and human rights organizations. Critics argue that conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism risks stifling political debate and undermining academic freedom, particularly regarding discussions about Palestinian rights and Israeli policies. The ongoing challenge for future discourse lies in striking a balance between combating antisemitism and ensuring that critics of Israel's policies have the right to express their views without being labeled antisemitic. This balance is essential for maintaining open and constructive dialogue, especially in academic and activist settings, where nuanced debates about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are critical.

In international relations, this framing can also impact diplomatic efforts, as it complicates negotiations and alliances between countries that take differing stances on Israel's policies. For example, the increasing use of the IHRA definition by Western governments may limit their ability to engage with countries or organizations that advocate for Palestinian rights through anti-Zionist frameworks. Additionally, as global movements like BDS gain traction, the debate over whether they are antisemitic or legitimate forms of protest will continue to shape international relations and influence how countries approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

C. Final Reflections

The relationship between Jewish identity, Zionism, and modern antisemitism is complex and multifaceted. The emergence of the argument that "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" reflects this complexity, as it touches on deep historical, political, and social questions about the nature of Jewish self-determination, the rights of Palestinians, and the role of nationalism in global politics. While some forms of anti-Zionism clearly cross into antisemitic territory by invoking harmful stereotypes or denying the legitimacy of Jewish nationhood, it is equally important to recognize that many critiques of Zionism and Israeli policies are rooted in political and ethical concerns rather than hatred of Jews.

As this debate evolves, it is critical to foster a more nuanced discourse that carefully separates legitimate political critique from harmful prejudice. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most contentious and emotionally charged issues in global politics, and the stakes are high for both Jewish and Palestinian communities. Simplifying the discourse by conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism risks alienating individuals and groups who seek justice and peace in the region through political activism. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that discussions about Zionism, Israel, and antisemitism remain open, informed, and respectful, allowing for diverse viewpoints while being vigilant against genuine antisemitic rhetoric.

The ongoing challenge is to create spaces where criticism of Israel's policies can be voiced without fear of reprisal, while also addressing the very real threat of antisemitism in its various forms. By fostering dialogue that acknowledges both the historical roots of Zionism and the legitimate grievances of Palestinians, we

can hope to move toward a more just and peaceful resolution to one of the world's most enduring conflicts.

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This reference section provides a comprehensive list of key works and documents relevant to the exploration of the "anti-Zionism is antisemitism" debate, covering historical, political, legal, and academic perspectives.

