

# Recognizing when Anti-Israel Actions Become Antisemitic

## A GUIDE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Often, hostility toward Jews is easy to recognize. We know calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology is antisemitism. When Hamas, a U.S. and EU designated terrorist organization, calls for the killing of Jews, it is antisemitism. When Jews are attacked on American streets, it is antisemitism.

Sometimes antisemitism is not easy to recognize—especially when it involves Israel, when it’s spoken softly, when it’s peddled by celebrities, influencers, and those we trust.

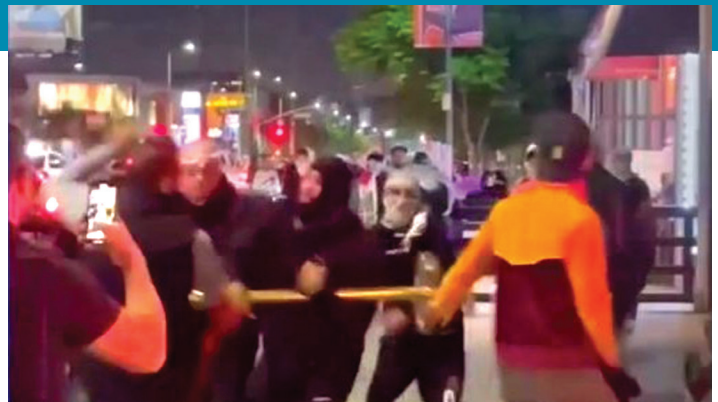
Political protests are an essential part of our democracy, and criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country is perfectly acceptable. But when Jews are targeted and attacked and Jewish institutions are vandalized for Israeli policies and actions, it is unacceptable. It is antisemitism.

During and following the Hamas-incited flare-up in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in May 2021, antisemitic incidents surged in the United States and around the world. The following examples—all taken from May 2021—show when anti-Israel statements and actions can become antisemitic. They all evoke antisemitic themes that must be recognized and condemned.

### ARE YOU JEWISH?:

#### *Holding Jews Accountable for Israeli Actions*

On May 18, 2021, in Los Angeles, a mob in Hamas-inspired garb asked patrons at a sushi restaurant, “Are you Jewish?” before launching a violent attack. They chanted: “Death to Jews” and “Free Palestine.” Holding Jews worldwide accountable for the actions of the State of Israel is antisemitic.



### GO BACK TO ISRAEL:

#### *Dual Loyalty*

On May 20, 2021 in New York, a man wearing a yarmulke was punched, kicked, and sprayed with pepper spray by several men who yelled: “Dirty Jew. Filthy Jew. F\*ck Israel. Hamas is going to kill you. Go back to Israel.” Telling an American Jew to “go back to Israel” is a form of [dual loyalty](#), accusing a Jewish person of being a disloyal citizen whose true allegiance is to Israel.

## EVOKING THE BLOOD LIBEL:

*Israelis kill babies, and sometimes eat them.*

The [Blood Libel](#) accuses Jews of murdering non-Jewish children to use their blood for ritual purposes, such as making Passover matzah. Blood libel charges have evolved from Medieval times into a widespread blame of Jews or Israelis for horrific crimes against Palestinian children, such as eating Palestinian children and drinking their blood, or purposefully targeting and killing them.



At a protest in Los Angeles, CA on May 15, 2021, protestors held a sign [brandishing Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu with a Hitler moustache eating a Palestinian child](#) that is beyond offensive. The antisemitism conveyed in this image is centuries in the making.



At a protest in Miami, FL on May 16, 2021, a sign says [“Jesus was Palestinian and you killed him too!”](#) The [Deicide](#) charge was also seen on signs and on social media.

## RELITIGATING DEICIDE:

*Jesus was Palestinian and Jews killed him too.*

While blaming Jews for Jesus’ death has been refuted by the Catholic Church, antisemites continue to make this charge to justify their anti-Jewish hatred. The same wrongful accusation and imagery connected with Jews as Christ killers has been recycled in the Middle East, often in the form of Jesus representing Palestinians who are “crucified” by the Israeli Defense Forces or the Israeli Government.

## LOOK AT THE MAP:

*“From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free”*

[“From the River to the Sea”](#) is a catch-all phrase that symbolizes Palestinian control over the entirety of Israel’s borders, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. This saying seeks to eliminate the State of Israel and is a historic call-to-arms for terrorist groups and their sympathizers, from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) to Hamas.

RIGHT: In San Francisco, CA on May 18, 2021, a sign says: *“From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free!”*



## ZIONISM IS RACISM:

*Self-determination is a right for all people, except the Jews.*

Zionism is the national liberation of the Jewish people to reestablish a state in their ancient homeland. Jews around the world are connected to Israel whether culturally, religiously, or historically. There is nothing inherent to Zionism that contradicts support for Palestinian self-determination; indeed, many individuals who identify as Zionists support Palestinian aspirations to achieve statehood.

LEFT: Sign at a protest in Dearborn, MI on May 18, 2021, reads, *“It wasn’t ok in Nazi Germany, why is it ok in Palestine?”*

Those who say [“Zionism is racism,”](#) a phrase which itself is a racist and religious distortion, convey that the Jewish people—unlike all other people in the world—do not have a right to self-determination. The phrase also denigrates the Jewish State and belittles the diversity of Jewish life in Israel.

Rejecting Israel’s right to exist is textbook antisemitism and is regarded as such by 85% of American Jews, according to [AJC’s 2020 State of Antisemitism in America](#) report.

## HOLDING ISRAEL TO A DIFFERENT STANDARD:

*The Jewish state is... Different.*

Expecting Israel to refrain from defending itself against terrorist attacks is a double standard that would not be expected of any other democratic country.

The Israeli Defense Forces selectively strikes military targets focused on Hamas weapons caches, military command centers, and terror tunnels. It takes extreme precautions to avoid civilian casualties, including dropping leaflets, sending SMS messages, and making phone calls to evacuate targeted sites. Nonetheless, Israel is disproportionately criticized, and Hamas is often left out of the picture or is seen as “the underdog.”

We can, and must, decry the loss of life in Gaza, but solely blaming Israel (omitting the fact that Hamas instigated, used human shields, and that its rockets also killed Palestinians) is a double standard.



On May 11, 2021 on the Daily Show, host Trevor Noah spoke about Israel’s military might, comparing Israel to himself, as a big brother, fighting with his younger brother: “As a person who has immensely more power, I had to ask myself whether my response to this child was just or necessary,” he said. “Could I find different ways to deal with this?” Noah is suggesting that because Israel “has more power,” it should not respond as forcefully when a terrorist organization—which is on record saying its primary goal is the destruction of Israel—is bombarding it with rockets.



ABOVE: White supremacists in Boca Raton, FL on May 12, 2021, drove a van saying “Holocaust never happened” and “Hitler was right” while waving a Palestinian flag, to provoke Jews who were peacefully demonstrating in support of Israel.

BELOW: A sign at a rally in Seattle, WA on May 16, 2021 shows Adolf Hitler side-by-side Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying “Zionism=Nazism.”



## HOLOCAUST DENIAL OR DISTORTION:

*Comparing Israeli leaders to Hitler or the conflict with Palestinians to the Holocaust*

Equating Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to Hitler is a graphic and offensive form of [Holocaust distortion](#). The Nazis attempted to annihilate all of Europe’s Jews. This is not what is happening between Israel and the Palestinians, and saying it is, is a false and slanderous attack on Jews, Jewish memory, and Jewish identity. One can disagree with Israeli policy, but saying Israel is perpetrating a “second Holocaust” against the Palestinians is not only factually wrong, it is antisemitic.

Those who say the Holocaust did not happen or deny the scope, mechanisms used (e.g., gas chambers), or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people, to provoke Jews and/or use the false claim as an argument for why Israel should not exist, are peddling in antisemitism.

# The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

- Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
- Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
- Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
- Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).  
(See [Holocaust Denial or Distortion](#) examples)
- Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
- Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.  
(See [Go Back to Israel](#) example)
- 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.  
(See [Look at the Map](#) and [Zionism is Racism](#) examples)
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.  
(See [Holding Israel to a Different Standard](#) example)
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.  
(See [Blood Libel and Deicide](#) examples)
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.  
(See [Holocaust Denial or Distortion](#) examples)
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.  
(See [Are You Jewish?](#) example)

## What You Can Do:

- 1 Speak out** loudly and clearly against all forms of antisemitism, including antisemitism as it can relate to Israel. Issue a statement or resolution condemning antisemitism and affirming that anti-Jewish bias has no place in your community.
- 2 Raise awareness** of the multi-faceted nature of antisemitism by endorsing and utilizing the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism which covers all forms of antisemitism, including all the examples listed in this resource. Antisemitism does not only come from far-right, white supremacist sources. While far-right, white supremacist sources still constitute the majority of reported incidents, the United States has increasingly experienced antisemitism coming from other sources, including religious extremism, such as Jersey City, NJ in 2019, and the anti-Israel antisemitism seen in May 2021 as Jews were attacked and harassed from Los Angeles to New York City. More information about the IHRA Working Definition can be found [here](#).

Raise awareness that antisemitism is not just a Jewish problem, but a problem for all Americans and is an assault on the core values of pluralism and democracy.

- 3 Invest in Jewish community security.** Given the increased threats toward the Jewish community, support funding and resources for community security needs.
- 4 Empower law enforcement, educators, and civic leaders in your community.** How is law enforcement in your community trained to recognize antisemitism? Are they reporting antisemitic hate crimes to the FBI? How do they track their data? Use the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism as a resource to help identify antisemitism for police, teachers, and other civic leaders. Closing gaps in data collection and reporting will allow the root causes of the problem to be addressed.
- 5 Encourage media literacy.** Check sources and question bias in the media, and especially online and on social media. The most recent attacks against Jews in America had their origins on social media, especially TikTok and Instagram. Posts and videos demonizing Israel were re-shared and viewed hundreds of thousands of times and we witnessed real life consequences as people went out and attacked Jews. Use and share [Translate Hate](#), a digital glossary of antisemitic terms and tropes, and link this resource to your city's or office's website.