

Anti-Zionism Is NOT Anti-Semitism, And NEVER Was

by Allan C. Brownfeld

For many years there has been a concerted effort to redefine the meaning of the term "anti-Semitism," which traditionally has referred to hatred of Jews and Judaism, to mean criticism of Israel and opposition to Zionism. This campaign has as its goal the silencing of those who are critical of Israel's 50-year occupation of Palestinian territories and are engaged in activities such as support for the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement.

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The fact that large numbers of Jews are, and have always been, critics of Zionism, and are deeply involved in the BDS movement, through groups such as Jewish Voice for Peace, does not give pause to those engaged in this enterprise.

The Re-Invention of Anti-Semitism

In recent days, this campaign has achieved some notable success. In July, French President Emmanuel Macron condemned anti-Zionism as a form of anti-Semitism at a commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the round-up by French police of more than 13,000 Jews at the Winter Stadium, or Velodrome d'Hiver. The men, women and children were imprisoned there for days in unsanitary conditions and without sufficient water, leading to dozens of fatalities. The Jews were then transported to Nazi death camps in Eastern Europe. The French president declared: "We will never surrender to the expressions of hatred. We will not surrender to anti-Zionism because it is a re-invention of anti-Semitism."

Former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls has consistently called anti-Zionism a form of anti-Semitism, but a French president in office had never made such a statement. Natan Sharansky, board chairman of the Jewish Agency, praised Macron. He declared: "When one of the most important leaders in Europe recognizes that modern anti-Semitism frequently cloaks itself with the veil of anti-Zionism, tearing the mask off the face of radical anti-Zionists, this is a highly significant development. President Macron's remarks serve to further clarify the nature of modern anti-Semitism and facilitate efforts to combat it." At the end of a speech on healthcare on the floor of the U.S. Senate in July, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY), the Democratic minority leader, thanked French President Macron for saying that anti-Zionism was a form of anti-Semitism. He said, "Anti-Semitism is a word that has been used throughout history when Jewish people are judged and measured by one standard and the rest by another. When everyone else was allowed to farm and Jews could not; when anyone else could live in Moscow and Jews could not; when others could become academics or tradesmen and Jews could not. The word to describe all of these acts is anti-Semitism. So it is with anti-Zionism, the idea that all other peoples can seek and defend their right to self-determination but Jews cannot; that other nations have a right to exist, but the Jewish state of Israel does not."

In Schumer's view, a recent manifestation of anti-Jewish bias is the BDS movement. "The global BDS movement is a deeply biased campaign," he declared, "that I would say, in similar words to Mr. Macron, is 'a reinvented form of anti-Semitism' because it seeks to impose boycotts on Israel and not on any other nation."

In June, the European Parliament voted to adopt a resolution calling on member states and their institutions to apply the working definition of anti-Semitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Most of the 28 EU states participate in the Alliance, though only Austria, Romania and the United Kingdom have formally adopted its definition. In addition to defining anti-Semitism as "Rhetorical and physical manifestations...directed toward Jewish individuals...toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities," it adopted the following declaration: "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g. by claiming the existence of the State of Israel is a racist endeavor."

Needless to say, there is much criticism of the effort to define criticism of Israel and Zionism as a new form of anti-Semitism. Prof. Mazim Qumsiyeh of Bethlehem University, a Palestinian, notes that, "Nobody is denying anybody the right of self-determination. Polish or Palestinian or U.S. Jews, Christians, and Muslims have a right of self-determination in their own countries per international law. Self-determination does not include deciding to go to someone else's country, claim it by 'divine power' and kick the natives out (as European Jews did to us, making 7.2 million refugees). The State of Israel and Zionism are factually racist endeavors."

Another element in the EU definition of anti-Semitism is "applying double standards by requiring of it (Israel) a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation." To this, Prof. Qumsiyeh responds: "Will Israeli journalists like Gideon Levy and Amira Hass and Israeli human rights organizations like B'Tselem all be lumped under 'anti-Semites?' After all, their words and fact-filled reports violate most of these Zionist definitions. Will the United Nations, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, and the International Committee of the Red Cross?"

Editorially, the Los Angeles Times rejected the idea that the BDS movement "is a form of anti-Semitism, as some claim...Whether one agrees with the goals of BDS or not, the fact remains that boycotts are a form of speech, a classic tool of political expression. Truly free countries tolerate peaceful dissent. The 50-year occupation of the Palestinian territories seized during the Six Day war has gone on for too long and must eventually be brought to an end."

In July, a pro-Palestinian organization in Scotland had a landmark victory in a United Kingdom court that ruled in favor of its members, who were accused of racism for having participated in a protest against the Israeli occupation three years ago. Glasgow Sherriff's Court announced on July 14 its verdict in favor of two members of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC), which supports Palestinian issues in Britain. The members of SPSC, Mick Napier and Jim Watson, had been facing charges of racism and aggravated trespass for a protest against an Israeli firm in 2014.

The two were arrested in a shopping center when they refused to leave the demonstration that was held against the Israeli company Jericho Cosmetics, which operates in the occupied West Bank and had been involved in Israel's 2014 military offensive against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Napier said they "were accused of being motivated by hatred of Israelis rather than opposition to Israel's repeated massacres, apartheid across the whole of Palestine and genocidal violence in Gaza." The prosecutor claimed that the two were recycling an ancient anti-Semitic "Jewish blood libel" by speaking about Israel's murdering of Palestinians. The SPSC has been under pressure from pro-Israel lobbyists and Scottish prosecutors who have been trying to criminalize their actions in support of Palestinians. Last year, two employees of the pro-Israel Community Security Trust made allegations against SPSC members but that was also thrown out by a court.

Students, staff and faculty at San Francisco State University (SFSU) are now under investigation by the University on charges of "anti-Semitism" brought by Hillel. Mondoweiss reports that, "Pro-Israel groups have time and again sought criminal and punitive charges for political and scholarly expressions critical of Israel on college campuses...One case involves the Irvine 11, in which the Orange County District Attorney's office charged students who protested a speech by Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren on the UC Irvine campus with two misdemeanors...More recently, pro-Israel legal organizations have brought a civil rights based lawsuit alleging the institutionalization of anti-Semitism on the SFSU campus and blaming a group of defendants, including top level SFSU administrators, staff and Dr. Rabab Abdulhadi,

the founding director of the Arab and Muslim Ethnicities and Diaspora Studies program and the long-time adviser to the General Union of Palestinian Students on campus."

The Lawfare Project and the law firm of Winston and Straw filed the lawsuit on behalf of three Hillel students. It is similar in nature to a 2011 lawsuit alleging an "anti-Semitic climate" at UC Berkeley. U.S. District Judge Richard Seeborg dismissed the lawsuit as its accusations presented no coherent or plausible argument. The latest allegations of anti-Semitism by Hillel were made in reaction to the organization not receiving a table at the "Know Your Rights" (KYR) Fair held in February 2017 at SFSU. The purpose of the Fair was outreach to groups viewed as vulnerable in the new political climate, with a focus on Arab and Muslim, LGBTQ and undocumented communities. Participants included Palestine Legal, La Raza Centro Legal and the ACLU. Jewish Voice for Peace participated in the Fair. Hillel alleged that Jews were excluded from the Fair and that excluding Hillel was an act of religious discrimination.

The Jewish Studies program at SFSU and its Hillel group made claims of institutional anti-Semitism at SFSU and cited the unanimous decision to deny Hillel a table at the KYR Fair as part of its evidence. Saliem Shehadeh, a graduate student in Anthropology at SFSU, argues that, "Providing a table to Hillel, whose conduct has threatened the safety of Palestinians and other advocates for justice in Palestine is akin to giving a table to ICE at a gathering of undocumented communities...The objections to Hillel were always, and are still, about the organization's conduct threatening students' rights. It was in no way an issue of religious discrimination...Hillel's activity centers on Zionist expressions of Judaism and has invested much political currency and funds into making such articulation mainstream and part and parcel of hegemonically imaged Jewish-American experiences. As such, Jewish organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network have been cast as fringe organizations and expelled by Hillel...It must be remembered that there has never been a consensus among Jewish communities on Israel or on Zionism. Jewish communities are not a monolithic unit."

Hillel International is not an organization which represents a wide range of Jewish opinion. Its Guidelines, for example, exclude those who oppose Jewish nationalism and "deny the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state," and rejects those who support the BDS movement, which includes an increasing number of Jews. Hillel works closely with the David Project to isolate students and groups that are critical of Israel's occupation. David Project executive director David Bernstein wrote a report titled, "How To 'Name-and-Shame' Without Looking Like a Jerk." The David Project promotes targeting advocates of Palestinian rights on campus. It notes that, "Accusing faculty members who propagandize against Israel of 'academic malpractice' is likely to be a much more effective strategy than challenging specific allegations or invoking anti-Jewish bigotry."

Saliem Shehadeh assesses the approach used to silence criticism of Israel by Hillel, the David Project and similar groups this way: "This indicates their willingness to use anti-Israel and anti-Semitic accusations interchangeably, in a deliberate and false conflation of the two. This distinction is important because anti-Zionism and anti-Israel politics are legitimate anti-colonial positions and protected civil liberties while anti-Semitism is hate and oppression. And the David Project, in clear terms, reveals that the tactics they use for smearing are neither anti-Semitic nor an infringement of rights despite their accusations to the contrary. Pro-Israel organizations have often cast the challenge on campus as an assault on Jewish students rather than as a spreading pervasive negativity toward Israel."

In July, the State Department issued a report on terrorism in 2016, and said that some Palestinian violence is driven by "a lack of hope in ever gaining sovereignty." It declared, "Continued drivers of violence included a lack of hope in achieving Palestinian statehood, Israeli settlement construction in the

West Bank, the perception that the Israeli government was changing the status quo on the Haram Al Sharif/Temple Mount and IDF tactics that Palestinians considered overly aggressive." In response, the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) demanded that Secretary of State Rex Tillerson step down. The ZOA said, "In light of the U.S. State Department's new, bigoted, biased, anti-Semitic, Israel-hating, error-ridden terrorism report, the ZOA calls on Secretary of State Tillerson to resign."

The effort to redefine anti-Semitism as criticism of Israel has been going on for nearly four decades. In 1974, Benjamin Epstein, the national director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), co-authored "The New Anti-Semitism," a book whose argument was repeated in 1982 by his successor at ADL, Nathan Perlmutter, in a book entitled "The Real Anti-Semitism In America." After World War II, Epstein argued, guilt over the Holocaust kept anti-Semitism at bay. But as memories of the Holocaust faded, anti-Semitism had returned---this time in the form of hostility to Israel. The reason: Israel represented Jewish power. "Jews are tolerable, acceptable in their particularity, only as victims," wrote Epstein and his ADL colleague Arnold Forster, "and when their situation changes so that they are no longer victims, or appear not to be, the non-Jewish world finds this so hard to take that the effort is begun to render them victims anew."

Nathan Perlmutter embarked upon a campaign to redefine anti-Semitism. He declared:

The search for peace in the Middle East is littered with minefields for Jewish interests...Jewish concerns are confronted by the Semantically neutral postures of those who believe that if only Israel would yield this or that, the Middle East would become tranquil and the West's highway to its strategic interests and profits in the Persian Gulf would be secure. But at what cost to Israel's security? Israel's security, plainly said, means more to Jews today than their standing in the opinion polls.

Perlmutter substituted the term "Jewish interests" for what were, in reality, "Israeli interests." By changing the terms of the debate, he helped create a situation in which anyone who is critical of Israel becomes, ipso facto, "anti-Semitic."

One of the leading practitioners, for many years, of the effort to silence criticism of Israel by calling it "anti-Semitic" has been Norman Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, which was originally published by the American Jewish Committee. In an article titled "J'Accuse," (Commentary, September 1983), Podhoretz charged America's leading journalists, newspapers and television networks with "anti-Semitism" because of their reporting of the war in Lebanon and their criticism of Israel's conduct. Among those so accused were Anthony Lewis of The New York Times, Nicholas von Hoffman, Joseph Harsch of The Christian Science Monitor, Rowland Evans, Robert Novak, Mary McGrory, Richard Cohen, Alfred Friendly of The Washington Post, and a host of others. These individuals and their news organizations were not criticized for bad reporting or poor journalistic standards; instead they are the subject of the charge that always seemed to be on Podhoretz's lips: anti-Semitism.

"The war in Lebanon," he wrote, "triggered an explosion of invective against Israel that in its fury and its reach was unprecedented in the public discourse in this country...We are dealing here with an eruption

of anti-Semitism." Ignored by Podhoretz was the fact that Israeli government policy in Lebanon was even more harshly criticized by the Israeli media.

In the political arena, those few politicians who have dared to criticize Israel have been subjected to brutal attack. In 1982, Rep. Paul McCloskey (R-CA) was a candidate for his party's nomination for the U.S. Senate. After a trip to the Middle East in 1979, he concluded that new Israeli policies were not in America's best interests. He was alarmed over Washington's failure to halt Israel's construction of West Bank settlements---which the U.S. Government had labeled illegal---and to stop Israel's use of U.S.-supplied weapons.



Rep. Pete McCloskey (R-CA)

Beyond this, McCloskey raised a provocative question: "Does America's 'Israel lobby' wield too much influence?" In an article in The Los Angeles Times, he wrote, "Yes, it is an obstacle for Mideast peace...If the U.S. is to work effectively toward peace in the Mideast, the power of the lobby must be recognized and countered in open and fair

debate. I had hoped that the American Jewish community had matured to the point where its lobbying efforts could be described and debated without raising the red flag of anti-Semitism."

The response was quick in coming. The B'nai B'rith Messenger charged that McCloskey had proposed that all rabbis be required to register as foreign agents. Columnist Paul Greenberg, writing in the San Francisco Examiner, compared McCloskey with such notorious anti-Semites as Gerald L.K. Smith. Douglas Bloomfield of AIPAC described McCloskey as "bitter" with "an intense sense of hostility" toward Jews.

During the 1981-82 congressional campaign period, pro-Israel PACs spent \$104,236 in an obscure House race in downstate Illinois to defeat Rep. Paul Findley (R-IL), a 22-year House veteran.

Findley's sin was criticism of Israel and the urging of a more even-handed U.S. policy in the Middle East. In his book on the subject, "They Dare To Speak Out," he writes, "If one particular group can succeed in inhibiting free expression on a particular subject, others inevitably will be tempted to try the same in order to advance their favorite causes...If a lobby can force government officials into ignominious silence in one vital area of public policy, other parts of the body politic could be similarly disabled..When a lobby stifles free speech nationally on one controversial topic---the Middle East---all free speech is threatened."



Rep. Paul Findley (R IL), and current AMEU National Council member

During this period, former Under Secretary of State George Ball, a frequent critic of U.S. Middle East policy, was described in a public letter by Morris Abram, former president of the American Jewish Committee, published in The Washington Post, as "one who is willing to accept and spread age-old calumnies about Jews." It was Ball's view that silence had been imposed upon the discussion of Middle East policy by the broad use of the charge of anti-Semitism: "Most people are terribly concerned not to be accused of being anti-Semitic, and the lobby so often equates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. They keep pounding away at the theme, and people are deterred from speaking out."

The term "anti-Semitism" was used to characterize the arrest, trial and incarceration of Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard. In May, 1987, Pollard, an intelligence analyst for the U.S. Navy, was found guilty of espionage, having sold some 360 cubic feet of classified documents to Israel. So damaging to U.S. security was Pollard's role as a spy that Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger told Israeli Ambassador Meir Rosenne that Pollard should have been executed.

The organized pro-Israel community did not hesitate to embrace Jonathan Pollard. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) called upon the entire Reform Jewish community to express support for Pollard. Rabbi Mark Golub, a spokesman for CCAR, declared: "All the images about Pollard by the press turned out to be a terrible slander." On April 25, 1989, a group of 15 rabbis and others participated in a Passover "Freedom Seder" in front of the maximum security federal prison in Marion, Illinois in support of Pollard. The Seder, led by Rabbi Avi Weiss of The Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, New York, began with a brief ceremony on the front steps of the historic Old Courthouse in St. Louis, where the landmark Dred Scott case was argued in 1846. Rabbi Weiss called Pollard "a Jewish political prisoner."



Jonathan Pollard

Shortly after Pollard's conviction, a Justice for the Pollards Committee was organized. It portrayed Pollard as a victim of a vindictive and anti-Semitic Justice Department. "We have before us a new Dreyfus affair," said a newsletter put out by the committee. Discussing this analogy, Robert Friedman, writing in *The Village Voice*, noted that, "Unlike Dreyfus, who was framed by the French army, Pollard is an avowed spy."

The tactic of using the term "anti-Semitism" as a weapon against dissenters from Israeli policies is not new. Dorothy Thompson, the distinguished journalist who was one of the earliest enemies of Nazism, found herself criticizing the policies of Israel shortly after its creation. Despite her valiant crusade against Hitler she, too, was subject to the charge of "anti-Semitism." In a letter to *The Jewish Newsletter* (April 6, 1951) she wrote:

Really, I think continued emphasis should be put upon the extreme damage to the Jewish community of branding people like myself as anti-Semitic...The State of Israel has got to learn to live in the same atmosphere of free criticism which every other state in the world must endure...There are many subjects on which writers in this country are, because of these pressures, becoming craven and mealy-mouthed. But people don't like to be craven and mealy-mouthed; every time one yields to such pressure, one is filled with self-contempt and this self-contempt works itself out in resentment of those who caused it.

A quarter century later, columnist Carl Rowan (*Washington Star*, Feb. 5, 1975) reported that "When I wrote my recent column about what I perceive to be a subtle erosion of support for Israel in this town, I was under no illusion as to what the reaction would be. I was prepared for a barrage of letters to me and newspapers carrying my column accusing me of being 'anti-Semitic.'...The mail rolling in has met my worst expectations...This whining, baseless name-calling is a certain way to turn friends into enemies."

A list of those who have been falsely accused of anti-Semitism because of their criticism of Israel would be a long one. In 2014, Jerusalem Post columnist Caroline Glick declared that Secretary of State John Kerry is "anti-Semitic." According to Glick, "Kerry is obsessed with Israel's economic success...The anti-Semitic undertones of Kerry's constant chatter about Jews and money are obvious." At the same time, Moti Yogev, a Knesset member in the governing coalition, said that Kerry's efforts at achieving a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians had "an undertone of anti-Semitism."

Writing in the Israeli newspaper Yediot Ahronot, Cameron Kerry, a brother of the Secretary of State and formerly general counsel to the U.S. Department of Commerce, declared that charges of "anti-Semitism" against his brother would be ridiculous if they were not so vile." Cameron Kerry, a convert to Judaism, recalled relatives who died in the Holocaust. The Kerrys' paternal grandparents were Jewish.



The reaction to the 2014 Presbyterian study guide, "Zionism Unsettled," issued by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was vitriolic. The ADL claimed the study guide "may be the most anti-Semitic document to come out of a mainline church in recent memory." J Street, which promotes itself as a more moderate pro-Israel lobbying group than AIPAC, was almost as harsh. It said that the church document promotes "polarization" and "intolerance." Saying it was "deeply offended," J Street asserted that "one has to question the...motives in publishing this 'resource.'"

In fact, the church document, which examines the role of Zionism and Christian Zionism in shaping attitudes and events in Palestine and the region, devotes extensive space to a discussion---and harsh criticism ---of anti-Semitism within Christianity and its influence in the rise of Nazism. It rejects racism and religious bigotry in all its forms. And it has many strong Jewish supporters. Rabbi Brant Rosen, author of "Wrestling In The Daylight: A Rabbi's Path To Palestinian Solidarity," notes that, "As a Jew, I'm especially appreciative that while 'Zionism Unsettled' is strongly critical of Zionism, it doesn't flinch from extensive Christian self-criticism."

Discussing the Presbyterian study guide, the respected Israeli political scientist Neve Gordon said, "I welcome the effort to emphasize a conception of Judaism and Christianity that espouses universalistic ethics---whereby all humans are imago dei---and to use it to expose injustices carried out in my homeland."

Jewish critics of Israeli actions are as likely to be denounced as "anti-Semites" as non-Jews. For example, columnist Caroline Glick, writing in the International Jerusalem Post (Dec.23-29, 2011), found New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman guilty of employing "traditional anti-Semitic slurs" and "of channeling long-standing anti-Semitic charges." She described Friedman as a "dyed-in-the-wool Israel-hater" for writing that he "sure hopes that Israel's prime minister... understands that the standing ovation he got in Congress this year was not for his politics. The ovation was bought and paid for by the Israel lobby."

In 2009, the ADL, AIPAC, and other Jewish groups, condemned the White House's decision to award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Mary Robinson, Ireland's first female president and former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, because she had criticized Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza. What the Jewish groups did not mention was that Robinson had been instrumental in helping remove language about racial discrimination and Zionism from the U.N. Durban Conference's final report, thereby angering Syria and Iran. Neither did they mention that after discovering an Arab non-governmental organization at the parallel NGO forum across the street in Durban was displaying anti-Semitic cartoons, Robinson offered an impassioned public denunciation of anti-Semitism, declaring, "When I see something like this, I am a Jew." While American Jewish groups categorized Mary Robinson as an anti-Semite, Israeli human rights groups issued a joint statement in her defense.

Those who have been labeled "anti-Semitic" by Jewish groups because of their criticism of Israeli policies include former President Jimmy Carter, journalists Andrew Sullivan and Bill Moyers, and groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Peter Beinert, a contributing editor to *The Forward* and author of "The Crisis of Zionism," calls the idea that such individuals and groups are anti-Semitic "absurd." He argues that, "If they really hated Jews, wouldn't they express their hatred in some form other than criticism of Israeli policy? But for prominent American Jewish leaders, any criticism of Israel that is not accompanied by equally harsh criticism of other countries constitutes anti-Semitism."

Writing in *The Jerusalem Report* (July 18, 1991), editor Ze'ev Chafets, discussing Orthodox anti-Zionism in Israel, argued that "the Jewishness of these anti-Zionist rabbis is not authentic. It is autistic, fearful and a sick outgrowth of the long nightmare of exile." In response, Rabbi David Hartman, founder and director of the Shalom Hartman Institute and professor of Jewish thought at Hebrew University, rejected this view. He wrote that, "The ultra-Orthodox community holds a very particular understanding of Jewish history. For it, the Jews are a nation only because of God's selection of Israel and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. For it, the Jewish people's birth as a nation in the desert teaches us that it is not land but the search for holiness, the challenge to be God's witnesses in history, that constitutes Jewish existence. Jews are the symbol of divinity in history. 'And I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel.' A land without Torah, for the ultra-Orthodox, has absolutely no significance. They repudiate secular Zionism because for them nationalism separated from Torah is not a Jewish value."

While not sharing the anti-Zionist perspective himself, Rabbi Hartman points out that, "I cannot ignore its intellectual power. Nor do I see it as a distortion of tradition...Allegiance to the State of Israel is not the only legitimate form of giving expression to Judaism. In the spirit of Hillel, I am prepared to present an intelligent argument for their position. 'These and these are the words of the living God' should be the way we deal with Jewish disagreement."

Writing in *Haaretz* (July 19, 2017), Rebecca Vilkomerson of Jewish Voice for Peace provided this analysis:

Seventy years into the ongoing dispossession and displacement of Palestinians, 50 years into Israel's military occupation, and 10 years into the siege on Gaza, we think it is time for American Jewish communities to have some really uncomfortable conversations...Challenging anti-Semitism requires us to distinguish between anti-Jewish ideas or actions and legitimate criticisms of the human rights abuses of the Israeli state and of Jewish institutions which aid in supporting or justifying the domination of another people.

The Long History of Jewish Anti-Zionism

Zionism, many now forget, has always been a minority view among Jews. Most Jews believe that their Jewish identity rests on their religious faith, not any national identification. Jews in the United States, Great Britain, France, Canada, Australia, Italy and other countries do not view themselves as living in "exile," as Zionist philosophy holds. Instead, they believe that their religion and nationality are separate and distinct. The God they believe in is a universal God, not tied to a particular geographic site in the Middle East.

In 1841, in the dedication of America's first Reform synagogue in Charleston, South Carolina, Rabbi Gustav Poznanski told the congregation, "This country is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, this house of God our temple."

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, did not believe in God or in Judaism. The state he sought to create would be secular, based on the idea of Jewish "national" and "ethnic" identity and incorporating those features he found most attractive in 19th-century Europe, particularly Germany. This immediately brought opposition from Orthodox Jews as well as those Jews who rejected the idea of a separate Jewish nationalism and considered themselves full members of the societies in which they were born and lived.

The chief rabbi of Vienna, Mortiz Gudemann, denounced the mirage of Jewish nationalism. "Belief in One God was the unifying factor for Jews," he declared, and Zionism was incompatible with Judaism's teachings. The Jewish Chronicle of London judged that the Zionist scheme's lack of a religious perspective rendered it "cold and comparatively uninviting."

The executive of the Association of German Rabbis, representing the Jewish communities of Berlin, Frankfurt, Breslau, Halberstadt and Munich, denounced the "efforts of the so-called Zionists to create a Jewish National State in Palestine" as contrary to the "prophetic message of Judaism and the duty of every Jew to belong without reservation to the fatherland in which he lives."

Adolf Jellinek, who became known as the greatest Jewish preacher of his age and a standard bearer of Jewish liberalism from his position as rabbi at the Leopoldstadt Temple in Vienna, deplored the creation of what he called a "small state like Serbia or Romania outside Europe, which would most likely become the plaything of one Great Power against another, and whose future would be very uncertain." This, however, was not the real basis for his opposition. He argued that it threatened the position of Jews in Western countries and that "almost all Jews in Europe" would vote against the scheme if they were given the opportunity.

For Reform Jews, the idea of Zionism contradicted almost completely their belief in a universal, prophetic Judaism. The first Reform prayerbook eliminated references to Jews being in exile and to a Messiah who would miraculously restore Jews throughout the world to the historic land of Israel and who would rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem. The prayerbook eliminated all prayers for a return to Zion. The most articulate spokesman for the German Reform movement, the distinguished rabbi and author Abraham Geiger, argued that Judaism developed through an evolutionary process that had begun with

God's revelation to the Hebrew prophets. That revelation was progressive; new truth became available to every generation. The underlying and unchangeable essence of Judaism was ethical monotheism. The Jewish people were a religious community destined to carry on the mission to "serve as a light to the nations," to bear witness to God and His moral law. The dispersion of the Jews was not a punishment for their sins, but part of God's plan whereby they were to disseminate the universal message of ethical monotheism.

In Nov. 1885, Reform rabbis, meeting in Pittsburgh, wrote an eight-point platform that one participant called "the most succinct expression of the theology of the Reform movement that had ever been published in the world." The platform emphasized that Reform Judaism denied nationalism of any variety. It stated: "We recognize in the era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching 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."

In 1897, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a resolution disapproving of any attempt to establish a Jewish state. The resolution declared, "Zion was a precious possession of the past...as such it is a holy memory, but it is not our hope of the future. America is our Zion."

In 1904, The American Israelite noted, "There is not one solitary prominent native Jewish American who is an advocate of Zionism."

In 1919, in response to Britain's Balfour Declaration calling for a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine, a petition was presented to President Woodrow Wilson entitled "A Statement to the Peace Conference." It reflected the dominant American Jewish view on Zionism and Palestine. The petition criticized Zionist efforts to segregate Jews "as a political unit...in Palestine or elsewhere," and underlined the principle of equal rights for all citizens of any state "irrespective of creed or ethnic descent." It rejected Jewish nationalism as a general concept and held against the founding of any state upon the basis of religion and/or race. The petition asserted that the "overwhelming bulk of the Jews of America, England, France, Italy, Holland, Switzerland and the other lands of freedom have no thought whatever of surrendering their citizenship in those lands in order to resort to a 'Jewish homeland in Palestine.'"

Among those signing this petition were Rep. Julius Klein of California, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., former U.S. Ambassador to Turkey, Simon W. Rosendale, former Attorney General of New York, Mayor L. H. Kempner of Galveston, Texas, E.M. Baker, president of the New York Stock Exchange, Jesse I. Straus of Macy's, and New York Times publisher Adolph Ochs.

In a speech to the Menorah Society Dinner in New York City in December 1917, Chief Judge of the New York State Supreme Court Irving Lehman, brother of Governor Herbert Lehman

of New York, stated:

I cannot recognize that the Jews as such constitute a nation in any sense in which the

word is recognized in political science, or that a national basis is a possible concept for modern Judaism. We Jews in America, bound to the Jews of other lands by our common faith, constituting our common inheritance, cannot as American citizens feel any bond to them as members of a nation, for nationally we are Americans and Americans only, and in political and civil matters we cannot recognize any other ties. We must therefore look for the maintenance of Judaism to those spiritual concepts which constitute Judaism.

In England, most Jewish leaders opposed the Balfour Declaration. In fact, they argued that the proponents of a Jewish state in Palestine were, in fact, "anti-Semites." Rabbi Claude Montefiore, president of the Anglo-Jewish Association opposed the idea of special privileges for his co-religionists in Palestine. He asked rhetorically in *The Edinburgh Review* for April 1917, "How can a man belong to two nations at once?" No man, he declared, could belong equally and simultaneously to two nations. One who tried opened himself to the charge of divided loyalties. "No wonder," he declared, "that all anti-Semites are enthusiastic Zionists."

A Jewish member of Lloyd George's cabinet, Secretary of State for India Edwin Montagu, insisted that Jews be regarded as a religious community. In a memorandum circulated to other Cabinet members, Montagu used the term "anti-Semitism" to characterize the sponsors of the Balfour Declaration. The document of Aug. 23, 1917 was titled, "The Anti-Semitism of the Present Government." He noted that:

...I wish to place on record my view that the policy of His Majesty's Government is anti-Semitic in result and will prove a rallying ground for anti-Semites in every country of the world." He declared: "I assert that there is not a Jewish nation...It is no more true to say that a Christian Englishman and a Christian Frenchman are of the same nation...I deny that Palestine is today associated with the Jews. It is quite true that Palestine plays a large part in Jewish history, but so it does in Mohammedan history, and, after the time of the Jews, surely it plays a larger part than any other country in Christian history...The Government should be prepared to do everything in their power to obtain for Jews in Palestine complete Liberty of settlement and life on an equality with the inhabitants of that country who profess other religious beliefs. I would ask that the Government should go no further.

These views were widely held by prominent Jews in England. Lucien Wolf discussed the fundamental premise of Zionism: "The idea of a Jewish nationality, the talk of a Jew 'going home' to Palestine if he is not content with the land of his birth, strikes at the root of all claims to Jewish citizenship in lands where Jewish disabilities still exist. It is the assertion not merely of a double nationality ...but of the perpetual alienation of Jews everywhere outside Palestine."

A prominent voice for Jewish universalism in England was Rabbi Israel Mattuck. In his book "What Are The Jews?" Mattuck argues that the distinctiveness of the Jews is religious, not national:

The dispersion of the Jews, which gives them universality, is a condition of their religious value that they remain distinctive and dispersed...By its very nature, religion tends to

universalism. There have been national religions. All religions began in tribalism, but religion long ago outgrew its nationalist swaddling-clothes. Judaism cast them off at least 26 centuries ago---in the time of Isaiah, Amos and Micah...The genius of the Jews is a genius for religion, the contribution of the Jews to the life of humanity has been in the field of religion. The chief argument against Zionism is that the nationalization of Jewish life would interfere with the religious function and value of the Jews...When the Zionist answers: 'But it will save the Jews,' the non-Zionist asks, 'Save them for what?' To be a small nation in a small corner of the world! Is that to be the issue of Jewish history, its struggles and achievements, its sufferings and glories? How small, insignificantly pathetically small, is the result of the process?"

It was not just Reform Jews who opposed Zionism, but Orthodox Jews as well. Indeed, prior to the mid-twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of all Jews rejected the philosophy of Jewish nationalism.

In 1929, Orthodox Rabbi Aaron Samuel Tamarat wrote that the very notion of a sovereign Jewish state as a spiritual center was "a contradiction to Judaism's ultimate purpose." He noted that, "Judaism at root is not some religious concentration which may be localized or situated in a single territory. Neither is Judaism a 'nationality,' in the sense of modern nationalism, fit to be woven into the three-foldedness of 'homeland, army and heroic songs.' No, Judaism is Torah, ethics and exaltation of spirit. If Judaism is truly Torah, then it cannot be reduced to the confines of any particular territory. For as Scripture said of Torah, 'Its measure is greater than the earth.'"

The distinguished rabbi and academic Arthur Hertzberg, in his book "Jews: The Essence and Character of a People," (written with Aron Hirt-Manheimer) argues that the Zionist idea of making Jews a "normal" people is a rejection of the very uniqueness of Judaism and the Jewish mission: "The Jew...lives in two dimensions---the now and the forever. Jews have lived within changing and often tragic circumstances, but their religion has lifted them up to another realm in which nothing changes. The holy days and the commandments that Jews observe are timeless. Historical events are fleeting. The Zionist settlement in Palestine is no more important to the continuity of Judaism than the revolt against Rome or the expulsion from Spain or the pogroms in Russia...Chronology is irrelevant in the study of Torah: all of its divine teachings and interpretations are eternal values that transcend time."

Rabbi Hertzberg said that Jews should be asking not how to perpetuate the Jewish people, but what God expects of them. If God has some role for Jews to play, they will, in some mysterious way, find themselves able to do it. If there is no belief in God, or in Judaism's uniqueness, there will be no Jews.

One of the leading Jewish theologians and philosophers of the 20th century, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who marched with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. for civil rights for all people, said, "Judaism is not a religion of space and does not worship the soil. So, too, the State of Israel is not the climax of Jewish history, but a test of the integrity of the Jewish people and the competence of Israel."

In 1938, alluding to Nazism, Albert Einstein warned an audience of Zionist activists against the temptation to create a state imbued with "a narrow nationalism within our own ranks against which we have already had to fight strongly even without a Jewish state."

Another prominent German Jew, the philosopher Martin Buber spoke out in 1942 against the "aim of the minority to 'conquer' territory by means of international maneuvers." From Jerusalem, in the midst of the hostilities that broke out after Israel unilaterally declared independence in May 1948, Buber cried with despair, "This sort of 'Zionism' blasphemes the name of Zion; it is nothing more than one of the crude forms of nationalism."

In his book, "What Is Modern Israel?," Professor Yakov Rabkin of the University of Montreal, an Orthodox Jew, shows that Zionism was conceived as a clear break with Judaism and the Jewish religious tradition. In his view, it must be seen in the context of European ethnic nationalism, colonial expansion and geopolitical interests rather than as an incarnation of Biblical prophecies or a culmination of Jewish history. The religious idea of a Jewish return to Palestine had nothing to do with the political enterprise of Zionism. "Jewish tradition," writes Rabkin, "holds that the idea of return must be part of a messianic project rather than the human initiative of migration to the Holy Land...There was little room for Jewish tradition in the Zionist scheme...It is not the physical geography of the Biblical land of Israel which is essential for Jews but the obligation to follow the commandments of the Torah."

To the question of whether Jews constitute "a people," Yeshayahua Leibowitz, the Orthodox Jewish thinker and Hebrew University professor, provides this assessment:

The historical Jewish people was defined neither as a race, nor a people of this country or that, nor as a people that speaks the same language, but as the people of Torah Judaism and its commandments...The words spoken by Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882-942) more than a thousand years ago: 'Our nation exists only within the Torah' have not only a normative but also an empirical meaning. They testified to a historical reality whose power could be felt up until the 19th century. It was then that the fracture, which has not ceased to widen with time, first occurred: the fissure between Jewishness and Judaism.

The early Zionists not only turned away from the Jewish religious tradition but, in their disregard for the indigenous population of Palestine, Jewish moral and ethical values as well. In his book "Israel: A Colonial-Settler State," the French Jewish historian Maxime Rodinson writes that, "Wanting to create a purely Jewish or predominantly Jewish state in Arab Palestine in the 20th century could not help but lead to a colonial-type situation and the development of a racist state of mind, and in the final analysis to a military confrontation."

In the wake of growing anti-Semitism in Russia and Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century and the rise of the Nazis in Germany in the nineteen thirties, many Jews began to look positively upon the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine as a refuge for those being persecuted. Jewish organizations in the U.S. that had always opposed Zionism, slowly began to view it more favorably. The American Council for Judaism was created in 1942 to maintain the philosophy of a universal Judaism free of nationalism and politicization. In his keynote address, Rabbi David Philipson declared that Reform Judaism and Zionism were incompatible: "Reform Judaism is spiritual, Zionism is political. The outlook of Zionism is a corner of Eastern Asia." The first pledge of major financial backing was made by Aaron

Strauss, a nephew and heir of Levi Strauss of blue jeans fame.

An early leader of the Council, Rabbi Morris Lazon, who served from 1915 to 1946 as rabbi of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, was originally a supporter of cultural Zionism, but later altered his views. Slowly, he discovered that Zionist nationalism was not different from other forms of nationalism: "The Jewish nationalist philosophy of separateness as a people who would always and inevitably be rejected because they were Jews boldly asserted itself. The idea seems to have been to break down the self-confidence and opposition to Jewish nationalism...Behind the mask of Jewish sentiment, one can see the specter of the foul thing which moves Germany and Italy. Behind the camouflage of its unquestioned appeal to Jewish feeling, one can hear a chorus of 'Heil.' This is not for Jews---Reform, Conservative or Orthodox." Speaking at the January 1937 annual meeting of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in New Orleans, Lazon declared: "Judaism cannot accept as the instrument of its salvation the very philosophy of nationalism which is leading the world to destruction. Shall we condemn it as Italian or German, but accept it as Jewish?"

Rabbis who joined the Council led some of the nation's leading congregations. Among them were Samuel Goldenson of New York, Irving Reichert of San Francisco, David Marx of Atlanta, Edward Calisch of Richmond, Henry Cohen of Galveston, Samuel Koch of Seattle, and Julian Feibelman of New Orleans. The Council also recruited many nationally prominent laypersons, including Judge Marcus Sloss of the California Supreme Court, Herbert and Stanley Marcus of the Nieman-Marcus Company in Dallas, Admiral Lewis L. Strauss, and Alfred M. Cohen, president of B'nai B'rith. The first president of the Council was Lessing J. Rosenwald, who had retired as chairman of Sears Roebuck and Co., which was founded by his father, the respected philanthropist Julius Rosenwald who, among many other things, worked with Booker T. Washington to build schools for black children in the South after the Civil War.

Rabbi Reichert made his first significant declaration of opposition to Zionism in a January 1936 sermon:

If my reading of Jewish history is correct, Israel took upon itself the yoke of the Law not in Palestine, but in the wilderness at Mt. Sinai and by far the greater part of its deathless and distinguished contribution to world culture was produced not in Palestine but in Babylon and the lands of the Dispersion. Jewish states may rise and fall, as they have risen and fallen in the past, but the people of Israel will continue to minister at the altar of the Most High God in all the lands in which they dwell...There is too dangerous a parallel between the insistence of some Zionist spokesmen upon nationality and race and blood, and similar pronouncements by Fascist leaders in Europe.



Rabbi Elmer Berger

When the American Council for Judaism was established, Judah Magnes, chancellor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wrote a letter endorsing its statement of principles: "It is true that Jewish nationalism tends to confuse people not because it is secular and not religious, but because this nationalism is unhappily chauvinistic and narrow and terroristic in the best style of Eastern European nationalism."

From 1943 to 1948, the Council conducted its public campaign against Zionism. One of the speakers at its 1945 conference was Hans Kohn, a one-time German Zionist associated with the University in Exile in New York. He declared, "The Jewish nationalist philosophy has developed entirely under German influence, the German romantic nationalism with the emphasis on blood, race and descent as the most determining factor in human life, its historicizing attempt to connect with a legendary past 2,000 or so years ago, its emphasis on folk as a mythical body, the source of civilization."

In the face of the 1947 partition of Palestine, the Council wished the new state well, and declared its determination to resist Zionist efforts to dominate Jewish life in America. Rabbi Elmer Berger, who served for many years as the group's executive director, published an extended essay that outlined the challenges to all Americans who are Jews by religion presented by Zionist plans to foster an 'Israel-centered' Jewish life in the U.S. He wrote: "The creation of a sovereign state embodying the principles of Zionism, far from relieving American Jews of the urgency of making that choice, makes it more compelling." This year, the American Council for Judaism commemorates its 75th anniversary.

Jonathan Sarna, a Brandeis University historian and author of the book "American Judaism," says that, "Everything they (the American Council for Judaism) prophesied---dual loyalty, nationalism being evil--- has come to pass." He states that, "It's certainly the case that if the Holocaust underscored the problems of Jewish life in the Diaspora, recent years have highlighted the point that Zionism is no panacea."

Indeed, in recent years, sympathy for Zionism among American Jews has been in steady decline. A study by social scientists Ari Kelman and Steven M. Cohen found that among American Jews, each new generation is more alienated from Israel than the one before. Among American Jews born after 1980, only 54% feel "comfortable with the idea of a Jewish state." The reason, Cohen asserted, is an aversion to "hard group boundaries" and the notion that "there is a distinction between Jews and everybody else." Other polls show that among younger non-Orthodox Jews, only 30% think that "caring about Israel is essential to being Jewish."

In his book "Trouble In The Tribe: The American Jewish Conflict Over Israel," Professor Dov Waxman of Northeastern University writes:

A historic change has been taking place in the American Jewish relationship with Israel...Israel is fast becoming a source of division rather than unity for American Jewry...A new era of American Jewish conflict over Israel is replacing the old era of solidarity...This echoes earlier debates about Zionism that occurred before 1948. Then, as now, there were fierce disagreements among American Jews and the American Jewish establishment...It was only after Israel's founding that the communal consensus came to dominate American Jewish politics. Thus, from a historical perspective, the pro-Israel consensus that once reigned within the American Jewish community is the aberration, rather than the rule. Jewish division on Israel is historically the norm.

Beyond this, in Waxman's view, the overwhelming majority of American Jews, while supporting Israel and wishing it well, were never really Zionists. He writes that:

Classical Zionism...has never had much relevance or appeal to American Jewry. Indeed, the vast majority of American Jews reject the basic elements of classical Zionism---that Diaspora Jews live in exile, that Jewish life in Israel is superior to life in the Diaspora, and that Diaspora Jewish life is doomed to eventually disappear. American Jews do not think that they live in exile and they do not regard Israel as their homeland...For many American Jews, America is more than just home, it is itself a kind of Zion, an 'almost promised land.' Zionism has never succeeded in winning over the majority of American Jews.

By the 1980s, a host of liberal Jewish groups emerged such as New Jewish Agenda, Breira, Americans for Peace Now, Project Nishma, and the Jewish Peace Lobby. More recently, groups such as J Street and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) have appeared, and have attracted much support. Established in 2008, J Street, by 2013, had around 180,000 registered supporters, 20,000 donors and over 45 local chapters. Jewish Voice for Peace was established in Berkeley, California in 1996. Expressing the view of establishment Jewish organizations that were slowly seeing themselves displaced, the Anti-Defamation League publicly listed JVP as one of the "ten most influential anti-Israel groups in the U.S." For many years the journal *Tikkun*, edited by Rabbi Michael Lerner, has been an important advocate for Judaism's commitment to universal moral and ethical values. Philip Weiss has provided a widely read website, *Mondoweiss*, as a place for Jews and others who are critical of Zionism and Israeli policies to express their views.

The views expressed by establishment Jewish organizations----the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, the ADL, AIPAC, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations--clearly do not represent the views of most American Jews. In December, 2016, the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution criticizing Israel's policy of settlement building in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the Obama administration decided not to veto this resolution. The U.N. Resolution was followed by an address in which Secretary of State John Kerry declared that the Israeli government was undermining any hope of a two-state solution. Establishment Jewish groups immediately expressed outrage. Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, declared, "Obama has made it clear that he is a Jew-hating anti-Semite." David Friedman, now U.S. ambassador to Israel, compared J Street and other Jewish critics of Israel to "kapos," Jews who assisted the Nazis at concentration camps during World War II.

In expressing such views, these groups were not representative of the thinking of most American Jews. Samuel Heilman, a sociology professor at Queens College specializing in Jewish life, said that, "These days the right-wing has a louder voice in Israel, and, in some ways, it also has a louder voice in America, because the people who are most actively and publicly Jewish, sectarian Jewish, share the right-wing point of view, and are very pro-settlement. But it's not the mainstream point of view." Steven M. Cohen, a research professor at Hebrew Union College, said that Secretary Kerry's speech represented the thinking of most American Jews: "On survey after survey, American Jews are opposed to Jewish

settlement expansion. They tend to favor a two-state solution and their political orientations are liberal and moderate."

Cohen reports that "serious donors" to Jewish organizations have started to balk at giving money to Israel. He cites his work with Jewish Federations, the largest Jewish charity organization: "The issue of Israel is and will continue to be a major source of polarization and friction. I was having questions---- what pulls our community apart? Is it Orthodox, secular, Reform, Haredim? And people say, that's the number two issue. What's number one? Number one is Israel. Recently, we're seeing a lot of tension on Israel, we really have a hard time managing the Israel conversation. It's like our donors are telling me, I'll give you money as I have before...But not if you're going to give it to Israel."

Rabbi Henry Siegman, a former leader of the American Jewish Congress, declared concerning the debate over the U.N. Resolution, "Netanyahu's 'J'Accuse' against Obama is a concoction of lies and deceptions." Rabbi John J. Rosove of Temple Israel in Hollywood, California, applauded Secretary Kerry's speech: "I felt Kerry was exactly right. The people will criticize him and will take a leap and say he's anti-Israel, just as some are saying Obama is an anti-Semite. This is ridiculous." Rabbi Jill Jacobs, the executive director of T'ruah, a rabbinical human rights organization, says, "There's a very clear values clash going on. On the one hand, we have a small but vocal minority of American Jews who believe that supporting Israel means supporting the right-wing agenda, the current government. And on the other, there is a larger percentage of American Jews who are committed to Israel and committed to democracy and want to see it as a safe place that reflects our values."

The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War and the 50-year occupation that followed has focused much attention upon the contradiction between Israel's reality and its claim to be a Western-style democracy. The realization that more and more American Jews are becoming alienated from Israel, a society which repeatedly proclaims itself "Jewish," but seems to be moving away from the Jewish moral and ethical tradition, is being increasingly discussed by those in the Jewish establishment who have sought to defend Israeli actions in the name of a "solidarity" not shared by those in whose name they try to speak.

In an article, "Why Many American Jews Are Becoming Indifferent or Even Hostile to Israel," (Mosaic, May 8, 2017), Rabbi Daniel Gordis, Chair of the Curriculum at Shalem College in Jerusalem, notes that:

The waning of attachment to Israel among American Jews...has rightly become a central focus of concern...The emerging impression among significant numbers of American Jews is that Israel and modern day progressive America are two fundamentally different if not antithetical political projects...The most obvious difference between the American and Israeli project lies in the ethnic particularism at the core of Israel's very reason for being...American Jewish life and Israeli life reflect the difference between voluntary and non-voluntary communities...Add the American idea of the primacy of the universal over the particular and the ideological insistence that religion is a strictly private matter, the more American Jews think of Judaism in religious terms, without the component of peoplehood, the less necessary and less justified Israel becomes, the more anomalous

and abnormal. Religions, after all, do not have countries. Is there a Methodist country?
A Baha'i state?

When many American Jewish groups criticized Israel in June 2017 for its government's backtracking on a decision to create a space at the Western Wall in Jerusalem where men and women could pray together and non-Orthodox rituals could be practiced, some critics noted that these same groups have been silent when it comes to Palestinians.



Rabbi Brant Rosen

Rabbi Brant Rosen, who serves Tedek Chicago Congregation and also serves as Midwest Regional Director of The American Friends Service Committee, wrote an article in *The Forward* (July 2, 2017) with the headline, "The Real Wall Problem: When Will Diaspora Jews Fight For Palestinians?":

The North American Jewish establishment is furious with Israel...Has the Jewish institutional community finally broken their abject silence over Israel's human rights abuses? Are Jewish communal leaders finally finding the courage of their convictions on the issue of Israel/Palestine?...While Israel's oppressive occupation now marks its 50th year and the cause of a just peace remains more remote than ever, our Jewish leaders are still more concerned about the rights of Jews than the rights of all who live in the land...We will willingly violate our own values for you. Just give liberal Jews rights and we'll remain silent on your unchecked militarism and oppression of the Palestinian people. The silence is all the more egregious given the humanitarian crisis Israel is currently inflicting on the people of Gaza. Now, 11 years into its crushing blockade, the government announced this past month that it will start cutting electricity to the Gaza Strip, a move that could cause 21-hour blackouts just as the heat of the summer is gearing up. Surgeries have already been canceled...According to UNICEF, the 2014 war took a heavy toll on children. More than 500 were killed, 3,374 were injured, and more than 1,500 were orphaned. I can't help but ask: where is the moral outrage in liberal Jewish establishments over these cruel human abuses? While I certainly believe in the cause of religious freedom, I find it stunning that so many liberal-minded members of the Jewish community are more concerned with Jewish rights in a Jewish state than the basic human rights of non-Jewish children who live under its control. Such are the sorrows of Jewish political nationalism---even the more 'liberal' among us seem only to be able to express their tolerance selectively.

Many Israelis, concerned about their country's treatment of Palestinians, lament its departure from Jewish values. Prof. David Shulman of the Hebrew University notes that:

No matter how we look at it, unless our minds have been poisoned by the ideologies of the religious right, the occupation is a crime. It is first of all based on the permanent disenfranchisement of a huge population...In the end, it is the ongoing moral failure of the country as a whole that is most consequential, most dangerous, most unacceptable.

This failure weighs...heavily on our humanity. We are, so we claim, the children of the prophets. Once, they say, we were slaves in Egypt. We know all that can be known about slavery, suffering, prejudice, ghettos, hate, expulsion, exile. I find it astonishing that we, of all people, have reinvented apartheid in the West Bank.

The history of Jewish opposition to Zionism is a long one and the evidence that American Jews largely reject the Zionist idea of Israel as the "homeland" of all Jews, and that they are in "exile" in America, is everywhere to be seen. Those who promote the idea that "anti-Zionism" is "anti-Semitism" have no legitimate historical basis for doing so. Their purpose in promoting such a view is simple and transparent: to silence criticism of Israel and its policies. In this, they are failing and their failure is most dramatic among Jews who are increasingly outspoken in their dismay over those who violate Judaism's humane values in their name. Sadly, we have seen examples of real anti-Semitism in recent days, as in the case of neo-Nazis and Ku Klux Klan members marching in Charlottesville, Virginia. Any comparison of real anti-Semitism with the criticism of Israel which has been characterized in that way shows us how ahistorical and irrational such claims really are. □

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