

# ANTISEMITISM, ANTI-ZIONISM, AND THE BDS MOVEMENT



“Classical antisemitism denies the rights of Jews as citizens within society. Anti-Zionism denies the equal rights of the Jewish people to its lawful sovereignty within the community of nations ... all that has happened is that the discriminatory principle has been transferred from the realm of individual rights to the domain of collective identity.”

ABBA EBAN, ISRAELI SCHOLAR, DIPLOMAT, AND POLITICIAN

**ANTISEMITISM** — hostility or prejudice against Jews — is on the rise in America from all sides of the political spectrum. It is most painfully manifested in violent outbreaks such as in Pittsburgh and San Diego, but it also permeates the public consciousness in more subtle ways. Sadly, discourse around Israel is increasingly a source of anti-Jewish rhetoric. Many critiques of Israeli policies are not antisemitic, but unfortunately some are — especially those that deny the right of the Jewish state to exist or defend itself.

**ANTI-ZIONISM** is a stance that opposes Jewish self-determination in any part of the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement is one manifestation of anti-Zionism, as it seeks to replace the current Jewish state with a single, Palestinian-majority one. Anti-Zionists have a long record of disturbingly antisemitic commentary encompassing all facets of classical antisemitic language.

## BDS SUPPORTERS HAVE SAID:

“**[Jews] are not a people.**” Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the BDS movement

“**Zionism is a false and failed answer; ... a “settler-colonial movement establishing an apartheid state” ... “creating a racist hierarchy.**” Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)

“**We’re not going to let them stand by and support Zionism ... Our point is to make being Zionist uncomfortable on the NYU campus.**” NYU Students for Justice in Palestine President Khalid Abu Dawas

“**The Jews are trying to destroy all other cultures ... as a survival mechanism ... the only Nazi country in the world is Israel.**” Former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke

“**The emergence of the Zionist movement in the twentieth century is a retrogression of the Jewish community into the history of its very distant past, with its most elementary and primitive forms of the concept of God.**”

Zionism Unsettled, Israel Palestine Mission Network, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Exchanges with Israeli law “**reinforce American law enforcement practices of ... racial profiling, marking Black and Brown people as suspect, ... controlling media coverage of state violence.**” JVP’s Deadly Exchange program

“**Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him ... The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily.**” Rev. Naim Ateek, Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center

In order to help distinguish legitimate criticism of Israel with antisemitism, it is helpful to understand the different strands of classical antisemitism: religious (Jews as Christ-killer), economic (Jews as manipulators of global finances), racist (Jews as ethnically inferior), and ideological (Jews as culturally subversive). Here are examples of the types of arguments, tropes and motifs used in conversations about Israel that cross the line from legitimate critique to antisemitism:

Depicting Jews or Israelis as dominating finance or the media, or controlling governments outside of Israel

Denying the legitimacy of the State of Israel and the right of the Jewish people to sovereignty in any portion of its ancient homeland – but supports the rights of others, including Palestinians, to national existence

Applying a double-standard by criticizing Israeli policies that are ignored or excused when implemented by nations other than Israel

Using Holocaust and other antisemitic imagery to critique Israel (i.e. calling Israelis the “new Nazis”)

Demonizing Israel, its Jewish citizens, or Jewish people globally for complex issues like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Portraying Israeli Jews as white European colonizers, denying the indigeneity of Jews in the land and erasing the stories of more than half of Israel’s Jewish citizens who are people of color

Assigning to Israel responsibility for all Palestinian violence and incitement, or justifying all Palestinian violence and incitement

Denying the rights of Jews or Israelis to defend themselves against violence and existential threats

Casting Jewish religious belief or practices as primitive, tribal, or parochial

Assigning biblical responsibilities and judgments to the state of Israel that are not assigned to other countries or holding that the Jewish people lost any rights to the land because of their rejection of Christianity

With the increase in anti-Zionist rhetoric and associated BDS activity, the world now has a pernicious, offensive, and particularly challenging form of antisemitism to address.

“Of course it’s theoretically possible to distinguish anti-Zionism from antisemitism, just as it’s theoretically possible to distinguish segregationism from racism. But the striking feature of anti-Zionist rhetoric is how broadly it overlaps with traditionally antisemitic tropes.”

BRET STEPHENS, NEW YORK TIMES (2/9/19)