

International Campaign Is Criminalizing Criticism of Israel As ‘Anti-Semitism’

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For two decades, some Israeli officials and Israel partisans have worked to embed a new, Israel-focused definition of antisemitism in institutions around the world, from international bodies and national governments to small college campuses in heartland America. This effort is now snowballing rapidly. As a result, advocacy for Palestinian rights is well on the way to being curtailed and even criminalized as “hate.”

As the world has witnessed the oppression and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, many people have risen in protest. In response, the Israeli government and certain of its advocates have conducted a campaign to crack down on this activism, running roughshod over civil liberties (and the English language) in the process.

The mechanism of this crackdown is the redefinition of “antisemitism”^[1] to include criticism of Israel, and the insertion of this definition into the bodies of law of various countries.

Where most people would consider “antisemitism” to mean bigotry against Jewish people (and rightly consider it abhorrent), for two decades a campaign has been underway to replace that definition with an Israel-centric definition. That definition can then be used to block speech and activism in support of Palestinian human rights as “hate.” Various groups are applying this definition in law enforcement evaluations of possible crimes.

Proponents of this Israel-centric definition have promoted it step by step in various arenas, from the U.S. State Department and European governments to local governments around the U.S. and universities.

While this effort has taken place over the last two decades, it is snowballing rapidly at this time. The definition is increasingly being used to curtail free speech and academic freedom, as well as political activism.

Furthermore, such politicizing of an important word may reduce its effectiveness when real antisemitism occurs, doing a disservice to victims of true bigotry.

As of this writing, the U.S. Congress has endorsed the distorted definition, the governments of the UK and Austria have officially adopted it (in December and April, respectively), various U.S. State legislatures are considering it, and numerous universities are using it to delineate permissible discourse. Many representatives and heads of other states around the

world have embraced the new meaning, even if they have yet to officially implement it.

This article will examine the often interconnected, incremental actions that got us where we are, the current state of affairs, and the public relations and lobbying efforts that are promoting this twisting of the definition of “antisemitism” — often under cover of misleadingly named “anti-racism” movements.

Claims of “Antisemitism” Used to Silence Support for Palestinians

For many years, numerous respected organizations have documented Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, including killing of Palestinian civilians, abuse of Palestinian children, torture of Palestinian prisoners, confiscation of Palestinian land, and other cases of systematic violence and oppression. Detailed reports have been compiled by [Defense for Children International](#), the [International Red Cross](#), [Amnesty International](#), [Foreign Service Journal](#), [Physicians for Human rights](#), [Christian Aid](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the [National Lawyers Guild](#), Israel’s [Public Committee Against Torture](#), Israel’s [B’Tselem](#) and others.

Israel long claimed that its 1948 creation was on “a land without a people for a people without a land,” and many people may still believe this founding myth. The fact is, however, that the land was originally inhabited by an indigenous population that was approximately 80 percent Muslim, 15 percent Christian, and a little under 5 percent Jewish. The Jewish State of Israel was created through the ejection of approximately three-quarters of a million people.

Over the decades since Israel’s founding in 1948, accusations of antisemitism have been leveled against many people who criticized Israeli actions. Indeed, the accusation was used effectively to silence very prominent critics.^[2]

However, for most of that time, the meaning of the term itself was not in question. The [standard definition was](#), in [Google](#)’s terms, “hostility to or prejudice against Jews.”^[3] Around the turn of this century, though, certain advocates began promoting official and even legal definitions of antisemitism that included various kinds of criticism of Israel.

Conflating Criticism of Israel with Antisemitism

Unsurprisingly, the new definitions appear to have originated from within the Israeli government, or at least with an Israeli government official.



Natan Sharansky, Israeli minister, in 2003:
“The State of Israel has decided to take the gloves off and implement a coordinated

counteroffensive against anti-Semitism.” Sharansky’s formulation formed the basis for the new Israel-centric definitions adopted around the world.

The definitions adhere to a pattern set by a man named **Natan Sharansky**, who was Israel’s [Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs](#) and chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Sharansky founded a Global Forum against Anti-Semitism in 2003, [stating](#):

“The State of Israel has decided to take the gloves off and implement a coordinated counteroffensive against anti-Semitism.”

But Sharansky apparently didn’t mean a counteroffensive against just anti-Jewish bigotry, but an offensive against criticism of Israel. The following year he wrote a [position paper](#) that declared:

“Whereas classical anti-Semitism is aimed at the Jewish people or the Jewish religion, ‘new anti-Semitism’ is aimed at the Jewish state.”

Sharansky’s paper laid out what he called the “[3-D Test of Anti-Semitism](#).” Sharansky applied the term “antisemitic” to criticism of Israel in three cases. First, he argued that statements that “demonize” Israel are antisemitic — by being, in his mind, unfairly harsh. (Some of those allegedly guilty of “[demonizing](#)” Israel are Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Human Rights Watch, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, French President François Mitterrand, and others.)

Second, Sharansky declared that it’s antisemitic to apply a “double standard” to Israel — in other words, to criticize Israel for actions that other states may also take. However, if one could never criticize, protest or boycott abuses without calling out every single other similar abuse, no one would ever be able to exercise political dissent at all.

Finally, Sharansky said it’s antisemitic to “delegitimize” Israel, or dispute its “right to exist” (a standard Israeli talking point for many years). In fact, insisting Israel has the “right” to exist amounts to saying it had the right to expel Muslim and Christian Palestinians in order to found a religiously exclusive state. (See “What ‘Israel’s right to exist’ means to Palestinians,” by John Whitbeck, published in the [Christian Science Monitor](#).)^[4]

Sharansky’s outline provided the pattern for a European agency to create a new definition of antisemitism the next year, 2005 — a definition that would then be adopted by a succession of organizations and governments, including the U.S. State Department.

There is a back story to how this all came about.

This European agency itself was founded and run by a man with important connections to Israel. It was called “[The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia](#),” under the Council of the European Union. A Frenchman named **Jean Kahn** had [convinced](#) European heads of state to create it in 1997.



Jean Kahn (R) with French President Francois Mitterrand. Kahn initiated the creation of the European Monitoring Centre, which released an Israel-centric “working” definition of antisemitism.

Kahn had been a [President](#) of the European Jewish Congress, elected in a plenary session in Israel, and said the Congress “would demonstrate its solidarity with Israel” and that he hoped European countries would “coordinate their legislation outlawing racism, anti-Semitism or any form of exclusion.”

[Kahn](#) was chairman of the Monitoring Centre’s management board and called the “[personification](#)” of the agency. Within three years, the Centre issued a [position paper](#) calling for the definition of anti-Semitic offenses to be “improved.”

A few years later, Israeli professor [Dina Porat](#) took up the effort to create a new definition. Working with her were [Kenneth Stern](#) and [Rabbi Andrew “Andy” Baker](#) of the American Jewish Committee. Stern [reports](#) that when the Monitoring Centre’s then head, **Beate Winkler**, had failed to deliver the desired definition, Andy Baker “smartly developed a working relationship with her.” Stern and others^[5] then created a draft for the Monitoring Centre to use.



Israeli Dina Porat, Kenneth Stern, Rabbi Andrew Baker worked to draft what became the European

In 2005 the agency issued its “[Working Definition of Anti-Semitism](#),” largely based on that draft. It included an array of negative statements about Israel as examples of antisemitic offenses. While standard dictionary definitions of antisemitism didn’t even mention Israel, fully half of the newly devised Monitoring Centre definition referred to Israel.

Once the Monitoring Centre had created its expanded definition, certain Israel partisans used it to promote similar definitions elsewhere. And while the Monitoring Centre itself continued to term it only a “working” definition and its replacement organization eventually withdrew the definition, in other countries and agencies the expanded definition became official.

In addition, quite frighteningly, proponents pushed successfully to begin applying the Israel-centric definition to law enforcement.

In the United States

The same year Sharansky created his “3-D” antisemitism test — a year after he founded the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism — the U.S. Congress passed a [law](#) establishing exceptional government monitoring of antisemitism. The law created a special State Department envoy and office for this monitoring, over objections of the State Department itself.

The law, called the “[Global Anti-Semitism Review Act](#),” included a line that subverted its meaning by enshrining a new definition of antisemitism aligned with Sharansky’s:

“Anti-Semitism has at times taken the form of vilification of Zionism, the Jewish national movement, and incitement against Israel.”

The bill was introduced in April 2004. That June, a Congressional [hearing](#) was conducted about how to combat antisemitism. A major witness was Israeli minister Sharansky. In his testimony Sharansky [proposed](#) his “3-D” Israel-connected definition for anti-Semitism.^[6]

State Department officials objected to the proposed legislation, saying the new office was unnecessary and would be a “bureaucratic nuisance” that would actually hinder the Department’s ongoing work. A State Department [press release](#) opposing the new office described the many actions that State was already taking against antisemitism.

Despite this opposition, the Senate bill acquired [24 cosponsors](#) representing both parties, including **Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Diane Feinstein, Russ Feingold, Sam Brownback, Saxby Chambliss** and **Ted Stevens**. Similar bills ([here](#) and [here](#)) were introduced in the House of Representatives, acquiring [35 cosponsors](#), again including both Republican and Democratic leaders. The legislation passed easily and quickly became [law](#).



Gregg Rickman, first U.S. antisemitism envoy, later worked for AIPAC.

The first Special Envoy, **Gregg Rickman**, endorsed the European Monitoring Centre's Working Definition in [2008](#). Rickman's [report](#) called it a "useful framework" for identifying and understanding antisemitism. After Rickman left the State Department, he went to [work](#) for the American Israel Political Affairs Committee ([AIPAC](#)), the major Israel advocacy organization that lobbies Congress.

The next Special Envoy, **Hannah Rosenthal**, took this campaign a major step forward: In [2010](#) the office officially adopted the European Monitoring Centre's [definition](#).

Rosenthal was extremely proud of having achieved this "breakthrough" definition. She began making use of it quickly, establishing a 90-minute course on the new antisemitism at the Foreign Service Institute, the training school for diplomats.

"We have now a definition we can train people on," she [told the Times of Israel](#), "and we've been very aggressive in training foreign service officers."



Hannah Rosenthal adopted the "breakthrough" Israel related definition and promptly used it in training U.S. diplomats.

Rosenthal announced that with the new definition including criticism of Israel, their reporting on antisemitism improved "300 percent," even though, she said, that didn't mean that antisemitism had actually increased in all the countries monitored.

The gloves were off. Now fully half of the official U.S. State Department definition of

antisemitism had gone beyond the normal meaning of the word to focus on Israel.

Applying the New Definition to U.S. Citizens

The State Department uses the new definition to monitor activities overseas. But once the State Department definition was in place, efforts began to use it to crack down on political and academic discourse and activism within the U.S.

This past [December \(2016\)](#) the U.S. Senate passed a [law](#) to apply the State Department's definition (i.e. the Sharansky-Stern-Rosenthal definition) of antisemitism to the Education Department, for use in investigating reports of religiously motivated campus crimes.

A companion bill for [the House](#) is supported by AIPAC, the ADL, the Jewish Federations of North America and the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

[South Carolina](#)'s House of Representatives recently passed legislation under which the State Department's definition "would be used in probes of possible anti-Semitism at state colleges and universities." The state [senate](#) will consider this in 2018. If passed, it will mean that the state will now probe criticism of Israel on state campuses.

Similar bills are being considered in [Virginia and Tennessee](#).

Such efforts are also ongoing in [California](#). In December Democrat Brad Sherman called on the California Secretary of Education to "expand its definition to include certain forms of anti-Israel behavior." Pro-Israel organizations such as the [Amcha Initiative](#) have also been pushing the state legislature for several years to officially adopt the State Department definition. So far these have been [defeated](#) but continue to be promoted.

U.S. Campuses

A parallel effort has been occurring on U.S. campuses. In 2003 Sharansky [said](#) that college campuses were "one of the most important battlefields" for Israel.

In 2015 [University of California President Janet Napolitano](#) (head of 10 campuses) publicly supported adopting the state department definition, after 57 rabbis sent a letter to her and the University Board of Regents promoting the definition.

Student councils or other groups at various universities have passed resolutions adopting the State Department definition, which can then be used to block campus events about Palestine.

An ongoing campaign to ensure Israel partisans become influential in student government has supported these efforts. This campaign was [announced](#) by an AIPAC leader in 2010:

"We're going to make certain that pro-Israel students take over the student government," he said. "That is how AIPAC operates in our nation's capitol. This is how AIPAC must operate on our nation's campuses." (Video [here](#).)

Resolutions referencing the Israel-centric definitions have now been passed by student governments at [UC Santa Barbara](#), [UCLA](#), [East Carolina University](#), [Indiana University](#), Ohio's [Capital University](#), Ohio's [Kent State](#), [Orange County's Chapman University](#), [San Diego State](#)

[University](#), and [other campuses](#) around the country.^[7]

An example of these resolutions is the 2015 bill at Indiana University. The resolution [denounced](#) anti-Semitism

“as defined by the United States State Department” and stated that the student government would not fund antisemitic activities or activities that “undermine the right of the Jewish people to self-determination.”

It also said that IUSA executives and Congress members would undergo diversity training on anti-Semitism.

According to the [student newspaper](#), the bill was written by **Rebekah Molasky**, a fellow with the international pro-Israel organization [Stand With Us](#). After the resolution was passed,

“the bill’s sponsors and outside supporters hugged and high-fived before gathering in the hallway to take a picture to commemorate the moment.”

As evidenced above, such resolutions can now be used to censor student events. The UC San Diego [resolution](#) largely replicated the Indiana format, announcing that the student government will not support activities that “promote anti-Semitism” under the new definition, including “denying Israel the right to exist.” Stand With Us applauded the resolution.

In 2012, an organization called the [Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under the Law](#) was founded and immediately began promoting the new definition. Within a year it launched [an initiative](#) to establish student chapters at law schools throughout the U.S. to advance “the organization’s mandate to combat campus anti-Semitism through legal means.” The Center helped push the South Carolina legislation. It is one of numerous organizations promoting the new definition.

(Incidentally, former Supreme Court Justice Brandeis was a leader in the world Zionist movement and worked in public and covert ways to promote it — see [here](#).)

“Thought Policing”

A number of analysts have pointed out some of the many significant flaws with such legislation.

Anthony L. Fisher at [Reason.com](#) writes of Congress’s December law applying the State Department definition to the Education Department:

“It gives the federal government the authority to investigate ideas, thoughts, and political positions as violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

Fisher continues:

“By specifically using the broad language of a [2010 State Department memo](#)

attempting to define anti-Semitism, the Senate bill wades into thought policing.”

Attorney Liz Jackson wrote in an [opinion piece](#) in the *Los Angeles Times*:

“Anyone who values the constitutional right to express political dissent should worry about this development.”



NY Times columnist Bret Stephens says Jewish Americans should “do all we can to assure the survival of the Jewish State.”

On the other side of the debate is *New York Times* columnist **Bret Stephens**, formerly *Wall Street Journal* deputy editorial page editor and before that editor of an Israeli newspaper. Stephens, extremely hawkish on Israel, writes and speaks fervently against the movement to boycott Israel (BDS) and what he says is antisemitism on [US campuses](#) and elsewhere. In a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, he [claimed](#) that

“anti-Semitism is the disease of the Arab world.”

In 2014 Stephens [spoke](#) at the [Tikvah Fund](#), a philanthropic foundation committed to supporting the “Jewish people and the Jewish State,” [opining](#) that it would be a scandal if Jewish people failed “to do all we can to assure the survival of the Jewish State.”

U.S. and European Lawmakers Pressure Governments to Ban Criticism of Israel

During all this time, parallel efforts to promote the new definition continued in Europe.

In 2009 an organization called the [Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism](#) (ICCA) took up the effort to spread the expanded definition. The group says it brings together parliamentarians from “around the world” to fight antisemitism and lists a steering committee of six European and U.S. legislators.

The group held a conference in London in 2009 at which it issued a [“London Declaration on Combating Antisemitism,”](#) which was signed by then **British Prime Minister Gordon Brown** and [other](#) heads of state and legislators. This declaration called on governments to use the European Monitoring Centre’s definition and to outlaw and prosecute such “antisemitism.”

It was couched in “anti-racism” terms, but when we look at the declaration’s recommendations combined with its definition of antisemitism, one thing becomes clear: In the declaration, numerous lawmakers of the Western world called on world governments to restrict political dissent.

Specifically, they called on governments to outlaw certain forms of criticism of Israel, including calls to boycott Israel; to regulate criticism of Israel in the media; to monitor criticism of Israel online and elsewhere; and to prosecute critics of Israel under “hate crimes” legislation.

Among numerous other demands, the lawmakers declared that governments:

- “must expand the use of the EUMC [Monitoring Centre] ‘Working Definition of antisemitism’” including “as a basis for training material for use by Criminal Justice Agencies;”
- should “isolate political actors” who “target the State of Israel;”
- “should legislate ‘incitement to hatred’ offences and empower law enforcement agencies to convict;”
- “should ... establish inquiry scrutiny panels;”
- “should utilise the EUMC [Monitoring Centre] ‘Working Definition of antisemitism’ to inform media standards;”
- “should take appropriate and necessary action to prevent the broadcast of antisemitic programmes on satellite television channels, and to apply pressure on the host broadcast nation to take action to prevent the transmission of antisemitic programmes” (keeping in mind here that the declaration’s definition of “antisemitic” includes various criticism of Israel);
- “should use domestic ‘hate crime’, ‘incitement to hatred’ and other legislation ... to prosecute ‘Hate on the Internet’ where racist and antisemitic content is hosted, published and written” (again keeping in mind what is defined as “antisemitic”);
- and that “education authorities should ... protect students and staff from illegal antisemitic discourse and a hostile environment in whatever form it takes including calls for boycotts.”

In 2015 the European Commission created a special position to coordinate work on combating antisemitism and [appointed](#) German national **Katharina von Schnurbein** to the post. Schnurbein proceeded to [promote](#) the use of the Israel-centric definition.^[8]

UK and Austria Adopt Definition

In December 2016, the UK announced it would formally adopt the Israel-centric definition. It was quickly followed by Austria, which [adopted](#) the definition in April 2017. The [Austrian justice minister](#) had previously announced that the new definition would be used in the training of new judges and prosecutors.



British Prime Minister Theresa May announced the adoption of the Israel-centric definition at a Conservative Friends of Israel event.

UK **Prime Minister Theresa May** made the [announcement](#) during a talk before 800 guests at the Conservative Friends of Israel's annual lunch.

[UPI reported:](#)

"The British police are already using this definition^[9], which can now also be used by other groups, such as municipal councils and universities. The definition is not a law, but provides [a formal interpretation](#) of an illegal act that can serve as a guideline for criminal proceedings."

Shortly afterward the UK's higher education minister sent a [letter](#) informing universities that the government had adopted the IHRA definition and directing them to utilize it.

(The London council quickly followed suit with its own adoption of the definition, and other [cities](#) have now done the same. In May the Israel-Britain Alliance (IBA) began asking candidates for Parliament to sign a [pledge](#) that they would support the new definition.)

A number of groups [objected](#) to the definition, arguing that the definition "deliberately equates criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews."

Opponents said it was

"vigorously promoted by pro-Israel lobbyists to local authorities, universities, Labour movement organisations and other public bodies."

They stated that after its adoption there had been "an increase in bannings and restrictions imposed on pro-Palestinian activities, especially on campuses." Some of the [cancellations cited](#) the IHRA definition. Oxford **Professor Stephen Sedley** wrote in the *London Review of Books* that the IHRA definition gives "respectability and encouragement to forms of intolerance which are themselves contrary to law."

Professor Jonathan Rosenhead, [recipient](#) of the President's Medal of the British

Operational Research Society and Chair of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine, [said](#) there were many examples of the definition creating a “chilling effect” on institutions’ willingness to permit lawful political activity, “even when the definition was not specifically cited.”

The [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#), which represents all of Europe, Eurasia, the U.S., and Canada — a billion people — was also pushed to adopt the definition at its December 2016 conference.

The American Jewish Committee, which has offices in Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Rome, and Warsaw, [reported](#) that it had “met with senior European government officials to encourage OSCE adoption of the definition.” However, adoption of the definition has so far been blocked by one member: Russia.



AJC’s Rabbi Andrew “Andy” Baker helped create and disseminate the new definition throughout Europe, Eurasia, the U.S., and Canada.

AJC leader **Rabbi Andrew Baker** wrote that the AJC would now work “to foster its greater use by the individual states of the OSCE and members of the European Union.”

Inter-Parliamentary Coalition’s American Representatives

Two American Congressmen are among the six-member steering committee of the Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism (CCA).

One is Florida **Congressman Ted Deutch**. Deutch’s [Congressional website](#) highlights his support for Israel as well as his work against antisemitism.

According to the site, Deutch

“works closely with his colleagues in the House and Senate to... pass resolutions strongly opposing manifestations of anti-Semitism at home in South Florida, across the United States, and around the world.”

Florida Congressman Ted Deutch The website reports:

“Congressman Ted Deutch is a passionate supporter of Israel whose advocacy for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship stretches back to his youth. Ted spent his summers at Zionist summer camp, worked as a student activist in high school and college, and served in leadership roles on several local and national Jewish

organizations throughout his professional career. Today, Ted serves as Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee’s influential Middle East and North Africa Subcommittee, where he continues to champion Israel’s security during a time of great volatility in the Middle East.”



Florida Congressman Ted Deutch has pushed the use of the Israel-centric definition to curtail academic freedom and campus political dissent within the United States. Deutch’s website declares him “a passionate supporter of Israel whose advocacy for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship stretches back to his youth.”

Deutch is also a member of the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats. His [ICCA bio](#) announces that he plans to use this position “to continue to publicly condemn anti-Semitism.”

Deutch receives considerable [funding](#) from the pro-Israel lobby.

In March Deutch [led](#) a bipartisan letter to Trump “Urging Forceful Action on Anti-Semitism.” It demanded ‘a comprehensive, inter-agency strategy that called for the Justice Department to investigate “anti-Semitic crimes” and “ensure the perpetrators are brought to justice.”’



New Jersey Congressman Chris Smith, member of the Inter-Parliamentary Coalition,

brought Sharansky to testify before Congress about his new definition.

Deutch was one of two Congresspeople who introduced the December law to apply the State Department definition to education.

The other U.S. Congressman on the steering committee of the ICCA is [Republican Chris Smith](#) of New Jersey. Smith is also a senior member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. According to the website Open Secrets, a large proportion of his campaign donations are also from [pro-Israel sources](#).

Natan Sharansky twice testified at hearings Smith chaired. In a [speech](#) at an event honoring Smith for his work against antisemitism, Smith remembered that Sharansky had

“proposed what he called a simple test to help us distinguish legitimate criticism of Israel from anti-Semitism. He called it the three Ds: Demonization, double standard, and de-legitimization.”

Spreading the New Definition Under Cover of “Anti-Racism” Movement

UK universities have seen repression of pro-Palestinian activism on an epic scale. In 2007 the [UK’s National Union of Students \(NUS\)](#) adopted the new antisemitism definition at its national conference, when pro-Israel students introduced a motion entitled “AntiRacism: Challenging Racism on Campus and in Our Communities.” Some student unions at various UK universities then did the same.

This was a particularly ironic name for a pro-Israel motion, given that many people around the world consider Israel’s founding ideology, political Zionism, [racist](#). In fact, in 1975 the UN General Assembly specifically passed a [resolution](#) that “Zionism is a form of racism.”

(The resolution was revoked In 1991, but not because the world body had changed its mind. In that year President Bush was pushing for the Madrid Peace Conference, which he hoped would end the “Arab-Israeli” conflict. When Israel said it would only participate in the conference if the UN [revoked](#) the resolution, the U.S. pressured member states to do just this.)

Through the years numerous entities have affirmed that Zionism is a type of racism, including conferences in South Africa and a recent UN commission which reported that Israel was practicing apartheid. (This report was then [removed](#) by the UN Director General, after Israeli and [U.S. pressure](#).)

The UK student actions exemplify a trend that has pervaded this movement since the beginning: Efforts to shut down pro-Palestinian activism, curtail free speech and police thought both online and off are repeatedly packaged as “anti-racism” and sometimes “anti-fascism.”^[10]

Campaign for New Definition Overcomes Hiccups

Taken together, these steps towards redefining “antisemitism” to include criticism of Israel, and then ban it, are effectively (and increasingly rapidly) producing significant results in

terms of actual regulation and even law enforcement. Nevertheless, there apparently has been some resistance to the change.

In 2013, the successor organization to the European Monitoring Centre (called the European Fundamental Rights Agency) quietly [dropped the working definition](#) from its website. [Without](#) any public announcement, the definition was simply no longer on its site. When questioned about this, the agency's director simply said that the organization had "no mandate to develop its own definitions."

Proponents of the definition were outraged. **Shimon Samuels** of the Simon Wiesenthal Center complained that the agency's "disowning of its own definition is astounding" and that "those who fight antisemitism have lost an important weapon." (The [Wiesenthal Center](#) is a global organization that declares it "stands with Israel" with offices in Los Angeles, New York, Toronto, Miami, Chicago, Paris, Buenos Aires, and Jerusalem.)

However, the fact that the Monitoring Centre had never officially adopted the definition, and that its successor organization now had apparently discarded it, seems to have been ignored by [those who had adopted it](#).

The U.S. State Department [continues to use](#) the discarded version. The only difference is that the [PDF](#) that gave its Monitoring Centre origins has been removed from State's website.



The World Jewish Congress convention 2014, chaired by David de Rothschild, urged "all countries to adopt a binding definition of anti-Semitic crimes" based on the Israel-centric definition.

The following year, the World Jewish Congress, which represents Jewish umbrella bodies in 100 countries, [called on](#) "all countries to adopt a binding definition of anti-Semitic crimes based on the Working Definition of Anti-Semitism developed by the former European Union Monitoring Commission (EUMC) and used in a number of states' law enforcement agencies."

IHRA Picks Up the Ball

Other groups stepped into the vacuum and kept the definition alive. In 2016 The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) [adopted](#) the definition.

The IHRA consists of [31 Member Countries](#), [ten Observer Countries](#), and [seven international partner organizations](#). Its chair announced that the IHRA's goal was to inspire "other international fora" to also adopt "a legally binding working definition." It's working: Britain and Austria almost immediately followed suit.

The U.S. Brandeis Center [applauded](#) the move, saying that "because the IHRA has adopted it, the definition has now officially been given the international status that it was previously lacking."

The Brandeis Center reported that this was the

"culmination of a process initiated by Mark Weitzman, Director of Government Affairs at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, two years ago, with help from others including Ira Forman and Nicholas Dean of the U.S. Department of State."



Ira Forman, antisemitism envoy under Obama and formerly of AIPAC, played a pivotal role in the IHRA adoption of the new definition.

[Forman](#) was the State Department Special Anti-Semitism Envoy under Obama, reportedly [led](#) Obama's reelection campaign in the Jewish community, had worked for Bill Clinton, and had served as Political Director and Legislative Liaison for AIPAC, the pro-Israel lobbying organization. Nicholas Dean had been the State Department [Special Envoy for the Holocaust](#).

The [New York Jewish Week](#) reported that Forman and Dean "played a pivotal role in diplomatic efforts that led to the recent adoption by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance of a Working Definition of Anti-Semitism."

"This is the first-ever formal international definition of anti-Semitism, and a potentially crucial tool for forcing governments and international agencies to confront and take action against it," the article continued.

Pressure On State Department to Continue Extra Monitoring

Among much budget slashing proposed by President Donald Trump were cuts to the State Department that would have ended funding for the antisemitism monitoring office and

special envoy (though State Department monitoring of antisemitism would continue even after the cuts).

Various organizations are lobbying to keep the office and envoy, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), a U.S. organization whose mission is to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people” but which in effect seems to serve as an American extension of the most right-wing elements of Israel’s government. It has a long and infamous history of attacking critics of Israeli policy as “antisemites” and also uses an Israel-centric [definition of antisemitism](#).

The [ADL and allies](#) pointed to a rash of bomb threats against Jewish institutions to strengthen their argument that this exceptional office must be funded. A letter with over a [hundred](#) signatories was sent to Trump demanding that he keep the dedicated State Department position, a [bipartisan letter](#) in support of retaining that special monitor was circulated in Congress, and over 100 Holocaust memorial [groups](#) and scholars urged Trump to keep the office.

As this political fight has raged, the ADL, which has a budget of over \$56 million, sent out press releases to national and local media around the country reporting that antisemitic incidents have soared. The release was repeated almost verbatim in numerous national media and in individual states (as a random example, a Massachusetts [headline](#) declared: “Report: Anti-Semitism on the rise in Massachusetts.”)

However, it is impossible to know how many of the antisemitic incidents reported by the ADL were actually related to criticism of Israel, because the ADL didn’t release the data on which these results were based.

In addition, the ADL’s reported spike includes a spate of threats called in to Jewish organizations, schools and community centers that, thankfully, were hoaxes. The vast majority of threats (reportedly to over [2,000](#) institutions) apparently were perpetrated by an 18-year-old [Jewish Israeli](#) who reportedly suffers from medical and mental problems. (This alleged perpetrator is also accused of trying to [extort](#) a US Senator, threatening the children of a US official, and a range of [other](#) crimes.)



Israeli man arrested for over 2,000 bomb threats.

Another individual, [an American in the U.S.](#), apparently perpetrated eight hoax bomb threats in a bizarre campaign to get his former girlfriend in trouble.

A Jewish News Service [article](#) says the threats by the Israeli teen made up a significant

percentage of the ADL's spike and reported:

"The Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) decision to count an Israeli teenager's alleged recent bomb hoaxes as 'anti-Semitic incidents' is prompting criticism from some Jewish community officials."

An ADL official admitted that the audit is an approximation, saying "the science on it is currently being written." A regional ADL director [said](#) that "this is not a poll or a scientific study," but rather "an effort to get a sense of 'what's going on in people's hearts.'"

Regarding hard data, the report said that anti-Semitic assaults across the nation had "decreased by about 36 percent."

The ADL blames various groups for antisemitism, [pointing the finger](#) at people of color with claims that Hispanic Americans and African Americans are "the most anti-Semitic cohorts," at "white supremacists" and at Trump's election — but not at the Israeli teen responsible for 2,000+ hoax threats that terrorized Jewish institutions, nor at its own distorted, Israel-connected definition.^[11]

Claims of increased antisemitism are cited repeatedly in calls for the U.S. government to maintain funding for the special State Department monitoring.



Former US Ambassador to UN Samantha Power tweeted that the entire Trump administration should focus on antisemitism.

Former Ambassador to the UN **Samantha Power** and two Democratic congressional representatives, Reps. Nita Lowey of New York and Deutch of Florida, are among those [demanding](#) that Trump appoint a new antisemitism monitor and maintain this office at full strength, even while he cuts other federal spending.

Power [tweeted](#): "Anti-semitism is surging in world. Entire Trump admin needs to focus on it & envoy position must be kept."

Lowey demanded:

"The president must show he takes the rise of anti-Semitism seriously by immediately appointing a special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism and fully staffing the Special Envoy's office."

In a May 2017 [speech](#), World Jewish Congress leader **Ronald Lauder** said,

“Being anti-Israel is being anti-Semitic.” He announced that the congress “is creating a new communications department, or what you might call Hasborah” to counter this new “antisemitism.”

Dissenting Views

Many Jewish writers and activists dispute Lauder’s contention and oppose the campaign to conflate antisemitism with criticism of Israel. An [article](#) in Israel’s *Ha’aretz* newspaper points out that “were anti-Zionism a cover for the abuse of individual Jews, individual Jews would not join anti-Zionist groups. Yet many do. Jewish students are well represented in anti-Zionist groups like Students for Justice in Palestine.”

Rabbi Ahron Cohen of Naturei Karta (“Guardians of the Faith”) [writes](#) that “Judaism and Zionism are incompatible and mutually exclusive.” Cohen states that antisemitism is “an illogical bigotry. Anti-Zionism, however, is a perfectly logical opposition, based on very sound reasoning, to a particular idea and aim.”

Cohen argues:

“According to the Torah and Jewish faith, the present Palestinian Arab claim to rule in Palestine is right and just. The Zionist claim is wrong and criminal. Our attitude to Israel is that the whole concept is flawed and illegitimate. So anti-Zionism is certainly not anti-Semitism.”

Antisemitism?

Recently Israel’s *Ha’aretz* newspaper published a column entitled, “[An Israeli Soldier Shot a Palestinian in Front of Her Kids. Where’s Her Compensation?](#)”

The article, by Israeli journalist **Gideon Levy**, begins:

“For three months, Dia Mansur was certain his mother was dead. He was 15 years old when he saw her collapse in the living room of their home, felled by a bullet fired by an Israel Defense Forces soldier that sliced into her face, tearing it apart. He saw his mother lying on the floor, blood oozing from her mouth...”



Gaza, 2014. Israel's invasions and shelling of Gaza killed and injured thousands of children and left multitudes homeless.

Levy, citing a report by an Israeli human rights organization, writes that from September 2000 to through February 2017,

“Israel killed 4,868 noncombatant Palestinian civilians, more than one-third of them (1,793) were children and adolescents below the age of 18.” (More info [here](#).)

He continued:

“Thousands of others, who were also not involved in fighting, have been wounded and permanently incapacitated.” (Photos [here](#).)



Shifa Hospital, Gaza, 2014

A few weeks before that report, [Ha'aretz](#) published an article that described Israel's month-long imprisonment of a 12-year-old Palestinian boy, one of over 200 Palestinian children taken by Israeli forces in a little over three months. The boy, accused of throwing stones

against Israeli soldiers, would have been released from incarceration earlier, except that his impoverished family didn't have enough money to pay the fine.

In the article, Israeli journalist Amira Haas reported that the boy's father said that his son "wasn't how he used to be before he was arrested."

"He used to joke," the father said, "and he stopped doing that. He talked a lot, and now he is silent."

Haas wrote that UNICEF had issued a report four years ago that Israel was "extensively and systematically abusing detained Palestinian children and youth." Today, she reported,

"The stories of physical violence, threats, painful plastic handcuffs and naked body searches remain almost identical."

Sadly, every week there are similar stories.

To the multi-billion dollar network of lobbies advocating for conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism, those who work to get such information to the American people - whose government gives Israel [\\$10 million per day](#) - are antisemitic.

Many others of all faiths and ethnicities have a different view.

Sixteen years ago I [wrote](#):

"Equating the wrongdoing of Israel with Jewishness is the deepest and most insidious form of anti-Semitism of all."

It is ironic that it is the Israel lobby that is today doing this equating, and that it has worked to invert the very meaning of antisemitism itself. Rather than denoting only abhorrent behavior, as it once did, today the term is often officially applied to what many consider courageous actions against oppression.

More troubling, still, these lobbying groups are working to outlaw conduct that numerous people (including many Israelis and Jewish Americans) consider morally obligatory.

It seems imperative for Americans who wish for justice and peace in the Middle East, and who oppose Orwellian distortions of language and law, to speak out against this campaign - while we can.

Alison Weir is executive director of [If Americans Knew](#), president of the [Council for the National Interest](#), and author of [Against Our Better Judgment: The Hidden History of How the U.S. Was Used to Create Israel](#).

* * *

Timeline for creating new Israel-centric definition of antisemitism

Following is a timeline of some of the key events in the creation, promotion and adoption of

the Israel-focused definition of antisemitism. It provides an outline, but does not include every step of the process, all the key players, or every action.

1991 - [Jean Kahn](#) is elected president of the European Jewish Congress at its plenary session in Israel. He announces an ambitious agenda, including demonstrating solidarity with Israel and European countries coordinating legislation to outlaw antisemitism.

1997 - Kahn “convinces 15 heads of state” to [create](#) the The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia to focus on “racism, xenophobia and antisemitism.”

2000 - The Monitoring Centre issues a [position paper](#) calling for the definition of antisemitic offenses to be “improved.”

2003 - Israel’s minister for diaspora affairs Natan Sharansky founds the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism, [stating](#): “The State of Israel has decided to take the gloves off and implement a coordinated counteroffensive against anti-Semitism.”

2004 - Sharansky, who is also chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel, issues a position paper that lays out the “[3-D Test of Anti-Semitism](#),” statements that “demonize” Israel, apply a “double standard” or “delegitimize” Israel are “antisemitic.” These will form the blueprint for new definitions adopted by lobbying organizations and finally governments.

2004 - US Congress passes [law](#) establishing special office and envoy in the State Department to monitor antisemitism that includes statements about Israel under this rubric. (Sharansky is witness at Congressional hearing.)

2004 - American Jewish Committee directors Kenneth Stern and [Rabbi Andrew “ Andy” Baker](#) work with Israeli professor [Dina Porat](#) to draft a new antisemitism definition and push the Monitoring Centre to adopt it, [according to](#) Stern. Their draft drew on Sharansky’s 3 D’s.

2005 - Monitoring Centre issues a “Working Definition of Anti-Semitism” that includes Sharansky’s 3 D’s, based on Stern et al’s draft. While standard dictionary definitions of antisemitism didn’t even mention Israel, fully half of the newly devised Monitoring Centre definition referred to Israel.

2007 - [UK’s National Union of Students \(NUS\)](#) adopts the new antisemitism definition focused on Israel, after pro-Israel students introduce a motion misleadingly entitled “AntiRacism: Challenging Racism on Campus and in Our Communities.” Some student unions at various UK universities then follow suit.

2008 - The first U.S. State Department Special Envoy on antisemitism, Greg Rickman, endorses the Monitoring Centre working definition in State Department [report](#) to Congress. (Rickman later went to work for AIPAC.)

2009 - The [Inter-parliamentary Coalition for Combating Antisemitism](#) (CCA), which brings together parliamentarians from around the world, issues the [London Declaration](#) signed by then British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and others. The Declaration calls on governments to use the Monitoring Centre definition and to outlaw and prosecute such “antisemitism.” US Congressmen Ted Deutch and Chris Smith are members of the CCA’s steering committee.

2010 - Second US State Department Special Envoy on antisemitism Hanna Rosenthal officially adopts European Monitoring Centre definition; this is subsequently referred to as

the State Department definition of antisemitism. Rosenthal creates course on antisemitism using this definition to train Foreign Service Officers.

2012 - [Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under the Law](#) is founded and immediately begins promoting the new definition. Within a year it launches [an initiative](#) to establish student chapters at law schools throughout the U.S.

2013 - Successor organization to the European Monitoring Centre (called the European Fundamental Rights Agency) quietly [drops the working definition](#) from its website. When questioned about this, the agency's director says the organization had "no mandate to develop its own definitions." (Groups using the definition continue to use it.)

2014 - Mark Weitzman, Director of Government Affairs at the Simon Wiesenthal Center, with help from Ira Forman and Nicholas Dean of the U.S. Department of State, initiates efforts for another agency to adopt and promote the working definition of antisemitism.

2015 - European Commission creates a special position to coordinate work on combating antisemitism, [appointing](#) German Katharina von Schnurbein to the post. Schnurbein proceeds to [promote](#) use of the Israel-centric definition.

2015 - Indiana University passes resolution [denouncing](#) "anti-Semitism as defined by the United States State Department and will not fund or participate in activities that promote anti-Semitism or that 'undermine the right of the Jewish people to self-determination.'" [University of California Santa Barbara](#) and [UCLA](#) also pass such resolutions.

2016 - The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), consisting of 31 Member Countries, [adopts](#) the definition; the goal is to inspire others to also adopt "a legally binding working definition." An analyst writes that the IHRA action is "a potentially crucial tool for forcing governments and international agencies to confront and take action."

December 2016 - U.S. Senate [passes law](#) to apply the State Department's definition of antisemitism to the Education Department, for use in investigating reports of religiously motivated campus crimes. Now the law defines actions connected to criticism of Israel as "religiously motivated."

December 2016 - UK announces it will formally adopt the Israel-centric definition—the first country to do so besides Israel. UK Prime Minister Theresa May made the [announcement](#) during a talk before 800 guests at the Conservative Friends of Israel's annual lunch.

December 2016 - Adoption of the definition by the 57-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which had been heavily lobbied by the American Jewish Committee, is blocked by Russia. The AJC then [says](#) it will push for individual member states to adopt it.

March 2017 - [South Carolina](#) House of Representatives passes legislation under which the State Department's definition "would be used in probes of possible anti-Semitism at state colleges and universities." The [Senate](#) version will be discussed in 2018. Similar bills are being considered in [Virginia and Tennessee](#).

March - May 2017 - Resolutions adopting the Israel-centric definitions are passed by student governments at Ohio's [Capital University](#) and [Kent State](#), California's [San Diego State University](#) and at [other campuses](#) around the U.S.

April 2017 -

- Austria [adopts](#) the definition. (The [Austrian justice minister](#) previously announced that the new definition would be used in the training of new judges and prosecutors.)
- The ADL, which uses Israel-centric definition of antisemitism, [announces](#) that antisemitism has risen by 86 percent in 2017, but includes questionable statistics. News organizations throughout the U.S. report the ADL claim.
- Reports that Trump administration budget cuts might cause special antisemitism envoy position to remain vacant provokes outrage among Israel lobby groups and others. Samantha Power calls for entire Trump administration to focus on antisemitism. Soon, Trump administration [says](#) it will fill post.
- All 100 US Senators send a [letter](#) to UN demanding it stop its actions on Israel and connects these to antisemitism.

May 2017 -

- Israel-Britain Alliance begins asking candidates for Parliament to sign a [pledge](#) that they will support the new definition.

Notes

^[1] I'm using the newer, unhyphenated spelling of this word, which seems to be growing in popularity. I feel it is a more appropriate spelling, since the hyphenated version suggests that it refers to all Semites, which is incorrect. The word was created in [1879](#) specifically to refer to anti-Jewish prejudice.

^[2] Former Israeli parliament member Shulamit Aloni [explained](#) this in a 2002 interview with Amy Goodman on *Democracy now*. "It's a trick. " she said. "We always use it. When from Europe somebody is criticizing Israel, then we bring up the Holocaust. When in this country people are criticizing Israel, then they are 'anti-Semitic'."

Aloni noted that the pro-Israel lobby in the United States "is strong, and has a lot of money." She continued: "Ties between Israel and the American Jewish establishment are very strong ... their attitude is 'Israel, my country right or wrong.'"

"It's very easy," she said, "to blame people who criticize certain acts of the Israeli government as 'anti-Semitic' and use that claim to justify everything Israel does to the Palestinians."

Examples abound of critics of Israel silenced in this way. One telling story is that of once-famous journalist Dorothy Thompson, who was virtually erased from history after writing about the Palestinian cause. Read about her [here](#) and [here](#).

^[3] Dictionaries all agreed on this meaning, with one [exception](#) that caused considerable outrage. This was Merriam-Webster's mammoth unabridged dictionary, which included a second meaning: "opposition to Zionism: sympathy with opponents of the state of Israel."

When some people discovered this extra, Israel-related meaning in 2004 and raised objections to it, there was a general outcry that the additional meaning was inaccurate and should be removed, [including](#) by New York Times columnist and linguistics arbiter Jeffrey Nunberg, who wrote that it "couldn't be defended."

Merriam-Webster responded by saying that the extra meaning would “probably be dropped when the company published a new unabridged version in a decade or so.” The company hasn’t published a new version yet, but it seems to have followed through with this decision. The [online version](#) of the unabridged dictionary, which says it is updated with the latest words and meanings, makes no mention of Israel or Zionism.

^[4] An increasingly common Israeli talking point is the claim that it’s antisemitic to deny the Jewish people their “right to self-determination.” This is disingenuous: Self-determination is the right of people on a land to determine their own political status, not the right of some people to expel others in order to form an exclusive state on confiscated land. In reality, the principle of self-determination would have had the Muslim, Christian and Jewish residents of historic Palestine forming a government for all of them, and today would give Palestinians living under Israeli occupation the freedom to determine their own destiny.

^[5] [Michael Whine](#), [Jeremy Jones](#), Israeli [Roni Stauber](#), [Felice Gaer](#), Israeli [Yehuda Bauer](#), [Michael Berenbaum](#) and [Andy Baker](#), and later on, AJC’s [Deidre Berger](#), previously an NPR reporter.

^[6] The other witnesses were representatives of the Orthodox Union of Jewish Congregations, American Jewish Committee, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, Anti-Defamation League, National Conference for Soviet Jewry, B’nai B’rith International, World Jewish Congress, Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Simon Wiesenthal Center, Shai Franklin, and [Jay Lefkowitz](#) of Kirkland & Ellis, LLP.

^[7] An organization called [Students Supporting Israel \(SSI\)](#) takes credit for most of these initiatives. Created in 2012 at the University of Minnesota by Israeli [Ilan Sinelnikov](#) and his sister, [Valeria Chazin](#), SSI now has [chapters](#) on over 40 college campuses around the U.S., at least three high schools, and some campuses in Canada. In 2015 Israel’s Midwest Consulate chose SSI to receive the award for “Outstanding Pro Israel Activism.” Campus Hillels are also frequently involved.

The bill at [Chapman University](#) passed but was [vetoed](#). Another vote will probably be proposed in in the [fall](#).

^[8] For information on additional Israel-centered campaigns, see the works of Israeli strategist [Yehezkel Dror](#), such as his paper “[Foundations of an Israeli Grand Strategy toward the European Union](#)”

^[9] The AJC’s Andy Baker [reported](#): “It is part of police-training materials in the UK.”

^[10] An antifa group in [France](#), for example, reportedly shut down a talk by an anti-Zionist intellectual.

^[11] A number of analysts have also suggested that some antisemitism may at times be an (inappropriate) response to Israeli violence and oppression of Palestinians. Yale Chaplain Bruce Shipman pointed out in a [letter](#) to the *New York Times* that an earlier period of reported rising antisemitism in Europe paralleled “the carnage in Gaza over the last five years, not to mention the perpetually stalled peace talks and the continuing occupation of the West Bank.” Israel partisans were outraged and Shipman was soon required to resign.

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