

Weaponising Antisemitism: The Gift That Keeps on Giving

Apologists for Israel's brutality against Palestinians in Gaza are continuing to use the past persecution of Jews to neutralise criticism of Israel.

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Thousands of Israelis gathered in Jerusalem on 28 January for a far-right conference.

It called for the Jewish resettlement of the Gaza Strip and the transfer of the population living there, described dubiously using the euphemism "a legal way to voluntarily emigrate them".

Featuring as key speakers were prominent extremist government leaders. This included Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national security minister from the Jewish Power Party, and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich from the Religious Zionist Party.

Their scheme, which members of the far-right Israeli government were floating from the earliest days of the Gaza war, constitutes ethnic cleansing.

Any Palestinians remaining in Gaza would be subjected to the extension into the territory of the state-sanctioned apartheid prevailing in pre-1967 Israel, post-1967 West Bank and the Golan Heights.

This genocidal plan was hailed by Likud's tourism minister Haim Katz as an "opportunity to rebuild and expand the land of Israel".

'Antisemitic Bias'

This signified a comprehensive rejection of the 26 January decision of the UN's International Court of Justice (ICJ) that "Israel must take action to prevent genocidal violence by its armed

forces” and “prevent and punish” the incitement to genocide.

It was also an endorsement of the flood of accusations of antisemitic treatment of Israel that the ICJ decision provoked. [First](#) out of the blocks were Israeli government representatives. The court displayed “antisemitic bias”, they declared.

Leaders of the J7, the large US Jewish Communities’ Task Force Against Antisemitism, [concurred](#). The ICJ has been “captured by antisemitic propaganda”, wrote *Jewish Chronicle* editor Jake Wallis Simons in the [Telegraph](#).

Such a deployment of weaponised antisemitism to deflect criticism of Israel’s responses to the Hamas 7/10 attacks on Jewish settlements and Israeli army units beyond the security fence on the eastern side of the Gaza strip was evident even as news of the atrocities was still emerging.

And reaction to the ICJ decision came as no surprise. After all, this is a gift that keeps on giving—using past experience of anti-Jewish persecution to neutralise criticism of, and generate sympathy for, the Jewish state—and is decades old.

Propaganda Offensive

As I have analysed in my [book](#) *Whatever Happened to Antisemitism?* this ploy is remarkably adaptable to practically any Israeli violation of the human rights of Palestinians.

It was deployed from the first day to describe Hamas’s motives, and continuously since then to undermine and deflect demands for an immediate ceasefire.

Within hours, in what had all the hallmarks of a coordinated propaganda offensive, Israeli government officials and politicians were calling the attacks “pogroms” and characterising the events as the “deadliest day for Jews since the [Holocaust](#)”.

And these descriptions continue to frame public discourse and understanding of the 7/10 events.

[Pogrom](#) is a Russian word referring to violent attacks by local non-Jewish populations on Jews in the Russian Empire and in other countries in the 19th century. They were perpetrated by the powerful oppressor against the weak and vulnerable.

However grotesque, Hamas’s attack was precisely the opposite: “an unprecedented display of anti-colonial violence”, wrote Tareq [Baconi](#) in a comment for Al Shabaka, the international Palestinian think tank.

It was an attack on what was always a vulnerable target that symbolised the anti-Palestinian racist regime, the powerful Israeli state, driving subjugation of Gaza’s population.

‘Trick We Always Use’

As for the Holocaust comparison, such apocalyptic language distorts and trivialises the Nazi genocide of Jews.

The late outspoken and respected head of Israel’s then most left-wing party Meretz in the 1990s, Shulamit [Aloni](#), candidly condemned it “as a trick, we always use it. When from

Europe somebody is criticizing Israel, then we bring up the Holocaust.”

If we compare the weaponisation of antisemitism then, when it was still in its infancy, with its dimensions today, we find that the role the Holocaust is shamelessly made to play in whitewashing Israeli apartheid and justifying ongoing dispossession and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians has become increasingly significant.

The institution through which this was made possible is the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the “working definition” of antisemitism it adopted in 2016, known worldwide simply by the organisation’s acronym: IHRA.

Irrespective of what’s in the definition, who would question something disseminated by a body with ‘Holocaust Remembrance’ in its name? Especially since the definition’s promoters virtually decreed that it was sacreligious to do so.

And yet most of the examples of antisemitism the definition contains serve the purpose of justifying the curtailing of the right of Palestinians to speak publicly about their experiences of ethnic cleansing and ongoing dispossession, and do nothing to protect Jews from real antisemitism.

Protected Behaviour

Even before 7/10, standard antisemitism narratives characterised Palestinians as almost exclusively associated with terrorism.

Today, “Palestinian” and “ Hamas terrorist” are often seen as synonymous. Therefore, to suggest Palestinians might be deserving of rights, sovereignty, and solidarity is itself an expression of support for violence against Jews, [writes](#) the journalist and academic Natasha Roth-Rowland.

Preventing this and fighting it when it happens “essentially posits Israeli state violence—ethnic cleansing, mass incarceration, extrajudicial killing, land theft—as a form of protected behaviour because it is being carried out by Jews”.

As some plausibly argue, one manifestation of the redefinition of antisemitism as anti-Zionism is that antisemitism is no longer about “who hates Jews”, but “who Jews hate”.

Anti-Zionism

The continued success of weaponisation relies on a distorted and instrumentalised view of Jewish history: the notion that, on the one hand, antisemitism is eternal and unchanging, and yet on the other, anti-Zionism is the ‘new antisemitism’.

Either way, the politicised anti-antisemitism organisations constantly encourage people to believe that antisemitic annihilation is just around the corner.

The first, eternalist understanding of the Jewish past, described as the lachrymose view, ignores antisemitism’s contingent and historically specific forms.

As for anti-Zionism, nothing could be more Jewish. Jews were the first anti-Zionists, overwhelmingly remained so until the Second World War, and hundreds of thousands remain anti-Zionist to this day.

However, it serves Israel's interests to continue to cultivate the view that Jews everywhere are equally and eternally vulnerable, even though Zionism was supposed to bring Jew-hatred to an end.

When so many seem to welcome being milked for sympathy because of doubtful claims of ever-rising antisemitism, why not continue to instrumentalise the discourse of Holocaust and pogroms as clear and present dangers?

For Israeli leaders, every military confrontation, every battle with Hamas or Hezbollah is on behalf of the 'Jewish people'. Never mind that making no distinction between the state of Israel and Jews worldwide is an antisemitic belief according to the IHRA.

Ephraim Mirvis, the British United Synagogue's chief rabbi, certainly hadn't read the script when he [praised](#) the Israeli soldiers committing genocide in Gaza in the name of eradicating antisemitism, as "our incredible heroic soldiers".

Could it be any more obvious that weaponised antisemitism is a clear and present danger for Jews not calling for equal rights for all from the river to the sea?

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