



The Dark Universe of Antisemitism

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BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 1,478, March 11, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The acceptance of a non-legal working definition of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016 was an important step forward in the battle against this widespread hatred. It included 11 examples of antisemitism, several of which concerned anti-Israelism. Yet no definition can fully encapsulate the dark and expanding universe of post-modern antisemitism. It includes hate statements and positions by Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders, former German Socialist leader Sigmar Gabriel, and many others.

In the global battle against antisemitism, a definition of this hatred is essential. This is why a number of countries, cities, universities, and other institutions in Europe have accepted the non-legal International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism for internal use.

The text was approved in 2016 by the Board of the IHRA, which consists of representatives from 34 countries. Most are EU members; others include the US, Canada, and Australia. The definition had to be approved unanimously to be accepted.

The IHRA definition document includes 11 examples of antisemitism, several of which concern Israel. Nevertheless, a special definition of anti-Israelism would be worthwhile. No definition of antisemitism, including that of the IHRA—even if the initiators had added many more examples—can come close to covering the multitude of issues that contain elements of antisemitism or touch upon it. This is partly the product of the post-modern era we live in. Many issues have fragmented, and antisemitism is one of them.

There is a vast and dark universe of issues beyond the IHRA definition that touch upon antisemitism. Many did not exist in the classic pre-WWII religious or nationalistic/ethnic version of antisemitism.

Much publicity has been given to the institutional antisemitism of the British Labour party, which came into the public eye after Jeremy Corbyn was elected Party Chair in September 2015. He has displayed antisemitic attitudes on numerous occasions, but the IHRA definition is not helpful in identifying his actions and comments as antisemitic. It does not cover, for instance, his welcoming of representatives of the genocidal Hamas and Hezbollah Islamist movements to the House of Commons, or his references to representatives of those extreme anti-Israeli terrorist organizations as his “friends” and “brothers.” Nor does the IHRA definition cover Corbyn’s verbal and financial support for a Holocaust denier’s organization or his willingness to appear on a podium with another Holocaust distorter.

Another figure in the antisemitism universe, if a less overt and unequivocal one, is Bernie Sanders, a leading contender for the US Democratic presidential nomination (and a Jew). When Sanders refers to the Palestinians, it is their dignity he discusses. One wonders about the dignity of those Palestinians who, in their 2006 parliamentary elections, gave a majority to Hamas, which openly states as its mission to murder Jews in large numbers—but Sanders does not address such matters. He does, however, speak freely about Israel’s “racist government” and “racist prime minister.” The juxtaposition of these statements shows Sanders’s affinity for extreme Palestinian antisemites.

Before WWII, antisemites had no reason to hide their antisemitism, as it was a commonplace and socially acceptable hatred in Europe. Nowadays, explicit antisemitism is no longer politically correct in mainstream Western society. Thus, smokescreening—that is, being an antisemite but pretending not to be—has become more prolific. An antisemite might even falsely claim he or she is a “friend of Israel.” This kind of pattern can be seen in statements about Israel made by former German FM and socialist party leader Sigmar Gabriel.

A crucial issue that complicates the understanding of contemporary antisemitism is that the main type of antisemite in the Western world has mutated. During the rise and rule of the Nazis, many Jew-haters were full-time antisemites. This was not only the case with Germans. Norwegian war-time PM Vidkun Quisling, for instance, was also in that category.

Nowadays, most antisemites are part-timers. A part-time antisemite might make only one major antisemitic remark and then not repeat it. Consider, for example, German ambassador to the UN Conrad Heusgen. In explaining one of his country’s many anti-Israel votes there, he made a morally repugnant statement at the UN in March 2019: “We believe that international law is the best way to protect civilians and allow them to live in peace and security and without fear of Israeli bulldozers or Hamas rockets.”

The largest German daily, *Bild*, wrote a response to Heusgen's equation of Palestinian rockets to Israeli bulldozers. It said: "This equivalence is pure malice...in a week in which the Israeli population frequently had to flee from rockets shot by Hamas terrorists... the bulldozers...are a measure the Israeli government takes against illegal building which concerns mainly Palestinians, but also Israeli settlements." The Simon Wiesenthal Center included Heusgen's UN statement in its 2019 list of the world's major antisemitic incidents.

As antisemitism is no longer politically acceptable, the denial, whitewashing, and minimizing of antisemitism have grown exponentially. The UK Labour Party is a prime example, as it is full of antisemitism whitewashers. A poll of paying Labour members in March 2018 found that 47% believe antisemitism to be a problem, but feel the extent of the problem was exaggerated "to damage Labour and Jeremy Corbyn or to stifle criticism of Israel." A further 31% said antisemitism was not a serious issue. Sixty-one percent thought Corbyn was handling the antisemitism accusations well.

Many cover-up techniques have been developed. One even finds whitewashers of extreme, overt cases of antisemitism. The Nazi-esque floats at the carnival in the Belgian city of Aalst in February 2020 and 2019 are one example.

Louis Farrakhan is America's leading antisemite. Many of his statements about Jews fit the IHRA definition. He calls Jews "termites" and "poisoners." Yet how does one identify people who want to be in his company? Is being intentionally photographed with such a leading antisemite itself an antisemitic act? Probably not, but it is somewhere on the spectrum. Barack Obama did this in 2005 before announcing that he would be running for president. (He managed to suppress the photograph for a number of years.) Other Democratic members of Congress, as well as leading figures in the Women's March (who had defenestrated Jewish founders of the movement to consolidate their leadership position), also got close to Farrakhan.

Claiming that Jews themselves are the cause of antisemitism is a key factor in the historic origins of this hatred. When Christians brutalized Jews they claimed that their resulting suffering was divine punishment for their not recognizing Jesus. This motif of Jewish guilt returns in many versions. Sawsan Chebli, the socialist State Secretary for Federal Affairs in Berlin, tweeted one day after this year's memorial on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz: "'Sure, what happened back then is sad. But when it comes to the return of hatred, the Jews are not entirely innocent. Just look at the settlement policy, the annexation ...' I hear this very often, not from Muslims, Arabs or refugees, but from Germans without addendum."

The Berlin Spectator reported that Burkard Dregger, CDU's leader at the Berlin House of Representatives, accused Chebli of spreading classic antisemitism and blaming Jews for their own past suffering. Yet Chebli has come out against antisemitism and even received an award for it. She is a representative of an ambivalent form of antisemitism.

There are many other examples that belong in the dark universe of antisemitism. New ones are emerging all the time in what is an ever-expanding universe.

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