

# COMMON TERMS AND EXPLANATIONS

## *Antisemitism*

Hatred or prejudice against Jews — is a conspiracy theory that goes back more than 2,000 years that regards Jews as an evil and corrupting force behind the scenes of world events. Hatred and prejudice against Jews have existed in every society where Jews have lived (and at times in which no Jews have lived) — in Christian and Muslim countries. It has led to restrictions on what jobs Jews can have and where we can live, to expulsions, forced conversions, persecution, and mass murder. The word “antisemitism” was coined in the 19th century to justify the hatred of Jews based on the idea that Jews are not just a religion but a separate race. The definition of a Jew is not based on race as our people include every race, but we are also not only a religion. We are a people — called Am Yisrael — which means we have a religion, rites, faith, history, legal and ethical traditions, cultures, languages, and a national homeland.

Antisemitism is on the rise in America, and it manifests in different ways and from different perspectives or ideological vantage points. It is most painfully manifested in violent outbreaks such as in the synagogue attacks in Pittsburgh and Poway, and it also permeates public consciousness in more subtle ways. Discourse around Israel is increasingly a source of anti-Jewish rhetoric. Many critiques of Israeli policies are not antisemitic, but some are — especially those that deny and ignore Jewish history by rejecting the legitimacy of Israel, the right of the Jewish people to self-definition as a people and self-determination, the right of the State of Israel to exist and defend itself.

## *Anti-Zionism*

There are multiple definitions. For some, it is a stance that denies the Jewish people’s right to self-determination in any part of the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people. This position constitutes a denial of Jewish history and is therefore antisemitic/anti-Jewish. For others, anti-Zionism is opposition to the State of Israel as it is currently defined. One can believe that a binational state will be best for both Israelis and Palestinians. As long as proponents of a one-state solution are dedicated to the safety and human rights of Jews as well as Palestinians, and as long as they acknowledge the Jewish people’s history and rightful claim to the Land of Israel.,

One can criticize Israeli policies in the context of it being a modern nation-state that is failing to live up to its human rights and democratic aspirations without being antisemitic. One can use strong language, can protest, can even boycott Israel to pressure it to change its policies without being antisemitic. If one participates in the BDS movement, and in so doing denies the Jewish people’s legitimate right to self-determination in a state of our own in the Land of Israel, that is antisemitism. If one says that Jews should go back to where their families came from — which is not possible for most Jews whether their

families came from Arab countries in the Middle East, North African countries, or European countries — that is antisemitism.

Many anti-Zionists have a history of disturbingly antisemitic commentary encompassing all facets of classical antisemitic language. If one accuses Israel of secretly controlling other world powers, that is antisemitism. If one uses the word “Zionist” as code for Jews or Israelis, that is antisemitism. If one uses the word “Zionist” as a replacement term for “fascism,” “imperialism,” “colonialism,” and “oppression,” that is antisemitism.

## *Understanding the Palestinian Flag and the Watermelon*

People are using watermelon images to communicate solidarity with the Palestinians because the fruit's colors match the Palestinian flag. Some activists are using the watermelon as a workaround to tackle documented reports of online censorship and shadow banning, where platforms restrict creators' content without their knowledge. For further reading and background see the following articles:

- [Why watermelons are a symbol of Palestinian solidarity](#) – NPR
- [How watermelon imagery, a symbol of solidarity with Palestinians, spread around the world](#) – PBS

## *From the River to the Sea (aka “Free Palestine”)*



“From the river to the sea, Palestine Will be Free,” has become a battle cry with new power to roil Jews and pro-Palestinian activists in the aftermath of Hamas’ deadly rampage across southern Israel on Oct. 7 and Israel’s bombardment of the Gaza Strip in response. But like so much of the Mideast conflict, what the phrase means depends on who is telling the story — and which audience is hearing it. “From the River to the Sea” echoes through pro-Palestinian rallies across campuses and cities, adopted by some as a call for a single state on the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. By 2012, it was clear that

Hamas had claimed the slogan in its drive to claim land spanning Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Some Palestinian activists claim that they use the slogan with peaceful intentions and employ it with the hopes that Palestinians will achieve freedom without any political intonations. Rep. Rashida Tlaib called it “an aspirational call for freedom, human rights, and peaceful coexistence, not death, destruction, or hate,” and was censured by Congress for using this language. However, many Jews hear this call as a rally cry calling for the eradication of Israel, as it has ties to the Hamas charter and often displays maps displaying a Palestinian flag over the entirety of Israel. Some point out that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s Likud party, published a version of the slogan, saying that between the sea and the Jordan River, “there will only be Israeli sovereignty.”

## *The Charge of Genocide*

Since the beginning of the war between Israel and Hamas, critics of Israel in the streets, on campuses, in Congress, and elsewhere have weaponized the charge of genocide in their condemnation of Israel's response to the October 7 attacks. This is particularly painful for Israelis and Jews for multiple reasons, including the fact that Hamas explicitly calls for the genocide of Israelis and Jews; and the not-so distant history of the Holocaust, the premiere example of genocide. This FAQ explores the definition of genocide and considers the merits of the charges against Israel. As these questions and answers demonstrate, the term genocide does not describe Israel's actions in Gaza.

- [\*\*This resource about Genocide was produced by The iCenter.\*\*](#)

## *Ceasefire*

Why would anyone not want a ceasefire right now? The history of failed agreements between Israel and Hamas does little to inspire faith in a truce. A ceasefire is also antithetical to Israel's stated goals of eliminating Hamas and securing the release of all the hostages. Some people contend that Hamas broke the ceasefire that was in place before October 7th and should not be rewarded by reinstating it when they are suffering heavy losses. Additionally, a ceasefire that allows Hamas to retain power in Gaza would ignore the organization's pledge to continue fighting Israel and killing Jews.

- [\*\*This resource about Ceasefire was produced by The iCenter.\*\*](#)

## *Apartheid*

Israel's treatment of Palestinians is inextricably linked to distinctions that Israel itself makes between different territories under its control. The difference between a Palestinian living in Abu Ghosh versus a Palestinian living in Abu Dis is that one of these places is inside Israel while one of them is not, and thus the Palestinian living in the former is an Israeli citizen while a Palestinian living in the latter is under Israeli occupation. This does not let Israel off the hook for occupying the West Bank, and it particularly does not let Israel off the hook for not doing very much in recent years to find a way out of its occupation, but it makes the treatment of West Bank Palestinians primarily a problem of politics rather than racism (even as racism against Palestinians absolutely exists) and a struggle between competing and unreconciled nationalisms. The argument that treating one area under Israel's control differently than another area under Israel's control is a discriminatory boycott doesn't create a problem for the Biden administration; it creates a problem for Israel.

- Apartheid assumes exclusion based on identity or race, not based on nationalism or political affiliation.
- [\*\*What We Mean When We Call Ourselves A Zionist Movement\*\*](#)

## *The Accusation of Settler Colonialism - Israel as a Settler Colonialist State*

At the heart of decolonization ideology is the categorization of all Israelis, historic and present, as “colonists.” This is simply wrong. Most Israelis are descended from people who migrated to the Holy Land from 1881 to 1949. They were not completely new to the region. The Jewish people ruled Judean kingdoms and prayed in the Jerusalem Temple for a thousand years, then were ever present there in smaller numbers for the next 2,000 years. In other words, Jews are indigenous in the Holy Land, and if one believes in the return of exiled people to their homeland, then the return of the Jews is exactly that. Even those who deny this history or regard it as irrelevant to modern times must acknowledge that Israel is now the home and only home of 9 million Israelis who have lived there for four, five, six generations.

- Zionism bears none of the defining features of European settler-colonialism. All settler colonialist movements of the modern period consisted of imperial conquests of foreign lands. For instance, the British and the Spanish, who ruled their own homeland, conquered, and settled the land of other peoples, mostly in South and Central America, Africa, and Asia – lands with which they had no prior relationship or connection.
- In contrast, we Jews lost our homeland and lived in exile/Diaspora. We then returned to our homeland, purchased land from local and absentee Arab landlords, and built a country. While that is our narrative, we can and should acknowledge that Palestinians maintain a different foundational narrative, one of catastrophe and displacement, known in Arabic as “Nakba”.
- Israeli Jews are not all white, Israel has a large community of Ethiopian Jews, and about half of all Israelis—that is, about 5 million people—are Mizrahi, the descendants of Jews from Arab and Persian lands, people of the Middle East. They are neither “settlers” nor “colonialists” nor “white” Europeans at all but inhabitants of Baghdad and Cairo and Beirut for many centuries, even millennia, who were driven out after 1948.
- According to the decolonizers, Israel is and always has been an illegitimate state because it was fostered by the British empire and because some of its founders were European-born Jews. The argument is that it is almost impossible for the “oppressed” to be themselves racist, just as it is impossible for an “oppressor” to be the subject of racism. Jews therefore cannot suffer racism, because they are regarded as “white” and “privileged”; although they cannot be victims, they can and do exploit other, less privileged people, in the West through the sins of “exploitative capitalism” and in the Middle East through “colonialism.”

### **Recommended reading:**

- [The Decolonization Narrative Is Dangerous and False](#), by Simon Sebag Montefiore
- [The Curious Rise of Settler Colonialism and Turtle Island](#), by Michael Powell