

# Anti-Zionism IS Anti-Semitism

by [Sammy Stein](#) (June 2025)



David Ben Gurion, Kibbutz Sde Boker (Micha Bar-Am, 1966)

**Is anti-Zionism the new antisemitism?** Many believe it is. But that raises a troubling question: why would a new form of antisemitism be necessary when the old one is still so persistent?

This question matters more than ever, given the steep rise in anti-Zionist rhetoric and actions. Is this simply a political stance, or a more palatable disguise for age-old prejudice? The uncomfortable truth is that anti-Zionism, in many of its forms today, is indeed a modern mutation of antisemitism.

To be clear, criticising Israel is not antisemitic. Debating government policies, challenging leaders, and even questioning aspects of the country's founding are all legitimate. Many Israelis do so every day. At *Glasgow Friends of Israel's* weekly peace advocacy stall on Buchanan Street in Glasgow's city centre, our own members often disagree with actions taken by Israel's leaders. Such conversations are entirely within the bounds of democratic discourse. But anti-Zionism is something different altogether.

Antisemitism is hostility or prejudice against Jews as individuals or as a people. The term originated in the 19th century to describe a racialised form of Jew-hatred, but its meaning now encompasses the many forms of discrimination, stereotyping and hatred Jews have faced throughout history. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), whose working definition of antisemitism has been adopted by numerous governments including the UK and Scottish governments, makes clear that denying Jews the right to self-determination—such as by claiming the existence of the State of Israel is a racist endeavour—is itself antisemitic.

Zionism, the target of anti-Zionist hostility, is the belief in the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. It emerged as a political movement in the late 19th century, long before the Holocaust, driven by

the urgent need for Jewish safety and sovereignty in response to centuries of persecution. It culminated in the creation of the State of Israel in 1948—a state that has since become a vibrant democracy and home to nearly half the world's Jewish population.

What sets anti-Zionism apart is not concern over specific Israeli policies or the fate of the Palestinians. It is the blanket rejection of Israel's right to exist. Anti-Zionism doesn't just critique the state; it demonises it. It holds that the Jewish national movement is uniquely illegitimate, irredeemably evil, and inherently racist. In doing so, it singles out the world's only Jewish state as an exception among the nations, and demands its dismantlement.

The implications of that are chilling. To call for the abolition of Israel is not a metaphor. It would mean the displacement—or worse—of millions of people. The citizens of Israel are not going to passively accept the erasure of their country. They will fight to defend it, as any nation would. So a demand to dismantle Israel, in practice, amounts to a call for violence. What else can we call that if not antisemitism?

Throughout the 20th century, national independence movements reshaped the global map, leading to the creation of dozens of new states. Yet only Israel is continuously subjected to calls for its elimination. Only Israel is subjected to such intense campaigns of delegitimisation and demonisation. The double standard is impossible to ignore.

Anti-Zionists often argue that they support Palestinian self-determination. But that support becomes deeply suspect when it is paired with the denial of that same right to Jews. If you claim to support national liberation for all peoples except the Jews, then you are not advocating for justice—you are engaging in discrimination. That is antisemitism.

This is precisely why anti-Zionism has become the acceptable

face of antisemitism. In a society where open racism and bigotry are no longer tolerated, antisemitism has had to evolve. It now finds expression in the language of human rights, decolonisation, and political activism. But scratch the surface, and the old hatred remains. The target has changed—from the Jew in the ghetto, to the Jew in the synagogue, to the Jew in the Israeli flag.

Take, for example, Pakistan—created at nearly the same time as Israel, also in the wake of a partition. Pakistan is a state with a clear religious identity, and like Israel, it was born of historic conflict. Yet no one questions Pakistan's right to exist. No campaigns call for its destruction. No international forums debate whether its founding was a mistake. Israel alone is treated as an anomaly. That singling out is antisemitic.

In Scotland, there exists a fringe group called *Scottish Jews Against Zionism*. While they present themselves as representatives of the Jewish community, they are far from it. Some members attend synagogue but conspicuously walk out when the prayer for the State of Israel is recited. They distance themselves from the vast majority of Scottish Jews, for whom Israel is a central part of religious and cultural identity. Their rejection of the state is not a political disagreement—it is a repudiation of Jewish collective identity. That, too, is antisemitic.

The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks offered a powerful reflection on this phenomenon. He pointed out that in the Middle Ages, Jews were hated for their religion. In the 19th and 20th centuries, they were hated for their race. And today, they are hated for their nation-state. What links all three forms is a single message: that Jews, unlike other peoples, have no right to exist as a collective with the same dignity and rights as others.

This is why anti-Zionism cannot be separated from antisemitism. The two are not always identical in form, but

they are identical in spirit. When you deny the Jewish people the right to a state, when you hold Israel to standards no other country is asked to meet, and when you reserve your outrage for the world's only Jewish homeland, you are not engaging in fair criticism. You are continuing the longest hatred, wrapped in the language of modern politics.

Antisemitism has simply changed its clothes. It no longer marches under a swastika—it waves the banner of “anti-Zionism.” But the aim remains the same: to deny the Jewish people safety, legitimacy, and a place in the world.

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