

The antisemitic mob by any other name



Anti-Israel protesters in downtown Chicago on Nov. 18, 2023.
Credit: James Kittendorf

by Phyllis Chesler

In the aftermath of Oct. 7, Western cities have been inundated by loud, sometimes violent, masked zombie-like pro-Hamas mobs. They glue and chain themselves to roads and bridges; interrupt public events; storm museums, classrooms, churches and synagogues; and deface Israeli, Jewish and pro-Israel restaurants. And, of course, the mobs call for the death of the Jews and the extermination of Israel. The sight of Jewish blood and the burned corpses of Jews seems to have enraptured and unleashed Jew-haters worldwide.

Many of these protestors are well-funded by the same sources

that pay for the indoctrination of American professors, students, student organizations, the media and non-profits.

But there is another kind of harassment that academics and pro-Israel advocates and activists have been facing. It is more private and personal but equally invasive and invidious. We are being berated, bullied and condemned face-to-face or via email by other academics and activists, some of whom we've worked with for decades.

I do not seek to "talk" to those whose views I already know are profoundly anti-Zionist and antisemitic. I am too busy for such private and dinner table dialogues. I am careful not to poke the bear or the beehive. But since Oct. 7, long-time "comrades" have been unable to resist privately castigating me for my thought crimes. This is their own petty form of mob harassment.

One woman, a red-diaper baby I've known since 1971, began writing articles accusing Israel of every imaginable crime. Apparently, she felt compelled to do so because of the articles I've been writing. I quietly removed her from my mailing list and, when she called, I told her that we could never discuss Israel or Judaism.

Then, I received an unsolicited email from a longtime colleague. She asked whether I had lost my mind or was misinformed due to my support for Israel and the IDF. "Would [I] object to removing Netanyahu so that a two-state solution could be achieved?" she demanded to know.

My otherwise worthy correspondent is a very well-educated European and an honorable feminist. Nonetheless, she seems clueless about the history and geography of the Middle East, totally unaware of military realities and ignorant of the ongoing Islamic theological war against the Jews. She does not even seem to know that the Arab Palestinian leadership has rejected a state of their own at least seven times.

Why did I spend time answering her and sending her articles that rebutted the articles she sent me? I was testing the waters, trying to see if a genuine dialogue was still possible, at least with an educated, ethical academic and activist.

“Phyllis, don’t you think that 20,000 people killed as revenge for 1200 killed on 7 October is absolutely appalling?” she asked. “And bombing these poor Palestinians who are NOT Hamas and have nowhere to go, would just confirm that [Israelis] simply want to rid themselves of Palestinians—which is genocide!”

She sent me articles that supported her views, but wrote that she already knew I’d “find [the articles] deplorable. ... It is impossible to have a rational conversation with you. One either supports Israel 100% or one is antisemitic.”

This appears to be a new form of gaslighting: If I don’t agree with her false narratives, I must be “irrational.”

My correspondent failed to grasp that the Arab and pro-Hamas “street” has culturally appropriated Jewish history and projected their own genocidal, Nazi-style views onto Israelis. She believes that Israel is committing genocide and that Hamas/Qatar/Iran are not.

She also tried to shame me for sending her videos and articles that brought up the Holocaust. She wrote: “I am very sad for you. To bring in the Holocaust into this pro-Israel propaganda is a cheap shot. Where has this erudite, deepthinking and questioning woman gone Phyllis?”

She at last concluded: “It seems to me that we are living on two different planets. At least it looks like we are reading two radically different articles. What struck me is that in your posts there is this underlying belief that the whole world hates Israel and wants it to cease existing and that everybody is totally antisemitic.”

She no longer ended her emails by signing "Love" but rather "In sorrow and regret." In the end, not even that.

Last week, I reached out to someone with whom I worked on a pioneering project in the 1980s. I suggested, "It would be mind-blowing if we turned up at a conference taking place later this month on the same subject."

Her response? "Let's get together—when things settle down politically. I'm a smaller donor to J Street and I was shocked by your negative comment about them. I hate Netanyahu almost as much as Trump, so a calm discussion between us would be difficult if not impossible."

She signed this missive "With much love and esteem." Of course, I responded. As did she.

"Criticism of Israel is not necessarily antisemitic ... the starvation of Palistinians [sic] is not Jew Hatred," she claimed. "The largest demonstrations against the Gaza assault in NYC has [sic] been organized by Jews. I've lost my faith in Israel, but not the Jewish people. That you've become a right winger in so many areas is perplexing. But so be it."

I reminded her of all my 21st-century feminist work, such as rescuing Afghan women, financially adopting one, submitting affidavits on behalf of Muslim women in flight from being honor-killed, etc. I wondered if she considered all these "right-wing" accomplishments. Maybe they are.

She is a Marxist but it has not made her a kinder or more diplomatic person. I bid her goodbye and quietly removed her from my mailing list.

Clearly, blood libel memes are as alive and well among educated activists as they are among the most ignorant and illiterate. Apparently, neither reason nor respect for my work in other areas matters in the least.

First published in [*JNS*](#).