

# ANTISEMITISM WORLDWIDE REPORT FOR 2023



**The Center for the Study of  
Contemporary European Jewry**  
The Lester and Sally Entin  
Faculty of Humanities  
Tel Aviv University

With the support of The Adam and  
Gila Milstein Family Foundation

**The Irwin Cotler Institute  
Democracy | Human Rights | Justice**  
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**The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University** supports research on Jewish history, culture, politics, and interfaith relations. It publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report and the annual For a Righteous Cause Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

You are welcome to visit: <https://cst.tau.ac.il>



**The Irwin Cotler Institute at Tel Aviv University** is devoted to instruction, training, and policy-oriented research on human rights, democracy, justice, and the fight against antisemitism and racism at large.

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**ADL** is the leading anti-hate organization in the world. Founded in 1913, its timeless mission is “to stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” Today, ADL continues to fight all forms of antisemitism and bias, using innovation and partnerships to drive impact. A global leader in combating antisemitism, countering extremism and battling bigotry wherever and whenever it happens, ADL works to protect democracy and ensure a just and inclusive society for all. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, ADL takes no position in support of or in opposition to any candidate for political office.

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# IRAN

## THE DEVIL'S ADVOCATES

Contrary to a common misconception, antisemitism is not a new phenomenon in Iran. It predates the Islamic Revolution and even the establishment of the State of Israel. Alongside good relations between some Persians and Jews and the economic flourishing of some in the Jewish community, and partly as an antagonistic response to those realities, anti-Jewish hatred has existed for hundreds of years in the country that has become, in today's world, the fiercest enemy of the Jewish people.

Shiite clerics prohibited equality between Muslims and Jews. Until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jews were forced to live in "open ghettos," were referred to as "impure," and paid a special tax for religious minorities. Some were compelled to convert to Islam. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, clerics accused Jews of being secularists and Western agents who cooperated with the Shah's regime and Israel to change the Islamic character of Iranian society.

During the Holocaust, anti-Jewish sentiments intensified. Some Iranians considered the Jews and the British as usurpers of their property. The Nazis were thought to be a movement that could free Iran from Western-assisted political oppression. The Nazi Iranian party, "Sumka," advocated the superiority of the Aryan-Iranian race and campaigned against the communists, who were growing in influence at the time, as well as the Jewish community. Its propaganda sowed the seeds for the state-run antisemitism that followed.

While in exile, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, called upon Muslims to boycott Jews and avoid working in Jewish-owned factories or businesses. After establishing the Islamic regime in 1979, the Iranian leadership adopted an uncompromising anti-Israel line and bolstered it with blunt antisemitic rhetoric. Dozens of new organizations were established with the support of the regime inside and outside of Iran, and they were massively funded to promote antisemitic propaganda in traditional and new media.

This tendency reached its lowest during the years of Mahmud Ahmadinejad's presidency. Ahmadinejad was obsessed with the denial of the Holocaust and, upon the conclusion of his failed term in 2013, stated that shattering what he called the myth of the Holocaust was one of the most significant achievements of his presidency. He suggested that the Jews of Israel should be transferred to Europe or to Alaska.

Ahmadinejad's antisemitism and Holocaust denial harmed the Islamic regime internationally. Over the past decade, Iran distanced itself from such rhetoric while not shunning antisemitic expressions altogether.

The October 7 massacre marked a change. The worst of demons went loose in the Iranian official media, which gave voice to particularly heinous antisemitic rhetoric.

The official websites of the Iranian regime, particularly those close to Revolutionary Guards and official propaganda bodies, published articles that involved classic blood libels and other antisemitic tropes. For example, the website Javan, run by the Revolutionary Guards, wrote about “the ancient and hidden roots of the murder of children by Jews, stemming from their beliefs and history. The Jews of today are not those who were loyal to the Prophets Abraham or Moses but have usurped this title and are using it for their own purposes [...] Even today, these Jews worship the calf and the idol in secret ceremonies, a monster with bull’s horns to which they used to sacrifice babies. Jewish secret societies made sure to unite around rituals in honor of Molech, and their priests performed gruesome rituals for the idol [...] They even brought this ritual to the USA, where they perform it in a group known as the ‘Bohemian Club’ in the woods.”<sup>1</sup>

Jews were described as leading sophisticated conspiracies. The conservative website Irdiplomacy condemned Turkey for not severing its ties with Israel. It warned that “the foreign policy of the Jews was based on foreign trade, and they transferred this policy to the Zionists. That is why Germans in the period before the Second World War said that for the Jews, the economy is more important than their feelings [...] It is not clear how Erdogan’s Turkey chose such a policy [of maintaining commercial ties with Israel], which dictates the Turkish policy towards Gaza [...] It can be seen clearly today that his policy regarding the Palestinians and Gaza throughout his 20 years in office was fraudulent. Erdogan is motivated by promoting propaganda for the benefit of his image, and therefore, today, during the war in Gaza, we meet Erdogan who is, so to speak, Islamist and pro-Palestinian, but in practice, it is only propaganda, and Erdogan promotes his relations with Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

Some described the war in Gaza as heralding the Day of Judgment, with special conferences organized on the subject. An article on the website 313 (the number symbolizes the “Mahdi” – the Muslim Messiah) stated that the present war between Israel and Hamas is the great war that was prophesied already in the Bible to take place in the land of Palestine. According to this prediction, the war will be the war of Armageddon and Judgment Day for the Jews.<sup>3</sup>

In a conference entitled “Jewish Zionism and the New World Order,” organized by the Messianic organization “Mahdi is Coming” and attended by the “Association for the Defense of Palestine” and the “Supporters of the Liberation of Al-Quds Institution,” one of the speakers stated that there are indeed material reasons for the war between the Jews and the Palestinians. Those reasons include a famine imposed by the Jews against the Muslims, as well as the internal disputes within parts of the Zionist regime. The Jews’ belief in being the “chosen people” is what really causes them to try to destroy other nations because, so the speaker continued, it is written in their holy books that they must destroy the Amalekites. Thus, the Jews try to

<sup>1</sup> “Khodaye vaqeiye regime koodak kosh Esraail,” Javan, October 15, 2023, <https://www.javanonline.ir/fa/news/1191668>.

<sup>2</sup> “Siasat Yahoodi Erdogan dar Ghazeh,” IRDIPLOMACY, December 10, 2023, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/2023503>.

<sup>3</sup> “Pishbini Naboodi Esraail dar Torat,” U313, October 28, 2023, <https://www.u313.ir/item/1211>.

revive their 3000-year-old monarchy by creating the doomsday war known as Armageddon in order to destroy the Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

Following the war in Gaza, Holocaust denial and distortion made a comeback in Iranian official media. *Farhikhtegan*, a newspaper associated with conservative elements in the regime, claimed that the history of the Holocaust was distorted by the Jews in order to justify Zionist crimes in Palestine. These, they say, exceed the severity of those committed by the Nazis. The newspaper doubted that six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

Antisemitic tropes prevalent on Iranian social media following October 7 include phrases such as “Mice Jews,” “They will soon make you Soaps,” “You worship the devil and take the money of the Muslims,” and “The Jews are at the bottom of humanity but exploit everyone.” Some accounts use the Nazi flag or the swastika in their responses.

The Jewish community living in various cities throughout the country was compelled to demonstrate against Israel and its actions in the war and to justify the narrative of Hamas and the Iranian regime. According to international observers, these were the largest demonstrations of the Jewish community in Iran since the revolution. Members of the community felt their safety would be endangered unless they showed their total opposition to Israel. The spokesperson of the US State Department condemned the Iranian regime for forcing the Jews in Iran to demonstrate against Israel.<sup>6</sup>

After years of moderating its deep hatred of Jews, the Iranian regime and elements within Iranian society have taken the masques off. The combination of deep-seated antisemitism and the attempts to develop nuclear arms make Iran an existential threat to the Jewish people and to human civilization at large.

**– Beni Sabti**

<sup>4</sup> “Yahood dar tadarok jang jahani Armageddon,” *Mizan*, November 9, 2023, <https://www.mizanonline.ir/fa/news/4743609>.

<sup>5</sup> “Nazi tar az Hitler,” *IRDIPLOMACY*, December 13, 2023, <http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/2023595>.

<sup>6</sup> “Esraail: Yahoodian Iran chareii joz sherkat dar rahpeymaii zed Esraili nadashtand,” *VoaFarsi*, December 1, 2023, <https://ir.voanews.com/a/7380669>.

