

# A General Framework for Defining Antisemitism

Ofir Dayan | No. 2181 | August 9, 2026

**The events that have erupted in the wake of October 7 have underscored the need to distinguish between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism. This article reviews four main definitions: the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition, the most widely accepted in the Western world, which includes examples of the use of double standards and dual loyalty; Natan Sharansky's 3D model, which emphasizes Delegitimization, Double Standards, and Demonization; the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which adopts a narrower definition in order to safeguard freedom of expression; and the Nexus Document, which seeks to chart a liberal middle course. While there is broad consensus that hatred of Jews and holding Jews collectively responsible constitute expressions of antisemitism, the main point of contention remains surrounding the denial of their right to self-determination. Despite the criticism, action should be taken to expand the adoption of the IHRA working definition and facilitate its implementation as public policy, while addressing the concerns of its critics. Doing so would help ensure an effective policy against antisemitism without undermining freedom of expression or the existence of legitimate critical discourse.**

The events that have unfolded on the global stage since the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, particularly the turbulent demonstrations and extreme rhetoric directed against Israel, require researchers and practitioners engaged in combating antisemitism and the delegitimization of Israel to revisit a crucial question—what distinguishes criticism of the State of Israel from antisemitism? In recent years, and even more so since the outbreak of the war, there appears to have been a broad and permissive use of the term "antisemitism" to describe phenomena, some of which merit being included in this definition and some of which do not. Alongside this, the rise of antisemitism in various countries, including attacks on Jews who have been targeted because of Israel's policies, has turned the discussion from a theoretical one into a practical and increasingly urgent matter. Like many other issues, the struggle against antisemitism has itself become, in part, a political struggle; thus, the discourse on adopting a definition for the phenomenon has intensified and become politicized, making it difficult to adopt a definition that is acceptable to different states, organizations, and groups.

The purpose of this article is to review the principal definitions of antisemitism that are currently in use, as well as events that have occurred since the outbreak of the Swords of Iron war that correspond to these definitions. Finally, this article will attempt to extract key characteristics in defining antisemitism from the various definitions and recommend how best to proceed in the future toward adopting a uniform standard that governments and organizations can apply in combating the phenomenon.

**The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism**

The most widely accepted [definition](#) of antisemitism today is that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition, which [emerged](#) from a collaboration among organizations, research institutes, and scholars who joined forces at the initiative of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). To date, this definition has been adopted by 47 countries, including the United States (and 37 of its states), 26 of the 27 member states of the European Union, as well as hundreds of civil society organizations, international organizations, and academic institutions worldwide. The definition reads as follows:

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

This definition is popular for several reasons. First, it was adopted by the 31 member states of the IHRA alliance when the definition was accepted in 2016. Since then, four more have joined the alliance, which now comprises 35 member states, alongside observer states. Second, the definition is not merely theoretical, but also includes an operational framework. Within this framework, representatives of the member states meet regularly to discuss ways of addressing the scourge of antisemitism and to promote Holocaust remembrance. Each year, a different member state assumes the presidency of the alliance as well as responsibility for organizing its meetings, thereby enabling each member state, in turn, to shape the shared agenda.

While the intention was for foreign ministers or special envoys for combating antisemitism to participate in the alliance's annual meetings, it appears that most member states do not attach sufficient importance to these gatherings. At last year's meeting, held at the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, most states were represented by lower-ranking officials. At the same time, a more fundamental problem concerns the adoption of the definition as policy. According to officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel had expected that the states and organizations adopting the definition, although it is not legally binding, would also incorporate it into their policies. While some states, such as Germany and France, have indeed adopted the definition as official policy, for most, its adoption has remained largely declarative, or it is treated as a guiding principle rather than a binding standard.

Finally, the definition responds to a practical need arising from the field and provides 11 examples of manifestations of antisemitism. Thus, for example, the use of stereotypes about Jewish world domination, holding all Jews accountable for the actions of a single Jew, Holocaust denial, and justifying the murder of Jews are all considered expressions of antisemitism.

Yet it is precisely this functionality that has led to criticism of the definition from certain entities, particularly with regard to the six examples that address the charged connection between antisemitism and the State of Israel:

- Accusing Jews of being more loyal to the State of Israel or to global Jewish interests than to the countries in which they reside (commonly referred to as "dual loyalty")
- Denying the Jewish people their right to national self-determination
- Applying double standards by requiring Israel to behave in a way that is not expected or demanded of any other democratic state

- Using classic antisemitic symbols (such as the swastika) to characterize Israel or Israelis
- Drawing comparisons between contemporary Israeli policy and that of the Nazis
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the State of Israel

It is therefore no surprise that these examples have drawn criticism, as all of them were prominently manifested during the Swords of Iron war. For example, claims circulated online that released American-Israeli hostage [Edan Alexander](#) was more loyal to the State of Israel than to the United States; the slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," which denies the existence of a Jewish state, became [widespread](#) on social media and in street demonstrations; women's organizations [applied](#) double standards by either refraining from condemning the sexual crimes committed by Hamas during the October 7 massacre, or by condemning them only after a delay that many regarded as intolerable; demonstrators compared the State of Israel to Nazi Germany, including by replacing the Star of David on the Israeli flag with a swastika; and Jews around the world, who have no influence over the Israeli government's decision-making, were [accused](#) by antizionist actors of being responsible for the actions of the State of Israel, whether they supported those actions or not.

### **Natan Sharansky's Definition**

To some extent, the IHRA Working Definition appears to build upon the earlier work of former Prisoner of Zion, recipient of the American Presidential Medal of Freedom, and former Chairman of the Executive of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky. This is because Sharansky's definitions of delegitimization and double standards overlap in both definitions. As early as 2004, Sharansky [addressed](#) the inherent tension between antisemitism and criticism of the State of Israel and proposed a rule of thumb for distinguishing between them, which he termed the "3Ds"—Delegitimization, Demonization, and Double Standards. According to this test, antisemitic behavior, as expressed in the context of the State of Israel, meets one or more of the following criteria: it delegitimizes Israel by denying the Jewish people's right to self-determination; it demonizes Israel by portraying the State of Israel and its citizens as inhuman or monstrous; or it applies double standards by judging Israel according to standards different from those applied to other states. This rule of thumb gained a certain traction among both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences alike, owing both to the simplicity of the model and to Sharansky's reputation as a human rights advocate and a figure widely respected in both the international community and Israel. As mentioned, subsequent definitions of antisemitism appear to have borrowed insights and distinctions from Sharansky.

During the Swords of Iron war, the 3Ds were prominently manifested. One example of the demonization of the State of Israel was an [installation](#) displayed in Turkey in February 2026, depicting Benjamin Netanyahu, alongside Donald Trump, Bill Clinton, Jeffrey Epstein, and Michael Jackson, devouring blood-covered babies on a table draped with an Israeli flag.

### **The "Jerusalem Declaration" Definition**

Opponents of the IHRA Working Definition claim that it hinders the fight against antisemitism, rather than assisting it. Therefore, they drafted a new [definition](#) -dubbed the "Jerusalem Declaration" - that would better reflect the way its authors perceive the challenge facing the Jewish people and the world. This declaration defines antisemitism as follows:

"Antisemitism is discrimination, prejudice, hostility, or violence against Jews as Jews (or Jewish institutions as Jewish)."

Unlike the IHRA definition, this one has not been adopted by state representatives or significant international and civic bodies, despite efforts by progressive activists to promote its adoption. Its principal source of authority lies in the academics who research antisemitism, Israel, Palestinians, the Middle East, and related topics, and who consulted with legal experts and representatives of civil society. Presumably, this is one of the reasons this definition is "leaner," as academics wish to leave as wide a scope as possible for open debate. Their interest is in promoting freedom of expression rather than the enforcement of restrictions on speech that could produce a chilling effect, causing people to refrain from expressing views on certain issues. With regard to classic antisemitism, there are no substantial differences between the two definitions. The same cannot be said, however, with respect to criticism of Israel and the very legitimacy of its existence. The Jerusalem Declaration defines phenomena that are inherently antisemitic and also appear in the IHRA definition, such as holding all Jews responsible for the actions of the State of Israel; but it also defines actions and statements that are not antisemitic according to this definition, thereby directly contradicting the widely accepted definition. For example, according to the Jerusalem Declaration, "statements that could be interpreted as double standards" are not antisemitic, nor is support for a future that does not include a Jewish state, even at the cost of dismantling the State of Israel.

Despite the narrower focus of this definition, many incidents since the outbreak of the Swords of Iron war also fall within its scope and are generally regarded by the public as unacceptable manifestations of antisemitism. For example, Jewish students were [denied](#) access to certain facilities on university campuses across the United States, and Jewish centers including [synagogues and Hillel buildings](#) on campuses ("Hillel" is an organization that serves the needs of Jewish students on campuses worldwide) were vandalized as a means of protesting the actions of the State of Israel. Furthermore, in 2025 alone, 21 Jews were [murdered](#) because they were Jewish - in Australia, England, and the United States - the most overt expression of violence against Jews during this period.

### **The Nexus Definition**

In 2021, another [definition](#) was published in the United States, drafted by individuals who define themselves as "committed to fighting antisemitism and to preserving a pluralistic and democratic society." In practice, this is a group of individuals from diverse backgrounds, most of whom belong to the liberal camp in the United States, including business leaders, academics, and philanthropists. According to their definition:

"Antisemitism consists of anti-Jewish beliefs, attitudes, actions, or systemic conditions. It includes negative beliefs and feelings about Jews, hostile behavior directed against Jews (because they are Jews), and conditions that discriminate against Jews and significantly impede their ability to participate as equals in political, religious, cultural, economic, or social life. As an embodiment of collective Jewish organization and action, Israel is a magnet for and a target of antisemitic behavior. Thus, it is important for Jews and their allies to understand what is and what is not antisemitic in relation to Israel."

Like the definitions presented above, the Nexus definition also recognizes the tension involved in defining antisemitism in relation to Israel, and offers examples of behaviors that are, or are not, antisemitic. The definition views promoting discourse around Zionism that reinforces classic antisemitic

stereotypes as antisemitism. However, unlike the Jerusalem Declaration, this definition also considers denying Jews the right to sovereign self-determination and the application of double standards to Israel to be manifestations of antisemitism. Nexus even defines attacking Jews due to their connection to Israel and questioning their Jewishness due to their views, whether favorable or critical regarding Israel, as antisemitic. The latter point is particularly significant, as it opens the door to defining parts of the Jewish far-right and the Haredi community, who question the Jewishness of Diaspora Jews, as antisemitic.

In contrast to these phenomena, the definition states that opposition to Israeli policies, as well as non-violent actions directed at Israel, are not antisemitic. This statement contradicts the stance of parts of the Jewish community and among conservatives in the West who view the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel as an antisemitic movement. To reinforce this claim, the document notes that using the term antisemitism to describe criticism of Israel is dangerous and undermines the fight against antisemitism and freedom of expression. Here, too, the definition implicitly criticizes Israeli decision-makers, some of whom use the term antisemitism to describe actors and statements critical of Israel, effectively framing them as entities that harm efforts to combat the phenomenon.

The definition also attempts to distinguish between those who oppose the State of Israel because they do not believe that Jews alone have a right to self-determination, and those who oppose ethno-nationalism in general. This is a complex claim in a world where most people, including those who define themselves as opponents of ethno-nationalism, do not necessarily call for the dismantling of states other than Israel - not the states of which they themselves are citizens, and certainly not a Palestinian state. Even if this argument is perceived as overly philosophical or academic, it is an important one, as the discourse opposing ethno-nationalism has become a lively debate in many intellectual spheres, chief among them liberal universities and civil society organizations.

In effect, the Nexus group appears to be seeking a middle ground between the IHRA Working Definition, which has been criticized by elements on the political left, and the Jerusalem Declaration, which has been criticized by the right. Furthermore, it places considerably greater emphasis on the systemic dimension of antisemitism than the other definitions, which focus primarily on individual acts.

Indeed, on a systemic level, antisemitic phenomena that correspond with the Nexus definition have been evident since the outbreak of the Swords of Iron war. The European Union Fundamental Rights Report from June 2025 [noted](#) that European countries failed to create conditions that would allow the continent's Jews to conduct their daily lives freely. Alongside these findings, a 2025 [survey](#) by the Anti-Defamation League found that approximately 45% of respondents and about 50% of young respondents hold actual antisemitic attitudes, including belief in traditional stereotypes regarding excessive Jewish control over key positions in the global economy, society, culture, and politics. In her [book](#) *Be a Refusenik*, Izabella Tabarovsky suggests examining these stereotypes and the way they have been embedded in antizionist rhetoric. She argues that these stereotypes remain unchanged even when speakers replace the word "Jew" with the word "Zionist" and attribute the same disproportionate influence to the State of Israel rather than to Jews, as a way of masking the antisemitism within their rhetoric.

### **What Is Not Antisemitism?**

Over the past two years, statements have been made, and events have occurred that were labeled as antisemitic, but in fact do not meet any of the definitions discussed in this article. The most prominent example is anti-Israel demonstrations held in protest of Israel's policies in Gaza. Although the accusations leveled against Israel in these demonstrations are at times exaggerated and may even rely on false or distorted data, they do not constitute antisemitism but rather legitimate criticism of Israeli policy. Granted, as has occurred in several cases, when protests escalate, they can cross the threshold into antisemitism. This happens, for instance, when participants call for the destruction of Israel or display signs comparing Israel to Nazi Germany. Similarly, anti-Israel graffiti, such as the common slogan "Free Gaza," is not antisemitic in and of itself. However, when it is spray-painted on a synagogue or another Jewish community building, it becomes antisemitism, as it involves the deliberate vandalism of a Jewish institution simply because it is Jewish, while simultaneously holding Diaspora Jews responsible for the actions of the State of Israel.

### **Points of Agreement and Contention**

A review of the definitions of antisemitism currently in use points to a common concern shared by their drafters, whether they are associated with the political right or the left. This concern is the tension between legitimate criticism of Israel, even if very sharp, and antisemitism. Addressing this tension is always important, but it is especially so in the reality that has emerged since October 7, 2023, in which anti-Israel demonstrations and displays have taken place worldwide.

A large portion of these expressions remains within the realm of legitimate criticism, but some cross the threshold of legitimacy and drift into antisemitism. As some of the documents cited above aptly noted, labeling every critic of Israel as antisemitic is not only misguided, but also liable to divert attention from genuine manifestations of antisemitism that require a response. Therefore, some scholars [suggest](#) that, when examining whether a speaker or a statement is antisemitic, intention should also be taken into account, as is customary in the legal sphere. If the motive is primarily political, it is reasonable to assume (even if not with absolute certainty) that it is not a matter of antisemitism. Conversely, if the motive is the dissemination of a conspiracy against Jews or defaming them as a people, it should be assumed that it indeed constitutes antisemitism. While this approach may be theoretically sound and useful, its implementation is complicated because at least some perpetrators do not declare their intentions in advance, and may even seek to conceal their motives.

Moreover, because of this same tension between antizionism and antisemitism, there are growing calls, including from prominent academics and community leaders, to make the [distinction](#) between anti-Zionism and antizionism, where the absence of the hyphen is not merely a stylistic choice. Anti-Zionism denotes opposition to a specific political movement and frames the discussion as a political debate. Antizionism, by contrast, refers to an ideological movement that has emerged in recent years, which uses stereotypes and arguments that exceed the boundaries of political debate and expresses opposition to Jewish self-determination exclusively. A similar process occurred several years ago when academics and community leaders sought to [distinguish](#) between "anti-Semitism" and "antisemitism." The central idea behind this change was that, while "anti-Semitism" could be interpreted as hatred toward all members of Semitic groups, including Arabs and Assyrians, antisemitism refers to a unique form of hatred directed specifically against Jews.

All of the definitions agree that primordial hatred toward Jews, justifying harm to them, and holding them responsible for Israel's policies are manifestations of antisemitism, but the controversy remains regarding the application of double standards and the denial of the Jewish people's right to self-determination. It is important to note that the only definition that does not consider these last two examples to be antisemitic is the Jerusalem Declaration, whose drafters are individuals who define themselves as antizionists in the sense of denying the Jewish people's right to a state. As such, they have an inherent interest in ensuring that this position is not regarded as antisemitic. It is also important to recognize that the IHRA Working Definition, although currently the most widely accepted, faces sharp criticism. Most states in the world have not yet adopted it, and it is primarily accepted in the West. Beyond the substantive criticism, the definition is also problematic because it is relatively complex and lengthy, making it difficult to adopt and, even more so, to incorporate into legislation and enforcement across diverse contexts by states and organizations for which combating antisemitism is not a primary concern.

Drafting a new definition could be a long and arduous process that may not produce an outcome substantially different from the one achieved thus far. Therefore, the arguments advanced by critics of the IHRA Working Definition should be given serious consideration, and explanations should be provided to help bridge the gaps between the competing positions. This should be done with the [understanding](#) that the definition is neither a law nor a framework that determines in a binary fashion what is antisemitic and what is not, but rather a framework for assessment that is not binding, even for the parties that have adopted it. Subsequently, action should be taken to encourage additional countries to adopt the definition, recognizing that, among the existing definitions, it is the most widely used and the only one that includes an implementation framework in which numerous states participate.

Alongside this, the implementation of the definition should be simplified, even if not the definition itself, by establishing fewer and clearer rules of thumb that will make it easier for states and organizations to enforce laws against antisemitic crimes. This need is especially important because today most legislation against antisemitism exists within broader hate crime laws that deal with hate crimes in general, without taking into account the differences among various forms of hatred or the distinctive nature of antisemitism. Only a relatively small number of states have [enacted](#) legislation dealing exclusively with antisemitism.

For professionals and ordinary citizens interested in understanding how these definitions translate into the reality they witness every day, an effort should be made to apply the definitions to the actions and intentions of entities and organizations whose positions are questionable. If such an evaluation reveals a problem with the conduct of an organization or an individual, but not with their motives, educational and awareness-raising measures should be employed to enable them to express their views in a manner that is not antisemitic. However, if the evaluation reveals that the intentions of an organization or individual are antisemitic, then they must be dealt with systemically. Therefore, adopting one definition or another is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by the incorporation of the definition into legislation and public policy, through which it can be implemented in practice and enable an effective fight against surging antisemitism.

Editors of the series: Anat Kurz, Rinat Harash, Eldad Shavit and Keri Rosenbluh