

How not to combat antisemitism

written by David M. Weinberg | 30.06.2023

In a private letter to US antisemitism envoy Deborah Lipstadt, Israeli President Isaac Herzog this week called the Biden administration's national strategy to combat antisemitism "a historic moment deserving of recognition and gratitude... The formidable language of the report contains a sound strategy, well-defined pillars and concrete, viable goals that will help create more tolerant and open societies."

Well, yes and no. It is certainly important that the Administration acknowledges the growing threat to Jewish Americans amid record spikes in antisemitism and that it has made suggestions for action to counter antisemitism. But the language of the report is less than "formidable."

As Jacob Olidort (director of the Center for American Security and its Middle East Peace Project at the America First Policy Institute) points out, "Charlottesville" appears four times in President Joe Biden's two-page cover letter, including in the first sentence. "Judaism" appears seven times in the strategy document and "Zionism" does not appear at all. The acronym "LGBTQI+" appears seven times, "gender" seven times, "equity" 10 times, and "Islamophobia" 21 times.

Furthermore, the Biden Administration's strategy paper omits any mention of Islamists, the Iranian regime, the Palestinian Authority, or the BDS movement. It "embraces" the super-important International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, which includes attacks directed against Israel, but does not officially adopt it.

Instead, the paper "welcomes and appreciates" the Nexus Document, a tendentious definition of antisemitism which claims that no criticism of Israel or Zionism, however defamatory, should be considered antisemitic.

Adding insult and ridicule to dumb injury, the Biden strategy paper then includes the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) - which has a notorious record of hostility towards Jews and Israel - as a partner in its plan, babbling that the Administration wants to "give people a chance to change their past behavior."

In short, the strategy paper is blind to the weaponization of progressive and

Islamic ideologies in fueling contemporary forms of antisemitism, especially antisemitism which masquerades as “only” opposition to Israeli policies.

BREAKING DOWN the report points to several underlying flaws.

First, as British columnist Melanie Phillip pointed out several years ago, even when condemning antisemitism, politicians and intellectuals feel the compunction to condemn “Islamophobia” and “all forms of racism” at the same time and in the same sentence.

This politically correct refusal to acknowledge the uniqueness of antisemitism (and the overwhelming preponderance of antisemitism, above and beyond all other hatreds including anti-Moslem hatred) demonstrates precisely that Jew-hatred. “People can’t stand the uniqueness of antisemitism because they can’t stand the uniqueness of the Jewish people,” says Phillip.

Second, the issue of antisemitism manifesting as mere anti-Zionism remains a flash point. As Prof. Eugene Kontorovich pointed out in rigorously erudite testimony given last week to the subcommittee on global health, global human rights, and international organization of the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, referencing the Nexus document is an outrage. That document justifies double standards against Israel, while purveying the illusion that antisemitism is only such when it presents as pure unreasoned Jew-hatred or as stereotypes and “tropes.”

But this is demonstrably not true. Accusations leveled against Israel often resemble those made by antisemites throughout history. Kontorovich: “Instead of the Jews being accused of killing Gentile children, Israel is accused of deliberately killing Palestinian children; instead of Jews being accused of causing plague among Gentiles, Israel is accused of causing disease among Palestinians.”

“And the accusation of ‘apartheid’ is a modern blood libel – an absurd ‘Big Lie,’ but inciteful in ways that cannot be rectified by mere refutation. Just as the classic blood libel resonated with the theological preoccupations of earlier ages, today’s claims resonate with the ethnic justice concerns of our times. That in our times several members of Congress can level such libels against the Jewish State without facing sanctions from their party demonstrates how dangerous ‘polite’ antisemitism is.”

The writer Peter Savodnik delves even deeper into this: “The American left has stumbled into the bottomless rage of identity politics,” he says. “They have embraced the new racial-gender taxonomy, which reimagines thousands of years of Jewish history into a wokified diorama. Today, the Arab-Israeli conflict can only be seen through this flattening prism, with Israel playing the role of the white, colonial settler and the Palestinian that of the settler’s dark-skinned, indigenous victim.”

“By squeezing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the Procrustean Bed of left-wing identitarianism, the new progressives have alienated the Jew, who for the most part remains attached to the Jewish State, from the American body politic. By transforming the Jewish State into a force for evil, they have forced the Jew to defend that attachment. They have created a space separating the Jew from America, and, in that space, they have legitimized violence against the Jew for defending the indefensible: Israel’s supposed apartheid, colonialism, white supremacy, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.”

In short, by dancing around this core issue, namely that Israel is the focal point for much contemporary antisemitism from the Left and its intersectional allies, the Biden administration strategy is far less than it seems.

Third, because of the above problematics, one must wonder whether government-led programs help or hinder the fight against antisemitism. US presidential historian Tevi Troy details (in an enlightening essay in *National Affairs*) Bush W., Trump, and Biden administration initiatives in this regard, reaching the conclusion that caution is warranted. These initiatives tend to create unwanted and unintended consequences.

“Sometimes an organization designed to address the problem ends up exacerbating it. The UN Human Rights Council, in which human rights abusers routinely condemn democratic nations, is a paradigmatic example of this phenomenon.”

The Biden administration strategy relies heavily on existing government-enabled diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives to address root causes and promote anti-hate education. This is a worrisome development given that some DEI offices are more likely to house anti-Semitism than to combat it. A Heritage Foundation study of the social media patterns of 800 campus DEI officers found

that they tended to reflect a level of hostility toward Israel that went far beyond policy disagreement and often descended into anti-Semitism.

Ridiculously, the Biden Administration also mandates agencies with no apparent connection to the issue to “fight” antisemitism. For example, it directs the Department of Transportation to “better understand the extent to which race, ethnicity and religion or religious appearance impact assaults on, harassment of and discrimination against transit riders.” The Department of the Interior is told to “highlight new resources on Jewish American contributions to American history and disseminate the content through the National Park Service website and mobile app.”

Troy: “This reminds me of President Ronald Reagan’s quip that ‘the most terrifying words in the English language are I’m from the government, and I’m here to help’.”

Instead of this, Troy suggests a deep scrub of government-funded programs that indirectly subsidize antisemitism, such Higher Education Act Title VI programs that provide funds to anti-Israel Middle East Studies programs, academic departments that have issued extremist anti-Israel statements, and public institutions that pay membership dues to the virulently anti-Israel Middle Eastern Studies Association. Federal funds also should be cut to public schools that assign textbooks containing anti-Semitic materials, encourage anti-Jewish attitudes through ethnic studies or anti-Israel programs, or pay for anti-Semitic critical-race-theory training.

In addition to these education-related expenditures that may have the unintended impact of increasing anti-Semitism, Troy recommends that the US also cut off foreign aid that has a similarly destructive effect. These include contributions to the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO, UNRWA, and any funds that go to programs that subsidize anti-Semitic textbooks or Palestinian terrorism.

Eliminating these programs would not only save taxpayers money and reduce funding to those who purvey antisemitism but also send the strongest possible signal that the federal government does not tolerate this animus, whatever its source may be.

Another orbit that the US government could usefully tackle is online hate, even though extreme freedom of expression is sacred to progressives.

According to the new “Toxicity Analysis,” a monthly report of the Combat Antisemitism Movement published in partnership with the Network Contagion Research Institute, a total of 1.3 million tweets pertaining to Jewish topics were collected in January 2023, and a statistically significant random sample of 10,000 were indexed using a machine learning model. The results showed 14% of the tweets were identity attacks on Jews, 11% were toxic toward Jews, 7% were insults to Jews, and 1% were threats against Jews.

Biden ought to start leaning on US social media giants to clean-up their act instead of funding more uncertain DEI programs.

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