

ANTISEMITISM POLICY TRUST

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ANTISEMITISM IN
PRO-PALESTINIAN/
ANTI-ISRAEL
DEMONSTRATIONS
IN THE UK

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Background

The right to protest is fundamental and must be protected. That principle stands for those seeking to demonstrate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as much as any other conflict around the world, be it Russia-Ukraine, in Yemen, or Myanmar.

Pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Israel demonstrations occasionally take place across the UK, especially at times of violent clashes between Israel and the Palestinians/Hamas. Such rallies are frequently attended by public figures, including Members of Parliament and local councilors. When these individuals speak, it will often be to chanting crowds, holding up Palestinian flags and placards. This right to demonstrate and to voice political criticism of Israeli policies or actions is fundamental and protected free speech. However, some of the chants, the writing on placards, and the speeches made during past

demonstrations have crossed the line from expressing legitimate political views into antisemitism.

Antisemitism during these demonstrations includes expression of hatred towards Jews, blaming Jews for the actions of the Israeli government, spreading conspiracy theories about Jews, and calling for violence against Jews. Although sometimes antisemitism is disguised by the use of language that, on the face of it, seems to be anti-Israel or 'anti-Zionist' and not anti-Jewish, when explored and unpacked, these declarations can be antisemitic, and in some instances, criminal.

This document will explore some of the common messages expressed during these demonstrations, explain why they may be antisemitic, and offer some advice on what one can do if encountering them.

Common Antisemitic Chants

“Khaybar, Khaybar Ya Yahud, Jaish Mohammed Sauf Ya’ud.”

The chant ‘Khaybar, Khaybar Ya Yahud’ in its shortened version also appears as “Khaybar, Khaybar Ya Yahud, Jaish Mohammed Sauf Ya’ud.” This translates to “Khaybar Khaybar oh Jews, the army of Mohammed is returning.” The chant is a reference to a massacre of Jews by an Arab army led by Muhammad that took place in Khaybar in Arabia (North of Medina, Saudi Arabia) in 628CE. The surviving Jews were expelled from Khaybar a decade later.

The chant calls for Jews to remember the massacre, warning that the ‘army of Muhammad’ is returning. It was commonly chanted in demonstrations throughout May 2021¹ nation-wide, but has been used in UK rallies as early as 2017. It is also a chant used by terrorist organisations, including Al Qaeda and the terrorist convicted of the 2002 Bali nightclub bombing that killed 202 people.² It targets Jews as a race and it serves as a threat, or an expression of support for the killing of Jews. It falls within the globally agreed IHRA definition of antisemitism³ (subject to individual contexts in which it is used). It also has been found to be in contravention of laws against inciting racial hatred under section 18 of the Public Order Act.⁴

“From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Free”

This is one of the most common chants heard in anti-Israel demonstrations in the UK. There will be many people using this chant as a general expression of support, or perhaps seeking to express their desire that the Palestinian people will be ‘free’ from oppression.

However, the chant can have a more sinister interpretation. It is also popular among arch-terrorists and leaders of terrorist organisations, such as Osama Bin Laden, who was leader of Al Qaeda, Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Lebanon-based terrorist organisation Hezbollah,

and former Iraqi President Saddam Hussain. The chant taken in this frame, calls for war to ‘liberate’ the region between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, and annihilate the state of Israel – either forcing all Israeli Jews out of the country, or killing them, paving the way to establishing an Arab, Muslim state that is free of Jews.

It is a threat of genocide directed specifically at Israeli Jews, not all Israelis (such as Muslim, Druze and Christian Israelis). This chant also rejects Israel's right to exist and denies Jews the right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. It is also one of Hamas's⁵ declared goals. Hamas, Hezbollah and Al Qaeda are not only anti-Israel organisations, they are deeply antisemitic and target Jewish people internationally.

People using this chant or engaging with it should be fully aware of these dual meanings (irrespective of their original intent) and might consider chants which are less ambiguous in relation to genocidal intent.

“Birruh Biddam Nafdika ya Aqsa”

Translated, this phrase ‘With our soul, with our blood, we will redeem you, al-Aqsa/Palestine’, can be heard in demonstrations in the UK. Like with some of the other chants, this phrase can be interpreted in different ways.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque, which counts as the third holiest site in Islam, has long been at the centre of tension between Israelis and Palestinians. In the literal translation, the soul and the blood referenced in this statement can be interpreted as a metaphor for the willingness of individuals to sacrifice themselves for Al-Aqsa. Some of the ways in which the phrase has been used are rhetorical, including in response to threats from Israeli extremists. In the past, the chant has also been used by crowds during protests to demonstrate allegiance to leaders such as Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and Iraq's former President Saddam Hussein at times of violent conflicts. It is not always a direct call for violence, but it can be viewed as support for a

¹ This was during a round of fighting between Israel and Hamas.

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-19881138>

³ Working Definition of Antisemitism <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

⁴ <https://www.thejc.com/news/death-threat-to-jews-sung-openly-at-rallies-across-the-uk-6OsCLjtY9PwD1D7byF0Kpl>

⁵ The terrorist organisation that rules over the Gaza Strip. It is included in the list of proscribed terrorist organisations in the UK: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/islamist-terrorist-group-hamas-banned-in-the-uk>

cause that is achieved by violent means, and received as violent and extremist.

People might use it today as a rallying tool towards protecting the holy site. Nevertheless, context is key. So, if the statement references Jewish people, includes clear incitement to violence, or if it precedes an antisemitic statement, it can be (and has been) expressed in antisemitic ways. For example, if anyone

chants this outside a synagogue or Jewish community center, in that context it would be considered antisemitic and a call for violence. This chant has been heard in Canada and elsewhere across the world, including in Manchester,⁶ Newcastle, and elsewhere in the UK.

6 https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1404398618426101760?t=rwY7qJx-PVpKP7VJ3g-MITQ&s=08

Antisemitism on Placards and in Speeches

The All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism released a report in 2014, following pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel protests in the UK. This was in response to an intense period of armed conflict during the Israel-Gaza war in 2014 that lasted from July until August that year. The report was informed by several sub-reports, including one authored by Dr. Ben Gidley. Dr. Gidley's research found that although most of the messages on placards in demonstrations from that time were not antisemitic, there 'were also a number of incidents of messages with some antisemitic content.'⁷

The incidents of antisemitism in protests considered by Dr. Gidley, coincided with a significant increase in antisemitic incidents against Jews in the UK. His report mentioned that 'over 130 antisemitic incidents were recorded by the Community Security Trust (CST) in July, making it the highest monthly total since January 2009.'⁸

The report identified four antisemitic themes that were repeatedly present in demonstrations: blood libels, Jewish collective responsibility, Holocaust comparison and conspiracy theories relating to a powerful 'Jewish Lobby'.⁹ The same antisemitic themes are still present in pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Israel demonstration today.



⁷ <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/BenGidley50daysinthesummer-APPGAAsubreport-1.pdf> p.6

⁸ Ibid. p.2

⁹ Ibid. p.6

Equating Zionism or Israel with Nazi Germany

A number of the messages on placards held during demonstrations about the Israeli-Palestinian have been antisemitic. The most common ones include comparing Judaism or Zionism to Nazism, and claims that Israel is committing genocide by treating Palestinians in a similar way in which Jews were treated during the Holocaust. Comparing Israel or Zionism to Nazi-Germany has no factual basis. Equating the Holocaust with the actions of Israel against Palestinians diminishes the acts of the Nazis who were engaged in the systematic killing of six million Jews and others. It minimises the scope of the Holocaust and uses it as a propaganda tool against Israel.¹⁰ Drawing parallels between Zionism or Israel and Nazism can be antisemitic (depending upon context) according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, which is the most widely accepted definition of antisemitism and has been adopted by the UK government.



¹⁰ https://cst.org.uk/data/file/4/a/The_Month_of_Hate.1626263072.pdf



Antisemitic Blood Libels

Some demonstrations have also included placards that express the old antisemitic trope of deicide: that Jews killed Christ.¹¹ It holds all Jews collectively responsible for the killing of Jesus, and it still exists today, even though the Vatican made a proclamation in 1965, asserting that no Jews today, and not all Jews at the time of Jesus, were responsible for his crucifixion, a view echoed by Pope Benedict XVI.¹²

Another allegation that is often expressed in demonstrations, is that that Jewish/Israeli soldiers target Palestinian children. Although Palestinian children have tragically been killed during the conflict, it is a false accusation that they are being systematically targeted. Israelis are presented as blood-thirsty (and there have even been disgraceful allegations of organ harvesting). This relates to a blood libel conspiracy theory about Jews that has existed for hundreds of years. Jews have traditionally been accused of the

ritual killing of non-Jewish children in order to drink or otherwise use their blood.¹³ This blood libel demonises Jews and has been used to incite hatred of Jews and justify violence against them since the Middle Ages.

The images below, from demonstrations in the UK, show a woman carrying a doll, representing a blood-soaked baby, and a placard blaming Jews for the death of Jesus, claiming that they still pose a threat.¹⁴



¹¹ <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myths-and-misconceptions-may-2020-1-1.pdf> p.5

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myths-and-misconceptions-may-2020-1-1.pdf> p.4

¹⁴ photos from Jewish News: <https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/jews-are-christ-killers-banner-at-anti-israel-protest/>



Jewish Control of the Media and Banking

Other conspiracies that occasionally surface in demonstrations focus on alleged Jewish control of the media and politics.¹⁵ For example, a speaker at a demonstration in Manchester in May 2021, invoked a conspiracy theory about Jewish control of the media, by saying: “the main 13 executives that approve the content released by the BBC are actually in fact Jewish. So this means the information released by the mainstream media will be biased.”¹⁶ In another demonstration, led by the University College London’ Students for Justice in Palestine, where “from the River to the Sea” chants were heard, the organisation’s President addressed the crowd and talked about “Zionist manoeuvring and plotting.”¹⁷ This relates to old conspiracy theories, most notoriously described in the antisemitic forgery *The Protocols of The Learned*

Elders of Zion, published in Russia in the early 20th century. The book argues that there is a Jewish plot to achieve world domination by controlling the media, the economy, foreign government, and by spreading wars and instability.¹⁸ When an antisemitic trope is mentioned, whether it uses the terms Jews, Zionists or Israelis does not make a difference, it remains antisemitic.

These are only some of the tropes that frequently occur during demonstrations of this type. Other conspiracy theories can be present too, including that Jews are filthy or impure,¹⁹ and that Jews, or ‘the Zionist Lobby’ control the actions of the UK and other Western governments.

¹⁵ <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/myths-and-misconceptions-may-2020-1-1.pdf> p.10

¹⁶ https://cst.org.uk/data/file/4/a/The_Month_of_Hate.1626263072.pdf

¹⁷ <https://antisemitism.org/president-of-ucl-palestine-society-leads-hundreds-in-from-the-river-to-the-sea-chant-and-warns-of-zionist-plotting-at-rally/>

¹⁸ <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/APT-Protocols-Report.pdf>

¹⁹ https://cst.org.uk/data/file/4/a/The_Month_of_Hate.1626263072.pdf p.22



Image source: <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/thousands-march-in-london-for-a-free-palestine/>

Conclusion and Recommendations

Racist and aggressive anti-Jewish language is commonly present in these demonstrations, whether in chanting, speeches or on placards. Calls for an armed struggle, ‘intifada’ or a ‘jihad’ (using this violent interpretation of the word) with the goal of annihilating Israel, can incite racial hatred and violence. Similarly, blaming all Jews for the actions of the Israeli government, is antisemitic. Simply replacing the word Zionism or Zionist with Judaism or Jews, is only an attempt to whitewash the message and make it seem palatable. If the terms are interchangeable, then the message is antisemitic.

The use of such language on the streets of Britain can make its Jewish population feel alienated, threatened and unsafe in their own country. Hateful and racist speech has no place in Britain, it is divisive and should not be tolerated. The problem is further exacerbated when public figures attend these demonstrations – almost always in good faith – to demonstrate support but fail to recognise or challenge antisemitic language or imagery and by doing so, legitimise hate speech, conspiracy theories, and calls for violence.

This guide, we hope, helps to illuminate some of the challenges, and issues relating to language, placards and chants on demonstrations. Where involved in the planning of such a rally, we recommend setting organising principles and briefing stewards appropriately. When encountering antisemitic content, do challenge it, if it is safe to do so. Either way, document any incident so that it can be recorded and reported to the police (if appropriate), communicated to the Community Security Trust, and raised with organisers, who should then act to prevent it recurring.

* We further recommend making changes to how these demonstrations are policed. So far, the police have been reluctant to act against demonstrators suspected of hate crimes or other public order offences, while a demonstration is ongoing, for fear of negatively impacting public order, and inflaming tensions by making arrests. The police prefer to investigate suspected hate crimes recorded during demonstrations only after events have ended. In practice, the perpetrators of those crimes nearly always go unpunished (either due to lack of investigation or no

arrests being made after the fact). It is unacceptable that antisemitic hate crimes which place the Jewish population in the UK at risk, and have a wider negative impact on community relations, go unpunished.

* The policing of protests was explored by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism in its 2015 inquiry into antisemitism, specifically in relation to Pro-Palestinian/anti-Israel demonstrations in 2014.²⁰ The inquiry found that in some areas, the police had been working with local Jewish communities, increasing patrols, visibility and arrests. However, it was also found that “police responses can be inconsistent and dependent on the knowledge and determination of individual officers.”²¹ Additionally, flags of proscribed organisations and jihadi (using this violent interpretation of the word) groups, as well as antisemitic placards, were “paraded without police interruption.”²² The inquiry commented that improvements “could be made to ensure individual officers are better prepared and informed to police demonstrations and that public confidence is improved.”²³ The inquiry added that police response should be proportionate and legal, and that sometimes arrests may be delayed due to operational reasons.²⁴ There is still work to be done in this regard.

* It is essential that police forces present at these demonstrations should be able to recognise illegal chants, behaviours, flags and placards. The inquiry recommended that police and Home Office officials should work with anti-racism experts in order to expand their knowledge and understanding, as well as hold briefings for police officers before they attend such events. We expect police forces present at demonstrations to interrupt or disallow illegal activities with greater frequency and in any event, to investigate them and make arrests as appropriate, either during or after a demonstration.

20 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Report-of-the-All-Party-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Antisemitism-1.pdf>

21 <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Report-of-the-All-Party-Parliamentary-Inquiry-into-Antisemitism-1.pdf> p.58

22 Ibid. p.60

23 Ibid. p.59

24 Ibid. p.59

The Antisemitism Policy Trust's mission is to educate and empower parliamentarians, policy makers and opinion formers to address antisemitism. It provides the secretariat to the British All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism and works internationally with parliamentarians and others to address antisemitism. The Antisemitism Policy Trust is focussed on educating and empowering decision makers in the UK and across the world to effectively address antisemitism.

Contact APT



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