Antisemitic anti-Zionism is on the rise and is a threat to UK Jewry

A BICOM (Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre) submission to Home Affairs Select Committee Inquiry into the rise of Antisemitism, 2016.

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Executive Summary

• Antisemitism is not only the longest hatred but also the most protean. Today, Jews in the UK do not only face the threat of neo-Nazi or skinhead antisemitism. In addition, they face a modern 'anti-Zionism' – anti-Israelism of a particularly demonising kind – which has co-mingled with an older set of classical antisemitic tropes, images and assumptions to create *antisemitic anti-Zionism.* This submission focuses upon the phenomenon of anti-Semitic anti-Zionism.

• There are three modes of contemporary antisemitic anti-Zionism: a *programme* to abolish Israel, a *discourse* to demonise Israel, and a *movement* to boycott Israel. These three modes reinforce each other, creating an environment and a culture conducive to the spread of antisemitic anti-Zionism.

- Antisemitic anti-Zionism bends the meaning of Israel and Zionism out of shape – *demonises* both – until they become receptacles for updated versions of the tropes, images and ideas of classical antisemitism. In short, that which the demonological Jew *once was* in older forms of antisemitism, demonological Israel *now is* in contemporary antisemitic anti-Zionism: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricksy, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment, and so on.

- Antisemitic anti-Zionism is found most often on the far left of the political spectrum. There has always been a distinct tradition of left-wing antisemitism, from the 19th century 'socialism of fools' through the Stalinist-era 'anti-Zionist' campaigns, to the 'anti-imperialism of idiots' of parts of the New Left. Today's antisemitic anti-Zionism is not new.

- There is a direct and proven causal connection between the degree of presence of anti-Semitic anti-Zionism as a programme, discourse and movement – in particular the use of the Nazi analogy – and the level of antisemitic incidents. Antisemitic anti-Zionism is a driver of hostility to Jews in the UK.

Part 1: Antisemitism changes over time. Today, it often takes the form of antisemitic anti-Zionism.

1.1 Antisemitism is not only the longest hatred but also the most protean (Wistrich 1984, Gidley 2011).

1.2 Today, Jews in the UK do not only face the threat of neo-Nazi or skinhead antisemitism. In addition, they face a modern 'anti-Zionism' or anti-Israelism of a particularly excessive, obsessive, and demonising kind, which has co-mingled with an older set of classical antisemitic tropes, images and assumptions to create *antisemitic anti-Zionism* (Wistrich 1984, 1991, 2004, 2009, 2012; Johnson 2015a, 2016).

1.3 Antisemitic anti-Zionism bends the meaning of Israel and Zionism out of shape – *demonises* both – until they become receptacles for updated versions of the tropes, images and ideas of classical antisemitism. In short, that which the demonological Jew once was in

older forms of antisemitism, demonological Israel now is in contemporary antisemitic anti-Zionism: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricksy, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment, and so on (Johnson 2015b, Hirsh 2007, 2013b).

1.4 The relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism can be understood as that between two distinct but overlapping circles. When anti-Zionism makes demonising claims about Zionism and Israel, in hate-filled language, animated by an obsessive spirit, and indulges classic antisemitic tropes, images, and ideas about 'the Jew', and calls for its abolition, we have left legitimate 'criticism of Israel' behind and entered the area where the two circles overlap in complex ways, where a new phenomenon is found: antisemitic anti-Zionism, a comprehensive hostility to almost all of World Jewry, that, paradoxically, claims to have 'nothing against Jews as Jews'.

Part 2: There are three modes of antisemitic anti-Zionism

2.1 There are three modes of contemporary antisemitic anti-Zionism: a programme to abolish Israel, a discourse to demonise Israel, and a movement to boycott Israel.

2.2 These three modes – programme, movement, and discourse – reinforce each other, creating an environment conducive to the spread of antisemitic anti-Zionism.

2.3 **Antisemitic anti-Zionism has a programme**: the destruction of the existing Jewish nation-state in Israel. Israel's very existence is viewed as a crime against humanity: an illegitimate nation. While classic antisemitism wanted to make the world Judenfrei, free of Jews, antisemitic anti-Zionism wants to make the world Judenstaatrein, free of a Jewish state. The right granted to every other oppressed people in history – the right to national self-determination – is denied to just one people, the Jews (of all people), who are told to embrace post-national universalism; and not in some socialist future, but *now* (Cohen 1984).

2.4 **Antisemitic anti-Zionism has a discourse.** The following ways of talking about Israel are common on parts of the left today.

2.4.1 Depicting Israel as being all-powerful and at the heart of an all-controlling conspiracy, as 'the Jew' was in classical antisemitism. Once, the discourse was all about the 'devilish Jew' who – as *both* arch-capitalist and arch-Bolshevik, a division of labour to trick the gentiles – with the world in its grips. Today, the discourse is all about devilish 'Israel' being depicted as doing what the devilish Jew used to do: 'standing in the way of world peace … responsible for stirring up wars … uniquely racist or apartheid or dangerous in some other way' (Hirsh 2007).

2.4.2 Depicting support for Israel as the site of a dubious dual loyalty, a shadow under which 'the Jew' was cast in classical antisemitism. For example, in 2011 Labour MP Paul Flynn alleged that Britain's first Jewish ambassador to Israel had divided loyalties because he had 'proclaimed himself to be a Zionist'. Flynn added that ambassadors to Israel had hitherto not been Jewish precisely 'to avoid the accusation that they have gone native'. Britain needed, he said, 'someone with roots in the UK [who] can't be accused of having Jewish loyalty' (see Bright 2011).

2.4.3 Depicting Israel as guilty of the wanton and gratuitous shedding of the blood of non-Jewish children, as 'the Jew' was held to do in the classic blood libel slander. The classic blood

libel held that Jews murdered gentile children for pleasure or in their religious rituals – to bake their Matzo bread. Today we have a peer of the realm, Jennie Tonge, who demanded an enquiry into the monstrous Big Lie that the rescue mission sent by Israel to Haiti had a secret agenda of harvesting the organs of the dead for transportation back to Jews in Israel. The blood libel / baby killers trope was present at, sometimes central to, the protests during the 2014 Gaza conflict as in this photograph of a protest outside the BBC.

2.4.4 Depicting Israel as the obstacle to a better, purer, peaceful and spiritual world, as 'the Jew' was in classical antisemitism. In classic antisemitism, a peaceful utopia is depicted as being just out of reach, graspable if only 'the Jew' would get out of the way. Now it is Israel which is to get out of the way, or to be pushed.

• Form 1 (Christian): Jews as the betrayers and killers of the universal God.

• Form 2 (Enlightenment): Jews as a particularist anachronism, standing in the way of universalist reason.

• Form 3 (Anti-Enlightenment): Jews as rootless cosmopolitans, the dissolvent of every nation and people.

• Form 4: (Nazi): Jews as untermenschen, the biological pollutant in the otherwise healthy social body of the volksgemeinshaft.

• Form 5: (Anti-Zionist): Today, the homeland of the Jewish people, Israel itself, has been handed the role of 'Jewish obstacle to utopia'. It is not treated in antisemitic anti-Zionist discourse as a nation-state to be criticised like others but as the very fulcrum of all that is wrong with our world, to be cleared away as the necessary preliminary to local, regional, indeed world peace (Gardner, 2007).

2.4.5 Depicting Israel as inherently racist, violent and supremacist, as Judaism was depicted as being in classic antisemitism. In classical antisemitism, Judaism is framed as a violent, supremacist pseudo-religion; a tribal affair masked as something more elevated to fool the gentiles. Today, the discourse depicts a 'racist' 'imperialist' 'genocidal' Israel as the inevitable result of, and the natural expression of a fundamentally malevolent Jewish religion.

For example, Oren Ben-Dor, a Southampton university lecturer, argues that 'the Holocaust occurred because of something that haunts Jewish being and thinking, something that cannot be tamed' (see Browne 2015). Ben-Dor is not a one-off. The leading European philosopher Gianni Vattimo's editorial introduction to *Deconstructing Zionism* – a collection of essays written by 'some of today's leading philosophers' and which is used in UK universities – claims that 'To speak of Israel as an "irredeemable sin" is therefore not so excessive.' Vattimo suggests we listen less to 'the Zionists' and more to the former Iranian President Ahmadinejad who has had the courage to 'question the very legitimacy of Israel's existence'. He goes on: 'When Ahmadinejad invokes the end of the State of Israel, he merely expresses a demand that should be more explicitly shared by the democratic countries that instead consider him an enemy' (Vattimo 2014).

2.4.6 Depicting Israel as the equivalent of the Nazi state. One of the most dangerous developments in antisemitic anti-Zionism in recent times has been the spread of the Nazi Analogy or what is increasingly called 'Holocaust Inversion' (Gerstenfeld 2007; Klaff 2014).

Holocaust Inversion takes four forms.

First, the depiction of Israelis as the new Nazis and the Palestinians as the new Jews; an inversion of reality.

Second, Zionism is made to appear as akin to Nazism, or to be considered alongside of, or in comparison to, or even collaborating with Nazism.

Third, the Holocaust is turned into a 'moral lesson' for, or a 'moral indictment' of the Jews – an inversion of morality.

Fourth, Holocaust memory appears only as a politicised and manipulated thing, a 'card' that is 'played', a club that is wielded instrumentally, with malice aforethought, by bullying Jews, for Jewish ends (Klaff 2013, 2014).

By the 1980s, according to the leading scholar of antisemitism, the late Robert Wistrich, 'the Soviet Union ... stood in the forefront of the global campaign to equate Zionism with Nazism' (1984). And this became 'an integral part of the cultural code of many Leftist and some liberal circles' in the West (Wistrich 1984; see also Ben Cohen 1984). This trend was 'most striking in Great Britain', Wistrich believed, where the far-left led the way in 'reflecting motifs long familiar from Soviet propaganda' (Wistrich 1984).

The Inversion has now been in use for over three decades in far-left circles in the UK, as demonstrated by these cartoons depicting Israeli Prime Minister Begin as a Nazi, published in 1982 in the hard-left *Labour Herald* newspaper, co-edited at the time by Ken Livingstone, and in the Socialist Workers Party's monthly magazine *The Socialist Review* (see Cohen 1984; Wistrich 2012; Cohen 2004; Gerstenfeld 2007a and 2007b).

Image. *Labour Herald*, June 25 (1982). According to his biographer Andy Hosken, Ken Livingstone, who had a leading role at *Labour Herald*, insisted that the paper publish this cartoon.
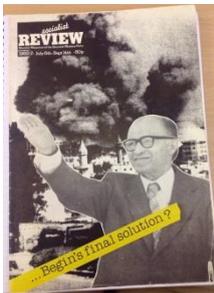

Image. *Socialist Review*, 7, 5 July-14 September (1982).

In 2009, the European Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism noted the 'growing normalisation' in the UK of 'the use of Nazi or related terms or symbols (Nazism, Hitler, Swastikas, etc.) in reference to Jews, Israel, Zionism' (Iganski and Sweiry 2009).

Writing in 2010, Anthony Julius claimed, in his history of antisemitism in England, that the Inversion had become 'a reflex' among certain groups in the UK (2010).

2.4.7 **Antisemitism denial and victim-reversal.** This is the notion – really, just a prejudice – that people who claim to see 'antisemitism', and speak up about it, are guilty of deliberately 'playing' a 'card' in bad faith to 'prevent criticism of Israel'. A short-hand term for this form of denial and victim reversal is 'The Livingstone Formulation' (Hirsh 2016), which Hirsh defines as 'a rhetorical device which enables the user to refuse to engage with the charge made. It is a mirror which bounces back onto an accuser a counter-charge of dishonest Jewish (or "Zionist") conspiracy.'

Antisemitic anti-Zionism tends to see Holocaust memory only as a politicised and manipulated thing, a club wielded instrumentally, with malice aforethought, by bullying Jews, for Jewish ends. The words 'Zionism', 'Holocaust,' 'Israel,' 'Nazi,' 'Jenin,' 'Gaza,' 'IDF,' 'SS,'

'Ghetto,' 'Concentration Camp' – are now routinely twisted until their meaning is established not by its real-world referent but by its new place in the structure of antisemitic anti-Zionist discourse.

For example, 'The Holocaust' is transformed so that it no longer really comes into focus as a descriptor of the Nazi murder of the six million. Instead, it is reconstituted as a 'lesson, unheeded, for the Jews'; as 'what the Zionists are doing now to the Palestinians'; as 'a card played by Zionists to prevent their incremental genocide of the Palestinians being criticised'.

For example, Israel's operations to stop rockets from Gaza have been described as a 'vernichtungskreig' (war of extermination) and Israel itself as a 'Taetervolk' (a nation of criminals). Tariq Ali can say that Israelis treat Palestinians as 'untermenschen' while Noam Chomsky can write about the 'jackboots' of the IDF.

Part 3: Left-Wing Antisemitism is not new

3.1 Antisemitic anti-Zionism is found most often on the far left of the political spectrum. There has always been a distinct tradition of left-wing antisemitism (see Steve Cohen 1984, Johnson 2015b).

3.2 Left-wing antisemitism got going during the foundations of the socialist movement in the late 19th century as parts of the left, often as a tactical ploy, identified 'The Jew' with finance capitalism. August Bebel, the German Social Democrat leader, shook his head at all this and called it the 'socialism of fools' (Steve Cohen 1984, Wistrich 2012).

3.3 After the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, the 'socialism of fools' did not disappear. Rather, it morphed into the 'anti-imperialism of idiots' in the second half of the 20th century, when vicious, well-funded and long-running anti-Zionist campaigns were conducted by the Stalinist states in alliance with authoritarian Arab states (Herf 2016).

3.4 This global flood of Communist propaganda ensured that the following demonising notions took root in parts of the global Left: Zionism equals racism; Zionism equals imperialism; Zionism equals South African apartheid; Israel is the USA's 'watchdog' in the

Middle East; Zionism is complicit with, or even promotes, antisemitism; Zionism is a form of Nazism; Israel is a Nazi-like state. All of these notions are central to antisemitic anti-Zionism today.

3.5 While the 1960s New Left challenged Stalinism about many things, it mostly *inherited*, rather than critiqued, antisemitic anti-Zionism (see Julius 2010, Hirsh 2007, Wistrich 2012, Johnson 2015b).

3.6 A change in the world view of parts of the left also opened the door to antisemitic anti-Zionism. Academic David Hirsh (2007) has observed that whereas before the late 1960s, for the left, anti-imperialism was 'one value amongst a whole set – democracy, equality, sexual and gender liberation, anti-totalitarianism' – it was raised to a radically new status after the 1960s. Indeed, 'anti-imperialism' became 'the central value, prior to and above all others'. Parts of the Left then abandoned universal progressive values rooted in the Enlightenment and became apologists for authoritarian and reactionary political forces. Parts of the Left apologised for, or refused to criticise, any and all 'resistance' to the West.

3.7 Israel was now redefined not as a nation-state among others, to be criticized as others, but as 'a key site of the imperialist system'. The Israel-Palestine conflict was no longer a complex unresolved national question to which democrats should respond with support for the peacemakers on both sides and work for 'two states for two peoples'. Instead, parts of the Left now supported Israel's enemies – whatever these enemies stood for, however they behaved – as a left-wing 'anti-imperialist' duty (see Berman 2005).

3.8 For example, the globally influential US academic Judith Butler argues: 'Understanding Hamas, Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the left, that are part of a global left, is extremely important' (quoted in Johnson 2012). For example, Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn has said '[Hezbollah is] an organisation that is bringing about long term peace and social justice and political justice in the whole region' (see Hirsh 2016).

Part 4: Antisemitic anti-Zionism is a driver of antisemitic incidents in the UK

4.1. There is a direct and proven causal connection between the presence of antisemitic anti-

Zionism as a programme, discourse and movement – in particular the use of the Nazi analogy – and antisemitic incidents.

4.2 The Community Security Trust (CST), the UK Jewish community's monitoring organisation, recorded that around one-third of the antisemitic incidents in July and August 2014 involved Holocaust-related language or imagery. Indeed, 239 of the 1,168 antisemitic incidents reported to CST across 2014 'employed discourse based on the Nazi period, including swastikas and references to the Holocaust' (2015a).

4.3 'Reference to Hitler or the Holocaust' noted the CST, was used to 'taunt or offend Jews, often in relation to events in Israel and Gaza' (cited in Gidley 2015). Offenders will 'select from a range of Jewish related subjects,' say CST, 'particularly insults related to the Holocaust or Israel, for language or imagery with which to abuse, insult or threaten their Jewish victims' (CST 2015a, emphasis added).

4.4 The academic Ben Gidley analysed the mass demonstrations in London during the Gaza conflict of 2014 and concluded that while antisemitism was not a 'predominant presence' at these events, antisemitism was 'nonetheless a feature' of street protests, where 'a continuum of expressions emphasising the Holocaust' was found (2015).

4.5 Social media was 'a platform for antisemitic rhetoric' during the conflict, according to the Association of Chief Police Officers (APPG 2015:40). Paul Iganski and Abe Sweiry, two academics from Lancaster University's Corpus Approach to Social Sciences Unit, conducted an analysis of antisemitic discourse on Twitter. Working with 22 million Tweets from July and August 2014, they analysed a subsample of 38,460 Tweets containing the words 'Israel' or 'Gaza', along with the words 'Jew', 'Jews' or 'Jewish'. Their findings suggest that Holocaust Inversion discourse may be moving closer to the centre of contemporary antisemitic discourse:

A keyword analysis – one of the core methods of corpus linguistics – showed that in the sub-sample analysed, the spectre of Nazism, with words such as "Hitler", "Holocaust", "Nazi" and "Nazis", was present in the top 35 keywords for the downloaded sample. "Hitler" was mentioned 1117 times; "Holocaust" was mentioned in 505 tweets, and "Nazi" or "Nazis" were mentioned in 851 tweets.

The Nazi theme was also evident in hashtags analysed for the sub-sample, with the high frequency of the hashtags '#hitler, # hitlerwasright, and #genocide' (Iganski et al 2015). Iganski and his colleagues found that 0.9 per cent of tweets in the corpus that mentioned Israel or Gaza in July 2014 also invoked Hitler, Nazis or the Holocaust – some 99, 832 out of 11,008,511 (2015b).

Using the linguistic technique of collocation analysis, they then examined a sub-sample of the twitter data set for the presence of invective and provisionally concluded: 'The largest category in relation to invective, again, was Nazi references.' (APPG Report 2015:52)

4.6 The Nazi analogy, or Holocaust Inversion, is antisemitic because of three determining contexts that shape its meaning and impact.

4.6.1 **First, the Nazi analogy is antisemitic because of the Jewish context**. Iganski, McGlashan and Sweiry point out that 'deep wounds are scratched when the Nazi-card is played in this way in discourse against Jews ... [it] is not simply abusive [but] ... invokes painful collective memories for Jews and for many others. By using those memories against Jews it inflicts profound hurts' and can incite violence against Jews (Igansky et al 2015).

In similar vein, Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust has argued that Holocaust Inversion in the UK in 2014 deliberately played on Jewish sensibilities 'in order to provoke a reaction' adding that 'another word for that is Jew-baiting' (in Gidley 2015).

The CST record incidents equating Israel with Nazi Germany as antisemitic because the Inversion has a 'visceral capacity to offend Jews on the basis of their Jewishness' and so 'carries a particular meaning for Jews because of the Holocaust' (2015a).

Israeli academic Elhanan Yakira points out that the Nazi analogy has a 'more immoral, more significant ... more effective ... more widespread' character 'when applied to Jews and the Jewish state'. More: the Inversion seeks to 'suppress memory, which in this instance can only mean eliminating identity' (2010).

Robert Wistrich believed that the Inversion was actually becoming more central to

contemporary antisemitism; indeed was 'in practice ... the most potent form of contemporary antisemitism' (2004). Invertors, he pointed out, 'exploit the reality that Nazism in the post-war world has become the defining metaphor of absolute evil' and by associating Zionism with Nazism and Israel with the Third Reich, seek to place upon all people nothing less than 'a moral obligation to wage war against Israel' as a uniquely malign force (2004).

4.6.2 **Second, the Nazi analogy is antisemitic because of the political context.** Holocaust Inversion is not just a poor use of language. It is, rather, used knowingly as part of the political practice of a global social movement that seeks the destruction of only one state in the world, the Jewish one. It is a deliberate, relentless, state-sponsored, well-funded and global political project, that has stretched over several decades and across several continents, and has often merged with murderous antisemitism. As Elhanan Yakira observes, there is an entire 'eco-system'; an 'international community' with a shared code, language, jargon, credo and sensibility that is pushing the Nazi analogy as part of a political agenda (2010).

4.6.3 **Third, the Nazi analogy is antisemitic because it updates the motif of Jewish malignity.** The core motif of antisemitism is that that 'the Jews' are not just the Other but malevolent (Gerstenfeld 2007c). The supposed content of that malevolence changes with the times: the Jew has been depicted as God-killer; as Rootless Cosmopolitan dissolving the integrity of every Nation; as the world-controlling Capitalist-Bolshevik conspirator subverting the Gentile world for Jewish purposes; as Untermenschen, the Biological Pollutant of the Master-Race, and so on.

Holocaust Inversion *functions* today – whatever the subjective intentions of the speaker – to update for our times the core antisemitic motif of malignity, by depicting the Jewish State as a Nazi state, and its supporters as Zio-Nazis.

As the 2006 All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism put it, 'discourse has developed that is in effect antisemitic because it views Zionism itself as a global force of unlimited power and malevolence throughout history ... having redefined Zionism in this way, traditional antisemitic notions ... are transferred from Jews ... on to Zionism...' (APPG 2006:17).

This photograph of a blood-sucking vampiric Netanyahu, the puppeteer of the world powers, taken on an anti-Israel demonstration in central London on 26 July 2014 illustrates the point.

Far-left writer Tariq Ali says that Israelis treat Palestinians as 'Untermenschen' (cited in Julius 2010). By doing so, he is constructing what Elhanan Yakira calls a 'transhipment mechanism', that is, a 'vehicle for transferring blame and negation', i.e. for transferring the 'absolute evil, limitless guilt, and suffering' from the Holocaust to Israel and Zionism and Jews.

To minimise all of this as merely 'offensive' and 'hurtful' is to fail to grasp the evolution of antisemitism in the era of Israel, and to fail to delineate one of its contemporary forms.

Part 5: Recommendations

5.1 UK public bodies and political parties should **codify the difference between legitimate criticism of Israel and the kind of demonisation that feeds antisemitic anti-Zionism** by using the **EUMC Working Definition of Antisemitism** (European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, now the Agency For Fundamental Rights, FRA).

Bodies and parties should educate staff / members in the spirit and guidelines of the Working Definition, which is used around the world from the European Parliament to the UK College of Policing, from the US Department of State to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (See Hirsh 2013 on the history of the EUMC Working Definition, see IHRA 2016).

Bodies and parties should follow the EUMC Definition guideline that 'criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic'. That guideline would define as legitimate – even if not fully informed, fair and balanced, which is a separate matter - criticism of the following, all the subject of intense debate *within Israel*

and between Israeli Jews.

- the continuing Israeli occupation of the West Bank;
- the existence and expansion of settlements;
- the proportion of the force with which Israel periodically restores deterrence against Hamas rockets fired at its civilians, Arab as well as Jewish;
- the inequality that exists between Israel's (minority) Arabs and (majority) Jews;
- the illiberal actors that undoubtedly exist in Israeli society and politics.

However, bodies and parties would be obliged to *also* follow the EUMC Working Definition when it goes on to define the following as 'examples of the ways in which antisemitism manifests itself with regard to the State of Israel taking into account the overall context':

• 'Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination (e.g. by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour).
• Applying double standards by requiring of it a behaviour not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
• Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g. claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterise Israel or Israelis.
• Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
• Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.'

5.2 Holocaust-analogising should always be avoided when talking about Israel and the Arab world. It is always grossly misleading, wrong and offensive (see Feldman 2015) in addition to being a form of antisemitic anti-Zionism.

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