

Flaws in the Nexus Task Force Definition Of Antisemitism

The [Nexus Document](#) is a definition of antisemitism that was created by the Nexus Task Force, derived from a lengthier white paper by that group. The Nexus Task Force is a project created by the Knight Program on Media and Religion at the Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism at USC. It aims to analyze the issues at the core of antisemitism and Israel in American politics.

The Nexus Document provides the following 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 can be a target of antisemitism and antisemitic behavior. Thus, it is important for Jews and their allies to understand what is and what is not antisemitic in relation to Israel.”

Some of the Nexus language can be helpful as a complement to the widely accepted IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism. However, it also defines antisemitism in a way that unjustly defends many bigoted forms of opposition to Israel’s existence and Jewish rights to self-determination. It does so by prioritizing intentions over impact..

The distinctions made between what can and cannot be considered antisemitic are misleading and harmful to efforts in combating antisemitism.

- The main difference between these two definitions is found in the examples related to Israel. The Nexus Task Forces’s stated aim is to help navigate through the intersections of antisemitism and Israel. It provides specific guidelines clearly outlining what can be considered antisemitic and what cannot be considered antisemitic. Unfortunately these statements do not necessarily reflect the views of the majority of the Jewish community¹ and can easily be taken out of context by those attempting to derail efforts to combat antisemitism. This runs the risk of creating more confusion and controversy.
- The Nexus Task Force demonstrates a misunderstanding of Zionism by claiming that opposition to Zionism are not antisemitic. Because Zionism is not simply a political movement, but actually forms a fundamental component of Jewish identity for many, these statements are misleading and may have the effect of perpetuating anti-Zionist forms of antisemitism.
- The Nexus Task Force says that disproportionate focus on Israel and treating Israel differently than other countries cannot necessarily be considered antisemitic, because

¹ Luntz Global, “American Jews on Israel and the Middle East,” *CAMERA*, May 16-17, 2011, at http://www.camera.org/images_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf

there may be legitimate reasons for such focus or treatment. While each instance needs to be judged case by case, there is no question that such discriminatory double standards do exist. For example, the UN Human Rights Council has passed dozens of anti-Israel resolutions and barely any condemning other nations.

- By determining what can and cannot be considered antisemitic in very specific terms, and by considering an individual speaker/actor's personal experiences, the Nexus Task Force is prioritizing motive and intent above impact when determining whether antisemitism has occurred. This can actually cause more confusion and further the spread of antisemitism by allowing people to shield themselves from being called out for using antisemitic rhetoric simply by claiming they didn't mean to promote antisemitism.

The Nexus document does not reflect a consensus among American Jews and is not fully reflective of antisemitism Jews experience across the political spectrum.

- The Nexus definition reflects the positions of a minority of Jewish people and was created by one department at USC. On top of that, by focusing on American politics, it has omitted the perspectives and experiences of the rest of world Jewry. At best, this definition reflects the opinions and views of a few.

The Nexus document does not take context into account, which is very important in determining whether antisemitism has occurred.

- The Nexus definition approaches antisemitism in a dogmatic, per se, manner, speaking in terms of "What Is Antisemitic?" and "What is Not Antisemitic?" This approach leaves no room for evaluating content in light of context. When determining whether antisemitism, or any other form of discrimination or bigotry, has occurred, context should be key.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Antisemitism remains the best consensus driven definition for understanding and identifying antisemitism.

- The IHRA Definition provides eleven examples rooted in antisemitic conspiracy theories that have evolved over time with the acknowledgment that these have evolved and will continue to evolve. These examples allow for education to better identify antisemitic manifestations and provide for the context to be taken into account in investigating whether antisemitism has occurred. The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism best reflects how contemporary antisemitism **can** manifest across the political spectrum. It is called a working definition because it is intended to be used, i.e., "worked with," allowing for continued investigation and consultation with those affected by antisemitic language and acts.
- The IHRA Definition does not rely on or account for intentions in consideration of whether antisemitism has occurred. Whether or not one intends to engage in

antisemitism is not the determining factor as to whether certain substantive words or actions are, in fact, antisemitic. The IHRA Definition allows for antisemitism to be identified as such, considering overall context, but not simply on the basis of motive or intention. This allows for better education to take place, including when antisemitism occurs but was not intended, as is often the case.

- The IHRA is an intergovernmental agency first established in 1998 and comprised of 34 member countries as an assembly of international experts and governments. The IHRA Working Definition is based on a definition first published by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in 2005, now the Fundamental Rights Agency. The IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism was developed and adopted following extensive research and consultation. This IHRA committee worked to build international consensus around this working definition of antisemitism by consulting with international experts and leaders of the organized Jewish community. In 2016, the working definition and its list of examples was adopted by a plenary meeting of the 34 countries in the IHRA. Since then, this definition has been adopted by leading Jewish organizations fighting antisemitism around the world, over 30 governments, and a growing number of organizations and institutions.
- The IHRA Definition expressly provides that the examples it offers “could” be antisemitic, but that determination must be made “taking into account the overall context.” This approach avoids claiming that certain words or actions are always antisemitic, while still providing educational information about common forms of antisemitism that, if encountered, warrant further investigation.

Sources

1. Jonathan Jacoby “Understanding Antisemitism: The Nexus Document,” *Israel and Antisemitism Policy at the Nexus of Two Critical Issues*, February 2021 at <https://israelandantisemitism.com/the-nexus-document/>
2. Luntz Global, “American Jews on Israel and the Middle East,” *CAMERA*, May 16-17, 2011, at http://www.camera.org/images_user/pdf/luntz.camera%20poll.results.final.pdf
3. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), “About the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism,” *IHRA*, 2018 at <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>
4. International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), “Fact Sheet: Working Definition of Antisemitism,” *IHRA*, June 23, 2020 at https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/inline-files/Fact%20Sheet%20Working%20Definition%20of%20Antisemitism_25_0.pdf