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A VENEZUELAN student walks over a cloth with red paint and the Star of David during an anti-Israel demonstration..(Photo by: REUTERS)

The Israelization of Antisemitism

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In this world, where we are trying to eliminate racism, misogyny, homophobia and more, it is time to include the age-old hatred of Jews as well.

In the 21st century, criticism of Israel that is grounded in antisemitic thinking and aimed at Jews in general has become the dominant verbal form in which Judeophobic ideas are articulated and disseminated.

Between 2002 and 2012, the Israeli Embassy in Berlin and the Central Council of Jews in Germany received over 14,000 emails, letters, postcards and faxes from all regions of Germany. Figuring that this material could provide us a window into the contemporary German mind vis-à-vis Israel, we conducted a study of these messages and found that the vast majority began with criticisms of Israel's policies but immediately deteriorated into antisemitic assaults. We call this phenomenon the "Israelization of antisemitism."

We found a similar pattern in a smaller study of over 2,000 emails sent by citizens of eight European countries to the Israeli embassies in those countries. We believe that the results are representative of similar antisemitic discourse worldwide, including in the United States, as a recent ADL investigation showed that 2.6 million antisemitic messages were posted on Twitter between August 2015 and July 2016.

To be certain that we did not conflate anti-Jewish and anti-Israel sentiments, we defined in advance the definitions of criticism of Israeli policies and anti-Jewish hatred.

Another startling conclusion of our study was that, contrary to popular assumptions, it is not exclusively alt-right, neo-Nazis and/or extreme left-wingers who think this way. On the contrary, the language of contemporary antisemitism, as in the past, is anchored in and spread by the educated mainstream as much as by fringe groups. Rather than physical attacks on Jews – with some exceptions – today's assaults are verbal, ideological and cloaked in the guise of a critique of policies of the State of Israel.

Antisemitic attacks throughout the centuries have been grounded in demonizing Jews as the ultimate evil. This concept was found repeatedly in the messages we studied. For example, in one 2007 letter to an Israeli embassy, the writer states: "The Israelis are and remain, no matter what a show they put on, the greatest racists, war criminals, warmongers, murderers, child-murderers, violators of international law, torturers, robbers and thieves, Nazis, liars, [and] terrorists..." Another message sent to the embassy in 2008 announces plainly: "Here's one in the kisser for you, you filthy Jew. You're to blame for the misery in the world!"

In addition to demonization, a second millennia-long antisemitic idea delegitimizes the very existence of Jews, paving the way first for segregation and then elimination or genocide. Just as Jews have no right to exist, it is claimed, a state so abysmally evil and destructive has no right to exist. In the minds of these antisemites, Israel has become the collective Jew and should be destroyed.

Racist delegitimization draws on stereotypes of Jews as exploiters, parasites, and homeless nomads, as in this message from 2006 sent to the Central Council of Jews in Germany: "Only dissolution of the Israeli state can counter the Jews' solidarity and thereby also their highly aggressive tendencies as a united people that ruthlessly indulges its congenital aggression and frustration. The Jews who move away from Israel will then have the possibility of settling elsewhere. In Old Testament times, the Jews were already a nomadic people that emigrated at one point to Egypt, at another to Babylon, the latter, by the way, because of moral turpitude, after which they moved back to Israel."

Looking at the messages as a whole, there is little variation among the different years except the spikes we noticed during times of military conflict, such as the 2014 war in Gaza. This event ignited a storm of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish commentary in Europe and the United States that continues to this day – spread most widely online.

It is also interesting to note that these conflagrations were defined always in one-sided terms, with Israel as the sole aggressor. This unilateral framework applies not only to Israel's military conflict with the Palestinians and Arab states, but also to the condemnation of Israel for human-

rights violations that are defined as almost exclusively characteristic of Israel in comparison to the records of other countries.

When Israel, the Jewish state, is denounced as uniquely evil and immoral, antisemitism is clearly at play. Modern antisemites have turned “the Jewish problem” into “the Israel problem.”

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