On June 5, 1937, WNYC radio aired a town-hall event organized in New York by an Arab American group, the Arab National League (ANL). It opened with ANL President Dr. Fuad Shatara reading a cable from the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, congratulating the guest of honor, poet Ameen Rihani, and continued with several speeches critical of Zionism. Almost immediately, the ANL and WNYC came under attack by New York City Alderman Samson Inselbuch, who charged them with spreading antisemitism. WNYC and the ANL, however, soon found defense from the highest echelons of American Jewish leadership—B’nai B’rith Vice President Louis Fabricant, American Jewish Committee (AJC) official Sol Stroock, Orthodox leader Rabbi Herbert Goldstein, the National Council of Jewish Women, and most notably, Rabbi Stephen Wise. Defending WNYC, Wise, a leading Zionist who headed the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress) and the World Jewish Congress (WJC), wrote that “absurdly enough, it has been charged with anti-Semitism—as if Arabs and Jews alike were not Semites.”

The episode says much about American Jewish perceptions of Arabs, anti-Zionism, and antisemitism. It reveals that the trend of viewing Arab opposition to Zionism as antisemitic has a long history in the United States, predating Israel’s creation. Yet it also shows that America’s most prominent Jewish organizations did not perceive early Arab critics of Zionism as inherently antisemitic. On the contrary, American Jewish

1. I would like to thank Hillel Cohen, Philip Mattar, Caroline Kahlenberg, Derek Penslar, Marjorie Feld, and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on this article.
leaders vigorously pushed back against labeling Arab critics of Zionism as antisemites, a characterization which Wise, arguably the most influential American Zionist of the era, considered absurd.

The response of American Jewish groups to the 1937 controversy may come as a surprise given that in recent decades, some of these same organizations have argued that anti-Zionism is inherently antisemitic and at times have specifically emphasized “Arab” and “Muslim” forms of antisemitism. In seeking to understand the origins of this rhetoric, scholars have focused on the emergence of the term “the new anti-Semitism” in the 1970s. Daniel Schroeter writes that in the aftermath of the 1967 war, advocates for Israel “alarmed at what they saw as growing sympathy for the Arabs and Palestinians began to use the term ‘new anti-Semitism,’ which they understood as antisemitism either expressed or disguised as anti-Zionism.” Central to the “new anti-Semitism,” Schroeter continues, “was Arab hostility to Israel and the Jews (‘Arab anti-Semitism’), as well as Western support for the Arabs and Palestinians.”

The 1974 book *The New Anti-Semitism* by Anti-Defamation League (ADL) leaders Arnold Forster and Benjamin Epstein gave a name to the concept. “Islamic anti-Semitism” soon became part of the “new anti-Semitism” discourse as Islamism ascended in Middle Eastern politics. Some began portraying Muslims’ opposition to Zionism as part of a long history of anti-Jewish feelings within Islam dating back to the medieval era, drawing from what Mark Cohen has termed the “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history,” a revisionist narrative that emphasized the mistreatment of Jews in Islamic lands. According to Cohen and Schroeter, this “neo-lachrymose conception” had been developed in part to rebut

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Arab advocates’ claims that Zionism had ruined an otherwise idyllic history of Jewish-Muslim relations.  

Yet while the 1970s marked the creation of the term “the new anti-Semitism,” the first crucial shift in American Jewish discourse on the connection between Arabs, anti-Zionism, and antisemitism came much earlier, not long after the WNYC controversy. Throughout the interwar period (1918-1941), American Jewish organizations generally downplayed Arab discontent with Jews and Zionism, preferring not to categorize it as antisemitism. But even when these same organizations began vocally condemning Arab anti-Zionist advocates in the 1940s and 1950s, they did so without characterizing their anti-Zionism as inherently antisemitic. Instead, these Jewish groups called attention to collaboration between Arab anti-Zionists and non-Arab domestic antisemitic groups, critiquing Arab advocates not for their Middle East agenda but for their alleged threat to Jews in the United States. Only after 1967 did American Jewish organizations portray domestic Arab opposition to Zionism as a concern that they needed to address for its own sake, without a local antisemitic component, a development that accompanied the rise of the terms “New anti-Semitism,” “Arab anti-Semitism,” and “Muslim anti-Semitism.”

While this article discusses a number of American Jewish groups, it places particular emphasis on the ADL due to the group’s central role in monitoring and combatting antisemitism from its foundation in 1913. Its reports from the 1930s and early 1940s, when domestic antisemitism hit its peak, make no mention of Arabs or anti-Zionism.  

And even in the aftermath of World War II, with antisemitic attitudes among the general population in precipitous decline, the ADL focused its energies on monitoring and combating a constellation of far-right antisemitic organizations, activists, and newspapers operating throughout the country. It is through a connection made here that the ADL began focusing on Arab activists. Hungering for material and for allies, these fascist groups requested collaboration so frequently that Arab spokesmen reported being “inundated with offers of co-operation from anti-Semitic organisations [sic].” Whether out of naïveté, sloppiness, or genuine


malice for Jews, Arab activists and officials agreed to speak at events run by far right antisemitic groups on a number of occasions. This led to criticism from groups like the ADL, which began to discuss the Arab threat to American Jewry in 1946, and by the 1950s were doing so in full book chapters. The ADL’s concern about the issue may have been genuine, though its decision to monitor Arab advocates may also have been influenced by its leaders’ increasingly warm feelings towards Israel.

While these events of the 1940s and 1950s serve as precursors to the “New Anti-Semitism” concept, they also contrast with later discourses in ways that highlight what exactly was “new” about “the New Anti-Semitism.” For one, the ADL of the 1940s and 1950s did not argue that anti-Zionism was inherently antisemitic, but rather emphasized that criticism of Israel and Zionism could be used by local antisemites. Moreover, even ADL material that attacked “Arab propagandists” did not portray their motives as antisemitic, but rather as cynical and strategic in that they sought to use antisemitism to “weaken American Jewry” and thus diminish American support for Israel. Finally, no ADL publication cited Islam as a potential source of antisemitism until the publication of The New Anti-Semitism in 1974. This is not surprising, given the secular nature of most Arab governments and the Christian background of prominent Arab spokesmen in America.

JUDEO-ISLAMIC KINSHIP AND THE RISE OF ARAB OPPOSITION TO ZIONISM

Prior to the 1920s, two contradictory concepts shaped American Jewish discourse on Arab and Islamic attitudes toward Jews. One emerged out of broader American discourses of Islamic barbarity and intolerance towards non-Muslims, especially Christians. While attempting to aid their beleaguered co-religionists in the Islamic world, nineteenth-century American Jewish leaders maintained that Jews had fallen victim to the same barbarous intolerance faced by Eastern Christians. This rhetoric placed Jews and Christians on the same side of a civilizational divide against a common Islamic threat to religious minorities whom Americans should protect. At the same time, many European and American Jews, particularly intellectuals, subscribed to notions of pan-Semitic kinship and romanticized ideas about Jewish life in the Islamic world, especially

Belief in a natural connection between Judaism and Islam permeated the highest realms of American society. During an era when few American Jews received high-ranking presidential appointments, five US presidents between 1887 and 1917 appointed Jews to serve as America’s chief diplomat to the Ottoman Empire on the premise that they would serve as a “natural bridge between Muslim Turks and American Christians.”

The First World War marked the end of the practice of appointing of Jews to serve as “bridges” to the Islamic world and, incidentally, the beginning of vocal opposition to Zionism among Arabic-speakers in America, immigrants from the Levant who then referred to themselves as Syrians. The Syrian American community’s anti-Zionist activism began in 1917 with the creation of the Palestine Antizionism Society. The American Jewish press covered its activity from almost the beginning. In 1918, The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger reported that 500 Syrians gathered in Brooklyn to protest the Balfour Declaration’s support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The newspaper did not critique the critique of the protest. The Palestine Antizionism Society changed its name to the Palestine National League before disappearing; in 1936, its leaders revived the group as the Arab National League (ANL).

Throughout the interwar period, Arab Americans expressed their political views in various newspapers and organizations, with leading figures including journalist Habib Katibah, surgeon Fuad Shatara, scholar Philip Hitti, communal leader Faris Malouf, and renowned poet Ameen Rihahi.

13. Cohen, Under Crescent and Cross, 4. Cohen writes that Jewish orientalists used the myth of an interfaith utopia to push liberal Europe to become more tolerant of Jews. The Jewish Encyclopedia, co-edited in part by future AJC leaders including Cyrus Adler, contains many positive depictions of Jewish life under Islamic rule, while also noting that Jewish minorities were often subject to the caprice of despotic leaders, which conveyed the idea of “Oriental despotism” rather than Islam as the source of occasional anti-Jewish policies in the Islamic world. See, Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler, The Jewish Encyclopedia, twelve volumes (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906).
14. Michael Oren, Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007), 333. This includes Oscar Straus’s three appointments by Presidents Cleveland, McKinley, and Taft (1887-89, 1898-99, and 1909-10), Solomon Hirsch’s appointment by Benjamin Harrison (1889-92), and Wilson’s appointments of Henry Morgenthau (1913-16) and Abram Elkus (1916-17).
Though small, this activist network made headlines. Shatara testified before the US Congress in 1922 to oppose America’s endorsement of the Balfour Declaration, and Rihani went on nation-wide speaking tours to promote Arab causes and debate American Zionists.\textsuperscript{17}

American Zionists often responded critically to Arab American activism, yet in the 1920s and 1930s, a period during which many prominent American Jews, including leaders of the AJC, opposed political Zionism, it would have been difficult for mainstream American Jewish groups to characterize anti-Zionism as inherently antisemitic.\textsuperscript{18} Arab American activists often mentioned prominent Jewish anti-Zionists in making their case, as Fuad Shatara did when he cited US Representative Julius Kahn, former Ambassador Henry Morgenthau, and \textit{New York Times} publisher Adolph Ochs during his 1922 Congressional testimony.\textsuperscript{19} B’nai B’rith and its Anti-Defamation League sided with neither Zionism nor with its Jewish critics, preferring to stay neutral.\textsuperscript{20} The group counted many non-Zionists among its members and most of its leaders were “German Jews” more reluctant to embrace Zionism that the more recent Eastern European migrants who flocked to the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress).\textsuperscript{21}

Zionist groups, including the AJCongress, did assess the question of Arab attitudes towards Jews, especially after the violent riots of 1920, 1921 and 1929, and during the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine. While these events would later be cited as evidence of Arab antipathy towards Jews, at the time many American Jews—especially Zionists—tended to write off the violent episodes as anomalies. For if the Muslim Arabs who made up the bulk of Palestine’s residents expressed innate hostility toward Jews, it would be hard to believe that the Zionist project had a chance of succeeding. In light of the 1920 riots, a report in \textit{The Maccabean} asserted that despite the violence, Arabs “do not savor to a very great extent of anti-Jewishism,” arguing the culprits were

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“thieves and criminals who victimized non-Jews as well.” A Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) official held that the incidents were not massacres but “Bedouin raids.” When testifying before Congress in 1922, another ZOA figure blamed “a few agitators” for recent violence, which he contrasted with the “many Arab communities” who wanted “Jews to come in and develop the land.” A report to the ZOA stated that the violence should “not be regarded as a sign of Arab hostility towards Jews.” Rather “claims to the contrary” were a “trap” set by “anti-Zionists to spread the notion of Arab-Jewish irreconcilability.”

This is not to say that all Americans avoided labeling the riots as antisemitic. As early as 1920, some American newspapers termed the violence “anti-Semitic” or a “pogrom,” and blamed Islam, enough so that Syrian American activists felt a need to respond by emphasizing that the conflict was not religious but political in its nature. However, the organized American Jewish leadership did not at all indict Islam or indigenous antisemitism for the violent outbursts. Instead, American Jewish leaders blamed Jewish communists, the British, “Egyptian and Syrian agitators,” or, as Stephen Wise did in 1922, Palestine’s Christian minority for anti-Jewish violence. All these theories, Rafael Medoff argues, left “the Moslem majority blameless.”

The 1929 Palestine riots, which alarmed Jewish communities worldwide, changed American Jewish perceptions only somewhat. The violence could be directly linked to religious tensions since it emerged from a dispute over the size of a Jewish prayer area at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, a major Jewish holy site next to the sacred al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount, a sacred place to both religions. Rightwing Zionist groups politicized the dispute as did Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who stoked Muslim fears of a Jewish takeover of holy lands. Days after hundreds of Revisionist Zionist youth marched to assert Jewish rights to the Western Wall, Arabs attacked Jews in several cities. One hundred and thirty-three Jews and one hundred and sixteen Arabs died, the latter mostly killed by British
While some newspapers spoke of the riots as “anti-Semitic” and emphasized religious causes, various prominent American Jews continued to point to external factors, claiming that communists had incited the anti-Jewish activity or blaming the British. They frequently reiterated that only a small minority of Arab “agitators” really opposed Jewish settlement. Al-Husseini, who despite his role in stoking tensions in 1928–1929, had been absolved of charges of inciting violence by the British, quickly became the chief “agitator” in the minds of many American Jews.

In the 1930s, many Zionists continued to externalize the conflict’s tensions. Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress claimed that they “were not due to anti-Jewish feeling but were provoked by enemies of Great Britain to divert British attention from Europe.” Similarly, the AJC expressed the view that heightened anti-Jewish sentiments in the Middle East came as a direct product of Nazi propaganda in the region. Meanwhile, the rise of the Nazis in Germany and their persecution of Jews spurred growth in the Zionist movement in the 1930s and into the war years.

THE ARAB NATIONAL LEAGUE

In this context Arab activists faced greater opposition than in year prior, leading to the cancellation of some of Ameen Rihani’s public lectures in 1937. After a speech in Louisville, an ADL official accused Rihani of “a very strong prejudice...against Jews,” but soon apologized to the poet after learning that a news correspondent had mischaracterized Rihani’s words. By the time of the June 1937 ANL town hall event honoring Rihani, political differences between Arab Americans and American Zionists had already fostered some mutual wariness.

The New York Times noted that the ANL’s gathering of 300 activists marked the first time “in several years at least on which the so-called ‘Arab side’ of Zionism was discussed” on the radio. The ANL described itself as “not anti-Jewish but anti-Zionist,” and one individual who

“interrupted a speaker with the cry ‘down with the Jews’ was booed.” Boston community leader Faris Malouf, “stressed his friendliness and admiration for the Jews, but assailed the Balfour Declaration and political Zionism,” a sentiment echoed by other speakers. Guest of honor Ameen Rihani suggested that Zionists should declare the Jewish national home project complete and allow it to develop without additional immigration, in a state in which Jews and Arabs would be equals. Harvard Professor William Ernest Hocking and Arab delegate to London Izzat Tannous also spoke, with Fuad Shatara serving as the master of ceremonies.35

WNYC and the ANL immediately faced accusations of antisemitism, but crucially, not from organizations like the ADL, AJC, or AJCongress. Rather, criticism came in the form of a “barrage of protests from Orthodox and militant Zionist groups, a flood of angry phone calls from Jewish listeners, and scathing editorials in the Yiddish-language press.”36 A young Brooklyn alderman, Samson Inselbuch, whose Orthodox Jewish father had been a Religious Zionist leader in Palestine, capitalized on the grassroots unrest.37 Narrowly elected and soon up for reelection, Inselbuch introduced a resolution condemning the radio station, apparently the first attempted legislative action against anti-Zionist activism in American history.38

Mainstream American Jewish leaders, however, came to WNYC’s defense. While New York politics perhaps played a role in their defense of WNYC, Jewish groups’ unity across religious and political lines and the strength in their rejection of charges of antisemitism against the ANL seems to indicate their sincerity. Had Wise and the others wished to defend WNYC without exculpating the Arab speakers who the station broadcasted, they could have.

Some prominent Jewish figures even viewed ANL leaders favorably. ANL President Fuad Shatara made a “very good impression” on Albert Einstein during a meeting between the two, leading the renowned physicist to encourage Shatara to meet with American Jewish leaders. On June 30, 1938, Shatara met with Maurice Hexter of the New York Jewish Federation and Morris Waldman, executive secretary of the AJC. Uncertain of the standing of a Christian Arab American in negotiations, the trio suggested that Shatara reach out to Jerusalem Mufti Amin al-Husseini to see if he would participate in a peace conference. While the conference with al-Husseini never took place, Hexter reported that the meeting with Shatara “was very good,” demonstrating that a degree

of good faith existed between the ANL and members of the American Jewish elite.\textsuperscript{39}

The ANL’s activities soon waned and in 1939 the group became inactive.\textsuperscript{40} Meanwhile, events in Europe directed American Jewish organizations’ energies toward crises there and toward rising antisemitism at home. In the early 1940s, the AJCongress’ Congress Weekly discussed Nazi atrocities and American antisemitism regularly but made no note of antisemitism coming from Arab activists domestically.\textsuperscript{41} From the 1930s into the early 1940s, when American Jewish groups did discuss antisemitism in the Arab world, they focused more on the effects of fascist propaganda emanating from Germany and Italy than on anything else.\textsuperscript{42}

THE “ARAB-FASCIST ALLIANCE”

As the war years went on, however, Arabs were less often portrayed as passive recipients of Nazi and Italian fascist propaganda and more as active collaborators in the broader Axis project. A 1944 Congress Weekly article, for example, admonished Arabs for welcoming the Axis powers as saviors.\textsuperscript{43} But the emerging symbol of the Nazi-Arab link soon became former Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini. The British had dismissed al-Husseini from his post in Jerusalem in 1937 for his support of the Arab uprising in Palestine. He fled and ultimately took haven in Nazi Germany. Having fallen out with the British, al-Husseini saw an Axis victory as his only hope for future political leadership in Palestine. He aided the Nazi war effort through broadcasting radio propaganda in Arabic, by recruiting Muslims to fight for the Axis cause, and by attempting to supply the Nazis with intelligence.\textsuperscript{44} Though most of al-Husseini’s activities focused on helping Germany achieve its military goals, his Arabic broadcasts also included anti-Jewish incitement such as a direct appeal in 1944 to “kill the Jews wherever you find them.”\textsuperscript{45}

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\item \textsuperscript{39} Fred Jerome, Einstein on Israel and Zionism: His Provocative Ideas about the Middle East (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2009), 113–20.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Bawardi, The Making of Arab Americans, 189.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Review of Congress Weekly issues from 1941 to 1944, Harvard Widener Library.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid; “Confidential memorandum: Analysis of the Present Situation and Suggestions for Meeting It”; “The Nazi Program and its Realization,” 1939.
\item \textsuperscript{43} David Polish, “Lo! The Noble Arab,” Congress Weekly, February 4, 1944.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Jeffrey Herf, Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 213.
\end{itemize}
Al-Husseini’s antisemitism and willing collaboration with the Nazi regime quickly became, in the minds of many Jews, indicative of a deeper darkness within the Palestinian national movement. In April of 1945, *Congress Weekly* declared al-Husseini a “war criminal,” discussing both verified facts of his collaboration as well as unsubstantiated rumors of a more direct role in the genocide of Jews.\(^46\) The article cited a piece by Czechoslovak journalist Joseph Kalmer who inaccurately linked al-Husseini with the initiation of Nazis’ mass murder of Jews.\(^47\) In June 1945, *Congress Weekly* noted with alarm that the League of Arab States (the Arab League) was setting up an office in Washington. The Zionist publication expressed great concern about the politics of the Arab Office but stopped short of accusing the inchoate operation of antisemitism.\(^48\) In the ensuing months, however, American Jewish organizations discussed the al-Husseini’s alliance with Hitler with greater frequency.\(^49\) A March 1946 article in *The Nation* by future Israeli ambassador to the US Eliahu Epstein fueled concern by alleging that al-Husseini had pushed Hitler to exterminate European Jewry.\(^50\) Though the unsubstantiated allegation was based solely on statements purportedly made by one Nazi official, Dieter Wisliceny, the myth of the stateless Mufti’s central role in the Final Solution appeared in a number of American newspapers. As Michael Sells shows, despite a lack of credible evidence, future Israel Defense Force spokesman Moshe Perlman and others in the Jewish Agency circulated the myth, which expanded to include the allegation that al-Husseini gave Hitler the idea to commit genocide.\(^51\) Advocates of this view included Israeli Prime Ministers David Ben-Gurion and Benjamin Netanyahu, who declared without evidence that Hitler had not wanted to exterminate the Jews until al-Husseini convinced him to.\(^52\)

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\(^{47}\) Ibid.


\(^{51}\) Ibid.

The year 1946 also marked the moment when mainstream Jewish groups began to portray Arab voices in America as antisemitic. Throughout the 1930s and first half of the 1940s, the ADL made no public mention of antisemitism emanating from Arab activist circles. In June 1946, however, the ADL published for the first time an article condemning Arab groups in America—the Arab League’s Arab Office and the domestic Institute of Arab American Affairs (IAAA). Though warning that the IAAA’s subtlety in attacking Jews made the group all the more dangerous, the ADL still maintained that Arab-Jewish relations in Palestine were marked by “good feeling and harmony.” It is “only the Moslem princes, the Pasha overlords of Middle Eastern feudalism, the landed effendis and their hirelings in London and Washington who speak of the threat of revolt.” The Arab Office and IAAA consisted of such “hirelings, the professional agitators,” the ADL claimed, who aimed “to stimulate anti-Semitic sentiment amongst the American people.”

The ADL listed statements by the Arab Office and IAAA that it found upsetting, but the ADL article did not argue that their anti-Zionism was in itself evidence of antisemitism. Instead, the organization pointed to instances of Arab collaboration with known antisemites. These examples came primarily from allegations already publicized by a different organization. In May, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League (NSANL) had published ads in various newspapers alleging that Arab Office official Anwar Nashashibi had responded favorably to a clearly antisemitic letter requesting that he speak to a right-wing organization. As discussed by Rory Miller, the Anti-Nazi League’s accusation led Congressman Adolph Sabath to raise a furor that culminated with an FBI raid on the Arab Office. Miller notes that the Arab Office privately admitted that Nashashibi had indeed accepted the speaking engagement, but claimed that he had done so due to a misunderstanding. The office reportedly had


55. The NSANL was founded in 1933 to urge American businesses to boycott Germany. Its first president, attorney Samuel Untermyer, was a prominent Zionist and head of Keren Hayesod. By the 1940s, the NSANL was led by Professor James Sheldon, who shifted its focus to investigating fringe right-wing anti-Semitic organizations, including neo-Nazi groups. See, Richard A. Hawkins “The Internal Politics of the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League to Champion Human Rights, 1933–1939,” Management & Organizational History 5, no. 2 (2013): 251–78.

been “inundated with offers of co-operation from anti-Semitic organisa-
tions [sic]” that sought to use its anti-Zionist material to advance their
aims. Nashashibi’s letter thus constituted the exception rather than the
rule for the Arab Office, but it would be that exception, which came to
define the office in the eyes of many Americans.

The ADL repeated the Anti-Nazi League’s charges against the Arab
Office and the IAAA. Importantly, they centered not on IAAA activities
but rather of those of the defunct ANL’s leader, the late Fuad Shatara,
and Habib Katibah, then editor of the IAAA’s print material. Both
the Anti-Nazi League and ADL contended that Shatara and Katibah
“cooperated with pro-Nazi organizations” and that Shatara had “made
many speeches before pro-Nazi organizations, including the [German
American] Bund and the German Citizens’ Protective League.”

These allegations can be partially corroborated. On June 21, 1937,
only days after Jewish leaders defended the ANL, the New York Her-
ard Tribune’s “Going on Today” column casually noted that Dr. F. I.
Shatata would be giving a talk titled “The Truth About Palestine” to a
joint meeting of the German Citizens’ Protective League and German-
American Republican League. Both groups were indeed antisemitic,
pro-Nazi organizations. In addition, in a draft letter unearthed by Hani
Bawardi, Habib Katibah admitted that he had attended one German
American Bund meeting with Shatara, and later learned that Shatara
had addressed the pro-Nazi group on a separate occasion.

Despite the fact that at least one of Shatara’s speeches had been public
record, leading members of the AJC and New York Jewish Federa-
tion who met with Shatara appeared to have had no knowledge of it.
Moreover, there is no sign in the press of American Jewish organizations
publicly admonishing Shatara at the time as an antisemite. Shatara’s
activism, and perhaps these speeches specifically, did lead to his ostra-
cism after America’s entry into the war, however, and ultimately to his
death. Angry colleagues of Shatara at the Long Island hospital where

57. Miller, “More Sinned Against than Sinning?, 316.
Monthly by the National Fact-Finding Department of the Anti-Defamation League,
June 1946.
59. Ibid.; “Arab Propaganda in America Exposed by the Non-Sectarian League to
Champion Human Rights, Inc.,” New York Herald Tribune, ad on page 17, May 20,
1946.
61. Goodrick-Clarke, Black Sun, 74. The ADL listed them as antisemitic groups in
1937 but did not mention Shatara’s speech. “Report of the Anti-Defamation League,
January 1, through December 1, 1937,” BJPA.
63. Jerome, Einstein on Israel and Zionism, 113–120.
he worked forced him to take an indefinite leave of absence, a factor which, in addition to illness, apparently contributed to his decision to commit suicide in 1942.64 According to one internal Anti-Nazi League document, Shatara’s speeches to pro-Nazi groups were first publicized not by Jewish groups but by the Lebanese-American newspaper al-Hoda, which disagreed with Shatara on a range of issues.65

The ADLs and NSANL’s charges against Shatara was supported by evidence, their decision to publicize them after the war begs the question of why they chose to focus on the prewar activities of a deceased man who had led a defunct organization, the ANL, to make a case about a successor group, the IAAA, especially given that they garnered little attention in the 1930s. The citation of Shatara’s speeches may indicate genuine concern about IAAA’s antisemitism, but it may also be read as a roundabout attempt to discredit Arab activists because of their anti-Zionist politics. The Anti-Nazi League also linked Shatara and the IAAA to the Mufti’s embrace of Hitler both figuratively and literally. The picture in the Anti-Nazi League’s ad, “Arab Fascist Propaganda in America Exposed,” consisted of a chain with several links; at the top was an image of Adolf Hitler, connected with captioned images of “The Nazi-Helping Ex-Mufti of Jerusalem,” followed by “The Arab National League/Institute for Arab-American Affairs, Inc., [sic]” and the “Arab Office in Washington, D.C.”66

Among the most relevant concerns that the ADL and Anti-Nazi League raised was the issue of Habib Katibah’s role in a group called the League for Peace and Justice in Palestine (LPJP), run by a wealthy businessman named Benjamin Freedman, while Katibah served as the IAAA’s publication editor. Katibah perhaps believed that Freedman’s Jewish background would help immunize him from charges of antisemitism. But, though of Jewish parentage, Freedman differed categorically from most other anti-Zionist Jews in his Catholic religious beliefs and apparent acceptance of a wide array of antisemitic theories, which he deployed with zeal in newspaper ads starting in early 1946. One such ad by Freedman published in the New York Herald Tribune alleged that Ashkenazi Jews descended from a conquest-obsessed Asiatic race called the Khazars. It claimed that these Jews/Khazars advanced Zionism “in hopes of resurrecting in Palestine their former Eastern European Jewish king (Khazar).” This in turn was all a Khazar plot to secretly steal “the

65. “Pro-Nazi Arabs in the United States,” May 1946, folder 9, box 276, NSANL.
proven Five Trillion Dollars ($5,000,000,000,000) chemical and mineral wealth of the Dead Sea.” Freedman’s ad continued by citing a Cairo newspaper’s claim that “in the U.S.A., there is a Jewish colony...they can bring their influence to bear on the White House...the American President is surrounded by Rabbi Wise, Baruch and Morgenthau.” It ended by stating that “Zionists from eastern Europe (Khazar origin) had already infected Judaism in the United States with their toxic ideology twenty-five years before Hitler.” The bottom of the ad read “League for Peace with Justice in Palestine” and listed the names of its Jewish and Arab representatives: Freedman and Habib Katibah of the IAAA.

The AJC, a staunchly non-Zionist group, was among those that condemned Freedman, who sued the AJC as a result. Indeed, organizations dedicated to fighting antisemitism could hardly be expected to ignore such phenomena as Arab collaboration with the likes of Freedman.

**ZIONISM, B’NAI B’RITH, AND THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE**

But the ADL’s increasing support for Zionism does seem to have played a role in its shifting response to Arab activism. Though technically not a Zionist organization like AJCongress, the ADL’s parent organization, B’nai B’rith, gradually embraced the idea of Jewish statehood in the 1940s in direct response to the plight of Jews under Hitler’s rule. At a 1941 B’nai B’rith conference, its president, Henry Monsky declared, “Palestine presents the most realistic, single opportunity for the resettlement of large numbers of the unfortunate and victimized of our people,” noting the group’s “solemn and sacred responsibility of giving unreserved support for the upbuilding of Palestine.” Monsky then organized the 1943 American Jewish Conference, which resulted in B’nai B’rith endorsement of the Biltmore Conference’s call for a “Jewish Commonwealth” in Palestine. By 1946, many American Jews unaffiliated with the Zionist movement responded to the problem posed by tens of thousands of displaced Holocaust survivors in Europe to support the resettlement of survivors in Palestine.

68. “American Jewish Committee Sued for $5,000,000 for Memorandum Exposing Pro-Arab League,” *JTA*, July 9, 1946.
70. Ibid.
The ADL itself also underwent transitions in the postwar years. In 1946, its headquarters moved from Chicago to New York and its leadership passed to a new generation. Two men in their early thirties, Benjamin Epstein and Arnold Forster, became the ADL’s new National Director and Associate National Director/General Counsel, respectively, posts that they would hold for decades.\(^71\) In his memoirs, Forster reflected on two major changes that came about in the early postwar years in tandem with their professional ascent, one being warming attitudes toward Zionism and the second being the Jewish community’s new assertiveness in defending itself. Reflecting on the late 1940s, Forster wrote, “the hush-hush approach to fighting anti-Semitism was dead.”\(^72\) For Forster this contrasted with the pre-war era, when the organization focused too much, he believed, on altering offensive “Jewish conduct” that was seen to provoke antisemitism.\(^73\)

On the former point, Forster, despite having “no background in Zionism,” felt upon Israel’s creation in May 1948 “a personal and very emotional response... a sense of belonging that is inexplicable except in new-mystical terms.”\(^74\) “Like it or not, every Jew was automatically related to the Jewish State,” Forster claimed.\(^75\) Soon after, Israeli officials like Reuven Shiloah and Teddy Kollek developed strong relationships with the young ADL leaders, who provided them information about “domestic elements hostile to the Jewish state.”\(^76\) Reminiscing on the emergence of Arab anti-Zionist activism, Forster wrote:

clandestine propaganda was being disseminated by a newly established Arab propaganda movement, reflecting the efforts of the Institute of Arab American Affairs and the League for Peace with Justice, among others. As yet these Arab groups hadn’t made frontal attacks on Jews. But because these forces, with their malevolent attitude toward Jews in Palestine and their supporters abroad, avoided invective and the too-brazen lie, they were *more* dangerous. Covertly they did not hesitate to stimulate anti-Jewish sentiments, using notorious Jew-baiters to front for them.\(^77\)

For Forster, the ADL's new strong and unforgiving response to Arab activism marked a turning point, a moment of pride. Rather than looking away from these Arab dalliances with “Jew-baiters,” the community would now respond assertively. Continuing his line

\(^{71}\) Arnold Forster, *Square One* (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1988), 96.
\(^{72}\) Forster, *Square One*, 109.
\(^{73}\) Forster, *Square One*, 53.
\(^{74}\) Forster, *Square One*, 105.
\(^{75}\) Forster, *Square One*, 98.
\(^{76}\) Forster, *Square One*, 105–6.
\(^{77}\) Forster, *Square One*, 98.
of thought, Forster reflected that Jewish leadership “at long last accepted the concept of fighting back openly, in our names, not hiding behind rationalizations to justify keeping our counteraction secret. The notion that anti-Semitism was somehow unintentional was becoming a thing of the past, a sea change in American Jewish life.” 78

Both changing attitudes could be seen in articles appearing in the ADL’s monthly periodical. In May and June of 1948, the ADL published a two-part series titled “Anti-Semitism and the Palestine Issue.” 79 The series focused on how antisemites made use of the ongoing 1948 war, but also discusses two purported networks of activists, one consisting of prominent Christian critics of Zionism such as Kermit Roosevelt and Virginia Gildersleeve, and the other comprising the IAAA and its “allies” such as Freedman. Rather than the content of IAAA publications, the IAAA’s links to figures like Freedman were the primary source of concern.

Based on files from the ADL’s Boston office, 1948 also marked the beginning of sustained ADL monitoring of Arab activists. Tellingly, in the first Boston speech that the ADL monitored, the Arab speaker himself said nothing antisemitic, but the non-Arab American Christian woman who introduced him did. Rather attempting to delegitimize the speaker publicly, however, local ADL officials tried to reason with her. 80

By 1952, the ADL’s concern about antisemitism emanating from “Arab propaganda” had grown to be worthy of an entire book chapter. Forster and Epstein co-authored a book that year titled The Troublemakers, which detailed the activities of an array of antisemitic “agitators” in America, most of whom operated at the fringes of the far right. The book’s fourth chapter, titled “The Invasion,” dealt with the alleged Arab propaganda menace, especially an Arab League proposal to open an information office in the United States. It claimed that in a May 1950 Arab League meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, the League’s political committee proposed that such an office should focus on destroying “Jewish influence” in America by creating “a climate of opinion so harsh to Jews...the United Jewish Appeal and other forms of aid to Israel would find it difficult to function.” It would do so, according to Forster and Epstein, in part by arguing that Jews, Judaism, and Zionism were pro-

78. Ibid.
80. Boston Jewish Community Relations Council Collection, folder 1, box 123, American Jewish Historical Society in Boston.
communist, and by highlighting Israel’s victimization of its Christian Arab citizens and Arab refugees.  

The proposed office had not yet opened, and would not for several years, but Forster and Epstein spent the chapter discussing Arab activism in America and how domestic antisemites made use of it. The pair also discussed Arabs who made antisemitic statements in the Middle East, including the Arab League Secretary General Abdul Rahman Hassan Azzam and the former Mufti. “Azzam literally lived, ate, and slept anti-Semitism,” the authors stated. In conclusion, the chapter surmised, “What Azzam Pasha and his colleagues do, in effect, is to make political capital out of anti-Semitism—as did Hitler. The program of the Arab League in the United States is tantamount to the program of the Nazi-German propaganda office in the 1930s.”

The authors followed up on their 1952 study with a 1956 book titled Cross-Currents, published soon after the opening of the Arab League’s Arab Information Center (AIC). Divided in the three sections—“Cross-Currents in America,” “Cross-Currents in Germany,” and “Cross-Currents in the Middle East”—Cross Currents mostly consists of internal memoranda on antisemitic activity said to come directly from ADL files. The first two sections focused on neo-Nazis and other far-right “professional anti-Semites” such as James Madole, leader of the neo-fascist National Renaissance Party.

The third section focused on Arab antisemitism. “Since 1948, Arab propaganda in the United States has made use of two themes: the ‘imperialistic’ injustice to the Arabs in the reestablishment of Israel and the plight of the Arab refugees,” the introduction of “Cross-Currents in the Middle East” proclaimed. “But whatever the themes of Arab propaganda may be, one of its goals in this country is precisely similar to that of every dyed-in-the-wool American anti-Semite…the utter destruction of Jewish prestige in America.” The book maintained that Arab propagandists allied with local antisemites because they felt that increasing antisemitism in America would end US support for Israel. “Dual allegiance,” accusations against American Jews, after all, had been “something else the Arabs helped dream up,” the authors alleged. The book continued

81. Arnold Forster and Benjamin Epstein, *The Troublemakers* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1952), 169-71. The Arab League’s political committee did not meet in Alexandria in May but in June-August; a different Arab League meeting occurred in Cairo in May 1950. No minutes of these meetings have been located by the author.
by outlining various alleged acts of cooperation between Arab officials and “known Jew-baiters.”

The next fifty pages of the book consist of reproductions of internal memoranda from ADL informants to Forster documenting the intersections between Arab officials and American antisemites. In the course of the section, the names of nearly every major “professional anti-Semite” on the American far-right come up, all apparently interested in Arab funds, cooperation, or fresh anti-Jewish material. The relationship went both ways, with Arab officials also desiring to build such relationships with Americans ranging from respectable American Christian leaders to “dyed-in-the-wool” antisemites. If, of course, internal memoranda reprinted without any on-the-record source or other evidence can be believed.

Yet while most of the allegations made in the book can neither be verified nor disproven, the thrust of some of the Jewish organizations’ claims can be corroborated. For one, some Arab diplomats, most notably Syrian Ambassador Farid Zeineddine, certainly did make statements that reeked of antisemitism. In 1955, Zeineddine characterized Jews as “mongrelized Russians” who could not be integrated into host societies. Six months later, during a speech at Illinois State Normal University, Zeineddine stated that “the American Jew is not an American emotionally or even ultimately. A Zionist cannot have real allegiance to the country in which he lives.” Meanwhile, some Arab embassies stocked pamphlets that contained content critical of Jews as Jews, crossing the line into overt antisemitism. In addition, it is also true that antisemitic periodicals made use of articles by Arab representatives criticizing Israeli actions in the Middle East – though not always with the authors’ permission.

Antisemitic groups made efforts to work with Arab activists, which the latter most often resisted. The AIC’s own internal documents from 1956 note that antisemites frequently sought to collaborate with them, so often that the AIC had to outline a clear policy for employees strictly forbidding any contact. Fayez Sayegh, the AIC’s deputy director, noted that he turned away one neo-Nazi leader who appeared at his office...
five times. Yet while Sayegh, a Georgetown PhD, could easily discern potential “partnerships” that would serve to undermine his cause, other Arab representatives in the United States lacked the will or sophistication to reject an invitation from a “friendly” American antisemite.

One of the most detailed accounts of Arab officials’ collaborating with antisemites came from a particularly credible source: an article published in the June 13, 1955 issue of the Jewish Newsletter, a publication known to be critical of Israel and Zionism. The article reported on a meeting in New York in which Abdul H. Hassan, a member of the Egyptian delegation to the United Nations, “spoke for about fifteen minutes on Palestine and the Arab refugee issue.” Hassan’s talk, the author attested, “contained no anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish comment.”

The problem stemmed not from the guest but from the organization hosting him: a neo-fascist group. Prior to introducing Hassan, the group’s leader, James Madole of the National Renaissance Party (NRP) warned of the “Jewish International Bolshevik forces which run America.” After Hassan finished, Madole took the stage again to express doubt that Hitler killed six million Jews since so many “can now all be seen milling around the garment district any afternoon muttering in their foreign gibberish,” and characterized “those who fought against segregation in schools as refugees from the Warsaw Ghetto who have noses so long you could hang your wash on them.” Before concluding the meeting, Madole told attendees to look at the Egyptian embassy’s pamphlets and invited everyone to return next week, when a Syrian UN delegate would speak.

The NRP was a proud neo-Nazi organization. According to a US House Committee on Un-American Activities report compiled months prior, NRP material “contains extensive rehashes of Hitler’s speeches. Typical are National Renaissance Bulletin articles, ‘Adolf Hitler Explains Nazi Anti-Semitism,’ appearing in the February 1953 issue, and ‘Adolf Hitler, the George Washington of Europe,’ which appeared in the issue of May 1953.” Commenting on the article, Jewish Newsletter publisher William Zukerman, who publicly sympathized with Palestinian refugees,

89. Don Peretz to Simon Segal, “Interview with Dr. Fayez Sayegh concerning Arab Anti-Semitism in U.S.,” March 22, 1956, AJC Alphabetical Files (GEN-12), folder 5, box 143, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, NY.

90. Jewish Newsletter, June 13, 1955; William Zukerman wrote that the author of the report was “Don Peretz, a promising young man who has made a special study of the Arab refugee issue.” William Zukerman to Morris Lazaron, June 17, 1955, folder 2, box 12, Box 12, Folder 2, Morris Lazaron Collection, MS-71, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH.

lamented that the events “confirm the Zionist equation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism,” and led the Arabs to “hurt their own cause by hobnobbing [sic] with fascists and hatemongers.”

Other groups, including AJCongress, also discussed the “Arab propaganda” issue, linking it to Arab state policies that discriminated against American Jews. The AJCongress's booklet, *The Arab Campaign Against American Jews*, wove together three issues—the denial by some Arab countries of entry visas to American Jews, those countries’ boycott of businesses owned by American Jews, and “Arab Anti-Jewish Propaganda in the U.S.”

Throughout the rest of the 1950s and 1960s, the ADL and related groups continued to attack Arab governments for these discriminatory policies as well as for clearly antisemitic material sometimes circulated by Arab governmental offices. This included, for example, material from the Palestine Arab Delegation office, which in one pamphlet included sections titled “Zionist Double Loyalty,” “Zionists Railroaded the United States Into World War I,” and “Zionists push United States Into War Against Germany.” Often, Arabs who never engaged in any antisemitic activity would be criticized harshly by the ADL, as was the case for Arab students, whom the ADL said should be deported in the late 1950s. By the mid-1960s, the issue seemed to lose some of its urgency for the ADL, perhaps because of the Arab Information Center's ineffectiveness, and because of American foreign policy's ongoing drift in the pro-Israel direction.

**THE NEW ANTI-SEMITISM**

As discussed by Daniel Schroeter, the 1967 war coincided with the rise of new discourses internationally about the relationship between Arabs and antisemitism, most notably in the work of Yehoshafat Harkabi, who authored the book *Arab Attitudes to Israel* based on his dissertation.

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Harkabi’s writings, along with those of French intellectuals such as Léon Poliakov, made their way to the United States, where American Jewish organizations, emotionally affected by the war, felt a need to defend against increasing critiques of Israel coming from the New Left, the Black Power movement, and elsewhere. The ADL responded to these critiques as they came, but also in a cohesive way through a new book by Forster and Epstein titled *The New Anti-Semitism*, which would be their most important and best-selling publication. Like their previous books, *The New Anti-Semitism* stitched together a list of types of anti-Semitic threats, which had grown in length. In contrast to prior books focused on the far right and Arab propagandists, *The New Anti-Semitism* included the right-wing threat alongside threats that emanated from “The USSR, Western Europe, Latin America,” and included “the Radical Left,” “Arabs and Pro-Arabs,” and Black Americans. Taken collectively, this bundle of threats, taken to include anti-Zionism, has been called the “New Anti-Semitism” from the book’s publication onwards.

The core of “Arabs and Pro-Arabs” resembled that of Forster and Epstein’s previous writings on the topic, detailing various examples of Arab officials using antisemitic rhetoric or work with antisemites. The major differences, however, lay in the book’s contextualization of this content and its overarching justifications. For one, it started by specifically advancing Islam as a source of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. “Arab anti-Semitism is not a new phenomenon,” it began, noting that “the Koran is harsh on the Jews.” Albeit briefly, the paragraph alluded to what would soon become a core trope in discussion of anti-Zionism and antisemitism in the region—its essentially religious roots. The book’s other major innovation is that, unlike in *The Troublemakers* and *Cross-Currents*, the threat to American Jewry did not serve as *The New Anti-Semitism’s* central theme. Rather, by the 1970s, the ADL’s goals seemed to include combating anti-Zionists for Israel’s sake, not only in instances when anti-Zionists could be construed as a domestic threat. The book cited a much wider array of instances of Arab antisemitism, including anti-Zionist rhetoric within Arab states, the persecution of Middle Eastern Jews, and the Arab threat to Israel. This shift connotes an expansion in the ADL’s mission from protecting American Jews to also defending Israel and even Zionism conceptually. As Forester and Epstein wrote, the Arab “attempt to deny Jews the right of national self-determination and territorial independence accorded to all other peoples...is in fact the new anti-Semitism of Arab Islam.” The ADL leaders went on to praise

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97. Schroeter, “Islamic Anti-Semitism.”
a Dutch court that had, in their words, ruled that “‘anti-Israel’ meant the same thing as ‘anti-Semitic,’” a view that they clearly endorsed.101

Forster and Epstein closed their “Arabs and Pro-Arabs” chapter in a way that invoked Stephen Wise’s 1937 comments on shared Semitic roots. “Jews and Arabs are indeed closer than cousins; they are linked by a shared ancestor, Shem.” But they continued, “the hostility of the Arab world to the Jews of Israel is one of the greatest tragedies of mankind’s history.” A tragedy, they suggested, that could only be cured by Arabs accepting Jordan as a Palestinian state.102

CONCLUSION

In his 1988 memoir, Arnold Forster reflected on Israel’s creation forty years prior and its impact on American Jewish organizational priorities. “Inevitably,” he wrote, “Jewish defense agencies would change from America-centered to a concern with the new foreign nation as well. This didn’t occur quickly or harmoniously, but the anti-Zionists in the Jewish leadership never stood a real chance of preventing it.”103

Forster’s observation can be seen in the evolution of his own organization’s stance toward Arab critics of Israel. In the 1920s and 1930s, the ADL stood largely aloof in conversations about Arab opposition to Zionism, in part due to its domestic focus and its neutral position on the question of Zionism. During that era, American Zionist groups argued against portrayals of Arabs and Muslims as inherently antisemitic despite violence in Mandate Palestine. In the 1930s, Arab Americans affiliated with the Arab National League (ANL) faced criticism from some American Jews, but not from the major organizations tasked with combating antisemitism. In fact, the ADL’s parent organization, B’nai B’rith, even defended the ANL in 1937 alongside several prominent Zionists.

Jewish defense agencies reacted quite differently to pro-Arab spokesman when the latter revived their efforts at the end of World War II. During the intervening years a much wider array of American Jews and Jewish organizations, including B’nai B’rith, had come to support Jewish statehood in Palestine. Even many American Jews who did not support Jewish statehood in Palestine advocated the postwar settlement of European Jewish refugees there, placing Arab voices in direct opposition to a solidifying American Jewish organizational consensus. Meanwhile, the former Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husseini’s collaboration with the Nazis fueled suspicion towards advocates of Palestinian nationalism. Al-Husseini provided a connection between Arab advocacy and Adolf

103. Forster, Square One, 98.
Hitler, which some organizations emphasized to discredit the Arab cause. In 1946, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League publicized collaboration between Arabs in America and domestic antisemites, including some incidents that had apparently gone unreported prior to the war, and linked it with al-Husseini’s actions. The ADL soon re-reported this news, and amidst the waning of antisemitism in America more broadly, began monitoring Arab anti-Zionists and their allies.

This trend accelerated in 1948, a development which may stem in part from the ADL’s new leadership. The recently appointed ADL associate national director, Arnold Forster, felt a major emotional reaction to the Jewish state’s birth. He also linked the ADL’s newfound assertiveness with a broader attitude of postwar confidence in Jews’ willingness to stand up against anything close to antisemitism. Despite their lack of a formal Zionist background or affiliation, ADL leaders soon became close to Israeli officials. In 1948, and even more in the 1950s, the ADL kept a close watch on Arab spokesmen. In books published in 1952 and 1956, the ADL reported this “Arab anti-Semitism,” with a primary focus on points of collaboration between Arabs and right-wing antisemites.

Yet ADL still focused on the domestic front. Its material in the 1940s and 1950s shows that its purview did not yet involve defending Israel for the sake of defending Israel. The organization only attacked Arab anti-Zionists if they could be designated as a threat to American Jewry. A number of examples provide evidence that such a threat existed.

While shedding light on early roots of “New Anti-Semitism” discourses, these episodes also put into starker contrast the novelties of the post-1967 American Jewish political scene in general and the 1974 publication of The New Anti-Semitism in particular. By that time, combatting antisemitism and combatting anti-Zionism had become one and the same for many Jewish organizations. Emphasizing an inherent Arab or Islamic hostility to Jews became increasingly expedient politically for those who supported Israel holding on to territories conquered in 1967. Doing so took focus away from Israeli policy, as it meant that what Israel does is less relevant that who its opponents are—irrational antisemites conditioned to oppose Jews, Zionism, and Israel driven in part by their Islamic religious texts. In recent years, the ADL has made some efforts to combat Islamophobia and makes clear that Islam does not endorse antisemitism, perhaps a result of a change in leadership. But the legacy of The New Anti-Semitism remains strong, with its discourse reemerging frequently since the publication of the book decades ago.