Abstract

The goal of this work is to explore the conceptual roots of antisemitism, the evolution of the ideology, and to investigate H.Res.183, passed by the United States Congress, as a case study of the modern concept of antisemitism.

Since its coinage in the 19th century antisemitism has been a somewhat ambiguous term.

At first, followers of the new ideology were united by a belief that Jews should be stripped of the legal arrangements afforded to them by recent reforms in Germany. Soon, it came to denote a broader category of hatred of Jews as Jews. Often, this hate was driven by theology, racial motifs and an aversion to particularism. The term’s referents were also expanded to include discrimination against Jews in earlier eras, which had been known in Jewish traditional as *Sinat Yisrael* which translates as “hatred of Jews”. Still, since its designation, an international consensus by scholars and experts concerning the definition of antisemitism did not exist. Due to a growing practical need, in 2005, the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) reached a definition of antisemitism that was known as the “Working Definition of Antisemitism” (WDA). In 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Association (IHRA) adopted the definition along with thirty one of its member states. In addition to its earlier motifs, the definition includes a concept of antisemitism that scholars such as Robert Wistrich, Pierre-André Taguieff and Bernard Harrison, have called “a new antisemitism”, one that targets not only Jews but the Jewish State—Israel. Its ideological basis contains older themes but appropriates them to delegitimize Israel and those who support or identify with it. Some of its characteristics are Holocaust denial and holocaust inversion, that is, the equation of Israelis with Nazis. Despite the United States having adopted the WDA, not all policy-makers, institutes and political actors have agreed with the latest definition.

In 2019 a series of comments by a Freshman Democrat that were deemed controversial reignited the debated on defining antisemitism and prompted the United States Congress to pass H. Res. 183, a resolution condemning antisemitism and other forms of bigotry. This essay responds to the debate by exploring what concept of antisemitism is employed in the resolution. It seeks to analyze whether the language adheres to the traditional interpretation of antisemitism or whether it includes “the new antisemitism”. In order to answer this question, the paper is divided into two parts. Part A surveys the scholarly debate on whether one can exhaustively define antisemitism, and whether attempts to do so are fruitful by taking into account the opinions of key thinkers on the topic such as David Engel and Dan Michman. It then presents a brief genealogy of the term antisemitism, the origins of the ideology and the conceptual framework of its predecessor, anti-Judaism, primarily by focusing on the writings of Robert Wistrich. Finally, it analyzes “the new antisemitism” and highlights its main themes, according to Robert Wistrich, and additional scholars when additive, such as Pierre-André Taguieff, Bernard Harrison, Bernard Henri Levy and Elhanan Yakira, among others. Part B focuses on the language of H. Res. 183 and compares it to coinciding Republican legislation proposed to condemn antisemitism, and anti-Zionism, such as the “Combatting BDS Act”, introduced by Senators Marco Rubio (R-FL) and James Risch (R-ID), H. Res. 72, proposed by Congressman Lee Zeldin (R, NY-1), and the motion to recommit attached to the U.S measure to end the Saudi-led war in Yemen. The paper examines the political and legislative context in the months leading up to the vote and considers the influence of the political climate in the determining a definition of antisemitism.

The result of the analysis reveals that the text of the resolution adheres to the traditional concept of antisemitism rather than the one proposed by the WDA. Whereas conventional themes are condemned, the “new antisemitism” is not considered, save for one line on the Middle East and the generic reference to the charge of dual loyalty. While the paper is more concerned with the *what* of the resolution, it does seek to propose *why* this concept was excluded. It concludes that the “new antisemitism” may have been excluded for several reasons: one, it is possible that “the new antisemitism” is part of a climate of opinion that is somewhat unconscious and hence more challenging to categorize. Two, it may have been a result of the partisan atmosphere in the months leading up to the resolution, where including language on Israel was considered a Republican position. Third, defining antisemitism has historically proven challenging for professors and scholars and was likely an even greater burden for political actors operating in a hyper-partisan climate. The study reveals that due to evolving socio-historic and political contexts, defining antisemitism, whether by philosophers, institutes or political actors, is likely to remain the subject of scholarly debate.