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Abe Foxman's 'Anti-Semitic Pandemic'

by Ran HaCohen

If there were a Nobel Prize for Hypocrisy, Abraham Foxman would have been a great candidate. The director of the Anti-Defamation League, who once interpreted even International Holocaust Remembrance Day as an expression of the Gentiles' latent desire to see Jews dead, has published a [new survey on anti-Semitism in Europe](#) [.pdf]. One of the assertions respondents were asked to agree or disagree with was "Jews are more loyal to Israel than to this country"; an affirmative response was considered indicative of anti-Semitism.

Indeed, doubting the loyalty of a minority is not nice. And the fact that many Zionists *would* affirm that assertion, or at least expect a Jew to be more loyal to Israel than to his country of residence, is a weak excuse for agreeing with such a characterization of all Jews. But let's put things in perspective: even if about half of Europeans say it's "probably true" that Jews are more loyal to Israel, not a single European party is pledging to revoke Jews' citizenship unless they prove their loyalty. I haven't heard of such a demand toward any other native minority either, in Europe or elsewhere. Even the late Joerg Haider did not go that far.

There is one exception, of course. The foremost campaign slogan of [Avigdor Lieberman's](#) Yisrael Beiteinu Party has been "No Loyalty – No Citizenship," which is aimed at Israel's Arab minority. Thirteen percent of Israelis gave Lieberman their vote. What does Abe Foxman have to say about that? Well, Foxman actually defends Lieberman, describing him as harmless: "He's not saying expel them. He's not saying punish them." Not at all: he's just demonizing them and threatening to deprive them of their citizenship. No big deal.

So a private person who doubts the loyalty of Jews in a telephone interview is a dirty anti-Semite to Foxman. But a major political party that publicly defames Arab Israelis and pledges to revoke their citizenship gets a pass from the director of the Anti-Defamation(!) League, purportedly committed to "Fighting Anti-Semitism, Bigotry, and Extremism"!

A Biased Survey

The ADL survey as a whole deserves some critical analysis. Conducted for the second time in seven European countries, the survey consisted of a short list of assertions respondents were supposed to take a stand on.

Note that respondents were given only two choices: they had to refer to each assertion as either “probably true” or “probably false.” All the assertions were phrased in a way that “probably true” was the choice considered anti-Semitic. This suffers from the notorious “confirmatory bias,” which “inclines people toward accepting assertions, rather than thinking more extensively and seeing the flaws in those assertions” (see [Jon Krosnick, “Maximizing Questionnaire Quality”](#) [.pdf]). A serious survey would have phrased some of the assertions in the negative to overcome this natural bias. But the ADL followed its own bias: anti-Semitism should always be found, and the more the better. In fact, if some of this bias, as research indicates, is due to the desire of individuals of lower social status to defer to individuals of higher social status, this could explain why the ADL’s survey consistently found that levels of anti-Semitism were higher among people who did not continue education beyond the age of 17.

One also wonders whether the assertion “Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust” (note the suggestive adverb “still”!) has much to do with anti-Semitism (cf. [Yehuda Elkana’s](#) [.pdf] classical “[The Need to Forget](#)” [.pdf]). And what on earth made the ADL waste two of their six questions on almost identical assertions (“Jews have too much power in the business world” and “Jews have too much power in international financial markets”), which almost always yielded the same result (correlation coefficient 0.922). Was there a shortage of anti-Semitic assertions?

Just a couple of weeks ago, Foxman – not a man of understatement – made it to the headlines by decrying “[a pandemic of anti-Semitism](#)” as a consequence of Operation Cast Lead: the crisis was “the worst, the most intense, the most global that it has been in most of our memories.”

Operation Cast Lead began on Dec. 27, 2008. Now the ADL survey was conducted Dec. 1, 2008-Jan. 13, 2009; that is, its last third was conducted during the devastation of Gaza. If there is an “anti-Semitic pandemic” due to the Gaza events, as Foxman claims, a serious survey should have made a clear distinction between data collected before and after the outbreak of that “pandemic.” Actually, the ADL should have simply read its own survey to see the necessity of making such a distinction: one of its findings is that “23 percent of those surveyed say that their opinion of Jews is influenced by the actions taken by the state of Israel.”

At any rate – careful scientific distinctions aside – if all this were true, a survey conducted partly after the outbreak of the Gaza atrocities would be influenced by the alleged “pandemic” and show a significant rise in anti-Semitism.

Was this the case? Not quite. Actually, as the ADL admits, “A comparison with the 2007 survey indicates that over the past two years levels of anti-Semitism have remained steady in six of the seven countries tested.” Who was the party-pooper? Great Britain, of course, home of some of the most effective initiatives to [boycott](#) Israel: “The United Kingdom was the only country in which there was *a marked decline*” in anti-Semitism.

Steadiness in six continental countries, a marked decline in the UK – and this in a survey conducted partly during an alleged “pandemic” of anti-Semitism. Go figure.

Don't Confuse Us With Facts

Obviously, the survey was reported widely in the Israeli media. In fact, much like anti-Communism in the U.S. during the 1980s, anti-anti-Semitism is (Jewish) Israel's national religion. Every non-Jew is an anti-Semite, potentially if not actually – be it a bad-tempered waiter in a French restaurant or even Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Anti-Semitism is our best excuse: We do not believe in peace because all Arabs are anti-Semites. We must attack Iran because all Muslims are anti-Semites and want to annihilate us, and the rest of the world is anti-Semitic and doesn't care if we are annihilated. And of course every criticism of Israel's occupation is purely anti-Semitic.

Obviously, reports of steady or declining levels of anti-Semitism is not what Israelis want to hear: anti-Semitism should always be on the rise, to boost our national cohesion.

Therefore both *Ha'aretz* (Feb. 11, [Hebrew](#)) and YNet (Feb. 10, [Hebrew](#)) used the partial data of “31% of Europeans Blame the Jews for the Economic Crisis” as an ominous headline. Both focused on the absolute figures of 2009 and kept the inconvenient trend to a marginal penultimate paragraph. Even then, *Ha'aretz* journalist Natasha Mozgovaya went out of her way to translate the ADL's “marked decline” in British anti-Semitism as “a small decline” (not even bothering to mention what it was compared to), whereas YNet omitted the adjective and wrote just “a decline.” And both followed the ADL summary and quickly “balanced” the overall positive trend by emphasizing the negative fraction of the findings.

Make no mistake: some level of racism, including anti-Semitism, does exist in any society; racist Israel is the last place to deny that. But just like real anti-Semitism undermines the Palestinian cause, so do biased surveys and manipulative declarations about anti-Semitism undermine the struggle against racism. And Foxman criticizing one form of racism while supporting another is despicable.