

A Leadership Call for Critical and Necessary Debate About Israeli Policies

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Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Israel has had no greater ally than the United States, and the two countries have formed enduring unbreakable ties based on deeply held shared values.

At this pivotal moment in Israel's history – and with the beginning of a new Congress – we take this opportunity, as leaders in the American Jewish community, to affirm the importance of maintaining those bonds and upholding the strength of the U.S.-Israel relationship.

As the 118th Congress begins its work, we believe it is important to state our concerns—which are widely shared by supporters of Israel here and around the world and by a significant number of Israelis—regarding some of the policies proposed by members of Israel's new-government.

Our criticisms emanate from a love for Israel and a steadfast support for its security and well-being. Some will try to dismiss their validity by labeling them antisemitic. We want to be clear that, whether or not one agrees with a particular criticism, such [critiques of Israeli policy are not antisemitic](#). Indeed, they reflect a real concern that the new government's direction mirrors anti-democratic trends that we see arising elsewhere—in other nations and here in the U.S., rather than reinforcing the shared democratic values that are foundational to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

We are, for example, concerned about the Israeli Justice Minister's plan to [limit the Supreme Court's power](#), proposed modifications to the Law of Return to [change the status quo](#) on conversions to Judaism, and calls by ultra-Orthodox coalition members to [outlaw non-Orthodox prayer at the Western Wall](#). We are also concerned about provocative actions that seek [to open the Temple Mount to Jewish prayer](#) in defiance of long-standing international norms and coalition agreements, [legitimize settlement outposts retroactively](#), and expand Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank.

Let us be clear: when [antisemitism](#) shows up in debates about the situation in Israel and the occupied territories, it must be called out. It is antisemitic to advocate the destruction of Israel or to deny the right of the Jewish people to self-determination. It is antisemitic to condemn Israel by using antisemitic tropes or singling out Israel because of its Jewish character. It is antisemitic to use Israel or Zionism as a surrogate for Jews, to hold Jews collectively responsible for Israel's policies or conduct, or to suggest that American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the U.S.

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Accusations of antisemitism, however, must not be abused or misused. Indeed, it is profoundly irresponsible to [conflate charges of antisemitism with criticism of Israeli policies](#), especially when antisemitism is on the rise in our country and elsewhere around the world.

Promoting equal rights and justice for all peoples, including Palestinians within Israel and in the occupied territories, is neither anti-Israel nor antisemitic. Indeed, the two-state solution, which is critical for Israel's survival, provides both Israelis and Palestinians with national rights, individual human rights, safety, and security. It is not antisemitic to hold Israel to the standards that guide the U.S. commitment to human rights across the globe and reflect our commitment to democracy. And while we do not support the BDS movement, we recognize that non-violent actions that press for changes in Israeli policies are not *ipso facto* antisemitic.

Turning political disputes about the policies of the Israeli government into an argument about antisemitism interferes with the critical and necessary debate about these policies. It also makes it harder to fight antisemitism by diverting attention away from genuine occurrences of anti-Jewish bigotry and hate.

The bottom line is this: There is no contradiction between combating antisemitism and criticizing the deeply troubling policies of the new Israeli government. Those who employ accusations of antisemitism as a political weapon poison the debate, and they weaken our ability to fight real antisemitism and effectively advocate for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship.

(Signatories on following pages)

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