

WHAT IS ANTI-ZIONISM?

Senator Joseph Biden was in town last Sunday for an AIPAC meeting, and warned American Jews to be clear about *why* the U.S. supports Israel. The reason, of course, is that it is in America's national interest to do so.

It is also going to be important, in the hard days ahead, for American Jews to understand why Americans who *oppose* Israel, do so.

There are three broad categories of people who oppose Israel. Occasional criticism of Israel does not qualify as opposition; Israel's best friends are critical at times. "Opposition" means basic opposition to America's economic and diplomatic support of Israel.

Anti-semitism is *not* the basic reason for opposition to Israel, and we would be dangerously misled if we thought so. A lot of anti-semites support Israel; and a lot of people who support Israel are anti-semitic. For example, about 3 out of 5 of those Americans who are *willing* to see a Jew as President say they would support Israel in the case of another Middle East war. And about 3 out of 5 of those Americans who are *unwilling* to see a Jew as President say they would support Israel in such a war. About 1 out of 10 Americans who would approve of a Jewish President, and about the same proportion of those who would disapprove of a Jewish President, say they would support the Arabs. There is a great deal of such evidence.

Nor is "anti-Zionism" a useful description of people who oppose Israel. As a matter of fact, there is only one kind of anti-Zionism which deserves the name: opposition to some legitimate definition of Zionism. There are many ways to define Zionism, but the core definition, these days, is at least a belief that Israel is where it should be, that it belongs to all Jews and that it must remain a Jewish state.

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By that definition, simple Arab nationalists are anti-Zionist. So are a couple of religious Jewish groups. But we hear about another kind of "anti-Zionism," which is not opposition to any kind of Zionism which exists -- but rather is support of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. That "anti-Zionism" is based on this formula: "American imperialism is supported by an international Jewish conspiracy, and Israel is part of that conspiracy."

We hear that from the Soviet Union, from some Arab leaders and from some radical ideologues. It is old-fashioned political anti-semitism, of the kind which Hitler peddled, with Israel thrown in. It should not be called "anti-Zionism" at all, since it has nothing to do with any form of Zionism, and its main target is more often the U.S. than Israel. But whatever it is called, it is not held by very many Americans, not even in the San Francisco/Berkeley area.

Nor are there very many Americans who are anti-Zionist in the legitimate sense of opposing some form of Zionism. There are not very many Americans who know what Zionism is.

If broad American opposition to Israel will develop, it will develop not as any kind of anti-Zionism, but for the same reasons -- *in reverse* -- that Americans now support Israel. It will develop if and when Americans lose their belief that there is a common interest between the U.S. and Israel -- and therefore resent America's economic and military support of Israel. Anti-semitism will not cause that broad opposition to Israel -- but could well *result* from it as American Jews remain in vocal support of Israel, which they will. Senator Biden's point is a critical one.