

Scholars Circle Resource Guide

Secular and Religious Forms of Antagonism to Israel: Nazis, Soviets, Islamists

SCHOLARS CIRCLE



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About Professor Jeffrey Herf

Professor Jeffrey Herf, a historian of modern European, especially German, history, is Distinguished University Professor, Emeritus at the University of Maryland, College Park. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1969, and received his PhD from Brandeis University in 1981. Before coming to Maryland, he taught at Harvard, and at Ohio University.

His publications include *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Harvard U.P., 2006), *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (Yale U.P., 2009), *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967-1989* (Cambridge U.P., 2016), *Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949* (Cambridge UP, 2022). and *Three Faces of Antisemitism: Right, Left and Islamist* (Routledge, 2024).

Before and since the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023, he has published essays on Israel, Hamas, and responses to the attack of October 7 in journals of opinion including *The New York Review of Books*, *Persuasion/American Purpose*, *Quillette*, *Sapir*, *Times of Israel*, *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, and *The Washington Post*.



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Common Q&A's

Did the Nazis have any particular reasons to oppose the idea of a Jewish state, or did their opposition to the idea of a Jewish state just follow from their deep antisemitism. In other words, would they have been antizionist if they hadn't been so antisemitic?

It's hard to see why they would. Initially they worked with the Zionist movement, to allow the emigration of German Jews to Palestine, not out of any kindness but because (1) they wanted to get rid of their Jews, (2) they didn't see Zionism as likely to succeed or be a threat to them, and (3) they profited handily by the arrangement. So Zionism per se was not a problem for them. But it was only after the war began that they became full-throttle antizionists, partly for practical reasons—they wished to win the favor of the Arabs in the war—but mostly for ideological reasons. They saw Zionism through the lens of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, i.e. as a way for the Jews to advance their power in their quest to dominate the world. It was that antisemitic ideology that ultimately explains Nazi antizionism.

Is today's Western campus environment--decades removed from, ideologically seemingly very different from, the Nazis, the Soviets, the Islamists of the Middle East--just a completely separate independent stream of antizionism? If not, how exactly is it connected to or influenced by, those other streams?

The real question here is how or why today's campus activists, overwhelmingly progressives, make alliances with the Islamists. The world as envisioned by Hezbollah and Hamas—just consider the charter of the latter—is as far removed from the world aspired to by the progressives, being racist, misogynist, homophobic, totalitarian, etc. And yet campus activists seem in large measure to openly support those groups. Perhaps in their minds they see themselves as engaged in the battle against capitalism, and the West, and see the Islamists as their bedfellows in that battle. Be careful who you work with. One wonders if they truly understand the nature of these movements that they have signed on with. I hope some will watch this lecture to get at least some idea.

Key Takeaways

- ☑ The Nazis weren't merely antisemitic, they were also antizionist, with their antizionism deeply rooted in their antisemitism. To them, in a worldview saturated with the antisemitic forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, Zionism represented the Jewish quest for world domination, so their delusional antisemitism is what leads them, in conjunction with other antisemitic ideologies, ultimately to deeply oppose Zionism.
- ☑ Muslim Arab opposition to Jewish collective power, or any power at all, long preceded the advent of Zionism. Indeed it traces back to the origins of Islam in the 7th century, when the Jews living in Arabia declined to convert to Islam. Subsequently there was much violence between the parties, as Islamic texts document, coming explicitly to treat the Jews as the greatest enemy of Islam, as ever working to destroy Islam etc. That creates an uncanny parallel between Islamic antisemitism and classic, Protocols-inspired antisemitism: in both cases they are beholden to a worldview that sees the Jew as their biggest enemy, as an aggressor who seeks to destroy them, when in fact the truth is only the other way around.

The views expressed by the speaker don't necessarily reflect Chai Mitzvah's official position.