

A Broken Word as Shield: “Antisemitism”, Gaza, and the Politics of Epistemic Control

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The word “antisemitism” began life as a bad piece of nineteenth-century racial pseudo-science, built on an earlier linguistic label for “Semitic” languages such as Hebrew and Arabic. Over time it hardened into the central moral warning of post-Holocaust Europe and North America: a name for modern anti-Jewish hatred and its genocidal potential. In the twenty-first century, that moral centrality is now being fought over. On one side, real Jew-hatred persists and still needs clear naming. On another, the charge of “antisemitism” is increasingly deployed to police criticism of Israel, to deflect scrutiny of U.S. support for Israeli policy, and to delegitimize those who name Gaza as a possible or actual genocide. The result is that a historically broken word has become a shield around contemporary structures of power. This paper examines how that happened and what it costs. It traces the term’s invention, follows its post-Shoah elevation, and then analyzes the contemporary “weaponization of antisemitism” in political, media, and knowledge infrastructures, from Wikipedia to large AI models. The aim is neither to deny antisemitism nor to excuse Jew-hatred, but to separate the task of protecting Jewish people from the task of protecting specific states, lobbies, and policies from critique.

Keywords: antisemitism, weaponization of antisemitism, Semitic languages, Wilhelm Marr, Gaza, genocide denial, Israel, United States, AIPAC, donor capture, knowledge politics, epistemic control, Wikipedia, media framing, AI safety, logistics, post-Holocaust memory.

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Outline

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Framing the problem: a word, a war, and a captured discourse
- 1.2 Scope and method: conceptual analysis, not new archival work
- 1.3 Structure of the argument and limitations

2. From “Semitic Languages” to “Antisemitism”

- 2.1 The invention of the Semitic language family in eighteenth-century philology
- 2.2 Wilhelm Marr and the racialization of “the Semite”
- 2.3 Fixing “antisemitism” as a special term for modern Jew-hatred
- 2.4 Arabs, Aramaic, and who vanished from the semantic field

3. Antisemitism After the Shoah: Memory, Law, and Taboo

- 3.1 Post-Holocaust centrality: antisemitism as the paradigmatic modern hatred
- 3.2 Legal codifications, education programs, and institutional vigilance
- 3.3 Definitional battles: IHRA and competing standards
- 3.4 What “never again” came to mean, and what it left out

4. Weaponizing Antisemitism: Concept and Mechanisms

- 4.1 From description to instrument: defining “weaponization”
- 4.2 Techniques of overreach: conflation, overextension, and selective enforcement
- 4.3 Case patterns: how critics of Israel and Gaza policy are labeled
- 4.4 The double harm: to Jewish safety and to Palestinian survival

5. Gaza, Genocide Claims, and the Use of the Word

- 5.1 Gaza as a test case for the post-Holocaust moral order
- 5.2 Genocide frameworks and contemporary denial techniques
- 5.3 “It is antisemitic” as a stock response to Gaza criticism
- 5.4 The six-million echo: Palestinian demography and moral numerology

6. Knowledge Infrastructures: Wikipedia, Media, and Narrative Gatekeeping

- 6.1 Wikipedia as soft front line of “consensus reality”
- 6.2 How contested terms are stabilized, locked, and patrolled
- 6.3 Mainstream media, think tanks, and repetition of approved frames
- 6.4 What is consistently omitted: donors, lobbies, and imperial interests

7. Lobbies, Donors, and State Violence Behind the Word

- 7.1 AIPAC and donor capture as a concrete institutional mechanism
- 7.2 Israel and the United States as agents of kinetic death in Gaza
- 7.3 From structures to peoples: how blame is shifted and mystified
- 7.4 Why structural critique is neither optional nor anti-Jewish

8. AI, Safety Policies, and the New Epistemic Perimeter

8.1 Large language models as inheritors of contested vocabularies

8.2 Safety rails, group-blame bans, and the emergence of “gray zones”

8.3 When harm reduction overlaps with narrative containment

8.4 Possibilities for honest structural analysis under technical constraint

9. Toward a Cleaner Vocabulary: Naming Hatred and Naming Power

9.1 Preserving a precise term for anti-Jewish hatred

9.2 Separating Jew-hatred from anti-Zionism and Gaza solidarity

9.3 Building better language for donor capture and imperial violence

9.4 Protecting both Jews and Palestinians from instrumentalized discourse

10. Conclusion: After the Broken Word

10.1 What this inquiry clarifies about our current crisis

10.2 Risks of leaving “antisemitism” as an all-purpose political weapon

10.3 Minimal epistemic duties for citizens, scholars, and systems

10.4 Final reflections on truth-telling under siege and the cost of silence

References

1. Introduction

1.1 Framing the problem: a word, a war, and a captured discourse

This paper begins from a simple but uncomfortable observation. A word that originally emerged from bad nineteenth-century racial theory now sits at the center of moral and political argument in a twenty-first-century war. “Antisemitism” once named a specific hatred directed at Jews as Jews, and the industrial murder of European Jewry gave that word an unmatched gravity. Today, that same word is also used as a flexible accusation in struggles over Israel, Palestine, and the meaning of Gaza. It still names real, dangerous hostility to Jews. It is also invoked to discredit political positions, to silence critics of Israeli policy, and to shield particular alliances and flows of power from scrutiny.

The war in Gaza throws this tension into sharp relief. As images of destroyed neighborhoods and mass civilian death circulate, so do conflicting narratives about what may be genocide, what counts as legitimate resistance, and what language is allowed. In this environment, to call Israeli or United States policy criminal, colonial, or genocidal is, in some arenas, to risk being labeled antisemitic. The word that should protect a vulnerable minority becomes, at times, a defensive perimeter around states, lobbies, and donors. The discourse itself feels captured: the terms of speech are policed as fiercely as the facts on the ground.

The central question here is not whether antisemitism exists, nor whether Jews deserve protection from hatred and violence. They do, and it does. The question is what happens when a historically “broken” term, rooted in a racial misreading of language families, is elevated to near-sacred status and then repurposed as a shield in live conflicts. What does that do to Jews, to Palestinians, and to the larger public whose understanding of the world is mediated through institutions that adopt and enforce this vocabulary?

1.2 Scope and method: conceptual analysis, not new archival work

This paper does not pretend to offer new archival discoveries or original empirical datasets. Its work is conceptual and diagnostic. It draws on existing scholarship in intellectual history, genocide studies, political theory, and media analysis to perform three related tasks.

First, it reconstructs, in broad strokes, how a technical term for a group of languages (“Semitic”) was reinterpreted as the marker of a racial type and then fixed as the core label for modern anti-Jewish hatred. The figure of Wilhelm Marr matters here, not as a biographical obsession, but as a hinge where linguistic, racial, and political projects briefly converged.

Second, it examines how the word “antisemitism” functioned in the decades after the Shoah: as a moral warning, as a legal category, and as an organizing principle in education and commemoration. This is not a full history of Holocaust memory, but a targeted look at how this

one term became so central to the postwar moral vocabulary that questioning its use feels almost taboo.

Third, it analyzes the contemporary “weaponization of antisemitism” as a set of discursive techniques rather than a single conspiracy. Conflation of criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews, selective outrage that tracks geopolitics more than actual danger, and the policing of institutions from universities to technology platforms are treated as patterns to be described and understood.

The method is deliberately modest. It traces concepts, maps alignments between words and power, and reads a few key sites of epistemic authority, such as encyclopedias, media ecosystems, and AI safety frameworks. It does not claim to adjudicate every historical controversy about antisemitism, nor to exhaust the literature on Israel–Palestine. The aim is clarity about a limited set of questions, not a grand synthesis.

1.3 Structure of the argument and limitations

The argument unfolds in nine further sections. The next two sections move historically. Section 2 sketches the passage from “Semitic languages” to “antisemitism” as a racial term, with attention to who gets included and excluded when “Semite” is silently equated with “Jew.” Section 3 follows the term into the post-Holocaust order, where antisemitism becomes both a legal category and a cultural taboo, and where influential definitions attempt to stabilize its meaning in law, policy, and education.

Section 4 introduces the idea of “weaponization” and details the mechanisms by which a term meant to protect Jews can be stretched to cover state policy, military operations, and lobbying strategies. Section 5 then turns directly to Gaza. It does not attempt to settle legal questions about genocide but instead examines how genocide claims and genocide denial interact with accusations of antisemitism in real time. The demographic echo between the number that symbolizes Jewish destruction and the current population of Palestine is treated as a moral and symbolic fact worth pausing over.

Sections 6 and 7 move from words to infrastructures. They examine how knowledge systems such as Wikipedia and mass media stabilize particular narratives about antisemitism and Israel, and how organizations like AIPAC and allied donor networks operate inside the United States political system. The focus is on concrete mechanisms: endorsements, primary challenges, funding streams, and the way these structures shape what elected officials feel safe to say.

Section 8 brings artificial intelligence and safety policy into the frame, not as science fiction but as a new layer of epistemic governance. It considers how large language models inherit contested vocabularies and how content policies around group blame, hate speech, and

misinformation can simultaneously prevent genuine harm and unintentionally reinforce certain narrative boundaries.

Section 9 asks what a cleaner vocabulary might look like. It argues for preserving a sharp term for anti-Jewish hatred, while also building distinct language for criticizing states, lobbies, donors, and imperial structures. The conclusion then returns to the opening problem: what we risk if we leave a broken word to do incompatible jobs under conditions of war and capture.

The limitations of this approach are obvious. The paper centers largely on European and North American trajectories and on one contemporary conflict, leaving aside rich debates about antisemitism in other regions. It does not try to measure antisemitic incidents or attitudes quantitatively, nor to weigh all rival legal definitions of genocide. It treats certain institutional actors, such as AIPAC or major media outlets, schematically rather than as objects of full empirical study. These constraints are deliberate. The goal is to open a space where hatred of Jews, Palestinian suffering, and the politics of language can be discussed together without collapsing into slogan or denial.

2. From “Semitic Languages” to “Antisemitism”

2.1 The invention of the Semitic language family in eighteenth-century philology

The story begins in a place that looks, at first glance, almost innocent: the classification of languages. In the late eighteenth century, European philologists were trying to bring order to the growing body of linguistic data arriving from biblical studies, travel, and colonial expansion. They noticed systematic similarities among Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and several other languages of the Near East and North Africa. To name this cluster, some scholars reached back into the biblical table of nations in Genesis and chose the figure of Shem. The label “Semitic languages” followed almost automatically.

The early use of “Semitic” in this sense was technical. It denoted a family of languages with shared grammatical and lexical features, contrasted in particular with “Indo-European” or “Aryan” language families. At this stage, “Semitic” did not yet mean a race. The category was shaped by the theological and textual concerns of the time, but the object of study was still grammar, vocabulary, and historical relationships among tongues.

Even here, however, the seed of later confusion was present. By deriving the label from a biblical ancestor, the philologists encouraged a slippage between language, lineage, and people. If Hebrew and Arabic are “Semitic,” and the Bible associates Shem with certain peoples, it becomes easier, in a racializing age, to talk about “Semites” as if they were a coherent biological

group. What begins as a taxonomic convenience becomes a conceptual bridge between linguistics and emerging racial theory.

2.2 Wilhelm Marr and the racialization of “the Semite”

Wilhelm Marr’s importance is not that he invented hatred of Jews. Jew-hatred in Christian Europe long predates him. His significance lies in the way he translated that hatred into a new idiom and gave it a new name. In the 1870s, Marr was a restless German journalist and political agitator who came to see Jews not primarily as a religious community, but as a racial and civilizational threat.

In his most famous pamphlet, he argued that “Judaism” had triumphed over “Germandom” through its superior adaptability and control over finance and modern industry. Crucially, he framed this not as a moral or theological failure but as the outcome of a kind of race struggle. “Semites” and “Aryans” became opposed types with allegedly distinct psychological and moral characteristics. Marr cast Jews as the paradigmatic “Semites,” even though, in linguistic terms, many other peoples would also have fit that label.

It is in this context that he and his milieu popularized the noun “antisemitism” to describe their own position. They did not present themselves as bigots rousing a mob, but as modern thinkers offering a rational analysis of an intractable racial conflict. “Antisemitism” sounded scientific, even clinical, compared to older labels like “Jew-hatred.” The word implied that there existed a real, objective entity called “the Semite” against which one might reasonably take a stand.

This move completed the slippage that eighteenth-century philology had made possible. A term that began as a linguistic label was repurposed as a racial category. “Semite” now meant, in practice, “Jew,” and “antisemite” named a political actor who opposed Jews not simply as adherents of a religion but as bearers of an alien, corrosive racial essence.

2.3 Fixing “antisemitism” as a special term for modern Jew-hatred

Once coined, the term “antisemitism” quickly took on a life of its own. It migrated from Marr’s pamphlets into political slogans, party names, and polemical debates. Even critics of Marr sometimes adopted the word, if only because it was becoming the shared label for a set of attitudes and movements they needed to describe. Over time, the racial pseudo-science that tried to ground the concept in biology was discredited. The word survived the collapse of its original theory.

By the mid-twentieth century, “antisemitism” had crystallized into a special term for hostility toward Jews, regardless of whether that hostility was framed in religious, racial, cultural, or conspiratorial terms. The Holocaust then locked this meaning in place. Faced with the systematic attempt to annihilate European Jewry, postwar institutions needed a word that could

name the specific pattern of demonization, exclusion, and violence that had culminated in genocide. “Antisemitism” became that word.

The result is a curious hybrid. On the one hand, the term’s etymological root in “Semitic” languages is historically contingent and conceptually misleading. On the other hand, its historical and moral weight is anchored in the very real pattern of hatred and persecution directed at Jews in modern Europe and beyond. To abandon the word entirely would be to lose a crucial name for that history. To ignore its origins would be to miss how it frames the problem in particular ways and excludes other victims of related forms of hostility.

In practice, the postwar fixation of “antisemitism” as a label for Jew-hatred has been reinforced by legal texts, educational programs, and memorial cultures. It appears in laws against incitement, in school curricula, in public condemnations by states and institutions. It rarely appears to describe hostility to other Semitic-language peoples. The broken etymology sits under a hardened, widely shared convention.

2.4 Arabs, Aramaic, and who vanished from the semantic field

One of the strangest features of this history is who falls out of the picture. If “Semitic” began as a label for a language family, then large populations of Arabic, Aramaic, and Amharic speakers should, in principle, have been included whenever people spoke of “Semites.” In the racial theorizing of the nineteenth century, Arabs and other groups were sometimes indeed described as Semites and contrasted, along with Jews, to “Aryans.” Over time, however, the linkage between “Semitic” and “Jew” tightened, while Arabs and others drifted toward different categories.

By the time “antisemitism” became the standard term for modern Jew-hatred, the linguistic origin of “Semitic” was all but forgotten in public discourse. Few speakers of the word paused to consider that most Arabic-speaking peoples are, in the original sense, as “Semitic” as Jews. The term no longer tracked language families at all. It tracked only one people’s experience of persecution.

This narrowing had practical consequences. Hostility toward Arabs, toward Muslims more broadly, and toward other Semitic-language communities did not receive a parallel, central label with comparable moral force. No widely recognized term for systematic anti-Arab racism emerged with the same institutional backing as “antisemitism.” When, in later decades, Arab and Muslim communities faced demonization, collective punishment, or mass violence, their suffering had to be described in other, less symbolically charged words.

The asymmetry remains visible today. It is linguistically odd to say that harsh criticism of Israel might be antisemitic, while harsh dehumanization of Arabic-speaking populations is not commonly described that way, even when it draws on similar stereotypes of treachery, violence,

or civilizational threat. This is not an argument for collapsing distinct histories into one category. Jewish and Arab experiences of persecution differ in many respects. It is, however, a reminder that the word “antisemitism” does not neutrally mirror a linguistic or anthropological reality. It encodes a particular historical focus that has left other Semitic-language peoples at the margins of the semantic field.

That focus is understandable, given the catastrophe that befell European Jewry and the central place the Holocaust occupies in postwar moral consciousness. It is also part of what makes the contemporary politics of the word so fraught. When accusations of antisemitism are extended from the protection of Jewish communities to the defense of specific state policies, the earlier exclusions and silences matter. They shape who can be heard as a legitimate victim, whose suffering resonates with the weight of “never again,” and whose does not.

3. Antisemitism After the Shoah: Memory, Law, and Taboo

3.1 Post-Holocaust centrality: antisemitism as the paradigmatic modern hatred

The extermination of European Jewry during the Second World War changed the status of “antisemitism” in the moral vocabulary of the West. Before 1945, hostility to Jews was widespread across Europe and often seen as an ugly but almost normal feature of public life. After the discovery of the camps and the full scale of the murder, that position became untenable for mainstream institutions. Antisemitism shifted from being a tolerated prejudice to being treated as the paradigmatic example of modern, industrialized hatred.

This transformation had several dimensions. Intellectually, antisemitism came to be understood not only as a set of attitudes but as a structural pattern of scapegoating and dehumanization that could culminate in genocide. Politically, it was recognized as a threat to the legitimacy of liberal and democratic orders. Religiously, major Christian denominations began reevaluating long-standing teachings and practices that had demonized Jews and branded them collectively guilty for the death of Jesus.

The Shoah’s centrality was reinforced by the way it was narrated. It appeared as a unique collision of bureaucracy, ideology, and technology, carried out by a highly modern state at the heart of Europe. Antisemitism, in this framing, was not merely one prejudice among many; it was the engine of an unprecedented crime that revealed something essential about how modernity could go wrong. To speak of antisemitism after 1945 was thus to invoke the darkest lesson available about what hatred could do when combined with state power and modern technique.

This status did not mean that antisemitism disappeared. Violent attacks, vandalism, discrimination, and conspiracy theories persisted in various forms. What changed was the public posture of states and major institutions. Overt antisemitism became something that official actors felt obliged to condemn, distance themselves from, and, increasingly, to monitor and legislate against. A term that had been coined within a racist milieu was absorbed into the self-understanding of a postwar order that defined itself, at least in part, against the crime it named.

3.2 Legal codifications, education programs, and institutional vigilance

The postwar elevation of antisemitism was not just rhetorical. It was embedded in law, education, and institutional practice. Internationally, the Nuremberg Trials and the Genocide Convention signaled that certain forms of targeted group destruction and incitement would be treated as crimes of concern to humanity as a whole. Nationally, especially in Europe, states began passing laws against hate speech, incitement to racial hatred, and later, in some jurisdictions, Holocaust denial.

Germany and Austria, with their direct involvement in the Nazi project, built extensive legal and educational frameworks aimed at confronting and preventing antisemitism. France, the United Kingdom, and other countries developed their own mixtures of civil and criminal law addressing racist and antisemitic expression, as well as state-supported or state-adjacent bodies to monitor incidents and trends. In the United States, where constitutional protections for speech limited the scope of direct legal prohibition, non-state actors such as civil rights organizations, Jewish community groups, and universities became key sites of vigilance.

Education was an equally important arena. Holocaust curricula were introduced in schools, sometimes mandated by law, sometimes strongly encouraged by ministries of education. Museums and memorials were established, often with public funding, to preserve testimony, artifacts, and historical analysis. Annual remembrance days tied public ceremony, survivor accounts, and political speeches together. In many places, training about antisemitism and the Holocaust became part of the standard formation for teachers, police, judges, and other officials.

These measures had real value. They acknowledged a specific historical crime and the vulnerability of a particular minority. They aimed to inoculate societies against the re-emergence of genocidal hatred by making its history widely known and morally central. At the same time, they began to create a new kind of taboo. Antisemitism was not only illegal in certain forms; it was framed as morally unthinkable in respectable public discourse. Violations of that taboo carried reputational, professional, and sometimes legal consequences.

3.3 Definitional battles: IHRA and competing standards

As the term “antisemitism” became more central and more consequential, the question of its precise definition became contested. The need for clear guidance was practical as well as symbolic. Law enforcement agencies, universities, and international bodies wanted to know what should count as an antisemitic incident, how to record it, and how to distinguish legitimate criticism of policy from hateful speech.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance put forward a “working definition” of antisemitism that has since been adopted or endorsed by numerous governments and institutions. It describes antisemitism as a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews, and includes a list of illustrative examples. Some of these examples concern traditional tropes: conspiracy theories about Jewish control of media or finance, collective blame for the actions of individual Jews, and so on. Others explicitly address how hostility to Israel can function as a vehicle for antisemitism, for instance by applying double standards or denying Jews the right to self-determination in a way that is not applied to other peoples.

This approach has been strongly supported by groups that see contemporary antisemitism as closely intertwined with anti-Zionism and opposition to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. It has been equally strongly criticized by scholars, civil liberties advocates, and Palestinian solidarity groups, who argue that some of the examples risk conflating political criticism of Israel or Zionism with hatred of Jews as Jews. Alternative definitions, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism and the Nexus Document, have been proposed to separate more clearly between Jew-hatred, on the one hand, and robust criticism of Israel, on the other.

These definitional battles are not mere semantic quarrels. They determine the boundaries of permissible speech in universities, media, and civil society. They influence whether certain slogans, boycotts, or forms of protest are treated as racist or as legitimate political expression. They shape how incidents are counted in official statistics and how trends are reported to the public. As the conflict around Israel and Palestine has intensified, the stakes of these definitions have increased, with each camp accusing the other of either enabling antisemitism or weaponizing the charge to silence dissent.

3.4 What “never again” came to mean, and what it left out

The phrase “never again” emerged as a condensation of post-Holocaust resolve. It signaled a commitment that the kind of mass industrialized slaughter inflicted on Jews, Roma, disabled people, and others under Nazism would not be permitted to recur. Over time, “never again” acquired a near-sacred status in political and moral discourse. It appears on memorials, in speeches, in school textbooks, and in the rhetoric of international organizations.

Yet the practical meaning of “never again” has always been unstable. In some contexts, it is universalized: no group, anywhere, should face genocide or systematic destruction. In others, it is implicitly particular: it must never again happen to Jews. The two senses coexist, sometimes harmoniously, sometimes not. When genocides or mass atrocities occur elsewhere, the invocation of “never again” can be a call to action or a bitter reminder of promises broken. Rwanda, Srebrenica, and other sites of mass killing have generated precisely this tension between the slogan and the reality.

The relationship between “never again” and the state of Israel has added another layer of complexity. For many Jews, the existence of Israel is understood as a concrete guarantee that “never again” will not be merely rhetorical. A state with military power, intelligence services, and, in all likelihood, nuclear weapons is seen as the last line of defense against another attempted annihilation. In this view, policies of military strength, deterrence, and even pre-emptive action are framed as tragic necessities under the shadow of the Shoah.

At the same time, the language of “never again” has rarely been extended, with equal intensity, to the experiences of Palestinians and other Arab populations who have suffered displacement, occupation, and large-scale violence in the history of the Israeli state and its wars. Their suffering is often described in other terms: conflict, security dilemma, collateral damage. The moral spotlight that “never again” directs at Jewish vulnerability does not automatically illuminate others who may, in their own contexts, face forms of collective punishment or destruction.

This selective application is not unique to the Israeli–Palestinian case. It reflects a broader pattern in which the Holocaust becomes the central reference point for evil, and antisemitism the central name for hatred, while other genocides and racisms struggle for equal recognition. It also shapes how accusations of antisemitism function today. When critics of Israeli policy describe actions in Gaza as genocidal, they are implicitly or explicitly appealing to the same moral grammar that “never again” helped build. When defenders of Israeli policy respond by branding such critiques antisemitic, they are effectively claiming that the moral legacy of the Shoah belongs to one narrative and cannot be legitimately used against a state that presents itself as its answer.

What “never again” came to mean, then, is both inspiring and fraught. It codified a powerful refusal of genocidal hatred, particularly against Jews, and generated real efforts at remembrance and prevention. It also left gaps: other victims under Nazism often remain in the background; other genocides receive less sustained attention; and contemporary applications of the phrase are uneven and contested. These gaps matter when the word “antisemitism” is wielded in present conflicts. They shape who is seen, who is heard, and whose appeals to the postwar moral order are treated as legitimate.

4. Weaponizing Antisemitism: Concept and Mechanisms

4.1 From description to instrument: defining “weaponization”

In its most straightforward use, the word “antisemitism” is descriptive. It names a pattern of attitudes, speech, and actions directed against Jews as Jews. In this descriptive mode, the term is a diagnostic tool. It allows societies to recognize when hostility to Jews is surfacing, to track incidents over time, and to take appropriate measures to protect a vulnerable minority. The moral force of the word comes from its historical anchor in persecution and genocide.

“Weaponization” begins when this diagnostic function is joined to, and sometimes subordinated by, other purposes. To weaponize “antisemitism” is to deploy the charge not primarily to describe reality, but to shape it. The label becomes an instrument for achieving political, institutional, or reputational goals. It can be used to protect certain actors from criticism, to discredit opponents, or to close down particular lines of inquiry and speech.

This shift is not always deliberate or conspiratorial. Individuals and institutions genuinely alarmed by Jew-hatred may reach instinctively for the strongest available term when they perceive threats, including symbolic threats. At the same time, the charge gains extra power in contexts where being branded antisemitic carries serious professional or legal consequences. Universities, cultural institutions, and media organizations that fear scandal or loss of funding may respond to accusations of antisemitism by curbing speech well beyond what is necessary to protect Jewish communities. The word is no longer just a mirror held up to prejudice; it becomes a lever within conflicts over policy, narrative, and power.

Weaponization, in this sense, is not a single act but a pattern. It occurs when the moral prestige and protective intent of “antisemitism” are extended to shield states, lobbies, or donors from scrutiny, and when accusations of antisemitism are used to collapse complex political disagreements into questions of bigotry. The same term that rightly names the danger of Jew-hatred can, when stretched in this way, become a tool for disciplining dissent, especially around Israel and Palestine.

4.2 Techniques of overreach: conflation, overextension, and selective enforcement

The weaponization of antisemitism relies on recognizable techniques. These are rhetorical and institutional habits that, taken together, move the term from description to instrument. Three stand out in contemporary practice: conflation, overextension, and selective enforcement.

Conflation is the most obvious. It proceeds by treating Israel, Zionism, and Jewishness as if they were essentially the same object. In this frame, criticism of Israel as a state, of Zionism as a political project, or of specific Israeli policies is rapidly translated into hostility toward Jews as a people. Slogans, boycotts, or analytical language that target the state are interpreted as attacks

on Jewish existence. This conflation may be sincere, rooted in a sense that Israel is central to Jewish safety and identity, or it may be opportunistic. Either way, it collapses important distinctions between states and peoples, governments and communities.

Overextension is a related but distinct technique. It involves expanding the definition of antisemitism to cover a very wide range of speech and action, including those that may be sharp, provocative, or offensive, but are not expressions of Jew-hatred in any ordinary sense. Under overextended definitions, calling a policy apartheid, describing a military campaign as genocidal, or supporting boycotts of institutions connected to a state can all be treated as prima facie evidence of antisemitism. The problem is not that such terms are beyond criticism; they can be misused, exaggerated, or weaponized in their own right. The problem is that labeling them inherently antisemitic short-circuits the political and ethical arguments they are meant to raise.

Selective enforcement completes the pattern. Even under broad definitions, not all potential instances of antisemitism are pursued with equal vigor. The charge is often applied most aggressively to those who challenge particular foreign policies or donor structures, while similar or worse hostility to Jews in other contexts may be downplayed if it arises among political allies. Conversely, virulent racism or incitement against Arabs and Muslims may be tolerated or minimized even by actors who are highly sensitive to antisemitic language. This unevenness is visible in which incidents are amplified by officials and media, which are quietly ignored, and which trigger institutional investigations or sanctions.

Together, these techniques turn antisemitism from a label applied after careful analysis into a flexible instrument deployed in asymmetric ways. Conflation blurs the targets, overextension widens the net, and selective enforcement directs the resulting power against particular groups and causes. The field of legitimate speech narrows, often without a corresponding increase in actual safety for Jewish communities.

4.3 Case patterns: how critics of Israel and Gaza policy are labeled

The impact of these techniques can be seen in recurring patterns. While the specific incidents vary, the structure is consistent. A public figure, institution, or movement offers strong criticism of Israeli policies, especially in the context of Gaza or the broader occupation. They may describe the situation using terms drawn from international law, such as apartheid, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or genocide. They may call for conditioning or cutting military aid, or support nonviolent strategies such as boycotts and divestment campaigns.

In response, allied organizations, officials, or commentators frame these positions not simply as mistaken or one-sided, but as antisemitic. Statements are extracted from speeches or posts and presented as evidence of hostility to Jews. The focus shifts from the substance of the critique—

civilian casualties, blockade, settlement expansion, structural inequality—to the alleged bigotry of the speaker or movement. Calls are made for resignation, de-platforming, disciplinary proceedings, or withdrawal of funding.

Universities are a common arena for such clashes. Student groups that organize events on Palestinian rights, or that invite speakers critical of Israel, may find themselves accused of fostering an antisemitic environment. Administrative responses can include investigations, restrictions on events, compulsory “trainings,” or new policies on acceptable speech. In some cases, outside donors or political figures exert additional pressure, threatening to cut support if institutions do not take a stronger stand against what they describe as antisemitism.

Similar dynamics emerge in electoral politics. Candidates who take positions sharply critical of Israeli policy may face a flood of accusations that they are antisemitic, irrespective of their record on Jewish issues or their relationships with Jewish constituents. These accusations are then amplified by well-funded advertising campaigns and media coverage. The question of whether their criticisms are accurate, proportionate, or aligned with international law recedes behind the more emotionally charged accusation of bigotry.

Civil society organizations are not exempt. Human rights groups that document abuses in Israel and the occupied territories, or that apply legal frameworks such as apartheid or genocide, may be denounced as antisemitic and excluded from certain forums. Their reports are dismissed not on the basis of methodological flaws or factual errors, but on the grounds that their very framing reveals an underlying hatred of Jews.

These patterns do not show that every accusation of antisemitism is false or manipulative. Genuine antisemitic sentiments can and do infiltrate movements critical of Israel, just as racist sentiments can infiltrate any political cause. They do show, however, that the charge of antisemitism is often used in ways that flatten distinctions, silence debate, and protect specific policies from the scrutiny that other states routinely face.

4.4 The double harm: to Jewish safety and to Palestinian survival

The weaponization of antisemitism does not only harm those who are silenced or punished by overbroad accusations. It also harms the very communities the term is supposed to protect. When antisemitism is stretched to cover a wide range of political speech, the category becomes less credible. People who repeatedly see principled criticism of state violence or donor capture denounced as antisemitic may become skeptical of the term itself. Real antisemitic incidents risk being dismissed as just another tactical accusation in political struggle.

This erosion of trust has practical consequences. Jewish communities rely on the ability to signal genuine danger, whether from violent extremists, organized hate groups, or more diffuse cultural currents. If the signal is constantly used in battles over foreign policy, it becomes harder

to distinguish urgent alarms from routine polemics. The moral clarity that came from linking “antisemitism” to the lessons of the Holocaust is diluted when the word is invoked in response to critical slogans, academic reports, or nonviolent campaigns.

The harm to Palestinians is more direct. When accusations of antisemitism are used to delegitimize those who document or oppose their dispossession and suffering, the effect is to further isolate a population already subject to intense structural and physical violence. Advocates, journalists, and scholars who might otherwise amplify Palestinian voices or press for changes in policy may hesitate, fearing damage to their reputations or careers. Institutions that could serve as platforms for serious discussion retreat into risk-avoidance.

At the extreme, the weaponization of antisemitism can contribute to the denial or minimization of atrocities. If describing a pattern of mass killing, siege, and destruction as genocidal is treated as inherently antisemitic when applied to a state that presents itself as the guardian of Holocaust memory, then the conceptual and moral tools built after the Shoah are effectively sequestered. A category developed to ensure that genocidal patterns are recognized and confronted becomes unavailable in precisely the context where some observers argue it is most needed.

The double harm can be summarized simply. Jewish safety is undermined when the word that should mark genuine threats is overused for political battles, and Palestinian survival is threatened when that same word is used to silence or stigmatize those who call attention to their plight. The common element is a breakdown in the integrity of language. A term born in a broken etymology and sanctified by catastrophe is asked to do incompatible jobs. It must both protect a people from hatred and protect particular states and alliances from criticism. In the resulting confusion, neither task is performed well.

5. Gaza, Genocide Claims, and the Use of the Word

5.1 Gaza as a test case for the post-Holocaust moral order

Gaza is not the first place where mass killing, siege, and displacement have raised the question of genocide since 1945. It is, however, one of the clearest tests of how the post-Holocaust moral order functions when the alleged perpetrator is a state that explicitly understands itself as a guardian of Holocaust memory and as a refuge for Jews. This unusual configuration exposes tensions that might otherwise remain latent.

On one side, there is a densely populated territory under long-term blockade, experiencing repeated large-scale military operations, destruction of infrastructure, and very high civilian casualties. Entire neighborhoods are leveled, medical systems collapse, and basic necessities

such as food, water, and electricity are restricted or cut off for extended periods. The people trapped in this environment are, in overwhelming majority, members of a single national group, with a large proportion descended from refugees displaced in earlier rounds of conflict.

On the other side, there is a state that presents its actions as self-defense against attacks and threats emanating from that territory, operating within a broader historical narrative of existential danger. Political and military leaders invoke memories of pogroms and the Shoah, frame themselves as defending Jewish life, and describe their adversaries in Gaza as uniquely barbaric or nihilistic. The state's main military ally justifies continued support by appealing to Israel's right to defend itself and to the memory of past atrocities against Jews.

This juxtaposition forces a collision between two strands of the postwar order. One strand insists that nothing resembling genocide can be allowed to unfold without a strong international response, particularly when patterns of group-targeted destruction and severe deprivation are visible. The other strand insists that the Jewish state, born in the ashes of the Shoah, must enjoy extraordinary security guarantees and moral deference because of that history. Gaza becomes the place where these two imperatives are pressed most hard against each other, and where the language built after 1945 is tested against events in real time.

5.2 Genocide frameworks and contemporary denial techniques

The word "genocide" has both a narrow legal meaning and a broader moral resonance. Legally, it refers to acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such. These acts include killing, causing serious bodily or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children. Proving genocide in a legal forum requires evidence not only of destructive outcomes but of specific intent.

Morally and politically, the word is often used more broadly, and more controversially, to name patterns of violence and policy that appear to push a population toward destruction, whether or not they fit narrow legal thresholds. In public debate, the word carries the heaviest available weight. It signals that ordinary frameworks of war, occupation, or human rights abuse are inadequate and that something more radical and terrifying is at stake.

In the context of Gaza, advocates for Palestinian rights and many scholars of mass violence have argued that the combination of killing, blockade, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and explicit dehumanizing rhetoric indicates at least a plausible genocide scenario. They point to statements by political and military leaders that describe the population in sweeping, derogatory terms, to policies that restrict essential supplies, and to patterns of indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks. For them, using the term "genocide" is not rhetorical excess but an attempt to apply the postwar conceptual tools rigorously to a current catastrophe.

Opponents of this usage employ contemporary denial techniques that are familiar from other contexts. One is to insist that the violence is purely defensive, forced by the actions of armed groups, and thus cannot be genocidal by definition. Another is to focus narrowly on the absence of explicit official statements calling for total extermination, ignoring more diffuse indications of destructive intent. A third is to contest numbers and proportionality, arguing that civilian casualties, however tragic, are incidental, not the result of policies that deliberately inflict destructive conditions on a group as such.

A particularly charged technique is to frame any application of the term “genocide” to Gaza as itself a form of antisemitism, on the grounds that it denies Jewish suffering, relativizes the Holocaust, or unfairly singles out the Jewish state for extraordinary condemnation. In this move, the legal and moral frameworks built after 1945 are treated as property of one historical case, to be guarded against appropriation by others. The genocide concept, developed in part to ensure that patterns like those seen under Nazism would be recognized elsewhere, is ring-fenced around that original horror.

5.3 “It is antisemitic” as a stock response to Gaza criticism

Within this landscape, the accusation that a given criticism of Gaza policy is antisemitic becomes a stock response. When protesters describe the assault on Gaza as genocidal, or when legal scholars argue that plausible genocide claims exist, the reply in certain quarters is less to engage the evidence than to question the motive. To call this genocide is said to be a way of demonizing Jews, of resurrecting old blood libels in new form, or of denying the unique horror of the Holocaust.

This pattern appears across multiple arenas. In politics, elected officials who call for conditioning military aid or who use harsh legal terms for Israeli actions are sometimes accused of promoting antisemitism, regardless of their records on other Jewish issues or their condemnation of Jew-hatred. In media, opinion pieces that frame Gaza in the vocabulary of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, or genocide prompt backlash not only on factual grounds but as alleged manifestations of an antisemitic double standard. In universities, students and faculty who press for institutional divestment from companies supporting the occupation or war effort may face complaints that their activism creates an antisemitic environment.

The accusation carries particular force when it is linked, explicitly or implicitly, to the memory of the Shoah. The suggestion is that to use the word “genocide” of a state that identifies with Holocaust remembrance is to invert victim and perpetrator, to metaphorically place Jews back in the dock of history. This framing can make even careful, documented claims about Gaza feel forbidden. No one wants to be seen as trivializing or instrumentalizing the extermination of

European Jews. As a result, the fear of being branded antisemitic leads some potential critics to soften their language, avoid the topic, or retreat into euphemism.

In this way, “it is antisemitic” functions as a kind of gatekeeping phrase. It does not necessarily deny that Palestinian civilians are suffering or that serious wrongs are being committed. Instead, it polices the terms in which those wrongs may be named. You may speak of tragedy, of fog of war, of humanitarian crisis. You may not speak of genocide or structural destruction of a people without risking association with one of the darkest labels in contemporary moral life. The effect is not only to constrain speech but to shape what counts as knowable reality. If certain frameworks cannot be publicly articulated without stigma, the facts that make sense within those frameworks become harder to assemble and present.

5.4 The six-million echo: Palestinian demography and moral numerology

One striking, if uncomfortable, feature of the Gaza and West Bank situation is demographic. The number of Palestinians living under various forms of Israeli control or blockade in these territories is of the same order of magnitude as the number of Jews commonly cited as victims of the Holocaust. The figure “six million” has become, in the postwar imagination, almost more than a number. It is a symbol of total, industrialized destruction, repeated in speeches, textbooks, and memorials as a shorthand for the Shoah.

To note that there are today roughly as many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank as the number that symbolizes Jewish destruction is not to claim that the situations are identical. The mechanisms, time scales, and historical contexts differ in obvious ways. The Holocaust was a centrally organized, continent-spanning program of extermination in camps designed for mass murder. Gaza and the occupied territories involve blockade, occupation, recurrent wars, and structural violence played out over decades. Equating the two would flatten important differences and risk disrespecting both histories.

At the same time, the numeric echo is morally unsettling. A population whose size matches that of the canonical genocide is subject to sustained, visible harm under conditions shaped by states that invoke that genocide as their central moral reference. The phrase “never again,” which was supposed to warn against future group destruction, coexists with policies that many observers believe are pushing another people toward catastrophe. The dissonance is amplified when the very number “six million” is treated as sacred in one context but as irrelevant, or even inflammatory, when applied numerically to another.

This echo can function in several ways. For some, it is a wake-up call, a reminder that the scale of Palestinian vulnerability is not marginal and that postwar moral vocabulary must be available to name their situation if it is to retain integrity. For others, it is an intolerable comparison, felt as an appropriation of Jewish suffering or as an attack on Jewish identity. In that reading, even

mentioning the demographic parallel is itself suspect, another form of antisemitism masquerading as concern.

The deeper question is what it means for a number so heavily charged with one people's trauma to reappear, approximately, on the ledger of another people's precarity. Numbers alone cannot settle moral or legal debates. They can, however, frame the scale of what is at stake. If the post-Holocaust order is serious about "never again" as more than a tribal slogan, then confronting the reality that millions of Palestinians live and die under conditions of extreme structural and kinetic violence becomes unavoidable. To refuse that confrontation, or to declare certain comparisons forbidden a priori, is to accept that some populations will always remain outside the full protection of the moral architectures built in the wake of the Shoah.

6. Knowledge Infrastructures: Wikipedia, Media, and Narrative Gatekeeping

6.1 Wikipedia as soft front line of "consensus reality"

Wikipedia occupies a peculiar position in the contemporary knowledge ecosystem. It presents itself as an encyclopedia that anyone can edit, governed by open procedures and community norms. In practice, it functions as a soft front line of what counts as "consensus reality" for a large portion of the public. Journalists, students, policymakers, and casual readers routinely begin their inquiries there. Search engines foreground its pages. Their summaries and infoboxes shape first impressions of people, ideas, and events before any deeper reading occurs.

For terms like "antisemitism," "Zionism," "genocide," or "Israel–Palestine," the relevant Wikipedia entries are often the first structured, quasi-authoritative explanations that a curious reader encounters. The layout of these pages—introductory paragraphs, historical sections, lists of "notable" incidents—gives the sense of a settled narrative, even when the underlying topics are fiercely disputed. Footnotes and references convey the impression of rigor, regardless of how selective or skewed the sourcing may be.

This front-line role is amplified by the way other institutions rely on Wikipedia indirectly. Journalists under time pressure may adopt its framing and vocabulary. Teachers may ask students to start there, even if they are told to move on to other sources. Automated systems that scrape the web for context incorporate Wikipedia's wording and structure into their models. The result is that the choices made on a handful of contested pages reverberate far beyond the volunteer editors who write them.

6.2 How contested terms are stabilized, locked, and patrolled

Wikipedia's openness is constrained by its own governance mechanisms. Policies on neutral point of view, reliable sourcing, and original research are designed to prevent the platform from

turning into a battleground of unchecked assertion. In contested areas, however, these policies can themselves become tools in a struggle over meaning. Editors disagree not only about facts, but about which sources count as reliable, which events deserve prominence, and how much weight to give competing interpretations.

For terms entangled with current conflicts, such as “antisemitism,” “terrorism,” or “genocide,” debates often spill onto talk pages and arbitration forums. Proposals to adjust wording, add examples, or include critical perspectives can be accepted, endlessly delayed, or reverted within minutes. Administrators may protect pages from anonymous editing, impose topic bans on persistent dissenters, or lock specific versions of an article during “edit wars.” Over time, a particular framing becomes stabilized—not necessarily because it is true in any deep sense, but because it fits the site’s procedural criteria, aligns with the majority of active editors in that domain, and draws on sources already coded as authoritative.

Once stabilized, contested definitions are difficult to dislodge. New scholarship, fresh testimony, or shifts in public understanding may struggle to find a place, especially if they appear in outlets not yet recognized as reliable by existing standards. The platform’s own history creates inertia: earlier editorial decisions shape which sources are cited, which in turn helps determine what future editors can plausibly argue. In this way, Wikipedia’s aspiration to neutrality can mask the degree to which particular power-aligned narratives have been locked in and are now being patrolled.

6.3 Mainstream media, think tanks, and repetition of approved frames

Wikipedia does not create its content in a vacuum. It relies heavily on mainstream media and established think tanks for its “reliable sources.” Those institutions, in turn, are shaped by their own dependencies: access to officials, funding streams, editorial hierarchies, and professional norms. In foreign policy coverage, especially where close allies are concerned, major outlets often index their reporting to the range of views expressed by government and aligned experts.

This pattern is visible in how antisemitism, Israel, and Gaza are discussed. Official statements, press briefings, and talking points from recognized spokespersons are reported prominently. Think-tank reports that accept core assumptions about alliance structures and security imperatives are cited as expert analysis. Alternative frames—such as describing Gaza in terms of settler colonialism, apartheid, or genocide—may appear in opinion pieces or fringe coverage, but they rarely define the center of gravity. Even when quoted, they are often balanced with language that reiterates official justifications or casts these critiques as controversial.

Because Wikipedia editors are instructed to prefer mainstream, “reputable” sources, this media ecosystem feeds directly into encyclopedia content. If only a handful of outlets frame Gaza as a possible genocide, while a larger set restricts itself to humanitarian language and emphasizes

self-defense narratives, the latter framing will dominate the pages that summarize events. Think tanks funded by states, donors, or corporate interests appear simply as “experts,” and their vocabulary becomes the default. Repetition of these approved frames across media, policy reports, and encyclopedia entries reinforces their status as common sense.

6.4 What is consistently omitted: donors, lobbies, and imperial interests

What is left out of this layered process is as important as what is included. Across Wikipedia, mainstream media, and many think-tank publications, there is a tendency to underemphasize or compartmentalize structural questions about donors, lobbies, and imperial interests. Campaign finance patterns, the role of specific lobbying organizations, arms trade flows, and the strategic logic of basing rights and regional dominance are often treated as background technicalities rather than central drivers.

In coverage of antisemitism and Israel–Palestine, this omission is particularly stark. Stories may highlight antisemitic incidents in isolation from broader socio-economic trends or foreign policy decisions. Analyses of Gaza may focus on immediate triggers and visible violence while devoting far less space to the long-term architecture of occupation, blockade, and military aid. When donor networks or lobby groups appear, they are frequently presented in sanitized terms—“pro-Israel advocates,” “community organizations”—without sustained examination of their leverage over policy or public discourse.

This pattern is not absolute. Investigative pieces do, at times, trace money flows, name specific lobbies, and connect them to legislative outcomes. However, these are exceptions rather than the organizing principle. The dominant narrative keeps the lens trained on ethnic and religious tensions, security dilemmas, and diplomatic maneuvers. It rarely dwells on how imperial interests and donor capture structure the range of options that officials consider acceptable.

The combined effect is a knowledge environment in which certain causal stories are easy to tell and others are difficult even to formulate. Hatred, prejudice, and intercommunal fear are foregrounded. The machinery that channels weapons, shapes vetoes, and disciplines elected officials remains hazy. When accusations of antisemitism arise in this context, they are heard against a backdrop where the deeper architecture of power has not been fully mapped. The word “antisemitism” is pressed into service as an explanation for conflicts that are also, and often primarily, about force, money, and the maintenance of an unequal international order.

7. Lobbies, Donors, and State Violence Behind the Word

7.1 AIPAC and donor capture as a concrete institutional mechanism

Abstract talk about “lobbies” and “influence” can sound conspiratorial until it is broken down into everyday mechanics. AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is a useful example not because it is uniquely sinister, but because it illustrates how donor capture works in a system built around expensive elections and permanent fundraising.

Formally, AIPAC presents itself as a pro-Israel advocacy organization. Its staff produce policy briefings, organize conferences, and arrange meetings between members of Congress and Israeli officials. Less visibly, they serve as a hub connecting a dense network of donors with candidates who are willing to sign onto a particular foreign policy line: strong military aid to Israel, resistance to conditioning that aid on human rights performance, and political support in key diplomatic forums.

In the past, AIPAC did not itself give money directly to candidates. It functioned instead as a recommender. Candidates who passed its informal tests could expect introductions to sympathetic donors, help with fundraising events, and public praise as “pro-Israel.” Those who refused or criticized core policies risked being quietly frozen out. Over time, this selective channeling of funds and endorsements created a strong incentive structure. Candidates in safe districts grew used to the idea that a primary challenger backed by AIPAC-linked money could appear if they stepped outside the accepted range of positions.

More recently, the machinery has become more explicit. Separate but aligned political action committees and super PACs have been created to make direct contributions and to spend heavily in elections. In practice, this means that a member of Congress who calls for conditioning aid to Israel, or who describes Gaza in the language of apartheid or genocide, may face millions of dollars in negative advertising from “independent” groups whose core issue is precisely that policy disagreement. The advertising often focuses on domestic themes such as crime or local services rather than on Israel itself, but the trigger is foreign policy dissent.

This is donor capture in a straightforward sense. The representative is no longer primarily accountable to constituents on the question of Israel and Gaza. They are accountable to an organized donor network that can make their electoral life very difficult if they stray. The effect reaches beyond those directly targeted. When a few prominent politicians are defeated after well-funded campaigns linked to their stance on Israel, hundreds of others absorb the lesson. They moderate their language, avoid certain proposals, or remain silent altogether. The formal sovereignty of voters remains, but the range of options presented to them has been pre-filtered by money and fear.

7.2 Israel and the United States as agents of kinetic death in Gaza

Behind these donation patterns are states with armies. Israel and the United States occupy different places in the chain of violence but are jointly responsible for the kinetic outcomes in Gaza. Israel is the immediate agent. Its government declares military operations, orders airstrikes and artillery barrages, designs rules of engagement, and enforces the blockade that shapes daily life in the territory. It is Israeli pilots, gunners, and commanders who decide which buildings to hit, how to interpret intelligence, and how to balance claimed military advantage against the certain death of civilians.

The United States is the enabling agent. It supplies key weapons systems, munitions, and spare parts. It provides direct funding and guarantees that make these acquisitions possible. Its intelligence services share information and technology. In international forums, it uses diplomatic leverage and veto power to block or dilute resolutions calling for ceasefires, investigations, or sanctions. Its officials repeat or endorse narratives that frame large-scale civilian casualties as regrettable but necessary, or as the sole responsibility of armed groups using “human shields.”

When a family in Gaza is killed by a bomb, the immediate cause is an Israeli decision: a target selected, an attack authorized. The material chain often passes through factories and warehouses in the United States and through budget lines approved by the United States Congress. The political chain includes decades of strategic alliance, military aid, and diplomatic shielding. The donor networks that discipline U.S. elected officials are part of the same architecture, helping to ensure that this chain is not seriously questioned or interrupted within the core institutions that fund and protect it.

Naming Israel and the United States as agents of kinetic death is not an accusation leveled at “the Jews” or at “Americans” in general. It is a description of how sovereign power, law, and capital combine to produce lethal outcomes for a trapped population. It connects the abstractions of foreign policy and alliance management to the concrete realities of destroyed homes, severed limbs, and mass graves.

7.3 From structures to peoples: how blame is shifted and mystified

In public discourse, there is a recurring slippage from structures to peoples. Detailed criticism of lobbying practices, arms transfers, or military tactics is translated, sometimes in good faith and sometimes strategically, into an accusation of hostility toward Jews as Jews. The structural critique—aimed at laws, institutions, and decision-making chains—becomes, in the retelling, an attack on a people.

This shift serves several functions. For those invested in the current alignment, it is an effective way to delegitimize critics without engaging the substance of their arguments. If opposition to

specific policies can be framed as bigotry, then defenders need not discuss donor capture, blockade design, or civilian casualty counts. They can occupy a higher moral ground, presenting themselves as protectors of a vulnerable minority rather than as advocates for a particular configuration of power.

On the other side, some opponents of Israeli policy do occasionally slide into language that reinforces this conflation. Frustration with AIPAC or with the Israeli government is expressed in terms of “the Jews” or “the Zionists” as a monolithic enemy. Old tropes about control of media, finance, or government reappear under new slogans. In these moments, a legitimate structural critique is contaminated by essentializing language. The target is no longer a set of institutions and alliances, but a reified collective.

Both directions of slippage mystify the actual mechanics of state violence and donor influence. When critics use careless group language, they provide ammunition for those who wish to dismiss structural analysis as a cover for prejudice. When defenders deliberately collapse structural critique into charges of antisemitism, they divert attention from the role of money, arms, and policy. In each case, the focus moves away from how decisions are made and enforced toward moralized stories about peoples and identities.

This mystification is convenient for power. Complex systems of lobbying, legislation, procurement, intelligence cooperation, and military planning are hard to follow and even harder to change. Narratives about eternal ethnic or religious conflict are much easier to tell. They reduce a live political arrangement to a timeless struggle and make structural critique sound naive. The word “antisemitism” becomes one more tool in this conversion, invoked to stop discussion at the point where it threatens to become too concrete.

7.4 Why structural critique is neither optional nor anti-Jewish

If the preceding analysis is correct, then structural critique is not optional for anyone who takes seriously both Jewish safety and Palestinian survival. Without a clear account of how lobbies operate, how donor capture shapes policy, how alliances translate into weapons and vetoes, and how military doctrines are implemented on the ground, appeals to “peace” or “dialogue” float above the realities that sustain violence.

Structural critique begins by insisting on distinctions. It separates Jews as a diverse people from the state of Israel as a particular political project. It distinguishes between Zionism as a historical movement and the current government of Israel with its specific laws and decisions. It separates support for Jewish safety from support for any one strategy claimed to secure that safety. It differentiates between donors, lobbies, and officials who wield concrete power and the many individuals who have no influence over state policy despite sharing an ethnicity or religious background with those who do.

Far from being anti-Jewish, this kind of critique can be understood as protective. It refuses to let the fate of an entire people be bound to the choices of particular governments or donors. It resists narratives in which any criticism of a state is turned into a referendum on the right of Jews to exist. It acknowledges that Jewish communities themselves are internally diverse, with significant numbers of Jews opposing the policies being carried out in their name and questioning the role of organizations that claim to speak for them.

For Palestinians, structural critique is a matter of survival. Without it, their situation can be described endlessly in terms of “ancient hatreds,” “cycles of violence,” or “security dilemmas,” as if rockets and blockades materialized out of cultural atmosphere rather than being ordered, funded, and rationalized by identifiable actors. Mapping the structures of control, funding, and decision-making is a precondition for any serious attempt to reduce harm, redistribute power, or secure basic rights.

The challenge is to hold both commitments at once: a refusal of Jew-hatred in all its forms, and a refusal to treat that refusal as a license for impunity. This requires discipline in language and analysis. It means rejecting both the temptation to blame “the Jews” for the actions of states and the temptation to dismiss all structural critique of those states as antisemitic. It demands attention to donors, lobbies, and state violence not as an obsessive fixation, but as the normal terrain on which democratic accountability and international law are supposed to operate.

In such a framework, the word “antisemitism” would return to a more precise role. It would name specific patterns of hostility to Jews without being stretched to cover every strong objection to Israeli policy or U.S. support for that policy. Structural critique would be recognized as a necessary defense against the concentration and misuse of power, not as a coded attack on a people. Only then could the deep moral lessons drawn from the Shoah be applied consistently, without being conscripted into the service of any single alliance or apparatus of force.

8. AI, Safety Policies, and the New Epistemic Perimeter

8.1 Large language models as inheritors of contested vocabularies

Large language models do not invent the words they use. They inherit vocabularies, sentence patterns, and argumentative habits from the corpora on which they are trained. These corpora include books, newspapers, academic articles, social media posts, policy documents, and, increasingly, the very knowledge infrastructures discussed earlier: Wikipedia, major news outlets, and think-tank reports. The result is a compressed statistical map of how people have talked about the world, including all the asymmetries, omissions, and distortions built into that talk.

Terms like “antisemitism,” “terrorism,” “genocide,” and “security” arrive inside such models already contested. They come with patterns of association: which subjects co-occur, which metaphors are used, which actors are foregrounded. The model does not understand these histories in a human sense. It detects that certain word combinations are frequent and others rare or stigmatized. When prompted, it is more likely to reproduce frames that are well represented in its training distribution, especially if they also align with the sources that its creators regard as authoritative.

This inheritance means that the biases of earlier knowledge infrastructures can be amplified. If mainstream media and encyclopedic sources have tended to center certain narratives about antisemitism and Israel while marginalizing structural analyses of donor capture or imperial interests, those tendencies will be reflected in model outputs. At the same time, the model also contains fragments of counter-discourse: critical scholarship, activist writing, and alternative perspectives. Left to itself, it can generate surprising combinations, juxtaposing dominant and marginal frames in ways that human institutions might not sanction.

To prevent obvious harms, model developers overlay this inherited space with additional constraints. They attempt to add explicit norms that discourage hate speech, incitement, and targeted harassment. They design systems that adjust outputs based on user queries and internal policy. In doing so, they move from merely inheriting contested vocabularies to actively deciding which uses are acceptable and which must be blocked or redirected. A new epistemic perimeter is built on top of the old.

8.2 Safety rails, group-blame bans, and the emergence of “gray zones”

Modern AI systems are surrounded by safety policies. These policies are written in human language but implemented through a combination of training data curation, fine-tuning, and runtime filters. They typically forbid explicit hate speech, calls for violence, and the attribution of collective guilt or conspiratorial agency to protected groups. In the context of this paper, that includes bans on blaming “the Jews,” “the Muslims,” “the Blacks,” or any other large identity category for complex political phenomena.

On their face, such rules are straightforward harm reduction. They mirror, in code and training signals, norms already present in much public and institutional life: no dehumanizing speech, no collective punishment in language, no direct incitement. They aim to prevent models from becoming accelerants for bigotry or from generating content that could directly endanger people. Without some form of safety rail, a generative system trained on the internet would readily reproduce the worst material it has seen, including racist, antisemitic, and genocidal rhetoric.

However, these bans are necessarily broad. They must be expressed in general terms that can be applied automatically across billions of possible prompts. As a result, they can create “gray zones” where legitimate structural analysis brushes up against the prohibition on group blame. Discussion of a lobby that is overwhelmingly associated with a particular ethnic or religious group, or analysis of a state that presents itself as the homeland of a people, can easily trigger internal alarms meant to detect and prevent bigotry. The model must then navigate between acknowledging these realities and avoiding language that would be interpreted as endorsing hatred.

In practice, this often leads to a characteristic pattern. The system is willing to describe structures of power, donor networks, and state violence at a certain level of abstraction, naming institutions and policies. It is much more cautious about any phrasing that could be read as essentializing a people or as attributing hidden, unified intent to them. When users push toward statements that collapse structures into groups, the safety rails redirect, soften, or refuse. The gray zone is the region where the legitimate desire to talk concretely about power intersects with legitimate concern about phrases historically used to justify persecution.

8.3 When harm reduction overlaps with narrative containment

The difficulty arises because the line between preventing harm and containing narratives is not always clear. A system that refuses to endorse group-based conspiracy theories about Jews is performing an important protective function. The same system, if it persistently softens or deflects detailed discussion of how specific pro-Israel lobbies operate, or of how particular states carry out military campaigns in Gaza, may be experienced as participating in narrative management.

This overlap is not necessarily the result of secret coordination. It can emerge from the interaction of three elements. First, the training data already privilege certain frames, as described earlier. Second, safety policies are written by institutions embedded in the same political and media environment, with its own fears, loyalties, and blind spots. Third, the technical implementation of these policies tends to err on the side of caution, blocking or diluting content whenever there is a risk of crossing into prohibited categories.

From the user’s perspective, the effect can feel like soft censorship. Critiques of donor capture, arms transfers, and diplomatic shielding that involve actors closely associated with Jewish identity are met with warnings, euphemisms, or sudden shifts back to generic language about “powerful states” or “various stakeholders.” At the same time, more general condemnations of antisemitism, or affirmations of Israel’s right to exist and defend itself, pass through easily, since they align with both safety norms and dominant narratives.

It is important to recognize that this is not simply a question of malice or design. The same filters that make it difficult to attribute malign agency to “the Jews” also make it difficult to attribute malign agency to “the Muslims,” “the migrants,” or any other vulnerable group. They are genuinely intended to reduce the risk that AI systems will become tools of harassment or recruitment for extremist causes. Yet because antisemitism is so tightly intertwined with contemporary debates about Israel and Gaza, and because lobbies and states often present themselves as representatives of a people, everyday structural analysis risks being caught in the same net.

The result is a new kind of epistemic perimeter. Certain patterns of description are flagged not because they are false, but because they are close in surface form to historically dangerous speech. The system treats them with special care, which in practice often means special reluctance. To some users, particularly those trying to articulate critiques of lobbies and state violence, this reluctance looks indistinguishable from narrative containment.

8.4 Possibilities for honest structural analysis under technical constraint

Despite these constraints, there remains space for meaningful structural analysis within AI-mediated discourse. The key is precision. Models can talk in detail about named institutions, documented funding patterns, specific laws, and identifiable military operations. They can distinguish between governments, lobbies, donors, and the populations they claim to represent. They can describe how campaign finance systems work, how vetoes are used in international bodies, and how particular arms transfers influence the conduct of war.

Honest analysis in this environment requires making those distinctions explicit and maintaining them consistently. When discussing an organization like AIPAC, the focus can remain on its structure, its public positions, its documented spending, and its interactions with elected officials. When examining the role of Israel and the United States in Gaza, the emphasis can be on policy decisions, chains of command, and legal frameworks. The more concrete and institutional the language, the less likely it is to be misclassified as group blame.

There is also room for models to be transparent about their own limitations. They can acknowledge that safety policies prohibit endorsing statements that attribute unified, conspiratorial agency to broad identity categories, even when users themselves may frame their critiques that way. They can explain that, within those limits, they can still help map the connections between money, law, and force that underlie events. This kind of meta-communication does not dissolve the perimeter, but it can make it less opaque.

For users and designers alike, the challenge is to treat safety constraints as a set of technical and ethical guardrails, not as an excuse to evacuate politics from analysis. Protecting Jews and other vulnerable groups from hate speech does not require silence about donor capture, lobby

influence, or state violence. It requires vocabulary that does not collapse institutions into peoples, that avoids essentializing language, and that remains attentive to the documented, material mechanisms by which harm is produced.

In this sense, large language models can still contribute to a more honest discourse, even under constraint. They can help disentangle terms, clarify concepts, and assemble scattered pieces of evidence into more legible patterns. They can refuse to participate in Jew-hatred while also refusing to treat the word “antisemitism” as an all-purpose barrier against structural critique. Whether they do so in practice depends on the choices made by their builders and on the persistence of users who insist that the protection of human beings and the scrutiny of power are obligations that cannot be traded against each other.

9. Toward a Cleaner Vocabulary: Naming Hatred and Naming Power

9.1 Preserving a precise term for anti-Jewish hatred

If the word “antisemitism” is historically broken at the root yet morally indispensable in many of its uses, the first step toward a cleaner vocabulary is to sharpen what it should mean. At minimum, it should refer to speech, attitudes, and practices that target Jews *as Jews*: that is, as an ethnic, religious, or cultural group, irrespective of what any particular state does or claims to do on their behalf.

In this precise sense, antisemitism includes familiar patterns. It includes conspiracy theories about Jews secretly running media, banks, or governments. It includes collective blame for the actions of individual Jews, whether in finance, culture, or politics. It includes dehumanizing language, stereotyping, and the denial or trivialization of the Holocaust. It includes violence and threats directed at synagogues, Jewish schools, cemeteries, and organizations simply because they are Jewish.

Keeping this domain clear requires resisting two temptations. One is to dilute the term by applying it to any expression that makes powerful Jewish or pro-Israel actors uncomfortable, even when the criticism is specific, documented, and directed at institutions rather than at Jews as such. The other is to abandon the term altogether because it has been misused. That would risk erasing the name for a real and ongoing form of hatred that Jewish communities continue to experience in many places.

An alternative or complementary move is to foreground simpler phrases such as “anti-Jewish hatred,” “anti-Jewish racism,” or “Jew-hatred” alongside or instead of “antisemitism” when clarity matters more than tradition. These phrases avoid the etymological confusion around “Semitic” and make explicit that the object is hostility toward Jews. They can coexist with

antisemitism as a technical term in law and scholarship, while providing a more transparent label for public debate. The key is not the exact token used, but the insistence that hatred of Jews be named as such and not be blurred together with other, quite different, debates.

9.2 Separating Jew-hatred from anti-Zionism and Gaza solidarity

Once a clear term for anti-Jewish hatred is preserved, it becomes easier to distinguish it from political positions that, while uncomfortable for many, are not intrinsically bigoted. Anti-Zionism, in its most straightforward definition, is opposition to the idea that there should be a state defined as Jewish, with preferential structures for Jews. Gaza solidarity is support for the rights and safety of Palestinians living under siege, occupation, or attack. Neither position is inherently anti-Jewish.

Anti-Zionism can be motivated by many different frameworks. Some are religious: certain Jewish and Christian traditions oppose a modern nation-state project on theological grounds. Some are liberal: critics object to any state that grants special legal status to one ethno-religious group. Some are anti-colonial: they view the creation and expansion of Israel as part of a larger pattern of settler colonialism. These positions can be argued with, but they are not automatically expressions of hatred toward Jews; they are critiques of a specific political project.

Gaza solidarity, likewise, can be grounded in basic humanitarian and legal concerns: opposition to the bombing of densely populated areas, to blockade, to patterns of collective punishment. It can be rooted in a universal commitment to protect civilians, support self-determination, and resist structural violence. When people call for an end to attacks on Gaza, for lifting blockades, or for accountability for war crimes, they are not necessarily expressing hostility to Jews; they are responding to freely available evidence about suffering and death.

Confusion and abuse arise when any criticism of Zionism or of Israeli policy is reflexively labeled antisemitic. This conflation discourages careful analysis and pushes some critics into antagonistic positions they might not otherwise occupy. It also pressures Jewish communities by tying their identity to the behavior of a particular state. Conversely, there are cases where anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian rhetoric does shade into Jew-hatred: when it treats all Jews as interchangeable, denies Jewish peoplehood in principle, or recycles classic conspiracies with “Zionist” simply substituted for “Jew.”

A cleaner vocabulary would help disaggregate these strands. It would allow people to say, for example, “This specific chant or slogan is anti-Jewish,” while also saying, “This legal argument about occupation or this call to restrict arms sales is not.” It would help separate the necessary task of opposing bigotry from the equally necessary task of scrutinizing states and movements.

9.3 Building better language for donor capture and imperial violence

If antisemitism is reserved for anti-Jewish hatred, then other terms are needed to describe phenomena that have too often been smuggled under or around it: donor capture, lobbying power, arms transfers, and imperial security architectures. These are not primarily about ethnicity or religion. They are about how concentrated wealth and strategic interests shape policy and, ultimately, life and death.

“Donor capture” is a useful phrase for situations where elected officials feel more accountable to organized funders than to their constituents, especially on foreign policy questions that rarely dominate everyday campaigns. It points to a pattern: screened endorsements, bundled contributions, and the threat of well-funded primary challenges for those who deviate from certain lines. It can be applied to a wide range of issues, from financial regulation to gun control, and is not specific to any one lobby or ethnic group.

“Lobby leverage” or “policy lock-in” can describe the way certain advocacy organizations, through relationships, expertise, and constant presence, set the default assumptions in legislative and executive branches. “Alliance discipline” and “imperial security doctrine” can name the logic by which powerful states support client regimes and regional partners, often at the expense of local populations, because they fit a larger strategic pattern of bases, trade routes, and rival containment.

For Gaza and Israel, phrases such as “weapons-backed patronage,” “veto-backed impunity,” or “security alliance shielding” might better capture the mechanisms by which the United States and other states enable and protect particular military campaigns. These terms keep the focus on states, budgets, and doctrines, not on peoples. They make it possible to say, in direct language, that certain governments are agents of destruction without implying that all members of a given ethnic or religious group share responsibility.

Developing and consistently using such vocabulary would not solve political conflicts, but it would reduce the temptation to reach for lazy group labels. It would also make it harder for defenders of existing arrangements to hide behind accusations of antisemitism whenever donor networks or alliance structures are named. When the language for describing power is precise, the space for misdirection shrinks.

9.4 Protecting both Jews and Palestinians from instrumentalized discourse

Ultimately, a cleaner vocabulary is not an abstract stylistic preference. It is a way of protecting vulnerable people from being used as shields or proxies. Jewish communities are ill-served when their historical suffering is leveraged to justify contemporary policies or to deflect scrutiny from states and lobbies. Palestinians are ill-served when attempts to describe their

dispossession and endangerment are dismissed as antisemitic, denying them access to the very moral and legal tools that were supposed to prevent group destruction.

Protecting Jews means being able to say clearly when they are targeted for who they are, when synagogues are attacked, when conspiracy theories proliferate, when old myths of contamination or control resurface. It also means refusing to make their safety contingent on uncritical support for any state. A Jew in New York or Paris should not have to answer for decisions made in Jerusalem or Washington. A Jewish critic of Israeli policy should not be treated as disloyal to their people.

Protecting Palestinians means insisting that their lives and rights are not secondary, and that describing the structures that harm them is not inherently bigoted. It means allowing the words “occupation,” “apartheid,” “ethnic cleansing,” or even “genocide” to be debated on their merits, in light of law and evidence, without foreclosing the discussion through prior accusations of Jew-hatred. It means recognizing that solidarity with Palestinian civilians is compatible with a refusal of antisemitism, and that many Jews themselves occupy this position.

Both protections require resisting instrumentalized discourse. When antisemitism is wielded mainly as a weapon in foreign policy arguments, its ability to name real danger diminishes. When Holocaust memory is invoked selectively to sanctify some lives and not others, its universal moral claim is weakened. When words like “terrorism” or “security” are applied asymmetrically, they cease to illuminate and serve instead to excuse.

A cleaner vocabulary would not eliminate these abuses, but it would provide fewer hiding places for them. It would offer more accurate labels for different kinds of harm and different kinds of power. It would help citizens, scholars, and systems keep track of who is being protected and who is being exposed, and for whose sake. In a world where both Jews and Palestinians live under shadows cast by past and present violence, such clarity is not a luxury. It is a minimal condition for any honest attempt to honor “never again” without turning it into a phrase that only ever truly applies to some.

10. Conclusion: After the Broken Word

10.1 What this inquiry clarifies about our current crisis

This inquiry began with a narrow puzzle and ended in a wide crisis. The narrow puzzle was lexical: how a term derived from an eighteenth-century label for a family of languages became the central moral keyword for modern hatred of Jews, and how that term is now deployed in the politics of Gaza. The wider crisis is epistemic and ethical: whether the vocabulary built after

the Shoah is still capable of naming what is happening in front of us, and whether it can do so without being captured by the very structures of power it was meant to restrain.

Along the way, several clarifications emerged. First, “antisemitism” is both historically malformed and morally necessary. Its etymology is misleading, but its role in naming and tracking anti-Jewish hatred is indispensable. Second, the post-Holocaust elevation of antisemitism to a paradigmatic status has created both genuine protections and uneven taboos. It has provided a shared warning signal for a specific pattern of persecution, while also encouraging a selective application of “never again” that has not always extended to other threatened groups.

Third, the contemporary weaponization of the term is not an illusion. Techniques of conflation, overextension, and selective enforcement are visible in how accusations of antisemitism are used to police criticism of Israel and of Gaza policy. These techniques do not eliminate real Jew-hatred; they coexist with it, sometimes even obscuring it by turning the term into a routine political tool. Fourth, the knowledge infrastructures that structure public understanding—encyclopedias, media, think tanks, and now large AI systems—play a crucial role in stabilizing particular meanings and suppressing others.

Taken together, these elements help explain why discourse around Gaza, Israel, and antisemitism feels so brittle. Language that should be available for rigorous analysis is treated as explosive. Words that should protect vulnerable communities are used to shield states and donors. The result is a pervasive sense that the moral vocabulary inherited from the twentieth century is being stretched beyond coherence at precisely the moment it is most needed.

10.2 Risks of leaving “antisemitism” as an all-purpose political weapon

If the current trajectory continues—if “antisemitism” is allowed to function as an all-purpose political weapon rather than as a precise term—the risks multiply on all sides. For Jewish communities, the most immediate danger is dilution. When everything critical of Israeli policy can be called antisemitic, the word ceases to distinguish between genuine threats and ordinary political disagreement. People who watch it being used to silence or punish legitimate speech become skeptical of it, or tune it out altogether. In an environment where real antisemitic violence and conspiracy theories persist, losing the ability to signal danger clearly is not a minor problem.

There is also a risk of backlash. When communities see their attempts to describe structural injustice, donor capture, or state violence repeatedly dismissed as antisemitic, resentment grows. Some of that resentment will be directed not only at specific lobbies or governments, but at Jews more generally, especially where the distinction between Jews and Israeli state

actors has already been blurred. In that sense, weaponizing antisemitism can paradoxically feed the very animosity it claims to oppose.

For Palestinians and others living under the shadow of state violence, the danger is more immediate. If the strongest moral and legal concepts available—occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, genocide—cannot be used freely to analyze their situation without triggering accusations of antisemitism, then they are denied access to the full toolkit of postwar protective language. Their suffering is relegated to the vocabulary of “tragedy” and “conflict,” while the vocabulary of “crime” and “systemic destruction” is effectively reserved elsewhere.

At the level of public life, leaving “antisemitism” as an all-purpose weapon corrodes trust in institutions. Universities, cultural organizations, and media outlets that appear to respond more rapidly to allegations of antisemitism tied to foreign policy controversy than to other forms of racism or structural harm will be seen as captured. Their declarations about equality and inclusion will ring hollow. Once that perception sets in, their capacity to host genuine debate or to teach difficult histories is weakened.

At a deeper level, there is the risk that the entire post-Holocaust moral framework will be dismissed as a tool of selective power rather than as a universal warning. If “never again” is experienced as “never again for some, under certain alliances,” it loses its claim to guide a wider humanity. That loss would be grave not only for Jews and Palestinians, but for any group that might one day need the full force of that commitment.

10.3 Minimal epistemic duties for citizens, scholars, and systems

Given these risks, what are the minimal duties that fall on different actors in this landscape? They are not heroic, but they are demanding. Citizens, scholars, and systems each have specific responsibilities in how they use and respond to loaded terms like “antisemitism” in the context of Gaza and beyond.

For citizens, the duty is to resist purely tribal readings of the word. That means refusing both to treat every accusation of antisemitism as a bad-faith maneuver and to treat every criticism of Israel as antisemitic. It means asking, in each case, what is being described, who is being blamed, and whether the language used targets Jews as Jews or focuses on specific institutions and policies. It requires a willingness to listen to Jewish testimony about antisemitic experiences without automatically converting that testimony into endorsement of any particular state action.

For scholars, the duty is to clarify and differentiate. That includes tracing the history of terms without fetishizing etymology, mapping how they are used in law and practice, and exposing the mechanisms by which they are stretched or instrumentalized. It also includes being explicit about criteria: what counts as anti-Jewish hatred, what counts as legitimate anti-Zionism, what

constitutes plausible genocide claims. Scholars cannot prevent terms from being misused, but they can provide frameworks that make misuse easier to see and harder to justify.

For systems—especially large AI models and the institutions that deploy them—the duty is twofold. First, they must uphold robust protections against hate speech, including antisemitic content, without allowing these protections to become a blanket excuse for evading structural analysis. Second, they must be transparent about their constraints. When safety policies prevent certain formulations, systems can say so openly and offer alternative ways to explore the underlying issues. Hiding behind vague evasions only increases the sense of manipulation.

Across all actors, there is a shared duty to keep the distinction between people and structures sharp. Jews are not Israel. Palestinians are not any specific armed group. Criticism of a lobby, a donor network, or a military alliance is not the same as hatred of a people. Conversely, denouncing blood-and-soil fantasies about Jews, Muslims, or any other group is not the same as rejecting all forms of national belonging. These distinctions are not optional refinements; they are the basic grammar of honest discourse.

10.4 Final reflections on truth-telling under siege and the cost of silence

The phrase “truth-telling under siege” applies literally in Gaza, where journalists, doctors, and ordinary people document destruction at great personal risk. It applies more figuratively in societies where certain truths are difficult to state without professional or social penalty. In both cases, language is under pressure: from bombs and blockades in one context, from donors, lobbies, and reputational fear in another.

In such conditions, the brokenness of a word like “antisemitism” becomes a symbol of a broader difficulty. We inherit vocabularies that were forged in earlier crises and then elevated to near-sacred status. We then ask these vocabularies to carry new burdens in new conflicts. Some stretching is inevitable. But when stretching becomes strategic distortion—when words meant to protect the persecuted are used to immunize the powerful—truth-telling becomes harder and costlier.

The cost of silence, however, is higher. Silence allows structures of violence to operate without sufficient scrutiny. It allows donor capture to proceed unremarked. It allows the narrowing of moral concern to those whose suffering fits established narratives, while others bleed in the shadows. It is not that words alone can stop bombs or open blockades. They cannot. But without clear language, it is impossible to build the coalitions, exert the pressure, or imagine the alternatives that might eventually change material conditions.

What this paper has argued, in the end, is modest and uncompromising at once. Modest, because it does not propose a new grand theory or a replacement for existing legal frameworks. Uncompromising, because it insists that no alliance, state, lobby, or institution is entitled to

permanent exemption from structural critique, and that no people is expendable in the application of lessons drawn from past atrocities.

After the broken word, what remains is the work of careful speech: naming anti-Jewish hatred as such, naming Palestinian dispossession as such, naming donor capture, arms transfers, and veto-backed impunity as such, without collapsing these into each other. That work will not satisfy those who want a single, simple story. It will not protect anyone from all accusations or from all danger. But it is the minimal fidelity owed to those who suffered in the past and to those whose lives are now being decided in the shadow of their memory.

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