

Australian Jewish academics condemn Zionist lie that opposition to Israeli war crimes is antisemitic

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Over recent weeks, the sordid activities of small but politically-influential Zionist organisations that function as propagandists for Israeli war crimes have come under greater scrutiny.

A key turning point was the revelation last month that the December sacking of journalist Antoinette Lattouf was carried out by Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) management at the behest of Zionist activists in the Lawyers for Israel group. They had coordinated a series of vexatious complaints to have Lattouf fired, merely because she had made factual posts about Israel’s mass killings and other genocidal acts in Gaza.

An article published in the *Age* on Wednesday was a notable expression of the shift. Written by human rights lawyer and University of Melbourne academic Sarah Schwartz and historian Max Elliott Kaiser, it was forthrightly headlined: “As Jews, we don’t accept that criticism of Israel’s government is antisemitic.”

That assertion, branding all opposition to the Israeli state as an expression of anti-Jewish prejudice, has formed the central political and ideological plank of attempts to shut down widespread opposition to the levelling of Gaza.

Schwartz and Kaiser begin by writing: “Today, talk about antisemitism is everywhere—in newspapers, conversations between friends, and especially on social media. Many Jews feel scared. They are told to see antisemitism in the scarves worn in solidarity with Palestine, in the words ‘Free Palestine’ voiced at protests, and in the stickers calling for the boycott of Israeli products.

“But while reports of antisemitism have increased in Australia since the Hamas’ October 7 attack on Israel—as have those of anti-Palestinian racism and Islamophobia—none of these are examples of it. They are instead legitimate expressions of support for Palestinians who are facing overwhelming levels of violence and displacement.”

Directly addressing the line of the Zionist organisations,

identifying Judaism and the Israeli state, the academics write: “As proud Jews who are committed to combating real racism, we know these are not the same thing. Jewish people have identities separate from the state of Israel and our cultures and practices are far older than Zionism.”

They note that “The truth is that the Jewish community is not a monolith. We might better speak of multiple Jewish communities with unique histories, diverse expressions of Jewishness, and—in our view increasingly—conflicting views on Israel.”

In fact, the authors state that differences within the Jewish community are widening, but that this reality is covered-up and obscured by the media, which uncritically echoes the line of the Zionist groups. Opposition to Israel’s criminal actions was expressed in an open letter by one thousand Jewish Australians, condemning the assault on Gaza.

Among other significant points, two in the article are particularly striking. Firstly, the authors note that Jews who speak out against Israel have themselves been subjected to venomous attacks by the Zionists, including “threats, social exclusion, intimidation, campaigns for sacking or attempts to discredit them.” That reality explodes the narrative of a monolithic Jewish community, united by Israel. It also completely refutes claims that the ardent Zionists are defenders of Judaism and all Jewish people.

Secondly, the authors note that the cynical misuse of the term antisemitism, to legitimise war crimes and to suppress opposition to them, risks undermining the fight against genuine anti-Jewish bigotry.

“The history and concept of antisemitism risks becoming confused and devalued amid a very real fight worldwide against genuine anti-Jewish racism and an increase in fascist activity. It will lead to real instances of antisemitism being dismissed,” they write.

That risk is evident from the fact that the would-be dictator Donald Trump is the presumptive Republican Party candidate in this year’s US presidential election. Figures

such as Trump hail Israel, as an imperialist outpost and a fascistic ethno-state, while promoting classic antisemitic tropes, such as the need for a “national struggle” against “rootless globalists.”

Schwartz announced the establishment of a new Jewish Council of Australia, founded because “our Jewish representative organisations fail to represent Jews who are critical of Israel and support a free Palestine.”

This has been shown in spades in the Lattouf case, when it was revealed that Robert Goot, vice-president of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) was heavily involved in the conspiracy to have the journalist sacked, including by participating in the secret Lawyers for Israel WhatsApp group.

ECAJ claims to be the peak representative body of Australian Jews, and receives substantial government funding on that basis, even as its executives function as de facto agents of the criminal Israeli state.

This week, a December speech by ECAJ co-CEO Alex Ryvchin was highlighted by freelance reporter Alex McKinnon. It was delivered to a webinar organised by a foundation that funds Moriah College in Sydney and posted to the ECAJ website. After McKinnon reported on it, ECAJ took down the video yesterday.

The video revealed that the students of Moriah College, who range from kindergarten to Year 12, the final year of school, have been directed to write congratulatory letters to Israel Defence Forces (IDF) soldiers involved in the onslaught against Gaza. The International Court of Justice found last month that those IDF forces and the Israeli state as a whole have a plausible charge of genocide to answer.

Ryvchin’s remarks were identical to those that would be delivered by a representative of the Israeli government. He declared that the Hamas military operation on October 7 retroactively legitimised the illegal Israeli siege on Gaza, as well as the apartheid-like occupation of the West Bank, which is not governed by Hamas.

In chilling comments, Ryvchin declared: “To speak absolutely bluntly, if you had a population in the state that it is described by our opponents, and an army of the status and power that we know Israel is, it would take a matter of days to complete that genocide.” In the first instance, those remarks display a disturbing contempt for the Palestinian civilians who have been murdered, in one of the most intensive bombardments of modern history.

More generally, though, Ryvchin’s remarks were contrary to the established definition of genocide under international law. The Genocide Convention states: “genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group,” and lists several actions, including “Killing

members of the group; Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part...”

That is undeniably what Israel is carrying out, with its genocidal intent clearly enunciated by government leaders who have declared they are at war with an “entire nation,” whom they describe as “human animals.”

The terrible irony is that the Genocide Convention was explicitly developed in response to the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews. Ryvchin’s comments go in the direction, not only of denying the Gaza genocide in real time, but even of downplaying the genocidal character of the Holocaust itself, given that the Nazi regime was unable to murder all Jewish people in the world.

Ryvchin’s most telling remarks, though, were about the Australian Labor government of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The speech was delivered shortly after the government shifted its position, voting for a token and toothless ceasefire resolution at the United Nations in December.

But Ryvchin effectively dismissed this as window-dressing. “If you look at the words of the Prime Minister he has been very consistent, very consistent in supporting Israel at this time, both in the immediate aftermath of October 7 and since. Despite certain developments about voting at the UN General Assembly, about a ceasefire, the position of the Australian government remains to not support a permanent and unconditional ceasefire. Their position is that Hamas must be destroyed, ‘dismantled’ in their language, which means it has to be destroyed, there’s no other way to dismantle it...”

Interestingly, Ryvchin also referenced experiences with official politicians, who have sometimes postured as defenders of the Palestinians. He said: “In my work I’ve sat across from many politicians [and] civil society leaders who have tweeted horrible things, signed horrible petitions. And when you sit across [from] them and ask them and poke them and scrutinise their conduct, half the time they wilt and crumble, express embarrassment and regret.”

In other words, an ardent defender of Israel and its genocide was making plain that Labor’s occasional statements of concern over civilian “casualties,” and its references to a “pathway towards a ceasefire” were lies aimed at dampening down public anger.



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