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Trump's new executive order promotes white supremacy

Trump seeks to divide the liberal opposition to his presidency by leading an 'anti-Semitism crusade'.



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US President Donald Trump after he signed an executive order on anti-Semitism during a Hanukkah reception at the White House in Washington on December 11, 2019 [Reuters/Tom Brenne]

On Wednesday, US President Donald Trump [signed an executive order](#) which he says is meant to fight anti-Semitism on college campuses. The document extends Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on race, colour and national origin in programmes and organisations receiving federal funding, to include anti-Semitism.

The executive order uses the [definition](#) of anti-Semitism put forward by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which is [opposed](#) by its own author and includes in its examples:

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“Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour.”

Thus, it equates anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism, targeting Palestinians and their anti-Zionist allies who accurately [view Zionism](#) as a racist, white supremacist and settler-colonialist enterprise. It also codifies the notion that Jewish self-determination is necessarily linked to Israel and justifies apartheid and genocide of the indigenous Palestinian people.

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More broadly, however, the executive order is a step aimed at bolstering Trump’s vision of the United States as a white supremacist ethno-state and is part of a pattern meant to split his opposition.

Bolstering white supremacy

Trump’s executive order exceptionalises Judaism by adding it to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, constituting a dangerous precedent, which compounds religious with civil rights.

Accordingly, it could become a future model for suppression of civil liberties with so-called religious justifications, such as squashing reproductive rights for women or denying employment to people of the “wrong faith”.

The equation of so-called religious with civil rights fits well with a goal of enacting a white supremacist patriarchal ethnostate supported by settler-colonial manifest destiny doctrine.

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What’s more, the notion Jews are somehow exceptional plays into the Machiavellian, prejudiced anti-Semitic perception of their community. By including anti-Semitism as defined by the IHRA into Title VI – which explicitly refers to discrimination by race, colour or national origin – the executive order implicitly delineates Judaism as a race or national identity, in line with the Zionist manifest destiny notion of Israel as the “Jewish homeland” and “Jewish state”. The path from this erroneous conflation to anti-Semitic sentiments of “Jews go home” is short, direct and very traumatic.

Not surprisingly, Trump signed the executive order just days after his own [vicious anti-Semitic tirade](#) at the Israeli-American Council National Summit, in which he used “anti-Semitic stereotypes to characterise Jews as driven by money and insufficiently loyal to Israel”.

Trump’s presidency has already been plagued by a dramatic rise in anti-Semitic incidents, which involve harassment, vandalism and assault. In fact, 2017 and 2018 saw the second and third-highest number of recorded incidents in four decades.

This construction of Jews as a nationality or race with an inherent right to eliminate an indigenous population serves to model an American revisionist formulation of a victimised “white race” with “Christian values” and inherent, exclusive rights to land and resources.

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Much like the US and all settler-colonial projects, Israel exploits [a dynamic of aggression and trauma](#), reinforced by fear-mongering propaganda and the rewards of expansionism to promote a privileged ruling class at the expense of indigenous people, workers and other oppressed groups.

Divide and rule

The executive order is designed to boost the effort to [suppress](#) advocacy for Palestinian human rights and targets the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement on university campuses, which has made significant gains in recent years.

It is also part of a pattern aimed at splintering Trump’s opposition in the Democratic Party by luring the corporate-friendly centre into his xenophobic bosom, while isolating the progressive wing and playing into his [large Christian Zionist base](#).

Several left-leaning, progressive Congress members and activists have been subjected to an ongoing harassment campaign for many months. These include Congresswomen Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib, and Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez, and [Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders](#), who constitutes the single most serious threat to Trump in the 2020 elections.

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Palestinian-American activist and Sanders supporter Linda Sarsour has been subjected to an especially virulent assault. Sanders’ relationship with Sarsour has been repeatedly used to attack the senator, most recently in the extreme right outlet The Federalist.

[Smear campaigns](#) focused on so-called “anti-Semitism on the left” were spearheaded by [liberal Zionists](#), picked up by corporate Democrats, and amplified by Republicans, all of whom are extremely threatened by the [intersectional solidarity](#) represented by the growing progressive grassroots movement and its rejection of patriarchal white supremacy.

Crucially, the campaign waged against Omar managed to distract from her original intention of addressing Israel's criminal behaviour toward Palestinians, producing instead a reactionary outpouring of Islamophobic and white supremacist hate, including threats to Omar's safety.

Reactionary politicians have long used a strategy of "divide and rule" as a means of holding onto the reins of power, while plundering the commons. Anti-Semitism is simply the current method of choice, as American Jews are split between reactionary Israeli/Zionist politics and a liberal identity, which affords them equal human rights.

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American Jews are US citizens with full rights and obligations, while enjoying freedom to practise Judaism as a religion similar to all other religious groups. Defining Israel as a Jewish instead of a Zionist project and Judaism as a race or nationality immediately raises profoundly problematic issues of dual loyalty, and exposes American Jews to criticism, manipulation and potential abuse due to Israel's reactionary agenda of apartheid and genocide of Palestinians.

Inclusion of anti-Semitism in Title VI is designed to continue an ongoing effort to suppress advocacy for Palestinian human rights by tarnishing Palestinian activism as a form of racism and Jewish allies as "self-hating", instead of viewing it as legitimate protest against injustices perpetrated by a state against an indigenous population.

Accusations of anti-Semitism, reminiscent of those [employed](#) against British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, are intended to distract from ongoing corruption within the ruling class, marginalise anti-racist dissidents and critics, fragment cohesive anti-colonial resistance, and promote real anti-Semitism and right-wing politics.

In fact, intersectional, international working-class solidarity and the anti-racist human rights-based BDS movement are the single greatest political threat to reactionary politicians, as they represent precisely the opposite tactics to divide and rule.

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To counter Trump's reactionary politics and racist agenda, it is necessary to take the initiative and attack the roots of white supremacy. Zionism, a reactionary, white supremacist, modern Western settler-colonialist movement, must be [decoupled](#) from Judaism and intersectional solidarity between various anti-racist struggles upheld.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance.