

Antisemitism & the U.S.-Israel War with Iran

A Nexus Project Messaging Guide

The United States and Israel launched coordinated airstrikes against Iran in early March 2026, drawing the U.S. into an expanding regional conflict. The responsibility for US engagement in this war lies squarely with President Trump. Still, Secretary of State Rubio asserted that the U.S. acted in part to preempt an imminent Israeli military operation, stating the U.S. needed to act or "suffer higher casualties." Rubio and others in the administration later walked back this comment. At the same time, Prime Minister Netanyahu publicly credited U.S. military partnership with enabling a campaign he said he had sought for 40 years. Both governments have been explicit about the coordination involved. This guide helps interested parties engage the resulting debate responsibly and with accuracy — discussing Israel's role in U.S. decision-making, identifying genuine antisemitism, and avoiding the weaponization of antisemitism accusations to shut down legitimate discourse.

1. THE THREE-TIER FRAMEWORK

Not all criticism of the war is antisemitic, and not all controversial rhetoric is innocent. The framework is meant to serve as a guide to assess which category statements on the U.S.-Israel war on Iran fall into: antisemitic, not antisemitic, or rhetoric that could unintentionally feed into antisemitic tropes.

This framework is just that: a way for people writing and speaking in good faith to think through what they're saying in order to ensure their criticism is pointed and targeted without villainizing any particular community. As always, context matters, and this framework cannot substitute thinking through individual situations. It is, however, meant to make that reflection easier.

✓ NOT ANTISEMITIC	✗ EXPLICITLY ANTISEMITIC	⚠ FEEDS TROPES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Criticizing the timing, legality, or goals of the war• Citing Rubio's or Netanyahu's statements to analyze Israel's role• Questioning whether Congress was adequately consulted• Discussing Israel's diplomatic/intelligence role in the U.S. decision to go to war• Holding specific U.S. and Israeli leaders or their governments accountable for decisions made	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blaming "Jews" rather than Israeli and U.S. leaders• Dehumanizing language about Jewish people (e.g., calling those fleeing for shelter "rats")• Claiming "Jewish imperialism" requires non-Jews to die• Treating all Jewish Americans as responsible for Israeli government actions• Implying Jews control global conflicts or dominate governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Placing ALL responsibility on Israel — erasing Trump's role as the decision-maker. This imprecise oversimplification provides fodder for the promotion of antisemitic conspiracies.• Using "Zionist" as a catch-all synonym for Jewish people• Describing the pro-Israel lobby in conspiratorial rather than factual terms. Referencing an organization for concrete documented actions it has taken is legitimate. Treating it as a shadowy force secretly controlling US policy is not.

2. LANGUAGE GUIDANCE

Analyzing Israel's influence on U.S. decision-making is legitimate and an important responsibility of lawmakers involved in foreign policy, but it can and should be done without slipping into antisemitic tropes. The language guide below highlights problematic phrases that often appear in otherwise valid criticism of the war, and suggests phrasing that conveys legitimate political concern without giving rise to dangerous and false conspiracies

✗ Not Acceptable	✓ Valid Discourse
<i>"Jews pushed us into this war"</i>	"The Israeli government advocated for U.S. military involvement"
<i>"The Jewish lobby controls Congress"</i>	"Pro-Israel advocacy organizations played a significant role in the political debate"
<i>"Zionists engineered this conflict"</i>	"Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Netanyahu, publicly called for U.S. intervention"
<i>"Israel manipulated the U.S."</i>	"Serious questions remain about how U.S. decision-makers were briefed and by whom"

3. RESPONDING TO CONSTITUENTS & MEDIA

Constituents

- Policy criticism is not antisemitism — engage it on the merits.
- When content crosses the line, separate the legitimate concern from the antisemitic framing — address the content while calling out antisemitism

Media

- Affirm that vigorous debate about U.S. foreign policy — including Israel's role — is legitimate and necessary.
- When real antisemitism appears, name it with specific examples — vague condemnations are less effective.
- Do not use "antisemitism" as a shield against policy questions about war.
- Member statements should name governments, officials, and institutions — not groups defined by ethnicity or religion.

The Quick Test

Is the criticism directed at the actions of a government, leader, or specific policy? → Legitimate discourse.

Is an organization being cited for specific, concrete actions it has taken — lobbying activity, political donations, public advocacy, or statements on the record? → Legitimate discourse.

Are insinuations being made about Jewish organizations or pro-Israel lobbying groups as shadowy forces secretly controlling U.S. foreign policy? → Antisemitic.

Is it making claims about Jewish people as a group, or engaging in conspiracy theories connected to an individual's Jewish identity? → Antisemitic.

4. THE BOTTOM LINE

✓ Call out real antisemitism When antisemites use this war to blame or target Jews — name it, reject it, regardless of source or intent.	↔ Protect legitimate debate Do not malign or silence those engaged in good-faith criticism of the war, its causes, or the governments involved.	⚠ Be wary of tropes Push back when rhetoric crosses into hate — even when the speaker's intent is not hateful. Tropes do damage regardless of intent.
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