A Conversation with Assistant Special Envoy Ellie Cohanim on Combating Anti-Semitism

TRANSCRIPT

Discussion

- Husain Haqqani, Director for South and Central Asia, Hudson Institute
- Ellie Cohanim, U.S. Assistant Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, Department of State

Disclaimer: This transcript is based off of a recorded video conference and breaks in the stream may have resulted in mistranscriptions in the text.

A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1855-video-event-a-conversation-with-assistant-special-envoy-ellie-cohanim-on-combating-anti-semitism92020

About Hudson Institute: Founded in 1961 by strategist Herman Kahn, Hudson Institute challenges conventional thinking and helps manage strategic transitions to the future through interdisciplinary studies in defense, international relations, economics, health care, technology, culture, and law.

Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings, and recommendations.
Husain Haqqani:

Hello, and welcome to this conversation about Anti-Semitism with Ellie Cohanim, the Assistant Envoy for Special Envoy to monitor and combat Anti-Semitism. She was appointed by President Trump to an institution that has existed for several years. The belief or behavior of hostility towards Jews, just because they are Jewish, has existed for a long time. It can take the form of religious teachings that proclaim the inferiority of Jews, or political efforts to isolate, oppress or otherwise injure them. It may also include prejudice or stereotype views about Jews. It has been an attitude that has led to programs and laws targeting Jews in Europe, and of course, we all remember the Holocaust in which six million Jews were killed by Nazis between 1941 and 1945 in Europe.

For half a century after World War II, public Anti-Semitism became less pronounced and frequent in the Western world. Stereotypes about Jews endured, but Jews faced little physical danger in western countries. Unfortunately, that is changing and there has been a assumption of attacks on Jews, even in European nations and the United States. Disagreement over policy toward the State of Israel has created an opportunity in which the expression Zionist, which is support for Israel as the Jewish homeland is often used as an Anti-Semitic code word for Jews in mainstream debate. Holocaust denial, and attempts to rewrite history such as the false claim that Jews control the Atlantic slave trade and other lies, suggesting that the Jews were to blame for the tragedies that befell them, these are definitely around. And we see them surfacing even in academic discussions.

But the center of Anti-Semitism now is less the West and more the greater Middle East. Jews were driven out of the Arab countries in the 1940s and '50s, and from Iran and Turkey as well. Since 1979, Iran's Revolutionary regime has become a major promoter of Anti-Semitism. Today in this conversation, we couldn't have a better speaker. My colleague in this conversation is Ellie Cohanim, who is the Assistant Special Envoy to monitor and combat Anti-Semitism. Welcome on behalf of the Hudson Institute, Ellie.

Ellie Cohanim:

Thank you Ambassador Haqqani.

Husain Haqqani:

Yeah, why don't we start with a few opening remarks from you and then we go forward.

Ellie Cohanim:

Wonderful. Before I start my formal remarks, ambassador, I just want to thank the Hudson Institute for this invitation. The Hudson Institute, I find is a true thought leader on the most pressing issues of our day. And so it's really my pleasure to join you and to join the Hudson Institute for this conversation. As you mentioned, ambassador in your very kind introduction, I was appointed to the State Department in November of 2019, as Assistant Special Envoy to monitor and combat Anti-Semitism. This office at the State Department was created by a bipartisan act of Congress in 2004 under President George W. Bush.

What is new is that under our present administration, for the first time, we have been given the resources and the staffing such that I've joined, as well as two others in deputy level positions. And what that allows us is the ability to take a deep regional approach to the fight against Anti-Semitism. And I would tell you, that's very much to the credit of President Trump, the Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who understand the threat that Anti-Semitism presents to the world.

So in my work, I'm dealing mostly with the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America regions. And what you'll note about what brings those regions together, what ties those two regions is the Islamic
Republic of Iran. And that's a topic that I hope we'll explore together in depth today. And so ambassador, I think you did a fantastic job of explaining some of the history of Anti-Semitism and where we are today. So I want to share with you some statistics on where we are today.

The Kantor Center out of Tel Aviv University recently published a report and what they showed was that there were 456 violent Anti-Semitic attacks on Jews worldwide in 2019, which was an 18% increase from the year before that. And it was unfortunately the largest annual increase since 2014. So that's the state of Anti-Semitism, where Jews are finding themselves the victims of violent physical attacks worldwide.

What we have found in our office is that there are three primary sources for this hatred towards Jews. The first comes from the radical right wing, white supremacists, neo-Nazi camp, which engage in what's called classical Anti-Semitism. The second source of this hatred is coming from the far left camp, and where they're expressing their Anti-Semitism as Anti-Zionism, something that you noted as well. And often this source of Anti-Semitism is being called the new Anti-Semitism.

And finally, the last source of hatred towards Jews is emanating from the militant Islamic world. What we do in our work, in the special envoy's office is that we don't rank nor minimize these sources of hatred and what we know is that Jewish people worldwide are finding themselves the victims of all three of these forms of hatred coming at them at the same time. When it comes to radical Islamic Anti-Semitism, which is what plagues the Middle East and North Africa, as you mentioned, ambassador, what we find in those societies is that Anti-Semitism is institutionalized in the very fabric of society, such that children are being taught the most vile Anti-Semitic stereotypes in their very curricula, in the education system. We also find that there are certain mosques in the region where the imams are preaching just the most awful Anti-Semitic thoughts. And finally, we find that there is a fair amount of Anti-Semitism in the media.

And so what that does, again, is that it creates an institutionalized form of Anti-Semitism so that whether you're a child or an adult, you're being exposed to this messaging, almost in every space that you're going through, and somewhere along the way, you're going to pick this up and so it's a serious issue.

I thought there was two ideas that could help us frame this conversation today. So I wanted to refer to a 1995 piece and commentary magazine written by Martin Kramer. And Kramer discusses Israel's response to Hezbollah attacks. Specifically he states and I'm going to quote, "Israel's policy has been to signal that when Hezbollah attacks Israelis, Israel will invariably respond. But when it attacks Jews elsewhere, it must not reckon with Israel but with the world." Unquote. For me Martin Kramer's question about if it's true that Israel does not respond to attacks on Jews, not her citizens, what that does is it de facto puts the moral responsibility to respond to attacks on Jews from radical forces on other governments. I would argue that the United States today, certainly under President Trump and the Trump administration rises to the challenge of combating Anti-Semitism clearly and vigorously and wherever it raises its ugly head.

The second notion I thought would be helpful in framing this conversation was a piece that came from CIA veteran, Reuel Marc Gerecht, who in 2015 said and I quote, "Read through State Department telegrams and Central Intelligence Agency operational and intelligence cables on the Middle East. And you'll seldom find Anti-Semitism discussed. Even though Jew hatred, not just anti-Zionism, has been a significant aspect, if not a core component of modern Arab nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and what usually passes for critical thought among sophisticated Arab elites." Unquote.

What I find is that Gerecht is posing a scathing accusation here, directly at the United States State Department and our intelligence agencies in this 2015 quote. The question is, do we notice the Anti-
Semitism that's emanating from the Middle East and the Muslim world? Much less, are we doing something about it? And here again, I would posit that this president and this administration has pioneered and implemented the most effective three pronged strategy for combating Anti-Semitism worldwide.

And the strategy is as follows, first, the United States has launched the strongest sanctions regime ever in the history of the United States against the number one state sponsor of Anti-Semitism in the world, and that is the radical Islamic regime in Iran. Our sanctions have demonstrably weakened Iran. We've also weakened Iran's ability to fund its proxies. So whether that's Hezbollah, whether that's the Houthis in Yemen, and we’ve also hampered the regime's ability to spread their hatred worldwide.

The second prong of our strategy against Anti-Semitism is the President's vision for peace. And what the vision for peace calls for is normalization between the Gulf Arab countries between Jordan, Egypt and all the neighboring countries of the Jewish state of Israel. And I think that all of us are living through this historic moment right now where the peace deal that the United States brokered between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, is unfolding before our eyes right now as we speak. So this historic peace deal was just announced last week. We have Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who was just traveling through the region. We have the Special Advisor to the President Jared Kushner, taking the first commercial flight between Israel and the United Arab Emirates just today. And we have the UAE announcing just this past weekend that they have formally ended their 1972 boycott of Israel.

So what we're finding is that indeed, this Gulf Arab state has normalized relations with Israel, we're finding that Israel’s Arab neighbors are more and more normalizing relations, are more and more accepting that Israel is here to stay. And so what that does is that it, we know that normalization and acceptance of Israel automatically leads to a lessening of Anti-Semitism in the region.

The final note I want to make on the region is that this administration, as policy, has stated that anti-Zionism is Anti-Semitism full stop. So that what we don't do is we don't distinguish between those who hate Jews and those who merely hate the Jewish state. And the last prong of our Anti-Semitism policy has been to stand shoulder to shoulder with Jewish populations all over the world, and truly demand that governments everywhere provide for the safety and security of their Jewish communities. It's our feeling that the security of Jews for any given government is their responsibility, and it's not a favor that they do for their Jewish population. And that's something that we advocate very strongly everywhere. And so ambassador that is our three pronged Anti-Semitism strategy and I look forward to your thoughts and questions.

Husain Haqqani:

Thank you very much. Now, let me begin by saying that most State Department bureaus and functional departments, they divide things geographically in a contiguous manner. So for example, the Middle East and North Africa or for a long time what was known as the Near East and South Asia because they adjoin each other on the map. In your case, your responsibilities are Latin America, Middle East and North Africa. So basically, the heart of the Muslim world, and then Latin America. I talked about it and I thought that maybe the connection is because there is actually a connection in their Anti-Semitism or the manifestations of Anti-Semitism in Latin America and the Middle East. Explain that to us.

Ellie Cohanim:

Sure. So I think that's an astute observation, ambassador and I’m not surprised given your own history and all of the scholarship that you have already out there on this field. So ambassador, I mentioned earlier that Iran is a link between the Middle East region and Latin America. And so where you
specifically see that is the Iranian penetration in Venezuela, unfortunately. So those two very troubled
countries are tied together. Right now, they're both a lifeline, these two despotic regimes, which are
each oppressing their own people are tied together.

What I'm hearing from the Venezuelan Jewish community is that in Venezuela, there's really no interest
naturally among their citizens in issues of Israel and the Palestinians and yet they are being bombarded
with things like posters and billboards on the highways that are presenting these rallies as an apartheid
state and other lies like that, which are in essence trying to brainwash and influence the Venezuelan
population. This is all being directly linked to the Iranian regime in Iran's ties to Venezuela.

So in this case, you have a very clear example of Iran's exportation of its own messaging to a country
that has no natural interest to the Middle East conflicts, and really trying to influence public opinion in
Venezuela. In other parts of Latin America, you've got the tri border area of Argentina, Brazil, and
Uruguay, which has heavy, heavy Hezbollah activity. Now, again, Hezbollah is a creation of Iran, it's a
proxy of Iran. It's heavily funded by Iran. And what's happening in the tri border state area is that it's a
hub of narco trafficking, it's a hub of money laundering. And how it presents a danger to the Jewish
people and Anti-Semitism, well, if you recall, the AMIA attack, the attack that Hezbollah carried out on
the Jewish Community Center in Argentina in '94, was the deadliest Anti-Semitic attack on Jews in the
Americas since World War II.

So again, you have to really think about that, what does that mean? It's the deadliest. We've had over
120 people died in that attack and thousands more injured. So as much as unfortunately, ambassador,
we are seeing a rise in Anti-Semitism here in the United States. I can say that it's a blessing that we've
never seen anything like the Hezbollah attack. And it's something that we in the United States will never
forget. We have-

**Husain Haqqani:**

Has Argentina been sufficiently supportive of efforts to try and exclude Hezbollah and stop potentially
similar attacks in future?

**Ellie Cohanim:**

Well, we want to certainly credit Argentina for last year designating Hezbollah as a terrorist entity in its
entirety, and again, doing so this year. So again we applaud Argentina for doing that. And we really
applaud every country that has done so recently. So that includes Lithuania and Germany most recently.
And ambassador, I would tell you that the designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization is one of
our administration's priorities. We call on every nation to do so.

**Husain Haqqani:**

Okay. Now let's move to the region in which Hezbollah operates because it operates in a context. The
Jewish communities of Syria, Iraq are primarily thrown out, pushed out, expelled, forced out, made into
refugees, and live primarily in Israel. Libya, the same. So these are troubled spots. But there's another
troubled spot and that is Yemen, which has had a significant Jewish population, a very historic Jewish
population that has existed for millennia. What is happening in Yemen in the course of the civil war?
How safe is the Jewish population there? Extremist activity has been very high from both the Sunni
extremists of the Al-Qaeda variety and the Shia extremist of the pro-Iran Houthi variety. So how are
Jews faring in Yemen and what is the state of Anti-Semitism there? What is the US able to do, to help
the embattled community there, as well as to put pressure on the various parties to make sure that they
do not conduct a massive program of Jews there?
Ellie Cohanim:

Yeah, ambassador, thank you for bringing up, I think a subject that's been long neglected in understanding of the region. And that's the Jewish presence in the Middle East and North Africa. So if I can take back the subject, just to its history, the Jewish people are indigenous to the Middle East, North Africa region. So in each of those countries that you mentioned, the Jewish presence predates the Islamic conquest. So you're talking about people whose ties to the region go back thousands and thousands of years, including my own family. I was born in Iran, myself. And the Persian-Jewish community dates back to the First Temple period. So again, this is a community that had been living in ancient Persia prior to the rise of Christianity, and then prior to the rise of later Islam.

So the ties to this region are deep, and I can tell you that for Jews, whether it's someone like myself who was born there, or people of my parents' generation or the grandparents' generation, who had to flee our homeland, for many people, our hearts are still in that region. We very much feel for our brothers and sisters who in many of those countries that you mentioned, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, either they're under oppressive regimes or they're in countries that are in just catastrophic conditions because of government neglect and civil wars and so on.

And so again, for the Jewish people who come from this region, our hearts are very much there. And we feel for our brothers and sisters that are still there. And in many cases, I think the Jews feel that the story has been neglected, it's untold and there is still more work to be done in terms of getting the story out.

Ambassador, regarding the question of Yemen, specifically that you mentioned, so in fact, the Houthis, the Houthi militias who have run amok there, and they are an Iran proxy, they have a horrible, horrible human rights record there against the very small Jewish community that's still there, but also against the Baha'is and other religious minorities. At the moment, there is one Jewish man who has been imprisoned by the Houthis for over four years. And our office has recently called for his release, and we will continue to call for his release. He's being held there for no good reason and it's time for the Houthis to release him.

Husain Haqqani:

Now in the international community, and of course, one knows the diplomatic circumstances, it's a good thing that the United Arab Emirates has taken the bold step. Prince Mohammed bin Zayed deserves full credit for being bold enough and courageous enough to take the first step in recognizing Israel. There are still about 32 countries in the world that do not recognize the State of Israel, all of them Muslim countries. And the United Nations has so far not adopted a uniform definition of Anti-Semitism that can be the guiding light for how governments deal with this ancient hatred. What is the US government and your department, your bureau doing to deal with this?

Ellie Cohanim:

Well, I would tell you that adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of Anti-Semitism, what's often referred to as the IHRA definition, has been a priority of our office, the Anti-Semitism office. And just to share with you, the State Department adopted the IHRA definition back in 2010. President Trump in issuing the executive order combating Anti-Semitism of December 2019 adopted the IHRA definition for all of our executive agencies. So now the United States executive agencies have all also adopted the IHRA definition. Where there is some controversy on this universally accepted definition is that the IHRA definition underneath the proper definition has 26 or so examples
of what Anti-Semitism is. And some of those examples touch upon anti-Zionism and the Jewish state and the Jewish people’s right to sovereignty, in essence.

And so that’s where I think you have bodies like the UN and others who are resistant to this definition. We have called over and over again, for all countries, for the UN, for all multilateral bodies to accept this IHRA definition and it really does help in trying to understand where speech and actions have crossed the line into Anti-Semitism.

Husain Haqqani:

Well, we spoke about earlier and you really mentioned all the various categories. So you talked about the white supremacist Anti-Semitism. I know it’s not your specific area, but I think it is connected. And then there is the rise of, or revival of Anti-Semitism in Europe, especially France, where Jewish graves have been desecrated, synagogues have been attacked. Do you see a connection, at least in Europe, between Middle Eastern Anti-Semitism and the European Anti-Semitism? Meaning that as more communities have inflow from the Middle East, perhaps that reignites and then white supremacist as well as far left anti-Semites let their religious Anti-Semitism be the front while they operate in the back? Has there been any observation of that trend?

Ellie Cohanim:

So what I would tell you is that there is statistical information to back up this question, which is that indeed with the migration of people from the Middle East to Europe and to the west comes the migration of Anti-Semitic attitudes. So that what we spoke about earlier in the conversation about the institutionalized Anti-Semitism that people might have imbibed in the Middle East, they will, unfortunately naturally take those attitudes with them wherever they go. And so it is a challenge for European governments to figure out exactly how they’re going to deal with the integration of immigrants that are coming to their shores, with these hateful attitudes and what they’re going to do about that.

I would say also, your question about, what I heard you say ambassador is, does the rise in immigration from the Middle East to Europe somehow also lead to a response from the radical white supremacists in Europe? And certainly, I think, again, the facts bear out that indeed there is a backlash against these European open borders policies. And so again, what that does is that it behooves the center. It behooves the European center parties to try to figure out how they’re going to deal with these issues of immigration. What I would posit is that for them to pretend that these problems don’t exist, the problems that have come along with migration, it’s a terrible policy, because there is indeed a backlash. There are people who are concerned for numerous reasons about this migration onto Europe.

And so again, it behooves the center part, sorry parties in Europe to figure out how they’re going to deal with migration in a responsible manner, such that they can control the backlash and control also any of the racist Anti-Semitic, anti-LGBTQ, misogynist attitudes that some populations might be bringing with them to their shores.

Husain Haqqani:

Well, my question actually was two pronged, one part was of course, that the presence of Anti-Semitic migrants also allows the Anti-Semitic old populations to re manifest their hardcore beliefs that had been suppressed in the 50 years immediately after the Second World War when the memory of the Holocaust was very fresh and people thought, “No, no, we can’t let this happen.” So obviously, we have seen both migrant Anti-Semitism but also a revival of white supremacist Anti-Semitism in the West.
Ellie Cohanim:

Yeah. So I don't know that we can pin the increase in white supremacist, neo-Nazi Anti-Semitism on anything other than that there's just in some sense, I think, a loss of historic memory. There's a loss of historic memory, it's possible that these Western societies are not doing a good enough job to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive for their populations. So that probably another message that I think is getting lost is the effects that Anti-Semitism has on society.

So ambassador, if you look historically at every country, where Anti-Semitism was allowed to flourish, eventually the society as a whole, it becomes to the brunt of the punishment so that the entire society eventually falls into decay. Anti-Semitism is often, it's the canary in the coal mine. It's the first sign that something is going awry. And eventually the society pays for it as a whole. And I think for the Europeans, what happened 75 years ago with the Nazi murder of six million Jews on that continent, well, we all know, that it didn't start and end with the murder of the six million Jews. There were 11 million people murdered in total, the entire continent of Europe was decimated. You had the rise of fascism and communism come out of that.

And to this day, I think the Europeans are really still suffering the consequences of the fact that they failed to stop this hatred of the Jews when it first started on their shores. So indeed, I think that again, it becomes incumbent on responsible actors in Europe to really gain hold of any rising hate that they're finding on their land. And ambassador, I just want to say that to that point, there's a lot that we advocate for in our bilateral relationships. So adopting the IHRA definition is one of them. Designating Hezbollah as a terror organization is one of them. Providing for security for Jewish communities is one of them. Making sure that they have strong hate laws on the books is one of them and enforcing their hate laws is the other. So there's a lot that governments can do and there's a lot that responsible actors can do.

If I may, I also want to comment for one moment on something that I think is an interesting case study. If you look most recently at the Islamic Relief Worldwide organization, so this is an Islamic charity that over the last 10 years has collected almost one billion euros. Again, I want to make note of that, over almost one billion euros in donations from the United Nations and governments throughout Europe. And what we just saw on the news, recently is that first we had the executive director of the organization stepped down because there were Facebook posts of his revealed, in which he called Jews the children of apes and pigs.

So this man was forced to step down when this revelation came in there was another acting director who came in and a board of others who run this organization. Well, just in the last week, it was revealed again that all five of these people who were running this charity have indulged in pro terrorist and Anti-Semitic activities and social media posts and so on. And so now the entire leadership has been forced to step down. I have to ask myself, the person who was very instrumental in revealing this Anti-Semitic hatred was Lorenzo Vidino, who is director of the extremism program of GW and I know someone that the Hudson Institute has hosting, has relationship with as well.

And so what I have to ask myself is if someone at a center for extremism at a US university can expose this, if he can find this information, how is it that the United Nations and these governments in Europe couldn't? A little bit hard to believe. So I think, again, ambassador to your question, it is very much incumbent upon European governments to take the issue of Anti-Semitism seriously, and to really think about when they're funding organizations to the tunes of millions upon millions of dollars, to really making sure that those dollars are being spent responsibly.
Husain Haqqani:

But there's an unwillingness among Western governments to actually crack down on radical Islamist
groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, and its analog parties from other parts of the world, many of
whom carry these Anti-Semitic beliefs deeply, but have taken advantage of modern and Western
institutions to create these massive charities and other organizations, networks of schools, which
transpose the hatred that has been cultivated in the greater Middle East, back to Europe, and the United
States and Canada. And I think that your job is actually a much bigger job, the office that you're
associated with. I know that Elan Carr, the Special Envoy has talked about it, that actually this needs not
only expanded resources, but expanded commitment.

And so let us hear from you, what actually does your work entail on a day-to-day basis? I mean, people
would be interested and giving examples. Yes, we understand that it's about monitoring Anti-Semitism.
Several nongovernmental organizations do that too. How far is the United States willing to put its might
behind combating Anti-Semitism?

Ellie Cohanim:

Well, ambassador, I will tell you again that the United States, we're very fortunate right now under the
present administration, because no one has taken the threat of global Anti-Semitism more seriously
than the President, the Secretary of State. And they themselves, as I mentioned, have put in so much of
their own efforts in this fight. So whether it is the President's Executive Order combating Anti-Semitism
which was issued in December, that EO for those who may not know, for the first time in American
history, extended Title VI protection to American Jews, and a lot of that was in response to the Anti-
Semitism that American Jewish students on college campuses are facing. And that too, ambassador is
about Anti-Zionism and these horrible accusations that are made against Israel on our own campuses.

And ultimately, what happens is that Jewish students are finding themselves a target of a lot of hatred
on our campuses. And this executive order for the first time, as I said, gives Jewish students protection
that they never had historically before that. And again, in terms of the global stage, what the
administration has done is that we've taken on Iran, we've taken on terror organizations, we've taken on
all of the most hostile actors who are spreading Anti-Semitism both in messages, but also in their kinetic
activity and in all of their activity worldwide. If I may stay on Iran for a moment ambassador and the
reason why Iran is considered the number one state sponsor of Anti-Semitism is that they have an
almost-

Husain Haqqani:

I was going to come to Iran in a bit.

Ellie Cohanim:

Great.

Husain Haqqani:

Go ahead.

Ellie Cohanim:

So Iran's Anti-Semitism is an obsessive Anti-Semitism. Which is that they daily are calling for the
elimination of the Jewish state of Israel off the face of the earth, they chant death to Israel all the time.
You have this going all the way from the top, from the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, the Ayatollah Ali
Khamenei, who recently put out a poster, for example, which echoes Hitler’s Final Solution. The poster literally has the words 'the final solution' on it. And what this poster depicts is a Jerusalem that is [inaudible 00:36:43]. Again, it shows this fantasy that the Iranian regime has of taking over Jerusalem and pretty much freeing it from the Jews.

And he has used Twitter to tweet out a 14 point plan for eliminating Israel. He has used Twitter for really putting out a lot of hatred towards the Jewish people. And this is an obsessive Anti-Semitism that motivates them in everything that they do. So even their proxy activity that we spoke about earlier, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, all of this is aimed at Jewish civilians and Israelis. And so the United States has really taken on Iran in a way that no administration prior did.

One thing, I would tell you, President Trump has said over and over again is that as long as he’s president, the Iranians are not going to have a nuclear bomb. So if you understand that Iran presents an existential threat to the Jewish state of Israel, if we understand that Israel right now houses, Israel and the United States house the two largest Jewish populations in the world. And so when one country is threatening genocide against half the Jewish population, and then you have the United States of America president saying, well, he's just not going to allow that to happen, that is, I think, a strong a policy against Anti-Semitism as there could be.

The other question that we're facing right now in the world, is the issue of the UN embargo of conventional weapons for Iran. So right this moment, our European allies are contemplating whether they should allow the Iranians to have access to advanced military weapons. And that would mean that they would be able to buy and sell this advanced conventional weaponry. And again, here we are, only 75 years after the chimneys of Auschwitz have cooled and the crematoria have cooled where six million Jews were murdered on European soil. And we have the Europeans only 75 years later contemplating possibly arming this regime which calls for the elimination of the one and only Jewish state. So I think that there's a lot of questions, moral questions that our European allies need to be asking themselves right now.

**Husain Haqqani:**

And Iran's behavior of course needs to be challenged by its own neighbors. And even if it is for different reasons, I think that it would require a containment policy towards Iran in which the mullahs are not allowed to spread their doctrines of hate their violence, and their willingness to burn the entire region down because it does not follow what they want to believe or follow. So Iran does remain a major problem. I was going to ask that question, but I'm glad that you answered it before I could ask it. Turkey is another country in the region that is slowly becoming problematic. I don't know if in the geographic division within the Office of the Special Envoy, that falls under your purview. But I would still like you to say something because President Erdoğan has definitely reignited Anti-Semitic tropes in Turkey, and has also been fueling Anti-Semitism elsewhere by supporting groups like the Muslim Brotherhood.

**Ellie Cohanim:**

Indeed. So we are seeing that activity coming out of Turkey. I would tell you that the Jewish population in Iran and Turkey are the two largest populations left in the region. And we have a very close eye out on the Turkish-Jewish community. At the moment, they are still living, I would say very quietly and under the radar in Turkey. And certainly we're not pleased by some of the Anti-Semitic tropes that Erdoğan has trafficked in. And what's interesting for me is that I can't help but notice that I think with the 1979 Revolution in Iran, and this a dream of an Islamic, radical Islamic Republic that the Khomeinis ignited in the region, only so many years later you have a country like Turkey which was so proudly a secular Muslim country and I think a potential role model for the region, suddenly taking a turn for some
more radicalized elements. We still have hope that Turkey as a NATO country and an important player in
the region will find its way towards maintaining a fair and democratic and strong human rights system
for its citizens.

Husain Haqqani:

Okay. Coronavirus aftermath. Everybody's looking at the world after coronavirus. So we might even end
up like they used to be, Before Christ, After Christ. We might actually end up having a new calendar
some day, before coronavirus, after coronavirus. So the coronavirus has also brought in new Anti-
Semitic tropes. How do you see them playing out in the world and how much of a danger are they to the
Jewish community and to the understanding of all of us about Anti-Semitism?

Ellie Cohanim:

So very sadly, the coronavirus indeed became an opportunity for the hatemongers. What happened
when the virus came out was that we saw forces either spreading conspiracy theories that Israel or the
Jews somehow created the virus or that they were going to somehow profit from the virus. No matter
that we know this virus emanated from Wuhan, China. What's interesting to note, unfortunately, was
that a lot of this conspiracy theories emanated from government officials as well. So we saw that coming
out of the Palestinian Authority. Indeed, from Turkey, we saw some of that. And in fact-

Husain Haqqani:

Iran.

Ellie Cohanim:

Iran as well. I don't want to become a broken record on Iran. Yes, but the Iranians as well. In fact, the
Ayatollah Khamenei tweeted a tweet in which he uses hashtag COVID-48. So what that referred to is
1948, the year that Israel was created, and the COVID virus. He put these two things together. And so
we all know that what you need to do with the coronavirus is you need to wipe it out. And so obviously
he was again advocating for the wiping out of Israel with this COVID-48 hashtag.

And it's a sad shame that people would use a pandemic as an opportunity to spread hatred of Jews.
Ambassador, you also will have to ask yourself, when there is this scapegoating of Jews, who benefits
from this? So I think in the old paradigm, again, in the Middle East, North Africa region was that a lot of
governments used to engage in the scapegoating of Jews, the scapegoating of Israel, as a way to turn
their populations eyes away from their own issues and problems. And certainly in Iran, I think that is
very much what's going on. The regime thinks that by scapegoating Israel, by scapegoating the Jewish
people, they're going to somehow fool their people into not recognizing the tremendous problems that
they have in their own society and also the regime's failure to really address the pandemic in a strong
way.

And so what I think some of our government's policies have exposed is that those lies just don't work
any longer. And the best example I can give of that is when President Trump moved the US embassy to
Jerusalem, at the time, he was getting calls, left and right from world leaders who were in essence
telling him that the Arab street was going to go crazy. We were going to see World War III start because
the US Embassy was going to be moved to the Israeli capital. In fact, not only did we not see that, again,
I think what the President's move did was it exposed all the lies, which is that the Arab street is no
longer buying it. They're not buying the scapegoating of Israel and the Jews for the problems that they
have internally.
And the normalization that we're seeing with Israel, I think also is a recognition from many governments in the region, that they are on the same side with Israel. To your question earlier about isolating Iran, I think that Israel's neighbors, certainly the Gulf Arab countries, they all recognize that Iran is the threat in the region. And they're willing now to more openly work with Israel and work together to counter that shared threat.

Husain Haqqani:

I think we've had a quite a comprehensive conversation on the rising Anti-Semitism in the greater Middle East, the revival of Anti-Semitism in Europe, the tentacles of Anti-Semitism that spread from Tehran all the way to Buenos Aires and Caracas. And of course, always important to remind people that hate consumes the hater, as much as it hurts the hated. In fact more. So let us hope that you, your office, Special Envoy, Elan Carr and the United States government in general, succeed in this great effort to try and combat Anti-Semitism. Thank you very much, Ellie Cohanim for joining us today.

Ellie Cohanim:

Thank you ambassador.