

May 20, 2024

The links between the phrase “From river to the sea” and Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement NGO Monitor Submission to Meta Oversight Board

In accordance with the [call from Meta’s Oversight Board](#) (May 7, 2004), Prof. Gerald Steinberg, President of NGO Monitor,¹ submits this analysis on the question of whether posts with the phrase “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” violate Meta’s Community Standards. The question became particularly acute in the context and aftermath of the brutal Hamas attacks against Israelis on October 7 and the virulent attacks, intimidation and antisemitism targeting Jews and Jewish targets, including forcibly preventing Jews from entering synagogues, classes and university facilities.

As demonstrated in this submission, the use of this phrase clearly violates Meta’s rules on [Hate Speech, Violence and Incitement or Dangerous Organizations and Individuals](#) – specifically “Violent speech or support in written or visual form” (Tier 1) and “Social exclusion, which means things such as denying access to spaces” (Tier 3). The words “from the river to the sea” often accompany encouragement of acts of terror and the attacks against Jews, as highlighted after the brutal Hamas attacks against Israelis on October 7, and are the [basis of the three cases](#) being considered by the Meta Oversight Board.

1) “From the river to the sea” as a call for the elimination of the State of Israel:

The slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” (often abbreviated to “From the river to the sea” and translated from Arabic version – in which the full meaning is clear) is systematically and widely understood by those who proclaim it as calling for the elimination of the State of Israel, and its replacement by a Palestinian state (or states). As detailed in section 4 below, analysis of the history of this phrase demonstrates that it refers to the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, which encompasses Israel within the 1949 armistice lines, as well as what is referred to as the West Bank / Judea and Samaria (including areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority since 1994) and the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, calls to replace the current entities, including Israel (irrespective of boundaries) with a Palestinian state in the entire territory between “river and the sea” is the equivalent of destroying Israel. An [open letter signed by 30 major Jewish news outlets around the world](#) (8 November, 2023) declared: “Have no doubt that Hamas is cheering those ‘from the river to the sea’ chants, because a Palestine between the river to the sea leaves not a single inch for Israel.” As unequivocally stated in the guidelines of the international consensus [IHRA working definition](#)

¹ NGO Monitor is a project of the Institute for NGO Research, an independent and nonpartisan framework dedicated to promoting accountability and democratic values among NGOs claiming human rights agendas, and in special consultative status with UN ECOSOC since 2013.

[of antisemitism](#), “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel **is a racist endeavor**.” (emphasis added.)

This analysis was contained in the [congressional vote to censure](#) Representative Rashida Tlaib (D - Mi), declaring that the phrase was “widely recognized as a genocidal call to violence to destroy the state of Israel.” Similarly, [the White House spokeswoman stated that the phrase was “divisive” and that many considered it hurtful and antisemitic](#). According to a declaration published by the [Anti-Defamation League](#) (October 26, 2023), “It is an antisemitic charge denying the Jewish right to self-determination, including through the removal of Jews from their ancestral homeland. Usage of this phrase has the effect of making members of the Jewish and pro-Israel community feel unsafe and ostracized.” and on X (formerly Twitter) [the ADL posted](#): “‘From the River to the Sea’ is a Hamas call to annihilate Israel,” adding that “claiming it is a rally of coexistence gives cover to terror.”

2) Examples demonstrating the repeated use of this phrase as justification and incitement for acts of terror:

- a) May 10, 2000: Abu Ali Mustafa, leader of the PFLP (designated as a terror organization in the US², European Union, and elsewhere): “I perceive Palestine as the historic Palestine documented in all the UN and British Mandate records. In other words, **Palestine from the river to the sea. Q: Meaning, no Israel. Mustafa: No, in my opinion Israel is a plundering and aggressive entity on Palestinian land.**” Interview, *Al Jazeera*, [MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 94](#)
- b) October 9, 2000: Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein (Ba'ath party conference): “The conference made a number of resolutions to support the heroic Intifada and to provide the necessities of the Palestinian jihad warriors, so that they are able to continue their heroic jihad **to liberate Palestine from the river to the sea...to liberate Palestine.**” *Babil* (Iraq), [Will Saddam Hussein Attack Israel, MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 136](#)
- c) May 2020: Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah (U.S. designated terror organization): “‘**Palestine from the river to the sea** is the property of the Palestinian people and they shall return to it,’ Nasrallah said in the speech, adding that Jewish Israelis should leave. ‘Anything that has been stolen cannot become the legal property of a thief, even if the entire world recognizes its ownership.’” [Times of Israel](#), “In Quds Day speech, Nasrallah says Jews must leave Israel,” 22 May 2020
- d) March 21, 2001: Faysal Al-Husseini, Palestinian Authority Minister for Jerusalem Affairs: *Al-Safir* (Lebanon) “We may lose or win [tactically] but our eyes will continue to aspire to the strategic goal, namely, to **Palestine from the river to the sea**. Whatever we get now cannot make us forget this supreme truth.” [MEMRI Special Dispatch No. 197](#)
- e) June 6, 2006: Khaled Sha'ban Ibrahim Al-Dahdouh (Al-Quds Brigades, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad - US designated terror organizations): “The Al-Quds Brigades bear arms in

² “Foreign Terrorist Organizations”, BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM, U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/foreign-terrorist-organizations/>

order to drive this occupier out of the land of Palestine - Palestine in its entirety, **from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River..** No, it is written in the Koran. Palestine **from the river to the sea.**” Training Footage and Interviews with the Al-Quds Brigades, *Al-Jazeera Network* (Qatar), [MEMRI TV Clip #1291](#)

- f) December 25, 2009: Munir Al-Maqdah, Head of Fatah Militia In Lebanon: “...when I joined the Fatah movement, the oath we took was to liberate Palestine **from the River to the Sea**...I can assure you that within a few years, you will see the beginning of the end of the Jewish state in Palestine. I swear that it will be driven out of the land of Palestine...” Interview, *ON TV* (Egypt), [MEMRI TV Clip #2393](#).
- g) March 2, 2017: PLO Ambassador to Iran, Saleh Al-Zawawi: “...we must fight to liberate Palestine...certainly, everyone should fight in their own way, from carrying out stabbing and vehicular attacks to launching rockets. That is how we will liberate Palestine **from the river to the sea**...all means of combat are legitimate in order to realize Allah’s promise for liberation...” *Al-Akhbar* (Lebanon), [Memri Special Dispatch No. 6809](#)
- h) June 31, 2019: Nate Chase, in Times Square, New York: “Because every inch – **from the river to the sea** – is Palestine...Israel does not exist! It has not existed, it does not exist, and it will never exist! There is only Palestine. We are here today on Al-Quds day to celebrate the heroic resistance of the Palestinian people who resist the most powerful war machine created in the history of humankind. Rokeya Begum: “Globalize the intifada...Smash the settler-Zionist state!” Online Platforms - *FreeAlQudsNy* (YouTube), [MEMRI TV Clip #7276](#).
- i) April 26, 2024: Charlotte Kates, International Coordinator of Samidoun, affiliated with the PFLP terror organization: “We demand a free Palestine **from the River to the Sea**. And we stand with the Palestinian resistance and their heroic and brave actions on October 7. As they said, long live October 7th! And we say today: long live October 7th...Hamis is not a terrorist organization. [Palestinian] Islamic Jihad is not a terrorist organization. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is not a terrorist organization. Hizbullah is not a terrorist organization. These are our resistance fighters. These are our heroes...Yes – with their guns, with their missiles, and with their rockets.” Samidoun Charlotte Kates At Vancouver Rally: Long Live October 7; Hamas, PFLP, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah Are Not Terrorist Groups, They Are Heroes. Online Platforms - *Various X accounts*, [MEMRI TV Clip #11058](#).
- j) May 8, 2024: “The other day, I stood outside a locked gate at Columbia University.... From the other side of the gate, a bespectacled student in a keffiyeh worked them into a rage.... She had her rotation: “Intifada revolution,” then “Palestine is our demand; no peace on stolen land!” Then “Free, free Palestine!” Then “**From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!**” Finally, “Intifada, Intifada!” No one stopping to watch could fail to get the message. The young woman wasn’t calling for a cease-fire or a binational confederation of Palestine and Israel. She was calling for war.” Judith Shulevitz, [“What Those Pro-Palestinian Chants Mean,” *The Atlantic*](#)
- k) November 4, 2023: “Perhaps the most troubling thing that I have noticed, is the apparent normalisation of thousands of demonstrators chanting ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.’ The meaning of this is sometimes said to be open to interpretation.

This is not true. It has a single meaning: that the sovereign state of Israel should be superseded by a new nation, called Palestine. Most Israelis see this as calling, not only for the destruction of our country, but also for a genocide." [Alexander Horne "The case for prosecuting 'from the river to the sea'", *The Spectator*](#)

3) On advocating for the dignity and human rights of Palestinians

The claim that "the phrase has been used to advocate for the dignity and human rights of Palestinians" and therefore not a form of incitement to violence is clearly inconsistent with the evidence, particularly in the context of support for and justification of the October 7 mass slaughter against Israelis. There are many ways to advocate for "the dignity and human rights of Palestinians" without advocating for the elimination of Israel, or linking this advocacy to justification of mass terror. This slogan is clearly not one of these, but rather the plain meaning is a call for the elimination of Israel, often linked to the words "by any means necessary."

4) Antisemitic incitement

[According to Professor Ethan Katz Ethan Katz](#), professor of history and Jewish studies, University of California at Berkeley: "The vast majority of Jews in many contexts, hearing that slogan, hear something that feels deeply threatening and offensive, and many, many Jews would characterize it as antisemitic," and a call for "the annihilation of Jews living between the river and the sea."

In a detailed analysis, Jarrod Tanny ([The Real Meaning of "From the River to the Sea"](#), *Jewish Journal*, June 16, 2021) asks: "So why adopt the slogan "Palestine will be free from the river to the sea"? Why not call for 'Israel-Palestine: two peoples one land'? The answer is simple. The social justice advocates fighting for 'Palestinian freedom' do not view these two peoples as equal. They consider Jews in Palestine to be unwelcome settlers, who, perhaps, will be allowed to remain in a liberated Palestine so long as they accept their position of inferiority. ... There will be no happy ending for the remaining Jewish people in a liberated Palestine, from the river to the sea, because unlike the Palestinians, they will not belong there."

5) Brief history of the phrase:

As documented by Tanny ([The Real Meaning of "From the River to the Sea"](#), *Jewish Journal*, June 16, 2021), many Palestinian leaders "have called for the violent elimination of Jews from our ancestral homeland with the waters of the Mediterranean as a final destination. In 1948, Sheikh Hassan el-Bana, head of the Moslem Brotherhood, stated that 'If the Jewish state becomes a fact, and this is realized by the Arab peoples, they will drive the Jews who live in their midst into the sea.'

The phrase [was adopted and emphasized in the early 1960s](#) by the nascent Palestinian nationalist movement, which developed into the Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O.), and understood as a call, particularly in Arabic and connoting the use of violence, for a return to the period before 1948 and the establishment of Israel. As shown in the examples in section 2 above, these words have been repeated by other Arab leaders who have attacked Israel, such Saddam Hussein (Iraq) and Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah).

As summarized in [major media platform summaries](#), “By 2012, it was clear that Hamas had claimed the slogan in its drive to claim land spanning Israel, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. ‘Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north,’ Khaled Mashaal, the group’s former leader, [said that year in a speech in Gaza](#) celebrating the 25th anniversary of the founding of Hamas. ‘There will be no concession on any inch of the land.’ The phrase also has roots in the [Hamas charter](#)....”

Appendix: Illustrative graphics demonstrating the links to elimination of Israel, incitement to terrorism and antisemitism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5sXjqjOL94&ab_channel=PierreRehov

FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA - A CALL FOR GENOCIDE

Oct 16, 2015

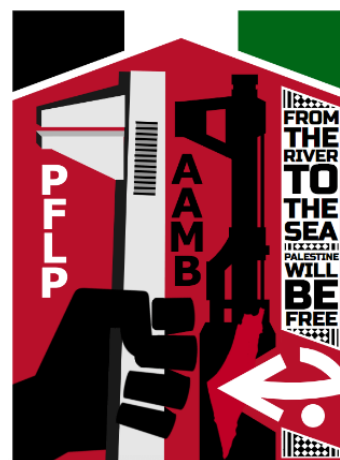
By Pierre Rehov. www.middleeaststudio.com

According to most Palestinians, “Israeli Occupation” means Tel Aviv, Ber Sheva and Haifa, and for their leaders, Palestine should be built “From the River to the Sea”. Meaning, should replace Israel, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.



PFLP - bottom right

<https://blogs.nvcc.edu/allibrary/2021/11/17/from-the-river-to-the-sea-palestine-will-be-free/>



https://www.reddit.com/r/leftistposters/comment/s/17x12t2/from_the_river_to_the_sea_pflp_aam_b/



[Downing Street condemns 'from river to the sea' projection on Big Ben, February 23, 2024, SKY UK NEWS](#)



<https://www.palestineposterproject.org/posters/river-intifada-street>

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Gerbang Tehran University dipasang spanduk "Di Tehran & New York, mahasiswa berkata: from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free"
Yel2 aksi demo mereka:
From Tehran to NYC
SJP or Basiji
From the River to the Sea
Palestine Will be Free
[@UnivOfTehran](#)



<https://www.aneews.com.tr/sport/2024/01/13/pro-palestine-protesters-pour-into-amsterdam-street-s-to-condemn-israeli-massacres-in-gaza-strip>

https://x.com/dina_sulaeman/status/1784713543604224253



stration, in Frankfurt, Germany, Friday, Nov. 3, 2023. The Jordan River is a winding, 200-plus-mile glittering Mediterranean to its west. But a phrase about the space-in-between, "from the river Jews and pro-Palestinian activists in the aftermath of Hamas' murderous rampage zza. (Boris Roessler/dpa via AP)

<https://apnews.com/article/river-sea-israel-gaza-amas-protests-d7abbd756f481fe50b6fa5c0b907cd49>



Demonstrators march in support of the Palestinian people on October 8, 2023, in New York City. (Adam Gray/Getty Images)

<https://www.foxnews.com/media/palestine-river-sea-means-extermination-israel-ex-counterterrorism-official-warns>