Pompeo plan to declare rights groups ‘anti-Semitic’ over Israel stance shelved

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<https://www.timesofisrael.com/pompeo-plan-to-declare-rights-groups-anti-semitic-over-israel-stance-shelved/>

An eleventh-hour initiative by the Trump administration to label as “anti-Semitic” international human rights groups deemed supportive of the BDS movement failed to materialize, a former US official confirmed on Monday.

The policy was announced by then-secretary of state Mike Pompeo during a visit to Israel less than two weeks after then-president Donald Trump was defeated by Joe Biden. The top US diplomat said he had directed his office’s special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, Elan Carr, to identify organizations that engage in or otherwise support, the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

According to [Politico](https://www.politico.com/news/2020/10/21/state-department-weighs-labeling-several-prominent-human-rights-groups-anti-semitic-430882), the policy was meant to target several prominent organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Oxfam, branding them “anti-Semitic” and ending American support for them.

But with just two months remaining in Trump’s presidency, Carr failed to submit the list directed by Pompeo in time. The special envoy, a Trump appointee, stepped down just before Biden took office.

In addition to the time crunch, the policy faced pushback from career diplomats in the State Department, who expressed serious concerns that it would limit free speech, a former US official said, confirming a Haaretz report.

The same aggressive policy is not expected to be pursued by the Biden administration.

At his confirmation hearing last week, secretary of state nominee Antony Blinken said he and Biden were “resolutely opposed” to BDS because it “unfairly and inappropriately singles out Israel and creates a double standard that we do not apply to other countries.”

“At the same time, I fully respect the first amendment rights of Americans to say what they believe,” he added, indicating that he would oppose measures backed by some prominent US Jewish groups to sanction those who boycott Israel.

Pompeo had [argued](https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-to-formally-declare-bds-anti-semitic-pompeo-says-announcing-crackdown/) that the policy would push back against what the Israeli government has long argued is an unfair bias against the Jewish state.

Last year, then-strategic affairs minister Gilad Erdan (now Israel’s ambassador to the US and the United Nations) threatened to [ban Amnesty International](https://www.timesofisrael.com/minister-threatens-to-ban-amnesty-over-settlement-tourism-report/) from Israel over a report that called on websites like Airbnb, Booking.com, Expedia and TripAdvisor to boycott listings in West Bank settlements

Amnesty accused the sites of profiting from “war crimes” by offering accommodation in settlements.

Also last year, [Israel expelled](https://www.timesofisrael.com/supreme-court-upholds-expulsion-of-human-rights-watch-local-director/) the local director of Human Rights Watch for allegedly supporting the BDS movement against Israel.

Israel has adopted a tough stance in recent years toward the BDS movement, which it says is aimed at delegitimizing its existence and wiping it off the map. The BDS movement says it is a nonviolent campaign for Palestinian rights and does not endorse a specific solution to the conflict.

Even before he announced his initiative, Pompeo drew criticism from several major Jewish organizations, such as the Anti Defamation League, which said it would politicize efforts to combat anti-Semitism.

“We strongly believe that these organizations are crucial to ensuring robust civil society and democratic protections worldwide,” the ADL said, while acknowledging there was “significant disagreement” between it and the three groups on Israel policy.

The ADL said calling the groups anti-Semitic “is neither accurate nor helpful to the fight against anti-Semitism.”