

Members of Meta's Oversight Board have criticized Israel over Gaza -- before deciding 'from the river to the sea' isn't hate speech

Thomas Barrabi

7–8 minutes

Several members of Meta's Oversight Board – which faced intense criticism after it determined the anti-Israel phrase “from the river to the sea” doesn't constitute hate speech – have espoused views critical of Israel's actions in Gaza.

The advisory board, which claims to be independent from Meta, determined that Facebook and Instagram [users can use the controversial slogan](#) – which has sprung up at anti-Israeli protests around the country – as long as it is not used in a way that glorifies Hamas or calls for violence.

Founded in 2020 with approval from Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg, the Oversight Board currently consists of 21 members who “come from a variety of cultural and professional backgrounds, speak more than 30 languages and are chosen to be reflective of the diverse users of Facebook, Instagram and Threads,” according to its website.

Yet past remarks by several members call into question their ability to remain impartial regarding the slogan, which refers to the idea of a

Palestinian state stretching across the land in between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea – the land currently controlled by Israel.

Its members include Tawakkol Karman, a Yemeni activist and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who declared in a speech last May at the Vatican that the “world is silent in front of the genocide and the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people in Gaza.” Israel denounced her [speech as “flagrantly anti-Semitic.”](#)



Critics say the slogan “from the river to the sea” fuels anti-semitism.

Jonah Elkowitz for NY Post

Alan Rusbridger, the former editor-in-chief of left-leaning UK news outlet The Guardian, penned [a column earlier this year arguing](#) that, while “real and vile antisemitism” does exist, the “horrors of 7 October most certainly did not happen in a vacuum.” He also weighed in on the debate over “from the river to the sea.”

“Some even thought the chant worthy of prosecution. Yet Netanyahu

recently pronounced that Israel “must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River” – thereby wiping out the idea of a state of Palestine. Is one sayable, and the other not?” Rusbridger wrote.



Meta’s Oversight Board has 21 members. oversightboard.com

Nighat Dad, the director of the Pakistan-based Digital Rights Foundation, [accused Facebook in a 2018 column](#) of caving to Israel by “silencing the voices of a historically victimized people for calling of what can rightfully be called an occupying state is confirmation of the influence that some governments have on Silicon Valley tech giants.”

Endy Bayuni, an Oversight Board member and senior editor at the

Jakarta Post, [penned a column last April that argued Indonesia](#) “should be seen championing an independent Palestinian state and full membership of the United Nations.”

The Oversight Board did not reveal which of its members had participated in the vote or a tally of how many had voted for and against the decision. The Post has reached out to the board for comment.

Other notable members of the board include former Denmark prime minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, former United Nations spokesperson Khaled Monsour and Mexico City-based human rights lawyer Pamela San Martín.

The board acknowledged that a minority of its members dissented to the decision and pointed out that the phrase “from the river to the sea” even appears in the Hamas terror group’s charter.



Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg is pictured. AP

“A minority of the Board finds that Meta should adopt a default rule

presuming the phrase constitutes glorification of a designated organization, unless there are clear signals the user does not endorse Hamas or the October 7 attacks,” the board’s statement on the ruling said.

Meanwhile, a majority of the board’s voters felt the phrase “has multiple meanings and is used by people in various ways and with different intentions.”

“Context is crucial,” said San Martín, who serves as co-chair of the board. “Simply removing political speech is not a solution. There needs to be room for debate, especially during times of crisis and conflict.”

The group said its decisions are “made by panels of five Members and approved by a majority vote of the full Board” and noted that the decisions “do not necessarily represent the views of all members.”

Of the 21 members named on the Oversight Board’s website, just one is an Israeli.

Emi Palmor is Jerusalem-born lawyer and former director-general of Israel’s Justice Ministry who was part of the team that negotiated with Hamas for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit following his notorious abduction in 2006. Her parents survived the Holocaust as children.






Emi Palmor is the lone Israeli on Meta's Oversight Board.

In a March 2021 [interview with Jewish Insider](#), Palmor said she had joined to Oversight Board in part to lend her “perspective as a Jew on issues of antisemitism or on issues of genocide.”

The Combat Antisemitism Movement, a watchdog advocacy group, called the Oversight Board's decision “absurd” and said it would fuel the spread of antisemitism online.

“‘From the River to the Sea’ is a slogan created with the sole vision of destroying the national homeland of the Jewish people,” CAM CEO Sacha Roytman said in a statement. “It is genocidal in intent and meaning, and is not a legitimate political or ideological vision, because it targets the one Jewish state and its inhabitants for destruction.”





Meta's Oversight Board said users can use the slogan as long as it is not used in a way that glorifies Hamas or calls for violence. REUTERS

In May, CAM submitted a white paper to Meta's Oversight Board outlining its position on why the slogan should be banned.

"It shows a conscious bias that some on the Meta Oversight Board use a twisted logic and verbal contortions to protect antisemites," added Roytman. "We sent them the history and context of the phrase and how it was invented and used solely as a call for genocide by those who have openly and proudly called for the murder of Jews everywhere."

"There is no amount of context or twisted logic that can excuse this outrage."

The World Jewish Congress said it was "profoundly disappointed" in the decision.

"The phrase 'From the River to the Sea,' part of the charter of the terror group Hamas, is a clear call for violence against Israelis and the Jewish world at large," the WJC said. "Jews around the globe have the absolute right to live freely as Jews, and Meta's decision does nothing to defuse explicit antisemitism. Words matter, especially in the aftermath of October 7."