Response To Common Inaccuracy: Arabs Cannot be Anti-Semitic

Inaccuracy: Arabs who hate Jews cannot be labeled “anti-Semitic” because they themselves are Semites.

Response
The term anti-Semitism was formulated to refer specifically to the hatred of Jews. The term has never been used to refer to hatred against Arabs. Claims to the contrary are an effort to diminish the term’s potency or to seize ownership of it.

The historical roots of the term “anti-Semitism” go back to the 19th century when it was invented and popularized by anti-Jewish German writers and intellectuals in the closing decades of the 19th century. The anthropology of that era gave the name “Semitic” – from the Hebrew “Shem,” one of Noah’s sons – to a family of languages that included Hebrew, Arabic, Assyrian and Phoenician; and labeled members of groups that spoke these languages as “Semitic.” Through the ministrations of late-century racial “science,” Semitic was increasingly used to designate Jews as a “race” with inborn biological attributes. The use of the term “anti-Semitism” to specifically denote opposition and antagonism to Jews was first suggested by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in his 1879 work The Victory of Judaism over Germanism, a best-seller that helped push “the Jewish question” to the center of German politics.

Quite simply, anti-Semitism refers to the hatred of Jews, whatever the nationality, race, color or creed of the perpetrator. Attempting to dismiss the term anti-
Semitism because of semantics does not erase the fact of its existence or its history.