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Mamdani, AOC denounce pro-Hamas chants outside Queens synagogue, with mayor using 'terrorist' label for first time

The progressive politicians drew criticism from pro-Palestinian activists over their statements.



Zohran Mamdani and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez grasp hands at an Oct. 26, 2025, rally on Mamdani's behalf in Forest Hills, Queens. (Neil Constantine/NurPhoto via Getty Images)

By Joseph Strauss January 12, 2026

New York City politicians, including progressives Mayor Zohran Mamdani and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, have widely condemned the pro-Palestinian protesters who chanted “We support Hamas here” outside a Queens synagogue last week.

In Mamdani’s case, his comments — which his critics said came especially late — marked the first time that he used the words “terrorist organization” to refer to Hamas, though he did not use the group’s name.

“As I said earlier today, chants in support of a terrorist organization have no place in our city,” Mamdani tweeted late Friday. “We will continue to ensure New Yorkers’ safety entering and exiting houses of worship as well as the constitutional right to protest.”

In initial comments not posted to social media, Mamdani had said, “The rhetoric and displays that we saw and heard in Kew Gardens Hills last night are wrong and have no place in our city.”

Other politicians had weighed in on social media sooner, including Gov. Kathy Hochul. Ocasio-Cortez, like Mamdani a critic of Israel, had denounced the protest as antisemitic.

“Hey so marching into a predominantly Jewish neighborhood and leading with a chant saying ‘we support Hamas’ is a disgusting and antisemitic thing to do,” she wrote on X on Friday, the day after the protest. “Pretty basic!”

The protest was widely viewed as a test for Mamdani, a staunch critic of Israel who had alarmed some Jewish leaders with his response to a November rally in which people seeking to attend an event about moving to Israel at a Manhattan synagogue had to pass close to demonstrators who were yelling insults at them. At the time, the mayor-elect reiterated his vow to keep all New Yorkers safe but added that “sacred spaces should not be used to promote activities in violation of international law.”

The group that organized that rally, PAL-Awda, was also behind the Thursday demonstration outside Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, which was hosting an event promoting real estate in Maale Adumim, a Jewish city in the West Bank.

While Mamdani called the protesters’ rhetoric “wrong,” the New York City mayor’s initial comments drew criticism from people — including his own supporters — who saw it as weaker than what other politicians wrote. Unlike Ocasio-Cortez and Brad Lander — Mamdani’s most prominent Jewish ally — he did not call the protest antisemitic or denounce the protesters.

“I am a vocal & passionate support [sic] of Mamdani’s,” wrote Adam Carlson, founder of polling group Zenith Research. “But I’ve waited patiently all day for him to forcefully condemn Hamas — watching dozens of other city & state electeds do so — and am still waiting. This is not only hurtful to me, but it’s bad politics & distracts from his agenda.”

His second statement, posted to X, appeared to refer to Hamas as a terrorist organization, allaying concerns of some of his critics. Mamdani, a longtime pro-Palestinian advocate, had drawn criticism for seeming to resist

condemning Hamas on the campaign trail, though he did denounce the group's Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel.

"Thank you!" wrote Yaacov Behrman, a Crown Heights activist who works as a PR liaison for the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. "The mayor did the right thing by calling Hamas a terrorist organization and making clear that this rhetoric is unacceptable."

On the other hand, some of Mamdani's supporters with staunchly pro-Palestinian views expressed displeasure with Mamdani's statement for criticizing only the protesters, and not the sale of land in the West Bank.

"ftr i don't expect an elected us politician to come out as pro hamas, but its clear that many people see the pro palestinian cause as at least discardable if they're going to make a fuss about THIS instead of the kahanist flags waving zionists or the illegal synagogue land sale!!" Hasan Piker, the progressive streamer and Mamdani supporter, posted on X.

Some of the pro-Israel counter-protesters shouted "We love ICE," a reference to the federal immigration enforcement agency that has been involved in the Trump administration's efforts to deport pro-Palestinian protesters, sometimes under the accusation that they are "Hamas sympathizers."

Ocasio-Cortez's comments also drew criticism, including from the Palestinian writer and activist Mohammed El-Kurd, who initially shared them by saying, "Shut the f-k up" and later likened the protesters to those who had demonstrated for women's right to vote.

"Protest, by definition, is supposed to ruffle feathers. It is supposed to be provocative and confrontational," he wrote. "That is how things change: you do not appease the status quo; you challenge it."

In a joint Instagram post, left-wing organizations Jewish Voice for Peace, IfNotNow and the American Council for Judaism criticized the general response to PAL-Awda's protest.

"When people protest against sales of stolen Palestinian land, elected officials and far too many Jewish institutions rush to decry the demonstrations," their post read. "But this outrage obscures the real questions: Why is Palestinian land being stolen and sold? And why is it sold inside our synagogues and temples?"

On Saturday, Mamdani was asked at an unrelated event why he didn't condemn the land sale in his statement, and responded, "I absolutely am in opposition to the sale of land in the occupied West Bank."

On Sunday, he denounced a fire at a synagogue in Jackson, Mississippi, as antisemitic. While a suspect has been arrested, authorities have not commented on his potential motivation.

"I'm horrified by this violent act of antisemitism in Jackson," Mamdani tweeted from his mayoral account. "As hatred rears its ugly head across our nation, it is incumbent upon each of us to reject it with the unity it fears, and to stand steadfast alongside our Jewish brothers and sisters."