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Behind Islamophobia Is a Global Movement of Anti-Semites

The global rise of white nationalist violence proves that the threat of fascism is not just about one community — it threatens all communities: white people, black people, Muslims, Jews, and beyond.

The spate of mass shootings at the end of July comes head on the heels of an escalating epidemic of U.S. gun violence. Since the beginning of the year, there have been at least 257 mass shootings, which have killed 9,080 people. This is nearly triple the number of people that died on 9/11, the terrorist attack which justified U.S.-led wars that have killed at least a million people.

Over the last decade, nearly three quarters of terrorist attacks on U.S. soil have been linked to domestic right-wing extremists, with just a quarter linked to Islamists. And in 2018, every terrorist murder in the U.S. was linked to the extreme right.

The ideology of extreme white nationalism is now a bigger U.S. national security threat, and a bigger cause of death, than Islamist terrorism or immigration. Yet millions of white Americans have been brainwashed into believing the exact opposite.

How could this happen?

There is an unmistakable line of transmission between the white supremacist views that helped inspire the California and El Paso attacks, burgeoning anti-Muslim hysteria around the world, and the traditional bedrock of anti-Semitic neo-Nazism that is normally

associated with the far-right. Yet this nexus between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism is little understood.

Digital tipping points into mass violence

The El Paso shooter, Patrick Crusius, posted his white nationalist manifesto online in the 8chan message board. The manifesto not only railed against the “Hispanic invasion of Texas,” it also praised the Christchurch mosque massacre. Since January, Trump’s re-election campaign has funded 2,199 Facebook ads characterizing immigration as an “invasion.” The ads were viewed by at least a million, and as many as 5.6 million, people. There is now compelling research suggesting a link between social media and spikes in racist violence. Last month a joint study by academics at Princeton University and the University of Warwick found “a clear pattern” in data correlating Trump’s tweets about Muslims with a higher frequency of anti-Muslim hashtags on Twitter, and increased actual hate crimes against Muslims.

The study found that the start of Trump’s presidential campaign preceded a shift in anti-Muslim sentiments on pro-Trump Twitter accounts and a rise in the rate of hate crimes. In more quantitative terms, a one standard deviation higher social media use was associated with a 38 percent larger increase in hate crimes against Muslims.

Trump has personally gone out of his way to amplify far-right anti-Muslim figures. Within the last few months, he has repeatedly retweeted racist British commentator Katie Hopkin, who has a long track record of denigrating blacks, Muslims, immigrants, and Jews.

Last month, Trump retweeted Hopkins multiple times, including her attacks on London’s Muslim Mayor Sadiq Khan over knife crime in the capital, her endorsement of crowds at a Trump rally shouting “send her back” in relation to a Muslim American Congresswoman, and a description of the majority black city of Baltimore as a “disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess” where “no human being would want to live.”

Trump’s engagement with Hopkins is revealing. Although he does not follow her, nor have her on any Twitter lists, he is consistently able to locate her choice racist tweets and amplify them — suggesting that far from merely being an accident of Trump’s personality, amplifying these tweets is a deliberate strategy of his White House communications team.

The shared ideology of global white nationalism

In one of these tweets, Hopkins openly endorsed the rise of extreme nationalist politicians around the world, including Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini, Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orban, and leader of the Polish Law and Justice party (PiS) Jaroslaw Kaczynski.

All four politicians have promoted divisive, xenophobic policies.

Bolsonaro has promised to “disappear” minorities that do not “bend to the majorities,” granted the police a “carte blanche to kill” criminal suspects, which potentially includes leftists and opposition forces, and described black activists as “animals” who should “go back to the zoo.”

Salvini has called for “ethnic” shops to be forced to close at 9pm because they are “managed by foreign citizens” that harbor “drunks and drug dealers” who “piss and shit” on the doorstep; and threatened to “bulldoze” the home of a woman he called a “dirty gypsy” on the eve of the Roma Holocaust Memorial Day, commemorating the murder of 3,000 Romani and Sinti people in Auschwitz gas chambers.

Orban has promoted the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that Jewish philanthropist George Soros is orchestrating the mass migration of millions of Muslims to Europe, accused the EU of having “secretly launched a programme to breed a Soros-like human race,” and declared that “we do not want our own color... to be mixed with those of others.”

Kaczynski has claimed that migrants from the Middle East could trigger “epidemics” in Europe as they carry “various parasites and protozoa, which don’t affect their organisms, but which would be dangerous here.” He has also been accused by Polish Jewish leaders of covering up and failing to address their concerns about growing hostility to minorities and Jews in the country, and his ruling party is closely aligned with neo-Nazi movements in Poland.

By amplifying Hopkins’ tweet about these politicians, Trump demonstrated his affinity with these emerging proto-fascist movements across Europe and South America, as part of a global far-right network with converging aims and a shared ideology.

The making of the ‘great replacement’ mythology

It is now widely recognized that at the core of this shared far-right ideology is the so-called “great replacement” theory, which posits that a genocide of white people is being achieved through their replacement by migrants, mostly from Muslim countries (or, in the United States, from Latin America).

The overlapping xenophobic agendas of these politicians illustrates how latent anti-Semitism remains a driving force in this global movement, which nevertheless masquerades under the guise of anti-migrant and anti-Muslim sentiment as a mechanism to achieve mainstream reach.

In short, the focus on a “Muslim invasion” through a combination of mass immigration and birth rates allowed far-right groups inspired by neo-Nazi ideas to rehabilitate themselves and conceal their traditional anti-Semitic roots.

It is no surprise then to see that many of the groups that have played the biggest role in spreading the core tenets of the “great replacement” mythology through the specter of a global Islamist conspiracy are simultaneously allied with longstanding white nationalist movements.

Among the most entrenched narratives that cross these different far-right groups is that Muslim citizens and civil society groups in the West represent “fronts” for the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamist group founded in Egypt in 1928.

Many of the same far-right think tanks which have promoted the white genocide thesis that has inspired recent terrorist attacks started off scapegoating Muslims as closet extremists attempting to takeover Western societies from within.

In the U.S., groups like the Gatestone Institute (formerly chaired by Trump’s current National Security Advisor John Bolton), Frank Gaffney’s Center for Security Policy, Robert Spencer’s JihadWatch, David Horowitz’s Freedom Center, Daniel Pipes’ Middle East Forum, Steve Emerson’s Investigative Project on Terrorism, and Raphael Shore’s Clarion Project have made it their business to accuse prominent Western Muslim civil society networks of being hotbeds of extremism conspiring to conquer the West by stealth.

“With the massive migration of Muslims to Europe, the Brotherhood — with its history, organization, cadre, clear ideology, and international connections — was in the perfect position to affect their thinking and compete for their leadership,” claimed a [Gatestone article](#) earlier this year. “The Muslim Brotherhood has, over the last decades, also successfully implanted itself in the United States,” the article continues, concluding that: “In fact, nearly all prominent Islamic organizations in the United States are rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood.”

One organization that has repeatedly come under fire from this sort of far-right propaganda is the International Institute for Islamic Thought (IIIT), the largest American Muslim philanthropic foundation, founded in 1981. Like many other ordinary American Muslim civil society groups, such as the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) or the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), IIIT is routinely portrayed as little more than a front for an Islamist conspiracy to infiltrate America and impose "Shariah Law."

Yet the "fake news" playbook used to build up this picture is revealing — a close inspection reveals that the claim is built-up entirely from innuendo, non-sequiturs, and false generalizations.

Widening the net

After 9/11, the U.S. government launched a major multi-agency investigation into terrorism financing across multiple agencies known as Operation Green Quest, focused on uncovering Muslim charities operating as "front organizations" for terrorists.

The problem was that U.S. government agencies like the Treasury Department, FBI, and many others had a nebulous and weak understanding of the Muslim world, often leading investigators to see connections and ties which were not there, and to read conspiratorial meaning into every association or relationship that might potentially link individuals or organizations to extremism — however tenuous.

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the net of suspicion was thrown over virtually the entire American Muslim community. IIIT was just one venerable organization that found itself caught up in Operation Green Quest's vast effort.

"All the major Muslim charities have had their assets frozen and raids have been conducted on homes and businesses around the country without any kind of accountability or redress," noted the ACLU. "Raids were mounted in scores of cities across the country, with special attention given to convenience stores. Once a business, charity or other body was 'flagged' as having some kind of connection to 'terrorism' — no matter how tenuous — the investigation would proceed entirely in secret, giving the organizations no opportunity to clear their names."

According to Michael Isikoff, reporting in Newsweek in late 2003, Operation Green Quest's "most highly publicized case — its raids on the offices of a large network of Islamic charities and foundations in northern Virginia in March 2002" resulted in no charges or prosecutions relating to terror financing. "Customs agents, armed with federal

search warrants, hauled away truckloads of documents and computer files. But so far the investigation, which created a ruckus within the American Muslim community, has yet to yield any criminal charges.”

Even in relation to a number of successful indictments, Isikoff noted that “it is still unclear whether these connect to the financing of terror groups or simply involve networks of Middle Eastern immigrants attempting to send money home to relatives.”

Eventually, Operation Green Quest did yield some results. But IIIT and its most senior founders and officers — such as Jamal al-Barzinji and Hisham al-Taib — having fully cooperated with U.S. investigators, were eventually exonerated completely when it became clear there was simply no meaningful evidence whatsoever they had ever organized or facilitated terrorist financing.

Much of the “evidence” cited by far-right groups implicating IIIT in a terrorist-Brotherhood conspiracy is based on cherry-picking documents that came to light from Operation Green Quest, including alleged Muslim Brotherhood documents as well as FBI files relating to inquiries at the time.

Yet innocent Muslims were regularly caught up in this sweeping process. A 2004 report by the U.S. government’s General Accounting Office pointed out that having provided a list of 30 suspected terrorists to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement identified from July to October 2003, the FBI went on to find that only “10 of the approximately 30 subjects had a confirmed nexus to terrorism or terrorist financing.”

Far-right penetration of the FBI

Indeed, part of the problem is that for years the FBI has suffered from institutional Islamophobia.

FBI training manuals obtained by Spencer Ackerman for Wired revealed that after 9/11 the agency was teaching its counterterrorism agents that “main stream” [sic] American Muslims are likely to be terrorist sympathizers; that the Prophet Mohammed was a “cult leader”; and that the Islamic practice of giving charity is no more than a “funding mechanism for combat.” And “combat” can include numerous techniques including “immigration” and “law suits”. Thus, a Muslim who immigrates to the U.S. or sues the FBI for harassment is seen as just another agent of the jihad.

One FBI training manual instructed its agents that Islam “transforms country’s [sic] culture into 7th century Arabian ways,” and that “It is characteristic of the Arab mind to be swayed more by words than ideas and more by ideas than facts.”

Most surprisingly, many FBI anti-Muslim briefings were inspired by the same nexus of far-right anti-Muslim bigots promoting conspiracy theories about the Muslim Brotherhood and, more recently, elements of the “great replacement” theory. For instance, among this FBI manual’s recommended reading materials are two books by Robert Spencer, whose JihadWatch website portrays IIIT and other American Muslim groups as terrorist-supporting Brotherhood fronts.

Many other FBI anti-Muslim briefings were drafted by intelligence analyst William Gawthrop, who had previously given an interview to WorldNetDaily (WND) blaming the Prophet “Muhammad’s mindset” as “a source for terrorism” and calling on counter-terrorism efforts to focus on getting Muslims to abandon the Qur’an. WND, of course, is a notorious extreme right website which has promoted numerous conspiracy theories such as the “birther” theory denying Barack Obama’s U.S. citizenship.

It is no surprise then to see that some FBI files used by these far-right groups to justify their claims wrongly painted IIIT’s founder as Muslim Brotherhood members, when this was simply never the case.

The Brotherhood did, of course, have its own agenda and as such was trying to insert its members into groups like IIIT and many other American Muslim networks. However, the very Brotherhood documents cited by far-right ideologues as “proof” of the alleged conspiracy actually confirm not only that the Brotherhood had no real control over IIIT and other American Muslim groups, but was increasingly losing whatever presence it once had among American Muslims.

Now, under Trump, Islamophobia inside the FBI is reportedly at record levels, and even Muslim special agents and intelligence analysts — sorely needed in the fight against Islamist terrorism — are being discriminated against and hounded at the agency purely due to their faith and ethnic backgrounds.

Suppressing American Islam

By defaming and denigrating organizations like IIIT, the far-right are ironically disempowering the very forces among Western Muslims that are on the frontlines of the fight against Islamist extremism.

Over the years, IIIT has harnessed research and education with the goal of improving Muslim societies and building the next generation of American Muslim leaders. This has included publishing ground-breaking theological work undermining the core narratives of Muslim extremists.

IIT's research has encompassed work on 'tajdid' and 'islah' covering the need for Islamic scholarship to continually renew and reform itself; developed the 'maqasid' approach to interpretations of Islamic law around questions of Islamic reform focusing on universal ethical principles and values; challenged extremist claims that apostates should be put to death and established an Islamic basis for freedom of religion and belief; pioneered new Islamic approaches to understanding 'jihad' which engage critically with the classical tradition while delegitimizing extremist interpretations that promote terror; demonstrated how Islam underpins "liberation and the equality of women" as fundamental; promoted Islamic grounds for Muslim minorities in the West to become integrated, active citizens that contribute to their host societies based on a "humanistic vision."

Yet the far-right would never know this body of work exists, because it is irrelevant to their goal of portraying Islam and Muslims as a civilizational threat to the West.

More insidious is that the narrative of "Muslim invasion," propped up by suppressing authentic visions of American Islam produced by the likes of IIT, is in reality not just about Muslims.

Rather the "Muslim invasion" narrative is central to the goal of legitimizing a broad, xenophobic agenda rooted in anti-Semitic movements historically aligned with neo-Nazism.

The alliance between Islamophobes and anti-Semites

That is why so many of the same groups promoting Islamophobic myths play a lead role in amplifying white nationalist concepts.

Bolton's Gatestone has published material claiming that white people could go extinct thanks to Muslim birth rates and mass migration; Clarion Project has featured far-right politicians like Geert Wilders insisting that Muslims should be deported en masse from Europe; Gaffney's Center for Security Policy has called for naturalized American Muslims who practice their faith to be deprived of their citizenship and deported.

Yet these groups frequently cultivate ties with anti-Semites. In 2016, I was commissioned to investigate the trans-Atlantic networks behind the rise of the far-right as a global movement by the London-based hate crime charity Tell Mama UK. Among the most shocking findings of our report, Return of the Reich: Mapping the Global Resurgence of Far Right Power, was that anti-Muslim groups were often rooted in political movements

that were traditionally anti-Semitic, and often worked closely in secret with active neo-Nazi movements.

I described this alarming phenomenon as a form of “reconstructed-Nazism,” “indicating that the core ideology [of the global far-right] embraces core Nazi principles, but embeds them in a range of cosmetic narrative adjustments which allow those principles to function subliminally in a new postwar, anti-Nazi, and post-9/11 global cosmopolitan context.”

Part of the strategy for this movement has been to brand itself precisely as fighting against “foreign invaders” who are themselves depicted as “Nazis” or “fascists,” thus cementing the movement’s self-portrayal as an “anti-Nazi” movement defending freedom and civilization. In this case, the specter of Muslims as tentacles of a near omnipresent Muslim Brotherhood conspiracy has functioned as an ideal bogeyman against which far-right groups can legitimize their existence, and distract from their own fundamentally fascist goals.

For instance, in 2017 Gatestone partnered with Rebel Media to produce a video series featuring racist bigots like Daniel Pipes and Geert Wilders. Yet Rebel Media is a far-right Canadian website with what reporter Eli Clifton describes as “a history of bigotry and anti-Semitism that once published a ‘satirical video’ titled ‘Ten Things I Hate About Jews.’”

Rebel Media has not only released materials defending Holocaust denial, its staffers have disturbing connections to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. The website has, for instance, hired former Trump advisor Sebastian Gorka, who was belatedly fired after being outed for ties with Hungarian Nazi collaborators.

Similarly, Gaffney’s Center for Security Policy has a long established partnership with the International Free Press Society in Denmark, an anti-Muslim coalition whose senior staff are affiliated with the neo-Nazi Belgian Vlaams Belang party. The party, described by Professor Etienne Vermeersch at the University of Ghent as racist “in the Nazi sense of the word,” was born out of the Flemish Legion — a German Waffen-SS division recruited from Flemish volunteers.

Vlaams Belang’s leader Filip Dewinter once admitted that the party’s rebranded focus on Muslims and migrants was entirely tactical. His party, in turn, sits within the Identity and Democracy Group in the European parliament (formerly Europe of Nations and Freedom), whose members include far-right parties accused of neo-Nazi sympathies,

including the Freedom Party of Austria, Poland's Congress of the New Right, and France's National Rally, which has been unable to shake off revelations about the pro-Nazi attitudes of several Marine Le Pen associates.

Both Gatestone and CSP have direct ties to the Trump administration. Their advancement of Islamophobic ideology has provided them ideal cover to not only sanitize "white genocide" and "great replacement" theory, but to conceal their anti-Semitic heritage and ongoing partnerships with neo-Nazi political parties in Europe.

The upshot of this is clear: Jews and Muslims cannot afford to be at loggerheads in the fight against fascism. Both communities are in the firing line of a global far-right agenda advanced by groups and political parties forged in the historic bowels of Nazism.

Whatever their political differences and disagreements, both communities need to forge bonds of solidarity in the struggle against racism. If they are to survive, our communities have no choice but to resist being distracted by efforts to divide us and turn us against each other, which is a deliberate far-right strategy to debilitate both Jewish and Muslim communities. Instead, we need to identify new lines of strategic cooperation to resist and disrupt a global far-right movement which threatens not only our communities, but the very foundations of our democracies.

This means that no matter what our political leanings might be, the struggles against Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are fundamentally about the same thing: protecting diverse, inclusive, and free societies.