

10-2020

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Recommended Citation

Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander; Clifford, Bennett; Vidino, Lorenzo; Program on Extremism, George Washington University; and National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center, "ANTISEMITISM AS AN UNDERLYING PRECURSOR TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN AMERICAN FAR-RIGHT AND ISLAMIST CONTEXTS" (2020). *Reports, Projects, and Research*. 10.
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Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



NCITE NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM,
INNOVATION, TECHNOLOGY,
AND EDUCATION CENTER

A U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

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Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Bennett Clifford, Lorenzo Vidino
October 2020

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The Program on Extremism at George Washington University provides analysis on issues related to violent and non-violent extremism. The Program spearheads innovative and thoughtful academic inquiry, producing empirical work that strengthens extremism research as a distinct field of study. The Program aims to develop pragmatic policy solutions that resonate with policymakers, civic leaders, and the general public. The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policies, either expressed or implied, of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security or George Washington University. This material is based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under Grant Award Number 20STTPC00001-01.

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Executive Summary

- Antisemitism is pervasive throughout several categories of American extremist movements, both violent and non-violent. American extremists incorporate antisemitic tropes and narratives in every level of their worldviews, using them to help construct “us/them” dichotomies and wide-sweeping conspiracies that are essential to their movements.
- During the past several decades, the American extremist movements that have been among the most violent—specifically, far-right and jihadist groups—have used antisemitism to target Jewish people, Jewish houses of worship, Jewish community institutions, and Americans supporting the Jewish state of Israel.
- Antisemitism, as a belief and world-structuring theory, can at times serve as a gateway issue for individuals into further radicalization to violent extremism. Non-violent and violent iterations of the same extremist milieus often share antisemitic views as central elements of their belief system, and thus antisemitism constitutes a linkage between activist and violent extremist segments of the same movement.
- Several case studies of violent American extremists, representing far-right and jihadist movements respectively, demonstrate that antisemitism can be an integral part of American extremists’ progression through the radicalization process and in justifying terrorist attacks.
- Based on this report’s finding that antisemitism is foundational to multiple violent extremist movements in the United States, counter-extremism practitioners and scholars may consider incorporating antisemitism as a diagnostic factor for extremist radicalization.
 - While there is no single profile of an American extremist, antisemitism has long been widespread among American extremist movements of multiple persuasions, acting as a least common denominator between extremist groups.
 - Antisemitic beliefs often serve as a key entry point for individuals to radicalize, join extremist groups, and progress into violent mobilization.
 - By using promotion of antisemitism as a factor in identifying key influencers and ideologues in extremist movements, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programming can isolate key nodes in extremist groups and debunk the narratives they promote without engaging in theological debates.
 - Studying the role of antisemitism in extremist groups can assist scholars in identifying common themes between different types of extremism, as well as between non-violent and violent strands of the same extremist movements. This can improve analysis on the broader relationships between and within extremist groups.

Introduction

Antisemitism is highly intertwined with extremist ideology in the United States. For several decades, a wide array of extremist groups in the United States—from violent Islamist extremists to neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and skinheads to far-left extremists—have each incorporated antisemitic ideology as components of their worldviews. Using Jews and the Jewish community in the United States as foils, perpetrators of these extremist ideologies construct identity formations for their followers that paint them in stark opposition to the “Jews” and their alleged interests. Inspired by these ideologies, supporters of these groups believe the only acceptable action is to target and attack Jews or the Jewish community in the United States. In the United States, no single extremist group can claim a monopoly on the perpetuation of antisemitic tropes and narratives or attacking the Jewish community.

While antisemitic hate speech is generally protected under the 1st Amendment, there is a growing international effort to define clearly what constitutes antisemitism. The Anti-Defamation League defines antisemitism as “belief or behavior hostile towards Jewish people just because they are Jewish.”¹ In 2016, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) — a consortium of 34 Western countries — unanimously adopted a definition for identifying antisemitism in public life. The IHRA definition delineates antisemitism as “a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”² The U.S. government under President Obama helped draft the IHRA definition. The United States Congress cited the IHRA definition in 2017 legislation on antisemitism passed by unanimous consent, and the State Department and Department of Education both use the IHRA definition and its examples as a basis for monitoring antisemitism.³

Despite the development of an international consensus on defining antisemitism, more work is needed in identifying the role antisemitism plays in extremism. Yet, counter-terrorism scholars and practitioners in Western Europe and the United Kingdom increasingly see antisemitism as a *sine qua non* of modern extremist groups, given the near-ubiquity and perpetual nature of antisemitism in extremist ideology and identity formation. In Europe, the 2019 annual report issued by Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (the country’s chief intelligence body) claims that antisemitism is “an important element of right-wing extremism across the spectrum,” as well as being an “ideological link” that “[connects] all Islamist extremist movements.”⁴ Europol’s Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) also assesses “hatred for Jews” and the belief in malevolent control by a “global elite, often perceived to be led by Jews” as two narratives shared by extreme left-wing, right-wing, and jihadist groups.⁵ Some comparative studies of extremist movements demonstrate a similar relationship between antisemitic narratives and extremist ideology, with Matthew Feldman dubbing antisemitism as a “long-standing shibboleth” of lone-actor terrorism in Europe.⁶

In the United States context, however, fewer assessments of this type exist. The Department of Homeland Security’s recently released “Homeland Threat Assessment”

noted a rise in white supremacist extremist activity, in particular that related to attacks on “ethnic minorities or Jewish persons in support of their belief that Caucasians are intellectually and morally superior to other races and/or their perception that the government is controlled by Jewish persons.”⁷ Yet, due to 1st Amendment concerns and structural differences in law enforcement and counterterrorism capacities, U.S. federal agencies are often more reluctant to tie terrorism to its ideological underpinnings.⁸ However, a review of notable incidents during the past three years—from deadly shootings in synagogues in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Poway, California, to a stabbing spree at a Hasidic rabbi’s house in Monsey, New York, to a plot to attack synagogues in the Toledo, Ohio area—shows that the dynamic of American extremists motivated by antisemitism remains just as pervasive.⁹ According to the FBI 2018 Hate Crimes statistics, Jews are the targets of the majority of hate crimes (56.9%) committed in the United States against any religious group.¹⁰ The 2019 Anti-Defamation League Audit of Antisemitic Incidents found the 2,107 domestic antisemitic incidents to be the highest level ever recorded.¹¹

This paper argues that adoption of antisemitic beliefs in the American context can be considered a potential indicator of adoption of extremism, either by a group or an individual. It does not claim that antisemitism is *inherent* to extremist ideologies, as there are multiple extremist groups that do not profess, or are not inexorably linked to antisemitism. Instead, the paper argues that the role of antisemitism and antisemitic ideology is *essential* to the American extremist groups that perpetrate it, to the point that if antisemitic discourse was removed from the group’s worldview that the makeup, goals, and strategies of the movement would be nearly unrecognizable. In the U.S. context, the extremist movements that arguably pose the largest risk for inspiring terrorist attacks—Salafi-jihadist and extreme right-wing groups—also happen to be the extremist groups that are most reliant on antisemitism as a cornerstone of their worldview. It should be noted that, in the United States, no single extremist group can claim a monopoly on the perpetuation of antisemitic tropes and narratives or attacking the Jewish community.

In the following sections, this paper will detail the ideological underpinnings of antisemitism for extremist movements in the United States and profile three individuals (from different extremist movements) who operationalized antisemitic narratives to plan and commit terrorist acts. In the first section, the types of antisemitic ideology delineated will follow one of two “strands” of antisemitism: essentialist and functionalist.¹² First elucidated by Werner Bergmann, the essentialist strand of antisemitism is hatred for Jews based on the idea that Jews are, by their nature, “an alien group living amongst other peoples and practicing different customs.”¹³ This form of antisemitism assumes that the “otherness” of Jews cannot change throughout time, place, and context. In contrast, functionalist antisemitism is “the internal, changing problems of the non-Jewish majority and the specific historical constellations in which the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish environment is played out.”¹⁴ This form of antisemitism places hatred for Jews in a specific socio-historical context.

The authors will also explore two primary functions of antisemitism for extremist groups’ ideology. Borrowing from J.M. Berger, who defines extremism as a “belief that an in-group’s success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against

the out-group,”¹⁵ extremist groups in the United States have historically relied on antisemitism to serve dual purposes. First, the otherization of Jewish people assists in in-group/out-group formation. This permits extremists of multiple persuasions to distinguish “us” from “them” and clearly identify the targets of hostile actions.

Otherization also creates the foundation for conspiracy theories that scapegoat Jews for historic and current grievances of the in-group. Broad, sweeping narratives about Jewish “control” of world governments, the media, society, the economic system, and other sociopolitical entities help extremist groups situate new recruits within a grand scheme of ideology and justify the legitimacy and scope of their struggles. When these two narratives are combined, the results are individual extremists who believe simultaneously that 1) the Jewish people are the enemies of their in-group of extremists, 2) their extremist group is the only entity that is carrying out “the righteous struggle” against Jews, and 3) that hostile action, including violence, is the only acceptable response to perceived grievances against the Jewish community. This cocktail of narratives is at the root of why multiple groupings of extremists in the United States have conducted violent attacks against the Jewish community.

While this report is focused on antisemitism in extremist thought and violence, it is important to note that it is a phenomenon which should not be viewed solely as a function of extremism. To do so would ignore its existence in wider Western history, thought, and culture. Indeed, like other components of extremism, antisemitism is an outcrop of long-held, and at times mainstream, ideas, fears and beliefs found in our past and present.

Antisemitism as a Connection Between Non-Violent Activism and Violent Extremism

Similar to other components of violent extremist thought, negative and conspiratorial views of Jews are commonplace across the spectrum of extremist activists, including non-violent iterations of both Islamist and far-right ideological currents. This is particularly relevant for counter extremism practitioners, as it may provide insight into their ongoing efforts to determine when individuals are beginning to show signs of moving from extremist ideas to violent action.

There are countless examples of non-violent extremists expressing ideas about Jews which differ little, if at all, from those held by their violent counterparts. In America, Islamist activists from groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood regularly identify Jews as a threat to Muslims and the wider world. One of the most notorious examples can be found in a publication of the Islamic Association of Palestine, an organization set up by Muslim Brotherhood activists in America. “America’s Greatest Enemy: The Jew and the Unholy Alliance,” is replete with popular antisemitic tropes shared by both Islamists and Jihadists, including references to a “super government” which runs the globe and is controlled by Jews, and “hidden” Jewish control of the mass media.¹⁶ In an

example of cross-pollination between extremist movements, the publication included the text of a 1978 speech by Austin App, a neo-Nazi regarded as the first American Holocaust denier, to the Congress of German American Clubs in Williamsburg, Virginia.¹⁷

A more recent example, from May 2019, comes from another Muslim Brotherhood inspired organization, the Muslim American Society (MAS), which was found to be organizing and hosting events in which young children were encouraged to repeat antisemitic slogans in Arabic, mostly in reference to the Israel-Palestine conflict.¹⁸ Videos showed children chanting “chop off their heads” and reading statements proclaiming that “we will defend the land of divine guidance with our bodies, and we will sacrifice our souls without hesitation. We will lead the army of Allah fulfilling his promise, and we will subject them to eternal torture.”¹⁹

Alongside Islamist activists, non-violent Salafi clerics in America also regularly preach hatred and mistrust of Jews. Pittsburgh-based Naeem Abdullah, for example, has recorded multiple sermons in which he discusses the present Jewish threat as one with deep historic roots, claiming that “The American Empire is often considered by many scholars to be *Pax Romana*, and a continuation of the Roman Empire. It's the same people, they just relocated the capital. Even if you look deeper, behind the scenes – Jews [are] running everything.”²⁰ The influential Minnesota-based Salafi imam Walid Idris al-Menesi has on at least one occasion publicly referred to Jews as “the descendants of apes and pigs,” a common Salafi refrain for Jews which helps bolster frames seeking to dehumanize them, and potentially make them easier targets for violence.²¹

Similarly, a range of far-right actors who officially condone violence express views about Jews that are identical to far-right terrorists. Perhaps the most successful purveyor of antisemitism within the American far right is the former head of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke. He has written and spoken extensively about his belief in Jewish control of American institutions, and most of his thoughts on the matter are collected in his 2002 book “Jewish Supremacism: My Awakening To the Jewish Question.” The book opens with a promise to examine the “long record of Jewish supremacist ideology and history that have had a powerful and damaging effect on both the Jewish and Gentile world.”²² The book also argues that Jews (which he refers to as Israelites in an attempt to avoid accusations of antisemitism) possess innate threatening characteristics as detailed in the Old Testament which “continue to thrive in the modern day.”²³ These include their belief that they “have a right to rule over all other people and are promised that they will someday own and rule over the whole world,” and that they “are commanded to murder all the people of the lands where they intend to live and to kill all the people of foreign nations that do not submit themselves in slavery.”²⁴

Other popular far-right thinkers have focused specifically on the desire of Jews to ethnically cleanse “indigenous” white populations in American and Europe. Kevin Macdonald, a former professor and longstanding figure in the white supremacist movement who is often cited as an inspiration for the so-called “alt-right”, is credited with putting forward the most detailed theories (often dressed up as social science)

about the supposed replacement of white Christians and their values and beliefs by Jews and immigrants. According to him,

Jews won the culture war without a shot being fired and without the losing side seeming to realize that it was a, war with real winners and real losers — where the losers have not only given up their cultural preeminence, but have failed to stand up to the ultimate denouement: demographic displacement from lands they had controlled for centuries.²⁵

Macdonald’s presentation of the nature of the Jewish threat in America has been cited as a direct inspiration for the main slogan of the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, VA, in which a collection of neo-Nazis and other White supremacists, including alt-right figurehead Richard Spencer chanted “the Jews will not replace us.”²⁶ The rally’s noxious mix of right-wing extremist groups, backed by the antisemitic ideological backing of non-violent extremists like Duke and Macdonald, contributed to the creation of a foundation for the escalation of violence. The rally culminated in the murder of a counter-protester, Heather Heyer, by a violent white supremacist.²⁷

The examples in the preceding paragraphs provide only a small sample of what is widespread antisemitic activity amongst extremist activists who, while publicly rejecting terrorism, continue to help popularize and disseminate central components of their ideology which are also known to inspire violent action. Indeed, the violence in Charlottesville is a useful example of the role of so-called non-violent extremists in creating atmospheres which are conducive to political violence. It did not take long for messages of suspicion and hate broadcast by far-right ideologues to lead to a murder. Even though many of the figures promoting antisemitism among the far-right publicly rejected the use of terrorist violence at Charlottesville, the narratives they promoted were essential to the escalation of violent extremism.

Historical Roots of Contemporary Antisemitism

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the two most prominent extremist movements in America which rely on antisemitism in their propaganda and activities are both to some degree influenced by their predecessors in the 19th and 20th centuries. Of course, this period represents only one aspect of the long history of antisemitism; nevertheless, it is a useful starting point for discussion. While Gervase Phillips stresses that contemporary antisemitism can be considered as a “manifestation of an ancient prejudice,”²⁸ our discussion shows that the precise narratives and canards that current extremist groups most frequently rely upon draw from the way that their immediate predecessors interpreted core historical antisemitic prejudices.

This section will focus on historical developments in two specific extremist movements—the jihadist movement and the extreme right-wing current— in terms of how antisemitism frames their outlook. However, this does not deny the reality that a much wider swathe of groups has utilized antisemitism to advance their political ends.

For instance, several far-left groups also have long histories of using antisemitism in propaganda, happy to exploit pre-existing anti-Jewish sentiment in wider society. From the Soviet Union to modern far-left political parties and movements, there has often been an obvious streak of antisemitism in their propaganda and activism.²⁹ Stalin, for example, famously helped to concoct and spread a conspiracy theory called the “Doctors’ Plot,” which claimed that Jewish doctors were engaged in a plot to assassinate Soviet officials.³⁰

More recently, antisemitic tropes about Jewish bankers creating an unfair and rigged economic system which targets the poor and disadvantaged have been shown to be adopted by a range of Western far-left activists. In late October 2020, for example, an independent investigation by the UK’s Equalities and Human Rights Commission into antisemitism in the UK Labour Party under its former leader Jeremy Corbyn found that there were “unlawful acts of harassment and discrimination for which the Labour Party is responsible,” and that there existed “a culture within the Party which, at best, did not do enough to prevent antisemitism and, at worst, could be seen to accept it.”³¹ Similarly, in the United States board members of the 2017 Women’s March in the United States stepped down after allegations that they defended antisemitic remarks by the leader of the Nation of Islam, Louis Farrakhan.³²

Unlike far-right or Islamist movements, however, the antisemitism of the far left can arguably be regarded more as a cynical exploitation of deep-rooted bigotry found in wider society along with a penchant for conspiratorial thinking rather than as an integral part of their ideology.³³ Thus, there is little evidence, for example, of far-left violence being directed or inspired by antisemitism, something which, as will be explored further down, cannot be said for jihadist or far-right attacks. Experts on contemporary antisemitism in America nonetheless point with concern to growing antisemitic rhetoric on certain university campuses, including from some virulent anti-Zionist movements, as contributing to the ‘mood music’ targeting Jews that can spur violent assaults.

Antisemitism in Europe in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

By the turn of the 20th century, cultural views of the Jewish people had solidified into both an essentialist view of Jews as having specific innate traits related to treachery and mischief, and wider conspiratorial view of Jews as retaining outsized power which they wielded for nefarious purposes. The first view was influenced to some extent by the lack of opportunities afforded to Jews in Europe, many of whom had to resort to underground work such as moneylending.³⁴ This contributed to the “Shylock” trope so commonly associated with antisemitic depictions of Jews, and to a general view of Jews as cheating and subversive outsiders.³⁵

Added to such cultural views and depictions of Jews were biological interpretations of Jews which furthered the notion that they were inherently threatening to wider society. With the emergence of the term “antisemitism” in the 1870s during a period when attacks against Jews were on the increase came a view that Jews were genetically separate from other European whites and that this, perhaps more than anything else, is what determined their behavior.³⁶ As Jews became increasingly viewed in such racial terms, previous Biblically-inspired prejudice became subsumed by a secular belief in a link between genetics and behavior. An early example of this development in the European approach to Jews can be found in *The Jew and the German State*, one of the better-known antisemitic publications of the time: “Seclusion and inbreeding over many thousand years strengthened the thorough domination of the race type and made the way of thought a part of it. Jewish blood and Jewish sentiment became inseparable and we have to conceive of Judaism not only as religion and congregation but also as the expression of racial peculiarity.”³⁷

The question of Jews as a race soon brought along with it chauvinist concerns about the preservation of superior White bloodlines. Fears of the mixing of the two came to define one of the main expressions of antisemitism in Europe and the United States. Prominent anti-Jewish figures such as those from within the Christian Identity movement began warning against “the mutation of the blood stream” leading to a “defection from God’s will.”³⁸ This supposed loss of white racial purity has also often been presented as a form of so-called “white genocide” intended to wipe out the White race through the mixing of bloodlines.

Alongside these racialized views of an essential Jewish character, the turn of the 20th century saw the development and establishment of the conspiratorial component of antisemitism. Perhaps the most important influence on this view was the 1903 publication of “The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion.”³⁹ Often referred to as a work of forgery, the document is better understood as an elaborate hoax which purports to contain proof of the Jewish conspiracy in the form minutes of a meeting of powerful Jews planning the downfall of civilization through the manipulation of the various levers of power in their control, including the economy and education. This work, more than any other, contributed to the cementing of the notion of Jews as parasites who exploited honest, hard-working white people for their own evil ends.

The presentation of the nature Jewish threat in the Protocols remains a crucial building block for a range of extremist conspiracy theories. One of the most prevalent of these among the extreme right is the ZOG (Zionist Occupational Government) conspiracy, developed by American Neo-Nazis who believe that Jews are in control of the U.S. government. This theory is also applied more broadly to suggest that the governments of all white-majority nations are run by a cabal of Jews bent on destroying the white race.⁴⁰

The ZOG worldview has long inspired a range of extremist thinkers who influence the modern violent right-wing, including James Mason who has provided inspiration and direction to violent groups like the Atomwaffen Division. His main collection of

writings, published under the same title of his 1980s newsletter “Siege,” premises the “white resistance” he calls for on the existence of ZOG:

At the quickest glance, any observer will see that we speak of the general anti-White drive afoot in every branch, at every level of "officialdom", and they will know what it is we are resistant to: ZOG... the Zionist Occupation Government. They will know that we do not alternate between established political parties because the System, the Establishment, controls them ALL.⁴¹

Online, the ZOG concept can today be observed as a common driving force behind popular memes portraying negatively stereotyped images of Jews which are frequently shared and used by a range of extremists interested in ideas related to global Jewish power and control. Most recently, these images and tropes have been adapted online to connect the “Jewish problem” with the global coronavirus pandemic.⁴² While there are a variety of variations to the theme, the claim is that Jews are in some way behind the current crisis. In some cases, they are presented as the secret creators and spreaders of the disease, while others claim that the virus is either harmless or a hoax which is being spread by Jews intent on using lockdowns and other anti-virus measures gain further control over (or in some cases destroy) the economy and further weaken white influence and power. Some even use imagery depicting Jews themselves are the virus, harking back to long-standing characterizations of Jews as a sort of vermin or disease blighting society.

European Influences on Islamist Antisemitism

The import of these European manifestations of antisemitism has deeply influenced views of Jews in the Muslim world and in particular amongst Islamists. Examples of antisemitism in Islamist discourse are not in short supply, and have been documented in detail elsewhere.⁴³ In general, however, what we see from Islamist groups is a view of Jews which combines Islamic scriptural antisemitism with European conspiratorial and racist antisemitism. Indeed, the latter is arguably the bigger influence of the two. One scholar, for example, has referred to the Protocols as “the most successful anti-Semitic import of all in the Muslim-Arab world.”⁴⁴

While many of the ideas were indeed supplanted in the Muslim world prior to the 1930s, the German scholar Matthias Kuntzel details a mutual antisemitic zeitgeist shared by both fascist parties in Europe and burgeoning Islamist parties in the Middle East.⁴⁵ While the Nazis engaged in their efforts to liquidate Europe’s Jewry, Islamist groups were motivated by clashes between Jewish settlers and Arabs in British Mandatory Palestine to take a stronger stance against Zionism. Indeed, the Nazis infamously collaborated with several proto-Islamist figures and groups in the Middle East.⁴⁶ Among them was the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by Hassan al-Banna in Egypt in the late 1920s, which operated publishing houses that were among the first in the Arab world to publish and distribute Arabic-language editions of several antisemitic tomes, including Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and the Protocols.⁴⁷

It is through this prism, for example, that many in the region viewed the establishment of Israel, a moment which still provides among the main sources of lament for Islamists of all shades. While Islamists certainly rely on the primary sources discussed above, this alone does not account for how they have characterized the threat to Muslims from Jews as one emanating from the wielding of global Jewish control and power. Indeed, along with his chauvinist interpretation of Islamic scripture, the creation of Israel in 1948 and the various conflicts in the region before and after are cited as a key source of Palestinian-born Abdullah Azzam's virulent antisemitism by his biographer, Thomas Hegghammer. As well as believing that Jews were the primordial enemies of Islam, Azzam, who is one of the first and also most influential jihadist scholars, would rely on the Protocols in his explanations for the struggles of the ummah and in particular the Afghan mujahideen of which he was a part.⁴⁸

Another key Islamist thinker, Syed Qutb, had a similar dislike of Jews rooted partly in Islamic scripture but also influenced by the events of 1948, and in his writing he often referred the dual threat of the "Crusaders" [Christians/the West] and "Zionists." Influenced, like many Islamists, by European political thought, in his essay "Our Struggle With the Jews," he uses language that appears much closer to Nazi thought than it does to Islamic scripture, with its characterization of Jews as subhuman "creatures" and possessing innate negative qualities:

Free the sensual desires from their restraints and they destroy the moral foundation on which the pure Creed rests, in order that the Creed should fall into the filth which they spread so widely on the earth. They mutilate the whole of history and falsify it...From such creatures who kill, massacre and defame prophets one can only expect the spilling of human blood and dirty means which would further their machinations and evil.⁴⁹

Shortly after publishing this essay, Qutb formally joined the Muslim Brotherhood and became one of the movement's most influential thinkers. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, his books were prominently promoted by American Islamists in their publications, bookstores, and convention booths.⁵⁰

Qutb's brother Muhammad in turn mentored a young Osama bin Laden.⁵¹ Muhammad Qutb repeatedly argued that Western society was controlled by Jews and inherently at war with Islam.⁵² Inspired by the Qutb brothers, Osama bin Laden's (and, later, the wider jihadist movement's) preferred term for the threat facing the ummah is the "Zionist-Crusader alliance," and another useful example of a European, and specifically Nazi, influence on jihadist antisemitism is found in his October 2002 "Letter to America." Addressing the American people directly, bin Laden attempts to explain why his organization targeted them on 9/11. Buried in his exhaustive list of American crimes is the following accusation:

You are the nation that permits Usury, which has been forbidden by all the religions. Yet you build your economy and investments on Usury. As a result of this, in all its different forms and guises, the Jews have taken control of your economy, through which they have then taken control of your media, and now control all aspects of your life making you their servants and achieving their aims at your expense; precisely what Benjamin Franklin warned you against.⁵³

Of particular interest here is bin Laden’s claim that American founding father Benjamin Franklin had at one time warned the nation of the potential threat posed by Jewish control of the country. This is based on a fabricated claim by an American Nazi sympathizer named William Dudley Pelley, who in the 1930s purported to have found reports from the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia which proved Benjamin Franklin, who was in attendance, made a series of claims about Jewish control in America. Among them was his apparent belief that Jews funded the civil war in order to prevent American from becoming financially independent and thus less reliant on Jewish money, and his desire to place them in concentration camps.⁵⁴ It is hard to imagine where bin Laden found this claim other than in American Nazi propaganda.

Case Studies: Extremist “Fringe Fluidity” and Antisemitism

A litany of case studies from the United States demonstrate that antisemitism is one of the central ideologies that drives American violent extremists of multiple persuasions. Across the spectrum, from jihadists to left-wing extremists to neo-Nazis and white supremacists, American violent extremists adopt the tropes of historical, religious, and ideological antisemitism to justify participation in terrorist groups. Many of these extremists, who view planning and carrying out terrorist attacks as essential to participation in their violent extremist movement and are inspired by antisemitism, choose to attack the Jewish community in the United States.

The following case studies are one of dozens that reflect the importance and ubiquity of antisemitism on violent extremist activity in the United States. They explain how antisemitic tropes and narratives fit into the worldview of three individuals who operationalized antisemitism to participate in violent extremist groups. The three individuals profiled below—Robert Bowers, Damon Joseph and Nicholas Young—can be situated at three separate points on a spectrum of extremist behavior. Bowers, a white supremacist, Joseph, a jihadist ISIS supporter, and Nicholas Young, a longtime neo-Nazi who believed in a convergence between the neo-Nazi and jihadist movement, had radically different extremist ideologies from one another. Yet, central to all three of their belief systems was the premise that their ideological movement was engaged in a zero-sum struggle against the Jewish people or Jewish interests; that Jews had collective responsibility for previous “misdeeds;” and that Jewish people should be killed or exterminated.

This finding from the case studies substantiates the possibility of treating antisemitism as a potential indicator of radicalization to extremism. In each of the three following cases, hatred of Jews was the entry point into the extremist movement that they participated in. The adoption of antisemitic narratives and tropes was reported to be one of the first signs of radicalization in each case. Bowers was, in many regards, a run-of-the-mill American conservative until he began ensconcing himself in an antisemitic online network on the

social media platform Gab.⁵⁵ Indeed, the fact that extremist groups propagate virulent antisemitism is often one of the pull factors that draw individuals who are already inclined towards antisemitism. Damon Joseph, for instance, claimed that he “always hated Jews” prior to his participation in the jihadist movement.⁵⁶

In other cases, antisemitism can function as an ideological “bridge” for an extremist between two separate extremist movements. Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Madeleine Blackman refer to this function as “fringe fluidity,” and use it to describe a two-way pathway between adherents of the neo-Nazi and jihadist movements.⁵⁷ Describing fringe fluidity as a “pipeline,” Gartenstein-Ross and Blackman assess that the cross-over appeal between two diametrically opposed movements has a “ideological basis, including the fact that both extremist ideologies share a common set of enemies in the Jewish people.”⁵⁸ This factor is apparent in the case of Nicholas Young, who attempted to reconcile his neo-Nazi beliefs within the confines of the jihadist movement.

Robert Bowers

On October 27, 2018, Baldwin, PA resident Robert Bowers conducted the deadliest attack on a Jewish house of worship in the United States when he stormed the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh during Shabbat services, killing eleven and wounding six.⁵⁹ During the commission of the shooting, Bowers allegedly made statements inside the synagogue that he was conducting the attack “to kill Jews” and announced that “all Jews must die.”⁶⁰ In the days following the attack, which resulted in Bowers’ arrest, investigators uncovered the attacker’s extensive social media presence which detailed his intense antisemitic motivation for committing the attack. Federal prosecutors charged Bowers with 63 separate crimes, some of which carry the death penalty if convicted.⁶¹

Bowers’ social media presence, much of which was on the Twitter alternative platform Gab, is indicative of some of the major antisemitic conspiracy theories that are prevalent in extremist right-wing circles. Three antisemitic narratives that had particularly noticeable impacts on Bowers’ worldview. First, Bowers used his Gab account constantly to promote material from the Christian Identity movement, which believes that white Europeans are the “chosen people” referenced in the Bible and—in Bowers’ words—today’s Jews are the “children of Satan.”⁶² Indeed, this allegation appeared as the “tagline” to Bowers’ Gab profile, which read “Jews are the children of satan. (john 8:44) --the lord jesus christ is come in the flesh.”⁶³ Next to the tagline, Bowers’ profile photo included the numbers “14:88,” the “14” referring to the 14 Words, a white supremacist slogan, and the “88” a code for “Heil Hitler” (H is the 8th letter of the alphabet, hence HH).⁶⁴

In addition to the influence of Christian Identity ideology on Bowers’ motive for the Tree of Life shooting, evidence from his Gab profile demonstrates that Bowers believed in the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Jews had taken over the United States government.⁶⁵ Tailoring the message to the Trump Administration, Bowers peddled an idea popular amongst American right-wing extremists that despite some perceiving overtures to the community from Trump, he remained beholden to Jewish interests. “Trump is a globalist,

not a nationalist,” Bowers wrote on Gab, “There is no #MAGA as long as there is a kike infestation.”⁶⁶ Parodying Martin Niemöller’s famous poem about the Holocaust, Bowers used Trump-era federal prosecutions of other white supremacists and neo-Nazis as proof that the administration remained in control of the Jews:

“First Trump came for the Charlottesville 4 but I kept supporting Trump because he is better than Hillary Clinton. The Trump came for RAM but I kept supporting Trump because he is better than Hillary Clinton. Then Trump came for the Proud Boys but I kept supporting Trump because he is better than Hillary Clinton. Then Trump came for me and the was no one left to support...”⁶⁷

Combining elements of these two narratives, the most formative antisemitic trope that radicalized Robert Bowers was the theory of the “Great Replacement.” Bowers believed that Jews in the United States were orchestrating a plot to bring in non-white immigrants into the country, in effect overwhelming the white European population with non-white masses.⁶⁸ Bowers embedded himself in a network of virulently anti-immigrant voices online, many of whom promoted ideas like the “white genocide” or the “Great Replacement.” Among the more infamous purveyors of hate with whom Bowers interacted were the white nationalist Bradley Dean Griffin, who operated a website called “Antisemitica” that argued that “Jewish influence (in the aggregate) is a menace to the racial and cultural health of American society, and that White Americans would be better off without a Jewish presence within our borders,” Daniel McMahon (a.k.a Jack Corbin), who pleaded guilty in April 2020 to making racially motivated threats against a local candidate in a Virginia election, and failed California Congressional candidate Patrick Little, who told *Newsweek* that he believed Adolf Hitler was “the second coming of Christ.”⁶⁹

Understanding Bowers’ core belief in the Great Replacement theory is critical to explaining his radicalization and decision to commit the attack on the Tree of Life synagogue. A month before the shooting, Bowers’ Gab posts turned increasingly antisemitic, violent, and targeted. His posts included “denials of the Holocaust and conspiracy theories about Jews destroying the planet and secretly supporting the migrant caravan heading toward the U.S. border.”⁷⁰ He threatened Jews using incendiary slurs:

“just want to put this psa out there for all the vile degenerate oven dodgers. The goyim know. This is becoming increasingly obvious. Eventually it will not be safe here for you and you will be unable to leave. It takes time to convert your stuff to shekels and flee. Time is critical. That is all.”⁷¹

He began to focus on a particular refugee aid organization, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). “Why hello there HIAS! You like to bring in hostile invaders to dwell among us? We appreciate the list of friends you have provided,” Bowers posted on Gab the Friday before his attack on the Tree of Life synagogue, alongside a URL link to HIAS’ “National Refugee Shabbat” fundraiser events.⁷² These events, which would support the Jewish nonprofit to fund refugee resettlement efforts, were scheduled to be held in synagogues throughout the country, including in Pittsburgh. Two hours before the shooting on Saturday, October 27, Bowers issued another threat to HIAS on Gab. “HIAS

likes to bring invaders in that kill our people. I can't sit by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I'm going in.”⁷³

Bowers' social media posts prior to the attack show a deep belief in antisemitic conspiracy theories that are pervasive in extremist online circles. These include elements of religious Christian Identity doctrine, the theory of Jewish takeover/control of the United States government, and the “Great Replacement” theory, which posits a Jewish plot to commit “ethnic cleansing” against people of white European descent in the United States through organizing mass immigration. The combination of these ideologies, which share a common thread of antisemitism, radicalized Bowers and gave him the motivation to conduct one of the most lethal terrorist attacks on U.S. soil in the past five years.

Damon Joseph (a.k.a. Abdullah Ali Yusuf)

In December 2018, 21-year-old Holland, Ohio man Damon Joseph was indicted by a federal court in the Northern District of Ohio for attempting to provide material support to ISIS, attempting to commit a hate crime, and possession of firearms in furtherance of a crime of violence.⁷⁴ Joseph, a security guard for a local private contractor, allegedly planned an attack on a Toledo, Ohio-area synagogue on behalf of the jihadist group. A recent convert to Islam, Joseph communicated with an undercover FBI agent and reportedly planned his “operation” on behalf of ISIS in the direct wake of the Tree of Life shooting in Pittsburgh.⁷⁵

Acting Special Agent in Charge of the FBI Cleveland Office Jeff Fortunato described Joseph's pathway to radicalization and jihadist extremism as “a matter of months” where “Damon Joseph progressed from radicalized, virtual jihadist to attack planner.”⁷⁶ Joseph first came to the attention of the FBI through his social media presence in May 2018, when he shared ISIS propaganda and posted several pictures of knives and guns on one of his social media accounts.⁷⁷ An FBI undercover agent posing as an ISIS supporter contacted Joseph and after confirming with Joseph that he was a recent convert to Islam, began a conversation with him about his support for ISIS. Throughout the two-month planning process for his attack, Joseph frequently expressed antisemitic viewpoints and described their centrality in his ideological worldview.

Damon Joseph professed to being an anti-Semite prior to his conversion to Islam. “Jews are jews none are innocent...They support israel, then theyre enemies in my book,” Joseph messaged the FBI undercover agent on October 30, 2018. “I absolutely despise jews always have even before being Muslim.”⁷⁸ In this case, Joseph's antisemitism seems to have carried over from prior to his conversion to Islam, and following his conversion, was one of the primary motivating factors driving him towards an extremist interpretation of the religion. Using rudimentary religious justifications, Joseph couched his plans for participating in ISIS' attempt to reestablish the caliphate within explicitly antisemitic doctrine propagated by the group. “My opinion is the Jews are evil and they get what's coming to them,” Joseph explained, “I don't feel bad at all considering what they're doing in Palestine. They're the same as the shia in my eyes. All dogs.”⁷⁹

The Tree of Life shooting, despite being inspired by extreme right-wing as opposed to jihadist ideology, catalyzed Joseph to plan his own attack on a Jewish house of worship. Referring to the shooter, Robert Bowers, Joseph said that he “[admired] what the guy did with the shooting actually... I can see myself carrying out this type of operation.”⁸⁰ The effect of the Tree of Life shooting pushed Joseph, who previously saw himself as primarily aiding ISIS’ cause through the “virtual jihad” of spreading propaganda, into the “physical jihad” of planning attacks for ISIS.⁸¹ In the very beginning of the planning stage, Joseph already had a target in mind for an ISIS-inspired attack on U.S. soil:

“For starters [sic], we would pick a synagogue or place jews gather, scope it out, find all exits and entrances, times people will be there, police presence of the area, i have a police scanner so i would be able to hear when they would be responding, we would coordinate it by splitting up to ensure the most casualties possible. Then escape in a vehicle before police arrive. And if they got there fast, then fight it out...I am no coward. I wouldnt want to die any other way except a martyr...Thats just my thoughts as of now.”⁸²

In November 2018, Joseph allegedly distributed a manifesto online that outlined his operational plan for a martyrdom attack on a synagogue. The manifesto claimed that the “desired targets” of the attack were “Jews who support state of israel,” and listed the tactical steps for a lone gunman to attack a synagogue.⁸³ Joseph noted to an FBI undercover agent that there were two synagogues in the Toledo area: the Conservative Congregation B’nai Israel and the Reform Temple Shomer Emunim.⁸⁴ While he claimed to be interested in attacking both synagogues, he told the undercover that he chose his target based on “which one will have most people, what time and what day. Go big or go home.”⁸⁵ Days before the planned attack, Joseph met with an FBI undercover agent and gave him the address of a synagogue in Toledo, telling him that he did research to determine that attacking the synagogue on Saturday morning would yield the most casualties, as Jews would be attending services for the Sabbath. Joseph additionally noted his intent to kill a rabbi.⁸⁶ If carried out as planned, Joseph’s attack would have coincided with a Hannukah celebration at the synagogue.⁸⁷

On December 7, 2018, the FBI arrested Damon Joseph after he purchased inoperable AR-15 assault rifles from an undercover agent.⁸⁸ U.S. Attorney Justin E. Herdman, during a press conference after Joseph’s arrest, said that the charges against Joseph described “a calculated man fueled by an ideology of hatred and intent on killing innocent people.”⁸⁹ The Jewish Foundation of Metropolitan Detroit, in response to the arrest, sent a news release that argued that “this incident, coming on the heels of the terrible massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, is a stark reminder of the virulence and danger of antisemitism in our society. It also reaffirms the critical need for vigilant and ongoing security.”⁹⁰ In February 2019, Damon Joseph pleaded not guilty to all charges against him.⁹¹

Robert Bowers and Damon Joseph instrumentalized antisemitism for the benefit of two disparate violent extremist movements—Bowers in furtherance of the violent white supremacist movement and Joseph for ISIS and its jihadist ideology. Despite their differing motives, the two violent extremists converged on plots targeting Jewish religious institutions, and Joseph was inspired to act on behalf of his own movement by Bowers’ attack. Like Bowers, antisemitic narratives were the core driving factor behind Joseph’s

planned attack on a synagogue, although this time they reflected a jihadist outlook. The conversations between Joseph and FBI undercover agents show Joseph's belief in divine retribution against Jews by jihadists for perceived Israeli injustices in the Palestinian territories, Jewish collective responsibility, and the need to attack Jews because of their disbelief.

Nicholas Young

A transit police officer in the metropolitan Washington, DC area at the time of his arrest, 36-year-old Nicholas Young traversed the spectrum from openly participating in neo-Nazi groups to being convicted for attempting to provide material support to ISIS.⁹² Even during his time as a supporter of jihadist groups, Young continued to be inspired a seemingly bizarre mélange of far-right and jihadist ideologies that sought to hybridize the two types of extremism into a single justification for violence. The undercurrent of Young's dual-track extremist beliefs—on both the white supremacist and jihadist sides—was virulent antisemitism.

Evidence presented during Young's 2017 federal trial highlights Young's core belief that a grand rapprochement between white supremacists and jihadists was critical. A friend testified that Young became interested in Islam in the early 2000s while he was still active in the neo-Nazi movement, and once told him after a Nazi rally to seek "an alliance with Muslims to combat the Jews."⁹³ Even after his conversion to Islam, Young retained his tattoo of the insignia of the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen," and his car had a license plate referencing the Nazi volunteer military corps and a bumper sticker promoting "boycott[ing] the terrorist state of Israel."⁹⁴ He possessed several knives and other weapons with Nazi insignia on them.⁹⁵ The FBI found several images of Young in Nazi dress, alongside several cartoons and images glorifying the Holocaust and depicting Jews as pigs with hook noses.⁹⁶

The most intriguing evidence against Young during his trial was found by the FBI on a hard drive at his residence, containing dozens of pictures and documents that help explain Young's belief in a convergence between jihadist and far-right extremism.⁹⁷ In one document, Young handwrites a prayer for his friends, family, and for several deceased historical figures, including "Hitler, Skorzeny, Hajj Amin al-Hussaini, Mussolini, Saddam Husein, Prophet Muhamed, John the Baptist & all the Companions."⁹⁸ Several individuals in this list illuminate Young's antisemitism as the central element in his neo-Nazi and jihadist beliefs. "Skorzeny" is a reference to the Nazi lieutenant colonel Otto Skorzeny. Skorzeny was a commander on the Eastern Front for the Nazis during World War II and a decorated military officer.⁹⁹ Following Germany's surrender, Skorzeny was arrested and detained for his participation in war crimes, but escaped in 1948 and fled to Egypt. In Egypt, Skorzeny became a military advisor to President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and helped to train Palestinian commando units for raids on Israel.¹⁰⁰ Young's writings reference that one infamous trainee of Skorzeny's was Yasser Arafat, who later became the head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).¹⁰¹

Young's picture collection on his hard drive contained several images of Hajj Mohammed Amin al-Hussaini, the Mufti of Jerusalem during the Second World War.¹⁰² As a historical figure, al-Hussaini is highly significant to those who believe in a symbiotic relationship between far-right and jihadist extremists. Al-Hussaini fled Jerusalem after the nationalist revolt by Palestinians against the British Mandate in Palestine in 1937 and collaborated with both the Nazi regime in Germany and the fascist regime of Mussolini in Italy.¹⁰³ After the British Mandate government elected to split Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, al-Hussaini became an outward supporter of the Third Reich, viewing the Nazi government as an indispensable ally in the fight against the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.¹⁰⁴

After his departure from Mandatory Palestine, al-Hussaini operated out of Baghdad and helped in the planning of a coup against the Iraqi government, backed by the Nazis. During the commission of this plot in 1939, al-Hussaini proclaimed "a jihad against Britain and the Jews."¹⁰⁵ The coup was crushed, and al-Hussaini fled again, this time to Berlin. He quickly became a key propaganda voice in the Arab world for the Nazi regime. The Mufti made radio broadcasts in Arabic that were broadcast across the Middle East, in which he "stressed the ideological affinities between German National Socialism and Islam," and "urged Muslims to 'kill the Jews wherever you find them. This pleases God.'"¹⁰⁶ Al-Hussaini was instrumental in recruiting the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar, an all-volunteer force in Yugoslavia made up mostly of Bosnian Muslims.¹⁰⁷ To this brigade, he issued a treatise entitled "Islam and the Jews," urging the division to participate in the Holocaust.¹⁰⁸ Nicholas Young had several images of this volunteer force on his hard drive.¹⁰⁹

Following Young's conversion to Islam, he quickly immersed himself in a prominent Islamist network in Northern Virginia. His contacts testified at his trial that his friend group included Zachary Chesser, convicted in 2011 for attempting to provide material support to the Somali jihadist group al-Shabaab, Farouque Ahmed, convicted the same year for planning jihadist attacks on DC subway stations, and Amine el-Khalifi, who pleaded guilty in 2012 to attempting to commit a suicide bombing at the U.S. Capitol Building.¹¹⁰ Young himself traveled to Libya to fight alongside anti-Muammar Gadhafi revolutionaries in 2011; he claimed to have joined the al-Qaeda-linked Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade.¹¹¹

In 2014, Young received information that one of his contacts, whom he believed to be an ISIS supporter, had traveled to Syria to join the terrorist organization. Using a Gmail account that he created (for which the password was Hitler's birthday), he contacted the individual, who unbeknownst to Young was in reality an FBI confidential human source.¹¹² The FBI interviewed Young about the interaction on several occasions in 2015, but Young attempted to cover the tracks by telling the investigators that his contact was simply on vacation in Turkey. In 2016 Young "purchas[ed] and sen[t] gift card codes that he believed would allow ISIS recruiters to securely communicate with potential ISIS recruits."¹¹³ The FBI arrested Young in August 2016, less than a month after the transaction. A federal jury convicted Young of attempting to provide material support to ISIS and obstruction of justice, and in 2018 he was sentenced to 15 years in federal prison.¹¹⁴

Nicholas Young's apparently oxymoronic, simultaneous belief in the tenets of neo-Nazism and jihadism stemmed from the central theses of antisemitism. The belief in the Jews as a perpetual enemy for Young shaped his idea that the two extremist groups could act in symbiosis to exterminate the Jewish people. Without the central place of antisemitism, it would be impossible for this combination of ideologies to exist simultaneously. Therefore, Young's case shows a clear example of the role of antisemitism as a least common denominator amongst a variety of seemingly-opposed violent extremist movements.

Conclusion and Analysis

The role of antisemitism on the process of violent radicalization is clearly visible in the three cases described above, as it is in many more besides. Perhaps most importantly, it provides a clear-cut and straightforward explanation or *diagnosis* of the problems and perceived suffering of the in-group in question. Antisemitism also helps to *dehumanize* possible targets of violence, a process often seen as a key component of mass violence against a specific group.

Due to the immense variety of demographic variables, life experiences, pathways to extremism, and ideological backgrounds that make up the radicalization process in the United States, there is no single profile of an American violent extremist. A constant concern amongst law enforcement and intelligence agencies in the United States is that it is nearly impossible to determine indicators of an individual's violent radicalization. Currently, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and Department of Homeland Security (DOJ) annually release a guide for law enforcement that contains "mobilization indicators" — signs that an individual who is *already radicalized* is about to conduct an attack.¹¹⁵ This document notes that "dehumanizing people who are not in the identity group (e.g. non-believers, followers of other religions or ideologies...)" is construed as a "long-term" indicator of violent extremist mobilization.¹¹⁶ However, as this document addresses indicators of mobilization to attack, not radicalization, it treats this variable as "minimally diagnostic," and is insufficient on its own to assess that an individual is mobilizing to violence.¹¹⁷

It may be the case that antisemitism is minimally diagnostic to determine that an individual violent extremist is about to conduct an attack. But, as the previous sections detail, belief in and/or promulgation of antisemitic tropes and narratives is a pervasive pathway into an array of American violent extremist groups throughout various categories of analysis, times, and context. Therefore, those tasked with countering violent extremism should consider treating antisemitism as a potential indicator of violent extremism. As the cases of American extremists profiled in the previous sections detail, antisemitism can often be a gateway issue into increasingly violent forms of extremism. Once an individual is locked into the sweeping conspiracy theories, us/them world construction, and presentation of Jews as the "other," the foundation is set for the adoption of other tenets of the extremist ideology in question.

Treating antisemitism as a predicate for violent extremism in CVE program development could entail several benefits for the United States' efforts to counter extremism. First, by understanding least common denominators amongst several extremist movements like antisemitism, researchers and practitioners can identify the roots of how these movements function and form their ideology. Antisemitic narratives demonstrate that different extremist groups can use the same narratives about the Jewish people, integrate them within their broader ideological structure, and create versions of the narrative that fit within the confines of the structure.

CVE practitioners, in particular those both within and outside of government who work on creating counter- or alternative messages, may find that debunking antisemitism is a more straightforward endeavor than becoming embroiled in, for example, theological arguments about which interpretation of Islam is the more legitimate. A new effort to deconstruct antisemitism may also be the first step in helping to unravel an extremist's closely-held world view, which much of the time is bound together by the tropes that underpin hatred and distrust of Jews.

Second, focusing on antisemitism can assist in finding key nodes of radicalization. Oftentimes, the ideologues responsible for promoting extremist sentiments are difficult to identify, because they hide themselves behind a veneer of objectivity, and in the United States, First Amendment-protected speech.¹¹⁸ But, by focusing on antisemitism as a core indicator of violent extremist sentiment, authorities can identify how extremist narratives are spread by finding purveyors of antisemitic thought that are influencing American extremists.

More broadly, the relationship between non-violent and violent strands of extremist movements is a subject of concern for scholars of extremism and practitioners alike. These interactions are often studied at an *individual* level—for instance, by analyzing the radicalization to violence pathways of individual extremists who begin their process by participating in a non-violent extremist group and then progress into increasingly violent forms of extremism. However, studies on the nature of relationships between non-violent and violent extremist groups of the same broad ideological organization on a *movement* level are less frequent. As this analysis demonstrates, antisemitism is one least common denominator in several cases between non-violent and violent groupings of extreme right-wing and Islamist extremist groups. Therefore, studying how non-violent and violent extremist groups coalesce on issues related to mutual hatred of Jews may be an important starting point for broader analysis on the relationship between violent and non-violent extremism.

This paper highlighted several types of antisemitic discourse that are especially pervasive within extremist groups. In addition to religious narratives, political antisemitism also colors the viewpoints of modern American violent extremists. Jihadists center grievances about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, arguing that Jews everywhere should be punished or killed as a result. Right-wing extremists in the United States blame Jews for what they perceive as problems with race relations and immigration—including the “Great Replacement” theory which posits Jewish-led “ethnic cleansing” of white Europeans through the imposition of immigration. While relying on broader, historical

tropes, the political antisemitism of American extremists is tied to a particular social and historical environment, and is therefore more grounded in functionalist antisemitism.

While this paper largely focused on two extremist groupings—jihadists and the far-right—this does not deny the reality that other extremist trends in the United States have utilized antisemitism. During the past few years, several attacks on Jewish targets were tied to individuals who were inspired by the Black Hebrew Israelite movement.¹¹⁹ This movement claims that modern day African Americans are the descendants of the biblical Israelites and is overwhelmingly peaceful; a fringe minority believes, like white Christian Identity extremists, that Jews are the spawn of Satan.¹²⁰ The perpetrators of two December 2019 attacks, one shootout in Jersey City, New Jersey that killed four people in a kosher supermarket and stabbing at a Hasidic rabbi's house in Monsey, New York, were all reportedly inspired by ideological material from the extremist fringe of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement.¹²¹ In assessing American extremism's relationship to antisemitic violence, a closer examination of this movement is necessary.

Additional focus may also be needed on the nexus between legitimate, anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitism. While it is true that most who decry the State of Israel are doing so not because of any ill-will towards Jews or the American Jewish community, some individuals are either incapable of making the distinction between being anti-Israel and antisemitic, or use legitimate anti-Israel sentiment as a cloak for their antisemitic beliefs.¹²² The three individuals profiled above all expressed anti-Israel beliefs at some point in their radicalization pathway, with two of them professing anti-Israel sentiment as the core motivator for their intent to attack Jewish people in the United States.

On a final note, violent political and religious extremism have taken many forms in the United States context. Without a doubt, the current prominent extremist movements, both on the far-right and in the Islamist current, will ebb, flow, and wane, and will likely face competition from new types of extremist movements. Throughout not just American history but the history of the world, antisemitism has structured the basic foundation of many different types of extremist movements, and its appeal continues for individual extremists even when the movements it supports lose popularity. In the future, antisemitic narratives are likely to retain their importance for the next wave of extremist movements in the United States, and continue to inspire violence by their supporters.

Notes

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