



The existential genocidal threat of jihadism

BY STEVE MARANTZ([HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/](https://jewishjournal.org/author/steve-marantz/))

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I was bar mitzvahed in a Reform temple and became secular as an adult. Oct. 7, the subsequent war in Gaza and rivers of blood didn't change that. My qualms about religion didn't change.

What changed was my complacency about religious extremism, starting with jihadist theology.

Inexcusably, I had forgotten the lesson of Sept. 11, 2001. Shame on me. Jihadist theology fuels Islamic terrorism, which is a primitive, genocidal threat to civilization. That's putting

A database on Islamic terrorism maintained by a French watchdog group, Fondation Pour L'Innovation Politique, states: "We can establish that between 1979 and May 2021, at least 48,035 Islamist terrorist attacks took place worldwide. They caused the deaths of at least 210,138 people. On average, an Islamist attack has resulted in the death of around 4.4 people. We identify and quantify the *modus operandi* and targets. Explosives are the most common type of weapon used (43.9%), while the military is the main target (31.7%), ahead of civilians (25.0%) and police forces (18.3%). The picture of this phenomenon is becoming clearer. Afghanistan was the country most affected by Islamist terrorism, ahead of Iraq and Somalia. Within the European Union, France was the country most affected, with at least 82 Islamist attacks and 332 deaths. We also show that the majority of Islamist attacks (89.5%) were in Muslim countries and that the victims were mainly Muslims, in the same proportions."

Let's be clear, jihadists are a small percentage of the worldwide Muslim population. Most Muslims want nothing to do with jihadism, and share with Westerners the common goals of peace and prosperity. They would readily agree to a peaceful coexistence with Israel and the West. But their voices are muffled by Islamic extremists and authoritarian caliphates such as Iran.

As Harris notes, "This is fundamentalist religion in its worst form. We are dealing with religious fanatics who have had most rational

human goals and considerations scraped from their minds by a lunatic ideology. And while there are differences among jihadist groups – and they can be sometimes found murdering one another – they are all part of the same death cult.”

Meanwhile, antisemitism gains momentum. Antisemites conjure up endless provocations to hate Jews. From the killing of Jesus to the blood libel, to manipulating international finance, to colonizing the Palestinian homeland, the Jews are found guilty, *ad infinitum*.

On campuses of our most elite universities, students and faculty protest angrily and self-righteously against Israel and Zionism. Anti-Zionism isn't necessarily antisemitism, but it can serve as a convenient front.

Watching this, and reporting on it, I'm thinking, "Why don't they get it? Why don't they see the real danger?"

Imagine for a hypothetical moment that pro-Palestinians get what they want: Israel vanishes "from the river to the sea" and is replaced by an Islamic sovereignty. Or maybe the region is redrawn into two states, side by side, Israel and Palestine.

Then what? The jihadists become suburban parents, join the PTA, and tend backyard gardens? Hardly. Can anyone doubt they would be propelled to even more violence in

the pursuit of martyrdom? Jews, Christians and moderate Muslims would be their worldwide targets. 9/11 redux.

If Oct. 7 reawakened me to the threat of jihadism, it also reminded me that every religion has extremists, not as violent, but with similar MO's. They're tight with God, in conversation with God, doing the work of God. Their rules for a moral life can seem to push at the boundary of immorality.

Which brings me to another change wrought by the last 11 months. Perplexity. I've never been so perplexed by being Jewish.

So many questions. How did Israel, with its sophisticated intelligence apparatus, allow Oct. 7 to happen? Then why, with its retaliatory demolition of Gaza, did it willfully squander worldwide sympathy and public opinion? Why does it continue to prop up a leader, Netanyahu, who is more a blundering Pharoah than a Moses? Why does he persist in the notion he can corner and defeat Hamas, which he can't do any more than Americans could corner and defeat the Viet Cong? Why are so many liberal Democrats pro-Palestinian without uttering a word against jihadism? Why can't the brilliant "leaders" in the West and Middle East figure out a peaceful path forward, the deconstruct of jihadism, and two coexisting states, Israel and Palestine?

Perplexity bleeds into cynicism, which perhaps explains why I'm secular rather than observant. That said, I'll close on an upbeat.

My cynicism is tempered by the beauty of our community on the North Shore. I've lived here for 45 years and have experienced nothing but respect, acceptance, and the spirit of Pirkei Avot. No, I haven't read it, but yes, I know it's a Talmudic guide to self-improvement, mutual respect, peace, and a better world. Right on. ☺

Steve Marantz is a former staff reporter for The Boston Globe and The Boston Herald.

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