Antisemitism and genocide — over and over again

Of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the U.S., 58 percent target Jews, despite Jews comprising only 1.9 percent of the U.S. population and only 0.2 percent of the population of the world.

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By Ellen J. Kennedy

I had my gym clothes and running shoes on and I was ready to get on the treadmill on Saturday, Jan. 15, when I saw the alert.

Shabbat services at a Texas synagogue were interrupted by an armed person who had taken some worshippers hostage.

We all have moments when we sensed that our reality shifted. JFK’s assassination when I was a junior in high school. The events of 9/11, when my daughter was on a ship in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with 750 other American college students, another potential target for terrorists. Jan. 6, 2021, when American democracy began to crumble. And that Saturday at the Texas synagogue.

It certainly wasn’t the first, or the most, horrific act of antisemitism in the United States, but it paralyzed me because it seemed almost routine ... a lone person terrorizing Jews in a place called a “sanctuary,” yet again.

These acts are happening over and over again — just like the bigger picture of hate, which, writ large, is genocide.
After the Holocaust, the world leaders’ mantra was “never again.” And then there was Cambodia. And Guatemala, Argentina, East Timor, Bosnia, Darfur, the Uyghurs, the Rohingya, the Tibetans. The list goes on and on.

The list of anti-Semitic “incidents” in the U.S. goes on and on. Of all religiously motivated hate crimes in the U.S., 58 percent target Jews, despite Jews comprising only 1.9 percent of the U.S. population and just 0.2 percent of the population of the world.

Scholars say that antisemitism is the world’s oldest and most-enduring form of hate. As an academic, I understand the forms of scapegoating that occur. As a Jew, those acts damage the essence of my soul.

There are fine statements decrying this latest act of antisemitism coming from many organizations and individuals, including the United Nations General Assembly and President Biden. But these words do nothing. They don’t stop the hate and the scapegoating and the violence and the desire to lash out against this tiny minority as punishment for all the ills in the world.

There are some well-intentioned actions. The U.S. may finally pass the 2021 “Pray Safe Act,” which will provide information on best practices and available federal grants for security at houses of worship. FEMA will probably increase funding for its Nonprofit Security Grant Program. The project’s current annual budget is $180 million, which increased several times in recent years due to the rise in antisemitism across the U.S. The program allows houses of worship to apply for grants of up to $100,000 each for security measures such as fences, cameras, stronger doors and security personnel.

But stronger doors and higher fences don’t stop hate.

On another front, a genocide is happening right now, at this very moment, on the other side of the world — the destruction of the Uyghurs in western China. Again, there are fine statements and intended good actions.

Last month, the French parliament labeled the atrocities against the Uyghurs to be genocide, and the French parliamentarians applauded the Uyghur refugees who were in the room. The French have joined the U.S., Canada, Australia, the U.K. and the Netherlands with this pronouncement.

The U.S. has issued economic sanctions and forbidden diplomats’ attendance at the February Beijing Olympics. It has threatened pressure on businesses like Abercrombie and Fitch, Adidas, Calvin Klein, Gap, H&M and Nike that use Uyghur slave labor in their supply chains.

But the genocide continues — despite the pronouncements, applause and sanctions.

And the antisemitism continues.

Last month the New York City Police Department arrested a woman for harassing and spitting on an 8-year-old Jewish boy outside a Brooklyn synagogue.
The woman, identified as 21-year-old Christina Darling, was charged with aggravated harassment as a hate crime, acting in a manner injurious to a child, and menacing as a hate crime, the NYPD said. According to CNN, the woman approached three children outside the synagogue shouting “anti-Jewish statements” before spitting on the boy and walking away.

The children’s father told reporters that the woman said “something along the lines of Hitler should have killed you all.”

The 8-year-old boy replied to the woman that he would save his little sister. The woman then spit in his face and said, “We will kill you all. I know where you live, and we’ll make sure to get you all next time.”

That little boy’s world must have shifted at that moment.

Genocide and hate — “never again” means nothing when the hate endures.

World Without Genocide will hold a webinar on Feb. 23, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. on “China: Politics, Human Rights, and Law.” Register by Feb. 22 at www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/china. The event is open to the public at $10 general public, $5 students and seniors, free to Mitchell Hamline students and $25 for Minnesota lawyers for 2.0 Elimination of Bias credits. Teachers, nurses and social workers will receive “Clock hours.”

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https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2022/02/antisemitism-and-genocide-over-and-over-again/