

Where is Our Leadership?

By

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We are a small people. We have multiple and powerful external enemies. Striving for Jewish political unity is our natural and rational impulse. Criticizing other Jewish leaders and mainstream Jewish organizations is usually just not done.

But these are extraordinary times. We face daunting challenges for which there are no known answers. Chief among them are Islamic anti-Semitism and the global jihad that pose enormous, unanticipated threats to Jews around the world.

In my last column I criticized the Anti-Defamation League and its head, Abraham Foxman, for its inadequate response to these threats. In truth, it is not only the ADL that is failing: Few Jewish leaders and almost no mainstream organizations have alerted our community that we face a radically new and potentially existential threat profile.

Jews are caught up in a perfect storm: In Western societies, real danger to Jews no longer comes from Christian hatred of Judaism or from Nazi-like animus against our "race"; it comes instead from a hatred of the Jewish state and its Jewish supporters. That this animus comes mostly from the ideological left, with which a majority of Jews identify, is painful and confusing to many.

At the same time, blowing in from the Muslim world is a different sort of anti-Semitism, one which combines modern anti-Zionist themes with primordial Islamic theological hatred. Jew-hatred now drives countless masses around the globe. Imbibing this poison, Muslim radicals have attacked and murdered Jewish people from Israel to Europe, from India to Seattle.

Islamic hatred has indeed come to America. In 1999, Sufi Sheikh Hisham Kabanni, head of the Supreme Islamic Council, testified to the State Department that 80 percent of American mosques are in the hands of radicals. A study by Freedom House, a Washington, D.C. policy center, found Saudi-produced anti-Semitic literature in Islamic Centers around the country. "Close Guantanamo, Re-open Auschwitz" has been shouted by Muslims at anti-Israel demonstrations in Fort Lauderdale and posted on Boston-based Muslim Web sites.

Jewish leaders, at least at the national level, are not blind to these threats. Two years ago at an international conference on global anti-Semitism in Jerusalem, the heads of many major American Jewish organizations heard speakers like Robert Wistrich, the director of Hebrew University's Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, who described Muslim Judeophobia as an existential threat. Last March, Wistrich wrote in Haaretz that "the scale and extremism of the literature and commentary available in Arab or Muslim newspapers, journals, magazines, caricatures, on Islamist websites, on the Middle Eastern radio and TV news, in documentaries, films, and educational materials, is comparable only to that of Nazi Germany at its worst." Through the Internet, this material is available to Muslims living among us here.

Because the mainstream media for various reasons downplay these threats, Jews who depend on The New York Times, The Boston Globe or CNN mostly don't see how our situation has been radically altered. And so the question remains: If they know, why haven't our leaders told us?

I suggest three reasons. First is a fear of being attacked as racists, bigots and Islamophobes - a line of attack that has been particularly effective against Jewish organizations. Second is a fear of being targeted for "defamation" suits like the one launched against activists and media outlets in Boston who reported on, or asked questions about the radical connections of leaders of the Saudi-funded Roxbury mosque. "Lawfare" works: Legal defense costs can be crippling. But I think the real reason that our leaders are silent is that they simply don't know what to do. Rather than admit this, they stay mum and mostly limit their public efforts to issuing reports and posting on their Web sites.

In this context, the letter to the Advocate by ADL's New England head, Derreck Shulman - in which he protests that I am "unaware of ADL's activism" against radical Islam - was a bit disappointing. Shulman points to articles about Islamic extremists and Arab anti-Jewish cartoons on ADL's Web site, instances of Congressional testimony and consultations with world leaders. Surely this is not a serious effort for an operation with a \$50 million annual budget that claims to be our chief defender. Where is the big-picture strategy?

I don't blame Derrick - in fact his letter exposing CAIR (Committee on American Islamic Relations) just published in the Globe is a step in the right direction. The problem resides in New York. Should Jews not expect Foxman - and our other leaders - to level with us? To tell us what they know - about the penetration of the Muslim Brotherhood into our communities and about the proliferation of radical mosques across America, and about the intimidation of Jewish students by Muslims on campuses?

Help us, Abe. We cannot continue with PC-denial and with timidity. Silence is potentially deadly. Let us face this challenge forthrightly, and together.