Jewish Security in the United States After Tree of Life

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The Threat

Entering 2021 in an environment of hyperpolitical polarity, Jewish communities in the US face a perfect storm of antisemitism, unlike anything American Jews have ever seen in their four hundred years in North America since Elias Legarde, a Sephardic Jew first arrived at James City, Virginia, in 1621 to teach the colonists how to grow grapes for wine (Sloan, 1978). The current threat emanates from at least three different ideological wellsprings:

White supremacism embraces a "white genocide" ideology that posits "that forces— principally Jewish, often coded as 'globalist'—are pursuing policies seeking to destroy the 'white race' in their 'traditional homelands' like Europe and the US through the deliberate importation of non-white people" (Amend, 2018). Since 2018, terrorist actions of two adherents of this ideology have resulted in the death of 12 American Jews—in Pittsburgh, on October 27, 2018, when 11 congregants of the Tree of Life Synagogue were killed, and on April 27, 2019, in Chabad of Poway, California, when one parishioner was shot dead (Cowan, 2019).

A different antisemitic ideological current is prominent in the ultraprogressive left. Though, it has not resulted in violence against Jews, "a vicious demonization of Israel and its supporters has become routine in much of the American left and endemic on college and university campuses making for a hostile environment for Jewish students" forced to choose between their liberalism and support for Israel (Halkin, 2019). Instead of violence, Jews who do not hide their Zionism face a *cancel culture* of "moral condemnation, social ostracism and reputational vilification meted out by peers, professors, friends and political allies" (Weiss, 2019).

A third ideological wellspring for antisemitism in the United States emanates from Islamist sources. While al-Qaida, ISIS, and other transnational Sunni jihadi groups have come to the fore in the post 9/11 environment, there is a history of long-standing antipathy toward Jews and Israel in the US that predates 2000 among Hamas and

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Muslim Brotherhood supporters in America. In fact, between 1992 and 2011, eight out of 18 Islamist plots to attack New York City targeted Jewish institutions or Jewish people in New York (Reuters, 2011).

Although Islamists did not launch any successful attacks against Jewish targets in the United States between 2001 and 2020, a few thwarted plots are worth citing to underscore the threat (Barsky, 2016). For example, in May 2009, four men who believed they were working with a Pakistani jihadist group were arrested for placing explosive devices in cars outside of two synagogues, the Riverdale Temple and the Riverdale Jewish Center in the Bronx. Similarly, in 2011, following a seven-month investigation, in a plot inspired by al-Qa'ida, two individuals were arrested after purchasing weapons and ammunition from a New York Police Department (NYPD) undercover detective with intent to attack a prominent synagogue in Manhattan (Barsky, 2016).

Lastly there were two deadly attacks during December 2019 against Jews that either originated in a fringe ideology or had no ideological background at all. In Jersey City, New Jersey, two Black Israelites—a fringe religious movement that rejects widely accepted definitions of Judaism and asserts that people of color are the true children of Israel (ADL, 2020)—carried out the deadly attack against a Jewish-owned store, killing three, two of whom were Jewish as well as a police officer in a related incident (Gold & Watkins, 2019). A few weeks later, in Monsey, New York, a sole attacker invaded the house of a rabbi, killing one with a machete during a Hanukkah party. To date, it appears that no ideology other than "Jew hate" motivated the attacker. He was known to be an individual with mental health issues and held a mix of antisemitic beliefs (Jacobs et al., 2020).

With a Jewish population of close to six million spread across 50 states, the key challenge to keeping Jews in America safe is matching resources to protect a diverse Jewish population spanning a great geographical expanse, as well as changing communal behavior to accept new security protocols—vital for this altered environment.

Securing American Jewish Communities Since the Tree of Life Attack
The deadly terrorist attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh was the "9/11 event" for American Jewish communities, forever changing the view of Jewish security in the US and demanding action. In its wake, Jewish organizations at both the national and local level sprang into action to enhance security across the community, both reinvesting and creating programs to address this new clear and present danger.

While the deadly attack in Pittsburgh emanated from white supremacist antisemitism, efforts enhancing the security of the Jewish community must be agnostic to the typology of the violent antisemitism. The mission of Jewish security organizations must be to provide security advice and work in close partnership with the management of synagogues, schools, and many other types of communal locations, so that all Jewish communal premises meet high standards of physical security.

Following the Pittsburgh attack in late 2018, at the national level, the Secure Community Network (SCN)—an organization established jointly by the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and the Jewish Federations of North America—was galvanized into action, helping communities both large and small across North America hire security directors, providing "best practices" materials, and giving ongoing advice as needed (Secure Community Network, 2021). Moreover, major metropolitan areas with their own resources have formed their own autonomous security initiatives like the Community Security Initiative (CSI) in New York, created by the UJA Federation-NY and the Jewish Community Relations Council-NY (UJAFEDNY, 2019). In addition, the Community Security Service, a national Jewish volunteer security organization, has been revamped and relaunched at a national level (Community Security Service, 2021).

Across the board, at the national and local level, resources have been invested in personnel, intelligence collection and analysis, as well as in enhancing the physical security of synagogues, schools, community centers, summer camps, and other Jewish institutions. In some regions, efforts have been made to reach out to Jewish communal security organization overseas, like the Community Security Trust (CST) in the UK, in order to adopt tried and true best practices.

Architecture of Jewish Security in the US
While the SCN serves as the umbrella organization responsible for Jewish security across North America and operates with the endorsement of both the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations and the Jewish Federations of North America, many of the major cities and Jewish population centers (New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Detroit, and Boston among others) operate independently and function as independent security arms reporting directly to their local Jewish federation. Complementing these efforts is the CSS, which, as previously discussed, provides a cadre of trained Jewish security volunteers.
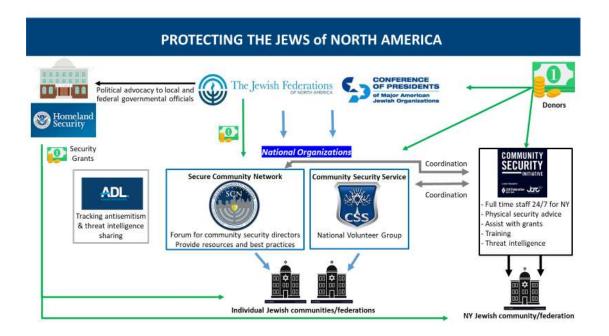
Cooperation among the local federation-led security initiatives, which have specific regional responsibilities, and the national SCN has been a work in progress. The SCN is the primary point of contact for the federal government when it comes to homeland security issues, setting national standards and helping smaller Jewish communities who lack capacity and resources. At the same time, for Jewish communities with more significant resources, there is no substitute for robust, federation-led "on the ground" ever-present expertise to secure dense Jewish populations and develop deep and direct relationships with local law enforcement and elected officials.

There have been occasional tensions between regional federation-led security initiatives and the national network, which is normal for all systems or networks that have central hubs seeking uniformity and significant nodes on the periphery that are exceptional. However, by the close of 2020, a rapprochement had evolved that balances national standards and shared best practices as well as a diversity of approaches. Most

importantly, in early 2021, efforts have been made to share intelligence and even use common technology platforms.

As of January 2021, only the Community Security Service, a national Jewish volunteer security organization, remains outside this system, having established partnerships with the New York-based CSI (Community Security Service, 2020) but not with the national Security Community Network. This situation remains at odds with the best practices of other Jewish security organizations worldwide (France, UK, Australia, and South Africa) that integrate both a professional security team and trained Jewish volunteers from the community to serve as a force multiplier.

Finally, there is the Center on Extremism of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) which collects threat intelligence regarding antisemitism and constantly tracks trends and new groups of concern (ADL, 2021). It is well known nationally and in constant contact with law enforcement at all levels nationwide. One of its most important roles is to inform the local and federal authorities about individuals or groups that may warrant further investigation. In December 2020, the New York Community Security Initiative announced that it had struck a partnership to embed its joint CSI/CSS threat intelligence analyst within the ADL's Center on Extremism to maximize intelligence-sharing opportunities between the two organizations (ADL, 2020a).

Policy Recommendations

While combating antisemitism is a long-term project—a scourge that has been with Jews for thousands of years—protecting our communities from *violent* antisemitism is something that can and must be done now.

The Community Security Trust in the UK provides the "gold standard" of Jewish security in the diaspora. Close attention to how the CST has secured the UK Jewish population is worth using as a guide for the Jewish community in the US.

Resources are first and foremost essential. The CST could not do all that it does without a robust budget that is dependent on significant charitable giving within the Jewish community in the UK as well as tremendous governmental support totaling approximately $18.5 million dollars per year (Jewish News Reporter, 2020). Combined, the CST's budget for security well exceeds $20 million dollars to protect a population of 250,000 to 300,000 British Jews. On a comparative scale, with the American Jewish population close to six million, that would require 20 times the amount of funding in the US or $400 million dollars. While information on the total charitable funds raised for Jewish security in the US is limited, at the end of 2020 Congress announced that the Department of Homeland Security Nonprofit Grant Program would be doubled from $90 million dollars to $180 million dollars in grants for security for FY 2021 (JCRC, 2021). Although all nonprofits, regardless of affiliation can apply, this is a major source of funds for Jewish security efforts. Jewish political advocacy groups lobby elected officials for this grant funding and others like it at the state level for physical security enhancements to benefit houses of worship, schools, community centers, and other community institutions.

While physical security and hardening of the targets is important, collecting and analyzing threat intelligence has the promise to thwart plots against Jewish institutions and communities while they are still inchoate. The Community Security Trust has a robust threat intelligence capability that is national in scope. In the US, while SCN has recently formed an intelligence analysis team, local CSIs in some major cities also have begun similar programs. Diversity in intelligence collection is a good thing and rather than operate from the same platform, a meshed network where there is a national exchange between local CSIs and the national SCN would provide an expanded network with higher likelihood of identifying hostile actors and groups that seek to harm Jews.

The CST in the UK maximizes community participation in protecting itself by operating and training a sophisticated cadre of security volunteers, recruited from the British Jewish community. These volunteers know their communities, are motivated, and serve as another protective layer, complementing the efforts of both paid/armed security and the police. The Community Security Service in the US is an embryonic version of this effort that has not gained broad acceptance among all the Jewish federations. With the recent effort to further professionalize this organization (Holt, 2020), they are an untapped asset for the American Jewish communities to enlist in communal security efforts.

Lastly, Community Security Trust plays a key role as it "secures, advises, and trains Jewish communal organizations, schools and synagogues throughout the UK" (Community Security Trust, 2020). The national Secure Communities Network must

continue and augment its efforts to play a similar role in the US, especially in assisting smaller Jewish communities across North America with efforts to enhance their security by providing advice, being a repository for training expertise, and serving as a security net for communities in need of support.

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