



The Unraveling

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Program on
Extremism

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On May 21, 2025, Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim were murdered on the streets of our nation's capital by an individual who embraced hate and believed violence was the solution to a political problem. In the immediate aftermath, discussions on social media ensued about whether this act was motivated by anti-Semitic or **“merely”** anti-Israeli ideologies, but would the latter make this tragedy any more acceptable? It should not. This act of extremism and the discourse surrounding it hint at a greater problem this country faces and that is the unraveling of the fabric of our democratic society. Our nation was founded on the principles of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the dedication to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” and today those should exist without exceptions based on ethnicity, religion, skin color, or nationality. Yet, individuals and groups march throughout our streets and campuses, spreading narratives that fuel hatred toward the Jewish people and hint at, and in some cases out-right call for, violence against them. The normalization of this type of rhetoric erodes the very principles our nation is supposed to represent.

“Free Palestine,” was the slogan allegedly uttered by Elias Rodriguez on May 21 when he was taken into custody for the murder of Lischinsky and Milgrim, providing early clues as to his ideology and motivation for the killings. Preliminary information indicates Rodriguez was affiliated with secular leftist groups. His purported *Manifesto*, if authentic, demonstrates Rodriguez consumed graphics and news about the Israel-Hamas war from sources potentially linked to Hamas, and he cited the Gaza Health Ministry statistics, while blaming Western and Arab governments for enabling Israeli genocide. The terminology he uses and the reference to Israel committing genocide are echoes of Hamas’ messaging that distort the truth and justify Hamas’ terrorist acts. Similar to Hamas’ propaganda, Elias asserts that violence is necessary because his enemies have “forfeited their humanity.”

The narratives promoting the hatred of Jews and the justification of violence against them have long been driven by Islamist groups like Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, who seek the annihilation of the country of Israel, but also importantly seek to sow discord within US society. Years ago, the federal government seized the archives of Hamas and

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the Muslim Brotherhood from the home of a senior Muslim Brotherhood leader in northern Virginia. One of the seized documents explained the Muslim Brotherhood's plan destroy our democracy by "eliminating and destroying the Western civilization from within and 'sabotaging' its miserable house by their hands and the hands of the believers..." By powerfully seeding narratives that promote Jew hatred and validate acts of murder, like we saw when groups here in the US loudly justified the rape, torture, and murder of 1200 men, women and children on the morning of October 7, 2023, Islamists have normalized what years ago would have been abhorrent to our American society.

The fact that there is no information indicating Rodriguez is an Islamist, and in fact appears to be affiliated with secular leftist groups, should cause more concern not less. It indicates the Islamist message has spread well-beyond its inner circle.

Once the foundation has been laid here in the US, the normalization of hatred and the justification of violence against people because of their religion, race, or ethnicity, the stage will be set for many more acts of inexcusable murder and violence. Then, the unraveling of the fabric of our nation will be akin to that of a thread-bare garment that cannot be stitched back together.