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ANTI-SEMITIC AND ISLAMOPHOBIC INCIDENTS ON THE RISE AS GAZA CONFLICT CONTINUES

Bottom Line Up Front:

- Reports of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents, including violence, have been on the rise in Europe and the United States since the conflict between Israel and Hamas began in early October.
- Conflict-fueled hate speech has proliferated online, reinforcing and even inciting incidents and violence offline.
- Anti-Semitic messaging online, along with mis- and disinformation about the conflict in Gaza, has been amplified by some state actors.
- Extremists and terrorist groups – from the far-right to al-Qaeda – have also proliferated anti-Semitic and Islamophobic content online to further their own agendas, including radicalization and recruitment.

Reports of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents, including violence, are on the rise in Europe and the United States since the conflict **between Israel and Hamas began in early October.** Although data, including methodologies as to what qualifies as an "incident," varies and is often self-reported, governments and organizations that monitor anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have reported a notable increase in incidents since October 7. According to the French interior minister, between October 7 and November 5, there were over one thousand anti-Semitic incidents recorded in France – home to Europe's largest Jewish population. In approximately the same period, the Council on American-Islamic Relations said it received 1,283 requests for help and reports of bias – representing a 216 percent increase from the previous year and the largest wave of Islamophobic and anti-Arab bias the organization had recorded since 2015 when the Trump administrations so-called "Muslim ban" was introduced. Authorities and anti-hate groups have also noted increases in anti-Semitic incidents in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Moreover, many Jewish, Muslim, and Arab communities in the West have expressed immense anxiety and fear of reprisals, particularly as rhetoric and debates over the conflict in Gaza – and its humanitarian toll – continue to escalate both on- and offline.

The incidents reported have ranged from harassment, vandalism, assault, and even death. A six-year-old Muslim boy in Chicago, Illinois, was killed in mid-October after being stabbed 26 times by his family's landlord. The boy's mother suffered more than a dozen stab wounds in the attack, leaving her seriously injured. The local county sheriff's office said investigators determined the victims "were targeted by the suspect due to them being Muslim and the ongoing Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the Israelis," and the U.S. Department of Justice has opened a hate crime investigation into the deadly incident. In early November, a Jewish woman in Lyon, France, was stabbed in her home, with a swastika found graffitied outside her residence, according to local authorities. Stars of David have been spray painted on Jewish homes in Paris and Berlin, harkening to the violence, forced displacement, and genocide committed against European Jews under fascism. College campuses in the United States, which have become a flashpoint for contentious debate about the conflict, have seen what the Biden administration has called "an alarming rise" in anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents. A Cornell student was arrested in late October for allegedly posting threatening messages on an online discussion board, where he graphically called for the deaths of Jewish people.

Fueled by the conflict in Gaza, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate speech has proliferated online, reinforcing and inciting incidents and violence offline, as well as contributing to an environment of fear for

impacted communities. According to a New York Times investigation, on the day of Hamas' attack on Israel, the hashtag #HitlerWasRight appeared on X, formerly known as Twitter, and was shared thousands of times over the following weeks, often alongside violent language directed toward the Jewish community. During the same period, the hashtag #DeathtoMuslims also spiked and was shared thousands of times on X, and researchers have reported millions of often explicitly violent posts circulating on Instagram, TikTok, X, and Facebook. This trend is heightened on more fringe platforms – particularly on 4chan, Gab, and BitChute. According to the Global Project Against Hate and Extremism, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic content rose nearly 500 percent in the 48 hours after October 7. Such hate speech has led to real-world violence, as what proliferates online often rarely stays there. In late October, large crowds in Russia's Dagestan region stormed an airport after the resumption of flights between the region's capital and Tel Aviv. The riot was incited by a false rumor about the resettlement of Israelis to Dagestan, which had spread online – particularly on Telegram channels – in the lead-up to the riot. Videos widely shared online showed men searching for and making violent threats against Jewish people, destroying doors and barriers in the airport, and questioning staff about the whereabouts of Israeli arrivals.

Anti-Semitic messaging online has also been amplified by some state actors. Such posts – including those that perpetuate tropes of "Jewish control" of U.S. politics, media, and economics – have been widely shared on state-backed online platforms in China in an apparent attempt to denigrate not only the state of Israel but also the United States. Moreover, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which strictly controls messages circulating on social media platforms, has done little to limit anti-Semitic content online. Islamophobic content has also spread on Chinese social media platforms, as some users portray all Palestinians as terrorists, for example. Islamophobic conspiracy theories and false stories originating on the Western far-right have historically been noted to transfer to and proliferate on popular apps such as WeChat, reinforcing the CCP's brutal repression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang province. Further, mis- and disinformation about the conflict in Gaza amplified by state actors has comingled and reinforced the broader milieu of anti-Semitic content online – primarily by spreading disinformation about aspects of the conflict that can then be used to justify anti-Semitic hate speech. Microsoft's Vice Chair and President, Brad Smith, recently said that Russia has been spreading disinformation about the situation in the Middle East. The French Foreign Affairs Ministry also accused Russia of destabilizing acts linked to online disinformation campaigns. Russia views the conflict as an opportunity to amplify far-right narratives that cause rifts in the West, a classic Russian disinformation tactic straight from Moscow's playbook.

Extremists and terrorist groups – from the far-right to al-Qaeda – have also sought to exploit the war by proliferating anti-Semitic and Islamophobic content online to further their own agendas, including radicalization and recruitment. Groups linked to al-Qaeda have posted messages and content encouraging attacks on Jewish communities and other targets in the United States and Europe, according to two intelligence bulletins by the New York Police Department obtained by NBC News. In Congressional testimony from late October offered by FBI Director Christopher Wray, he noted that the Hamas-Israel conflict could inspire violent extremists and lone actors to attempt attacks on U.S. soil. According to Wray, "Here in the United States, our most immediate concern is that violent extremists—individuals or small groups—will draw inspiration from the events in the Middle East to carry out attacks against Americans going about their daily lives." Director Wray testified again on Wednesday before the House Homeland Security Committee alongside Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and Christine Abizaid, director of the National Counterterrorism Center. In this week's testimony, Wray noted in his opening remarks, "In a year where the terrorism threat was already elevated, the ongoing war in the Middle East has raised the threat of an attack against Americans in the United States to a whole 'nother level. Since Oct. 7, we've seen a rogue's gallery of foreign terrorist organizations call for attacks against Americans and our allies." He went on to add, "Given those calls for action, our most immediate concern is that individuals or small groups will draw twisted inspiration from the events in the Middle East to carry out attacks here at home."

Far-right and neo-Nazi groups have also utilized the conflict to spread hate speech and even radicalize those who might otherwise be considered their ideological opponents. Discussions about capitalizing on

the opportunity to indoctrinate far-left activists into anti-Semitism have occurred on several far-right platforms, including 4chan and Telegram, according to a New York Times investigation. On one Telegram channel, instructions were shared for users espousing anti-Semitic beliefs to manipulate sympathetic posts about the deaths of Palestinians in Gaza to draw in far-left users and activists, demonstrating a wider trend of the coalescing of far-right and far-left actors politically. Further, far-right groups in India have utilized the war to spread Islamophobic disinformation, while far-right extremists in Canada have exposed new audiences to hate speech and anti-Semitic and Islamophobic tropes, including those that attempt to dehumanize Muslims and portray Jews as "powerful and all-controlling." Moreover, these same groups have weaponized general anxieties about the conflict and the increasing instability that has occurred in its wake to justify white nationalist activity and accelerationist ideology. As the conflict continues, and a range of actors capitalize on the conflict to perpetuate their varying agendas, the proliferation of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic rhetoric online and its translation into real-world acts will likely continue, with vast implications for political and societal stability in the Middle East and beyond.