

Commentary

Reflections on the Jewish-American Response To Resurgent Antisemitism

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As our thoughts are with the victims of the tragic shooting in Sydney, we are all too aware of how antisemitism has skyrocketed here in the United States. Since Oct. 7, 2023, when Israel responded to the barbaric massacre by Hamas that murdered more than 1,200 men, women, children, and elderly and took 240 hostages.

In a report issued in 2024, the Anti-Defamation League documented nearly 9,000 incidents of assault, vandalism, and harassment against Jews in the United States in 2023—a 140% increase over 2022, with more than half occurring after the October 7th terrorist attack. A separate 2024 American Jewish Committee survey found that 77% of American Jews feel less safe in the United States as a direct result of that attack.

The surge of antisemitism on many college campuses—where Jewish students have been physically assaulted, harassed, and in some cases forced to barricade themselves for safety—initially met tepid responses from administrators. We have previously addressed these issues in relation to Columbia University (see Scharf and Saxe, “Thoughts on Columbia University’s Dilemma and a Proposed Solution,” *New York Law Journal Online*, June 17, 2025; “Columbia’s Dilemma Redux,” *New York Law Journal Online*, Sept. 15, 2025).

This systemic rise demands a comprehensive, multi-pronged response that combines education, legal action, advocacy, and responsible community preparedness. A few thoughts follow:

- Recommit to rooting out antisemitism in education from pre-K through university by standardizing age-appropriate Holocaust and tolerance education nationwide.
- Strengthen enforcement of existing civil-rights laws and hate-crime statutes, while supporting civil litigation that holds institutions accountable for failing to protect Jewish students, from harassment and discrimination. The law is a powerful tool and it can be used by the American Jewish community as a force for protection and justice.
- Insist that private universities, as recipients of substantial public funds, earn public confidence by fostering environments free of harassment and intimidation, grounded in the Judeo-Christian principles that undergird democratic society.
- Publicly oppose foreign funding sources that fuel campus antisemitism, demand vigorous prosecution of hate crimes, challenge the tax-exempt status of nonprofits linked to designated terrorist organizations, and reinforce the legal principle that speech inciting imminent violence enjoys no constitutional protection.
- Expand alliances—across political, religious, and civic lines—to combat antisemitism, building on initiatives such as the ADL’s national network of pro bono attorneys and Robert Kraft’s Blue Square Alliance Against Hate.

These measures protect Jewish Americans while simultaneously safeguarding core democratic values. Yet legal and institutional responses, however vigorous, have limits. Resort to the courts may however be less effective against more subtle forms of antisemitism, requiring a more holistic approach.

History teaches that Jewish communities have sometimes needed to organize their own responsible, lawful self-protection when threats outpace official response. Today that lesson translates into coordinated, disciplined, and fully legal community preparedness.

We propose the creation of professionally led Jewish Community Security Networks—rapid-response volunteer groups trained in de-escalation, observation, documentation, and lawful self-defense. These networks would operate in full coordination with local and federal law enforcement, much like existing community-patrol or neighborhood-watch models that serve other ethnic and religious communities. Their presence would demonstrate solidarity deter potential aggressors through visible preparedness and provide real-time information to authorities.

Such networks would be staffed by men and women who receive regular, professional training in situational awareness, lawful use of force, and crisis response. Participants would carry flags of the United States and other self-identifying features, film incidents for evidentiary purposes, and serve as additional eyes and ears for law enforcement—never as vigilantes.

Complementing these networks, we urge every Jewish institution—synagogues, day schools, JCCs, and campus organizations—to adopt best-practice security protocols already employed by many communities: professional security assessments, active-shooter training, and coordinated emergency planning with local police and FBI field offices.

Within this framework of lawful preparedness we also encourage:

- Mandatory age-appropriate self-defense and situational-awareness training (e.g., Krav Maga or similar programs) in Jewish day schools and youth movements to build confidence, resilience, and physical capability.
- Open and proud display of Jewish identity—Kippot, Stars of David, Mezuzot—as an act of dignity and defiance against those who would intimidate Jews into hiding.
- Where individuals and families choose to do so, responsible exercise of Second Amendment rights, accompanied by rigorous training and strict adherence to all federal, state, and local laws. Armed self-defense, when legally undertaken, is a constitutional right available to all Americans and has protected countless houses of worship across faith traditions.

We also encourage American Jews to arm themselves with knowledge of history, geography and current events to confidently counter the daily canards and antisemitic topos that arise in conversations, on campuses, or in public discourse. For instance, when confronted with the misguided notion—sometimes echoed within our own community—that events in Israel inherently jeopardize Jewish safety in America, respond with informed dialogue that highlights the distinction between legitimate criticism and the weaponization of such claims to foster division.

Similarly, challenge the false characterization of Israel as a theocratic ethno-colonial state by pointing to the true historical colonizers—such as England, France, Spain and the Netherlands—and emphasizing Israel’s democratic foundations and diverse society. And address the epidemic of selective outrage over Palestinian hardships by drawing attention to comparable or greater injustices elsewhere in the world, where destruction and displacement of indigenous populations go largely unaddressed by the global community.

Drawing inspiration from figures like Charlie Kirk, who engaged opponents through rigorous debate and factual rebuttal, American Jews should prioritize self-education to participate in these exchanges with poise, evidence and a commitment to constructive dialogue—ensuring that distortions and lies are met not with silence, but with reasoned, resolute responses in both private and public settings.

These steps are not about confrontation; they are about removing the option of easy victimization. A community that is trained, coordinated, visible, and—where members choose—capable of lawful armed response is a community far less likely to be targeted.

American Jews have every right to expect protection from government at all levels, and we must continue demanding it. But prudence requires that we also build our own resilient infrastructure of safety—working hand-in-glove with law enforcement, never in opposition to it.

Hanukkah, the festival of lights that commemorates the Maccabees’ refusal to live in fear or submission, approaches. Its message of faith, fortitude, and disciplined resistance remains strikingly relevant. Let it inspire a unified American Jewish community that meets today’s challenges with education, advocacy, lawful preparedness, and unapologetic pride.

When Jews stand together—educated, organized, trained, and resolute—we not only protect ourselves; we uphold the strongest traditions of American freedom and self-reliance. That is the most powerful answer we can give to those who traffic in hate.

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