

[Ideas](#)

The New Blood Libel

This is what globalizing the intifada looks like.

By [David Frum](#) May 21, 2026



Nick Lachance / Toronto Star / Getty

The synagogue where I was bar mitzvahed was built in 1963. The Nazi Holocaust of the Jews of Europe had ended only 18 years before. But those nightmares seemed remote from the verdant and prosperous cul-de-sac in northern Toronto that led to the door of Temple Emanuel. Light streamed into the lobby through large picture windows. The congregants gazed out at the world through undraped glass, confident and hopeful. They invited the world to gaze back in.

On the night of March 2, 2026, at about 10:45 p.m., a car pulled into the synagogue's driveway. A person stepped out of the passenger side and aimed a handgun at the synagogue's glass windows. According to the synagogue's rabbi, Debra Landsberg, surveillance video did not capture the faces of the shooter or driver, or the car's license plate. It caught instead something less practical but more telling: the shooter's outward

calm. This person emptied the gun, paused, then resumed firing, 20 shots in all. The bullets shattered nine panes of glass, their wooden framework gouged by bullet fragments.

Two months later, the synagogue's windows remain boarded over. The synagogue's rabbi, board, and other decision makers are pondering a new and difficult dilemma: how to fortify their house of worship against a world where Jews are again marked for violence by their neighbors.

This is the backdrop for the vehement response that so many Jews and friends of Israel have had to a column by Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times* last week, in which he alleged a systematic Israeli campaign of sexual violence against Palestinian prisoners and detainees. Anti-Semitic violence in the Western world is quickening in tempo and intensifying in lethality. Much of that violence can be blamed on anti-Jewish incitement that draws on the deepest foundations of anti-Jewish myth.

The story of Temple Emanu-el and its windows feels particularly personal to me because so much of my family life took place within its welcoming walls. But it's just one incident out of too many to summarize or even tally. The deadliest so far was the [mass slaughter](#) at a Hanukkah party on Sydney's Bondi Beach in December, but perhaps only luck and good police work have prevented an even worse atrocity on American soil. In March, a man bearing an AR-15-style rifle crashed a car loaded with improvised explosives into a Michigan Jewish preschool near dismissal time. Just this past week, New York City Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch announced that federal prosecutors had thwarted a plot to commit mass-casualty attacks on Jewish institutions in Los Angeles and New York.

The town of El Burgo, Spain, near Málaga, has a tradition called the "Burning of Judas" on Easter Sunday. In April, the image of Christ's betrayer was replaced by a 23-foot effigy of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, detonated to the cheers of townspeople and tourists. In November, protesters staged a parody Thanksgiving dinner at Union Station in Washington, D.C., in which figures wearing masks of Netanyahu, President Trump, and former President Biden pretended to drink blood and eat human organs and limbs, and wiped their mouths with Israeli flags.

As these instances suggest, the line between anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist is often merely semantic. Do you disapprove of Israeli policy? Then go ahead and depict the country's prime minister as the betrayer of Christ. Do you believe that the Israeli government used excessive force after the pogrom of October 7? Then revive ancient accusations of Jews masterminding a political conspiracy and engaging in ritual murder and dismemberment. Eager to show solidarity with Palestinian grievances? Go ahead and shoot a synagogue.

After each incident, local politicians intone familiar formulas: *This is not who we are. Anti-Semitism has no place in our city/state/country.* These formulas ring false because they are false. After the first DUI, an inebriated motorist might plausibly say, “This is not who I am.” But after the sixth or eighth? Sir, an alcoholic is exactly who you are. If you want to change, you’d better accept the truth about your condition.

This is the concern that the critics of Kristof’s inflammatory *Times* opinion column have been trying to convey. Kristof claimed that Israeli prisons systematically engage in extreme sexual abuse of prisoners, including anal rape by dogs. He argued that this alleged systematic abuse is morally equivalent to the mass rape of Israelis by Hamas: “The Israeli government rejects suggestions that it sexually abuses Palestinians, just as Hamas denied raping Israeli women.”

Many critics have noted the column’s defects of evidence and sourcing. For example, Kristof relied heavily on information provided by Euro-Med Monitor, despite the fact that the NGO has reportedly deep connections to Hamas and a history of circulating false allegations, including that Israeli forces harvested the organs of dead Palestinians. Critics have also pointed out that the two named victims of prison abuse have changed their stories over time. One man who initially claimed in 2024 to have been “threatened” with sexual abuse insisted six months later that he had suffered it. The other named source, described by Kristof as a freelance reporter who prides “himself on his journalistic professionalism,” has a record of celebrating terrorists on social media.

Kristof wrote that he asked former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert about these allegations of sexual abuse against Palestinians. “Do I believe it happens?” Olmert responded. “Definitely.” Yet Olmert later said that he has no knowledge to support Kristof’s claims of systematic sexual abuse and that the column misrepresented his views.

The most inflammatory charge in Kristof’s column was the report that Palestinian men were anally penetrated by dogs “coached to rape prisoners.” The rape-by-dogs claim seems to have originated as [a pure invention](#) by the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health. It was then recycled [on social media](#) by anti-Israel partisans who amplified the slur into an urban legend. In response to skepticism about the anatomical improbability of a dog penetrating a human, Kristof mentioned that he had found “three different medical journal articles” that discussed “rectal injuries in humans from anal penetration by dogs.” Kristof did not provide links to these articles, nor did he acknowledge that the [medical literature](#) actually discusses very rare cases of people initiating sexual intercourse with dogs, not of dogs engaged in assault. But this discussion misses the point. The tainted origin of this allegation, from sources that have previously promoted other fantasies, should have triggered that indispensable journalistic tool: the bullshit meter.

“Jewish space lasers” has become a joke. But the “Israeli rape dogs” slur has now gained credibility at one of the world’s most prestigious media outlets. Kristof’s critics have recalled past incidents in which the double Pulitzer Prize winner was betrayed by his reliance on deceptive sources, including identifying [an innocent man](#) as the author of the anthrax terror attacks of 2001. Yet the *Times* stands by Kristof’s work: “Details were extensively fact-checked, with accounts further cross-referenced with news reporting, independent research from human-rights groups, surveys and in one case, with U.N. testimony.”

For journalists, the most important question is always, “Is the story true?” If the story is true, its consequences are not the journalist’s concern. Our job is to inform society, not to protect it. But in this case, the story is very doubtfully true. It also happens to be a claim that will likely incite and justify acts of violence.

Anti-Semitism has long trafficked in images of Jews as simultaneously uniquely cunning and uniquely disgusting. What could be more cunning and disgusting than training dogs to commit anal rape? The sexual abuse of men by animals transgresses the profoundest taboos protecting human dignity and purity. Those who believe Israelis and Jews capable of such an outrage might feel justified in wishing that such bestial monsters were wiped from the Earth—a shift from disgust to dehumanization to possible destruction that is [well charted](#) by social psychologists.

Six years ago, the section for which Kristof works was keenly sensitive to even the most far-fetched theories of harm. In the summer of 2020, the *Times* published an op-ed by Senator Tom Cotton urging President Trump to act forcefully to quell disturbances that followed the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer. Dozens of *Times* staffers tweeted objections to the editorial decision, many using the same phrasing: “Running this puts Black [@nytimes](#) staff in danger.” [That op-ed](#), which convulsed *The New York Times*’ newsroom and led to the forced resignation of the opinion editor, James Bennet, is now prefaced on the paper’s website by a five-paragraph disclaimer that draws attention to disputed factual claims, criticizes the piece’s tone as excessively harsh, and regrets that it failed to include necessary context “given the life-and-death importance of the topic.”

The wave of violence now besetting Jews in the United States and throughout the Western world apparently does not qualify as sufficiently “life-and-death” to expect this same scrupulous regard for tone, context, and accuracy from the newspaper’s columnists. Or maybe there’s something else going on, something simpler and stranger.

Matti Friedman, a former Associated Press reporter in the Middle East, has observed that in the conflicts embroiling Israel and diaspora Jewry, many major Western media institutions

have recast themselves as participants instead of observers. Stories harmful to Israel—false claims that Israel caused a famine as a weapon of war, or that an Israeli air strike destroyed a Gazan hospital—are reported credulously and corrected slowly, if at all. Stories that discredit Israel’s enemies, such as about Hamas’s crimes against Palestinians in Gaza, are reported grudgingly, if at all. Last week, Israel released the most thorough account yet of Hamas’s genuinely systematic and horrific sexual violence, an account that rests on video and other evidence recorded and shared by Hamas itself. Kristof’s column, which appeared the day before, blunted the impact of that powerful report.

The October 7 attack was the most ambitious and best-organized undertaking ever waged by a Palestinian military force. Tunnels were dug and buildings booby-trapped at a cost of billions of dollars, including from donated aid intended to benefit Gazan civilians. On the eve of the fight, Hamas controlled an army estimated by Israel to be up to 30,000 people—far larger than the deployable ground forces of Great Britain or Germany. Operational secrecy was preserved with steely discipline, and Israel was utterly deceived and taken by surprise. Yet although the operation inflicted grievous damage, it ultimately failed in its goal of sparking a regional war to invade and overthrow the Jewish state. The failure left Gaza a ruin and tens of thousands of fighting men and civilians dead.

The slogan “Globalize the intifada” proposes a new mode of operations. Rather than wage a difficult and dangerous war against the highly armed Jews of Israel, the slogan urges anti-Zionists to target a more vulnerable population: the Jews of the diaspora.

Since late March, attackers have [randomly stabbed](#) two Jewish men, and arsonists have attacked three synagogues, an educational building, and four charity ambulances in the United Kingdom. Five days after the shooting attack on Temple Emanu-el, shooters fired on two other Toronto-area synagogues. (Police have apprehended a suspect in those cases.) A Montreal synagogue was twice the target of arson, in 2023 and 2024. Mobs have attacked Jews outside synagogues in Los Angeles and New York City.

One obvious response to the threats is for governments to fund new defenses around synagogues, schools, and community centers. American Jewish organizations spend an estimated 14 percent of their budgets on security, or about \$765 million a year. These defenses exact a psychic toll as well as an economic one. The North American Jews of the 1960s and ’70s imagined that they had left the ghetto walls behind forever. Now new walls are rising around them, to protect against the violence stirred by campaigns of defamation.

It’s all a long and sad distance from the brave declaration of *belonging* symbolized by the now-shattered windows of my boyhood synagogue. But the story is not over yet. There are Americans—and Britons and Canadians and Australians and Europeans, too—who

remember that a society that turns on its Jewish minority eventually devours itself. The shots aimed at the windows of synagogues are aimed at larger targets. The advent of liberal modernity was announced by the dismantling of ghetto walls. The re-erection of those walls sounds a note of doom, and not only for the Jews.