

An American Problem

We cannot afford to excuse, indulge, or minimize political violence.



Valerie Plesch / The Washington Post / Getty

By [Reihan Salam](#) and [Jesse Arm](#) May 26, 2025

On Wednesday night, a young couple left an American Jewish Committee event in Washington, D.C. Moments later, they were gunned down. As police arrested the suspect, he shouted, “Free Palestine.”

The victims—Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim—were 20-something Israeli Embassy aides. Lischinsky, a devout Christian born to an Argentinian Israeli father and a German mother, had just bought an engagement ring. Milgrim, a Jewish American with a master’s degree from the United Nations University for Peace, was devoted to humanitarian work and cross-cultural dialogue. They were idealists. They were in love. And they were murdered—not for anything they had done, but for who they were and what they represented.

Their alleged killer, Elias Rodriguez, was at one time affiliated with the Party for Socialism and Liberation—a U.S.-based Marxist group [tied to](#) China, Iran, and Russia. The group lionizes Hamas and calls for violent “resistance” against Israel. It’s hard not to conclude that this was a political assassination, fueled by a deranged but coherent ideology that’s spreading with alarming speed through American institutions.

Rodriguez didn’t invent this worldview. It has been cultivated for years—by groups that venerate terrorists, by academics who excuse anti-Jewish hate as anti-colonial resistance, and by students chanting “Intifada” while shutting down bridges and storming campus buildings. It is a worldview that divides people into fixed categories of oppressor and oppressed, resents Jewish achievement, embraces violence, and sees Western civilization as inherently illegitimate. It targets Jews first—but never only.

Some call it protest. Our Manhattan Institute colleague Tal Fortgang calls it “[civil terrorism](#)”: the use of lawless disruption to intimidate and destabilize. Over the past 18 months, we’ve watched it escalate—from public rallies romanticizing Hamas after October 7, to anti-Semitic harassment on campuses, to slogans openly demanding ethnic cleansing. In this climate, the leap from vandalism to murder was all but inevitable.

The D.C. shooting was not the first incident of its kind. Just weeks ago, the home of Pennsylvania’s Jewish governor, Josh Shapiro, was allegedly [firebombed](#) on the first night of Passover by a man upset about his support for Israel. In Michigan, Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel initially pressed charges against demonstrators who assaulted police during a campus encampment—then [dropped](#) them under pressure from the left flank of her party. But when extremists escalate and the law falters, the risks to public safety grow.

What we’re witnessing is an issue not with Israel, but with America. When violence aimed at Jews—or those seen as aligned with them—is dismissed, excused, or rationalized, it undermines the civic norms that hold our society together. Elite institutions that once upheld liberal pluralism now indulge a

form of identity politics that prizes grievance over justice. Some of the ugliest reactions to the D.C. shooting treated the murders as incidental—or even deserved. That’s not just moral failure. It represents a worldview that treats violence as politics by other means. Such rationalizations have been used to justify the [ideological murder](#) of a health-care executive, [coordinated arson attacks](#) on Tesla dealerships by anti-capitalist extremists, and, now, executions outside a Jewish museum in the nation’s capital.

The denial of Jewish legitimacy—whether of the state of Israel or of American Jews participating in public life—is no longer a fringe opinion. In too many quarters, it’s treated as respectable. It is not. It is bigotry. And when paired with the belief that those claiming oppression are justified in doing “whatever it takes,” the result isn’t justice. It’s carnage.

We do not argue that speech should be criminalized; our First Amendment freedoms need to be protected. And it is possible to criticize Israeli policies, or those of any other government, without crossing the line into incitement.

But we must be honest about what’s happening. When networks of activists treat unrepentant killers as heroes, coordinate illegal activity, and agitate for the collapse of Western society, they’re not engaged in civil disobedience. They’re waging political warfare. That some of these groups are backed by hostile foreign regimes only underscores the urgency of a serious response.

The way forward is not to panic, but to draw a clear line. We must reaffirm that no political grievance justifies murder. That Americans—of any faith or background—should not have to fear for their lives while leaving a museum event. That violence in the name of justice is still violence. And that democracy works only when we preserve the norms that keep politics from devolving into civil conflict.

The murders of Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim were horrific. They were also predictable. If Americans continue down this path—excusing, indulging, and minimizing political violence when it comes from favored factions—we will see more such tragedies.

It is not enough to mourn. We must act. Not by censoring ideas, but by enforcing the law, defending civic order, and refusing to normalize an ideology that leads, inexorably, to bloodshed.

[Reihan Salam](#) is a contributing writer at *The Atlantic* and the president of the Manhattan Institute.

[Jesse Arm](#) is the executive director of external affairs and chief of staff at the Manhattan Institute.