



# The Danger Within: Militant Islam in America

**An increasingly influential movement in this country shares the ideology, and the ultimate aims, of the terrorists who toppled the...**

NOV, 2001 • BY DANIEL PIPES

In the aftermath of the violence on September 11, American politicians from George W. Bush on down have tripped over themselves to affirm that the vast majority of Muslims living in the United States are just ordinary people. Here is how the President put it during a visit to a mosque on September 17: “America counts millions of Muslims among our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms and dads.” Two days later, he added that “there are millions of good Americans who practice the Muslim faith who love their country as much as I love the country, who salute the flag as strongly as I salute the flag.”

These soothing words, echoed and amplified by many columnists and editorial writers, were obviously appropriate at a moment of high national tension and amid reports of mounting bias against Muslims living in the United States. And it is certainly true that the number of militant Islamic operatives with plans to carry out terrorist attacks on the United States is statistically tiny. But the situation is more complex than the President would have it.

The Muslim population in this country is not like any other group, for it includes within it a substantial body of people—many times more numerous than the agents of Osama bin Laden—who share with the suicide hijackers a hatred of the United States and the desire, ultimately, to transform it into a nation living under the strictures of militant Islam. Although not responsible for the atrocities in September, they harbor designs for this country that warrant urgent and serious attention.

In June 1991, Siraj Wahaj, a black convert to Islam and the recipient of some of the American Muslim community's highest honors, had the privilege of becoming the first Muslim to deliver the daily prayer in the U.S. House of Representatives. On that occasion he recited from the Qur'an and appealed to the Almighty to guide American leaders "and grant them righteousness and wisdom."

A little over a year later, addressing an audience of New Jersey Muslims, the same Wahaj articulated a rather different message from his mild and moderate invocation in the House. If only Muslims were more clever politically, he told his New Jersey listeners, they could take over the United States and replace its constitutional government with a caliphate. "If we were united and strong, we'd elect our own emir [leader] and give allegiance to him. . . . [T]ake my word, if 6-8 million Muslims unite in America, the country will come to us." In 1995, Wahaj served as a character witness for Omar Abdel Rahman in the trial that found that blind sheikh guilty of conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States. More alarming still, the U.S. attorney for New York listed Wahaj as one of the "unindicted persons who may be alleged as co-conspirators" in the sheikh's case.

The disparity between Wahaj's good citizenship in the House and his militant forecast of a Muslim takeover—not to mention his association with violent felons—is only one example of a larger pattern common to the American Muslim scene. Another example, about which I have written recently elsewhere, involves the American Muslims for Jerusalem, an organization whose official advocacy of "a Jerusalem that symbolizes religious tolerance and dialogue" contrasts markedly with the wild conspiracy-mongering and crude anti-Jewish rhetoric in which its spokesmen indulge at closed events.<sup>1</sup> At a minimum, then, anyone who would understand the real views of American Muslims must delve deeper than the surface of their public statements.

Doing so, one discovers that the ambition to take over the United States is hardly a new one. The first missionaries for militant Islam, or Islamism, who arrived here from abroad in the 1920's, unblushingly declared, "Our plan is, we are going to conquer America." The audacity of such statements hardly went unnoticed at the time, including by Christians who cherished their own missionizing hopes. As a 1922 newspaper commentary put it:

To the millions of American Christians who have so long looked eagerly forward to the time the cross shall be supreme in every land and the people of the whole world shall have become the followers of Christ, the plan to win this continent to the path of the “infidel Turk” will seem a thing unbelievable. But there is no doubt about its being pressed with all the fanatical zeal for which the Mohammedans are noted.

But it is in recent decades, as the Muslim population in the country has increased significantly in size, social standing, and influence, and as Islamism has made its presence widely felt on the international scene, that this “fanatical zeal” has truly come into its own. A catalyzing figure in the story is the late Ismail Al-Faruqi, a Palestinian immigrant who founded the International Institute of Islamic Thought and taught for many years at Temple University in Philadelphia. Rightly called “a pioneer in the development of Islamic studies in America,” he was also the first contemporary theorist of a United States made Muslim. “Nothing could be greater,” Al-Faruqi wrote in the early 1980’s, “than this youthful, vigorous, and rich continent [of North America] turning away from its past evil and marching forward under the banner of *Allahu Akbar* [God is great].”

Al-Faruqi’s hopes are today widely shared among educated Muslim leaders. Zaid Shakir, formerly the Muslim chaplain at Yale University, has stated that Muslims *cannot* accept the legitimacy of the American secular system, which “is against the orders and ordainments of Allah.” To the contrary, “The orientation of the Qur'an pushes us in the exact opposite direction.” To Ahmad Nawfal, a leader of the Jordanian Muslim Brethren who speaks frequently at American Muslim rallies, the United States has “no thought, no values, and no ideals”; if militant Muslims “stand up, with the ideology that we possess, it will be very easy for us to preside over this world.” Masudul Alam Choudhury, a Canadian professor of business, writes matter-of-factly and enthusiastically about the “Islamization agenda in North America.”

For a fuller exposition of this outlook, one can do no better than to turn to a 1989 book by Shamim A. Siddiqi, an influential commentator on American Muslim issues. Cryptically titled *Methodology of Dawab Ilallah in American Perspective* (more idiomatically rendered as “The Need to Convert Americans to Islam”), this 168-page study, published in Brooklyn, remains largely unavailable to general readers (neither amazon.com nor bookfinder.com listed it over a period of months) but is widely posted on Islamist websites,<sup>2</sup> where it enjoys a faithful readership. In it, in prose that makes up in intensity

and vividness for what it lacks in sophistication and polish, Siddiqi lays out both a detailed rationale and a concrete plan for Islamists to take over the United States and establish “Islamic rule” (*iqamat ad-din*).

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Why America? In Siddiqi’s judgment, the need to assume control here is even more pressing than the need to sustain the revolution of the mullahs in Iran or to destroy Israel, for doing so will have a much greater positive impact on the future of Islam. America is central not for the reasons one might expect—its large population, its wealth, or the cultural influence it wields around the world—but on three other grounds.

The first has to do with Washington’s role as the premier enemy of Islamism (or, possibly, of Islam itself). In Siddiqi’s colorful language, whenever and wherever Muslims have moved toward establishing an Islamic state, the “treacherous hands of the secular West are always there . . . to bring about [their] defeat.” Nor are Muslim rulers of any help, for they are “all in the pockets of the Western powers.” If, therefore, Islam is ever going to attain its rightful place of dominance in the world, the “ideology of Islam [must] prevail over the mental horizon of the American people.” The entire future of the Muslim world, Siddiqi concludes, “depends on how soon the Muslims of America are able to build up their own indigenous movement.”

Secondly, America is central because establishing Islamism here would signal its final triumph over its only rival, that bundle of Christianity and liberalism which constitutes contemporary Western civilization. (One cannot help noting the irony that Siddiqi’s tract appeared in the same year, 1989, as Francis Fukuyama’s famous article speculating that, with the collapse of Communism and the apparent triumph of liberal democracy, we had begun to approach the “end of history.”) And thirdly, and still more grandly, the infusion of the United States with Islamism would make for so powerful a combination of material success and spiritual truth that the establishment of “God’s Kingdom” on earth would no longer be “a distant dream.”

But this dream will not happen by itself. To American Muslims, writes Siddiqi, falls the paramount responsibility of bringing Islam to power in their country; and to this goal, Muslims must devote “all of their energies, talents, and resources.” For this is how they will be assessed on judgment day: “Every Muslim living in the West will stand in the witness

box in the mightiest court of Allah . . . in *Akhirah* [the last day] and give evidence that he fulfilled his responsibility, . . . that he left no stone unturned to bring the message of the Qur'an to every nook and corner of the country."

How this desired end is to be achieved is a question on which opinions differ in Siddiqi's world. Basically, the disagreement centers on the role of violence.

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As has been made irrefutably clear in recent weeks, there are indeed some, not just abroad but living among us, who see the United States as (in the phrase of Osama bin Laden) an "enemy of Islam" that must be brought to its knees and destroyed. In its broad outlines, this judgment came to be solidified during the crisis over Iraq's seizure of Kuwait in the early 1990's, when militants like bin Laden discerned a historic parallel between the presence of American troops on the soil of Saudi Arabia and the brutal Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980's. In their dialectical view, as the *New Yorker* writer Mary Ann Weaver has explained, the United States, just like the Soviet Union before it, represented "an infidel occupation force propping up a corrupt, repressive, and un-Islamic government." And just as the Islamist *mujahideen* in Afghanistan had succeeded in defeating and driving out their occupiers, and thereby played a role in the collapse of the mighty Soviet Union itself, so Islamists might cause the collapse of the United States: one down, one to go, as it were.

To the blind sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, who after bin Laden is perhaps today's most notorious enemy of the United States, bombing the World Trade Center in 1993 was part and parcel of this revolutionary strategy to "conquer the land of the infidels" by force. The idea, as one of his followers put it, was to "bring down their highest buildings and the mighty constructions they are so proud of, in order thoroughly to demoralize them."<sup>3</sup> And this was a duty that Islamists saw as incumbent on all Muslims; having helped humiliate the Soviets in Afghanistan, they now, as one native-born American convert to Islam proclaimed in July 1989, must "complete the march of *jihad* until we reach America and liberate her."

But there are several problems with the approach of revolutionary violence, even from the perspective of those who share its goal. The most obvious has to do with its impact on American society. Although attacks like the 1993 bombing or the suicide massacres of

September 11 are intended to demoralize the American people, prompt civil unrest, and weaken the country politically, what they do instead is to bring Americans together in patriotism and purpose. Those who mastermind them, in the meantime, are often caught: Abdel Rahman is sitting out a life sentence in a federal penitentiary, his campaign of violence stillborn, while Osama bin Laden is the object of a massive manhunt to get him “dead or alive.” Unlike in the very different case of the Soviet Union, it is hard to see how the use of force will succeed in wearing down this country, much less lead to a change in government.

Besides, as a number of commentators have recently pointed out, in targeting all Americans the perpetrators of Islamic violence do not bother even to discriminate between non-Muslim and Muslim victims. According to preliminary estimates, several hundred Muslims died in the collapse of the World Trade Center. This is not exactly calculated to enlist the participation of most resident Muslims in a campaign of violent insurrection.<sup>4</sup>

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For all these reasons, the non-violent way would seem to have a brighter future, and it is in fact the approach adopted by most Islamists. Not only is it legal, but it allows its enthusiasts to adopt a seemingly benign view of the United States, a country they mean to rescue and make over rather than to destroy, and it dictates a strategy of working with Americans rather than against them. As a teacher at an Islamic school in Jersey City, near New York, explains, the “short-term goal is to introduce Islam. In the long term, we must save American society.” Step by step, writes a Pakistan-born professor of economics, by offering “an alternative model” to Americans, Muslims can refashion what Ismail Al-Faruqi called “the unfortunate realities of North America” into something acceptable in God’s eyes.

Practically speaking, there are two main prongs to the non-violent strategy. The first involves radically increasing the number of American Muslims, a project that on the face of it would not seem very promising. Islam, after all, is still an exotic growth in the United States, its adherents representing just 1 to 2 percent of the population and with exceedingly dim prospects of becoming anything like a majority. Islamists are not so unrealistic as to think that these numbers can be substantially altered any time soon by

large-scale immigration (which is politically unfeasible and might anyway provoke a backlash) or by normal rates of reproduction. Hence they focus most of their efforts on conversion.

They do so not only as a matter of expediency but on principle. For Islamists, converting Americans is the central purpose of Muslim existence in the United States, the only possible justification for Muslims to live in an infidel land. In the view of Shamim Siddiqi, there is no choice in the matter—American Muslims are “ordained by Allah” to help replace evil with good, and otherwise “have no right even to breathe.” “Wherever you came from,” adds Siraj Wahaj, “you came . . . for one reason—for one reason only—to establish Allah’s *din* [faith].”

This imperative, relentlessly propagated by authoritative figures and promoted by leading Islamist organizations like the Muslim Student Association, has been widely adopted by Muslim Americans at large. Many attest to the sense of responsibility that flows from being an “ambassador for Islam,” and are ever mindful of the cardinal importance of winning new adherents. And, given what they hold to be the truth of their message and the depravity of American culture, Islamists are optimistic about their chances of success. “A life of *taqwah* [piety] will immediately attract non-Muslims toward Islam,” writes Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, an important Indian Islamist, in his “Message for Muslims in the West.”

He has a point: the more readily the message of Islam is available, the more converts it is likely to win. In making headway in the United States, Islam has largely depended on hands-on contact and personal experience. According to one survey, over two-thirds of American converts to Islam were motivated by the influence of a Muslim friend or acquaintance. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1964), with its moving account of redemption through Islam, has had a wide impact on American blacks (and even some whites), causing a substantial number to convert. Similarly not to be discounted are the efforts of the various Muslim organizations in the United States, whose “attempts at educating the American public about Islam” may be responsible, according to one observer, for “Islam’s increasing numbers.”

But if increasing numbers are necessary, they are also not sufficient. After all, whole countries—Turkey, Egypt, Algeria—have overwhelmingly Muslim populations, but Islamism is suppressed by their governments. From an Islamist point of view, indeed, the situation in Turkey is far worse than in the United States, for it is a more grievous thing to

reject the divine message as interpreted by Islamists than merely to be ignorant of it. Therefore, in addition to building up Muslim numbers, Islamists must prepare the United States for their own brand of ideology. This means doing everything possible toward creating an Islamist environment and applying Islamic law. Activities under this heading fall into various categories.

*Promoting Islamic rituals and customs in the public square.* Islamists want secular authorities to permit students in public institutions, for example, to recite the *basmallah* (the formula “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate”) in classroom exercises. They also want the right to broadcast over outdoor loudspeakers the five daily Islamic calls-to-prayer. Similarly, they have agitated for publicly maintained prayer facilities in such institutions as schools and airports.

*Privileges for Islam.* Islamists seek public financial support for Islamic schools, mosques, and other institutions. They also lobby for special quotas for Muslim immigrants, try to compel corporations to make special allowances for Muslim employees, and demand the formal inclusion of Muslims in affirmative-action plans.

*Restricting or disallowing what others may do.* Islamists want law-enforcement agencies to criminalize activities like drinking and gambling that are offensive to Islam. While seeking wide latitude for themselves, for instance when it comes to expressing disrespect for American national symbols, they would penalize expressions of disrespect for religious figures whom Islam deems holy, especially the prophet Muhammad; punish criticism of Islam, Islamism, or Islamists; and close down critical analysis of Islam.

Some of these aims have already been achieved. Others may seem relatively minor in and of themselves, implying no drastic alterations in existing American arrangements but rather only slight adjustments in our already expansive accommodation of social “diversity.” Cumulatively, however, by whittling away at the existing order, they would change the country’s whole way of life—making Islam a major public presence, ensuring that both the workplace and the educational system accommodate its dictates and strictures, adapting family customs to its code of conduct, winning it a privileged position in American life, and finally imposing its system of law. Steps along the way would include more radical and intrusive actions like prohibiting conversion *out of* Islam, criminalizing adultery, banning the consumption of pork, formalizing enhanced rights for Muslims at the expense of non-Muslims, and doing away with equality of the sexes.

A muslim majority? Islamic law the law of the land? Even the most optimistic Islamists concede the task will not be easy. Just as Muhammad confronted die-hard opponents in pagan Mecca, writes Siddiqi, so pious Muslims in America will face opponents, led by the “secular press cum media, the agents of capitalism, the champions of atheism (Godless creeds) and the [Christian] missionary zealots.” Doing battle with them will demand focus, determination, and sacrifice.

And yet Siddiqi also thinks Muslims enjoy advantages undreamt of in Muhammad’s day or in any other society than today’s United States. For one thing, Americans are hungry for the Islamist message, which “pinpoints the shortcoming of capitalism, elaborates the fallacies of democracy, [and] exposes the devastating consequences of the liberal lifestyle.” For another, the United States *permits* Islamists to pursue their political agenda in an entirely legal fashion and without ever challenging the existing order. Indeed, precisely because the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, the system can be used to further Islamist aims. Democratic means are at hand for developing an active and persistent lobby, cultivating politicians, and electing Muslim representatives. Nearly a million legal immigrants arrive in the country each year, plus many more through the long coastlines and porous land borders. The courts are an all-important resource, and have already proved their worth in winning concession after concession from American corporations and public authorities.

Even so, the road will not be completely smooth. A delicate point will be reached, in Siddiqi’s mind, as society polarizes between Muslim and non-Muslim camps “in every walk of life.” At that point, as the struggle between Truth and Error “acquires momentum and the tension increases along with it,” the “Wrong Doers” are likely to take desperate steps to “eliminate the Islamic movement and its workers by force.” But if Islamists tread cautiously to navigate this point, taking special care not to alienate the non-Muslim population, eventually there will follow what Siddiqi calls a general “Rush-to-Islam.” It will then be only a matter of time before Muslims find themselves not just enfranchised but actually running the show.

How much time? Siddiqi sees Islamists in power in Washington before 2020. For Wahaj, implementation of the *shari'a* in the United States “appears to be approaching fast,” and in contemplating what that means his language grows ecstatic:

I have a vision in America: Muslims owning property all over, Muslim businesses, factories, *halal* meat, supermarkets, all these buildings owned by Muslims. Can you see the vision, can you see the Newark International Airport and a John Kennedy Airport and LaGuardia having Muslim fleets of planes, Muslim pilots? Can you see our trucks rolling down the highways, Muslim names? Can you imagine walking down the streets of Teaneck [New Jersey]: three Muslim high schools, five Muslim junior-high schools, fifteen public schools? Can you see the vision, can you see young women walking down the street of Newark, New Jersey, with long flowing *hijab* and long dresses? Can you see the vision of an area of no crime, controlled by the Muslims?

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It hardly needs pointing out that this vision is, to say the least, farfetched, or that Islamists are deluding themselves if they think that today's newborns will be attending college in an Iranian-style United States. But neither is their effort altogether quixotic: their devotion, energy, and skill are not to be questioned, and the larger Muslim-American community for which they claim to speak is assuredly in a position, especially as its numbers grow, to affect our public life in decisive ways. Indeed, despite persistent complaints of bias against them—more voluminous than ever in the wake of the airplane hijackings on September 11—Muslim Americans have built an enviable record of socioeconomic accomplishment in this country, have won wide public acceptance of their faith, and have managed to make it particularly difficult for anyone to criticize their religion or customs.

Whether and to what degree the community as a whole subscribes to the Islamist agenda are, of course, open questions. But what is not open to question is that, whatever the majority of Muslim Americans may believe, most of the *organized* Muslim community agrees with the Islamist goal—the goal, to say it once again, of building an Islamic state in America. To put it another way, the major Muslim organizations in this country are in the hands of extremists.

One who is not among them is Muhammad Hisham Kabbani of the relatively small Islamic Supreme Council of America. In Kabbani's reliable estimation, such "extremists" have "taken over 80 percent of the mosques" in the United States. And not just the mosques: schools, youth groups, community centers, political organizations, professional

associations, and commercial enterprises also tend to share a militant outlook, hostile to the prevailing order in the United States and advocating its replacement with an Islamic one.

Not all these organizations and spokesmen are open about their aspirations, though some are: for example, the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia, proclaims its academic purpose to be nothing less than “the Islamization of the humanities and the social sciences.” But the best-known organizations—the ones whose members are invited to offer prayers and invocations before Congress or to attend White House functions, or whose representatives accompanied the President on his September 17 visit to a mosque—tend to hide their true colors behind arch-respectable goals. Thus, the American Muslim Council claims to work “toward the political empowerment of Muslims in America,” the Council on American-Islamic Relations is “putting faith into action,” and the Muslim Public Affairs Council seeks only to make American Muslims “an influential component in U.S. public affairs.”

But as I have documented at greater length on other occasions,<sup>5</sup> much if not everything about the conduct of these organizations points to their essential agreement with the “conquer America” agenda, and from time to time their leaders—including Al-Faruqi and Shakir—have even said as much. As for Siraj Wahaj, he is a top figure in the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, the Muslim Alliance in North America, and the Muslim Arab Youth Association, and his views contaminate every single one of them. It is not accurate to say, as President Bush said of the Islamist leaders with whom he met on September 17, that they “love America as much as I do.”

That a significant movement in this country aspires to erode its bedrock social and legal arrangements, including the separation of church and state, and has even developed a roadmap toward that end, poses a unique dilemma, especially at this moment. Every responsible public official, and every American of good faith, is bent on drawing a broad distinction between terrorists operating in the name of Islam and ordinary Muslim “moms and dads.” It is a true and valid distinction, but it goes much too far, and if adhered to as a guideline for policy it will cripple the effort that must be undertaken to preserve our institutions.

What such an effort would look like is a subject unto itself, but at a minimum it would have to entail the vigilant application of social and political pressure to ensure that Islam is not accorded special status of any kind in this country, the active recruitment of moderate Muslims in the fight against Islamic extremism, a keener monitoring of Muslim organizations with documented links to Islamist activity, including the support of terrorism, and the immediate reform of immigration procedures to prevent a further influx of visitors or residents with any hint of Islamist ideology. Wherever that seditious and totalitarian ideology has gained a foothold in the world, it has wrought havoc, and some societies it has brought to utter ruin. The preservation of our existing order can no longer be taken for granted; it needs to be fought for.

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<sup>1</sup> “Islam’s American Lobby,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 20, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Here are two: <http://www.islambook.com/dawah.htm> and <http://www.halalco.com/dawah.html>.

<sup>3</sup> These words were found in a notebook kept by Sayyid Abd al-Aziz Nusayr, the Egyptian immigrant who assassinated Rabbi Meir Kahane in a New York hotel in November 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Upon hearing an immigrant Islamist speaker instruct an audience of Muslims that they were “obligated to desire, and when possible to participate in, the overthrow of any non-Islamic government—anywhere in the world—in order to replace it by an Islamic one,” one American-born convert remembers protesting in dismay that this would involve people like himself in political treason. “Yes, that’s true,” was the lecturer’s blithe response (Jeffrey Lang, *Even Angels Ask: A Journey to Islam in America*, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> See, in COMMENTARY, “Are Muslim Americans Victimized?” (November 2000), “How Elijah Muhammad Won” (June 2000), “‘How Dare You Defame Islam’” (November 1999), and “America’s Muslims Against America’s Jews” (May 1999).

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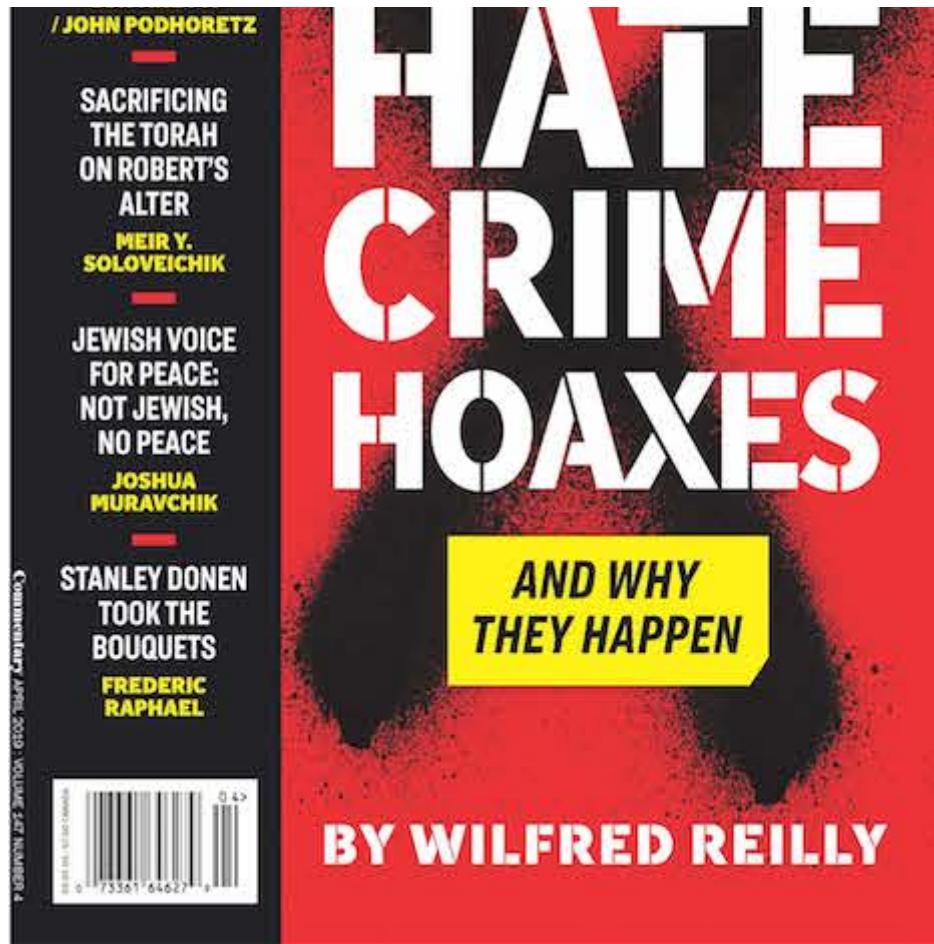
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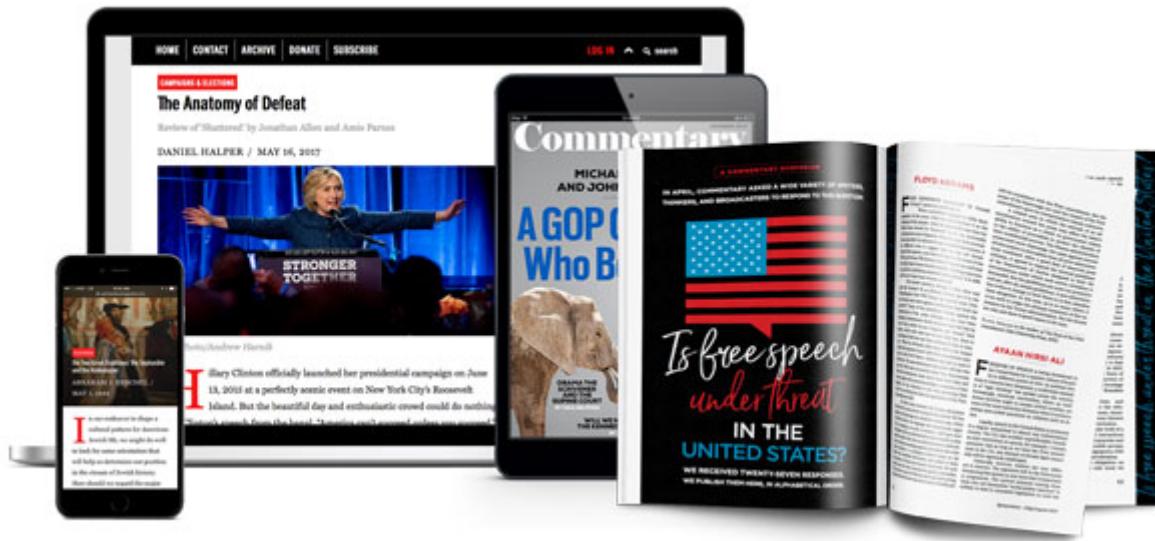
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