

Fascist antisemitism rears its head in hurricane disinformation campaign

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According to a report issued Tuesday by a British-based research group, fascist and far-right groups have launched brazenly antisemitic attacks on federal and local officials responsible for overseeing rescue and recovery efforts from Hurricane Helene, which struck the American Southeast on September 26.

The *Washington Post*, which brought the report to the attention of a US audience, pointed to the targeting of Alejandro Mayorkas, secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Jaelyn Rothenberg, director of public affairs for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); and Esther Manheimer, mayor of Asheville, North Carolina, the city hit hardest by Helene. All are Jewish.

The newspaper noted, “The attacks, which include wild claims that Jewish officials are conspiring to orchestrate the disasters, sabotage the recovery or even seize victims’ property, are being fomented largely on Elon Musk’s X.”

Thirty-three right-wing posts on X on hurricane relief have gone viral, reaching more than 160 million viewers, and 10 of them are overtly antisemitic, reaching 17 million viewers, according to the report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), a London-based think tank which collects information on the online activity of fascist and neo-Nazi groups in Europe and globally.

The ISD report found:

Some of the largest accounts sharing falsehoods about the hurricane response—including those with more than 2 million followers—have actively engaged with other forms of mis- and disinformation and hate. This includes anti-migrant conspiracies, false claims of electoral fraud, and antisemitic discourse around the so-called “Great Replacement.”

The report continues:

We found a mutually-reinforcing dynamic between accounts spreading misinformation about Hurricane Helene, and those pushing false claims around Haitian migrants in Springfield, Ohio, the integrity of recent US elections, Jewish American citizens, and Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Falsehoods around hurricane response have spawned credible threats and incitement to violence directed at the federal government—this includes calls to send militias to face down FEMA for the perceived denial of aid, and that individuals would “shoot” FEMA officials and the agency’s emergency responders.

What the ISD is describing is the substance of every campaign rally for the Republican Party presidential ticket of Donald Trump and JD Vance, in which the candidates invariably claim that the Biden administration is withholding disaster aid from heavily Republican areas and that aid has been diverted from “real” Americans to “illegal” migrants, together with claims that the Trump-Vance ticket can only lose the election if the Democrats succeed in getting millions of such “illegals” to the polls.

The flood of disinformation has obstructed recovery efforts after Helene by discouraging storm victims from applying for federal aid. It has also fueled threats of violence against local and federal officials. Asheville Mayor Manheimer wrote, in an email to the *Post*, “Our community’s priority is managing this crisis and addressing the immediate needs that exist in Asheville and Western North Carolina,” adding that the antisemitic comments create “a personal safety concern while trying to execute the work needed to move us through this catastrophe.”

The role of X, formerly Twitter, is critical. X owner Elon Musk, the world’s richest billionaire, is a leading supporter of fascist Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, appearing with him on stage last week at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. When he gained control of Twitter in 2022,

Musk reinstated hundreds of fascists and antisemites whose accounts had been suspended for spreading hate propaganda. Among these were many of those cited in the ISD report, as well as the account of fascist Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene.

In the wake of Helene, Greene has publicly tweeted that the hurricane was deliberately aimed to strike heavily Republican areas of Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina by scientists working for the Biden administration, in order to depress voter turnout in next month's presidential election. Notorious for suggesting in 2018 that "Jewish space lasers" were causing wildfires in California, Greene wrote last week on X, "Yes they can control the weather," going on to claim that anyone who denied the ability of the government to control the weather was part of the conspiracy.

The antisemitic content of the latest barrage of right-wing propaganda is not subtle. One viral post listed DHS and FEMA officials who are Jewish, claiming, "No wonder FEMA is so slow to help rural White Americans!" Another statement cited by the ISD reads: "So DHS is just basically a talmudic patronage club mostly replacing Whites with infinity browns when they bother to do anything competently at all," accompanied by an image of Adolf Hitler's face.

It is therefore remarkable and revealing that when Biden, Harris and other top officials held a press briefing on Hurricane Milton on Wednesday, they denounced Trump and other Republicans for spreading conspiracy theories about how aid was being distributed after Hurricane Helene, as well as Greene's demented ravings about weather control, but made no mention of antisemitism.

For an entire year, the Biden administration, congressional Republicans and Democrats and the corporate media have joined forces in a bipartisan campaign to depict widespread protests against the Israeli genocide in Gaza as "antisemitic." It has become the ideological spearhead of a McCarthyite campaign to witch-hunt and intimidate students, professors and anyone else outraged by the mass murder of Palestinians. This charge is entirely slanderous and provocative, especially given the widespread Jewish participation in the anti-genocide protests.

But confronted with real, actual, brutal antisemitism, complete with crude references to "big noses" and other anti-Jewish tropes typical of the neo-Nazi right, Biden and Harris say nothing—even when their own aides and officials are the targets.

This demonstrates, once again, that the principal concern of the Biden-Harris administration is the stepped up prosecution of its war policies, against Russia in Ukraine, against Iran in the Middle East and ultimately against China.

The Democrats have reserved the charge of antisemitism to smear opponents of these imperialist wars and thus effectively deprived the concept of any genuine political content.

Attacking real antisemitism, whose natural home is the fascist right, would undermine their hoped-for alliance with their Republican "colleagues" in bipartisan support for increased US military aid to Ukraine, direct involvement of NATO troops in that conflict, and further massive subventions for Israel as the military spearhead of imperialist intervention in the Middle East.

Moreover, by their silence on actual antisemitism, they give an opening to the fascists to exploit the evident failure of the capitalist system and both its parties, Republicans as well as Democrats, to organize a serious and energetic response to the growing number of weather disasters, fueled by climate change.

Millions trapped in the path of catastrophes like Helene and Milton, experiencing sudden and massive deprivation, losing their homes and possessions even if they manage to survive, can see the disparity between the social need and the aid provided by the state and federal governments. They can see the obvious indifference of top government officials—presidents, governors, cabinet members—as they pour billions into war and corporate subsidies, while offering a pittance for those devastated by the storms. The fascists offer a scapegoat for this social devastation, and Trump seeks to exploit the crisis to return to the White House.

A genuine alternative to war, social inequality and the destruction of the natural environment can only come about through a struggle against the root cause: the capitalist profit system. This requires the independent political mobilization of the working class as an international force, based on the program of world socialist revolution.



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