'The Devil That Never Dies' review: anti-Semitism is on the rise around the world

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THE DEVIL THAT NEVER DIES

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen

Little, Brown $30

485 pages

By GLENN C. ALTSCHULER/Special to The Oregonian

In 2010, Abdallah Jarbu, Hamas' Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs, proclaimed that Jews "suffer from a mental disorder, because they are thieves and aggressors ... in fact, they are foreign bacteria, a microbe unparalleled in the world." Expressing the hope that Allah would "annihilate this filthy people who have neither religion nor conscience," Jarbu condemned "whoever supports sitting down with them and whoever believes that they are human beings."

These sentiments "have exploded in volume and intensity in the last two decades," according to Daniel Goldhagen, a former Harvard professor and the author of "Hitler's Willing Executioners," "A Moral Reckoning," and "Worse Than War." In "The Devil That Never Dies: The Rise and Threat of Global Antisemitism," he demonstrates that anti-Semitism has surged around the world and, except in the U.S., is disseminated frequently in parliaments, the mass media, on the streets, in places of worship and in private homes. Based on longstanding prejudices but more political than ever before, the new anti-Semitism, Goldhagen argues, poses an existential threat to Israel -- and to Jews everywhere.

"The Devil That Never Dies" is a flawed work. It is awkwardly written and repetitious. More importantly, Goldhagen's definitions of anti-Semitism -- including, "a person, say for political gain but without inner conviction or hostility, speaking the language of antisemitism is an antisemite" -- seem, at times, vague and overly broad. And, although he acknowledges that some criticism of Israel is legitimate, Goldhagen seems to attribute virtually all of it to anti-Semitism.

That said, "The Devil That Never Dies" provides a mountain of evidence for the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in the 21st century. In many countries in Europe, Africa, South America, and Asia, where tiny numbers of Jew live, for example, a majority of the population tell pollsters that Jews are too powerful in business, exploit the Holocaust, and are more loyal to Israel than to the nation in which they are citizens.
Goldhagen makes a compelling case as well that because of antisemitism international organizations apply a double standard to Israel. In the last 10 years, he points out, two out of every five human rights resolutions passed by the United Nations have attacked Israel (with much less attention given to North Korea, the Sudan, Libya, Myanmar, Iran, Syria, Turkey and a host of other countries). Similarly, he notes, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have focused "almost obsessively" on Israel.

Goldhagen’s claim that the hatred and agitation that exists against Jews is a clear and present danger that may evolve into still more powerful forms should command our attention. We must be careful to distinguish it from appropriate (and heated) political discourse. But, as Goldhagen advises, all people of good conscience should unite to destroy the anti-Semitic devil that clearly has not died.

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