

Yet Another Terrorist Attack; Good People Must Respond

By Don Sutherland

On Friday, a white nationalist terrorist targeted and gunned down Muslim worshippers in two mosques New Zealand. That massacre provided a reminder that the second decade of the 21st century features, among other things, a growing struggle between tolerance and hatred. In the wake of this latest attack, there is growing urgency for people, institutions, companies, and societies to identify, call out, discredit, and combat the individuals and ecosystems that promote division, hate, and violence.

In recent years, the world has witnessed the re-emergence of populist-nationalist movements in parts of Europe, South America, and the United States. Even as these movements cloak their nefarious nature in the language of history, rule of law, and constitution, the heart that beats within these movements is incompatible with the elements of a free, civil, and tolerant society. White nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and nativism are among the defining characteristics of the toxic heart that beats within these movements.

The United States has witnessed loud, wild, and persistent attacks on immigrants, religious minority groups, and others who are somehow "different" in the eyes of those responsible for the rising challenge of hate and violence. Even worse, extremists have been taking lives in the U.S. The most recent [report](#) on such violence released by the Anti-Defamation League explained:

In 2018, domestic extremists killed at least 50 people in the U.S., a sharp increase from the 37 extremist-related murders documented in 2017, though still lower than the totals for 2015 (70) and 2016 (72). The 50 deaths make 2018 the fourth-deadliest year on record for domestic extremist-related killings since 1970.

The extremist-related murders in 2018 were overwhelmingly linked to right-wing extremists. Every one of the perpetrators had ties to at least one right-wing extremist movement, although one had recently switched to supporting Islamist extremism. White supremacists were responsible for the great majority of the killings, which is typically the case.

In the United States, the President and some of his staff have sometimes fanned the flames of those hateful movements with their incoherent, clumsy, and generally evidence-free responses. In the wake of the domestic terrorist attack carried out by a white nationalist's having plowed his car into a crowd of counter-protesters in Charlottesville, VA in 2017, the President [asserted](#) that there had been "very fine people on both sides" of the protests. Following the terrorist attack in New Zealand, he [all but dismissed](#) the threat posed by white nationalism. That is unacceptable. They need to do far better.

At Charlottesville, there were two sides. On one side were the white nationalists who hijacked a debate concerning Confederate statues to launch a rally in which they forcefully reasserted their vision of a society rooted in "blood and soil." On the other, were the counter-protesters who opposed the white nationalists and their exclusionary ambitions. By definition, any person who views or treats another person as somehow less than human and less worthy of enjoying the full rights and privileges of a free society is anything but "very fine." Instead, such intolerant persons

are similar to cancer cells that roam society. If left to metastasize to form groups united in intolerance and disseminate their message of intolerance, they can produce outcomes that ultimately threaten the survival of a free, civil, and tolerant society.

Well in advance of last fall's attack against Jews in Pittsburgh and last week's attack on Muslims in Christchurch, there was a growing body of evidence that highlighted the rising threat posed by white nationalists and other fringe right-wing groups. The President continued to ignore that evidence. Some of his loudest backers such as talk radio host Rush Limbaugh [entertained](#) a "false flag" theory that could only distort the reality of what took place.

As society approaches a possible cross roads of sort, good people have a moral duty to speak out. They must not remain silent. White nationalism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, nativism, and other hateful ideologies are intellectual, economic, and social dead ends.

Good people should single out the persons and ideas that form the contemporary transnational ecosystem that promotes intolerance, dehumanization, and hate-driven violence. They must knock down disinformation, lies, and other propaganda aimed at rationalizing intolerance and shifting the burden onto others, including the victims of hate.

If good people make their voices heard and directly place the focus on those who peddle the snake oil of intolerance, they will ensure that free, civil, and tolerant society survives and, over time, grows stronger. On the other hand, if they shrink from their obligation, they will be making an implicit choice to leave the stage to those who promote intolerance. That abdication could produce an outcome in which the cancer of hate spreads and increasingly weakens free, civil, and tolerant society before it finally collapses into an illiberal, intolerant, and unfree society.

The time to speak out is now.