

Anti-Israel Activity on American College Campuses



Copyright 2004, Anti-Defamation League

Colleges and universities across the United States have experienced periods of highly charged anti-Israel and anti-Zionist activity since the start of the second Palestinian uprising against Israel, in September 2000. Many rallies and events, often organized or supported by radical Muslim student groups, have gone beyond legitimate criticism of Israel and have been marked by hateful attacks against Jews and the Jewish state, crossing the line into blatant anti-Semitism.

On a number of campuses, Jewish students were verbally harassed or threatened and Jewish property (such as Hillel buildings) vandalized. Many incidents grew out of anti-Israel or anti-Zionist demonstrations in which some participants expressed overt anti-Semitism. These episodes created an atmosphere of intimidation and fear among Jewish members of university communities.

Criticism of Israel by anti-Israel college activists further increased in 2003 leading up to and following the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq was increasingly linked with opposition to Israel. Antiwar and anti-globalization activists on campus often attacked both Israeli and American policies in the Middle East, while the Palestinian cause was seen as a “progressive” issue on college campuses. Activists also worked to expand the campaign to encourage divestment from companies doing business with Israel and to increase the visibility of this issue in 2003.

Antiwar and Anti-Israel

A new dimension of anti-Israel activism on American college campuses in 2003-04, was that it occurred in the shadow of Iraq—either an impending war with Iraq, the war itself, or the violent postwar occupation of the country.

Anti-Israel college activists increasingly connected criticism of Israel with opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq; chants of “hands off Iraq” were heard alongside “justice for Palestine.”

ANSWER & United for Peace and Justice

The U.S. conflict with Iraq provided the first substantial opportunity for an antiwar movement in the United States since the end of the Vietnam War. From its outset, anti-Israel activists sought to link their own cause to the antiwar movement and to the activities of the two main antiwar groups, Act Now to Stop War and End Racism (ANSWER) (<http://www.adl.org/Israel/answer.asp>), associated with the Stalinist

Workers World Party; and United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), an umbrella group comprised primarily of far left groups. Many activists argued that all imperialism and all occupations (including that of the Palestinian territories) should be opposed, not just U.S. policies toward Iraq.

Many antiwar activists (primarily from within UFPJ) were far more interested in promoting opposition to the war in Iraq than the Palestinian cause and therefore resisted linking the two. Ultimately, proponents of an anti-Israel agenda succeeded in convincing antiwar activists to accept them. Throughout 2004, they shared platforms with those who opposed U.S. involvement in Iraq. The immediate result was that, in many places, mass antiwar protests were as much about the Palestinian cause as Iraq. For example, during a demonstration in San Francisco sponsored by ANSWER and UFPJ on March 20, 2004, protesters, reportedly from Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) (http://www.adl.org/Israel/israel_protest_calendar_groups.asp#13) and the Muslim Student Association, promoted the obliteration of Israel, chanting “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Muslim Student Association

The Muslim Student Association (http://www.adl.org/Israel/israel_protest_calendar_groups.asp#12) responsible for organizing many of the most extreme anti-Israel events on campuses across the country over the past few years, has been particularly active in the effort to link Iraq and the Palestinian cause (MSA’s hostility toward Jews was made particularly clear in 2002 when a local branch at San Francisco State University distributed a blatantly anti-Semitic flier with a picture of a dead baby, captioned “Canned Palestinian Children Meat--Slaughtered According to Jewish rites under American license”).

- At one April 2004 rally in San Francisco, Hatem Bazian, a Berkeley professor and frequent speaker at MSA events, shouted to the crowd that “we’ve been watching intifada in Palestine, we’ve been watching an uprising in Iraq, and the question is that what are we doing? How come we don’t have an intifada in this country?” Acknowledging the reactions his words might garner, Bazian said, “They’re gonna say some Palestinian being too radical—well, you haven't seen radicalism yet!”
- In January 2004, MSA was one of the originators of an “open letter” to the “U.S. Anti-War Movement” calling for a mass demonstration on March 20, 2004 (the one-year anniversary of the war in Iraq) to protest against all “colonial occupations from Iraq to Palestine to everywhere.” The letter, which was ultimately signed by well over 100 groups, refused to accept the

“delinking [of] the struggle of the Palestinian people from the anti-war movement.”

- In December 2003, MSA, the Campus Coalition for Peace and Justice and the Palestine Solidarity Committee united for a “teach-in” resisting “empire in the Middle East” at the University of Texas. Having failed to uncover weapons of mass destruction, the promotion stated that “the Bush administration is now attempting to sell its war on Iraq as a mission to promote democracy in the Middle East. But living under the daily humiliation of occupation, most Iraqis and *Palestinians* have found this rhetoric to be all-the-more arrogant and hollow.”
- In late 2003, the MSA and the Campus Antiwar Network (CAN) sponsored a nationwide campus speaking tour called “Speaking Truth to Empire,” ostensibly focused on Iraq but also providing a platform for anti-Israel speakers.

Divestment

The divestment campaign (<http://www.adl.org/Israel/disinvestment.asp>) demonizes Israel by assertions that Israel is the preeminent modern example of a "racist" and "apartheid" state, and has become one of the most coordinated anti-Israel campaigns on college and university campuses around the country.

Although dozens of professors and hundreds of students have signed on to divestment petitions on many campuses, the divestment campaign's arguments have not been persuasive to mainstream Americans and the overall results have not been successful. To date, no college or university has withdrawn its investments in companies that do business in Israel. Nevertheless, the divestment campaign remains one of the most organized sources of anti-Israel activity, especially on campus.

Several campus-based divestment campaigns have been active across the county, including the following:

- On February 4, 2004, the New York University Students for Justice in Palestine launched a campaign calling on NYU to divest from all companies that conduct business in Israel or the Occupied Territories, "until the state of Israel complies with international law and ends human rights abuses."
- That same month, the Wesleyan Students for a Free Palestine, the Middle East Crisis Committee and Al-Awda (http://www.adl.org/Israel/israel_protest_calendar_groups.asp#1) sponsored a conference called "Activism 102" at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. Among the sessions at the event were strategies for divestment and boycotts.

Anti-Semitic articles and fake dollar bills bearing swastikas were distributed at the program and Web sites promoting Palestinian terror attacks were endorsed.

- Anti-Israel student activists and speakers from around the United States and abroad converged on Duke University in North Carolina on October 15-17, 2004, for the fourth National Student Conference (http://www.adl.org/israel/psm_duke.asp) of the Palestine Solidarity Movement (<http://www.adl.org/israel/psm.asp>). Participants portrayed Israel as a “racist” and “apartheid” state and refused to condemn suicide bombing. Several speakers also made comments expanding upon their unwillingness to condemn terrorism, alleging Israeli control of U.S. media and comparing Israel to apartheid South Africa.

Radical Speakers

A number of Muslim campus groups organized specifically anti-Israel events and invited radical anti-Israel speakers to campuses. Many of these speakers combined criticism of American policies toward Iraq with attacks on Israel for its policies toward the Palestinians.

A common theme in such speeches is that U.S. government policy in the Middle East is directed and controlled by Israel. Many speakers attacked “neo-conservatives” (alleged to be Jewish or beholden to Israel) in the Bush administration. Others more explicitly elaborated conspiracy theories about Israeli/Jewish control of the administration, Congress, or the media—anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that had been quite rare on American college campuses until relatively recently. Recent examples include the following:

- The Muslim Student Union at the University of California, Irvine, sponsored a week of events in May 2004 labeled “Tragedy in the Holy Land: 56 Years of Terrorism.” Featured speakers included Amir Abdul Malik Ali, the Imam of Masjid Al-Islam in Oakland, and Mohammed al-Asi, a radical Islamic cleric from Washington, DC. During his speech, al-Asi, who in the past had accused Israel of complicity in the 9/11 attacks, now blamed Israel for the U.S. invasion of Iraq and referred to the Bush administration as a “puppet” of Israel. Al-Asi urged students to “tip the balance and recreate [America’s] image—not in the image of Zionist Israel.” Kareem Elsayed, president of Irvine’s Muslim Student Union, praised Asi, calling him “very knowledgeable, very eloquent and he presents points very clearly.”

Amir Abdul Malik Ali claimed that Zionism was a white European colonizing movement that was racist by nature and that those who consider themselves Zionists are therefore white supremacists. He said that he was

speaking about “Zionist Jews,” not “righteous Jews,” and claimed that his speech wasn’t anti-Semitic but rather anti-Zionist.

In an earlier visit to the Irvine campus, at the invitation of the Muslim Student Union, Ali gave a lecture titled “America Under Siege: The Zionist Hidden Agenda.” During the talk, Ali called Zionism a mixture of “chosen people-ness and white supremacy,” and claimed that the Iraqi war was in the process of “Israelization” and that Zionists had “Congress, the media and the FBI in their back pocket.” He also said that, “the Israelis knew about and were ‘in-control’ of 9-11” and that it “was staged to give an excuse to wage war against Muslims around the world.”

- In February 2004, the Students for Justice in Palestine and the Third World Forum sponsored a presentation by Dr. Jess Ghannam at the University of California-San Francisco. Ghannam, a University of California-San Francisco professor and outspoken pro-Palestinian activist, has repeatedly accused Israelis of practicing racism, apartheid, and “ethnic cleansing.” At the talk, according to one attendee, Ghannam characterized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an issue of white Jews vs. non-white Arabs, calling Israelis and Americans “racists, white masters, and oppressors.”

Muslims are not the only anti-Israel speakers invited to campuses by Muslim student organizations.

William Baker

William Baker is a popular speaker among American Muslim student groups. Baker, head of Christians and Muslims for Peace, has a long anti-Semitic and anti-Israel background. In the 1980s, he was a prominent associate of anti-Semitic publisher and Holocaust denier Willis Carto, chairing Carto’s extreme-right Populist Party. He also wrote *Theft of a Nation*, an anti-Israel and anti-Jewish book.

- Baker was invited to speak in May 2004 at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida, by the Muslim Student Organization, but the event was cancelled after protests from the local Jewish community.
- In March 2004, Baker spoke at Western Michigan University at an event hosted by that university’s MSA, which claimed that Baker was invited to speak “to promote peace, tolerance and understanding between the two largest religions in the world.”
- In October 2003, Baker was invited to the University of Pennsylvania by the MSA. After the issue of his extremist background was raised, MSA president

Muhammed Mekki said that Baker's anti-Semitism was "irrelevant to the discussion."

Neturei Karta

- The MSA and the Los Angeles chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) facilitated a speaking tour by the Neturei Karta, a tiny group of ultra-Orthodox rabbis with a record of hostility to the existence of the state of Israel. In June 2004, during a stop at California State University in Los Angeles sponsored by the Muslim Student Alliance, Neturei Karta members rehashed their basic beliefs, including the idea that the land used to create the state of Israel contradicts the principles laid out in the Torah. Several days later, at the University of California, Irvine, Neturei Karta reportedly voiced its support for suicide bombings. CAIR has claimed its association with the Neturei Karta was to "focus on ways for Muslims and Jews to cooperate."

Support for Violence

While blatant calls for violence against Jews are not the norm, some college campuses have been subjected to explicit demonstrations of support for Islamic terrorists or for violence against Jews.

- In June 2004, a radical opinion piece appeared in *Alkalima*, the University of California, Irvine, Muslim student paper, supporting the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas and calling Israelis "enemies of Allah." The article justified Hamas terrorism, which it said is directed against "the evils of Shaytan (Satan) and the enemies of Allah." The article, written by a fifth year history student, asserted that the "only solution to the Zionist situation is through military force, which is espoused by Hamas, [Hezbollah], Islamic Jihad, and other Islamic resistance organizations."
- Also in June, an editorial in *The Dartmouth* exposed anti-Semitic passages found on Al-Nur, the Dartmouth Muslim Student Association Web site. The editorial cited several inflammatory passages from the Al-Nur site, including part of a hadith (a sacred saying of Muhammad) that read: "The Messenger of Allah said, 'The Last Hour will not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews, until a Jew will hide himself behind a stone or a tree, and the stone or the tree will say: 'O Muslim, there is a Jew behind me. Come and kill him.'" After the editorial was published, Al-Nur removed the material and apologized. Al-Nur's president, Dale Corea, argued that the site did not reflect anti-Semitic beliefs. "We don't share those anti-Semitic views at all," Corea said. "They're not our opinions; they're something we put up for research purposes only."

- In May 2004, students at Georgia State University in Atlanta found Arabic posters on campus calling for “Christians and Muslims to rise up and kill Jews.”
- On April 18, 2004, the group Al-Awda held its annual convention at Hunter College in New York City. Convention attendees marched to the Israeli consulate from Hunter College to protest the killing of Abdel Aziz Rantisi, leader of Hamas. The rally was organized by Al-Awda, New Jersey Solidarity (http://www.adl.org/Israel/israel_protest_calendar_groups.asp#19), and the extreme left wing International Action Center. Abbas Hamideh, a coordinator for Al-Awda, told a crowd that Rantisi “was a leader who defended and fought for Palestinian rights.” Signs waved by the crowd included “What’s next Sharon. Ovens!! [sic]”, “Globalize the Intifada,” and “All of Israel is ‘occupied territory.’” The Neturei Karta was also present. An Al-Awda representative, Rama Kased, later told the *Workers World* that “Abdel Aziz Rantisi was a son of Palestine, a refugee, and a symbol of resistance against a racist apartheid regime.”

Harassment and Intimidation

A few Muslim campus groups have also sought to intimidate those with different opinions, hoping to silence expressions of opposition to their views.

- On February 10, 2004, the MSA at the University of California, Berkeley, protested an appearance by Daniel Pipes, a columnist and director of the Middle East Forum. The lecture was organized by the Israel Action Committee and Berkeley Hillel. Members of the MSA and other groups demonstrated outside the lecture, some carrying signs that equated Zionism with Nazism. One protester held up a sign that read “Israel: Born of British colonialism. Created through Zionist terrorism. Supported by Western imperialism. Sustained by Israeli militarism.” Openly anti-Semitic fliers handed out at the event claimed that “neoconservatives and the Jewish Lobby...planned the Iraq wars” and that “most of the US media...are Jewish owned.” Some protesters also attempted to disrupt the lecture by booing and calling Pipes a “racist” and “Zionist.”
- Confrontational tactics in response to pro-Israel speakers nearly got out of hand at New York’s Barnard College in November 2003 at a conference organized by WE RISE, a feminist group. Phyllis Chesler, who had recently published a book about rising anti-Semitism, gave a lecture at the event but was heckled about her position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. When Chesler was leaving the event, an attendee attempted to assault her, but organizers managed to stop the attack.

Opposing Israel's Security Fence

Some campus groups have also sought to bring attention to the Palestinian cause through organizing demonstrations against Israel's security fence, which is designed to deter terrorists by establishing a protective barrier between Israel and Palestinian areas. Some demonstrations have included replicas of the security fence, dubbed the "apartheid wall" by many protesters as a way to link Israel with the former apartheid regime of South Africa. For example:

- In November 2003, activists built a replica fence on the campus of Wayne State University in Michigan and handed out fliers claiming that "Israel has purposely decided not to stand in solidarity with the people of color in the Middle East, and instead sell itself white supremacy." The flier also asserted that "in the last 30 years Zionists have played a powerful yet unnoticed role in combating civil rights."
- Similar replicas were set up at Rutgers University in New Jersey and at California Polytechnic State University during an "international day of protest" against the security fence in November 2003. The demonstration at California Polytechnic was organized by the MSA and the Student Coalition for a Just Peace and included checkpoints where passersby were stopped and asked for identification by activists brandishing fake firearms.

Acknowledging Bias and Preventing Intimidation

University officials in some instances have been reluctant to acknowledge anti-Semitism on campus or to respond to the concerns of Jewish students. However, the recent rise of anti-Semitism on college campuses caused others to confront the issue in an effort to insure that their campuses do not foster an atmosphere of intolerance.

Harvard University President Lawrence H. Summers expressed concern about increased anti-Semitism on campus in a 2002 speech, saying that he was troubled that "serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent."

More recently, Columbia University in New York began to scrutinize its Middle East/Asian Language and Culture Department (MEALAC), which has been frequently accused of teaching a biased and subjective representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and which came under fire for hiring Rashid Khalidi, a prominent Palestinian activist, as its Edward Said Chair of the Middle East Institute.

Columbia President Lee Bollinger formed a committee, chaired by Columbia Law School professor Vincent Blasi, to “preserve a healthy atmosphere on campus.” This represents a shift in the way the University has dealt with MEALAC in recent years, and may signify the beginning of a new, more balanced and less politicized era in the field of Middle Eastern studies at Columbia.