



Anti-Israel Activity on Campus After Operation Protective Edge

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INTRODUCTION

Student groups seeking to isolate and delegitimize Israel, to stifle dialogue and control the message about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have organized activities on college and university campuses for several years.

These efforts polarize campuses, inflame existing tensions and intimidate students. In light of the previous academic year’s significant anti-Israel activity and the organized anti-Israel reactions to [this summer’s conflict between Hamas and Israel](#), the 2014-15 school year will likely be marked by another escalation in anti-Israel actions and events.

So far in this academic year, there have been 75 anti-Israel events scheduled to take place on U.S. campuses. During the same time period last year, there were only 35 of those events scheduled, marking a 114% increase in the number of those events scheduled to take place this year.

Student groups that constitute today’s anti-Israel movement hurl a multitude of hateful accusations against Israel, falsely claiming that Israel is guilty of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, genocide, and a number of other war crimes in an effort to demonize Israel by portraying it as the embodiment of the world’s true evils. These claims are rarely, if ever, balanced with an acknowledgement of Palestinian terrorism against Israeli civilians, Israel’s continual efforts to make peace with the Palestinians and make no mention of the Palestinians’ failings on security issues and their intransigence during negotiations throughout the years.

Not all criticism of Israel is anti-Israel in nature, and not all anti-Israel rhetoric and activity reflect anti-Semitism. However, anti-Israel sentiment increasingly crosses the line to anti-Semitism by invoking anti-Semitic myths of Jewish control and demonic depictions of Israelis or comparing Israel's actions to those of the Nazis during the Holocaust. Such messages have been seen throughout the years on the fringes of the anti-Israel movement and appear to be moving more to the forefront of many anti-Israel protests.

The response to Israel's military operation against Hamas in Gaza this summer was marked by an upsurge in anti-Israel rallies around the country, both on and off campus. [These protests](#) frequently featured rhetoric that devolved from legitimate criticism of Israel into hateful messaging about the Jewish State, its people and Jews in general. At least 30 of these anti-Israel demonstrations during Operation Protective Edge were sponsored or co-sponsored by student groups. Many groups sent representatives to speak at these demonstrations, including in Philadelphia, New York, and Louisville, Kentucky. In some instances, such as at the University of Michigan, students even organized demonstrations on their campuses to condemn Israel, even though classes were not in session.

This summer was preceded by an especially tense period on college campuses during the 2013-14 academic year, when student groups hosted at least 374 anti-Israel events, about 40% of which focused on how to effectively initiate [Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions \(BDS\) campaigns](#) on campus. Additionally, there were at least 57 events [sponsored by university academic departments](#) over the past two academic years that presented an extremely one-sided view of the conflict. This represented an increase from years past. Additionally, at 15 colleges, student groups submitted divestment resolutions to their student governments. While most of these resolutions were unsuccessful, they contributed to an antagonistic environment for some on campus.

Moreover, already in the 2014-15 school year, there have been instances of anti-Israel sentiment crossing the line into anti-Semitism, such as in [September at the University of California, Santa Barbara](#). Flyers depicting the Twin Towers and a Star of David were posted on campus that alleged that "9/11 was an outside job" and that "9/11 was Mossad." The flyers included the addresses of two websites promoting the idea that Israel and Jews were behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks as well as the web address of a group that accuses Israel of intentionally attacking an American ship and influencing the U.S. government to cover up the attack. At this time, it is unclear who distributed the flyers.

At the end of August, at a [campus activities fair at Temple University](#) in Philadelphia, an exchange between a Jewish student and members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) led to anti-Semitic name calling. The Jewish student was later punched in the face by an assailant who had apparently not been involved in the name calling exchange. After the [subsequent investigation](#) by Temple University officials, local law enforcement, and the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office, assault charges were filed.

Additionally, this school year, Jewish students have been targeted with anti-Semitism seemingly unrelated to anti-Israel activity, exacerbating difficult situations on some campuses. At [Emory University](#), for example, a Jewish fraternity house was spray-painted with swastikas and other offensive graffiti following Yom Kippur.

While anti-Israel activity is certainly a challenge many students encounter on campus, it must also be noted that for the most part, Jewish and pro-Israel students do not feel unsafe or insecure on their campuses. Furthermore, while anti-Semitism does occur too often at colleges throughout the country, generally respect is the norm, and anti-Jewish bigotry is not openly tolerated.

The following provides additional information on [BDS campaigns](#) on campuses so far [this year](#), during the [summer](#), and during the [previous school year](#). The next section examines [confrontational tactics](#) employed on campuses so far this [academic year](#), during the [summer](#), and during the [previous school year](#).

If the recent past and the start of this school year are any indication, pro-Israel students on campuses will need to [empower and equip themselves](#) with constructive and effective responses to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Israel bias.

BDS CAMPAIGNS AGAINST ISRAEL

In the 2014-15 Academic Year: This school year began with a high-profile example of BDS advocacy when the Student Senate President at Ohio University (OU), Megan Marzec, played off the ALS ice bucket challenge, and dumped a bucket of “blood” over her head to supposedly represent that of Palestinians killed by Israel. In the video, she also called on OU to divest from companies doing business with Israel and claimed that Israel is responsible for genocide in Gaza.

The Fourth National Students for Justice in Palestine conference, scheduled to take place at Tufts University from October 24-26, 2014, will also likely be used to promote BDS campaigns against Israel. It features speakers such as J Kēhaulani Kauanui, who endorsed BDS at [the 2012 Penn BDS conference](#) at the University of Pennsylvania and Sa’ed Adel Atshan, who advocated for BDS at [Harvard’s 2012 One State Conference](#).

Elsewhere, students have also hosted cultural events to promote BDS, including the “Boycott!” art exhibit at Brooklyn College where posters were displayed to promote a boycott as a nonviolent tactic.

Additionally, [American Muslims for Palestine](#) (AMP), the leading organization providing anti-Zionist training and education to students throughout the country, began the academic year with a call for an “International Day of Action on College Campuses” on [September 23, 2014](#). In AMP’s statement, the group advocated for a variety of BDS-related initiatives in an effort to isolate and demonize Israel and Jewish communal organizations.

This “Day of Action”—scheduled for the evening before the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah—encouraged the elimination of study abroad programs in Israel, a ban on university administrators travelling to Israel, and the cessation of collaboration of any kind between American academics and their counterparts at Israeli institutions. AMP also issued a call for students to engage in actions of civil disobedience. But instead, student groups primarily organized demonstrations and teach-ins on at least nine campuses, including New York University, Oberlin College, and University of California, Berkeley. These demonstrations featured signs that characterized Israel as an “illegitimate, U.S. backed, genocidal, apartheid” state and others that promoted BDS campaigns. Additionally, AMP plans for such BDS-related initiatives to continue throughout the year, intensifying the already divisive atmosphere on many college campuses.

During Operation Protective Edge: Several groups used Israel’s military operation as an opportunity to promote BDS campaigns. At demonstrations around the U.S., protestors, including members of student groups, [promoted BDS](#) by directly confronting businesses that have relationships with Israel. For example,

in July 2014 in New York City, demonstrators gathered outside a Max Brenner chocolate bar purportedly because the restaurant chain provides Israeli soldiers with care packages. Additionally, the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic & Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) released new guidelines for the “International Academic Boycott of Israel.” In its new pamphlet, the group offers students ideas for effectively organizing academic boycott campaigns and elaborates on its anti-normalization policy, stating that, “Activities and projects involving Palestinians and/or other Arabs on one side and Israelis on the other... [as] equally responsible for the ‘conflict’ are intellectually dishonest and morally reprehensible forms of normalization that ought to be boycotted.” Also, members of pro-BDS student groups were among those who attended a City Council meeting in Ann Arbor, Michigan to urge the city to divest from businesses that have relationships with Israel in response to Israeli military actions in Gaza.

In the 2013-14 Academic Year: Student groups hosted at least 374 anti-Israel events, approximately 40% of which focused on how to effectively initiate BDS campaigns on campus. In addition, [fifteen campuses held votes](#) on BDS resolutions, representing an 87.5% increase in the number of divestment resolutions from the previous year. While only a third of these BDS resolutions were eventually endorsed by their respective student governments, these initiatives brought attention to the BDS movement and sometimes led to additional anti-Israel activity. For example, at the University of Michigan, the group that organized the BDS campaign there later called for a “sit-in” in the chambers of the Central Student Government (CSG) in an attempt to force the CSG to vote on the resolution instead of tabling it. While the sit-in was successful in encouraging the CSG to hold the vote, the BDS resolution failed with 29 votes against, five for it, and five abstentions. Moreover, in 2013-14, both the [American Studies Association \(ASA\)](#) and the [Modern Language Association \(MLA\)](#) voted in favor of resolutions calling for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Although those resolutions were passed, afterward [more than 200 university presidents](#) issued public statements denouncing measures and distancing their universities from the resolutions.

CONFRONTATIONAL TACTICS

In the 2014-15 Academic Year: Anti-Israel groups and individuals have already begun to employ confrontational tactics and will likely continue to do so. For example, during the first week of classes at Brooklyn College, the SJP chapter organized a “die-in,” an action wherein participants lie on the ground to represent Palestinians killed by Israeli actions. At the Brooklyn College “die-in,” participants held signs with false allegations about Israeli actions and encouraged others to get involved in BDS campaigns. The students also drew parallels between [events in Gaza and the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri](#). Another “die-in” was led by the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter at John Jay College in October. While participating in the “die-in,” many of the students held signs that said “From Ferguson to Palestine INTIFADA INTIFADA,” and “Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions.”

Additionally, AMP’s call for an “International Day of Action on College Campuses” was accompanied by the publication of a guide called “The Art of Public Demonstrations for Palestine on College Campuses,” written to help groups organize anti-Israel demonstrations and to encourage direct actions such as a mock Palestinian funeral processions. The guide also recommends engaging in acts of civil disobedience such as sit-ins and claims that such acts “can garner great media coverage” if conducted properly.

During Operation Protective Edge: In response to Israel’s military operation in Gaza, demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience were conducted throughout the U.S., many of which involved the participation of

members of anti-Israel student groups. Some of these rallies were held outside local, state, and federal government offices in an attempt to pressure public officials to take a stance against Israel.

[Jewish Voice for Peace](#) (JVP), the largest Jewish anti-Zionist group in the United States with a significant campus presence, took things a step further. Instead of protesting outside buildings, JVP [entered the buildings of Jewish institutions](#) to directly confront the leaders of major American Jewish organizations. Actions like these took place on at least four separate occasions from Denver to Philadelphia. In Denver, for example, the President of the Tufts University JVP chapter made her way inside the Jewish Federation building and protested Israel from within the building. Such actions may inspire similar actions from campus chapters of such groups.

In the 2013-14 Academic Year: Last academic year, confrontational tactics were implemented on at least 15 campuses, including mock “checkpoints” or mock “apartheid walls,” leaving some students on these campuses feeling harassed or intimidated. Additionally, mock eviction notices were distributed to students at eight different campuses. Such notices are distributed to students’ residence hall rooms and state that the affected rooms will soon be demolished in the same way that Palestinian families supposedly receive similar notices. On several campuses, students have reported that the mock eviction tactic left them feeling intimidated. University administrations were typically responsive to these issues, while protecting First Amendment freedoms. At Northeastern University, for example, administrators briefly suspended the student group responsible for disseminating [mock eviction notices](#) on campus in February 2014, a violation of housing policies.

At Northeastern University, mock eviction notices were also slid under doors into students’ residence hall rooms [to announce the start of Israeli Apartheid Week \(IAW\)](#). IAW took place on dozens of college campuses across the United States at the end of February with events portraying Israel as a racist and apartheid state that is committing war crimes such as ethnic cleansing. The notices claimed that “eviction notices are routinely given to Palestinian families living under oppressive Israeli occupation for no reason other than their ethnic background...to cleanse the region of its Arab population,” and that similarly, these rooms would be demolished. Establishing the themes of IAW, the notices contained other hostile language, including allegations of Israeli racism and calls for BDS campaigns against Israel.

The 2013-14 academic year also saw an increase in the use of mock checkpoints and mock apartheid walls on campuses, structures built by anti-Israel campus groups to raise awareness of their cause, incorporating extreme anti-Israel imagery and language that generally accuse Israel of being an apartheid state that persecutes and deprives Palestinians of their fundamental rights. At Tufts University, the SJP chapter went further than most groups, setting up a “mock settlement” on the campus and attempting to annex a nearby area of the campus. The students carried large Israeli flags and mock guns, claiming that the action was conducted “to call attention to the settler-colonial realities faced by Palestinians.”

Furthermore, students hostile towards Israel also interrupted campus events related to Israel. In February 2014, at California State Polytechnic University – Pomona, for example, students directly confronted a group of Israeli soldiers that were invited to speak on their campus. Before the Israelis began the presentations, students in the audience sat with black tape over their mouths and held posters that demonized the State of Israel. Shortly after the soldiers started to introduce themselves, student protesters repeatedly interrupted their speeches, shouting that the Israelis are “baby killers,” “rapists,” and “terrorists.” The protesters persistently shouted so that other students in the room were unable to hear what was being said.