

# Network Against Islamophobia



*A Project of Jewish Voice for Peace*

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Welcome to the 2nd issue of the newsletter for the Network Against Islamophobia (NAI), a project of Jewish Voice for Peace. Since we posted our first newsletter, we have been putting together resources that we hope will be useful both to JVP chapters and to other groups organizing against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism: [FAQs on U.S. Islamophobia & Israel Politics](#); [Resources on Islamophobia & Anti-Arab Racism in the United States](#); and [Challenging the Pamela Geller/American Freedom Defense Initiative \(AFDI\) Anti-Muslim Ads](#). Also, check out the Jews Against Islamophobia Coalition's short video, [Jews Recommit to Standing Against Islamophobia](#), which we've posted on the NAI website.

This newsletter contains information about some of the organizing against Islamophobia that JVP chapters have been doing. It also highlights the links between Islamophobia and Israel's latest military campaign in Gaza. In an interview for the newsletter, human rights lawyer and activist Bina Ahmad discusses the impact on the U.S. Muslim community of the summer's assault and the connection between Islamophobia and Israeli and U.S. policies. Two pieces analyze some of the ways in which the Israeli government and its advocates have tried to increase support for its 2014 attacks on Gaza by pushing a virulently anti-Muslim narrative. One reports on threatening images of an alleged "Muslim take-over" of Western Europe, while the other focuses on the contention that Hamas = ISIS.

**Let us know if you have questions, comments, or suggestions about NAI or our newsletter.**

*Elly Bulkin, Sydney Levy, and Donna Nevel, NAI Conveners*  
[nai@jvp.org](mailto:nai@jvp.org), <http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/standing-against-islamophobia>

# What JVP Chapters Have Been Doing to Challenge Islamophobia

**FAQs on U.S. Islamophobia & Israel Politics** is a two-page document that responds concisely to six questions. They relate to: (1) the importance of making links between Islamophobia and Israel politics; (2) the development of the view of Israel's leaders and supporters that Muslims are "the enemy"; (3) financial connections between Islamophobia and adamantly pro-Israel politics; (4) the Israel politics of leading anti-Muslim ideologues; (5) "liberal Islamophobia"; and (6) the Islamophobic notion of "good Muslims" with whom mainstream Jewish groups find it "acceptable" to work. The FAQs includes a short list of citations and hyperlinked citations.

[http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/sites/default/files/islamophobia\\_faq.pdf](http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/sites/default/files/islamophobia_faq.pdf)

## Resources on Islamophobia & Anti-Arab Racism

**in the United States** includes an overview section, "A First Look at Islamophobia & Anti-Arab Racism in the United States." Eleven sections focus on different aspects of Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, including one on "Islamophobia, Israel, & the 'War on Terror.'" Seven additional sections fall under the heading of "Post-9/11 Anti-Muslim Campaigns." Many of the resources provide links or references to articles, interviews, reports, and books on these topics, as well as to sites that provide other relevant resources. Some of the resources identify groups that challenge Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. We have prioritized resources that people can access immediately. We hope that the range of perspectives in this resource list will add to existing work on this issue and will be helpful to those thinking about and organizing against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism.

<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/content/resources-on-islamophobia-anti-arab-racism-in-the-united-states>

## Challenging the Pamela Geller/American Freedom Defense Initiative (AFDI) Anti-Muslim Ads

The Geller / AFDI ad campaigns most often explicitly link Israel with Islamophobia, either through images and words that smear both Muslims and Palestinians or through ads designed to respond to "anti-Israel" or "pro-Palestinian" ads. These campaigns have led to bold and creative activism by a wide range of communities that often work in coalition with one another.

We know that Islamophobia takes many different shapes and forms, as do our actions. We highlight the multiple responses to the Geller / AFDI ads as examples of the powerful organizing that people have been doing all over the country and hope that they will be useful to our continued organizing against Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism. While we developed this resource with JVP chapters in mind, we also hope it will be valuable to other groups and communities.

<http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/blog/challenging-the-pamela-gelleramerican-freedom-defense-initiative-afdi->

## JVP-ATLANTA

As members of the Atlanta chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, we were extremely disturbed by the [racist and dehumanizing Rosh HaShanah sermon delivered by Rabbi Shalom Lewis](#) of Congregation Etz Chaim in Marietta, Georgia. We were also dismayed by the [lack of response](#) from the rest of the Jewish community after the sermon became public.

Because we believe strongly that people of conscience must speak out to challenge bigotry in all its forms, we decided to send letters to Atlanta area Rabbis, to the Atlanta Jewish Federation, and to the board of trustees of Congregation Etz Chaim calling on them to repudiate Rabbi Lewis's sentiments and to take a stand against anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism in their synagogues and organizations. Our hope is to raise awareness of racism in our community, to hold our leaders accountable, and to work together to find solutions.

We received only a brief reply from the President of Etz Chaim's Board of Trustees, stating "we appreciate your concern" and wishing us "a peaceful New Year."

The October 2014 letter addressed to Atlanta area Rabbis is reproduced below.

Dear Rabbi:

We are writing to you as

members of the Atlanta chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace. We are well aware that there are many issues that may divide us, but today we are writing to you regarding an issue about which we believe there should be no disagreement between us.

As you may be aware, a Rabbi in our greater Atlanta community, Rabbi Shalom Lewis of Congregation Etz Chaim in Marietta, recently delivered a Rosh HaShanah



sermon (originally posted at [www.etzchaim.net/ehr\\_daw\\_2014](http://www.etzchaim.net/ehr_daw_2014); the full sermon is also posted at <http://mondoweiss.net/2014/10/genocidal-atlanta-hashanah>). In it, he spoke of Muslims in what can only be viewed as a racist and dehumanizing manner. He asserts (without evidence) that there are “50 million Koran-waving, Allah Akbar-howling Muslim murderers out there planning to slit our throats, blow us up or forcibly convert us.” Rhetorically, he paints all Muslims as enemies of freedom – he describes the Muslim population of Europe as “violent Islamists, extremists who reject every value we treasure.” He states: “The enemy has eyes and ears. Fingers and toes. Speaks with lips. Runs with legs. Eats. Drinks. Has the face of a human being – but, has a much different heart and a much different soul.” He ends with a call to “exterminate [...] utterly and absolutely.”

This language, which explicitly denies the humanity of others, and calls for their extermination, should be unacceptable to anyone, but it should be doubly so to us as Jews. We know from our own all too recent history that dehumanization, if left unchallenged, can take root in a society with breathtaking speed, leading to genocidal consequences. Perhaps history might have been different had the plans of the Nazi leadership met with greater opposition from people of conscience in the German religious and intellectual communities before meaningful opposition became impossible.

We believe it is our responsibility as Jews, and in particular we feel strongly that it is your responsibility as a leader in the Atlanta Jewish community, to call out this dehumanization, to challenge it publicly and to make it clear that it has no place in our houses of worship, our homes, or anywhere else in our community.

While we believe all American Jewish leaders should decry

Rabbi Lewis’s sermon, we feel that as Jewish Atlantans we have a particular responsibility to do so, both because its words were spoken in our “backyard,” and also because of our responsibility to uphold Atlanta’s historical role as a leader in the civil rights movement by fighting racism in all of its forms. Let us continue to live up to our reputation as the “city too busy to hate.”

We call on you not to be silent when forms of racism and dehumanization appear in our midst, but instead to publicly call it out, to denounce it, and to ensure it has no place in your worship services, your religious instruction, or anywhere else in the life of your congregation. We ask that you repudiate Rabbi Lewis’s hateful speech in your own sermons, and in your communications with your congregation. Let us make it abundantly clear that these words are not the teachings of our religion or the sentiments of our community.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and hope to be in conversation with you now and in the future.

Respectfully,

The membership of Jewish Voice for Peace – Atlanta

## JEWIS AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA COALITION (JAIC) in NYC

On the day before the May 21, 2014 opening in New York City of the National September 11 Memorial Museum, the Jews Against Islamophobia Coalition (Jews Say No!, Jewish Voice for Peace, and Jews for Racial and Economic Justice) held a demonstration against a six-minute film, “The Rise of Al-Qaeda,” that was part of the museum

exhibit (see press release [here](#)).

Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and other South Asian civil rights groups, as well as scholars and leaders of the local interfaith community, had already been speaking out against the film and calling for changes in it. When the Museum first showed its Interfaith Advisory Board the film, Advisory Board members were unanimous in urging edits before the film was shown at the museum. When

museum leaders refused to make any changes, Advisory Board members continued to protest, and its sole Muslim member resigned. Subsequently, an interfaith coalition held a press conference with community and interfaith leaders, including a representative from JAIC.



Protesting the screening of anti-Muslim movie at National September 11 Memorial Museum

Additionally, more than 400 scholars in the fields of religion, political science, history, Islam, race theory, museum studies, and related disciplines sent a public [letter](#) to museum leaders urging them to “immediately invite a broad, outside group of scholars to evaluate and review ‘The Rise of Al-Qaeda’ film before the museum opens on May 21.” The museum refused repeated requests by media and civil rights groups to view the film prior to the museum’s opening.

As the 400+ scholars wrote:

*According to the group’s testimony, the video deploys academically-controversial terminology of “Islamist extremism/terrorism” and “jihadism” to generalize, unnecessarily and in a haphazard manner without full definition or context, about al-Qaeda’s acts of terrorism. The advisory group argued that the video, in its present form, may give many viewers, especially those not familiar with the subtleties of the terminology being used, the impression that Islam itself is responsible for September 11.*

*The claims of your advisory council are extremely worrisome for us as scholars. Labels to describe organizations such as al-Qaeda are heavily disputed among academics, and in a public environment, without proper explanation and historical context, these terms could easily mislead and assign collective responsibility to Muslims and Islam. The growing field of Islamophobia studies has increasingly identified how many of these terms can serve to stigmatize Muslims.*

Another critique centered on a member of the museum’s Board of Trustees, Debra Burlingame, sister of a 9/11 victim and a member of the museum’s “program committee,” which reviewed and [approved](#) all museum content. Burlingame has “[argued](#) publicly that [Islam is ‘a transnational threat’](#); that ‘Islamophobia’ is a ‘made-up term’; and that there is ‘no such thing as an irrational fear of Islam or Muslims.’

Commenting on the impact of the museum’s decision-making process, Amardeep Singh of the [Sikh Coalition](#) said:

*I think part of the problem is that the board of trustees, the leadership of the museum, they’re not from our communities.... When I have to worry when there’s an attack somewhere out there, and it’s associated with Islam, in some way. When I have to worry about my personal safety walking the streets of this city.... That’s not an experience that anyone associated with this film has ever had. . . . I’d ask the people who put together this film, I’d ask each and every Board of Trustees member of this museum to one day tie a*

*turban, grow out a beard, watch that film with other Americans and see how it makes you feel...*

**Let us know what your chapter or group is doing—or considering doing—to challenge Islamophobia.**

[nai@jwp.org](mailto:nai@jwp.org)



### Learning More About Islamophobia

Published in 2014 by Muslim Advocates, focuses on anti-Muslim bigotry on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, with examples by public officials, hate groups, and individual anti-Muslim ideologues. Contains very useful discussions of the legal issues related to the First Amendment (applicable only to government entities), and social media service agreements and user policies related to restricting speech. Offers step-by-step information about how users can report hateful content to each of the three social media companies, and gives examples of effective counter speech campaigns.

<http://www.muslimadvocates.org/wp-content/uploads/Click-Here-to-End-Hate.pdf>

# Stories & Strategies: An Interview With Bina Ahmad

*Elly Bulkin and Donna Nevel spoke with Bina Ahmad, National Lawyers Guild National Vice President, Public Defender, and inspiring organizer.*

*The conversation focused on the personal and political impact on members of the Muslim community of the summer Israeli assault on Gaza; on the organizing that ensued; on the context in which it happened; and on the relationship between organizing against Islamophobia and for justice in Palestine.*



*Alex Kane, Bina Ahmad (center) and Linda Sarsour at recent panel in NYC, hosted by JAIC, on Islamophobia and Palestine.*

Palestinians are Muslim, but are framed as such. According to these narratives, Muslims are subhuman, violent savages, who brought the Gaza onslaught on themselves. It's a narrative completely devoid of any historical context, with no mention of the occupation beginning in 1948; a narrative that completely ignores the fact that you cannot as a nation-state claim self-defense against a people you are militarily occupying. And many people erroneously conflate Muslims and Palestinians, and their Islamophobia intensifies their anti-Palestinian animus. On a political level, this is horrifying, but not surprising.

*An indefatigable organizer herself, Bina spoke of the meaningful organizing that emerged:*

The onslaught also galvanized a lot of strong and intense organizing in the activist, Palestinian, and Muslim communities, uniting many people in the streets who refused to believe that their resistance to this onslaught was futile. They believed that words, community, and organizing are still powerful tools against the crushing might of governmental and military powers.

*Speaking about the context in which the assault on Gaza happened, Bina continued:*

The assault on Gaza does not exist in a vacuum. The framing of the larger war on the Muslim world, especially since the Sixties and certainly post-9/11, is that the Muslim world is homogenous, the people are backward and savage, a threat to the U.S., and must be subdued, occupied, and dismantled. This distracts from and also justifies the larger purpose of U.S. wars abroad.

I can talk as an Ahmadi Muslim. I'm South Asian, not Palestinian. But I work heavily in the Muslim and Palestinian communities with people who are doing work on Palestine.

I know that people in the Palestinian communities have been just devastated by the assault on Gaza. It's an ongoing nightmare. They couldn't watch the news. They didn't know if family members were still alive. But this was not covered at all by the mainstream U.S. media. The message we received was, "We don't know them. They're insignificant. They're over there. They're not human." The Palestinian community had to watch as many cheered on the murder of their family members. They had to watch as government leaders treated their people and their deaths as insignificant. They had to watch as the world stood by and did nothing.

The larger Muslim community was subjected to intense anti-Muslim narratives that ignored the fact that not all

Today's strike against ISIS on the anniversary of 9/11 feels as if we're back in 2002 or 2003, and we're just starting this recurring nightmare again. I started law school in 2002, and it was incredibly difficult during the height of the anti-Muslim hysteria.

Now almost 10 years later, I'm the National Vice President of the National Lawyers Guild and a public defender with the Legal Aid Society, and the nightmare and hysteria have only escalated. I've done know-your-rights trainings before demonstrations, and Muslims have asked whether they'd be treated differently. And I've had to say, "Yes." We shouldn't have to worry about this, but we do.

Confirming our fears, in the fall of 2011, the AP published reports exposing the NYPD's and FBI's large-scale undercover surveillance and criminal entrapment program of the NYC Muslim community, spawning the birth of the NLG's Muslim Defense Project. Muslims and Palestine activists have been egregiously targeted, spied on, and trapped into outrageous government-fabricated plots, some resulting in life-long prison sentences.



Arab American Association of New York (AAANY)

I have done know-your-rights trainings for a variety of activist communities, mosques, and schools, including know-your-rights trainings with Palestine Solidarity Legal Support, which is an organization contacted by both Muslims and solidarity activists facing speech repression on university campuses. I've read extremely troubling reports about the suppression of pro-Palestine speakers by the university and the police, and the escalation in policing and suppressing of these events. I know law students who aren't publicly Palestinian at their schools, since they find it politically and physically unsafe to be publicly and outspokenly Palestinian.

*We spoke with Bina about the ways in which the work to challenge Islamophobia intersects and is interconnected with Palestine organizing:*

Linking the work on Islamophobia to the larger Palestinian movement is not just important, but vital. We need to push the analysis more, so we can be fully aware of the massive scale of what's operating.

Islamophobia is the fuel that feeds the fire. It's the justification to rob Muslims of their resources, put pipelines in their countries, and support a country engaged in genocide with modern weapons. It's the classic approach of blaming the victim, who is supposedly barbaric and needs a benevolent U.S. occupation of their countries and the overthrow of their governments in order to be "civilized," in order to be subdued of their "naturally violent" tendencies.

Islamophobia necessitates convincing people that there's a war at home and abroad: "The Muslims we are fighting abroad are also next door and want to bomb synagogues, impose Sharia law on us, and subjugate women. They are right here!" This messaging justifies massive fear-mongering and in turn massive human rights violations. It pushes through a brutal agenda and also allows our government to mask its true agenda.

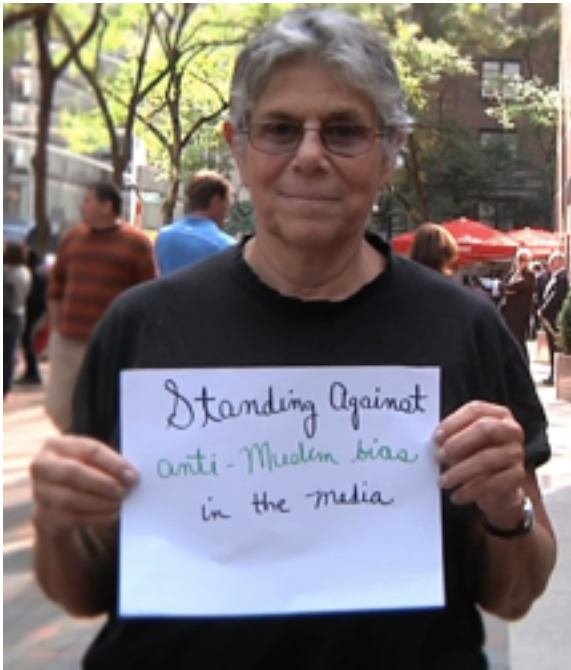
If you think about it from the occupier and oppressor standpoint, how would they be able to justify their greed for natural resources that do not belong to them, their desire to have these resources for free, the need to occupy and terrorize these countries to access both natural resources and military resources, brutally suppress the indigenous resistance to this robbery and decimation of their homelands, and justify the murder and torture of these indigenous people? Or justify the fact that a powerful wealthy lobby pays you to support their Apartheid, occupation, and genocide?

You do this by escalating the fear of your own constituency, saying that the purpose of your war is benevolent, for the good of subduing those who need to be civilized and for the protection of U.S. citizens who are threatened not only by those Muslims abroad who threaten the U.S. but by Muslims living right next door engaging in violent “terrorist” plots. This is Islamophobia.

If the U.S. decided to demonize Israel, Jews would have to become the “enemy.” If you hate and fear Muslims and Arabs, it’s easier to carry out war abroad and support Israel.

*We asked Bina how she understands what’s been called “liberal Islamophobia” —referring to those who speak out against Islamophobia in some contexts, but are silent about, or even perpetuate, other forms of Islamophobia:*

I work as a public defender, and most of my clients are young Black men. There are people who identify as liberal who still support tougher criminal penalties and call the police on Black people in their neighborhood. And though these liberals would not think they are racist, they are not recognizing that, by supporting the criminal justice system, they are supporting the larger criminalization of black and brown communities and the racist prison industrial complex that makes money off of imprisoning black and brown youth who are more harshly targeted for criminal activity than their white counterparts who receive leniency or are completely let off the hook. They ignore the larger political context within which these things take place, whether it’s the war on communities of color or the war on Muslims and Palestinians. It’s a racist framework of Black crime being “more dangerous,” or assuming subconsciously that Black equals criminal. It’s about how you frame it and your historical and political understanding.



This framework is a lot like the “good Muslim/bad Muslim” narrative, where you are faced with this litmus test: “What’s your view on Israel?” This ignores the narrative of the oppressor and the oppressed, the occupier and the occupied, and ignores any sort of power analysis in our politics. It defines an entire people as “good” or “bad” from the viewpoint of the oppressor, instead of asking, “Who fuels these events? Who benefits? Why are these things happening?”

*We concluded our discussion with Bina discussing her views on the Islamophobia of the media and public figures and the role they play in impacting public opinion about Palestine and Israel:*

Mainstream media coverage always uses Islamophobic language. There’s no alternate view presented in mainstream media. The majority of Americans WATCH mainstream media and get sound bites from Fox News or CNN. This is a key way that Islamophobia is spread. The main message is that Israel is entitled to defend itself, Israel wants peace, and Palestinians and Muslims want “terrorism” and death.

It’s a symbiotic relationship, where the media is fed what to say by the powers that be, and the powers that be cite these media sound bites in their speeches. The media is the mouthpiece of the war machine, not a critical journalistic source. It uses Islamophobia to drum up support for Israel and resulting wars: for example, in New York City right after Israel began its assault on Gaza, there was a press conference at City Hall with local officials standing with Israel who just repeated the statements of the Islamophobic and pro-Israel media, using sound bites about such contested and politically charged terms as terrorism, self-defense, security, and peace.

# A Picture Is Worth A Thousand (Islamophobic) Words

Molly Malone statue - Dublin



In the last week of July, at the height of Israel's 2014 assault on Gaza, Israel's Dublin embassy posted the four photo-shopped images above on its official social media accounts. Each transformed a national artistic icon into an image designed to terrify non-Muslim Europeans: Dublin's Molly Malone statue clad in a niqab, only her eyes visible; the Mona Lisa looking characteristically enigmatic while wearing a hijab and holding a rocket; Copenhagen's Little Mermaid holding a large weapon; and Michelangelo's David in a keffiyeh, with an explosive belt around his waist.

The message is clear: unless Israel is successful in its war in Gaza, "scary" Muslims will be taking over each Western European country. The argument that "Israel Is the Last Frontier of the Free World" is just another version of that classic Islamophobic [concept](#), the "clash of civilizations," with its clear threat that "Western civilization" might be overrun by [allegedly](#) backward, violent, and inferior Muslims. It reflects a central narrative of anti-Muslim ideologues: that Europe ([along](#) with the United States) is in imminent danger of being taken over by Muslims.

Encountering an irate Irish public and negative European media coverage, the embassy quickly removed the posts. The office of Israeli ambassador Boaz Modai offered a meaningless [statement](#): "There was no intention to cause insult or offense to anyone," which neither attributed responsibility to any individual nor demonstrated any awareness of what might have caused offense. A spokesperson for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs [said](#), "This particular item was not part of the official Ministry of Foreign Affairs campaign . . . I didn't personally like the approach." Notably absent from his comment was any condemnation of the Islamophobic content in the tweets.



This wasn't the first [incendiary comment](#) on the Dublin Embassy's official social media account—and it almost certainly won't be the last. As one Irish reporter [noted](#), the July tweets "emerged as part of what appears to be an increasingly aggressive social media campaign being waged by Israeli officials to win a fractious PR 'war' with its critics."



# What People Are Saying About the ‘ Hamas is ISIS ’ Meme, Islamophobia, and Israel

by Elly Bulkin

In the midst of Israel’s brutal 2014 assault on Gaza, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [tweeted](#) “Hamas is ISIS, ISIS is Hamas. They’re the enemies of Peace. They’re the enemies of all civilized countries.” This tweet originally included two pictures: one, titled “ISIS” (and deleted soon after), shows U.S. journalist James Foley about to be beheaded; the other, titled “Hamas,” is of a person being dragged behind a motorcycle, allegedly in Gaza.<sup>(1)</sup>

Since then, Israeli officials and other adamant pro-Israel supporters have made this meme a prominent part of their hasbara (propaganda) [campaign](#). As a chilling video of ISIS beheading Foley became public, the campaign kicked into high gear.

I [know](#) the actions of Isis are #NotInMyName, and I won't be pressured to apologise for them.  
—Mehreen Faruqi

The Times of Israel [described](#) the Israel Foreign Ministry as driving “the same message” with a graphic Facebook posting, along with the comment, “You will find it hard to tell the difference between them, simply because there isn’t any difference between them: Hamas is ISIS and ISIS is Hamas.”

In the United States, the meme has been picked up by elected and former officials, neoconservatives, the right-wing blogosphere, parts of the mainstream media, and Islamophobes like Pamela Geller, who has incorporated the statement that “Hamas = ISIS” into her latest New York City subway and bus ad.

This narrative—Hamas = ISIS—has become a centerpiece of the attempt by Israel and its advocates to shape public opinion in the period immediately after the signing of the ceasefire. And it stokes Islamophobia in a way that is arguably unparalleled since the backlash in the months after 9/11.

Numerous people have commented on the inaccuracy of this linkage, the Islamophobia inherent in the conflation of ISIS and Hamas, and the larger political context. Below are some of the many comments on these topics:

## Hamas Is ISIS?

*Rami G. Khouri, journalist; editor at large of the Daily Star newspaper (Beirut); director of Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut:*

[One](#) of the fascinating dimensions of the battle between Israel and Palestine is how Israeli leaders and their American apologists keep changing their propaganda message aimed at generally ignorant Western audiences. The

core, but always evolving, message that Zionists keep sending out is that Palestinians who challenge Israel are part and parcel of a larger universe of frightening figures that espouse criminal values, and represent a direct, mortal threat to Israel and also to all Western civilization.

The latest version of this fear-mongering campaign of lies and fantasy seeks to paint Hamas and others militant Palestinian resistance groups in Gaza as integral elements in the world of vicious actors and terrorists who fight in the name of Islam, such as the Salafist-takfiri extremists Islamic State in Syria-Iraq, Al-Qaeda, or the Taliban in Afghanistan. Most people in the United States or other Western lands who hear these messages lack the base of factual knowledge to understand that Israel’s accusations are bold and ridiculous lies; yet these lies often strike a receptive chord among uninformed audiences that only have two images drilled into them year after year: Israel and Jews are threatened with death and extinction in the Middle East, and the region is full of rabid killers who want to kill Christians and Jews and turn the world into one big Islamic society that enslaves women and martyrs its children.

*Phyllis Bennis, fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and the Transnational Institute; director of the [New Internationalism Project](#) at IPS. Bennis [explained](#) that the Islamic*

*State's "ideological agenda" is "completely" different from Hamas:*

Hamas does not believe in going back to the 7th Century. Hamas is a political organization that was created with Israeli support back in 1987, as a counterweight to the nationalist PLO, [which] Israel thought would be more dangerous, and was created to fight against Israeli occupation. It is an Islamist organization, but it has nothing comparable to the kind of extremism of the Islamic State. Now would I want to live under a Hamas government? Not particularly. I'm a pretty secular girl, Jewish or not. But that's my choice. I don't live there. Hamas was elected in 2006 in an election that the Carter Center, among others, called the most free and fair that had ever happened in the Arab world. It was not acknowledged. They were never given the chance to rule. And their military wing has carried out attacks that are in violation of international law. That's certainly true.

*Jonathan Cook, an award-winning British journalist based in Nazareth and author, most recently of [Disappearing Palestine](#):*

[Hamas](#) – split between political and militant factions – has shown itself both pragmatic and accountable to the Palestinian public. It won the last national election, in 2006, and after its recent fight against Israel in Gaza is by far the most popular Palestinian movement.

Despite being in control of Gaza for eight years, it has not implemented sharia law nor targeted the enclave's Christians. Instead it has recently formed a unity government with its secular political rivals in Fatah, and

has been more than willing to negotiate with Israel.

...

In casting a popular resistance movement like Hamas as ISIS, Netanyahu has tarred all Palestinians as bloodthirsty Islamic extremists. And here we reach Israel's real goal in equating the two groups.

....

All this fear-mongering is designed both to further undermine the Palestinian unity government between Hamas and Fatah, and to sanction Israel's behaviour by painting a picture, as after 9/11, of an Israel on the front line of a war against global terror.

*Larry Derfner, formerly with The Jerusalem Post and U.S. News and World Report, now a writer for [+972](#), a blog-based web magazine:*

[If Netanyahu](#) really believed Hamas is ISIS, would he have sent a delegation to negotiate with Hamas and offer it concessions in Cairo? Would he have reached a ceasefire agreement with Hamas after Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012? If Hamas is ISIS, would a "senior Israel Defense Forces officer" have told this to Britain's Financial Times in March:

*Today we can describe Hamas as a much more restrained, much more responsible organisation than it used to be a decade or two decades ago – this all in light of their statehood experience. This has made them much more responsible, much more cautious.*

... the decisive [difference] between Hamas and ISIS, of course, is that Hamas represents a nation under

foreign rule, which means Hamas is fighting a war of self-defense against Israel. ISIS is trying to take over a nation, or nations, that are beset by civil war, so ISIS, being the most murderous, totalitarian and feared of any of the factions, is fighting a war of aggression.

## ISIS and Islamophobia

*Wajahat Ali, the lead author of the investigative report, [Fear, Inc.: Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America](#):*

[For Islamophobes](#), ISIS is Hamas is Hummus is Hijab is Hezbollah is Allah is Ayatollah is Al Qaeda is Ikhwan is Taliban = Islam & all Muslims

*Mehreen Faruqi, Greens Party member of the New South Wales Legislative Council (Australia):*

[No one](#) can deny that video footage of journalists being beheaded by Isis operatives and ongoing news of vicious massacres are extremely distressing, eliciting a raw emotional response, requiring us to take action. But why should a whole community be compelled to apologise for or distance themselves from despicable actions they have no part in?

After all, we don't hold this expectation for citizens who practice other religions. As [Australian journalist and author] George Megalogenis aptly [tweeted](#):

*We don't ask . . . [Australian] Catholics to condemn child abuse when church has caused harm. Why hold law-abiding . . . [Australian] Muslims to a higher standard?*

Expecting constant apologies implies two things: that Muslims, of which there are over 1 billion worldwide, are a generally homogenous group; and that we are not truly accepted as part of western society.

*Linda Sarsour, executive director of the Arab American Association of New York and the national advocacy director of the National Network for Arab American Communities:*

All of us . . . recognize that religious fanatics perpetuate violent acts for their own deranged reasons.

Why is an apology only expected of Muslims?

We all share the responsibility of addressing the threats we face but we are having the wrong conversation when we try to paint one broad community as the problem. In the case of ISIS, these broad and dangerous generalizations are exactly what they want. They want the world to believe that their acts of violence are representative of my faith. They want my neighbors to look at me and feel threatened. ISIS is not representative of my faith and the group never has been. The moment we play into that narrative is the moment we help conflate the problem.

*Nihad Awad, national executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR):*

Every time we refer to ISIS as the “Islamic State,” call its members “jihadists” or in any way grant it the religious legitimacy that it so desperately seeks, we simultaneously boost its brand, tarnish the image of Islam and further marginalize the vast majority of Muslims who are

disgusted by the group’s un-Islamic actions.

*Richard Silverstein, whose Tikun Olam blog “focuses on exposing the excesses of the Israeli national security state”:*

ISIS has become the scare du jour of world politics. While ISIS is a profoundly disturbing phenomenon for which the world should develop some sort of response, the problem is that the Islamist movement has become a useful foil for many varied political interests from Israel to the U.S. Islamophobes among the Euro-nationalist far-right and the U.S. Tea Party have latched onto ISIS as their political gravy train.

### ISIS in Political Context

*Deepa Kumar, author of Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire:*

Virtually absent in the media circus around ISIS is an honest discussion of how the US War on Terror, rather than halting the growth of violent Islamist groups, actually fosters fundamentalism.

To be clear, the US did not create ISIS. That is, it did not fund and train ISIS in Syria in the way that it funded and trained the Mujahideen (from which al Qaeda emerged) to fight its proxy war with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Rather it is US actions in the Middle East that have created the conditions for the rise of a group like ISIS. Al Qaeda did not exist in Iraq until after the US invasion. Al Qaeda in Iraq was formed in 2004, and was the precursor organization to the current ISIS. It is the US’s reliance on Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Emirates to push back against the so called Shia

Crescent (Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Assad in Syria, and for a time the Sunni Hamas) that prompted rich donors in the Gulf States to channel funds to ISIS in Syria. It is US and various dictatorships’ support of counter-revolutionary forces opposed to the Arab Spring of 2011 that allowed reactionary groups to grow while thwarting progressive ones. And finally, it is the US’s destruction of Iraq and its support for the Shia government that excluded and oppressed the Sunni that allowed ISIS to take control of such large parts of that country.

*Mehreen Faruqi, Greens Party member of the New South Wales Legislative Council (Australia):*

We . . . need to ask the difficult questions: would Isis exist today without the devastation of the Iraq War, the more than a decade of crippling Western sanctions on Iraq that killed half a million children, or before that, the West’s unflinching support of the dictator Saddam Hussein?

At a time when, above all, calm heads and hearts should prevail to devise strategies that address the root causes of such brutal conflicts, we seem to be focussing on just the symptoms.

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 (1) Pro-Israel advocates have highlighted Hamas’ ruthless execution of suspected collaborators. While condemning such executions, Jonathan Cook places them in historical/political context when he writes, “The extra-judicial execution of collaborators . . . has a long tradition among resistance movements fighting asymmetrical wars. Militants among the Marxist revolutionaries of Latin America and the Catholic nationalists in Ireland, as well as the Allied resistance in Nazi Europe and the Jewish underground against the British in Palestine, had nary a Muslim in their ranks but they brutally punished those who betrayed them.”