



Academia's antisemitism and foreign funding in the corona era

UNTIL THE COVID-19 pandemic struck, a primary concern of the pro-Israel community has been the indoctrination against Israel of America's young people, in large part due to a toxic college environment where antisemitism manifests itself as anti-Zionism. In this era of intersectionality, their professors are more activist than free-thinking scholars. Students who support Israel are intimidated from expressing their views by professors and then fellow students, who disdain them for believing Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish democratic state.

In response, the White House strengthened the federal education department's ability to fight antisemitism on campus with an executive order expanding the protection of Jewish students so they can be protected under the Civil Rights Act, while including the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of antisemitism that includes anti-Zionism. The IHRA has been adopted by the US, the European Parliament, and 31 nations ranging from Canada to Greece. Universities from UCLA to Duke to NYU that allow antisemitism to fester are now being federally investigated for infringing on the rights of Jewish students.

Critics complain that Judaism is simply a religion not a race deserving civil rights protection, and defining it that way will harm the free speech of those who want to boycott and delegitimize Israel. Interestingly, this is the same logic Palestinians have used for years, claiming Judaism is only a religion not a nationality that does not have a civilizational dimension, to further their claim that Jews are not a people deserving the right to any land in the Levant, especially where any Muslims live.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been some relief in the campaign

against Israel on campus as "apartheid weeks" and student Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement resolutions that take place in the spring semester, will now have to wait another year to rear their ugly heads. However, not all was good news.

According to Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (SPME), an organization of professors whose mission is to bring "academic freedom, intellectual integrity and honest debate" back to campus and protect students from antisemitic intimidation, George Washington University used the distraction of the pandemic to appoint Ilana Feldman, a vocal BDS advocate, as the interim dean of the prestigious Elliott School of International Affairs. According to Asaf Romirowsky, executive director of SPME, Feldman's appointment is representative of the "politicization of the academy, especially as it relates to the Arab-Israeli conflict", blurring of the lines of scholarship and activism.

With college campuses planning to educate by Zoom and Blackboard apps in the fall, those who prioritized combating the politicization of America's academic university departments will need to understand this new landscape, and how to monitor and reach out to both affected students and intimidated college administrations.

The California-based AMCHA Initiative has also been leading the charge to investigate and document antisemitism at universities, bringing together organizations from across America, to inform and if necessary pressure university administrators to act against antisemitism and bias on the campus. StandWithUs's Alums for Campus Fairness is organizing concerned alumni to combat university indifference to the harassment of Jewish students on campus and promote a balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

During the lockdowns, some anti-Israel groups like IfNotNow have used the pandemic to advance their agenda through social media, by claiming any corona-related deaths in Gaza are directly related to Israel's blockade of its border. As of this writing there has been one coronavirus death in Gaza. At Cornell, Students for Justice in Palestine, another anti-Israel group, used the pandemic as an opportunity to tweet, #Zionist Occupation is the Virus.

As for funding, few Americans are aware that nations like Qatar, supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, have poured billions of dollars into American think tanks, colleges, our educational system and now even primary schools, buying enormous leverage to influence the next generation of Americans' views toward the Middle East, primarily to mainstream political Islamism and undermine Israel.

According to research from the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) "Autocratic Middle Eastern regimes, organizations, foundations and affiliated private corporations, have funneled billions of dollars of unreported funding to American universities in order to demonize Israel on campus... From 1986 to 2018, Middle East Muslim countries donated \$6,566,462,768 to US universities, only \$3,592,760,609 of which was reported to the federal government."

Qatar is not the first or the only nation that has attempted to influence American attitudes toward its orientation in the Middle East. The Saudis, whose worldwide propagation of fundamentalist Wahabi Islam began over 50 years ago not only affected the US, but radicalized moderate Muslims throughout the world, most notably in Pakistan through its funding of radical education in its madrassa system.

However, over the last 20 years since 9/11, the Saudis, worried about their own survival, have moderated their views while their Gulf rival Qatari neighbors have taken the lead in aligning with America's enemies in propagating antisemitic, anti-Israel, and anti-American agendas.

Middle East nations are not the only ones who try to affect American education and Americans' perceptions. The Department of Defense has alerted American universities not to accept Chinese funding or risk losing federal dollars, as they allege that through the Chinese funded Confucius Institutes, China whitewashes its negative side and promotes its Communist agenda.

Stanford University's Ayaan Hirsi Ali has said that "powerful foundations such as the Qatar Foundation continue to grant financial support and legitimacy to radical Islamic ideology around the world." What Hirsi Ali wants to do is widen the American focus from the easily seen violence and terror of radical Islam to the more dangerous and insidious infiltration of political Islamism that is now making its way into mainstream American education. The Qatar Foundation is the tip of that spear.

Qatar not only has spent billions of dollars trying to influence American education in the US, but also spends hundreds of millions of dollars a year subsidizing six American university branches within Qatar. Those "woke" institutions in the name of cultural relativism and greed have allowed their good names to be used to sanitize an authoritarian regime that supports radical elements and is aligned with Iran.

This is not to say the US should not work with Qatar in military affairs or intelligence but it does mean that a non-democratic government should not be influencing our children and the next generation of American leaders. Who can doubt that faculty of university departments that derive



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Ilana Feldman, a vocal BDS advocate, has been appointed by George Washington University as the interim dean of the prestigious Elliot School of International Affairs

a sizable portion of their funding from the Gulf are going to think twice about biting the hand that feeds them?

People who value the importance of the US-Israel relationship for both nations' security interests are concerned that American academia's anti-Israel bias has been in ascendancy for so long that it is now considered a legitimate mainstream academic opinion to more or less presume that Israel is a criminal, illegitimate state. Apartheid, racist, undemocratic, Islamophobic are some of the choice descriptions echoing from the walls of America's elite universities.

Of course the other post-colonial nations that have risen from the ashes of the Turkish, Austro-Hungarian, Soviet and other empires are just fine, even if they are undemocratic, misogynistic dictatorships that persecute minorities within their borders. Only the Jews aren't allowed to claim a place at the table.

The irony is that Zionism was created as a response to colonialism. After 2000 years of Crusades, pogroms, Inquisitions,



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Stanford University's Ayaan Hirsi Ali wants to focus on the insidious infiltration of political Islamism making its way into mainstream American education

antisemitism and the Holocaust, the need for a Jewish state is self-evident.

The problem is that as long as the coronavirus is circulating throughout the world, America's focus will be on the pandemic and its aftermath. Pro-Israel organizations as well as members of Congress and foreign policy advisers in the executive branch will have to find new strategies to refocus attention needed to address everything from growing antisemitism to the growth of political Islamism, as the anti-Israel, anti-American academic and organizational legions will continue to work hard to disseminate their hate and enhance their influence, pandemic or not.

The enemies of Israel aren't going to stop their dirty work during this pandemic, and the friends of Israel had better stay focused on the changing terrain. ■

The writer is the Director of MEPIN (Middle East Political Information Network). He regularly briefs members of Congress and their foreign policy aides, as well White House advisers.