From Ivory Towers to Dark Corners: Investigating the Nexus Between Antisemitism, Tax-Exempt Universities, and Terror Financing

DR. JONATHAN SCHANZER
Senior Vice President for Research
Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Washington, DC
November 15, 2023
Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Neal, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

In the wake of the October 7 terrorist attack in Israel, the United States has seen a marked rise in rallies and protests, both on main street America and on college campuses, expressing support for the Hamas terrorist organization. Much of this troubling activity, which has included calls for violence, the unabashed articulation of antisemitism, and even calls for genocide against Israel, can be attributed to a constellation of extremist groups.

Two groups stand out in particular: American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) and Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), a campus group that receives funding and training from AMP.1

Seven years ago, I testified before Congress on two separate occasions,2 noting how AMP was spawned by individuals who previously worked for nonprofits that were shuttered by federal authorities or sued in civil court because they provided financial or material support to Hamas.

When I testified in 2016, legislators exhibited an interest. So did federal law enforcement. However, one official candidly told me that suspected Hamas activists in the United States were viewed then as protected sources in the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group.

---


Since then, AMP has established an active lobby on Capitol Hill, and its ability to mobilize at the grassroots level has grown. Equally disconcerting is the way in which campus groups (such as SJP) receive funding and training from AMP, and systematically threaten or intimidate Jewish and pro-Israel students at universities across the country.

This testimony presents an updated snapshot of this pro-Hamas network in America, drawing attention to its history, current activities, connections to foreign actors, and allegations about possible illicit activities. Only the federal government can answer the question of whether this network of former Hamas operatives is or is not breaking the law right now. But I believe this committee has the power to harness the necessary resources to find out.

HAMAS IN THE UNITED STATES

Historically, Hamas supporters have abused the U.S. financial system to send millions of dollars overseas. From 1989-2001, one such network raised millions of dollars for Hamas through a Texas-based charity known as the Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development. In December 2001, U.S. authorities raided HLF and froze its assets. Ultimately, five individuals were convicted and sent to prison for providing material support to Hamas.³

This network was tenacious, however. Its members created a new entity in a different state and with a different name — but with the same goals, fundraising apparatus, and personnel. The new organization, Kindhearts for Charitable Development, did not evade U.S. government scrutiny. In fact, I was a terrorism finance analyst at the U.S. Treasury in 2006 when Kindhearts’ access to the U.S. financial system was blocked pending investigation.⁴

But elements of this network remained. The Islamic Association for Palestine (IAP), which provided media, communications, and fundraising services to HLF, still operated. The family of a slain American teenager named David Boim ultimately sued the Islamic Association for Palestine for its Hamas support. IAP was found civilly liable, with the judge awarding damages of more than $150 million.⁵ The last of the Hamas front groups closed shop.

In the years that followed, however, the United States government endeavored to end its “Global War on Terror.” Terrorist groups such as Hamas were no longer scrutinized, particularly as “great power competition” began to inform our foreign policy.

More than seven years ago, FDD discovered a reconstituted network of former employees associated with the aforementioned Hamas charities. At least nine individuals who worked for or

on behalf of these shuttered charities came together to run a new organization called American Muslims for Palestine.

**AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE**

AMP is a not-for-profit corporation founded in Illinois with national headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia. A 501c3 nonprofit called the AJP Educational Foundation is the group’s fiscal sponsor. In 2021, AJP Educational Foundation launched an affiliated c4 lobby, AJP Action.

Most of what can be gleaned about AMP’s donors derives from its annual fundraising conferences — which often feature family members of senior Hamas leadership as speakers. Although AMP’s official party line is that it does not discuss Hamas explicitly, it has also published fundraising appeals for the imprisoned leaders of the Holy Land Foundation.

---


The mission, goals, donors, and fundraising infrastructure of AMP share a striking resemblance to the charities that were dismantled more than a decade ago. All four members of AMP’s most senior leadership previously worked for these groups. Many of AMP’s donors, board members, and corporate sponsors have also been active with entities proven to support Hamas.

This was not lost on the family of David Boim. One year after I delivered testimony that exposed the existence of this reconstituted network, the Boim family sued AMP. The 2017 complaint alleges that AMP is the “alter ego” of IAP. It argues that AMP is the same institution as IAP, fulfilling the same functions with the same goals, merely operating under a different name to avoid IAP’s legal liabilities. The case is ongoing.10

AMP’s influence has grown in recent years. AMP’s lobbying arm, AJP Action, lobbied legislators here on Capitol Hill just two weeks ago.11 Lawmakers such as Rashida Tlaib, Betty McCollum, Summer Lee, Andre Carson, Jan Schakowsky, Bill Pascrell, and Ilhan Omar have all met with the group.12 These legislators may not have known the background of the lobby group they met.

Facilitating campus activism is a key part of AMP’s work. Its student network is coordinated by an AMP employee named Taher Herzallah. Per the AMP website, Herzallah is the “Associate Director of Outreach and Community Organizing for American Muslims for Palestine.” He is the “liaison between campus activism groups on campuses across the country,” helping “groups procure grants, materials and speakers.” He is also “instrumental in helping students set up programs and activities.”13

AMP’s founder, Hatem Bazian, also founded Students for Justice in Palestine, which is unquestionably one of the most vitriolic anti-Israel voices on campus.14

---

AMP has also become a leading grassroots organizer of the vehemently anti-Israel and sometimes violent protests that have swept the country and erupted on college campuses nationwide. Whether or not it is sanctioned by AMP, the rhetoric is often hateful, inciteful, and antisemitic.\(^\text{15}\) To the best of my knowledge, AMP has not denounced this hate-speech or taken steps to ensure that it won’t take place at future rallies.

In short, individuals who previously worked for Hamas charities are now a driving force behind the large, pro-Hamas demonstrations taking place in major cities across America. This same network is also providing training, talking points, materials, and financial support to students intimidating and threatening Jewish and pro-Israel students on college campuses.\(^\text{16}\)

Of course, every attendee of these rallies has a right to declare his or her political beliefs. But they also have the right to know who is behind this activity. The same goes for every state government, municipality, and university impacted by this recent surge in pro-Hamas activity.

**THE HOLY LAND FOUNDATION**

AMP’s staff and structure is deeply and intimately linked to the Holy Land Foundation. From 1995 to 2001, according to U.S. government estimates, “HLF sent approximately $12.4 million outside of the United States with the intent to willfully contribute funds, goods, and services to Hamas.”\(^\text{17}\) This charity was founded by Hamas’s current deputy director, Mousa Abu Marzook, who was at that time living in the United States. He seeded the Holy Land Foundation with $210,000 in startup funds.\(^\text{18}\)

After the Holy Land Foundation was shuttered, seven of its officers were indicted; two of them fled the country. Five were convicted and sent to prison for providing material support to Hamas.

At least four individuals who worked for or on behalf of the Holy Land Foundation went on to work for or on behalf of American Muslims for Palestine.

Jamal Said, a regular keynote speaker at AMP fundraisers,\(^\text{19}\) raised money for HLF as the head of the Mosque Foundation, a 501c3 organization that donated money to the HLF.\(^\text{20}\)

---

\(^\text{15}\) “Who are the Primary Groups Behind the U.S. Anti-Israel Rallies?” Anti-Defamation League, October 20, 2023. (https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/who-are-primary-groups-behind-us-anti-israel-rallies)


Foundation, which he continues to run, now sponsors AMP conferences.\textsuperscript{21} Said was an unindicted co-conspirator in the Holy Land Foundation trial.\textsuperscript{22}

Kifah Mustafa, another HLF fundraiser and unindicted co-conspirator, is now a speaker at AMP’s conferences and events.\textsuperscript{23} Mustafa is also the head of an Illinois foundation that shares a P.O. Box with AMP in Arlington, Texas.\textsuperscript{24}

Hussein El-Khatib, who spent five years as a regional director of the Holy Land Foundation, served as an AMP board member until his death in 2018.\textsuperscript{25}

Another AMP figure who previously raised funds for the Holy Land Foundation is AMP’s National Board member Salah Sarsour.\textsuperscript{26} He is also a director of AMP’s 501c3 arm.\textsuperscript{27} In the 1990s, Sarsour spent eight months in jail in Israel for Hamas activity.\textsuperscript{28} According to court documents cited by my former Treasury colleague Matthew Levitt, Salah Sarsour used a bank account of his furniture store in Milwaukee to send money to Adel Awadallah,\textsuperscript{29} a Hamas military leader.\textsuperscript{30} Sarsour today owns a Wisconsin furniture store that advertises and fundraises at AMP’s annual conferences.\textsuperscript{31}

American Muslims for Palestine regularly features the family members of the Holy Land Foundation’s convicted leadership at its conferences. AMP publishes fundraising appeals for

\textsuperscript{21} “On The Road To Free Palestine,” American Muslims For Palestine Conference Program, November 2021.
\textsuperscript{26} “Our Team,” American Muslims for Palestine, accessed November 12, 2023. (https://www.ampalestine.org/about-amp/our-team)
\textsuperscript{29} Matthew Levitt, \textit{Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad}, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), page 78.
\textsuperscript{31} “On The Road To Free Palestine,” American Muslims For Palestine Conference Program, November 2021.
HLF’s jailed leaders, some even written by the niece of Mousa Abu Marzook, Noor Elashi. In May of 2023, AMP sponsored an event featuring one of the Holy Land Foundation’s leaders, Mohammed El-Mezain, as well as other family members of top Hamas leadership.

AMP’s admiration for the jailed leaders of the Holy Land Foundation mirrors that of Hamas itself. Just days after the October 7 Hamas terrorist assault, senior Hamas leader Ali Barakeh announced that Hamas was demanding the release of the Holy Land Foundation’s leaders in any agreement to release the hundreds of hostages held in Gaza.

**THE ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION FOR PALESTINE**

The Holy Land Foundation did not operate alone. The Hamas fundraising organization enjoyed a close partnership with the Islamic Association for Palestine, which provided media, communications, and fundraising services. Like HLF, IAP was founded with startup money from Hamas leader Mousa Abu Marzook.

Court documents assert that IAP raised money and collected donations on behalf of HLF. According to evidence presented at the HLF trial, “numerous donation checks…made payable to…IAP,” were “deposited into HLF’s bank account,” in some cases with the memo line, “for Palestinian Mujahidden [martyrs] only.”

After American teenager David Boim was murdered by Hamas, his parents sued the Islamic Association for Palestine and its affiliate organizations in 2000, arguing that IAP’s Hamas fundraising made IAP liable for Boim’s death under the federal Anti-Terrorism Act. The lawsuit culminated in a $156 million dollar judgment against IAP and its co-defendants.

IAP never paid that judgment. According to court documents, IAP said it was “ceasing operations and had few assets left due to the burden of the Boim Judgment and associated litigation costs.”

---


34 @MarioNawfal, X, October 9, 2023. ([https://twitter.com/marionawfal/status/1711589703936290905](https://twitter.com/marionawfal/status/1711589703936290905))


36 [United States of America v. Mohammad El-Mezain, Appeal, 09-10560 (5th Cir. 2011), page 170.](http://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/opinions%5Cpub%5C09/09-10560-CR0.wpd.pdf)


Starting in late 2005, activists from IAP and HLF launched what the Boims allege was an effort to continue IAP’s work without IAP’s legal liabilities. The new Boim lawsuit alleges, “Activists who had been involved with IAP and HLF recognized that these organizations could not continue to pursue their missions with the same names, in the same form, and saddled with the same civil and criminal liability… They therefore deliberately concealed their connection to IAP… emphasizing internally that ‘we really need to distance ourselves from any well-known IAP figures.’”

However, AMP’s roster is strikingly similar to that of IAP.

The former president of IAP, Rafeeq Jaber, prepared the tax forms to help launch AMP’s fiscal sponsor, the AJP Educational Foundation. Jaber has been identified in the Palestinian press as the “spiritual father” of AMP’s coalition of like-minded organizations. His financial services business was listed at the same office building as IAP before it shut down.

Abdelbaset Hamayel, IAP’s secretary general, was never named as an officer or an executive, but his name appeared on the AJP Educational Foundation’s IRS 990 form as the person, “who possesses the organization’s books and records.” Hamayel was later featured on AMP’s social media as the group’s executive director. Today, he is active in AMP’s Chicago chapter.

Sufian Nabhan was IAP’s former Michigan representative. He went on to serve on AMP’s National Board. AMP and SJP founder, Hatem Bazian, was a frequent speaker at IAP events.

---


40 Ibid.


42 "لغزة
نصرة
ا美国人
الدم
شوارع


Osama Abuirshaid worked as the editor of IAP’s newspaper, Al-Zaytounah. He is now AMP’s executive director. Abuirshaid regularly publishes articles in English and Arabic promoting Hamas and has also published interviews that highlight his communications with Hamas leader Abu Marzook and other Hamas leaders in Gaza. In fact, in 2014, Abuirshaid was featured on the website of Hamas’s self-declared military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades.

In addition to his work on Capitol Hill, Abuirshaid regularly travels to Turkey, where he meets with and attends conferences run by Sami al-Arian, who pled guilty to providing material support to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist organization. Abuirshaid also travels to Qatar, where he is a “non-resident scholar” for the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS). This organization, funded by the Qatari government, hosts Hamas’s top leadership — including Hamas leaders Khaled Meshal and Osama Hamdan — at its events.

In short, several AMP founders and leaders formerly worked for or on behalf of IAP.
KINDHEARTS

In 2006, the Treasury Department froze the assets of Ohio-based KindHearts. Treasury called KindHearts the “progeny” of HLF.58 Treasury stated that KindHearts coordinated fundraising with an official from the Holy Land Foundation even after HLF was named a terrorist entity. Treasury further asserted that KindHearts and the Holy Land Foundation deposited money into the same overseas bank account owned by HLF.59 KindHearts also utilized IAP as a fundraiser and organizer, according to the group’s IRS 990 forms.60

59 Ibid.
KindHearts was run by Khaled Smaili, a former employee of the Global Relief Foundation (GRF).\(^{61}\) GRF was officially registered as a charity in Palos Hills, Illinois. In 2002, Treasury sanctioned it for funding al-Qaeda.\(^{62}\)

Faced with this and other evidence, the organization agreed to disband.

KindHearts’ Illinois representative was former IAP and current AMP leader Abdelbaset Hamayel.\(^{63}\) AMP’s current chairman (and SJP founder) Hatem Bazian also helped raise money for KindHearts in 2004.\(^{64}\)

**CONCLUSION**

At one of its conferences, AMP featured a panel that invited attendees to learn how to “navigate the fine line between legal activism and material support for terrorism.”\(^{65}\) I am not in a position to determine whether AMP is able to navigate that “fine line,” but it is clear some of its supporters have been part of organizations that failed to abide by the law in the past.

Mr. Chairman, what I have laid out here is cause for significant concern. At the very least, AMP is a hate group with its roots in Hamas fundraising organizations that were shuttered for a reason. It could be far worse. It is my strong belief that organizations that promote, encourage, or turn a blind eye to hate speech, incitement to violence, and intimidation have no place on Capitol Hill or on university campuses.

Relevant intelligence and law enforcement agencies have the resources to learn more about this network of Hamas supporters. On behalf of the many Americans who are deeply concerned about the rise of pro-Hamas activism in the United States, I sincerely hope you harness the government resources to investigate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.


\(^{65}\) Shane Harris, “Pro-Palestinian Group Lectured On Skirting Terror Laws,” The Daily Beast, April 14, 2017. (https://www.thedailybeast.com/pro-palestinian-group-lectured-on-skirting-terror-laws)
AMP is the latest in a long history of Hamas-linked charities in America

**HOLY LAND FOUNDATION**
Founded 1988
Designated Terrorist Organization 2001

**ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION FOR PALESTINE**
Founded 1993 • Liable for Hamas Finance 2004
Disbanded 2010

**KINDHEARTS FOR CHARITABLE DEVELOPMENT**
Founded 2002 • Assets Frozen 2006
Shut Down 2011

**AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE**
Founded in Chicago 2006 • DC office opens 2015
Sued as “Alter Ego” of IAP in 2017
Lobbying Arm “AIP Action” opens 2021
Virginia Attorney General Investigation 2023

---

**AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE**

AMP is led by these four former employees of Hamas front groups:

- **HATEM BAZIAN**
- **OSAMA ABUIRSHAID**
- **SALAH SARSOUR**
- **ABDELBASSET HAMAYEL**
Hamas's military (the Al-Qassam Brigades) featured AMP Executive Director Osama Abuirshaid on its website in 2014.

Are former pro-Hamas charity employees influencing vitriol on American college campuses today?