

Boston Northeastern University: Jewish Student Receives Death Threats Over Palestine Solidarity Work

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A Jewish member of [Students for Justice in Palestine](#) at [Northeastern University](#) in Boston has received death threats ostensibly because of his involvement in Palestine solidarity activism and outspoken criticism of [Zionism](#).

The threats come as Zionist groups warn of legal complaints against the university, alleging campus “anti-Semitism” — despite an ever-growing record of failure to support these kinds of accusations.

First reported on 18 September by CBS Boston, an anonymous group of Jewish students publicly accused Northeastern University of “an atmosphere of intimidation of those who are supportive of Israel, or an official indulgence of anti-Semitism” (“[Jewish students claim discrimination by Northeastern professors](#),” WBZ-TV, 18 September 2013).

When the story [reached the student daily newspaper](#) eight days later, the alleged perpetrators were, predictably, Northeastern Students for Justice in Palestine and a handful of faculty members who dared to criticize the ongoing Israeli colonization of Palestine.

In a letter written in July, the [Zionist Organization of America](#) states that if Northeastern University does not address the “hostile environment” faced by Jewish students, then it would risk losing its federal funding — citing guidelines mandated under [Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act](#) (“[ZOA letter to President Aoun](#),” 5 July 2013 [PDF]).

Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act protects students from racial and ethnic discrimination at federally-funded educational institutions. Israel-aligned groups and individuals have claimed that Jewish students face anti-Semitism, harassment and intimidation because of activism by Students for Justice in Palestine and Muslim student groups, and have filed claims with the Department of Education alleging violations of Title VI.

Even though legal campaigns to coerce censorship of Palestine solidarity activism on campus — through Title VI complaints — have been [dismissed from the University of California system](#) to [Columbia University](#) so far, well-funded Zionist organizations such as the [Anti-Defamation League](#) (ADL) and the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) continue to pose real threats to free speech and academic freedom.

This latest manifestation of “[lawfare](#)” by Israel advocacy groups appears to differ from some previous attempts to stifle debate.

Specifically, the campaign's focus on disbanding Students for Justice in Palestine while the student organization's status on campus remains in peril could potentially deliver these powerful pro-Israel forces a victory without necessarily succeeding in challenging Northeastern's funding under Title VI.

As the ADL and ZOA continue to pressure Northeastern president Joseph Aoun and other administrators, the university's ignominious record of silencing advocates of Palestinian and Muslim rights on campus calls into question its ability to fairly evaluate these slanderous accusations.

Inflammatory campaigns



Northeastern students walked out of an event featuring Israeli soldiers in April. ([Tess Scheffan /ActiveStills](#))

As The Electronic Intifada reported last August, Northeastern administrators [officially sanctioned Students for Justice in Palestine last semester](#) for silently walking out of an event featuring Israeli soldiers. The event was hosted by Huskies for Israel, the on-campus Israel advocacy group.

Despite widespread condemnation by the National Lawyers Guild, the Center for Constitutional Rights and local union and civil rights groups, Students for Justice in Palestine at Northeastern remains under administrative probation with all funding derived from the student activities' fee indefinitely suspended.

The provisions of the administration's sanctions against SJP included a grotesque, enforced normalization charade disguised as a "leadership council" with campus Zionists. Though the university [describes these monthly councils](#) as chances for collaboration with other like-minded student organizations, the inclusion of dialogue sessions with Huskies for Israel seems to be an underhanded attempt to tame and limit discourse around Israel-Palestine.

Furthermore, the administration has demanded from SJP the production of a "civility statement" through these problematic leadership councils that is to govern all future political advocacy. Neither Huskies for Israel nor any other student group on campus has ever been forced to comply with such anti-democratic measures.

In addition, the Boston-based (and Orwellian-named) Americans for Peace and Tolerance is supporting the ADL/ZOA effort, which has for years launched inflammatory campaigns against [supposed "Islamic extremism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Zionism"](#) at Northeastern University. Americans for Peace and Tolerance has conflated these three divergent phenomena as indistinguishable.

Among Americans for Peace and Tolerance's many targets was Imam Abdullah Faaruq, who was [removed from his post as Muslim chaplain of the Spiritual Life Center last September](#) despite more than 15 years of service to Northeastern University.

Faaruuq's advocacy on behalf of Muslim political prisoners Aafia Siddiqui and [Tarek Mehenna](#) and consistent opposition to unjust "War on Terror" policies drew a vitriolic response from Americans for Peace and Tolerance's president Charles Jacobs.

Emboldened by the administration's unprincipled appeasement, Americans for Peace and Tolerance has since intensified its efforts against Northeastern faculty and students who fail to meet its pro-Israel requirements.

Fear-mongering

Shortly after the administration fired Faaruuq, Americans for Peace and Tolerance released a fear-mongering [video](#) titled "Anti-Semitic Education @ Northeastern University" targeting NU professors Denis Sullivan and M. Shahid Alam.

Sullivan, a professor of international affairs and the director of the university's Middle East Center for Peace, Culture and Development, is perhaps Americans for Peace and Tolerance's most consistently attacked individual due to his support of a [one-state solution](#) in Israel-Palestine, and his criticism of Israel's [apartheid](#) policies.

Alam, an economics professor, has also been subjected to a series of [publications](#) and videos by Americans for Peace and Tolerance. He has been vilified for his participation in Students for Justice in Palestine's 2012 [Israeli Apartheid Week](#) — a series of Palestine awareness-raising activities and events held each year in universities around the world — and other declarations of support for Palestinian liberation.

The ZOA's recent letter to Aoun singles out both Sullivan and Alam and demands their immediate dismissal.

Litany of violent threats

While the campaign has succeeded in compelling the administration to sanction Students for Justice in Palestine, the Islamic Society of Northeastern University's funding and "Islamic extremism" has been [targeted](#) by not only Americans for Peace and Tolerance, but also right-wing Islamophobic blogger [Pamela Geller](#).

More gravely, due to witch-hunting on the Americans for Peace and Tolerance-controlled Facebook page "[Exposing Islamic Extremism at Northeastern University](#)," Jewish Students for Justice in Palestine member Max Geller (no relation to Pamela) has received a litany of violent threats in the last few days, along with accusations of being a "self-hating Jew" and a "terrorist sympathizer."

One commenter on the page who identified himself as a former marine, for instance, wrote of Geller, "I would seriously introduce that kid to the inside of an ambulance." Geller told The Electronic Intifada that private messages were even more explicit and included death threats.

According to Max Geller, this is simply another manifestation of Charles Jacobs' pattern of targeting, defaming, and intimidating members of the Northeastern University community and others in Boston in an effort to compel silence on Israeli human rights abuses — which the young activist defiantly refuses to accept.

Even still, over the phone Geller expressed concern after recent messages he received extended these threats to his family, and displayed knowledge of his home address. As the vicious threats continue to be directed at him and his loved ones, it is increasingly probable that Americans for Peace and Tolerance has put the SJP activist in real jeopardy.

This recent, ironic twist to the assertions by the Anti-Defamation League, the Zionist Organization of America and Americans for Peace and Tolerance of a “hostile campus climate” for Northeastern University’s Jewish students is sure to be lost on those now threatening legal action.

While recent victories against Zionist legal intimidation are cause for hope, the particularly strong and well-funded campaign in Boston against Students for Justice in Palestine, the Islamic Society of Northeastern University, and members of the Northeastern faculty will require a combined, determined effort to thwart.

Lacking an administration with the courage and integrity to defend students’ rights and academic freedom, it will be up to Northeastern University student activists and their supporters to keep closed a Pandora’s box of repression on US campuses.

The precedent threatened by the Anti-Defamation League and Zionist Organization of America’s legal complaint to the Department of Education make this active, developing situation potentially disastrous not only for Palestinian solidarity activism and free speech at Northeastern University, but throughout the country.

Conversely, a resounding defeat for Zionist lawfare in Boston could finally sound the death knell for this cynical and perverse manipulation of American civil rights law.

As Northeastern Students for Justice in Palestine remains steadfast in its commitment to advocate for Palestinian liberation on campus and braces for a long fight against censorship and repression, it is incumbent upon all those who believe in justice and civil liberties to join the chorus of resistance to Zionist bullying tactics in the US, and to Israeli apartheid in Palestine.

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