

The Extremist Zionist Media Campaign Has Gone Too Far

Open Letter of California Scholars for Academic Freedom

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

[Prefatory Note: Below is an Open Letter prepared under the direction of Vida Samiian of State University of California at Fresno on behalf of California scholars defending against any effort to abridge academic freedom anywhere in the world, but particularly in California and the United States. The group has been recently sensitive to issues surrounding Israel/Palestine, Zionism, and alleged Anti-Semitism, but it also references attacks elsewhere in the world that encroach upon academic freedom.]

The Open Letter references a defamatory article about me that recycles the by now familiar litany of mistakes, distortions, smears, and array of cherrypicking (mis)interpretations to create a false impression as to my actual views on controversial current issues. The evidentiary background of the article relies on the work of UN Watch, a supposed NGO that takes on all critics of Israel, especially at the UN, and made a habit of regularly launching harassing attacks on me during my six years as UN Special Rapporteur for Occupied Palestine. Their efforts included writing long derogatory letters to UN diplomats and public officials in governments complaining about my views, and urging my dismissal by the UN Secretary General. On this occasion as discussed in the Open Letter the attacks on me were contained in an article in the current issue of the conservative magazine written by intern, National Review, and can be found [here](#).

Such an attack is part of the concerted Zionist pushback against its critics, what I call 'the Zionist War of Cultural Aggression,' with the main current battlefields being university campus venues that host events or speakers critical of Israel or give aid and support to the BDS campaign. Unlike the South African anti-apartheid movement that relied on similar tactics to those relied upon by supporters of the Palestinian national struggle where apologists for apartheid were hostile to the movement, there was never an attempt as here, to take punitive action against those who expressed their hostility to apartheid by advocating various forms of militant nonviolence as expressive of global solidarity. Here the focus is on the role of the right-wing media in creating a climate of opinion that supports frantic Zionist efforts to intimidate and punish vocal critics of Israel, creating a crisis of confidence with regard to the exercise of academic freedom.]

OPEN LETTER

The Extremist Zionist Media Campaign Gone Too Far

As recently as five years ago Zionist extremists would engage campus speakers or events perceived as pro-Palestinian with substantive questions. Sometimes it was obvious that these questions were prepared in advance by some lobbying group as the student who spoke had a list of questions, was surrounded by several supporters, and usually left the conference hall without even waiting for a response. It was a disconcerting abuse of the discussion dimension of campus treatment of a controversial issue of great importance to the society as a whole.

This pattern of involvement has been abandoned in recent years by Zionist extremists. Instead a more insidious set of tactics has been adopted. Substantive engagement, even of a purely argumentative kind, is no longer even attempted, likely reflecting the reality that both the law and the moral dimensions of the Israel/Palestine relationship overwhelmingly support Palestinian grievances if fairly considered and give almost no aid and comfort to Israeli claims.

Instead of substantive engagement, the most ardent Israeli supporters smear critics of Israeli government policies, contending that criticism of Israel is 'the new anti-Semitism,' a position sadly endorsed by the Obama State Department and the Republican Congress, as well as several state legislatures. From such a standpoint, Palestinian supporters and their undertakings are demeaned and smeared while engaging in highly legitimate political discourse. Even the most qualified speakers are attacked before their scheduled appearances, often reinforced by back channel efforts. Usually stimulated and facilitated by more extremist national Zionist organizations, pressures are exerted on university administrations to cancel events. Additionally, local media is alerted so as to shift the focus of public interest as much as possible from message to messenger. The whole idea is to wound the messenger badly, and by so doing, create enough noise to drown out the message, a technique that often engages a compliant local media.

These tactics also seek a punitive backlash directed at Palestinian solidarity initiatives, especially the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Campaign, a nonviolent approach to ending abuses of the Palestinian people, which organizes advocacy of economic disengagement from commercial relationships with unlawful Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as academic, economic, and cultural boycott of Israeli institutions that serve to prolong the occupation and otherwise defy international law. Such tactics resemble the anti-apartheid campaign of the 1980s that proved so effective in bringing about the collapse of the racist regime in South Africa. What is most relevant to notice is that even those who opposed the South African BDS campaign never sought to ban its demonstrations or degrade and punish its leaders, which is what opponents of the Israel BDS campaign are intent on doing.

What we are describing amounts to a Zionist cultural war of aggression against academic freedom in the United States, but also in Europe, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It targets professors, student activists, and campus activities, which has an overall chilling effect (1). For every speaker or event that is cancelled, many more are not undertaken for fear of the backlash. These wider, largely invisible repercussions are rarely discussed, but their impact is significant. More junior colleagues are advised to avoid such zones of potentially toxic consequences that could cast a dark shadow over an entire career as has been the case with even such a notable established scholar as

Norman Finkelstein, as well as disrupting the academic future of promising junior scholars such as **Steven Salaita**.

We also take note of the wider reach of these efforts to discredit scholars who undertake public service beyond the confines of the academic community. The National Review in its issue of July 1, 2017 devotes an entire article to showing what a bad organization the United Nations has become because it had appointed an allegedly notorious anti-Semite, **Richard Falk**, to assess the Israeli treatment of Palestinians living under occupation. In fact, Richard Falk is one of the most highly respected and recognized international scholars of human rights law. He is the Albert G. Milbank Professor of International Law Emeritus at Princeton University and has been a Visiting Distinguished Professor and Research Fellow at the University of California, Santa Barbara since 2002. He taught international law and politics at Princeton University for forty years. He has served the United Nations in several capacities, including acting as a formally designated advisor to the President of the General Assembly in 2009. He has been a vice president of the American Society of International Law and currently serves as Senior Vice President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's Board of Directors.

The fact that an established conservative magazine would publish an article filled with smears, distortions, mistakes, and malicious cherry picking is of a piece with this concerted wider effort to discredit those who speak truth to power, while warning others to maintain silence or face the consequences.

Under these conditions two things seem imperative. First, calling attention to and seeking to counteract the alarming magnitude and insidiousness of this assault on academic freedom. Secondly, organizing support for and solidarity with those who are victimized, both directly and indirectly, by these Zionist tactics detrimental to academic freedom.

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CALIFORNIA SCHOLARS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM (cs4af) is a group of over 200 scholars who defend academic freedom, the right of shared governance, and the First Amendment rights of faculty and students in the academy and beyond. We recognize that violations of academic freedom anywhere are threats to academic freedom everywhere. California Scholars for Academic Freedom investigates legislative and administrative infringements on freedom of speech and assembly, and it raises the consciousness of politicians, university regents and administrators, faculty, students and the public at large through open letters, press releases, petitions, statements, and articles.

***Richard Falk** is an international law and international relations scholar who taught at Princeton University for forty years. Since 2002 he has lived in Santa Barbara, California, and taught at the local campus of the University of California in Global and International Studies and since 2005 chaired the Board of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He initiated this blog partly in celebration of his 80th birthday.*

Note

1. <http://mondoweiss.net/2016/10/california-scholars-academic/>

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