

Profile: American Muslims for Palestine

INTRODUCTION

American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) is the leading organization providing anti-Zionist training and education to students and Muslim community organizations in the country. Founded in 2005, AMP promotes extreme anti-Israel views and has at times provided a platform for anti-Semitism under the guise of educating Americans about “the just cause of Palestine and the rights of self-determination.”

Although the size of its membership remains unclear, the Chicago-based non-profit organization operates several chapters across the country. While its educational efforts have been primarily geared toward providing the Muslim community with inflammatory rhetoric and false accusations against Israel to promote advocacy for Palestine, AMP has also placed a heavy emphasis on supporting and helping coordinate the activity of [Students for Justice in Palestine \(SJP\)](#), the primary organizer of anti-Israel events on campus with dozens of chapters.

AMP seeks to delegitimize and demonize the Jewish state. Its materials are prominently featured at its events and conferences, in its publications and through materials available on its website.

In March 2013, [AMP unveiled a billboard campaign](#) on Metro North stations in suburban New York falsely accusing Israel of “apartheid.” The ad, which was announced on the first day of the Jewish holiday of Passover, features the silhouette of an Israeli soldier aiming a gun at a Palestinian child and called for an end to “unconditional American aid for Israel.”



AMP has its organizational roots in the [Islamic Association of Palestine \(IAP\)](#), an anti-Semitic group that served as the main propaganda arm for Hamas in the United States until it was dissolved in 2004. Since its creation in 2005, AMP continues to work closely with some former IAP leaders who currently hold positions as AMP board members.

STUDENT OUTREACH

AMP has made significant efforts to coordinate anti-Israel activity on college and university campuses in recent years, becoming a major facilitator and resource for students engaged in supporting the Palestinian cause.

In a speech at the 2011 AMP conference in Chicago, AMP’s Chairman Hatem Bazian emphasized the importance of the universities in the battle for public opinion on Palestine, saying, “The university is going to be the frontline and the pro-Israelis know this.” Bazian, a professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California - Berkeley, has also encouraged students to become active in anti-Israeli boycott and divestment campaigns.

To help coordinate student activism, AMP launched its “Signature Project” at the December 2010 Muslim American Society/Islamic Circle of North America convention. During the convention, AMP led three sessions on advocacy training for more than 160 students from several universities. To show its commitment to the project, AMP offered financial assistance to students interested in attending the convention, including free registration and reimbursements for food, travel and hotel expenses.

AMP also hired staff to better manage its campaigns and “strengthen AMP’s impact” on campus. The most notable is AMP National Campus Coordinator Taher Herzallah. In February 2010, Herzallah and 10 other pro-Palestinian student activists were [arrested](#) for disrupting a speech by Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren at the University of California, Irvine.

AMP’s main partner on campus is [Students for Justice in Palestine \(SJP\)](#), the primary organizer of anti-Israel events on campus with several dozen independent chapters. In its end-of-year appeal to its membership in 2010, AMP boasted about its campus efforts, noting that it has helped facilitate three regional SJP conferences and a two-day national SJP conference, and has “worked with hundreds of members of Students for Justice in Palestine.”



In October 2011, AMP further cemented its relationship with SJP by officially endorsing SJP’s 2011 National Conference at Columbia University. That conference, which was held over two days and open to students involved in pro-Palestinian groups on campus, drew the participation of over 350 students from more than 100 schools. Sessions focused on how to strengthen pro-Palestine activism on campus and how to “combat the myths of Zionism.” AMP’s director of media and communications, Kristin Szremski, led a media training workshop, providing students tips on how to write op-eds in student newspapers and local media.

AMP’s fourth annual conference in November 2011 primarily focused on giving students in pro-Palestinian organizations tools they could use on university campuses to counter the “Zionist narrative” and sway public opinion toward the Palestinian cause. AMP organizers focused on students through its specially tailored campus and youth tracks.

A special guest at the conference was Archbishop Atallah Hanna, Patriarch of Jerusalem’s Church of the Holy Sepulchre, who travelled from Jerusalem to attend the event. During one of his speeches, Hanna told the audience, in Arabic, that there will be “no peace agreement until the complete return of [Palestine’s] people and the liberation of its capital, Jerusalem.” In another of Hanna’s sessions, he glorified suicide bombers by describing them as “martyrs.”

In another session, AMP board member Osama Abu Irshaid alleged that “the nature of the occupation is aggression,” and, “in some cases [Israeli soldiers] rape children.”

AMP officially endorsed SJP’s November 2012 National Conference at the University of Michigan, where Hatem Bazian called SJP “the story of Palestine activism on U.S. college campuses” that is “reminiscent of the Anti-Apartheid student mobilizations some decades back.”

Encouraged by its success on university campuses and with SJP, AMP began working with high school students in early 2012. In February 2012, [AMP held its first high school educational training session](#) at the

Islamic Foundation School in Villa Park, Illinois. The training consisted of a half-day workshop on a variety of topics, including a session on media activism by Szremski.

In June 2012, AMP hosted a joint conference on “Palestine activism” with the [High School Muslim Student Association of Southern California \(HSMSA\)](#), an inter-high school network of Muslim student organizations. The conference was part of AMP’s 7th annual campaign to commemorate the “Nakba,” an Arabic term meaning “catastrophe” which is used by Palestinians and their supporters to describe Israel’s creation in 1948. Similar to the Villa Park workshop, the HSMSA conference was designed to help “train high school, college, and non-student activists on issues pertinent to Palestine activism.” The conference also featured speeches by [Ali Abunimah](#), co-founder of the anti-Israel Electronic Intifada blog; and AMP’s Taher Herzallah.

Prior to training high school students, AMP initiated its Public Library Project, a venture aiming at delivering books to public libraries in order to “Educate the public about Palestine” with books “that shed light on the history, culture and politics of Palestine...” Among the books are publications that promote a decided pro-Palestinian narrative by anti-Zionist authors, including *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by professors John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt and *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by anti-Zionist Israeli historian Ilan Pappé.

WORKING WITHIN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

AMP representatives frequently speak at major Muslim-American community events, including conventions held by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), [Muslim American Society \(MAS\)](#), and the [Islamic Circle of North America \(ICNA\)](#).

AMP is a member of the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections (AMT), an umbrella organization that represents most major Muslim American organization, including ISNA, MAS, ICNA and the [Council on American-Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#).

AMP has its organizational roots in the now-defunct [Islamic Association of Palestine \(IAP\)](#), an anti-Semitic group that served as the main propaganda arm for Hamas in the United States. AMP’s inaugural conference in November 2006, titled, “Palestine – A Just Cause,” in Rosemont, Illinois, featured several former IAP leaders, including Rafeeq Jaber, a former IAP president; Kifa Mustapha, a former IAP board member and head of the [Holy Land Foundation’s](#) Chicago office; Osama Abu Irshaid, an AMP board member and former editor of IAP’s official newspaper; Nihad Awad, former IAP public relations director and current executive director of the [Council on American – Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#); and Raed Tayeh, a former IAP member; all of whom have also worked for the [United Association for Studies and Research](#).

AMP’s hostility toward Israel was on full display at the [December 2009 MAS-ICNA convention](#) in Chicago. AMP sponsored a panel titled “Al Quds: The Heart of the Struggle,” during which speakers expressed support for armed resistance against Israel. One speaker, Sheikh Raghib Al Serjani, an author and physician from Egypt, characterized the eradication of Israel as a religious duty incumbent on all Muslims. He said it was “the duty of all Muslims to liberate all of Palestine, from the North to the South, from Al Quds [Jerusalem] to the sea.”



Another speaker, Rafeeq Jaber, a co-founder of CAIR, former president of IAP, and a regular participant at AMP conferences, described Jews as “the worst kind of people,” who came to Jerusalem “with false pretenses.”

During another session at the 2009 MAS-ICNA convention, frequent AMP speaker Othman Atta told the audience that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not be their goal, “As for our principles, we don’t have to say what our end goal is, like that we will accept 1967 borders or a two-state solution. I don’t believe that is what we should engage in.”

EXPANDING ITS ANTI-ISRAEL NETWORK

AMP’s anti-Zionist advocacy has been consistent with a host of far-left activists, with whom AMP has increasingly allied itself. Throughout 2009 and 2010, for example, AMP sponsored ten events on [George Galloway’s U.S Tour](#).

During a July 2009 event at Overland Park, Kansas, which AMP co-sponsored with the local MAS chapter, Galloway, a British parliamentarian and anti-Israel activist, said that since the 1970s, “I was a signed-up member of the Palestinian resistance, and I will remain one until my dying breath.” That event was held as a fundraiser for Galloway’s [Viva Palestina](#) campaign, a series of aid convoys to Gaza orchestrated by Galloway and other anti-Israel activists.

Following the 2010 [Mavi Marmara](#) incident where Israeli commandos raided a Gaza-bound humanitarian aid ship, AMP co-sponsored and organized anti-Israel demonstrations with the [Free Gaza Movement](#). In one such demonstration held in Chicago the day after the incident, Sheikh Jamal Said, the imam and director of the Mosque Foundation of Bridgeview and frequent speaker at AMP events, told the crowd of protestors, “We watched as the blood of Muslim, Jewish and Christian activists was shed in the Mediterranean sea while trying to break a shameful siege on Gaza. We watched as the forces of the most evil occupation of the Holy Land claimed their latest victims – let me take this back – their latest victims today ... The leaders of the occupation were not satisfied with the blood of the 20, they need more blood of the Palestinians to be satisfied.”

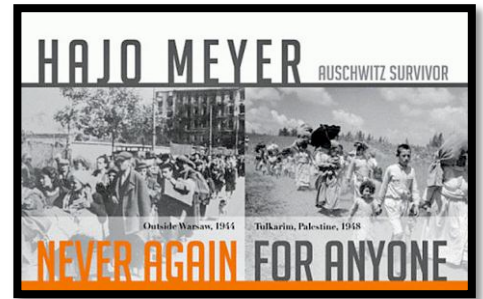
Representatives of [The Council for the National Interest \(CNI\)](#), including former U.S. Ambassador Edward Peck and President [Alison Weir](#), have attended AMP events to promote additional anti-Israel advocacy tools.

Another group AMP has sought to further strengthen its ties with is the [U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation](#), a coalition of anti-Israel groups that is often invited to speak at AMP events and conferences. At a November 2012 press conference in Washington D.C. which sought to highlight some Christian leaders’ call into the legality of U.S. “unconditional support of Israel,” a letter written by AMP Chairman Hatem Bazian was read aloud, stating that “U.S. unconditional support for Israel is harming the perception of America throughout the world ... It threatens our national security.”

AMP has also worked with anti-Zionist Jewish organizations such as [Neturei Karta](#), Jewish Voices Opposing Zionism and the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN). In January 2011, AMP teamed with IJAN to sponsor a speaking tour titled “[Never Again for Anyone](#),” a speaking event that featured two anti-Zionist Holocaust survivors and several other anti-Israel activists. The tour promoted the idea that Israel’s policies

are equivalent to Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jews and speakers denounced Zionism as a racist ideology.

During its fifth annual conference in Chicago in 2012, AMP attracted Israeli anti-Zionist activists Miko Peled and [Ilan Pappé](#), who addressed "Israeli propaganda" and Israel's "ethnic cleansing of Palestine."



AMP's website has also featured writing by various anti-Israel advocates, as well as by known anti-Semites and conspiracy theorists like Jeff Gates and Alan Sabrosky. On August 19, 2010, AMP posted an article claiming that Michael Rohan, the Australian follower of an evangelical Christian sect who set fire to the Al Aqsa Mosque in 1969, was in fact an "American Israeli Jew." The article further claimed that "the Jewish state has attempted to eradicate not only Al Aqsa, but most vestiges of Islam and Christianity in that city," and that "these are just a few examples of the atrocities taking place because of Zionist greed and malice."

LEADERSHIP

Hatem Bazian

Hatem Bazian, a professor of Near Eastern Studies at the University of California, Berkeley, is one of the founders and the current chairman of American Muslims for Palestine (AMP). During the organization's first few years in 2006 and 2007, many of AMP's events were held in Berkeley and Santa Clara, drawing largely on support from college students for their events.

Bazian, who established the nation's first Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) organization at UC Berkeley, often delivers anti-Israel lectures on university campuses and has become a fixture at anti-Israel rallies in the Bay Area. In his speeches, Bazian has often accused Israel of committing ethnic cleansing and war crimes against the Palestinians and has been a vocal proponent of anti-Israel boycott campaigns. In one session at the 2010 MAS-ICNA convention, Bazian endorsed a total boycott of Israeli products, academics and sports.



In a November 19, 2012, radio interview about the renewed military escalation between Israel and Hamas militants in Gaza, Bazian advanced the conspiratorial claim that AIPAC wields undue influence in pressuring in the U.S. to back Israel, while claiming that Hamas has the right to resist Israel by resorting to violence against "the colonizer."

In a June 2011 video discussion on the U.S. and Israeli political establishments, Bazian made several similar statements claiming Israel has the power to decide U.S. policy, and made the conspiratorial claim that "even the President of the United States cannot get elected without going to AIPAC and begging them."

Speaking at a January 2, 2009, rally in San Francisco protesting Israel's Operation Cast Lead against Hamas in Gaza, Bazian called for resistance against what he termed as the "American-Israeli and Arab elite agenda," adding "there are only a few people that are resisting this program, some in Palestine and some in south Lebanon," a thinly veiled reference to Hezbollah and Hamas.

At a [2010 lecture series](#) hosted by the [Muslim Student Union](#) at the University of California, Irvine, during Israeli Apartheid Week, Bazian gave a speech titled "Roots of the Conflict." Bazian portrayed Israel as a foreign colonial power and rejected the legitimacy of Jewish claims in the Middle East. He characterized the Jewish presence in the Middle East in Biblical times as "occupation," which he said was similar to the "occupation in the present context."

Kristin Szremski

With her background in journalism, AMP's Director of Media and Communications Kristin Szremski is in charge of producing AMP's publications on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Szremski also leads AMP's media workshops designed to provide students and organizations with tools to confront efforts by the "pro-Zionist lobby" and organizations that Szremski claims are responsible for the media's "unfamiliar[ity]" with the Israeli occupation."

In a September 2010 AMP press release, Szremski said "we are just trying to put a human face on a people who have been demonized way too long, thanks to the powerful pro-Israel lobby in this country ... The Zionist lobby does not rest."



In a September 2012 response to an American-produced anti-Islam film [Innocence of Muslims](#), Szremski posted a message on Facebook with the erroneous claim that Jews were behind the film's financing, warning supporters, "Let this be a lesson to our Muslim organizations that still insist it is in our best interest to work with Zionist organizations."

Osama Abu Irshaid

Osama Abu Irshaid is an AMP board member and current editor and publisher of *Al Meezan*, a Virginia-based community newspaper. For many years, Irshaid served as the editor of *Al Zaytounah*, the official newspaper of the Islamic Association of Palestine (IAP), an organization described by the U.S. government as part of "Hamas' propaganda apparatus."

Irshaid has a history of making anti-Semitic and conspiratorial remarks that portray Jews as a privileged group with undue power. At the December 2010 MAS-ICNA convention, Irshaid reportedly said that the Jewish community is "revered in this country," and asked the audience, "How influential is this [Israel] lobby in Washington? This establishment is as committed to Israel as it is to America."

In addition, Irshaid has often made veiled statements of support for the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas and has stated several times that he rejects compromise with Israel. At AMP's 2007 convention, Irshaid derided past peace agreements as mistakes and warned against the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, suggesting that such recognition would eliminate the right of return for Palestinians. Irshaid made similar statements rejecting a two-state solution at the 2011 AMP conference, saying, "When Israel took 78% of the land, 78% of Palestine's population was disposed and expelled ... How is this fair?"

Taher Herzallah

Taher Herzallah, AMP's National Campus Coordinator, is charged with coordinating and speaking at anti-Israel events on university campuses across the nation. Before he was hired in 2011, Herzallah was a student at the University of California, Riverside, and was involved in a campus protest against Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren. He was subsequently one of the 11 students [arrested](#) for disrupting a speech by the Ambassador at the University of California, Irvine, in February 2010.

Herzallah delivered a Friday sermon at the Islamic Society of Corona, California, in August 2012 denying any Jewish connection to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, the site of the ancient Jewish temples. Herzallah said, "Many Jews believe that the Al Aqsa compound sits on the site of the Second Temple, which the Romans destroyed in 70 A.D., although no archeological evidence exists to support this claim." Herzallah leveled charges that Israel is "Judaizing" Jerusalem, and that "within 50 years Jerusalem will be completely occupied by Israeli Zionists."

Othman 'Atta

Othman 'Atta, a former President of the Islamic Center of Milwaukee, is an attorney and a frequent speaker at AMP events. 'Atta also conducts AMP "training seminars" for students, purporting to educate them about the Israeli – Palestinian conflict with sessions titled, "Zionism and the Loss of Palestine."

At the 2010 MAS-ICNA convention, 'Atta made conspiratorial anti-Semitic remarks, saying, "Theft, detention, denial of rights ... this is all done in the name of the Jewish religion." 'Atta again made conspiratorial claims against Israel during the 2011 AMP conference, stating that when " Hamas and Hezbollah are designated [as terrorist groups] ... it is a political decision because [the U.S.] doesn't designate [Israel's] activities as terrorist."

Rafeeq Jaber

Rafeeq Jaber, a co-founder of the [Council on American Islamic Relations \(CAIR\)](#) and former president of the [Islamic Association of Palestine \(IAP\)](#), is a frequent speaker at AMP conferences. During a presentation on the risks and rewards of working for Palestine at AMP's 2011 conference, Jaber, who is banned from traveling to the West Bank by Israel, told the audience, "I don't recognize it [Israel] as a government or as a state, ever!" Jaber also warned supporters that they are facing an enemy in Israel, not an opponent: "The Zionist organizations are the true terrorist organizations ... they will be working against AMP and they closed IAP. These are our enemies, not opponents ... Israel is a terrorist state, a rogue state, and the whole world knows that."

Salah Sarsour

Salah Sarsour is a Milwaukee-based member of AMP's board of directors, and was reportedly implicated in Hamas activity in the West Bank in the 1990s. According to statements given to Israeli investigators by his brother Jamil, Sarsour was personally involved in fundraising for Hamas.

According to a November 2001 FBI memorandum, Jamil Sarsour was arrested in 1998 for funding Hamas and told Israeli investigators that Salah Sarsour was involved in funding Hamas through his fundraising for the [Holy Land Foundation \(HLF\)](#).



In 1995, Salah Sarsour was arrested and imprisoned by Israel for eight months for supporting Hamas. According to his brother, while in prison, Salah became close to the West Bank commander of Hamas's [Izzedeen al-Qassam Brigades](#), the armed military wing of Hamas.

In addition to his position with AMP, Salah Sarsour is also the Milwaukee representative of the [Muslim American Society \(MAS\)](#).

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