



# Controversy On Campus

A growing number of pro-Israel events are disrupted by demonstrators.

Robin Schwartz | Contributing Writer

The images are dramatic. Dozens of demonstrators, many wearing hijabs (Muslim female headscarves), sat silently with red duct-tape across their mouths at Wayne State University during a Nov. 1, 2011, visit from Gil Hoffman, chief political analyst for the *Jerusalem Post*. The group then got up and walked out of the lecture chanting, "We will not stand idly by!" and "Free, free Palestine!"

About a week earlier, a similar incident took place at the University of Michigan when Ishmael Khaldi, the highest-ranking Bedouin diplomat in Israel's history, paid a visit to Ann Arbor.

"A group of protesters filled the room almost an hour before the event was to start," recalls Leo Nayfeld, Midwest Campus Coordinator for the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which co-sponsored the event. "Less than a minute into the lecture, all the protestors stood up in unison, opened their sweatshirts to reveal photos of Palestinian children [to represent innocence], showing their backs to the lecturer. They also took out signs that read 'End the occupation!' 'Your boss is a racist!' and 'Israel is Apartheid.'"

After a short delay, Khaldi continued his talk, but was disrupted by the rustling of paper. Then, Palestinian flags were unfurled and signs were waved as the demonstrators slowly and noisily left the room.

More recently, during Israel Peace Week (Feb. 21-29) at Michigan State University, about 40 students from Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), which describes itself as a "diverse group of student activists ... organized to promote justice, human rights, liberation and self-determination for the Palestinian people," left their seats in a silent protest during a presentation by two soldiers from the Israeli Defense Forces. The protesters had signs taped to their chests and backs bearing the names of children who they

say had been killed during the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

Similar incidents have taken place across the country from the University of California, Irvine to the University of Pittsburgh, to Rutgers in New Jersey. During one of Khaldi's other visits at Kent State University in Ohio last October, a history professor yelled "Death to Israel!" during a question-and-answer session, touching off a debate about appropriate and inappropriate ways to express views.

"Unfortunately, extremist views and disruptive tactics are commonplace from anti-Israel advocates," Nayfeld says. "Student organizations around the country are repeating these vile tactics in an attempt to demonize Israel instead of working to promote dialogue and respect in an academic setting. It is my sincere hope that anti-Israel groups will act to promote dialogue instead of stifling it. However, history unfortunately shows us that we must be the greatest champions of our own cause as nobody will come to our rescue."

## Student Involvement

Max Heller, a U-M junior studying business, was in the crowd during the Khaldi demonstration. He was one of the student organizers of the event and a member of the group CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America). According to its website, the media-monitoring, research and membership organization, founded in 1982,

is "devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East." The group is non-partisan and takes no position with regard to American or Israeli political issues, but asserts that "because public opinion ultimately shapes

public policy, distorted news coverage that misleads the public can be detrimental to sound policymaking."

Heller says he was not surprised by the walkout.

"This isn't the first time a walkout was staged at U-M since I've been here," he says. "But, I was surprised there wasn't more of a strong representation from the pro-Israel community."

Heller says he noticed right away the crowd was full of protesters, many of whom were members of SAFE. He believes a more balanced audience would have countered the effectiveness of their demonstration.

"These are the same tactics they've employed in the past," he says. "They were afraid of what [Khaldi] was going to say. They didn't want his words and opinions to be absorbed by the campus community because people like him endanger their very movement. What perpetuates their existence is spreading their propaganda, their lies and inaccuracies about Israel."

Still, Heller says he supports the protesters' right to their opinions and free speech. He's calling on fellow students who support Israel to turn out in greater numbers at future events.

"I think part of it is there's a tendency for folks in my generation to just assume Israel is going to be OK; the existence of Israel is something they just take for granted," he says. "A lot of us don't have an appreciation for the difficult spot Israel is in sometimes."

"That's a big part of the struggle — to get people to show they care and get educated about this. I wouldn't say it's laziness, but I think apathy is the real reason why students don't make it a priority. I guess it's just important that people understand this is not just something happening on a few campuses across the country. More and more, these incidents seem to be happening. For those of us who want to defend Israel, it should create more of a sense of

urgency to get educated, get informed, get involved and put those feelings into action."

The Israel Peace Week demonstration by SAFE at MSU prompted this response from



Danielle Brickner

sophomore Danielle Brickner of Walled Lake, who was a Hasbara Fellow (a pro-Israel campus activism organization) in Israel last December. "This was the first time I have experienced anything anti-Israel, and this furthered my desire to continue to advocate for Israel."

## Hillel Responds

Leaders of U-M Hillel and Hillel of Metro Detroit (with a presence at Wayne State University, Oakland University, U-M Dearborn, Oakland Community College, Lawrence Technological University and University of Detroit Mercy) say while the local Muslim student demonstrations have been disruptive, they've also been "peaceful, civil and respectful."

They say student leaders involved with Hillel and pro-Israel groups on campus continue to plan and implement programming and bring in speakers.

While the ZOA believes universities across the country are not doing enough to protect the rights of Jewish and pro-Israel students, local leaders say they're satisfied with the administrative response and level of support from U-M, MSU and Wayne State.



Tilly Shames

"[The protests] have not stifled the rich exchange of ideas around Israel on campus," says Tilly Shames, executive director of U-M Hillel. "The most effective advocacy on campus is



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proactive, not reactive.”

Cindy Hughey, executive director of MSU Hillel and the Hillel Campus



Cindy Hughey

Alliance of Michigan (HCAM, which includes Western Michigan, Grand Valley State, Central Michigan, Albion Kalamazoo and Alma colleges) agrees.

“On the MSU and HCAM campuses, our strategy is to provide

pro-Israel activities throughout the school year. We do this in concert with our Israel Fellow and student-led Israel groups. We showcase Israel in positive ways and get our message out.”

Toward that end, the Jewish Community Relations Council of Metropolitan Detroit worked with Israel’s Midwest consulate to arrange and implement a one-day whirlwind itinerary on Feb. 29 for expert Israel advocacy trainer Neil Lazarus to train Jewish students and meet Jewish student leadership. Lazarus trained students at MSU Hillel, Frankel Jewish Academy and Akiva Hebrew Day School, and met with Jewish student leadership from Wayne State and Oakland universities.

In addition, during the winter semester, JCR’s Allan Gale served as a presenter at HMD’s Israel Fellows study sessions, designed for students learning to become better advocates for Israel. Gale also spoke at MSU Hillel’s “Talk Israel” event during the fall 2011 semester and provided advice to U-M’s American Movement for Israel student group.

Gale says he believes that Jewish students on campuses across Michigan need to “grab the bull by the horns” to create a visible Jewish presence on campus, building community, respect and influence by establishing relationships with the university or college administration, campus newspaper, university police, student government and other student groups. In this way, he says, Jewish students can impact the attitude toward and image of Jews, Judaism and Israel on their campus.

Neil Cantor, HMD’s director of Jewish Student Life, explained why Jewish stu-

dents don’t hold similar walkouts and demonstrations at Muslim-sponsored events.



Neil Cantor

“Our students generally don’t protest because it legitimizes their [Muslim] causes,” he said. “Instead, we do pro-Israel activities to educate students. Generally, we find that many of the speakers that come

in from Muslim student groups are brought in by outside organizations and don’t draw much of a student turnout.”

The ZOA — an outside organization that often works with on-campus groups like Hillel — supports that approach.

“One thing we’re completely against and will never condone is organized Jewish walkouts of anti-Israel programs,” Nayfeld said. “As supporters of Israel, we value democracy and support discourse. As such, we will never support impeding anybody’s rights. This does not mean, however, that students should not protest outside with signs, flags, fact sheets, etc., and students must attend anti-Israel programs in order to present the other side of the conflict when the time is appropriate [the question-and-answer period].”

But while Nayfeld believes the demonstrations have inhibited discussion, Cantor doesn’t see it that way.

“Following the Gil Hoffman lecture, there were dialogue and conversations between Jewish students and Muslim students,” he says. “Nothing is currently stifling or preventing pro-Israel programs and speakers. I have not seen any increased tension. The atmosphere on campus is not hostile at all.

“Jewish students from Hillel of Metro Detroit recently participated in a flash mob on campus with Arab students in support of Syrian citizens currently under attack by the Syrian government. Universities and college campuses are ideal places for the free exchange of ideas and healthy debate.” □

Story Development Editor Keri Guten Cohen contributed to this report.

## Positive Portrayals

### MSU Israel Peace Week educates students about Israel’s efforts.



Michigan State University students: freshman Corey Rosen, Farmington Hills; Felix Shohat, MSU Hillel Israel Fellow; sophomore Danielle Brickner, Walled Lake; senior Tracey Moskowitz, Northbrook, Ill.; junior Alex Waldman, Bloomfield Township; speaker Neil Lazarus; sophomore Michael Siegel, Farmington Hills; junior Shayna Danto, West Bloomfield; senior Marnie Beals, West Bloomfield.

**Danielle Brickner**  
Special to the Jewish News

**A**t Michigan State University during Israel Peace Week (Feb. 21-29), three programs were planned by the Team Israel Programming Committee (TIP-C) of the Jewish Student Union to show that Israel wants peace and is willing to make sacrifices to obtain it.

The first program, Israeli Soldiers Speak Out, featured two Israeli soldiers who talked about their personal experiences in the Israeli Defense Forces. Itzik Yushuvaev and Jossi Hertzog shared their backgrounds, life in Israel and answered questions. During their presentation, a silent protest was held by Students Allied for Freedom and Equality, a pro-Palestinian student group. This was the first time I have experienced anything anti-Israel and this furthered my desire to continue to advocate for Israel. This event was hosted by TIP-C, MSU Hillel and the MSU ROTC.

The second event was a screening of the film *Israel Inside: How a Small Nation Makes a Big Difference*, a documentary that shows positive aspects about Israel’s society: humanistic, physiological and emotional viewpoints. This

movie illustrates how Israelis have made the world a better place through their advancements in science, environment, medicine and technology. Hasbara (a pro-Israel campus activism organization) and StandWithUs provided the film. Daniel Cohen, Midwest Hasbara coordinator, answered student questions after the movie.

Our final program had Israel advocacy trainer Neil Lazarus speak to Jewish leaders on campus. His seminar, “Talking Israel: The Five Rules of Effective Israel Advocacy, Public Speaking and Communication Training,” engaged the audience about Israel advocacy and provided tools to strengthen our skills in representing Israel positively. The student leaders look forward to building coalitions with others on campus. And, after the protest by SAFE, we now see that it is extremely important to continue advocating for Israel.

Lazarus’ talk was sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of Metropolitan Detroit and the Israel’s Midwest consulate. □

Danielle Brickner of Walled Lake is a sophomore in the School of Engineering at Michigan State University. She was a Hasbara Fellow in Israel last December.