

CAIR Unmasked and Journalistic Due Diligence



by Eric Rozenman

Recent weeks have not been kind to the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). They have, however, been something of a revelation to the public and reminder to news media.

For years journalists often have described CAIR as the country's largest Muslim American advocacy and civil rights group. But recent actions by council leaders, and long-available open-source information expose this description to be erroneous and misleading.

The White House severed ties with CAIR earlier this month after its executive director, Nihad Awad referred to Hamas' October 7 massacres in Israel by saying "[I was happy](#) to see people breaking the siege and throwing down the shackles of their own land ..." He also claimed "the people of Gaza have a

right to self-defense” but “Israel as an occupying power [does not have a right](#) to self-defense.” The White House condemned Awad’s “shocking, antisemitic statements” and removed the council from an administration-organized effort to counter rising anti-Jewish actions.

Awad falsely accused Israel of occupying the Gaza Strip (it withdrew in 2005). He omitted the fact that shackles on Gazans were imposed on them by Hamas, which ruled the Strip as an Islamic fundamentalist police state, diverted international humanitarian aid to itself and used Gaza as a platform for anti-Israel terrorism. Exposed, Awad tried to retreat from his joy over the murder of 1,200 Israelis and foreigners and attempted to shoot the messenger, slandering the Middle East Media Research Institute, which first publicized his speech.

As a co-founder of CAIR as well as its executive director, Awad is not an outlier. Instead, his anti-Israel, anti-Jewish views are reflected [throughout the organization](#). For example,

*Zainab Chaudry, director of CAIR’s Maryland chapter, was suspended temporarily from her oxymoronic participation in the state’s Commission on Hate Crime Response and Prevention. This after she had compared Israel’s retaliation for Hamas’ October 7 slaughter to Nazi Germany’s [mass murders of Jews](#). Chaudry also criticized media for portraying “Palestinian freedom fighters” as terrorists.

*In 2021, the head of CAIR’s San Francisco Bay area operations, Zahra Billoo, warned fellow American Muslims against working with “polite Zionists,” including the Anti-Defamation League, Jewish federations, Hillel campus programs and [“Zionist synagogues.”](#)

CAIR’s hostility to and misrepresentation of Israel and its supporters is part of the council’s DNA. As Jewish Policy Center’s communications consultant, Eric Rozenman, detailed in a *Times of Israel* commentary days before Awad’s speech was

publicized:

*The council was an unindicted co-conspirator in the 2009 federal Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development retrial. Five men were convicted of raising \$12 million for Hamas, a U.S. government-designated terrorist organization. Two of them, including Ghassan Elashi, co-founder of CAIR's Texas chapter, received [65-year sentences](#);

*In 2005, CAIR [agreed to an out-of-court settlement](#) of its libel suit against the website Anti-CAIR. Anti-CAIR dropped two of five contested charges but the agreement let stand three others—that the council was founded by Hamas members, founded by Islamic terrorists and funded by Hamas;

*Over the years, at least four other CAIR lay leaders or staffers in addition to Elashi have been arrested, convicted and/or deported on [weapons or terrorism charges](#); and

*Council co-founder Omar Ahmad once declared that the Quran, Islam's scripture, "should be the highest authority in America, and Islam the [only accepted religion](#) on Earth."

On December 8, *The Wall Street Journal* headlined its editorial on Awad and CAIR "The True Face of the Anti-Israel Movement." Because much *Journal* content is behind a paywall, we are providing excerpts here:

"The response in anti-Israel circles to Hamas's Oct. 7 massacre has been clarifying. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), the tip of the spear on U.S. campuses, early on called the slaughter 'a historic win for Palestinian resistance.'

"The tune hasn't changed, even from the leaders pressuring President Biden. Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations ([CAIR](#)), celebrated October 7 at an American Muslims for Palestine convention on November 24. A damning excerpt was [publicized](#) Thursday by the Middle East

Media Research Institute.

“American Muslims for Palestine then took down the full video, and Mr. Awad now [claims](#) a ‘hate website selected remarks from my speech out of context and spliced them together to create a completely false meaning.’ But we got the video before Mr. Awad’s ally hid it, and here’s what [CAIR’s leader](#) had to say:

“‘The people of Gaza only decided to break the siege, the walls of the concentration camp, on Oct. 7. And yes, I was happy to see people breaking the siege and throwing down the shackles of their own land, and walk free into their land, that they were not allowed to walk in. And yes, the people of Gaza have the right to self-defense, have the right to defend themselves. And yes, Israel, as an occupying power, does not have that right to self-defense.’”

“... In late October, the White House invited Mr. Awad to convey Muslim concerns about the war to the President. In May the Biden Administration included CAIR as a partner in its Strategy to Counter Antisemitism. The White House has now [removed](#) CAIR from that document and condemned Mr. Awad’s remarks.

“On stage Mr. Awad accused Israel of buying ‘corrupt members of Congress,’ concluding, ‘We have to free so many people from the shackles of AIPAC [the American Israel Public Affairs Committee] and its affiliates who have sold the soul of America.’ Complaining of Mr. Biden’s betrayal, Mr. Awad asked, ‘For how much? It is for how much AIPAC and its affiliates have been controlling the U.S. government and the U.S. Congress. . . . Unless we free Congress, we will not be able to free Palestine.’

“There it is, the hoary conspiracy that justice—however defined—could be achieved if only the Jews weren’t secretly shackling and manipulating the powers that be. Maybe that’s easier for Mr. Awad to accept than the truth: The American

people support Israel and oppose Palestinian terrorism...

“Near the end of Mr. Awad’s speech, he said, ‘I ask young people: Be wise. You are not in Palestine. You are not in Gaza. The language there doesn’t work here.’ You know, less on the Jews and violence, and more on human rights. He should have taken his own advice.”

When it comes to CAIR—as well as partner organizations like American Muslims for Palestine and Students for Justice in Palestine—news media need to take Awad’s advice, at least that recommendation to “be wise,” seriously. Certainly, in this time of unprecedented anti-Jewish rhetoric and assaults, often thinly disguised as anti-Israel or anti-Zionist, journalists must exercise due diligence about individuals and groups they report on.

America’s Founders recognized the necessity of a free press to a well-informed, self-governing people. Hence the First Amendment’s free press protection. That necessity requires the news media itself to be well-informed. Continued presentations of CAIR as a civil rights or Muslim American advocacy organization rather than an anti-Israel, anti-Jewish Hamas front organization, would be a First Amendment failure.

Addendum:

Awad and CAIR incessantly practice the Nazi-refined big lie technique. This propaganda method holds that a big lie, constantly retold, will come to be believed on the grounds of its sheer scope and audacity, whereas a small untruth, only occasionally uttered, will be more readily discounted. Among Awad’s big lies at his American Muslim’s for Palestine appearance:

*The Gaza Strip was under “siege” by Israel before October 7. Israel and Egypt maintain a blockade on the territory to limit if not prevent arms, funds and other materiel by Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization and proxy of Iran. But

until Hamas' October 7 massacre, 18,000 Gazans worked in Israel daily, many were treated in Israeli hospitals, and residents of the Strip transited Israel to travel elsewhere;

*Israel is "an occupying power." Of what, Israel? It entered the United Nations as a "peace-loving state in 1949. Zionism is the Jewish people's national liberation movement and Israel is its physical fulfillment, realizing the return of an indigenous people to a portion of its ancient homeland;

*Awad and CAIR incessantly refer to "Palestine," asserting or implying that such a country exists or existed and did so or does so as an Arab state. Such references epitomize the big lie. The only political entity ever known as Palestine was the post-World War I League of Nations (later the United Nations) British Mandate for Palestine, created to facilitate restoration of the Jewish national home. It covered territory previously part of the Ottoman Empire for 500 years. Originally to encompass Transjordan (today's Jordan), in 1922 the Mandate was confined to the land west of the Jordan River, today's Israel, West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and Gaza Strip. Jordan (77.5 percent) and Israel (17.5 percent) are successor states to the Mandate, which expired in 1948. The West Bank and Gaza Strip comprise the remaining five percent of original mandatory lands, sovereignty over which is to be allocated according to negotiations required by U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973);

*Before as well as after October 7, CAIR repeatedly has labeled Israeli self-defense against Hamas terrorism as "war crimes" and called on the United States to [limit or end](#) aid to the Jewish state; and

*Awad and CAIR avoid, ignore or deny the council's Hamas connections and the call in the latter's [founding charter](#) for the destruction of Israel, its replacement by an Islamic theocracy over Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip as part of greater Islamic rule, and genocide of the Jews. They may do

so, but news media must not.

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