



AMERICAN MUSLIMS FOR PALESTINE
EMPOWERMENT through
EDUCATION and **ACTION**

Creeping Normalcy

a.k.a. Faithwashing

How Israel co-opts advocacy for Palestinian rights in the United States through 'interfaith cooperation'

CREEPING NORMALCY

Creeping Normalcy is the process where a negative is adjusted so slowly and in such small increments it eventually becomes 'normal' or accepted without any ill effects. In other words, it "... refers to slow trends that aren't easily detectable year by year, but accumulate over decades into extremely serious problems. Perception is altered because the gradual [change] is constantly adjusted as being 'normal' ..."¹

The idea of creeping normalcy is not a new one. At times, it has been used to describe an ancient Chinese torture treatment that imposed death upon prisoners one small cut at a time. This practice, which endured until the early 20th century, was often called "death by a thousand small cuts." Today, this term usually is applied to business, an economic downturn, or even the environmental movement, vis a vis 'global warming.' Creeping normalcy is also used to refer to the slow moral decline of a society.

The story or parable of the boiled frog, which often is used in business motivational meetings, describes this phenomenon with more color and flair. According to the story, a frog dropped into boiling water will immediately jump out. But a frog put into a pot of cool water, whose temperature is increased in slow, small increments, will remain until it boils to death.²

The American Muslims for Palestine (AMP) uses this term to refer to a specific strategy employed by Israel and the American Zionist organizations, which support it, in part by employing programs that attempt to normalize the occupation. This handout will identify and describe the major organizations responsible for implementing these strategies, while also examining some normalizing programs. The purpose of this short document is to prompt discussion among our Muslim leadership and other organizations in attempts to identify areas where Creeping Normalcy may be impacting our work as well as to create a comprehensive strategy for dealing with this phenomenon.

In 2010, Israel admitted it had an image problem and then created a new cabinet position to deal with the problem. Israel also continues to work closely with Zionist organizations in the United States to help craft and implement tactics to 'neutralize' the pro-Palestine narrative taking shape in public discourse as well as to disrupt the growing boycott, sanctions and divestment (BDS) movement.

In the fall of 2011, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met behind closed doors with the elite leadership of the Jewish Federations of North America to speak about the Israel Action Network and Israel Advocacy Initiative, for instance. These strategies will be discussed below.

Ministry of Information and Diaspora Affairs

Israel had a public relations disaster on its hands after its three-week assault on Gaza in 2008-'09 that killed more than 1,400 Palestinians. The world woke up and took notice. Due to the numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity Israel perpetrated during this attack, the global social justice movement exploded in response with international cries to hold Israel accountable. Then Israeli commandoes killed nine innocent activists aboard the Mavi Marmara, part of a flotilla trying to break the siege on Gaza, in international waters in May 2010. Global outcry focused on holding Israel accountable for these crimes.

Israel had a public relations disaster on its hands.

In response, Israel created a new cabinet position to combat the movement, especially in the United States. This new cabinet position is called the Ministry of Information and Diaspora Affairs and it is charged with coming up with ways to confront and silence any voice critical of Israel in the U.S. and elsewhere. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also has said that it is working through "front groups" so the propaganda about Israel can be disseminated without the **"fingerprints of the government"** being found on it.³

Reut Report

The Reut Institute is an Israeli think tank that informs the government on policy issues. In 2010, it released a report about the pro-Palestine movement and the growing boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. The report initially called for "attacks" and "sabotage" on the movement. The Reut Institute removed that language after the international community accused it of calling for potential criminal activity.

The report talks about the various ways Israel can combat the movement. One suggestion is to **engage those not active in the cause** in order to **divide communities** and create a **'political firewall'** to protect Israeli policies from those of us who advocate for international law and human rights.

"According to the Reut paper, the aim is to drive a wedge between bona fide critics of specific Israeli policies and promoters of delegitimacy, thereby winning over the nonpartisan political center and creating a 'political firewall around Israel,'"⁴ according to an article in the Jewish Telegraph Agency.

Zionist organizations in the United States are committed to helping maintain the status quo in Israel and two of the ways they hope to accomplish this is to a) engage Muslim leaders in illegitimate interfaith cooperation with a normalizing agenda like the Muslim Leadership Institute or b) or to create deep divisions within the Muslim community on the issue of Palestine.

How do we navigate this safely and in a productive way? How can we discern the difference between real interfaith dialogue and interfaith cooperation that comes with a Zionist agenda?

This booklet gives concrete guidelines for how to navigate this complex situation. But before we discuss what to do when approached for interfaith cooperation, we must first examine some of the programs Israel utilizes to **"strengthen and expand support for the state of Israel by building strong relationships with people of faith, human rights advocates, political and civic leaders, and friends and neighbors in our communities."**⁵

Zionist organizations

The David Project

The David Project was initiated in 2002 to combat Palestine solidarity work on America's college campuses. Until recently, the David Project followed a policy of aggressively attacking student activists and their events through protests, op-eds and smear campaigns.

In 2004, the David Project maligned Palestinian professor Joseph Massad for his views in a film called, "Columbia Unbecoming," which asserted he was biased against Jewish students and steered them to classes other than his. An independent university committee found no basis for the allegations of the film.

The David Project also is involved in the dissemination of harmful Islamophobia and for several years was one of the key instigators behind a campaign to stop the construction of the Roxbury Mosque by the Islamic Society of Boston. Court documents from a lawsuit stemming from the situation show The David Project collaborated with Zionist Islamophobe Steven Emerson as well as the state of Israel.⁶

Today, however, The David Project has changed its tune. Instead of protesting at pro-Palestine events, which actually attracts media attention, director David Bernstein has written a new strategy paper that encourages Israel's supporters to forward a narrative of peace and co-existence, instead. After all, once you 'build bridges' with your neighbor, he or she is less likely to speak out about something that makes you angry or uncomfortable, he asserts.⁷

"It can start as grabbing a cup of coffee with leaders representing other student groups and ultimately lead to joint programs. Support for anti-Israel causes then becomes unthinkable." ~ "It's Time to Kick the Reaction Addiction," David Bernstein, Director, The David Project⁸

This quote sums up perfectly how Creeping Normalcy works.

There are Zionist organizations instrumental in forwarding Creeping Normalcy as part of their strategic effort to help Israel maintain its occupation of the Palestinian people. They include the Jewish Federations of North America, the Jewish Council on Public Affairs and their Jewish Community Resource Councils, the David Project and the Hillel Foundation. These institutions work together on carrying out strategic plans to 'neutralize' the Muslim community as well as other groups and to stifle any discourse about Palestine.

Jewish Federations of North America

The JFNA is an umbrella organization for about 157 federations throughout the country. The JFNA was instrumental in supporting the creation of Israel and helping it to grow and prosper throughout the years.

It brings in about \$3 billion per year from all its federations. This money is used in large part for charity work. In 2010, the JFNA committed \$6 million to the Israel Action Network, a project designed to shut down Palestine solidarity work on college campuses.⁹

"While other groups, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Zionist Organization of America and J Street, focus primarily on influencing the political arena, others, such as the Israel Project and CAMERA (the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America), key in on the media, **the new network will aim to influence civic leaders.** ... Israel's government has been advocating for this, especially over the past six months or eight months,' said (JFNA's president and CEO, Jerry) Silverman."⁹

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs and its nationwide network of the Jewish Community Resource Councils work to garner and strengthen support for the state of Israel. It works closely with the Jewish Federations of North America and is the vehicle through which the Israel Advocacy Initiative and the Israel Action Network are implemented.¹¹

Hillel Foundation

According to Hillel's website (www.hillel.org), the "Foundation for Jewish Campus Life is the largest Jewish campus organization in the world. The organization serves students at more than 550 colleges and communities throughout North America and globally, including 30 communities in the former Soviet Union, nine in Israel, and five in South America. Since its origin in 1923, Hillel has played a critical role in ensuring the future of our Jewish community by creating a welcoming environment for Jewish students on campus and by fostering students' ability to incorporate Jewish tradition into their lives. Hillel helps students expand Jewish knowledge, hone leadership skills, bolster ties to Israel, and volunteer in social justice work."

In reality, a large part of Hillel's work is to build campus support for Israel and its occupation of Palestine. It does this through trying to engage Muslim Student

Associations and other student groups in interfaith cooperation activities as well as through the following programs.

Israel on Campus Coalition (ICC) - The ICC is a partnership of the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and Hillel in cooperation with a network of over 30 organizations committed to promoting Israel education and advocacy on college campuses. Members of ICC include the following Zionist organizations: American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC); American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise (AICE); American Jewish Committee (AJC); The American Jewish Congress; Anti-Defamation League (ADL); The David Project; Fuel For Truth; Hillel – The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life; The Jewish Federations of North America; and Jewish National Fund (JNF).

Taglit-Birthright Israel - Supported by the Israeli government, Jewish Federations and philanthropists, this partnership offers thousands of Jewish college students a free, first-time trip to Israel with their peers. More than 35,200 Jewish college students have experienced a first visit through Hillel since 2000.

Campus Israel Fellows – This initiative, in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel, places young Israelis on campuses to serve as peer educators and foster support for Israel. This year, Israel Fellows at 19 Hillels can reach about 80,000 Jewish students.

Strategic plans that implement Creeping Normalcy

Israel Advocacy Initiative (IAI)

The following is taken from the Jewish Council of Public Affairs' website. JCPA is the sponsor of IAI as well as the Israel Action Network, which is a more prominent strategy.

The IAI builds grassroots support for Israel. Launched jointly by the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), the IAI works with more than 150 communities to enhance the capacity of Jewish Community Relations Councils and Federations **to meet local Israel advocacy challenges within a nationally coordinated and strategic framework.**¹²

IAI helps more than 150 communities, large and small, from coast-to-coast, build a strong U.S.-Israel relationship through: **Interfaith and Intergroup Partnerships** ...¹³

Israel Action Network (IAN)

The following was taken from its website: "The Israel Action Network (IAN) is a strategic initiative of the Jewish Federations of North America, in partnership with the Jewish Council for Public Affairs to counter the assault on Israel's legitimacy. ... The IAN was created to educate, organize and mobilize the organized North American Jewish community to develop strategic approaches to countering these assaults and develop innovative efforts to change the conversation about Israel and achieving peace and

security for two states for two peoples. **Our work is grounded in building strong relationships with people of faith, human rights advocates, political and civic leaders, and friends and neighbors in our communities.**¹

In 2013, the Israel Action Network developed the Community Impact Partnership (CIP), “with the goal of increasing the capacity of small and mid-sized Jewish communities to counter ‘delegitimization’ through in-depth training and strategic planning over a three to six month period.” (Keep in mind that delegitimization here means any effort aimed at highlighting Palestinian rights and Israeli violations of international law.)

The goal is to “Develop a cadre of Israel advocates who will represent the Jewish community in civil society. Participants learn how to engage target groups such as mainline churches, college campuses, labor unions, racial and ethnic groups, as well as other constituency-based organizations, media and influentials,” according to the organization’s website, www.israelactionnetwork.org.

Vice President and General Counsel of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs Ethan Felson shared his experiences building relationships with Presbyterians and responding to divestment initiatives in the church (See Case Example.)

JCPA Director of Community Strategy Noam Gilboord stressed the importance of community outreach and relationship-building with area scholars and academics who can help build support for Israel and the two-state solution. And IAN will continue to steer and support them with materials and micro-grants, according to an article on the Jewish Federation website.

Case Study: Ecumenical Interreligious Working Group of the Chicago Presbytery

Before the historic Presbyterian Church (USA) vote at its General Assembly in the summer of 2014 to divest from companies benefitting from the occupation, the Ecumenical Interreligious Working Group of the Chicago Presbytery (EIWG) – a group within the same church body as the group working to get the divestment vote passed -- contacted several Arab, Muslim and Palestine solidarity groups, including AMP, with a “working paper,” forwarding a “new solution” for Middle East peace.

The EIWG was asking Arabs and Muslims specifically to read the paper and to write a response – whether negative or positive – which it would attach to its paper. The group suggested it would be a collaborative effort to forward a fresh approach to finding peace in the Middle East.

The problem, however, besides the obvious fact that no dialogue or position paper written by an American church will lift the occupation, was that the paper forwarded a Zionist narrative and was considered highly inaccurate and even offensive to the Arabs and

Muslims who had been asked to read it.

Without disclosing this beforehand, it turns out the EIWG had written the position paper with input from the Jewish Federation, which had been working to stop Presbyterian divestment. In addition, the group refused to work with Jews active in the Palestine solidarity movement, such as Jewish Voice for Peace. The paper was offered to the Presbyterian General Assembly as an alternative to the divestment resolution. Had AMP or any other group the EIWG approached acquiesced to its request to attach statements to its position paper, we would have been entirely complicit in trying to stop the Presbyterian Church USA from divesting from Israel!

No Arab or Muslim individual or group participated. When members of the body presented the paper at the Presbyterian General Assembly it was clear they needed us as a way to legitimize their Zionist positions.

This was an attempt at using Creeping Normalcy to stop BDS efforts and the Presbyterian effort to divest from companies profiting from the Israeli occupation.

(You can read AMP’s response to the EIWG on its website, www.ampalastine.org).

Jewish-Muslim Community Building Initiative A project of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs¹⁵

The Jewish Muslim Community Building Initiative was started after the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks for the purpose of easing tensions in the Chicago area aimed primarily at the Muslim community.

It must be noted that the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA) is actively involved in social justice programs in the city of Chicago and it does commendable work on issues such as homelessness, evictions, incarceration and poverty. Some Muslim organizations, which also engage in social justice programs, will cooperate with JCUA on these programs and this is fine.

The interactions become problematic in the Jewish Muslim Community Building Initiative when Muslims are not allowed to co-chair or help set the agenda or when they are forced to remain silent on important issues such as Israel’s violations of international law and the abuse of the Palestinian people. This is exactly what happened during Israel’s attack on the Gaza Strip during the winter of 2009-’09.

This attack, in which Israeli forces killed more than 1,400 Palestinians and injured more than 5,300, provides a perfect example of how working with Zionists can result in the silencing of Muslims at a time when our collective voices are most important in

the quest to influence U.S. foreign policy to have Israel held accountable.

In 2009, the Jewish Muslim Community Building Initiative, supported by several prominent Chicago-area Muslim organizations, released a statement reaffirming the friendship between the area's Jews and Muslims. The statement also condemned anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; and committed to "communicating and listening to each other throughout these difficult times."¹⁶

No one will deny these are laudable goals. However, nowhere in the statement was Israel called out for its bombardment of the enclosed and besieged Gaza Strip. It did not mention Israel's violations of international law or the targeting of civilians with white phosphorus, a chemical weapon banned for such use.

This is the result of successful Creeping Normalcy.

The framing of the statement was problematic because the tension that may exist between some Jews and Muslims is not a religious one. It is a political one that stems directly from the 1947 partition of Palestine and the dispossession of two-thirds of the indigenous Palestinian population in 1948 to make way for the creation of Israel.

The joint statement, while appearing to be life-affirming, actually hurt the work others were doing to stop the atrocities of the attack on Gaza. It fed into the mainstream characterization of the 'moderate' Muslim vs. the 'radical' Muslim at a time when Muslim voices were desperately needed to help pressure policymakers and elected officials to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international and American law.

The Jewish Muslim Community Building continues as a JCUA initiative. One highly controversial program that still exists is Iftar in a Synagogue. For years, this program, which was supported by several Chicago-area Muslim organizations, took place in the Anshe Shalom B'nai Synagogue, whose rabbi at the time, Asher Lopatin, was helping to create a settlement in the Negev Desert. His hope was to one day move to the settlement and become its chief rabbi, according to his blog.¹⁷

Lopatin is not shy about sharing his views. From his blog we learn that he supports Vladimir (Zev) Jabotinsky's form of Zionism, an ideology so violent it was rejected by David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister.^{18, 19}

He blames Palestinians for the Nakba²⁰ and asks whether Al Aqsa is really a mosque and whether, if a Jewish temple were to be built on the Muslim holy site, whether Al Aqsa would have the right to exist.²¹

These writings show us that while Rabbi Lopatin, an avowed Zionist, welcomed Muslims into his synagogue for iftar through the front door, he was working through the back door to ensure the continued occupation of the Palestinian people.

This is the result of successful Creeping Normalcy.

Instead of actually being a true interfaith friend, Rabbi Lopatin is very clear in his writings about how he feels about Palestinians and Muslims. The Muslim community appears weak when we engage in these kinds of normalizing activities.

Foundation for Ethnic Understanding

Another interfaith organization that works with many Muslim institutions is the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU), founded by the "Rabbi to the Stars" Mark Schneier. His personal life is such a mess²² – five divorces²³ and \$90K of unpaid debt²⁴ – the Rabbinical Council of America forced him to resign in the spring of 2016 from the synagogue he founded in the Hamptons.

Schneier still is popular, though. He attracts celebrities, and was honored on Capitol Hill on May 25, 2016 as one of six "outstanding American Jews," mostly for his interfaith work.

But behind the affable façade and the seemingly plausible interfaith work lurks an agenda to define what makes a 'good American Muslim,' thereby framing how mainstream society accepts some Muslims while 'otherizing' those who don't fit the accepted moderate definition. His writings espouse support for Zionism and he has equated American Muslim activists with ISIS.

Synagogue-Mosque twinning is one of the FFEU's key programs. Others include "Muslims are Speaking Out," a program, created by non-Muslims that offers Muslims the opportunity to condemn terrorism, extremism and violence. The FFEU has established Jewish Muslim solidarity groups across the country. In October 2016, the FFEU took a bus tour throughout the Washington DC area called "Spread Hummus not Hate," again forwarding the Zionist idea that a religious conflict exists between Muslims and Jews. There is no religious conflict. There is a political one that stems directly from Israel's occupation of Palestine.

During Ramadan of 2014, Israel unleashed its deadliest assault against Palestinians since the 1967 Six Day War. Airstrikes and ground assaults targeted defenseless men, women and children and killed more than 2,200 Palestinians. Hundreds of thousands of people around the world took to the streets in massive protests. During this painful time, Schneier wrote an article in which he equated Palestinian resistance with groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS. He then lauded the Muslim countries who supported Israel's attacks and equated protestors with terrorists.²⁵

He framed Israel's attack on Gaza as a war between 'moderate' Muslims and 'extremist' Muslims. This is important because it sets harsh parameters for Muslim behavior and speech. It sets the agenda surrounding what makes a "good" Muslim, without any input from our community at all.

Here are some excerpts from Schneier's article, "A New Paradigm For Muslim-Jewish Dialogue," The Jewish Week, 8/19/2014 (also published by The Huffington Post):

"First, this is not a war between Israel and Arabs. This is not a war between Muslims and Jews. Rather, it is a war between moderation and extremism; modernity and medievalism; civilization and barbarism.

"At the same time, Muslims in the West who have lately been indulging in harsh anti-Israel rhetoric over events in Gaza are operating on outdated perceptions that Muslims in the Middle East have already largely discarded."

He blamed Palestinian victims of Israel's barbarity for their own suffering.

"In ISIS territory and Hezbollah-controlled southern Lebanon, women are stripped of their rights, freedom of speech is non-existent and moderate and secular Muslims are also at risk. In the thuggish world of Hamas, the people of Gaza are used as pawns and collateral damage. Their suffering and death is used to make Israel look bad."

Finally, he got to his point. Rabbi Schneier wrote that he was going to encourage his Muslim 'friends' to start pushing the narrative of moderate Muslim vs. radical Muslim.

"I plan to initiate a dialogue next month with Muslim friends and suggest that moderate Muslims everywhere take a clear stand against the jihadists. Without a doubt, it is high time for the Muslims marching and even rioting in the streets of Paris and London to take a sober lesson from the playbook of their fellow Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Tides are changing in the Mideast, and the future lies with the forces of moderation, not extremism."

This is a slippery slope that poses dangers for the Muslim community in the United States, which has denounced violence and terrorist acts repeatedly since 9/11. But when you deconstruct the above paragraph, Schneier in effect is saying Muslims advocating for Palestinian rights are "extremists."

It wasn't long before we began to see the theme of the "moderate Muslim" pop up in Muslim writing and in the mainstream media. And it's this kind of rhetoric that lies behind the aspersions cast on Muslim communities and the formation of federal surveillance programs such as Countering Violent Extremism and others.

On the surface the FFEU's programs look positive and holistic. Yet, they hide an agenda that seeks to 'normalize' Muslims into refraining from the political activity we desperately need to influence a more fair and balanced U.S. foreign policy. According to Schneier, silent Muslims who just want to get along with their Jewish neighbors are moderate and thus desirable and the rest of us are radicals or extremists.

This is the result of successful Creeping Normalcy.

Muslim Leadership Initiative

One of the best examples of how Zionist organizations have "engaged" Muslim leaders is the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI), which takes cohorts of young Muslim Americans to Israel ostensibly to learn about Zionism.

Now, remember that in 2010 the Israeli think tank, the Reut Institute, suggested one way to combat the growing Palestine solidarity community — particularly the BDS movement — was to engage with Muslim leaders who were not involved in Palestinian rights issues in order to divide the community and to "create a political firewall."

MLI has been extremely successful in doing just this. There is not one program in effect today that causes such deep schisms within the Muslim community.

The Muslim Leadership Initiative was created by Duke University chaplain Imam Abdullah Antelpi and is funded by the Jerusalem-based Shalom Hartman Institute, a Zionist organization financed in part by the Berrie Foundation. The Berrie Foundation also finances the dissemination of Islamophobia in the United States.

According to journalist Sanaa Saeed, writing in her article "An Interfaith Trojan Horse: Faithwashing Apartheid and Occupation," Antelpi had been actively involved with Shalom Hartman before he created the MLI. The purpose of the trips to Israel, he told her, was to introduce young Muslim Americans at the forefront of society to "Judaism so as to better approach the question of Zionism and Israel." (See her article in Appendix I of this booklet.)

MLI trips violate the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions. Cohorts must agree to come back to the United States and write and speak about their experiences with Zionism. So a Zionist organization now has Muslim participants willing to forward a racist narrative that supports the occupation. Rabia Chaudry writing in Time magazine ("What a Muslim American Learned from Zionists")²⁶ said that after meeting Palestinians she understood why Israelis were afraid to lift the occupation. Worse still, MLI successfully created deep division within the Muslim community on this issue while also creating a 'political firewall' around Israel. Muslims participating in these trips fall right into the strategy of Zionist organizations discussed in this booklet.

This is the result of successful Creeping Normalcy.

For further reading on MLI, please see Appendix II.

The American Muslims for Palestine supports interfaith work based on justice and

international law and often participates in interfaith coalitions. However, AMP is suggesting that institutions, organizations and groups should have clear strategies for dealing with request for interfaith cooperation programs.

Guidelines for navigating Creeping Normalcy

Oftentimes, when some Jewish groups approach Muslim organizations, their leaders are at a loss for what to do. Being unfamiliar with notions like Creeping Normalcy or faithwashing they may not even be aware that some requests for interfaith cooperation come with a hidden, pro-Israel agenda attached.

Below are some concise guidelines on the Muslim stance on Palestine; how to create a strategy in order to ascertain legitimate interfaith requests; an explanation of Zionism; an explanation of anti-Semitism and what is and is not anti-Semitic; and a basis of commonalities for interfaith work.

The Muslim stance on Palestine

- Policies and positions regarding interfaith work should first and foremost be governed by religious and moral considerations.
- Do not adopt the views of any entity abroad; rather asserts the traditional Muslim narrative on the causes of oppression of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination.
- Do not adopt any particular position as to the resolution of the occupation, but support Palestinians' right to choose for themselves.
- Support the establishment of justice, as we are commanded in the Quran and assert that:
 - All religious sites, especially Muslim sites such as Al Aqsa, must be protected and open at all times to all Muslims and Palestinians.
 - Muslim sites must be controlled and administered by a Muslim authority.
 - Palestinians' human and political rights must be preserved and defended. The Palestinians have – and international law guarantees – the right to self-determination, the right of return, and an end to the occupation as well as an end to the siege on Gaza.
 - Affording Palestinians their human rights does not detract from the human rights of any other group.
- Oppose Israel's occupation of Palestine and its unjust and inhumane practices.
- International law guarantees all refugees the right to return to their homeland.
- Oppose all forms of bigotry, discrimination and racism toward anyone.

Zionism

- Political Zionism focuses on a "homeland" for the Jews in Palestine.
- Zionism is a racist ideology and at its core it calls for the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.

- Zionism uses religious interpretations and claims to allow groups to expel Palestinians from their country, kill them or turn them into refugees and allows for the violations of Palestinians' rights.
- Zionism is a distortion of Judaism which, like Islam and Christianity, has justice as a core value.
- We believe Zionism harms Jews, Muslims, their relations as well as international peace.
- Oppose Zionism.

Anti-Semitism

- Condemn all forms of bigotry, including anti-Semitism.
- Anti-Semitism is contrary to Islamic teachings, which accord Jews the status of "People of the Book."
- Discriminating against Jews based upon their religion or ethnicity is anti-Semitism.
- Criticizing Israeli policies or Zionism is not anti-Semitic and is no different than criticizing policies of any other country.
- Many Jews reject the notion that criticism of Israel amounts to anti-Semitism.

So how to create a strategy?

Based upon the above principles, it is fairly easy to create a strategy for deciding which interfaith programs to join.

- First and foremost, ask questions so you can ascertain whether the Jewish organization approaching you agrees with you on human rights and international law, particularly as they apply to Palestinians.
- Conduct due diligence by researching the organization's leadership, their participation in normalizing activities and their stances toward Palestinians.
- Consult with American Muslims for Palestine, if you are unsure.

Healthy interaction with interfaith partners

- Muslim Jewish relations should promote unity in the Muslim community.
- Muslim-Jewish relations should not require compromise on solidarity with Palestinians, Palestine, Jerusalem or Al Aqsa; nor should they affect the stance on Zionism or Israel.
- Ensure things like pictures and videos are not used in an exploitative way that gives the appearance that the Muslim group supports Zionism.
- For every program, the scope, objective, potential participants and other aspects should be known and written down beforehand so the agenda cannot be changed – without Muslim input -- at the last minute.
- Interfaith programs should be reviewed periodically.
- Observe Islamic manners of kindness and mercy and always act with dignity.
- Observe Islamic teachings and Jurisprudence.
- Identify anti-occupation and anti-Zionist Jewish groups, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, and Jews for Justice in Palestine, and establish good working relationships with them.

Finally, if a Zionist organization approaches you with the idea that dialogue between Jews and Muslims will heal centuries of conflict and also could bring an end to the occupation of Palestine, remember the conflict between Jews and Muslims – if there is one – is not religious. It's political and stems from the 1947 partition of Palestine and the creation of Israel on Palestinian land in 1948.

Palestinians are still in a national liberation movement. It is imperative for Israel's military occupation that controls every aspect of Palestinian life, which discriminates against Palestinian citizens of Israel and prohibits the return of Palestinian refugees to be resolved before dialogue will yield any results.

There are currently several Jewish groups working not just on Palestine solidarity but other social justice issues as well. Interfaith work centered on human rights and international law is a way to work together positively and constructively.

For a more in-depth look at Zionist organizations, who they are, how they are organized, how they operate and how to push-back against their tactics, contact American Muslims for Palestine at info@ampalestine.org or at 708.598.4267.

Appendix I

An Interfaith Trojan Horse: Faithwashing Apartheid and Occupation

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR Sana Saeed is a columnist with The Islamic Monthly

By: Sana Saeed

Interfaith work has the potential to create and sustain profound relationships across religions. But what happens when interfaith work becomes a Trojan horse? In this piece I explore the Muslim Leadership Initiative, a program which sends American Muslims leaders to Israel to study Judaism and Zionism and is funded by the Shalom Hartman Institute, a Zionist and anti-BDS organization. I've broken down the narrative into five parts – the actual critique and deconstruction of the institute and program are towards the later part of the article.

The Background

Last week, Rabia Chaudry – a National Security fellow at the [Truman National Security Project](#) and [New America Foundation](#) - published a piece on TIME magazine's website, entitled "[What an American Muslim Learned From Zionists](#)". In the article, Rabia reveals that two cohorts of young American Muslim leaders - their identities kept hidden because of the "risk" – over the past year have gone to Israel as part of an 'interfaith' program, called the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI), organized by Duke Muslim Chaplain [Imam Abdullah Antepi](#) and Trinity College Assistant Professor of Religion Homayra Ziad; it was funded by the Jerusalem-based [Shalom Hartman Institute](#) (SHI).

Chaudry's piece was a follow up to a [June 4th article](#) written on her [Patheos blog](#), which discussed the difficulty she, personally, faced in making the decision to accept the invitation. This was not, however, the first time Chaudry had discussed the trip. On November 17th, 2013, Chaudry [gave a talk on her first of two trips to Israel](#), through the Shalom Hartman Institute, at Silver Spring's Muslim Community Center. In the talk, she also mentioned that the participants reached out other Muslim American leaders and even shayukh - who encouraged the trip. Up until last week's TIME article, however, the institute behind the program had been left unnamed and other participants in the program have yet to be revealed (save those who have voiced their participation via social media).

The TIME article reduces the occupation to the displacement of "dialogue" and "both sides" (unsure if Chaudry means Palestinians and Israelis or Muslims and Jews) being unwilling to speak outside" their own bubbles". Muslims, it essentially argues, misunderstand Zionism and thus misunderstand Jews and Israel. Therefore, to have healthy and holistic interfaith dialogue back in the United States, American Muslims must understand what Zionism means to Jews and what Israel means to Jews. At the midway point of her piece, Chaudry even explains how it was only after she finally met Palestinians, during her trip, that she understood that the "fear many Israeli Jews have [of ending the occupation] is not a figment of [their] imagination" as "the pressure Cooker cannot hold indefinitely."

Chaudry followed up her article – which elicited, albeit relatively isolated, an uproar of condemnation from many Palestinian Americans on Twitter as well as voices of support from other groups elsewhere on social media – with another, responding to criticisms about the Shalom Hartman Institute's program and the participation of Muslim American 'leaders.' This blog post was, too, filled with deeply problematic and logically unsound arguments (see: 'don't single Israel out', equivocating 'jihad' and Zionism; claiming not to speak for Palestinians while, actually, doing that with both words and actions).

Additionally, it even mentioned that it was key to enable Muslim leaders "to use the language of Zionism to remind Jews of the ethical and moral callings of their faith." Because Muslims have a responsibility to make Judaism inseparable from Zionism and tell believing and non-believing Jews what's theologically up?

Criticisms of the articles themselves aside, the majority of the social media criticism was directed towards the existence of the program itself; the fact that Muslim American leaders would consider breaking, in effect, BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) by being sponsored, supported and funded by a Zionist institution seemed to knock the wind out of many. The inclusion of participants such as Wajahat Ali and Haroon Moghul – two well-respected and prolific Muslim names in US media – as opposed to the usual fringe- esque names we may be used to, set off a scurry of alarms and a tide of confusion.

What's going on?

Speaking to the Man Behind the Curtain

To those who know him Imam Abdullah Antepli, the visionary behind the Muslim Leadership Initiative, is a "beautiful man" with a passion for interfaith dialogue. In February of this past year, his interfaith efforts at Duke were featured in a Haaretz article chronicling the growing challenges of interfaith dialogue on US campuses with the growth of student-led BDS movements. I had the opportunity to speak with Imam Antepli last Thursday; like many others who had caught wind of the program and trip, I was livid, saddened and at a loss for words to see what I and so many others felt was a normalization of Zionism and Israel within our community through some of our most well regarded public leaders.

In our conversation, Imam Antepli stressed that the purpose of the program was to educate Muslim American leaders – those at the forefront of being in touch with young Muslims especially – about Judaism so as to better approach the question of Zionism and Israel that is otherwise made into the elephant in any and all interfaith dialogue between Jews and Muslims. This was, he said, just a pilot run of the program; he, along with the participants and the Hartman Institute were unsure of what exactly to expect from one another and from the experience. Nevertheless, Imam Antepli trusted the Shalom Hartman Institute, which he had visited for three years straight prior as a participant at the institute's multifaith, interdisciplinary International Theological Conference (ITC). The program consisted of curriculum by the Hartman institute, of which the majority was originally created for American Rabbis.

The institute, founded by American Progressive Orthodox Rabbi Dr. David Hartman, is dedicated to being "a center of transformative thinking and teaching that addresses the major challenges" faced by the world's Jewry. Following a progressive Orthodox Judaism, the institute also promotes Jewish pluralism, both for religious and secular

Jews, and multi-faith conversation (e.g. ITC). In particular, it is also interested in looking at the relationship that diaspora Jews have with Israel.

Because of Imam Antepli's own experience with the institute and belief in its principles and the sort of space it has cultivated for itself within the American Jewish community as well, he felt that the institute would be best suited to house the program. The line, for him, would be groups like the ADL and AIPAC.

He admitted, however, that there were shortcomings – most glaringly (and a central criticism waged against the program) the absence of Palestinian and Arab-Americans from the cohorts. Imam Antepli explained that in the original cohorts, there were a few Arab-Americans poised to go on the trip, but due to logistics and unforeseen events they had to leave, leading the cohorts consisting primarily of South Asians, a few Turks and one Black American. When I asked him the selection process for the MLI participants, he emphasized repeatedly that his goal was to have the proportional representations of members of the American Muslim community present in the program. Thus, because there are more South Asian Muslims than Arab American Muslims there would be more South Asian Muslims present in the program. Additionally, he continued, it was of dire importance to him that the participants be half men and half women – this was something he was completely unwilling, he said, to compromise on. In addition to these representations, Imam Antepli stated that he wished that there had been a more pluralistic Muslim representation, as all those who went on the trip were representatives of the Sunni community.

The Imam also explained how he had plans for a JLI – Jewish Leadership Initiative – which would bring Israeli Jewish leaders to the United States to speak with American Muslims and learn about Islam. This would be, of course, a plan for the distant future as opposed to anything in the next near while.

When I pushed about the crossing of the BDS line by this program, the answers seemed to be less than satisfactory. Imam Antepli did not deny the deplorable conditions of the Palestinian people or the 'disgusting' nature of segregated Israeli society; he minced no words in condemning the occupation and treatment of Palestinians as well as the Israeli attitudes towards both. Yet on BDS, he provided anecdotes of how during his conversations with Palestinians while they agreed with the importance and strength of BDS they also believed in the importance of Muslims, from around the world, coming to see for themselves the occupation.

Faithwashing Apartheid and Occupation

It is hard to ignore the obvious; it is hard to ignore that despite whatever good intentions and explanations there were and will be, a group of Muslim American leaders – many in the very public eye and with a great deal of social authority – went to Jerusalem through a program, albeit organized by an Imam, funded and supported by an institution that is unabashedly Zionist. That a group of Muslim American leaders traveled to Israel to learn about what 'Zionism means to Jews' to better understand Jewish connection to Israel and thus bridges, interfaith, dialogue and other such nouns.

And yet nothing about this is, unfortunately, surprising.

One of the most common tactics of Zionist lobby groups and organizations has been sanitizing the occupation and apartheid and displacing the actual cause and reason for the conflict. Zionist groups have courted Black college students and Latino

leaders (with pushback), for instance, in an attempt to, as independent journalist Rania Khalek describes it, “neutralize the brown electorate.” She explains how in an attempt to thwart identification or solidarity Latino, Asian and Black Americans may have with the Palestinian struggle there is a necessity to, quoting former US Ambassador to the European Union Stuart Eizenstat, show how the conflict “..is not a civil rights issue. It’s rather a very different conflict in which violence is being used and Israel’s right to be a state is questioned.”

This is, in its essence, what *washing* the occupation and apartheid clean actually is: to sanitize the narrative in which the oppressor becomes the oppressed or, at the very least, a *relatable* oppressor.

And this where what I will refer to as ‘Faithwashing’ comes in. Faithwashing is about changing the cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (or, rather, Israeli occupation and ethnic cleansing of Palestine) from a mid-20th century Euro-American settler-colonialist project (that brought anti-Semitism to the Muslim world) to a non-existent centuries long enmity between Jews and Muslims.

Using religion to whitewash Israeli crimes and dilute the occupation is nothing new. It’s relatively well known that Christian (Evangelical and others) often travel to Israel to visit holy sites as well as pledge support for the state of Israel – although not really in the interest of the world’s Jewry. What’s not as well known is that these trips are often, albeit not always, funded by Zionist groups interested in propping up support for Zionism and Israeli policies.

Now it seems that the attention has been turned towards mainstream Muslim American leaders who are anti-Islamophobia activists and well regarded within their communities. In the case of MLI – it seems as though good intentions have been turned into an opportunity for a liberal Zionist educational institution – Shalom Hartman Institute – to further its anti-BDS agenda.

The decision by these community members and leaders to go to Israel vis a vis a Zionist, anti-BDS institution is incredibly shameful and dangerous. Good intentions matter, but actions make the real difference. The bottom line becomes that this program should not have happened and should not continue as it undercuts the plight of Palestinians and normalizes Zionism – a racist ideology and institution that is antithetical to our own Islamic traditions of social justice – within our communities.

BDS matters. Ignoring BDS is Ignoring Palestinians.

In 2005, Palestinian civil society released a statement making a call for the international community to commit to the Boycotting, Divesting and Sanctioning of Israel (similar to the one issued against Apartheid South Africa) until it complied with international law.

Part of supporting BDS, beyond divestment from corporations and groups that directly exploit the occupation and Palestinians, is not enabling the very institutions that both directly and indirectly support the occupation, the status quo; that support Zionism, a secular ideology that co-opted religious narratives for nationalist aims, propagated by European colonial officers who supported the export of the so-called ‘Jewish problem’. When an individual, who claims to be committed to the Palestinian Cause™, makes the decision to be associated with and use the support of a Zionist organization – however good the cause – they are, without any grey, breaking the BDS line and are normalizing Zionism. And there should be no mistake about what Zionism is and what it isn’t.

The Shalom Hartman Institute is actively dedicated to and engaged in anti-BDS campaigns.

It is hard to imagine that not a single participant in the MLI checked out the Shalom Hartman Institute’s website before accepting the invitation to the program. It only takes a few minutes to discover some alarming facts and associations – facts and associations that point to an institute that is actively engaged in fighting BDS on campuses and faithwashing the existing and emerging narratives on Israel.*

In 2010, SHI launched the “Engaging Israel Project” or, IEngage - a project which has partnered with AIPAC. The goal of the project “is to respond to growing feelings of disenchantment and disinterest toward Israel among an ever-increasing number of Jews worldwide by creating a new narrative regarding the significance of Israel for Jewish life.” It does this by “addressing core questions pertaining to the necessity and significance of the Jewish national enterprise; how a Jewish state should exercise power; why a Jew who lives outside of Israel should care about Israel; and what the State of Israel can offer the world.”

In other, less euphemistic words: IEngage is about saving Zionism and ensuring Israel’s support, as a Jewish state, both at home and abroad.

One of IEngage’s faculty is McGill Professor of History, Gil Troy who has been at the forefront of fighting BDS. In 2009, he and Dr. Mitchell Bard presented a position paper at the Working Group on Delegitimization at the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism (seriously, *click that link and read it*). Tasked with the responsibility to “respond” to the challenges that would arise from the growing BDS movement, they emphasized that the fight against BDS was an “educational one” and outlined a three-pronged vision for fighting BDS:

1. *Israel Being a Cause to Celebrate*
2. *Humanize Israel*
3. *Driving a Wedge between Soft Critics and Hard Delegitimizers*

The Hartman website even features an article highlighting Troy’s efforts to fight BDS on campus, in which he said to have said “the Shalom Hartman Institute iEngage Project has been working for four years to shift the negative and doctrinaire conversation about Israel toward one that is constructive, thoughtful, and educational.” SHI president Rabbi Donniel Hartman is also quoted in the article in emphasizing how the campaign against BDS must be a campaign of ideas. Elsewhere on the website, Rabbi Hartman also discusses how BDS is “repulsive” and that it must be, once again, defeated through ideas, education and, essentially, reclaiming Zionism amongst the world Jewry.

A key program of the IEngage project is the CLI: Christian Leadership Initiative, which preceded the Muslim Leadership Initiative. The program, however, was not initiated by SHI but, rather, AJC – the Global Jewish Advocacy group that is also unabashedly and openly committed to fighting BDS. In May of this past year, the AJC discussed on its website that in an attempt to thwart any American Christian movement away from supporting Israel it had established the CLI in a partnership with SHI.

CLI is a mirror program of the MLI – beyond just sharing a name. In fact, the description of the MLI program (co-directed by Yossi Klein HaLevi, who is a former follower of Meir Kahane and member of the JDL) on the SHI website makes it abundantly clear that the purpose of the program is not to teach Muslim leaders about Judaism (at least solely) but to educate them on Zionism and the centrality of Israel to the world’s Jewry. The

curriculum for the Muslim leaders was, in fact, entitled “*Encountering Israel: Independence, Peoplehood, and Power.*”

Until Saturday, SHI’s 2013 Annual Report included the MLI under the IEngage project. When I brought this concern up with Imam Abdullah Antepli, he said that the MLI was not a part of the IEngage project and that he would, immediately, speak with SHI staff to have it removed. And within less than twenty-four hours, it was. Thank goodness for print screen:

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IENGAGE: THE ENGAGING ISRAEL PROJECT AT THE SHALOM HARTMAN INSTITUTE

MUSLIM LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

The goal of the Muslim Leadership Initiative (MLI), launched in summer 2013, is to empower an elite group of emerging religious and intellectual leaders – including *haN Xefg Vj Te Jaf ZbhaT Yg ZIVWk VZTaVMghaL Zhaf – qVa hXAVXj XA bej* – American Muslim community in reassessing its preconceived views of Judaism and Israel.

This program is unprecedented. Unlike typical interfaith initiatives, MLI is not a dialogue. Rather, the program invites Muslims to experience how Jews understand Israel and themselves. We believe that helping emerging North American Muslim leaders to develop a deeper understanding of Judaism, the Jewish people, and Israel has the power to change attitudes in the North American Muslim community and in Muslim-Jewish discourse in communities and on campuses across North America.

MLI brings together emerging North American Muslim leaders for a 13-month program comprising two 12-day seminars held in Jerusalem at the start and end of the program, two mid-year retreats in North America, and year-long distance learning. The curriculum, entitled *Encountering Israel: Independence, Peoplehood, and Power*, addresses a lack of understanding among Muslims about the way Jews see themselves – not only as a religion but as a people and a nation connected to a particular land. The curriculum deals with peoplehood, basic Judaism, Zionism, Jewish pluralism, and the challenges of Jewish sovereignty and power.

MLI began with a cohort of 16 North American Muslim leaders. Our experience with MLI so far has proven that there is indeed a great thirst in parts of the Muslim community for a greater understanding of Judaism and the relationship of Jews to Israel. *@Tal 'cTeMc Tag'na j X' efg@?Zib(bej| Ti X'kcbejWTA'egkerig* within their communities in fostering a conversation that will improve Muslim-Jewish relations in North America and view the program as necessary for this. Participants have been deeply affected by the program; MLI has been “life changing,” they report.

As a result of our relationships with Muslim chaplains on college campuses, Hartman scholars have been invited to address Muslim students. Our Muslim partners are keen to bring Hartman scholars to speak in local mosques and Muslim community centers.



“ ”

I think the breakthrough for me was coming here [to Israel, to the Hartman Institute] as somebody who always has been very careful to frame herself as an anti-Zionist but not an anti-Semite, and now not quite sure if I'm an anti-Zionist anymore. I'm not saying I'm a Zionist, I'm saying I don't know what I am anymore.

– MLI Participant, Cohort 1

While Imam Antepli was adamant that MLI had nothing to do with the IEngage project, it is incredibly telling that it is modeled after AJC’s Christian Leadership Initiative and that SHI included it under its IEngage project section in its 2013 annual report.

Is this a matter of thirteen months of miscommunication?

The program description in the annual report also reiterates – contrary to the claims of those who participated – that the interfaith initiative “is not a dialogue” but rather to help “Muslims to experience how Jews understand Israel and themselves. “And, perhaps most tellingly, also claims that it aims to “change attitudes in the North American Muslim community and in Muslim-Jewish discourse in communities and **on campuses across North America.**”

Emphasis added.

The Shalom Hartman Institute’s interests lie not in fostering better Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations for the sake of interfaith, but rather in fostering relationships with key leaders within these communities – specifically in the United States – who have access to the youth in their communities and can help normalize Zionism, legitimize Israel and thus delegitimize BDS.

The Need to Reject the Zionist Narrative

There are more questions than answers.

One of the first things that struck me about the program, after I learned that it was associated and funded by the Shalom Hartman Institute, was that there actually isn’t any reason for Muslim American leaders to travel to Israel to study Judaism for the sake of interfaith. Was there really a dearth of resources in the United States? Or are rabbinical studies only possible in Israel? Just as Qur’anic studies would *only* be possible in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Egypt, India, Jordan? Morocco has one of the most vibrant Jewish communities in the world; why not go there, where interfaith between Muslims and Jews isn’t obstructed by apartheid walls and laws? Not only would it not cross the BDS line but it would also shift the focus from Ashkenazi-centric Jewish narratives to Sephardic.

Does it make sense for American Muslim leaders to work with an institution where, by the participants own admittance, the instructors claimed they had never interacted with Muslims despite living in a country where the majority within a decade or so will be Muslim? Does it make sense to speak of bringing Israeli Jewish leaders to the US to learn about Islam when their neighbours are, in fact, Muslim?

And are we now accepting, after years of rejecting, the equivalence of Judaism and Zionism? Are we actually sidelining anti-Zionist Jewish voices that reject the modern state of Israel as an integral part of Judaism, of their Jewishness (secular or religious)? Where do we get the authority to do that?

Palestine is central to the hearts of Muslims all around the world, but that does not mean we try to re-write the narrative of the occupation on our own terms. There is a real need for interfaith understanding and work between Jews and Muslims and if Israel is a part of that work, then so be it. But we must not, in the process, allow ourselves, our communities and our leaders to be on the wrong sides of history and justice by normalizing and accepting what was and remains unjust.

Right now is a critical moment for our communities to have an actual conversation – not a shouting match. There are concerted efforts to drive wedges

between members of communities that may and do stand up against Zionism and the oppression of Palestinians. I earnestly hope we do not allow those efforts to succeed and I encourage others to write responses and engage on this topic.

Let's keep the conversation going.

**An important note: the Chair of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America is [Angelica Berrie](#), who is the president of the [Russell Berrie Foundation](#). In a 2011 report for ThinkProgress entitled [Fear Inc.](#), MLI participant Wajahat Ali revealed a network of organizations creating and feeding the Islamophobia industry in the United States. Amongst the foundations mentioned, the Russell Berrie Foundation was, too, included. According to the report, the foundation "contributed \$3,109,016 between 2001 and 2009 to organizations engaging in anti-Muslim work". Some of the anti-Muslim groups who received funding included "Counterterrorism & Security Education and Research Foundation, receiving \$2,736,000; the Investigative Project on Terrorism (\$100,000); and the Middle East Forum (\$273,016.22)."*

APPENDIX II

The following is a list of resources for further reading on the issue of the Muslim Leadership Institute and why it is so harmful to the Muslim community.

Articles

Dr. Hatem Bazian, AMP chairman

1. ['Interfaith' Under Occupation is Normalization, Not Solidarity!](#)
2. [Part I: Shalom Hartman's MLI Program – A Constructive Engagement Paradigm](#)
3. [PART II: Muslim Leadership Initiative and Understanding BDS, Zionism and Israel](#)

These articles are found at www.ampalstine.org in the blog section.

Sana Saeed, now of AJ Plus

4. [An Interfaith Trojan Horse: Faithwashing Apartheid and Occupation](#)

Ali Abunimah

5. [Islamophobia bankroller behind organizer of Israel junket for US "Muslim leaders"](#)

Kamel Abu Shamsieh

6. [A Palestinian's Journey Toward Healing](#)

Booklet

PETITION

8. [Call for immediate halt to Muslim Leadership Initiative](#) (signed by 1,364 supporters)
9. [Boycott MLI](#) (signed by 55 organizations and more than 300 individuals)

Creeping Normalcy footnote

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