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The Project on Allyship to Combat Antisemitism

*Sustaining Muslim-Jewish Relationship Building in America at a Time of
Unprecedented Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
By Sabeeha Rehman and Walter Ruby*

The Situation

Contrary to the perception that American Muslims and Jews have been and remain distant and hostile to each other, sustained efforts to build ties of communication and cooperation at the leadership and grass-roots levels have been underway for two decades or more. The symbolic kick-off of this campaign for rapprochement came on September 5, 2007, when Rabbi Eric Yoffie became the first American Jewish leader to speak at the national convention of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA)—the largest American Muslim organization—at which he gave a powerful evocation of the commonalities and shared interests of the Muslim and Jewish communities and urged that they work together on a sustained basis.

Over the ensuing sixteen years, Muslim-Jewish relations have blossomed and largely thrived, a heartwarming success story that, unfortunately, has received little coverage in the media. During this period, tens of thousands of Jews and Muslims across the U.S. and Canada have connected through twinning events linking synagogues and mosques and encounters between women, students, and young professional groups, with many forming lasting friendships and professional relationships. Over the same period, the American Jewish and Muslim communities, the two largest minority (non-Christian) faith communities in America, have come together to collaborate on a common agenda of fighting bigotry and hate and standing up together in support of principles of democracy, pluralism, and separation of church and state, vital to the long-term well-being of Jews and Muslims in a majority Christian America.

The unexpected success of the Muslim-Jewish movement showed that building a rapprochement and a common agenda was not only morally and intellectually uplifting—although it was all of that and more—but also very much in the interests of both communities. American Muslims needed a strong ally against the rise of Islamophobia in America in the wake of 9-11, and Jews wanted to ensure that young Muslims did not consider themselves to be an enemy and God Forbid, lash out violently.

Sadly, however, all the progress we have made in strengthening Muslim-Jewish relations in America is now at grave risk. The explosion of the Israel-Gaza War beginning on October 7, 2023, has led to the most severe crisis we have yet experienced in Muslim-Jewish relations, causing our two communities to lambaste each other, and drive us inexorably apart.

Three years ago, the two of us, a Muslim-American woman, and a Jewish-American man, authored a book together *We Refuse to Be Enemies. How Muslims and Jews Can Make Peace, One Friendship at a Time*. In this book, we argued that American Muslims and Jews cannot afford to allow the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to divide our faith communities here at home. We believe in that guiding principle today as much as we did then.

Let us state the stakes involved if we allow the Muslim-Jewish alliance to collapse. We are both in the crosshairs of White Christian nationalism and Trumpism; both in terms of an ever-growing number of hate crimes and the drumbeat of incitement against us; as well as in the erosion and possible termination of the separation of Church and State, which would make a full Jewish and Muslim life impossible in America. (one recent example was the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, which religious leaders from both communities challenged as undermining a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy, which is sanctioned, if not encouraged, in both Judaism and Islam). Given the existential stakes for Muslims and Jews alike, we need to stand together to protect democracy, pluralism, and religious freedom not only for themselves but for ALL faith traditions in America.

In committing to this imperative, the two of us embarked on building ties between our communities long before the eruption of the current conflict. We each continue to pursue this objective in our parallel lanes, as well as as a team.

Significant Events That Impelled Us to Engage in Muslim-Jewish Relationship Building

Walter:

I got involved in Muslim-Jewish relations in the aftermath of the collapse of the Oslo peace process, which I had covered extensively as a journalist and which I promoted as an advocate on an online discussion forum and through a global Israeli-Palestinian peace community called Encounter. I transitioned to Muslim-Jewish relations in 2007-2008, after realizing the importance of American Muslims and Jews working together to prevent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from causing us to fight each other over here.

In early 2008, I was hired to serve as the Muslim-Jewish program director at the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU), with the charge of reaching out to rabbis and imams in cities across the U.S. and Canada to urge them to hold 'twinning' events together. More than 50 pairs did so in November of that year, which came to be known as FFEU's first annual Weekend of Twinning. I was underway in the work I have been engaged in ever since with Sabeeha and other Muslim partners, strengthening ties of communication, cooperation, friendship, and trust between Muslims and Jews in America and beyond.

Sabeeha:

In the aftermath of 9/11 when Muslims in the US came under attack, the Muslim community became actively involved in interfaith relationship building. It was apparent to

us that we needed to make ourselves known and dispel the misconceptions about Muslims in America and Islam. In the ensuing years, we built relationships with the faith communities. It was after the 2016 Presidential elections when Islamophobia and Antisemitism became rampant, that both our faith communities came closer together than any other time.

Interfaith Dialogue Strategies That Have Worked

There are no two religions that are as theologically similar as Judaism and Islam and yet are so politically far apart on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. What unites us is our shared patriarchs, matriarchs, and prophets, belief in the Ten Commandments, shared values, dietary laws, circumcision, prayer at intervals through the day rituals and customs related to life cycle events, charity, Jewish history incorporated into Islam, and importance of Jerusalem.

What unites us is 4 major principles:

1. *If you save one life, it is as if you have saved all of humankind; and if you take one life, it is as if you have slain all of humankind.*

This expression that life and every human soul are sacred is stated in the Quran (5:32) and in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a). Except that neither of us was aware that this principle was in the scripture of the other. Walter learned about it when Hassan Askari was honored for saving several Jewish passengers on the NYC subway from being beaten up at the hands of anti-Semitic skinhead thugs. This sacredness of life continues to be upheld each time we acknowledge the tragedy of the immense loss of life that we are witnessing in Israel and Gaza.

2. *Welcome the Stranger*

Our mothers were refugees. Walter's mother fled from Nazi Germany making her way to the US, and Sabeeha's mother made a perilous train ride from India to the newly founded state of Pakistan. Both had near-death experiences. Both were welcomed in their new homeland.

This principle, which is central to both faiths (Leviticus 19:34, Quran 4:97, 9:60), was embraced by the Jewish community in 2017 when the Muslim travel ban was imposed, and they rallied to the support of the Muslim community. Rabbi Jesse Olitzky and eighteen other demonstrators marked the Sabbath by getting arrested after they sat down in the middle of the street outside the Trump International Hotel in Columbus Circle to protest the travel ban. They spent the night in a holding cell in NYC's 33rd Precinct.

3. *Islah and Tikkun Olam*

Islah and Tikkun Olam, analogous Arabic and Hebrew terms, have come to connote social action and the pursuit of social justice. To bring these ethical imperatives to life, FFEU

sponsored scores of twinning events bringing together Muslims and Jews to do social services such as feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and elderly, cleaning up derelict urban parks, and health fairs. The Muslim Volunteers of New York are on the front line for partnering with local organizations to organize food drives, park cleaning, and Thanksgiving dinners for senior citizens, The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom launched a tzedakah/sadaqah program, with Muslim and Jewish men and women serving Christmas meals in churches across America.

In these painful times, we can continue to work together on social programs that are important to our local communities, even if we disagree on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

4. *Standing up for each other.*

This is a value we embrace and uphold whenever purveyors of hate crimes, bigotry, or incitement victimize either of our communities. It's a critical component of our relationship because in the end a Muslim-Jewish alliance—or any alliance—only works if both sides believe that the other community will be there for them when they are under attack. And we've seen inspiring examples of "Standing Up for Each Other" in recent years. Thousands of Jews flocked into Times Square to protest the Muslim travel ban, waving posters that said *Today I Am a Muslim Too*. In 2018, when the Tree of Life massacre took place, Muslims in Pittsburgh immediately came to the scene to offer their full support, showed up for Shabbat across the nation, and two Muslim organizations raised \$238,000 for the families of the victims.

Challenges Encountered

Every time there has been a war in Israel-Palestine, especially through four short but ferocious mini-wars between Israel and Gaza, there has been a short-term pulling back from the work of relationship-building between Muslims and Jews in the U.S. But then, as the fighting ended, American Muslims and Jews came back together. However, at no previous time has there been such a strong pulling back, marked by mutual recriminations and countervailing charges against the other community as we have seen during the current Israel/Gaza conflict.

Israeli/Gaza Conflict: How Each Side Views the Crisis and the Fault Lines that Divide Us

Sabeeha:

American Muslims feel dread at the new wave of Islamophobia. Muslims are resentful at being pressured to speak out against Hamas' actions when they feel that there has been relative silence by many Jews over the oppression Palestinians have endured for decades under Israeli occupation. They question the fairness of our government's unconditional support of Israel with no accountability. They see the media as being one-sided, elected officials downplaying the disproportionate loss of life of over 33,000 civilians in Gaza,

25,000 women and children (as of March 2024), displacement of 2.2 million Gazans, Gaza razed to the ground, and their call for a cease-fire being ignored. Muslim leaders feel that the prevailing pro-Israel zeitgeist in American society makes it unsafe for them to speak up for Palestinians or risk being labeled antisemites or supporters of terrorism, the censure of Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib being one example. Meanwhile, nearly half of Muslim families with school-age children are facing bullying by classmates and teachers. The climate of fear grew in the Muslim community when a 6-year-old Palestinian American boy was stabbed to death in Michigan and three Palestinian college students were shot in Vermont.

Walter:

Members of the Jewish community feel that Muslim leaders have not gone far enough to denounce Hamas for its brutal, life-destroying rampage against 1,200 Israelis, the vast majority of them civilians, in the deadliest one-day spasm of anti-Jewish violence since the Holocaust. They also feel threatened by the dramatic rise in Antisemitic incidents across the US including at pro-Palestinian rallies on college campuses. They feel hurt by Muslim congresspeople like Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar who denounce Zionism and call the Israeli military operation in Gaza “genocide,” and are now leading the charge among progressive Democrats calling for a cease-fire and cutoff of U.S. aid to Israel. Jews have long felt under attack from BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) which they perceive as demonizing Zionism as the font of all evil, and from Palestinian-American and Muslim-American leaders like Linda Sarsour, a leader of the Women’s March, who subsequently claimed —absurdly to Jewish ears—that it is impossible to be both a Zionist and a feminist. Indeed, many Jews are alarmed that Israel’s critics have multiplied since October 7 within the Democratic party far beyond the “Squad” but including the likes of Senator Bernie Sanders and Chris Van Hollen, who are pushing for [resolutions](#) making continued U.S. military aid to Israel conditional on it not being used in ways that violate basic human rights principles as laid out in the [Leahy Law](#), and a recent [memo](#) from the Biden Administration.

Expectations of the Jewish Community

Sabeeha:

In the present crisis:

I would want the Jewish community to understand how much the plight of the Palestinians and justice for them means to us Muslims. Understand how much it hurts us to see Palestinians living under occupation, the blockade of Gaza, the controls on what goes in and out of Gaza, demolition of homes in Jerusalem, checkpoints in the West Bank, administrative detentions, what it is like to live in daily humiliation robbed of freedom and dignity, seeing their lands taken over by settlers, living as second-class citizens in Israel, and the dehumanization of Palestinians. It hurts. We are not asking American Jews to solve the problem but to acknowledge and understand our pain.

I denounce what Hamas did on Oct. 7. It is a violation of Islamic law governing the rules of warfare. One is forbidden from attacking civilians and hurting women and children. For my part, I want to hear American Jews show the same courage and commitment to speaking truth to power by condemning the Israeli government's relentless bombardment of Gaza. I would like to see my Jewish brethren call upon their elected officials to register their objection to the killing of civilians, women, and children. They should demand that Israel halt the bombing and burning of homes stop the displacement of women and children, and end the desecration of cemeteries and stripping of men, American Jews should insist that the funding of UNRWA for humanitarian aid be restored and that offensive military aid to Israel be terminated as long as the indiscriminate Israeli violence in Gaza continues. It will mean something to elected officials when American Jews lodge their objections.

At the same time, please address the root cause of the conflict. Killing and wiping out Hamas isn't going to solve the problem. If Palestinians can have access to necessities like food, water, a home, a job, and a life of dignity; if they are allowed to become self-reliant, able to determine their destinies, and are not under constant siege, Hamas will wither away. Militant movements emerge and thrive when people are desperate. Unless the desperation and misery of the Palestinians are addressed, another Hamas-like entity will emerge. Address the root cause—the humanitarian issue. Terrorism will die a natural death.

There is a visceral understanding in the Muslim community that the term 'Antisemitism' is being weaponized to censor and silence criticism of the Israeli government's actions in Gaza and beyond. Anti-Semitism is a terrible sentiment and must be opposed. But if Antisemitism is equated with criticism of the Israeli government's policies, its meaning will be twisted in ways that dilute its potency. Criticizing Israeli politicians is just that—a criticism of politicians. It is not a criticism of Jews or the Jewish community at large. I would like to see American Jews call out those who misapply the term, otherwise it will lead to resentment and a further increase in Antisemitism.

I would like to see the Jewish community speak up when pro-Palestinian voices are dealt with unjustly: For example, the doxing of students on campuses by potential employers. For example, writers were canceled and fired from their jobs for posting pro-Palestinian statements on social media. For example, surveillance of pro-Palestinian student protestors where their photos are plastered on trucks, their home addresses publicized, death threats issued, assaults, visits by the FBI, and tarred as pro-terrorist or antisemitic. For example, universities are being pressured to shut down Jewish Voices for Peace, Students for Justice in Palestine—Columbia has already done that—and even shutting down Muslim Students Associations (MSAs). For example, a Muslim TV anchor, Mehdi Hassan, being canceled by MSNBC.

Expectations from the Muslim Community

Walter:

Before going into what the Jewish community wants to hear from the Muslim community, I want to say that I agree with Sabeeha that the weaponization of Antisemitism in recent months to shut down debate is wrong-headed and is being pushed forward by political forces intent on playing up the prevalence of Antisemitism to crisis proportions and to the exclusion of consideration of the steep rise of Islamophobia and other forms of bigotry. This weaponization of Antisemitism by the Right for their political benefit has also served to drive Jews and Muslims apart, by sending a message to the Muslim community that they risk being labeled as Antisemites if they speak out forcefully about Israel's invasion of Gaza or its longstanding occupation and oppression of Palestinians.

One prime example was Rep. Elise Stefanik and her successful 'gotcha' question during Congressional hearings on anti-Semitism on campuses as to whether the presidents of UPenn Harvard and MIT would tolerate calls for genocide against Jews, even though there is no evidence that any such calls were made at the three universities or any others. The equivocal responses of the three university presidents, which reflected legitimate concerns about the need to maintain free speech, including abhorrent speech, in academia, allowed Stefanik and other powerful voices on the Right to whip up outrage about a non-existent situation on the three campuses that soon forced the immediate resignation of the president of UPenn and contributed to the later resignation of the president of Harvard. The Stefanik-led hearings also sent a chilling signal about the viability of academic freedom on campuses across America.

To be sure, the American Right has been encouraged to engage in such anti-intellectual tactics threatening freedom of speech because major American Jewish organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), American Jewish Committee (AJC), and Jewish Community Relations Councils across the country have spearheaded heavy-handed pressure campaigns on campuses and vis a vis national state and local governments to roll back pro-Palestinian advocacy and to explicitly equate anti-Zionism and strong criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. Yet in seeking to understand why traditionally pro-speech organizations have increasingly come to advocate chilling free speech when it comes to Israel and Zionism, one needs to comprehend the full impact of the trauma that American Jews absorbed on October 7. Certainly, there is great hurt in the Jewish community and even a sense of abandonment and betrayal that progressives, liberal Christians as well as our Muslim allies have barely mentioned the horrendous and gruesome mass murder of 1,200 Israeli-Jewish civilians on October 7. The Hamas attack showed overt genocidal intent—making clear that Hamas would slaughter every Jew in Israel if they had the means—and yet Muslims accuse Israel of committing genocide in Gaza without mentioning Hamas' actions.

For example, a prominent imam at the heart of Jewish-Muslim coalition building since 2008 said nothing about October 7. When I asked his closest associate about two weeks later whether the Imam might issue a public statement denouncing what happened on Oct 7th as a desecration of Islam, the associate responded, "No, the Imam can't do that." The associate explained that if the imam spoke out, many in the mosque would openly rebel;

especially in light of the already substantial civilian death toll in Gaza. I confess my feeling upon hearing that was, “If an Imam with whom we have worked so long can’t speak out about the mass murder of Jews for fear of negative reaction in his community, what good is he to us? He is a supposed ally who cuts and runs when the chips are down.”

Jews feel existential pain over October 7th, the greatest one-day slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, and one conducted in the Jewish homeland by an organization that claims to be motivated by precepts of Islam. Jews expect Muslims to get that and at least condemn Hamas as they once did Al-Qaeda and ISIS as a moral abomination and desecration of Islam, even as a growing number of Jews condemn excessive Israeli military actions in Gaza that have caused an appalling and disproportionate number of Palestinian deaths.

Here in America, Jews want our Muslim interlocutors to understand us as we see ourselves; not as part of a privileged White power structure complicit in the oppression of minority communities, but rather as members of a vulnerable minority community ourselves. After all, Jews were wrongly attacked, abused, and oppressed around the world for two millennia climaxing in the Holocaust, during which the U.S. and Western allies did next to nothing to save Jews in peril.

Most American Jews are proud of the long tradition of Jews standing up for the rights of other minority communities—most prominently in fighting for the rights of African Americans for full citizenship during the Civil Rights era. We also point out that over the past 15 years, Jewish leaders and organizations have spoken out against the growth of Islamophobia in America. In exchange, we want respect and understanding of the progressive role Jews have played in America and for our abiding commitment to a just America for all communities—including Muslims.

Steps That Can be Taken to Keep Our Two Communities Together

Sabeeha:

Now is the time for Jews and Muslims who have built friendships over the past two decades to show courage and reach out to each other, acknowledge the other’s pain and fears, even if we don’t agree on solutions to the crisis.

We appeal to our fellow Muslims and Jews to look out for the safety of the other. If you notice any suspicious activity, promptly notify the authorities. Be an upstander when riding the train or bus and watch out for your fellow Jew in the yarmulke or the Muslim woman in the hijab. Counsel your children. Help them understand the conflict and enable them to see the humanity in their fellow students and not give them more than what they ask for. Reassure them. Caution them against making ethnic remarks and guide them on how to respond if bullied.

Keep that lunch appointment with your Jewish colleague, or a walk in the park with your Muslim neighbor.

Organize small interfaith prayer groups and forums designed to evoke empathy. For example, start an ongoing Torah-Quran study group, and hold interfaith celebrations around holidays.

Raise awareness about our commonalities: our shared patriarchs, matriarchs and prophets, shared values, dietary laws, circumcision, tzedakah/sadaqah, and the four principles that unite us: the sanctity of life, welcome the stranger, Tikkun Olam and Islah, and Standing up for one another.

On a macro level, the leaders of the two sides should quit blaming and flaming at each other and resolve to end the campaign that threatens the freedom of speech of the other. If we keep this up, we'll destroy nearly two decades of creative and courageous coalition building and hand a huge victory to our common enemies.

Let's cut each other some slack and find the heart to forgive and reconcile. Despite what we have articulated about what Muslims want to hear from Jews and vice versa, we also need to understand that right now many in the other community, including people who have been involved in Muslim-Jewish relations for years, are not able to meet our needs at present. Many American Muslims do not condemn the Hamas attack as attempted genocide; many Jews cannot accept Muslim demands that they join them in demanding a cease-fire and characterizing Israel's harsh military response as genocide. But given the stakes for all of us in terms of standing together against the rapid spread of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and bigotry here at home, American Jews and Muslims need to forgive each other and take steps to renew our alliance. Let's agree to disagree respectfully, and with compassion for the other, while vowing to stand together for democracy, pluralism, and religious freedom here at home.

There are actions we can take right now to stand up for each other, including when attacks come from our respective sides against the Other. JAMAAT, (Jews and Muslims and Allies Acting Together) a Washington area interfaith group that Walter serves as president, has done important work in this field Since last November. JAMAAT has been calling insistently on Montgomery County, MD, Executive Marc Elrich and all members of the County Council to condemn anti-Muslim hate speech and explicit threats of violence directed against peaceful predominantly Muslim demonstrators on November 5, 2023, by a small group of Israeli-American counter-demonstrators. (see [this video](#)). While Elrich and the County Council have refused to address the issue, the semi-official Montgomery County Committee on Hate/Violence has denounced what occurred on November 5 and called on Elrich to do so as well, while the City Council of Rockville, the largest city in the county and the center of the Jewish community, responded by amending a resolution vowing to fight Antisemitism to include "anti-Muslim, anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian bigotry".

JAMAAT has been able to take these actions without agreeing internally on the issue of a cease-fire in Gaza. Instead of focusing on waging mutually lacerating battles over who is committing genocide 6,000 miles away, we emphasize Muslims, Jews, and allies standing together forcefully and consequentially to fight bigotry and hate speech here at home, whether directed at Jews, Muslims, or others.

Lessons Learned and Ongoing Steps to Take

1. We are Americans first.

While the Israeli-Palestinian issue matters greatly, we live here in America, not 6,000 miles away in Israel-Palestine. Our two communities are profoundly threatened unless we unite to help save democracy and pluralism.

2. Allow others to speak up whether we agree or not.

Many Jews don't like what Reps Ilhan Omar or Rashida Tlaib have said about Israel and American Jewry, feeling that some of it is insensitive and borderline Antisemitic. Nevertheless, the two Muslim congresswomen have been repeatedly reelected by their constituents in Michigan and Minnesota, and therefore have as much right to advocate for Palestine in the halls of Congress as Jewish members like Sens. Chuck Schumer and Ben Cardin or Rep. Josh Gottheimer or Adam Schiff have a right to speak up for Israel. Both sides must allow for full freedom of speech, whether in the halls of Congress, on campuses, and elsewhere in society, while making all efforts to keep discourse within the boundaries of truth, respectful dissent, and non-violence.

3. Don't allow the Israeli-Palestine issue to be 'weaponized' in ways to drive our communities apart.

For several years now key organizations within the organized Jewish community have sought to delegitimize free speech on Israel-Palestine, such as efforts to limit the right to advocate on behalf of BDS and ramped-up efforts to mandate the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism as the "supposed" gold standard to be adopted by federal, state and local governments. The IHRA definition is deeply flawed in that it includes examples of "certain expressions of animus toward the Jewish State of Israel that may at times cross the line into antisemitism" including; "applying double standards by requiring of (Israel) a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation." Unmentioned in this equation is the indisputable reality that Israel, unlike every other democratic nation, has been occupying another people for the past 57 years; denying them a wide array of human rights, as well as the right to self-determination.

This entire effort has served to equate criticism of Israel to Antisemitism and thereby limit criticism by non-Jews in America of repressive Israeli government actions toward Palestinians. Many Muslims and Christians who are active in interfaith relations have told

us that they have felt intimidated to criticize Israeli policies for fear of being labeled anti-Semitic. All of this has been put on steroids since October 7, especially on college campuses. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law recently issued an open letter to university presidents urging that pro-Palestine student groups be investigated for supposedly providing material support to Hamas, a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. This call for investigations, based on little discernible evidence, but augmented in many cases by the voices of donors, alumni, and politicians, certainly played a role in causing the banning of Students for Justice in Palestine on several campuses including Columbia, George Washington, Brandeis, and Rutgers. The chancellor of the State University System of Florida, under pressure from Gov. Ron Desantis, wrote a letter in late October 2023 to school presidents that chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine on public campuses across the state must be “deactivated” — an order civil rights groups say clearly violates the First Amendment.

As Michelle Goldberg pointed out in The New York Times [opinion](#) piece, both Jews and pro-Palestinian activists on U.S. campuses “have credible stories to tell about being censored and intimidated. The difference is where that intimidation is coming from. For supporters of Israel, it largely comes from peers and, in some cases, professors. For supporters of Palestine, it comes from powerful outside institutions, including the state.”

On the other hand, a growing number of Jews feel that Israel should not be the cause of Americans being denied their right to free speech and peaceful protest, and reflect that Jews have rarely fared well, in this country or any other, during periods of enhanced censorship. So far, however, key Jewish mainstream organizations such as those mentioned above, have doubled down since October 7 in their support of dubious efforts to limit freedom of expression on the subject of Israel-Palestine and Zionism.

4. Let’s be cautious about labeling one another as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic

We acknowledge the sensitivities of both communities. Criticizing Israeli policies or political leaders is just that: a criticism of policies and policymakers; it is not a declaration against Jews. Likewise, being critical of the leaders, or policies conducted by a Muslim country, does not translate into Islamophobia. Yet, we need to be keenly aware of heightened sensitivities on the other side so that our critical statements are not construed as anti-Semitic or Islamophobic, particularly if not meant as such.

Let’s not denigrate or demonize people on either side. Palestinian activists correctly demand that they be able to speak freely as proud Palestinian Americans, but we disagree with that advocacy when Zionists are demonized. A broad range of American Jews from left to right identify as Zionists: they support the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state. Likewise, let’s not rush to accuse those who speak up for the rights of Palestinians as not having a moral compass or of being advocates of terrorism.

5. Engage with mainstream Muslims and Jews

Muslims should engage with mainstream American Jews, who consider themselves Zionists, rather than allying exclusively with anti-Zionist groups like Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP). For their part, Jews should engage with Muslims like Tlaib, Omar, and Sarsour. People on both sides need to dialogue with people with whom we may disagree on Israel-Palestine but agree on many others, including advocating for diversity, freedom of speech and democracy here at home.

To be sure, JVP has grown dramatically since October 7, especially among young Jews, and their fierce advocacy on behalf of a cease-fire in Gaza has won the hearts of many Muslims. Nevertheless, Muslims and many liberals are unaware of the deep resentment of JVP in the larger Jewish community for what they perceive as its demonization of Israel and Zionism and providing a supposed Jewish cloak to efforts to delegitimize Israel's very right to exist. Despite its enhanced role, JVP and similar anti-Zionist groups represent only a small percentage of American Jewry, and Muslims who wish to dialogue productively with the mainstream Jewish community, undercut that effort by building strong alliances exclusively with the likes of JVP.

At the same time, Jews need to show an increased willingness to dialogue with mainstream organizations within the American Muslim community, especially the Council for American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). While CAIR is perceived in the Jewish community as having a strongly anti-Israel stance, it is also the Muslim community's preeminent 'defense' organization tasked with fighting anti-Muslim hate crimes, very much along the lines of the Anti-Defamation League. At a time when both communities are dealing with shocking rises in hate crimes and bigotry directed against them, and should be standing together in fighting these tendencies, it is decidedly counter-productive for Jews to refuse to engage with CAIR.

6. Work together in support of rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

On February 17, JAMAAT co-sponsored a fund-raising event in northern Virginia to support Americans for Palestinian Orphans, (APO), a Washington-based 501-c-3 organization. Nearly 100 people, including Palestinians, Muslims, and Jews came together to build awareness of the orphans' plight and to raise money for child-sized wheelchairs and crutches, to be delivered as soon as the fighting ends. It was a profoundly uplifting event during which participants ate a superb Palestinian meal, talked, laughed, cried, and sang together in English, Arabic, and Hebrew, and expressed love, peace, and unity in the common cause of helping the orphans of Gaza begin the process of rebuilding their shattered lives.

Supporting this and similar initiatives, such as a fund-raising drive presently underway by the Palestinian-American Medical Association (PAMA) to send desperately needed medical equipment to Gaza and dispatch medical personnel there to operate on the sick and wounded, would give many Jews, including those who continue to support Israeli military action against Hamas, an opportunity to offer support to desperate Palestinian

civilians caught up in the war. At the same time, Muslims should join with Jews in calls to free the remaining Israelis being held by Hamas.

We may disagree on much in this war but let us come together to do what we can to help desperate civilians on both sides. This would be a way to show that politics aside, both sides recognize the 'Other' as full human beings, who bleed, suffer, and die in the same way that we do. We must step forward together to do all we can to succor the innocent.

THE OUTLOOK

During the first three months of 2024, the two of us spoke to congregants at a Conservative synagogue, to rabbis in training at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and a predominantly Jewish audience at the Jewish Community Center in Indianapolis. In all three locales, we were warmly received and even applauded for openly criticizing Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza, especially in taking the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinian women and children. A prominent rabbi said to Sabeeha, "Thank you for making us uncomfortable," while a member of the JCC said to Walter, "Thank you for having the courage to say out loud what I have been feeling for more than a month now and had been afraid to say, especially in a Jewish institutional setting."

These personal experiences confirm for us what we have heard from a variety of sources; namely that much of the mainstream American Jewish community has come to feel that the Israeli response to the horrors of October 7 had indeed been in President Biden's inelegant phrase "over the top" and that it is OK to express support for Biden's criticism of Israeli actions and calls for an early end to the conflict in Gaza.

On the other hand, the two of us have not been invited to give remarks in mosques or Muslim settings in the past six months; a sign that the Muslim community's indignation at the Israeli assault in Gaza and overall staunch support for the Palestinian cause has been unrelenting. There has been a powerful response in the Muslim community of solidarity with the people of Gaza and the Palestinian people as a whole, which has led to an upsurge of communal activism and vows to hold the Biden Administration accountable for enabling the Israeli military response through military aid and diplomatic support. Emgage, a Muslim voting advocacy organization, turned down an invitation to a meeting with President Biden on the Gaza-Israel conflict, and Thaer Ahmed, a Palestinian physician who spent three weeks volunteering at Al-Naser hospital in Gaza, after making a statement, walked out of the meeting in protest of how the administration has handled the war in Gaza.

In short, everything we have seen up to early April 2024 tells us that even the majority of Muslims who have been involved in Muslim-Jewish relations in the past remain decidedly too distraught over what they perceive as Israeli "genocide" in Gaza to reconcile with their Jewish counterparts at this time. Even the first steps toward Muslim-Jewish reconciliation cannot be expected to begin unless and until a permanent cease-fire in Gaza is reached.

So, the jury is very much still out on the question of whether the Muslim and Jewish communities will be able to eventually reconcile and resume cooperation. The strong feeling of resentment in the Muslim community over what we have termed in this article the “weaponization of Antisemitism” should also not be underestimated.

Here are several scenarios as to what is likely to happen vis a vis Muslim-Jewish relations in the US:

The first scenario is that Muslim-Jewish relations are truly broken and will not be repaired in the foreseeable future—or perhaps ever. Going forward, the Muslim-Jewish relationship in America would be largely adversarial, with profoundly negative medium and long-term implications for the well-being of both communities. We see this as a real possibility.

The second scenario is that enlightened self-interest will bring us back together. We believe that the threat of escalating anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in an America moving in the direction of White Christian ethno-nationalism will eventually unite us as political allies on the domestic scene, just as happened in the past, though perhaps less fully and more slowly.

The third scenario would be a coming together of the two communities to avoid a Trump victory. However, we are now less than eight months before the November presidential election, and so far, the desired reconciliation has not begun. With Israel apparently committed to continuing its onslaught on Hamas, it feels unlikely that meaningful Muslim-Jewish reconciliation will take place before the election. Parenthetically, the degree to which the Muslim community continues to prioritize the Gaza issue over domestic concerns is a flashing danger sign for the Biden campaign, which must bring large numbers of presently disaffected Muslims back on board if they are to have any hope of carrying what is for them the must-win state of Michigan and several other toss-up states like Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Georgia, and Arizona.

A fourth scenario is a Trump victory, which, ironically, might bring our communities back together far quicker than a Biden one. If Trump wins and institutes anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian policies including a reinstatement of the Muslim Ban and threatened deportation of Palestinian-Americans—not to mention steps to unwind the separation of Church and State and move toward a more overtly ‘Christian America’—we might well see a coming together of Jews and Muslims, just as we did at the beginning of the first Trump Administration. Whether the two communities would be able to effectively promote their shared agenda under a more overtly authoritarian Trump Administration remains an open question.

We believe that once the present conflagration burns itself out—or hopefully is brought to an earlier-than-expected end with a cease-fire agreement—tender green shoots of Muslim-Jewish communication and cooperation will emerge from the burned-out forest floor. Achieving that renaissance of relations in the US is the highest priority to which we will devote ourselves in the coming weeks and months. Meanwhile, our initiative continues, as

do other pre-existing initiatives and relationships, such as the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, JAMAAT in the DC area, and NewGround in Los Angeles, as well as scriptural study groups.

Regardless of the outcome of the war, Muslim and Jewish communities in America will need to double and triple their efforts to reengage and revitalize our alliance; mend relationships triggered by the war; and prevent further fractures. If anything, the day after the war finally ends is bound to present a series of challenges to both our communities here in the U.S., as Israelis and Palestinians struggle to resolve decades-old issues. The conflict in Israel-Palestine and the resultant crisis in Muslim-Jewish relations in America are not going away anytime soon, and our strategy must be flexible and mutually embracing both in the immediate and long term.

The stratagems outlined above are a start, which must be sustained through alliances with Christians, including Quakers, Unitarians Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and other mainstream denominations who support pluralism, and democracy, and abhor the rise of White Christian nationalism, as well as other minority communities. Those of us who care for the well-being of both Muslims and Jews must stand together to protect democracy and pluralism in America. Both our communities and all of America have a huge amount riding on the success of these endeavors.

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