FAQS ON U.S. ISLAMOPHOBIA & ISRAEL POLITICS
Network Against Islamophobia (NAI):
a project of Jewish Voice for Peace

1) Why is it important to understand the links between Islamophobia and Israel politics?
Islamophobia plays a key role in building and sustaining public and U.S. government backing for Israel. Right-wing Christian and Jewish groups dedicated to denying the fundamental rights of Palestinians deliberately fuel fear of Muslims and Arabs (commonly assumed to be Muslims) to push their agenda in the Middle East. Unwavering support of Israeli policies contributes to the characterization of Muslims and all Arabs as the "enemy" and to the perpetuation of Islamophobia, or the failure to speak out against it. A money-Islamophobia-Israel network—bound by ideology, money, and overlapping institutional affiliations—both furthers a rabidly anti-Muslim climate in this country and helps bolster the state-sponsored Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian policies adopted and promoted by the U.S. government.

In the post-9/11 United States, those who are, or who are perceived as, Muslim or Arab live in a country driven by the domestic and global "war on terror." That "war on terror" overlaps with the U.S. alliance with Israel. Many within and outside the Jewish community view the U.S. focus on the domestic and global "war on terror" as integral to ensuring Israeli security and maintaining the United States' "special" relationship with Israel. Islamophobia shapes, and is shaped by, an interventionist U.S. foreign policy and support for Israeli policies.

2) Have Israel's leaders and its supporters always seen Muslims as "the enemy"?
This view of Muslims as "the enemy" dates to the 1980's. Until then, Israel's leaders primarily saw Israel's enemy as Arabs and conflated Palestinians and especially the PLO with terrorism. Two major conferences on "international terrorism" in which Benjamin Netanyahu played a pivotal role illustrate this shift.[1] The first conference (1979) highlighted "state support for international terrorism," particularly from the Soviet Union and Arab states, including backing for the (secular) PLO, and made almost no reference to Muslims or Islam. By the second conference (1984), which came after the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, the earlier perception gave way to a view of "Islamic terrorism" as central to the Israeli/U.S. view of "the enemy," even as it kept anti-Arab racism alive, well, and, for Christian and other non-Muslim Arabs, intertwined with Islamophobia.

An impetus for the view that Muslims are enemies of Israel and "the West" came from the introduction in 1990 and the subsequent popularization of the term "clash of civilizations": the idea that "Western civilization" is locked in an implacable battle with Islam resulting from fundamental cultural differences, not history, politics, imperialism, neo-colonialism, struggles over natural resources, or other factors. The virulently anti-Muslim "clash of civilizations" concept views more than a billion Muslims as belonging to a monolithic, insular, inherently backward, violent, and inferior culture that cannot be changed. It provides an ideological foundation for both the "war on terror" and the militantly pro-Israel belief that "the West" must back Israel, because of "fear of large Muslim minorities–unassimilated and unassimilable . . . ."

3)Are there financial connections between Islamophobia and adamantly pro-Israel politics?
Many funders of the country's most prominent Islamophobes also finance U.S.-based groups that espouse hardline Israeli polices and, in some instances, back West Bank Israeli settlers. Almost all of these groups spread anti-Muslim/anti-Arab hate through public statements of support for Israeli policies that range from hawkish to staunchly pro-settler. Among the many groups that receive significant financial support from funders of the nation's Islamophobia network are: StandWithUs, which has sued BDS supporters and issued a comic book featuring Captain Israel that depicts Palestinians as vermin; and the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), whose leaders see Palestinians as having a "shocking difference in values from ours in America and the West." Such dehumanizing stereotypes are central to both Islamophobia and the right-wing pro-Israel narrative.

4) What do we know about the Israel politics of leading anti-Muslim ideologues?
Anti-Muslim ideologues have Israel-right-or-wrong politics that they push, along with their Islamophobic beliefs, in the media, on college campuses, in government settings, and at gatherings of advocates of hardline Israeli policies. Pamela Geller, for example, who has instigated anti-Muslim campaigns across the United States, has written for *Arutz Sheva*, a media outlet of the Israeli settler movement; Steven Emerson, a key member of the "Islamophobia network in America" has spoken repeatedly about "Islamic radicalism" in the United States at AIPAC conferences; and Daniel Pipes, who focuses on the "threat" of "lawful Islam" in the West, supports student monitoring of professors for their views on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Similarly, the Clarion Fund, whose vehemently anti-Muslim, pro-Israel propaganda films have been funded in part by the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation and screened around the country by chapters of national mainstream Jewish organizations, links Muslims and Palestinians with Nazis and uses Islamophobia as a rationale for Israeli expansionism.

5)But those people are anti-Islam/anti-Palestinian ideologues. What about supporters and critics of Israel who are not virulently anti-Muslim and anti-Arab?
While not involving the hateful logic and language of the anti-Islam/anti-Palestinian ideologues, "liberal Islamophobia" and anti-Arab racism enable, and sometimes foment, the targeting of Muslims, Arabs, and South Asians. These liberals might, for instance, support mosque construction, while promoting, or just not protesting, government surveillance and infiltration programs that undercut the civil liberties of Muslim and Arab Americans. They might condemn Pamela Geller, while perpetuating, or failing to challenge, the use of anti-Muslim/anti-Arab stereotypes and assumptions to support Israeli policies that repress Palestinians and demonize Muslims and Arabs. In other words, Islamophobia comes not only from people viewed as fringe or from those who commit hate crimes, but also, significantly, from the mainstream, those with the power of government and other institutions behind them.

6) Who are considered "good Muslims"? And how do they relate to Israel?
Many mainstream Jewish groups apply an Israel-related litmus test to Muslim or Arab American groups or individuals in an attempt to identify the "good" Muslims or Arabs with whom they consider it "acceptable" to work. This test demands that, as a precondition to collaboration with the Jewish group, Muslims or Arabs not criticize Israeli policies, publicly denounce anti-Semitism (something not demanded of prospective Christian partners), and publicly dissociate themselves from—and perhaps condemn—groups or individuals that are pro-Palestine or are allegedly linked with Hamas or "terrorism."[2] Mahmood Mamdani, who introduced the "good Muslim-bad Muslim" concept, says that the "central message" behind it is that "unless proved to be 'good,' every Muslim was presumed to be 'bad.'"[3]

Muslim and Arab Americans and others have sharply critiqued the "good Muslim/bad Muslim" paradigm and the Islamophobic assumptions behind it. These critics highlight the right of Muslim Americans "to express dissent, even 'radical' or heretical ideas"; and condemn "the prerequisite to speaking"[4]—the demand that Muslims and Arabs must affirm their "loyalty" to U.S. and Israeli policy before they can even be "allowed" to speak.

Want an electronic version of the FAQs with hyperlinked citations or more information about JNAI, a new project of JVP? Go to http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/standing-against-islamophobia or contact us at NAI@jvp.org.

[1] Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire*.

[2] Elly Bulkin & Donna Nevel, *Islamophobia & Israel*.

[3] Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*.

[4] Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab Racism in the USA: Where It Comes from and What It Means for Politics Today*.