

# United States: Muslim-Hatred Fuels Attack on House of Representatives Member Ilhan Omar

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Two young Muslim women were elected to the House of Representatives in the 2018 election. Ilhan Omar is Black, and a refugee from war-devastated Somalia. Rashida Tlaib is of Palestinian descent, and has family living under Israeli oppression back home.

Both are outspoken supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which was initiated by Palestinian grass roots people to protest Israel's oppression.

As supporters of BDS, they have been under attack from the Israeli lobby in the U.S., the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), which falsely claims BDS is anti-Semitic. Following Israel's public stance, AIPAC claims that anti-Zionism, any assertion that Israel is an apartheid state, any noting of Zionism's historic relations with real anti-Semitic forces, advocating a single democratic secular state which guarantees equal rights to Palestinians and Israeli Jews, any major criticism of Israel and much more along these lines is – anti-Semitism.

Both Omar and Tlaib have received multiple death threats from white supremacists and other Islamophobes.

Omar has been especially singled out for her statements attacking AIPAC. Both Republicans, mainstream Democrats and the media have attacked her as a result. When she noted that AIPAC is one of the country's most powerful lobbies, and spends around \$100 million a year pressuring politicians to keep giving Israel billions for its military and to politically defend all Israeli policies, this was used to falsely claim that she was “really” saying that “Jewish money” dominates the U.S. government.

Trump urged that she be forced to resign. The Democratic Party establishment joined in. Democratic House leader Nancy Pelosi proposed a resolution denouncing anti-Semitism, directed against Omar without naming her.

But this attempt to smear Omar blew up in their faces when a huge outpouring of support for her came from a wide swath of progressive Black, Arab-American, Muslim, Jewish and civil liberties sectors outraged that a newly elected Muslim women was singled out.

The House Democratic leadership hastily constructed a new text of the resolution, that calls out all kinds of bigotry and the way white supremacist forces have “weaponized hate for political gain, targeting traditionally persecuted peoples, including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other peoples of color, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, the LGGTQ community, immigrants, and others with verbal attacks, incitement and violence.”

The resolution was the first time that Islamophobia was explicitly rejected in a House resolution. The resolution was passed almost unanimously, with about 20 Republicans opposed. One complained

that the resolution didn't support Israel.

The reaction to the original resolution indicates that many people in the country are increasingly questioning the U.S.'s consensus on backing Israel come what may. This includes Jews dismayed by Israel's move to the right. Soldiers using sniper fire to kill and maim hundreds of unarmed protesters at Israel's barrier fence with Gaza, the new Israeli "basic law" that defines Israel as "greater Israel" that includes at least the West Bank and that it is the state of all the Jews (implicitly in the world) who alone have the right to self-determination within it, and similar steps feed such dismay.

Netanyahu now has explicitly stated that the new basic law makes clear that Israel is not "the state of all its citizens," but the "nation-state of the Jewish people only."

While the attacks against Omar will continue, it is likely that resistance to those attacks will also continue.

Omar recently spoke out about the attacks against her. I've lightly edited a portion of her remarks:

"Every single time we [she and Tlaib] say something about foreign policy, regardless of what we say, our advocacy about ending oppression or the freeing of every human life and wanting dignity, we get labeled and nobody gets to have the broader debate of what is happening with Palestine.

"Why is it OK for me to talk about the influence of the NRA, of fossil fuel industries or Big Pharma, and not talk about a powerful lobbying group that is influencing policy?

"Now that you have two Muslims who are saying 'Here is a group of people [Palestinians] that we want to make sure they have the dignity that you want everybody else to have,' we get called names, and we get to be labeled as hateful?

"We know what hate looks like. We experience it every single day.... There are cities in my state where the gas stations have written on their bathrooms, "Assassinate Ilhan Omar." People driving around my district looking for my home, for my office, causing me harm. I have people every day on Fox News and elsewhere, posting that I am a threat to this country. So I know what fear looks like.

"The *masjid* [Muslim place of worship] I pray in, in Minnesota, got bombed by two domestic white terrorists. So I know what it feels like for someone who is of faith that is vilified. I know what it feels like to be of a race - I am an immigrant, so I don't have the historical drama that my Black sisters and brothers have in this country. But I know what it means for people to just see me as a Black person and to treat me less than human.

"So when people say, 'You are bringing hate,' I know what their intention is. Their intention is to make sure that our lights are dimmed, that we walk around with our heads bowed, that we lower our face and our voice.

"But I have news for people. You can call us any kind of name. You can threaten us any way. Rashida and I are here to stay [in Congress] and represent the voices of people who have been silenced for many decades and generations. ... There is a direct correlation between not having clean water and starting endless wars. It's all about the profit and who gets the benefit of it. There's a direct correlation between corporations that are getting rich and the fact we have students shackled with debt. There is a direct correlation between the White House and the people who are benefitting from having [prisons] that are privatized.

"So what people are afraid of is not that there are two Muslims in Congress. What people are afraid

of is that there are two Muslims in Congress that have their eyes wide open, that have their feet on the ground, that know what they are talking about, that are fearless and that they have the same election certificate as everyone else in Congress.”

Muslim-hatred has long roots in the U.S. It was seen in Washington’s support for Israel’s wars against the Arabs, with Israel being portrayed as the “only democracy in the middle East.” After the 9/11 attacks, it reached a new pitch, with an anti-Muslim witch hunt led by then FBI Director Robert Muller (now the darling of the Democrats), with frame-ups, raiding of Mosques, the targeting of Muslims opposed to U.S. foreign policy in the Mideast, and more. It was used to whip up support for the U.S. wars against Afghanistan and Iraq.

As the BDS movement has grown in recent years, a bipartisan drive against it, charging it is anti-Semitic, echoing AIPAC. Resolutions against BDS have passed in half of state’s legislatures. Recently, language to that effect was passed by the Senate with bi-partisan support. It is not clear what will happen in the House.

Trump has seized upon this already existing Muslim-hatred as an aspect of his consolidation of his white racist base. He charges that “Muslims hate us.” He promised in his campaign to ban all Muslims from entering the country. When his initial ban ran into difficulty legally, he made it a ban “only” of immigrants from six Muslim countries, and that was approved by the rightist Supreme Court.

The Zionist charge that anti-Semitism is on the rise on the left in the United States diverts from the real anti-Semitism that is on the rise, by the Trump-inspired white supremacists.

The man who attacked the synagogue in Pittsburgh late last year, killing 11, shouting “kill all Jews” wrote that he was especially targeting the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which was planning a service for refugees and immigrants at the synagogue. “HIAS likes to bring invaders in that kill our people [the context was Trump’s ranting about the Latino “invaders” at the Mexican border]” he tweeted. “I can’t stand by and watch my people get slaughtered. Screw your optics, I’m going in.”

One of the charges on the alt-right media is that whites are under attack by Blacks, Latinos, uppity women, Muslims, etc. – all orchestrated by the Jews. That’s real anti-Semitism.

**Barry Sheppard**

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