

American Profs Advance Qatari Influence Operations on 'Islamophobia'

by Ahnaf Kalam



Nader Hashemi

In February, the College of Islamic Studies at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) in Doha, Qatar, hosted a panel titled “Global Islamophobia: Understanding its Roots, Challenging its Impact.”

It was a [fitting venue](#) for a misinformation campaign based on the weaponized term “Islamophobia,” coined not to advance debate but to end it. Emad El-Din Shahin, interim provost and dean of the host College, is a member of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood sentenced to death in absentia in Cairo. Its faculty include a former Texas imam who encouraged his listeners to attack Israel, and several affiliates of the International Institute of Islamic Thought, a Virginia-based think tank founded by the Muslim Brotherhood “that is the

nexus of a terror-finance network named the [SAAR Network](#),” according to security analyst Oren Litwin.

Qatar uses its oil wealth to support extremism [worldwide](#), including jihadi groups in Iraq and Syria. It has lavished over [\\$1 billion](#) in support to the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, and [houses](#) the leaders of the Taliban, Muslim Brotherhood, and Hamas in Doha. Abroad, it spends billions of dollars on influence operations, including the international propaganda network Al Jazeera.

Its efforts to Islamize American education are no less impressive. Since 2011, Qatar has donated over [\\$1 billion](#) to universities in the U.S., making it the largest foreign donor. Additionally, six American universities have branch campuses in Doha. Qatari money also supports secondary education in the U.S., including through [biased](#) teacher training programs.

As detailed in the [Peninsula](#), a state-run Qatari newspaper, panelists at the Doha conference discussed how anti-Muslim discrimination has “effectively gone global,” spreading from its place of origin in Western capitals, metastasizing, and leading to [genocide](#), [mass incarceration](#), and [human rights abuses](#) in Qatar’s “regional neighborhood.”

The panel included four Western scholars with experience in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies chosen, no doubt, for their records of whitewashing Islamism and blaming the West for systemic problems in the Middle East. Predictably, they peddled the false assertion that Uighur Muslim concentration camps in China and [mob violence](#) against Muslims in India are Western exports stemming from racism, xenophobia, and anti-Muslim prejudice.

Advertised as “a dynamic mix of academic perspectives and thought leadership,” the panel included [Karen Armstrong](#), a British author on comparative religion; [John Esposito](#), founding director of the Saudi-sponsored Alwaleed bin Talal

Center for Muslim Christian Understanding (ACMCU) at Georgetown University and current director of its pro-Islamist Bridge Initiative; and Asifa Quraishi-Landes, a law professor at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and apologist for sharia. [Nader Hashemi](#), director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Denver and an [apologist](#) for Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, moderated the discussion. All were happy to support Qatar's foreign policy agenda: spreading a pro-Islamist, conspiratorial worldview that paints the West as a neo-imperialist aggressor in eternal conflict with Islam.

Our panelists have first-hand experience of the challenges posed by Islamophobia in its original heartlands," Emad El Din Shahin, told the *Peninsula*. "They also know what works when it comes to countering harmful narratives and negative perceptions." In other words, they are experts at extracting the maximum political capital out of perceived Muslim injustices by using identity politics to shut down debate and force concessions.

Hashemi has long been a mouthpiece for Islamist talking points, including his opposition to the state of Israel, which fundamentalists regard as the embodiment of Western imperialism in the Middle East. In the past, Hashemi has [publicly endorsed](#) the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions [campaign](#), an organized effort to single out, delegitimize, and ultimately destroy Israel as a Jewish state.

His apologies for Hamas include an [article](#) he [tweeted](#) during Israel's 2014 [Operation Protective Edge](#) against Hamas terrorists in Gaza falsely claiming Israel has "ethnically cleansed, occupied, subjected to apartheid, and repeatedly slaughtered" the "imprisoned" Palestinians. In fact, Israeli Defense Force mounted clearance operations in Gaza in response to a relentless barrage of rocket and mortar attacks, many of which Hamas militants [staged](#) in hospitals, schools, mosques, and United Nations facilities.

Unsurprisingly, Hashemi has in the past disavowed legislative efforts to designate as a terrorist entity the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its numerous [militant offshoots](#). When [reminded](#) in 2016 of Hamas's genocidal [charter](#) calling for the destruction of Israel, he dismissed the assertion as a "pro-Israel talking point," adding "if you were living in Gaza you would be sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, I guarantee you."

Of course, many senior Hamas commanders refuse to live in Gaza, preferring the glamor and safety of [Doha](#). And if top Muslim Brotherhood brass use Qatar as a launching pad for jihadist operations, Middle East studies professors such as Esposito have joined the emirate in whitewashing and minimalizing Islamic terrorism.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia are archrivals, but Esposito happily cashes checks from both Wahhabi powers. While the Saudis funded Georgetown's ACMCU under his direction, the university is now the largest recipient of Qatari aid. Esposito's allegiance to Islamist-supporting regimes in the Middle East is, then, transparent: he even implied that [Muslim rulers](#) who fail to back jihadist movements are Islamophobic. In a 2012 [interview](#) with *Ahram Online*, he argued that Muslim dictators who are "keen to display a negative image of Islamists" do so to preserve Western interests. "Authoritarian regimes always used the idea that any opposition was Islamist," he said.

Esposito denies any connection between nonviolent Islamism and terrorism. In a 2016 [essay](#), he pointed to "American and European foreign policies in the Middle East" as the culprit for terrorism in the region. The Georgetown professor's record of perpetually blaming the West made him an obvious choice for HBKU's Islamophobia conference.

Armstrong, a former [Catholic nun](#) an author of many books on comparative religious studies, also disparaged Western civilization. During the panel discussion, she diagnosed

bigotry in the West as people “retreating into ever more narrowly defined ethnic, religious, political, and national groups. They enhance their own identity by denigrating or belittling the ‘other.’”

She later did a bit of “denigrating or belittling” Westerners herself according to the [Daily Q](#), the student paper of Northwestern University in Qatar, by suggesting that bigotry and hatred against Muslims is a uniquely European innovation. As a point of reference, Armstrong once said in PBS [interview](#) that “Islam is a religion of success. Unlike Christianity, which has as its main image, in the West at least, a man dying in a devastating, disgraceful, helpless death.”

Qatar’s ongoing efforts to weaken the West is, therefore, multifaceted: In addition to funding Islamist preachers and militant jihadists, it sponsors willing Western academics, master dissimulators skilled at using social justice and grievance politics to deflect criticism of religious extremism. By assigning unilateral responsibility to the West for acts of anti-Muslim persecution in China, India, and the Middle East, Qatar hopes to legitimize the violent Islamist factions it hosts and supports. American or Western scholars who embrace and spread Qatari/Wahhabi-sponsored propaganda should be shunned as disgraces to their profession. Sadly, they are its leaders.

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