

How the Jewish Federation of Orange County and Hillel undermine Student Zionism at UC Irvine



Over the past several years we have chronicled anti-Israel hate mongering by campus Muslim Student groups and violation of opposing views of pro-Israel speakers and events at the University of California, Irvine (UCI). In a series of *New English Review* articles, interviews and Iconoclast blog posts we revealed the heckler's veto of former Israeli Ambassador to the US, Michael Oren in February 8, 2010 by an organized disruption of his speech by campus members of the Muslim Student Union (MSU). That was followed by the arrest, prosecution and conviction of [11 students, 8 from UC Irvine and 3 from UC Riverside](#) for disturbing a public event. The legal action brought by the Orange County District Attorney triggered a one year suspension of the Muslim Brotherhood affiliate by the Administration only to be reduced to 10 weeks by the retiring deputy Chancellor at UCI. In the interim, Students for Justice in Palestine was formed as a placeholder for the suspended MSU. We also unraveled the story behind the Jewish Federation of Orange County (JFOC) affiliate, the Rose Project, funding the Olive Tree Initiative that brought students to Israel and the West Bank in 2009 for an alleged chance encounters with a Hamas leader, Aziz Duwaik, former Speaker of the Palestine Legislative Council. See our NER article: "[Does the Olive Tree Initiative have Credibility?](#)" We questioned both the leadership of the Jewish Federation of Orange County and the UCI Administration dissembling over this incident.

UCI has a smaller Jewish student body versus a much larger Muslim one. For most of the 32 weeks on the UCI campus, things are relatively quiet. However, during Anti Zionism Week (AZW) and Israel Festival, iFEST, sponsored by Anteaters for Israel (AFI) the decibel levels and protests hate towards Israel rises to a veritable crescendo. The AZW events organized by the MSU have typically involved anti-Israel speakers, and in the past some like Malik Ali with anti-Semitic statements, holding forth at noon events at the flagpole. Despite this, JFOC President Shalom Elcott has suggested in the past, there is no anti-Semitism at UCI. Last year, an assault by MSU protesters disrupted iFEST with calls for campus police assistance that resulted in a woman student being upbraided by a JFOC board member. This year AFI President Sharon Shaoulian organized a three day event from April 22 to 24th without JFOC funding, but with sponsors including the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), StandWithUs, CAMERA on Campus, the Israel on Campus Coalition, and Hasbara. Hillel, which is affiliated with JFOC, provided funding for Shabbat.

What happened during iFEST on April 23, 2015 revealed why JFOC and Hillel have undermined Jewish student Zionism at UCI. This year it was triggered by an ambush of MSU and Students for Justice in Palestine (JSP) pouring out of the Campus Cultural Center to attack the Jewish student Zionist group, Anteaters for Israel's (AFI) during their iFEST Yom Ha'atzmaut celebration of Israel's Independence. The iFEST attendees in opposition to the MSU/SJP protesters created space between the opposing groups with massed Israeli and American flags and Israeli dances. A *FrontpageMagazine* article by Arnold Ahlert "[Pro-Israel Student Group Meets Opposition from Jewish Leadership](#)" revealed what happened when JFOC President Shalom Elcott and aide Lisa Armony, Hillel Executive, intervened:

Witness Gary Fouse, adjunct UCI lecturer, [reported](#) that

Lisa Armony, Director of the Jewish Federation of Orange County and Hillel Executive, was among those attempting to move the flag wavers back. One witness reported that they were “approached and told that it was wrong for anyone holding a flag to be standing facing the MSU/anti-Israel faction.” The witness was told that waving the flags was “antagonizing.” One of the flag wavers, who did not wish to be named, said that students who “seemed to be pressured by someone else” approached him and other flag carriers “and told us that we should not march with the flags since it ‘makes us look bad.’” It was further suggested to him that they move down the street and away from the area.

This witness also saw the far more troubling exchange between a man subsequently identified as Shalom Elcott, JFOC president and CEO, and AFI president Sharon Shaoulian. Elcott was seen “getting in the face of” Shaoulian, a third-year student, and screaming at her. As the witness explained, “I did not hear what this man said, but I saw Sharon break into tears,” he recalled.

Shaoulian confirmed that Elcott “advanced on me in a threatening fashion and began screaming at me and berating me” and was “looking down at me two inches away from my face.” He “blamed me..for ‘inciting’ the MSU/SJP to come out to protest,” though the anti-Israel protest happens every year. Elcott allegedly called Shaoulian “derogatory names, a ‘liar’ and a ‘disgrace.’”

Watch these YouTube videos of the UCI iFEST encounter on the *FouseSqwak* [blog](#):

[Video One](#)

[Video Two](#)

[Video Three](#)

Here is an excerpt from our NER interview with Shaoulian about the encounter with Elcott at the UCI iFEST Yom Ha'atzmaut clash with MSU and JSP :

Jerry Gordon:

You had a recent exchange with the head of the Orange County Jewish Federation. I wonder if you could talk about that and the context in which that exchange occurred?

Sharon Shaoulian: Yes, it happened on April the 23rd, which was a big festival day for AFI during iFEST. Because the Federation, threatened AFI through another student, not to associate with the Zionist Organization of America, my board and I decided that it would be prudent not to ask for a Rose Project Grant and stand more independently on our own.

[...]

We were walking towards Shalom Elcott so he heard me pretty much the entire time, and that's when he started advancing on me. I'm five feet tall, and so he got very close to my face, just centimeters away from my face, peering down, screaming at me in front of everybody. He called me a liar repeatedly, "You're a liar. You're a liar. They're not going to come rush through the event. You're inciting all of these people." He told me that I was a disgrace, that the protesters were here because of me, that I caused all of this uproar, and that I should be ashamed of myself.

When he paused, while berating me, I told him, "You know, sir, what you are talking about? They [meaning MSU protesters] are here every single year. They're not here because of me. They're here because we're trying to be pro-Israel on this campus and they won't stand for that."

Elcott continued to yell and to make a scene. I flat out told him, "You, sir, you and Rose Project, you didn't give us any funding for this event. You expressly told your son, Jordan, not to be a part of iFEST. So, with all due respect, why are you even here? You know, if you didn't want to have a stake in this event, why are you even here at our event?"

He didn't say anything. He obviously had nothing to say. That's when I told him. "You know what? You should be ashamed that you're screaming at me, that you're yelling at me." He started recording me. While this was going on, community members were defending me and trying to get him to back away from me. I think a lot of people were nervous about his proximity to me and the level that he was screaming at me. Eventually we were pulled apart. So that's when Lisa Armony caught what he did and tried to defend the action to my own parents.

On May 5, 2015, Carolyn Glick commented about the altercation at AFI's UCI iFEST in a *Jerusalem Post (JP)* column, ["Siding with the Victims of Aggression"](#):

Last month, the heads of the Jewish Federation in Orange County reportedly interfered with student celebrations of Yom Ha'atzmaut at University of California at Irvine on behalf of Muslim anti-Israel protesters who sought to ruin the festivities. According to a report of the events at the online *FrontpageMagazine*, the pro-Israel students separated participants in their event from Muslim student protesters by placing a line of students waving Israeli and American flags between them.

The move was angrily opposed by Federation Director Lisa Armony and Federation President Shalom Elcott. They reportedly insisted that the Israeli flags be taken down because they were "antagonizing" the anti-Israel protesters.

The accusation against JFOC of the *FPM* expose and Glick's *JP* column comment led to the response by Armony in the *JP* blog post, "[Turning against fellow pro-Israel advocates](#)" of May 14th:

The accusation that we interfered with a Yom Ha'atzmaut [Independence Day] celebration at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) on behalf of anti-Israel protesters is based solely on a recent piece from the online *FrontpageMagazine*. The blogger relied primarily on unnamed sources and unsubstantiated assertions to paint a misleading picture of the festival, JFFS, and Elcott's and my activities.

We reject the claims in the article that we told people to stop waving Israeli flags at anti-Israel protesters, claiming that we accept anti-Jewish discrimination on campus and "stand with the (anti-Israel) aggressor against the (Jewish) victim."

FrontpageMagazine on May 15, 2015 published an editorial castigating Shalom Elcott and Armony for obfuscating what occurred at AFI witnessed by others, "[An Attack on Front Page from the Jewish Federation of Orange County.](#)" That was crystallized by the May 4th *FPM* article suggesting that their interference at the IFEST event and shameful attack on AFI President Shaoulian were an affront to decency and unwarranted. *FPM* considers JFOC's defense of its actions calumnious. The *FPM* editorial concluded:

Without a doubt the JFOC has much to answer for. The JFOC can be assured Frontpage will continue our no-holds-barred coverage of its brazen attacks on Jewish students and pro-Israel activists without apology.

The JFOC alleged defense reminds this writer of J Street's Orwellian meme of "Pro-Peace, Pro Israel". But this is nothing new for Elcott and JFOC. This is just the latest example of their nefarious activities on the UCI campus.

Elcott's interference with Jewish student Zionist activities on the UCI campus amounts to bullying: denial of free speech rights of Shaoulian and fellow AFI members. It amounts to a heckler's veto equivalent to what occurred in 2010 during former Israeli US Ambassador Oren's speech at UCI when MSU members shut down his talk. The Elcott and Armony actions at iFEST and subsequent slander of both Glick and FPM does not serve the interests of the Jewish student community at UCI. Ms. Armony's *Jerusalem Post* blog post upbraiding Glick and *FPM* was emblematic of what Dr. Johnson once said about patriotism, the last refuge of a scoundrel. Witness JFOC claiming the mantle of a 'responsible' adult leadership on all pro-Israel activities at UCI implying less than adult behavior by Zionist AFI. That is truly topsy turvychutzpah. The screaming attack by Elcott against Shaoulian demeaning her is not 'adult behavior'. It is indicative of manifestly deep rooted animus against critics of his leadership at JFOC especially concerned Jewish community supporters of the Jewish Student Zionism of AFI. The JFOC attacks against a colleague, Nonie Darwish, preventing her from speaking at an AFI-sponsored event in 2014, accusing her of being an "Islamophobe" are indicative of an out of control leadership at JFOC. It is past time for responsible directors of JFOC to review Elcott's unacceptable behavior. Perhaps this most recent episode during IFEST at UCI may result in a search for new more effective leadership at JFOC.

More will be revealed about JFOC's behavior in this latest episode in our interview with Ms. Shaoulian to be published in the June edition of the NER.