

Jihad on Campus:

The Muslim Student Union at UC Irvine



By Reut Cohen



Introduction

The University of California Irvine, second youngest campus in the UC system, was founded in 1965 in Orange County after a gift of a thousand acres and the sale of another 500 to the university system by the Irvine Company, a land development enterprise in business since 1894 whose large holdings in California were partly assembled from Mexican land grants. Over the years, UC Irvine has risen steadily in the *U.S. News and World Report* ratings of “America’s Best Colleges.” In the magazine’s 2008 survey, it was ranked 13th best public university in the United States and 44th overall.¹ The university has become the cultural center of Orange County and helped moderate its image as the epicenter of California’s conservative movement.

Throughout the radical 1960s the Irvine campus, with its large Asian population, was relatively quiescent politically, especially in comparison to the radicalism of its sister campuses at Berkeley and Los Angeles. It was something of a surprise, then, when the university began drawing attention in the period after 9/11 as a hotbed of pro-Palestinian, anti Israel and anti Semitic sentiment. This development became a national news story in 2005 when Muslim students on campus launched major demonstrations against the Danish cartoons caricaturing the Prophet Mohammed that narrowly avoided becoming a full scale riot. But by then, such events, organized by the UCI Muslim Student Union (MSU), were familiar occurrences to the school’s campus community.

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David Horowitz Freedom Center
PO Box 55089
Sherman Oaks, CA 91423
(800) 752-6562
Elizabeth@horowitzfreedomcenter.org

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In its physical intimidation of Jewish students, its flamboyant support of Hamas, Hezbollah and other terror groups, its sponsorship of anti Israel and anti American hate events, and presentation of Islamist speakers preaching holy war, Irvine's MSU has defined itself as the most extreme of the Muslim student groups becoming increasingly active on U.S. campuses.² Its development and the actions it has undertaken make Irvine's MSU a case study in the growing radicalism of the Muslim Student Associations across the country and the role they play in the network established by the Muslim Brotherhood, godfather group to al Qaeda, to wage a stealth jihad against America and American institutions.

The MSU at UCI

The Muslim Student Union (MSU) at the University of California - Irvine (UCI) was established in 1992 by a group of Muslim students who expressed a desire "to establish a presence on campus." This modest goal can be found today on the MSU's website where the organization claims that it wants nothing more than "to build an environment that enhances good, discourages bad, and provides networks of resources, knowledge, people, and companionship to its members." Its menu of activities includes "daily congregational prayers, daily free iftars, the evening meal for breaking the daily fast during Ramadan that serves over a hundred Muslims, over eight weekly classes, a quarterly magazine *Alkalima*, coalition building with other clubs on campus, and a gateway to the larger Muslim community ...". The MSU also provides career advice and a study/tutoring program to help Muslims at UCI.³

But the facts on the ground belie this anodyne image of a devout religious and cultural organization encouraging a pious sense of community on the part of its members. Some

UC Irvine alumni from the 1990s remember the group as radically pro-Palestinian from the onset. Certainly, by the time of the Second Intifada the Muslim Student Union's hostility to Israel, Jews and America began to concern some members of the UCI academic community and to receive local media attention. The members of the MSU began wearing t-shirts with "Freedom Fighter" emblazoned on the front.⁴ More recently the slogan has changed to "UC Intifada," perhaps a vaunt generated by the success the group has had in making its weight felt on campus.⁵

The group makes no effort to conceal its commitments. At graduation each year Muslim Student Union members wear green stoles in emulation of those typically worn by suicide bombers with the Arabic word *shahada* ("martyr") printed on them. In response to criticism for adopting such a bloody symbol, MSU members say that they are merely affirming their faith.⁶ However, in their actions on campus, MSU members exhibit much more affinity for Islamism than Islam. The events they organize consistently reveal support for violence, anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism. Irvine's MSU proudly supports Hamas and publicly declares that Zionist Jews have no future and Israel will soon be wiped off the map.

Nor does the MSU restrict itself to symbolism and rhetoric. It holds numerous programs each academic year which unabashedly support terrorist groups and violently denounce Israel, America, and the West. MSU events have featured speakers such as Muhammad al-Asi (the radical imam with connections to neo-Nazis who claims that the U.S. government staged 9/11); Amir Abdel Malik Ali (a radical black cleric who endorses suicide bombings as a legitimate "resistance" tactic); and imam Abdul Alim Musa (who proclaims outspoken support for suicide bombers).

Campaigns staged by the MSU have had titles such as

“Holocaust in the Holyland” with talks titled “ Hamas: the People’s Choice” and “Israel: The 4th Reich”.⁷

In its obsessive effort to stigmatize Israel, the MSU has appropriated the word “Holocaust” and turned its meaning upside down. During May 2006, at a series of events entitled “Holocaust in the Holy Land”⁸ at UCI, imam Amir Abdel Malik Ali, a radical black imam from Oakland, told MSU audiences that Hamas was part of “Islamic resistance movements” struggling against Western “oppressors,” and called any monitoring of these terror groups mere “propaganda” as he led students in the battle cry “Takbir! Allahu Akbar!” On this occasion, Ali praised jihad and martyrdom:

“The apartheid state of Israel is on the way down, too. They are living in straight-up fear, and it’s about time that they live in fear. I’m told that they’re afraid to get on buses and things, or go to the café.... The people who you are fighting are coming to die. Meanwhile, you are coming to live. And once you deal with a people who are ready to die, who say either victory or martyrdom, you can’t fight against that.”⁹

Amir Abdel Malik Ali was again the featured speaker at an October 5, 2006 MSU event, where he told a crowd of roughly 200 cheering students:

“They [Jews] think they are superman, but we, the Muslims, are kryptonite. The Jews know that their days are numbered.”¹⁰

In May 2007, MSU held an “Israel: Apartheid Resurrected” week that featured twice-daily speeches and protests condemning the State of Israel. On May 17, Malik Ali delivered a lecture titled “UC Intifada: How you can help Palestine,” in which he informed UCI’s Muslim

students (who again wore Hamas-like green armbands) that a martyr’s death is the most honorable form of death. Malik Ali referred to Israel not by its name, but only as the “Zionist Apartheid state.”¹¹

It was also in May 2007, at a MSU event called “Islamic Revival,” that imam Abdul Alim Musa made an appearance.¹² Founder of As-Sabiqun, a movement that describes itself as being in agreement with Islamist thinkers such as Muslim Brotherhood founder Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and Ayatollah Khomeini, Musa asserted before cheering MSU members that the CIA was responsible for destroying the World Trade Center:

“Now that don’t mean fighting you. When you hear about some bomber that blew up the World Trade Center or blew up this or blew up that, I’m telling you brothers and sisters, that is your CIA. That is your government blowing up people, blaming it on us, so it will give it – ah – the guy laughing [pointing towards member of audience] – I’m telling you, if you think it’s wrong, study Adolph Hitler. What did Adolph Hitler do? You all read history. Isn’t that right? Didn’t Adolph Hitler burn the Reichstag, blame it on the people and he became the Fuhrer and what happened? He could suspend civil liberties. And he could wipe out and he could war against all of his enemies. That’s what Adolph Hitler did, isn’t that right? He burned the Reichstag himself. He burned the Reichstag himself. They blew up the World Trade Center, blamed it on us, and then come out with the Patriot Act and all these criminal laws. Right?”¹³

Most recently, in May 2008, the MSU hosted a series of programs to commemorate the Nakba (or “catastrophe,” as the Palestinians call the birth of Israel) entitled “Never Again?”

The Palestinian Holocaust.”¹⁴ On May 12, Muhammed al-Asi, a frequent MSU speaker, made an appearance. A onetime Air Force Officer, al-Asi became “radicalized” by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and is a fervent admirer of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. In 1983, he was removed from his position at the Islamic Center in Washington D.C. for being too extreme, and since then has preached his message of hate in front of this mosque to passers-bys.¹⁵ Al-Asi also makes frequent trips to Iran to meet hard-line officials, and is reported by the *Washington Post* to be under steady surveillance by the United State’s government.¹⁶

In a speech peppered with pro-terrorist and anti-Semitic overtones, al-Asi excited his admirers in the Muslim Student Union with a vision of the increasing jeopardy of the Jewish population in the Middle East, and the pent up aggression of their Arab neighbors.¹⁷ “As the years go by [he addressed Israelis] you are going to feel more cornered in the nation state ghetto you constructed.”¹⁸ The invocation of “ghetto” is a common theme in al-Asi’s talks. To the defrocked imam, modern Jewish culture is abnormal and corrupt, born from thousands of years of exile and the violent “ghetto life” they led in Europe before being ostracized from that continent:

“Just like you didn’t learn from exile, you didn’t learn from ghetto life. You left the ghettos of Europe; there were no ghettos to speak about in Muslim countries. You left those ghettos and came in the fashion that you did, with all the bloodshed that went with it and still continues.

You came to the holy land, which you desecrated and blasphemed with every decision that you made and still are making and then you realize that you are in a territory of hostilities around you. These hostilities didn’t come from nowhere; these hostilities are a

reaction to all the misery and all the hostility that you brought with you.”¹⁹

A few days later in the Nakba week, the featured speaker was the ubiquitous Amir Abdel Malik Ali, who was adamant about the destruction of Israel and also about his belief that the “empire” of America must fall.

“In order for people to live like human beings America must fall as an empire and America is coming down. When you put the Israeli flag up next to the American flag, what it means for many of us, you will fall just like that empire is going to fall.”²⁰

Disturbances, Harassment, Intimidation

Other campuses have Muslim student groups as radical as the Muslim Student Union, groups with equally inflammatory messages carrying an equal enthusiasm for a new genocide against Israel. But the MSU has gone beyond rhetoric to become an intimidating violent presence. This is true for Jewish students in particular, but others have also felt the pressure.

In the spring of 2006, UCI College Republicans staged an event called “The Unveiling of the Cartoons and a Discussion to Confront Terror” which focused on various cartoons including the by now notorious Danish cartoons caricaturing the prophet Muhammed, but also anti Semitic and anti Western cartoons as well. Topics to be discussed included whether and why domestic Islamic groups are apologists for terror and Islamic militancy on U.S. campuses. The MSU organized a counter event which eventually drew over 1000 Muslim student radicals from all over California who gathered outside the hall where the College Republicans’ meeting was held. MSU members began the protest by rolling out green prayer mats and praying in Arabic. The atmosphere

eventually became so tense that those who entered the hall to take part in the discussion were forced to pass through a cordon of police with bomb sniffing dogs.

Pressure on those regarded as enemies of the MSU could also be more subtle. In 2007, a UC Irvine student identifying herself as “OC Apostate” (she had recently left the Muslim faith in which she was raised) was forced to shut down the blog in which she was critical of Islam’s intolerance for fear that members of the campus MSU would harm her family in retribution for her apostasy. She explained:

“I started a blog as a way to express myself. Word finally got around that it was me who was writing it and my family got threats that if I didn’t shut up something might happen. I didn’t want them to suffer for something I had done. So I deleted everything. ... The other Muslim students saw me with my hair out of the hijab. They knew who I was. The reaction was a lot of gossip and speculation about my upbringing. Women who I didn’t know gave me dirty looks. ... I don’t underestimate them. ... The notion of a traitor in your own community is the worse thing that could possibly happen. There is no room for ex-Muslims in a Muslim society. The punishment for being an apostate is death.”²¹

In January 2007, members of the MSU prevented Dr. Daniel Pipes from finishing his talk on “The Threat to Israel’s Existence.” Flushed with their victory, the students later milled around outside the lecture hall where Pipes was shouted down, chanting anti-Israel slogans. Then a member of the MSU and organizer of the protest gave an impromptu speech. To shouts of “Takbir” and “Allahu Akbar,” he said:

“They have no future. And it’s just a matter of time before the state of Israel will be wiped off the face of the

earth.... Our weapon, our jihad, our way of struggling in this country is with our tongues. We speak out, and we deflate their morale, and this is the best we can do right now. And our brothers and sisters, on the other side of the world, they’re handling business in their own way. May Allah give them strength...”²²

Community members who had come to hear Pipes speak reported being fearful at the disruption, but the university administration issued a press release that characterized the event as “successful” and whitewashed the incident.²³

Investigation by the U.S. Office for Civil Rights

The pattern of hatred in actions staged by the Muslim Student Union became so obvious that in October 2004 the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), reacting to reports from concerned Jewish students, filed a Title VI complaint on their behalf with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education. The ZOA had tried to use diplomacy to address the hostility on campus, but when UCI administrators ignored these efforts, the organization turned to Title VI, part of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin in programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance. The complaint alleged that Jewish students at UC Irvine had been facing consistent and pervasive incidents of anti-Semitic hostility and intimidation, and that university administrators had failed to respond effectively. After reviewing the claims, the Office for Civil Rights decided that an investigation into UCI’s conduct was warranted.²⁴

The ZOA furnished the OCR with evidence regarding several situations in which harassment or intimidation occurred at UCI, and put the OCR in touch with students

and other individuals who had faced harassment.

Investigations dealing with Title VI are generally resolved by the Office of Civil Rights within 180 days after being filed, but the investigation at UCI took more than three years. During this time the OCR presumably gathered information and interviewed students who had reported incidents of harassment and intimidation, although, according to ZOA spokesmen, it had ignored some of the witnesses the ZOA presented as having experienced bigotry and intimidation on campus.

In November 2007, when OCR issued its decision, it absolved the university or administrators of any wrongdoing.²⁵ According to the report, the OCR found that several years-old complaints, including documented instances where rocks were thrown by MSU members at a Jewish student and destruction of a Holocaust memorial in 2003, did not contribute to a hostile environment on campus because they “constitute isolated acts that were unrelated to the timely alleged acts.” Because the complaint with the Office for Civil Rights was filed over 180 days after these incidents occurred, however, they were disregarded in the investigation.

In other cases, OCR investigators found that university officials acted appropriately, or that the complaint could not be conclusively identified as anti-Semitic. For example, a swastika found in a bathroom in the Social Ecology building was not considered anti-Semitic because there was a vulgar phrase in the same bathroom against Asians and the OCR could not ascertain whether the swastika was referring to Asians or Jews since there wasn’t sufficient “evidence.”

But the true basis for the OCR decision was its belief that Title VI did not apply to Jewish students as a racial or national origin group.²⁶

The OCR decision sparked an outpouring of concern from members of Congress. In a letter to the U.S. Education

Secretary Margaret Spellings U.S. Senators Arlen Specter (R-PA), Jon Kyl (R-AZ) and Sam Brownback (R-KS)--all members of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary--questioned OCR’s interpretation of Title VI in the UC Irvine case, as well as the decision it had made to whitewash the Muslim Student Union and the university administration.²⁷ According to the Senators, OCR’s conclusion was “inconsistent with its prior policy statements.” The Senators asked probing questions of Secretary Spellings, including why there were witnesses “that the ZOA proffered ... whom OCR did not interview.”

Members of the House also raised concerns about OCR’s decision, and demanded answers from Secretary Spellings about whether OCR’s policy for enforcing Title VI was affording Jewish students the protections they deserved.²⁸ U.S. Representatives Brad Sherman (D-CA), Linda Sanchez (D-CA), Steven Rothman (D-NJ), Allyson Schwartz (D-PA), Robert Wexler (D-FL) and Shelley Berkley (D-NV) emphasized that OCR’s conclusion in the ZOA’s case “reversed OCR policy, as clarified in 2004, of protecting Jews against anti-Semitism.”

In an April 25, 2008 letter to the ZOA, the OCR indicated that it planned to launch a new investigation of incidents that occurred at UCI.²⁹ The increased criticism from members of the Senate and House was likely the cause of the reopening of the case, particularly the criticism that the OCR had completely failed to interview key witnesses and individuals who experienced harassment, both physical and verbal, at the university. OCR indicated that it had determined after its first report that several of the ZOA’s allegations “are appropriate for investigation under the laws enforced by OCR. . . .” Students and witnesses have been contacted and interviews are scheduled so that they may furnish information to the OCR for this pending investigation.³⁰

Investigation by the Orange County Task Force

Concerned that the U.S. Office of Civil Rights was looking to explain away the issue of anti-Semitism at UC Irvine, a local citizens group formed a task force in February 2007 to conduct its own investigation. Comprised of various academic, professional, and religious leaders, the Orange County Task Force on Anti-Semitism decided to carry out a thorough audit of the situation on campus and defined its aim as follows:

“... to study, investigate and issue a report on alleged incidents of racism and anti-Semitism at the University of California – Irvine (UCI). We are not singling out any specific group. We are looking at all instances of alleged anti-Semitic and racist activity.”³¹

After several months’ investigation, the Orange County Task Force released a report in December 2007 that authenticated a pattern of anti-Semitism by the Muslim Student Union that was ignored or even in some cases justified by the UC Irvine administration. Among the incidents noted in the report are the following:

- “A non-Jewish Student described the atmosphere at UCI as dominated by a philosophy that looks at the United States and Israel as enemies, while supporting terror organizations. The same student had a professor who had a picture of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on her computer. The student also recounts an argument with an Iranian student who said “fuck Israel” and pulled down his trousers to show his swastika tattoo.”
- “A student journalist attended an evening lecture hosted by the Muslim Student Union featuring Amir Abdel Malik Ali. This student, along with his brother, was harassed by the Muslim Student Union for videotaping the anti-Semitic lecture. The student had video evidence of his interaction. Among other

things his video shows Ali accusing Jews of being behind 9/11. The student journalist was told by Acting Judiciary Dean Edgar Dormitorio to leave as the MSU had the right to prohibit coverage. In reality, recording cannot be prohibited on a public campus at a public event.”

- “A recent graduate recounts his experiences [in the spring of 2002] in which members of the Muslim Student Union followed him. He also recounts that in the spring of 2002, the Muslim Student Union had a Star of David on ring road, the main walkway on campus, painted with red symbolizing blood. The administration said they couldn’t do much about it. The student also asked the administration to cover up UC Irvine’s logo while hate-speakers were at the podium, and they said it was too much work.”
- “A female student from Anteaters for Israel (AFI), a Jewish student group [the Anteater is the official UC Irvine mascot], was followed by male members of the MSU leadership.” The female student reported feeling threatened as a result of being followed by a group of males.
- “Another female student said the administration ignored her complaints especially when Jewish student presentations were vandalized.”
- A female student who was questioning MSU speaker Ward Churchill, had a camera shoved in her face by a student from the MSU, obstructing the vision in her left eye for 15-20 minutes. The UCI police department [said it] could do nothing about it.
- Dean Sally Peterson in an email called a Jewish student hysterical for filing a complaint against the MSU for wearing Hamas sashes as graduation stoles.
- The following has been attributed to frequent MSU

speaker Amir Abdel Malik Ali:

- “Palestinian mothers are supporting their children who are suicide bombers, saying, ‘Go honey, go!’ That ain’t suicide; that’s martyrdom.”
- The Mossad [Israel’s intelligence agency] would have assassinated Al Gore if he was elected [in 2000] just to bring his Jewish Vice President, Joe Lieberman to power.
- He asserted that a martyr’s death is the most honorable form of death. “Victory or martyrdom,” he asserted, are the only two viable options available to the Palestinians in their battle against Israel. Refusing to recognize Israel’s existence, Malik Ali referred to that country not by its name, but only as the “Zionist Apartheid State.”³²

The Orange County Task Force’s recommendations show a campus in crisis and an administration unable or unwilling to enforce policy against hate speech and anti Semitic bigotry:

- The Chancellor should identify and condemn hate speech.
- Community (religious and secular) should hold University accountable.
- The University has an obligation to inform the community of steps taken to ensure the integrity of its academic program.
- The Board of Regents should look into the qualifications of the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs in his capacity to be an impartial arbiter.
- The University should refrain from selective enforcement of its rules and regulations.
- UCI resident assistants should be fully versed on procedures for filing complaints.
- All incoming students should be required to take a

course on appropriate civil discourse.

- Community leaders should meet periodically with the administration and improve the status of the University.
- During UCI Orientation Week, new Jewish students should be invited by Jewish organizations to attend an orientation, where they can be briefed about the support structures in their community as well as the procedures to follow when confronted with anti-Semitism.³³

It was an indication of how seriously it took the growing anti Semitism at UC Irvine that one of the Orange County Task Force’s recommendations for Jewish students is to consider enrolling in other universities.³⁴

The UC Irvine Administration Rejects Demands For Change

Despite the federal and local investigations of the conflict festering on the campus, UC Irvine has continued to protect the Muslim Student Union from criticism and from reform. Repeated evidence of anti Semitic behavior and speech reported by eyewitnesses has been minimized or rejected altogether by the university administrators, who, in the name of multiculturalism, continued to accept the MSU’s depiction of itself as a religious and cultural organization, despite the hardcore radicalism of its political advocacy. Rather insisting on civility and enforcing rules against hate speech, campus authorities blamed the victim by depicting those who voiced concern over the MSU’s actions as trouble makers who were the source of the tensions now dominating UC Irvine’s public square.

While the rhetoric of speakers like Amir Abdel Malik Ali may be lurid and brutal, summoning the vision of a new

genocide, UCI administrators, such as Chancellor Michael Drake and Vice-Chancellor Manuel Gomez, have said it is protected under the First Amendment. But when a Christian preacher, Michael Venyah, appeared on May 15, 2008, the same day that Malik Ali called for the apocalyptic destruction of America and Israel, Muslim students physically collided with him when he talked about the crimes of the prophet Mohammad. Although this was clearly an incident of assault, the campus police present, taking their cues from the administrators, did nothing, and Dean of Judicial Affairs Edgar Dormitorio forced Venyah to leave.³⁵

The UCI administration has also shown that it is ready to drop free speech protections—always cited to justify radical jihadists’ appearances on campus—when they apply to opponents of the MSU’s radical ideology. On May 15, 2008, for instance, while videotaping Malik Ali’s jihadist speech on campus, two student journalists were confronted by a school administrator. Dean of Student Services Sally Peterson told the students that male Muslim students wanted them to stop filming the female activists (or, as she called them, “the sisters”) there in support of Malik Ali. Aware of their rights, the student journalists refused her orders and continued covering the event.³⁶

Afterwards, MSU members walked up and down the main campus road chanting anti-Israel slogans and blocking off the entire walkway for several minutes while police and administrators stood by idly.³⁷ A male student filming the procession was charged by three Muslim males who screamed at him for filming the females from the group as they walked past. One of the males, a student named Yasser Ahmed, who had purportedly thrown a cinderblock at an FBI vehicle the previous year,³⁸ said to the cameraman: “You wanna get jacked! We can go get jacked right now! C’mon Emanuel, we’ve learned a lot about you let’s go! Let’s go get

jacked. Lets go get jacked!”³⁹

The student journalist gave his statement to a UCI police officer present at the scene and explained how he was assaulted. The officer then took statements from the males MSU members, but refused to interview witnesses of the assault against the student journalist. The police officer finally told the student journalist that one of the males who charged at him had apologized and that nothing more could be done.⁴⁰

Another case of MSU’s vigilantism also occurred on May 17, 2008 when a young Jewish female was followed back to her car and surrounded there by six members of the MSU.⁴¹ A non student local resident happened to be in the parking lot and watched the harassment. When the Muslim students noticed that she was watching them, they climbed on the hood of her car in order to photograph her face, her vehicle identification number, and her license plate. When this woman later called the police department for answers, they rationalized the criminal behavior as a justifiable need for Muslim students to “vent,” as they were just getting back at the Jews.

Conclusions

Muslim Student Associations on university campuses across the country have become increasingly aggressive in their support for radical jihad. The explosive situation on the UC Irvine campus is a case study in what happens when university administrators not only appease such a group by exempting it from the rules that otherwise governs political speech on campus. University administrators, apparently acting in support of some principle of multiculturalism, have allowed the Muslim Student Union to preach and practice hate, to bring in advocates of murder and genocide to its public events, and to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation on campus. Moreover, those who voice concern over MSU's actions are depicted as troublemakers who themselves have brought dissention to the university.

In October 2002, Robert M. Berdahl, the Chancellor of UC Berkeley, signed a letter, published in the *New York Times*, warning against anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish activity on campus. UC Irvine's then-chancellor, Ralph Cicerone, refused to sign this letter.⁴² The current chancellor at UCI has called hate speech "repugnant," but has refused to sanction the group responsible for bringing hate to campus and has been unwilling to ensure a safe environment for Jewish students who try to speak up against the MSU.

The administration at UC Irvine has sent a clear message to the MSU: incitement against and harassment of Jews, unleashing Muslim fascists on campus, and spewing hatred of Israel and America is protected activity and will incur no consequences.

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