

Palestinian student paralyzed by right-wing gunman tells NBC his suffering is “one drop in the ocean of what’s going on in Palestine”

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On January 17, NBC News aired a rare prime-time interview featuring Palestinian-Americans Kinnan Abdalhamid and Hisam Awartani, two of the three college students who were shot last November in Burlington, Vermont by a right-wing gunman, while walking down the street. Abdalhamid, Awartani and Tasheen Ali Ahmad were hospitalized following the shooting, with Awartani suffering a spinal injury that has confined him to a wheelchair.

At the time of last November’s shooting, two of the three students were wearing keffiyehs and all of them were speaking a mix of Arabic and English. The day after the shooting, across the street from where it occurred, federal agents arrested 48-year-old Jason J. Eaton in his apartment. Eaton allegedly told ATF agents when they knocked on his door, “I have been waiting for you.”

According to police, Eaton allegedly shot the students with a pistol he had legally purchased earlier that year. An anti-vaccine conspiracy theorist and libertarian, Eaton has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder charges. During a search of the former financial advisor’s apartment, police recovered multiple firearms.

While there is enormous physical evidence tying Eaton to the shooting, police have yet to specify a motive. Likewise, despite substantial circumstantial evidence, police have yet to charge Eaton with a “hate crime.”

The NBC interview with two of the three shooting victims was significant for multiple reasons. Reflecting the pro-Israel bias that permeates all of the capitalist press, it took nearly two months for a major television network in the United States to air a prime-time

interview with the students. There is no question that had three Zionist Jewish college students been shot while wearing kippahs, all of the major television networks would have been champing at the bit to provide airtime to the students and their families.

In fact, last month, Fox News and all the major television networks breathlessly reported on a press conference given by Speaker of the House Mike Johnson featuring Zionist college students. Johnson, a Christian nationalist, stood side by side with the students as they vented at university presidents for allowing anti-genocide protests on campuses.

In the NBC interview, the Palestinian students spoke powerfully against attempts by the media and politicians to reduce the phenomena of right-wing and hate-based shootings to the individual. The students also spoke out against attempts to separate what happened to them last November from the current genocidal policy being carried out by the Israeli government with the full support of the Biden administration.

Awartani said that being shot is “one drop in the ocean of what’s going on in Palestine.”

“What’s going on in Palestine, it’s still going on,” he told NBC. “And, like, that’s more on my mind right now, how there are still people—like, they’re starving to death. There are still people who are being maimed. There are still people who... don’t have access to clean water. There are still people who are, like, being shot at protests. So that, to me, is far more relevant than what happened to me.”

When the NBC reporter asked Awartani how he took the news that he would be paralyzed for the foreseeable future, the young man acknowledged that it is hard for him, but at the same time, “I take solace in the fact that I am able to receive this care and I am able to receive this physical therapy and go to a good hospital.

“It makes me think of other people in Gaza, who are in wheelchairs and who have been disabled by bombings. They are not able to receive... they can’t even receive the primary care they need, let alone the rehabilitative care that they deserve.”

“That was something that I thought of more than my own life, because I know my life will continue but I don’t know about theirs,” he concluded.

Abdalhamid said that the shooting was part of the “systemic dehumanization” of Palestinians, adding, “I just don’t think of the individual, I think there has been a lot of attempts for us to fully only demonize the guy but this is part of a larger systematic issue, which, both on purpose, and not, would like to focus on him the individual, ‘Oh he is just this one evil guy,’ but the truth is he is symptom of a larger issue.”

Since the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza began over 100 days ago, Democratic and Republican politicians, with the media in tow, have harangued against the entirely concocted scourge of “left-wing antisemitism” on college campuses. While seeking to steamroll opposition to the slaughter, which has claimed the lives of some 30,000 Palestinians in the process (overwhelmingly woman and children), these same forces have downplayed or ignored the gigantic rise in anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate crimes, assaults and harassment over the same period.

A December 2023 report from the Council on American-Islamic Relations found that the last months of 2023 saw “one of the worst waves of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States in the last three decades.” In just eight weeks, from October to November 2023, the organization received “42 percent of the complaints it received in all of 2022.”

The hate-filled atmosphere against perceived Muslims and Arabs, the report noted, is being “perpetuated by

the US government” including “domestic actors... seeking to justify Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.”

Quoting from a November 2023 report from the Center for Security, Race, and Rights at Rutgers, CAIR wrote: “American politicians and media executives have depicted Palestinians as ‘almost entirely violent,’” which “US leaders” have used to portray “the peaceful and principled calls of Palestinians” and their supporters for “human rights as dangerous and threatening.”

Later on in the interview, Elizabeth Price, Awartani’s mother, acknowledged this reality, stating that she was “so angry” not only that her son was shot, but that he is “being seen as part of a community that can be exterminated, and can be demolished and can be abused.”

“But I am his mother,” Price continued, “and my son is alive and he is cared for. And I am so angry that other mothers don’t have that, and so what is my pain to the pain of other mothers? And what is my grief? I still have my child, I can still touch him, but to know that other mothers don’t have that makes me angry and then my grief fades away.”



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