

Dearborn residents denounce Wall Street Journal slander of city as “jihad capital”

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9 February 2024

On February 2, the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) published a commentary titled, “Welcome to Dearborn, America’s Jihad Capital,” slandering members of the largely Arab-American city as supporters of terrorism due to the amount of pro-Palestinian sentiment and hostility to the US-Israel war in Gaza among residents.

“Support for terrorism in southern Michigan has long been a concern for US counterterrorism officials,” writes Steven Salinsky, executive director of the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). “What’s happening in Dearborn isn’t simply a political problem for Democrats. It’s potentially a national-security issue affecting all Americans. Counterterrorism agencies at all levels should pay close attention,” he ends ominously.

The article includes language from the hysteria whipped up after 9/11 to garner support for the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. It cites as fact a 2001 report by the Michigan State Police submitted to the US Justice Department, which has been thoroughly debunked for nearly two decades.

“On September 17, 2001, five days after the 9/11 attacks, the FBI raided a house in Detroit,” according to the book, *Arab Detroit 9/11: Life in the Terror Decade*. The agents were looking for one particular individual suspected of terrorism and instead his four non-citizen housemates were arrested. “They were quickly dubbed an ‘operational combat sleeper cell’ of ‘Al-Qaida terrorists’ by John Ashcroft, a label referenced frequently in news stories about Detroit for the next several years,” it continues.

Each of the housemates was wrongfully indicted on terrorism charges when one accused the others, in exchange for a plea deal, stating that they had attempted to recruit him to the supposed “sleeper cell.” However, the “convictions were overturned a few months later and the charges ... thrown out when the US Attorney’s office in Detroit was forced to admit that their former prosecutor, Richard Convertino, had withheld ‘impeachment and exculpatory material’ from the defense. Convertino quickly resigned, but after three years of investigative work and relentless international publicity, the government had failed to prove that anything remotely resembling a ‘sleeper cell of Al-Qaida terrorists’ had resided in Detroit.”

Ashcroft now sits on the board of MEMRI, alongside former CIA directors Michael Hayden and James Woolsey, retired Marine General Kenneth McKenzie Jr., Deborah Lipstadt, Alan Dershowitz and other war criminals, Zionists, and faithful servants of the state.

MEMRI is a Zionist DC-based American non-profit founded in 1997 by Yigal Carmon, counter-terrorism advisor to two former Israeli prime ministers, including Yitzhak Rabin; and Meyrav Wurmser, of the conservative Hudson Institute think tank, and the wife of David Wurmser, advisor to former US Vice President Dick

Cheney during the post-9/11 “War on Terror.”

A petition for the WSJ to retract both the commentary cited above and another titled “Chicago Votes for Hamas,” about the city council voting in favor of a ceasefire in Gaza, has garnered over 14,000 signatures since its launch earlier this week. “These articles are alarmist and espouse racist tropes of Arab and Muslim American communities,” the petition statement says. “It is imperative that media outlets uphold ethical standards of journalism and refrain from publishing content that discriminates against and demonizes entire communities based on their religion or ethnicity.”

US President Joe Biden has been unable to visit Dearborn in his 2024 campaign, as local government officials and residents have, until today, refused to meet with him or his representatives until he calls for a ceasefire in Palestine.

Anti-genocide protesters gathered again outside of the Henry Hotel in Dearborn during a meeting between Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud and Biden campaign aides. The mayor softened his anti-Biden stance afterwards in a series of tweets, stating that the “meeting was held to ensure that the White House and those with the ability to change the course of the genocide unfolding in Gaza very clearly hear and understand the demands of our community—directly from us.”

Just last week Biden held a meeting in Warren, another Detroit suburb, with the United Auto Workers (UAW) bureaucracy, in which he was shielded from anti-genocide protesters by police. Disgust with the Democratic Party among longtime voters in Michigan has led to a crisis for the Biden campaign, which is set to face Trump again in the 2024 elections.

The WSWs spoke with residents and students in Dearborn about Biden’s scheduled visit and the WSJ article.

Ali: “I don’t think there’s anything such thing as a lesser evil.”

Ali is a 31-year-old doctor and immigrant from Pakistan who discussed his thoughts on the upcoming election. “I don’t think any of these candidates have ever done anything to de-escalate any of the conflicts in the world in their power, be it Obama or Biden or Trump, they’re just part of the same war machinery that profits from it. It’s just a change of face. In this election one of them is racist and the other one is responsible for the murder of children. I don’t think there’s any such thing as a lesser evil. Both are evil, both should be called out as such. I’m not a voter in America but it’s a sad situation when these are the options. I’ve not seen any political candidate on

either the Democratic or Republican side who represents a real voice of the people,” he said.

“I think [the WSJ article] it’s really offensive. There are decent human beings, living all over Dearborn, who just want to be with their families who have many ambitions and motivations in their life, who have nothing to do with the bad that happens in the world,” he continued. “Labeling a community as a beacon of terrorism, or a group of people that others should be afraid of, is setting a really bad precedent because that’s how you profile people. That’s how you sow the seeds of hatred. That’s how you legitimize when somebody takes a gun and takes matters in their own hands. The repercussions of articles like these, or media propaganda of this kind, has far-reaching consequences. For the community that lives in Dearborn, this puts them at risk, in addition to the fact that this is just utterly humiliating for any human being to be labeled as such. So I strongly condemn it.

“At the very least, [Biden] should offer the people an apology. But that doesn’t cut it because there are actual people dying in the Middle East. I feel like they consider people to be stupid enough to just buy into whatever nonsense that they say on camera, that they would sometimes say a word or two of appeasement and they think that people are going to buy what they are saying. But people have woken up to it. We have been seeing it in many different kinds of socio-political movements at the grassroots level, which they try their best to quash. I think we need more collective effort from the people. People have to stand up for their rights and they have to stand up for their dignity. This community, regardless of any faith or religion or ethnic boundary, is pretty united in their belief that the war should end and America should stop poking its nose into the affairs of nations who can sort it out themselves.

“They think people are dumb. Remember in the last election campaign? Biden said, ‘If you are a real black American, you should vote for Biden.’ No, if you’re a real person, you should have a voice of your own. That voice may not be represented by the two candidates who are on the ballot.”

Aya: “Nobody’s listening to us. But then when they need our votes, they come back here again.”

Aya is an 18-year-old student at the University of Michigan, Dearborn. “My parents were actually in Iraq during the invasion, they had to flee because of that,” she said. “That’s a big part of why there’s still a lot of solidarity when things like [the genocide] happen.

“You see photos from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, all these countries pre-US intervention, and how they looked so ‘normal’ or even ‘Westernized.’ Then this image is shattered through US intervention and the same areas have been blasted to rubble.”

She had read the WSJ article and was disgusted with it. “There is this huge generalization of what our beliefs are as Muslims or people from the Middle East. The media portrays us as a monolith, especially this word jihad. It’s associated with all of us. It creates an extremely negative association. This kind of rhetoric can desensitize and dehumanize people.”

She was angered by tweets from Biden and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer claiming to take a stand against Islamophobia. “It’s incredibly hypocritical, because they’re just sitting there tweeting away on their phones, but they haven’t done a single thing

for us, they haven’t done a single thing for our families overseas. Nobody’s listening to us. But then when they need our votes, they come back here again. I think, when you are so tired of it, that you grow past the point of thinking that there could be change, but that’s a part of what they want from us. They want us to think that it’s not possible to create change because they won’t listen to us. They just want the power.

“I think a big part of [the two-party system] is rooted in American capitalism. We’re split into this two-party system that is geared to corner us. So we basically have no choice. It’s either one or the other. But in reality, they’re both the same thing. They’re both fighting for American power. The establishment of America was created on the fact that this two-party system wasn’t supposed to happen. But in the end, the two-party system happened anyways, even though there are specific warnings for us 250 years ago to not have that.

“I’m a socialist. Socialism has been portrayed as being bad, but then if you look at it, it’s all US intervention that’s led us to associate socialism with being bad. The media is incredibly powerful in helping us create this understanding that socialism equals ‘bad.’”

Mariam: Biden’s claims to oppose Islamophobia are “not going to take away from all of the lives in Gaza that have been lost.”

Mariam is also a student at UM Dearborn.

“Biden is not welcome here after the genocide that has been happening in Gaza. He has done nothing to fix this. He can post as many tweets as he wants, but he has promoted the Islamophobia that has been happening against us. He is promoting hate. He should not be accepted anywhere near us until he actually calls for a ceasefire. That’s the only way he would be welcome here, but it’s also not going to take away from all of the lives in Gaza that have been lost, the Palestinians who have lost their family, their friends, their homes, their land.”

Mariam also read the WSJ article and was disturbed by it. “This stereotype that all Muslims or Arabs are terrorists, that’s furthest from the truth. Islam literally means peace. It promotes peace, love and equality.”

She voiced concern for her own safety as well as the safety of her fellow students and residents of Dearborn. “It’s as simple as that. We are a target. That’s what the media is doing and it’s all on purpose. It’s all calculated. It’s all a scheme. It’s all a political game. It’s propaganda. It’s all words, no action from the politicians. That’s how politics are.

“You know, four years ago, Biden had a lot of Arab supporters. I mean, I was one of them. However, he lost a large majority of them. I used to always preach that you should vote if you have the opportunity but I’m at that point where I realized it’s all a game and they don’t really care about us. So I won’t be participating in that election because it’s lose-lose.”



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