

George Mason University president doubles-down on lies to justify crackdown on Students for Justice in Palestine

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality at George Mason University
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On Friday, December 13, George Mason University president Gregory Washington published a statement to the university website following the police and Federal Bureau of Investigation's joint raid of two members of the campus chapter of the Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and the subsequent banning of the students and the club from campus.

Washington claims to be addressing "concerns we have heard voiced on campus" regarding an "off-campus police action [that] has left many alarmed."

Many students at GMU, located in Northern Virginia outside Washington, D.C., have explained to the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) that the police and FBI agents' raid of the SJP members' home and the latter's subsequent banning raises many concerns about the university's regard for democratic rights.

Washington's letter is not interested in addressing these concerns. Instead, the president merely doubles down on deceitful allegations that have been made to justify the unprecedented assault on due process and freedom of speech on campus.

The university president drums up a dishonest narrative of the police raid last month, stating, "the search turned up sufficient amounts of weaponry and materials calling for violence against Americans and in particular Jews." This was enough "to warrant immediate precautionary action to maintain the safety of the university community," he says.

In fact, no publicly available documents surrounding the incident indicate any intent of committing violence on the part of the two students or the SJP as a whole. According to *The Intercept*, the weapons found on the premises were "antique firearms legally registered to

the family's son, a Mason alum and volunteer deputy chief firefighter." Efforts to press charges against him were fought in court "and a Fairfax County Circuit Court judge dismissed them two weeks later."

Lawyers representing the family have stated claims of "antisemitism" are based on mistranslations of anti-Zionist literature. No further arrests or charges have been made following the raid a month ago.

Washington resorts to a series of circular arguments, stating that "based on the evidence obtained [during the raid] and in furtherance of the investigation, GMU Police had cause under University Policy 1132 to issue a criminal trespass notice, barring two George Mason students from physically entering university property."

The reference to the university's policy resolves nothing, as a search of GMU's website brings back a description of its criminal trespass notice. It states GMU may issue such a notice if a student:

Violates criminal or civil laws;

- Violates University policies, regulations, rules, or directives;

- Poses a threat to the health, safety, welfare, or academic experience of members of the University community;

- Causes significant disruption to the regular operation of University functions; or

- Causes or threatens harm to persons or property.

None of these criteria apply in the current situation because the university's response has been based upon allegations which have either not been proven or have been dismissed outright in a court of law.

Coming to the conclusion of his letter, the university administrator reveals the authoritarian tendencies which dominate the school's outlook.

Issuing what can only in the present circumstances be seen as a veiled threat to the rest of the student population, Washington states, “The bottom line for you is this: You are safe here... Our police department and a number of other less visible security teams are looking out for you 24/7.”

He continues: “Whether you can see them or not, extensive protections are in place, working as they are intended to, maintaining the safe learning and living environment we cherish.”

In a subsequent email addressed to an unrelated incident involving a student involved in a suspected terrorist plotting, Washington reveals openly what these “extensive protections” are.

He refers to GMU having “capabilities, plus more measures that by design remain invisible, [which] form a protective web around the university campus that our proximity to the nation’s capital demands, with capabilities not always available to universities elsewhere.”

These “capabilities” include: “the first fully equipped university SWAT team in Virginia,” a campus police department having “close ties with local, state, and federal law enforcement,” police officers that are “routinely present at student gatherings” and “constant university vigilance,” including “a cross-functional team of university officials” meeting “regularly and as needed to provide on-demand emergency operations.”

Washington cynically conflates the raid on two student activists engaged in constitutionally protected activities and the arrest of a terror suspect, declaring “the two recent actions are proof that these systems are working as intended.”

In fact, no charges have been proven in either case to show “these systems are working as intended.” In the case of the SJP members, no charges have even been issued!

Washington, in replying to these incidents in such a manner, is demonstrating an obliviousness and disregard for a whole list of constitutionally defended democratic rights, including: the presumption of innocence, due process and freedom of speech.

George Mason University maintains substantial ties to the US government and intelligence apparatus, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously reported. Notably, the crime the two students are suspected of committing, which triggered the police raid, involved

graffiti on the site of a job fair sponsored by defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin and other weapons manufacturers, who have profited off the crimes of the US war machine.

In suppressing the democratic rights to due process and free speech, George Mason University is acting as the mouthpiece of a government which openly embraces the policies of genocide abroad and repression at home. Far from making students feel “safe,” Washington’s letter demonstrates that no one’s rights are protected at the university.



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