

Interview with Dr. Helyeh Doutaghi: “What’s happening in Palestine, in Yemen, and on US university campuses are threads of the same fabric”

Our reporter
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On March 28, Yale Law School fired Dr. Helyeh Doutaghi without providing her an opportunity to defend herself against the slanders of a pro-Zionist Internet bot and the witch-hunting campaign of the Trump White House against opponents of the US-backed genocide in Gaza on college campuses across the country.

In an official statement to the public, the university claimed that it had terminated Dr. Doutaghi’s contract because she “refused to meet to provide any responses to critical questions,” among other accusations. This narrative is entirely false. As the facts show, it is part of a conspiracy against the rights of a distinguished Associate Research Scholar of International Law and deputy director of the Law and Political Economy (LPE) Project at Yale since 2023.

As Dr. Doutaghi explains in the interview below, she learned on March 3 that the artificial intelligence-driven website “Jewish Onliner” published an article that asserted without evidence that she was a “terrorist.” Instead of defending her democratic rights, Yale University used the false online information to immediately place Doutaghi on administrative leave and ban her from the campus.

Meanwhile, Yale demanded that she submit, within a few hours, to an interrogation and answer “questions” from a representative of a law firm with deep connections to the state of Israel and the US State Department. When she requested time to prepare, that questions be provided in advance in writing, and that the pro-Israeli counsel be removed from the process, the Yale Law School refused.

Several days later, after efforts by her lawyer to continue communications and satisfy demands that she answer questions had elicited no response from university counsel, Yale Law School informed Doutaghi that she had been terminated.

As her attorney, Eric Lee, explained in a statement on April 1 that documented his exchange with Yale between March 20 and March 28:

It is not Dr. Doutaghi who refused to communicate with Yale, but the reverse. ... We believe this correspondence confirms that Yale was only interested in terminating Dr. Doutaghi and not in investigating any underlying facts, damaging her life in disregard of basic notions of fairness and due process.

Dr. Doutaghi has stated that her political support for Palestinian rights and against Israel and Zionism were well known when Yale Law School hired her. What has changed is the political environment within the US, where the Trump White House has made clear that opposition to the Israeli genocide in Gaza on college campuses is now a crime and the administrations of leading US academic institutions, such as Columbia, Yale and other universities, have acclimated themselves to this attack on basic democratic rights.

World Socialist Web Site: First, can you tell us a bit about your research, scholarship and areas of expertise?

Helyeh Doutaghi: My research sits at the intersection of international law and international political economy, with a particular focus on the Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL). I draw on both Marxian and postcolonial critiques to examine how legal regimes—especially sanctions—function as instruments of global imperial governance to facilitate value transfer and wealth drain from the periphery to the core. My doctoral work analyzed the sanctions imposed on Iran, examining their mechanisms, harms, and beneficiaries. Additionally, I am interested in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), having written about its history, practice, and the production of knowledge (and ignorance), particularly in the context of the US military.

My academic work is grounded in a deep commitment to liberation and justice. I have published across both scholarly and public platforms with the aim of making these critical conversations accessible beyond the academy. Over the past decade, I have been actively involved in the student movement on the unceded territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, while also participating in international anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist movements across Turtle Island.

WSWS: Can you describe what led up to Yale’s decision to put you on administrative leave and erase you from its websites?

HD: In the morning of Monday, March 3, I was notified that there was an online report about me. An illegitimate and disreputable AI-generated right-wing Zionist platform called “Jewish Onliner” published a report falsely accusing me of being a “terrorist.” Yale Law School embraced the far-right attacks of internet trolls in a breathtaking display of obedience and moved within less than 24 hours to place me on leave. It retained an external law firm which publicly listed “Israel” as a “service.” The firm also represents some

of “the world’s largest aerospace and defense companies.” Yale’s lawyer has also “twice served as a US State Department-appointed special compliance officer”—entities that profit directly from the machinery of Palestinian death—to interrogate and punish a research scholar.

I was given only a few hours’ notice for what essentially promised to be an interrogation, while enduring a flood of online harassment, death threats, and abuse by Zionist trolls and bots on the internet, alongside ongoing distress and complications at both work and home. I endured all of this while fasting. There was no consideration for my religious accommodations during Ramadan and no regard for my basic human rights or my humanity.

That very same evening, I was placed on leave and banned from campus. My profiles were erased, my access revoked. It was clear they moved with haste to disown me—all to appease their Zionist funders. The speed at which they severed ties once again showcased where their priorities truly lay—not in finding the truth, but in maintaining the approval of those who bankroll their silence.

Two weeks later, I was given a one-week deadline to meet with Yale’s external counsel—an individual about whom I had serious concerns regarding his ability to conduct a fair “investigation” due to clear conflicts of interest. Yale Law School had appointed a lawyer with public ties to and support for Israel to “investigate” their own employee over pro-Palestinian speech.

From the outset, the process was never about uncovering the truth, but about executing a predetermined agenda in bad faith. We informed Yale that I would respond to their questions in writing, with the opportunity for follow-up, provided the questions came from Yale’s general counsel. Despite previously stating they would consider my conditions for a meeting, they refused this reasonable request. They then falsely accused me of being uncooperative and terminated my appointment.

This experience, though appalling, was hardly surprising, and is consistent with Yale’s violent crackdowns—often in collaboration with law enforcement—on student encampments protesting genocide. It also reflects the university’s ongoing repression of pro-Palestinian student voices and its financial investments in companies that arm and support genocide. Yale is complicit in the ongoing genocide of the Palestinian people.

WSWS: What has been the response of academics and professors? Has anyone stood up publicly to defend you from this attack?

HD: There has been remarkable support from across the academy—including professors, scholars, and students—as well as from the legal community, movement lawyers, and broader social justice movements. Over thousands of messages of solidarity, and public condemnation of YLS (Yale Law School) from around the world have been deeply heartwarming and a powerful reminder that, despite efforts in the US to isolate and marginalize us, we belong to a global majority. I am profoundly grateful for this outpouring of care, resistance, and collective strength. The LPE (Law and Political Economy) movement, with some honorable exceptions—particularly among students and a few principled scholars—has remained largely silent.

WSWS: How do you see the assault on your rights as connected to the broader threat of dictatorship in the US today?

HD: The US has effectively become a fascist dictatorship. The systemic assault on fundamental constitutional rights is part of a broader, coordinated campaign to amplify atrocity propaganda online and weaponize AI to suppress free speech—particularly targeting the

pro-Palestinian solidarity movement across the country, especially on university campuses. The government’s new mission is clear: to silence dissent and crush any voices that challenge its oppressive policies, enabling it to carry out aggression abroad with impunity and without domestic opposition.

What’s happening in Palestine, in Yemen, and on US university campuses are threads of the same fabric—woven by empire, enforced by its loyal institutions, and justified by its crumbling ideology.

WSWS: The Trotskyist movement also faces censorship and state repression as a result of our opposition to capitalism, dictatorship and imperialist war. Our party in Germany has been declared “left-wing extremist” by the German state security forces, and one of our young comrades in Ukraine, Bogdan Syrotiuk, was arrested by the Ukrainian government for the “crime” of opposing the US/NATO-backed war against Russia. He has been sitting in a jail cell now for almost a year. Do you see any connection between your case and cases like Comrade Bogdan’s?

HD: Like many in the US, myself included, Bogdan has also been targeted for daring to speak out against imperialist violence and for refusing to conform to the dominant narratives manufactured by state power and its institutions. Bogdan’s imprisonment by a regime backed and armed by the US and NATO mirrors the broader pattern of repression aimed at silencing dissent and criminalizing solidarity with anti-imperialist movements.

WSWS: Is there anything else you’d like to add about your situation?

HD: What we are witnessing unfold in the United States is not the failure of democracy. This is Western liberal democracy itself—a system built to serve capitalist property. A system born in genocide and enslavement, whose objective has always been, in the first and last instance, the “freedom” of propertied classes to accumulate wealth through the denial of freedom and sovereignty to the colonized. In the face of unprecedented challenges to Western capitalist imperialism from the majority world, this system has shown its true essence again, once and for all, by returning to its genocidal roots.

For all those who claim to uphold principles of justice, of a decolonized world, the hour of truth is upon us. Do we acquiesce to the repression imposed by a genocidal Western order desperate to fight off the rising anti-imperialism of the majority world? Or do we join with the majority world of the Global South, led by the Palestinians fighting against the Zionist death machine, in continuing to raise costs and end the impunity granted to those waging genocidal war?

The choice is between a world founded on hatred and cowardice, fed on genocide and the slaughter of children, and one founded on justice and the liberation of Palestine and all peoples of the Global South. As much as I am pained by how much we have lost, I have faith that a world founded on justice and liberation, with a free Palestine as its heart, is the horizon towards which history is moving.



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