

Letter to the Editor: Misinformation harms progress of Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Daniel Kramer, Class of 2017 | Posted: Thursday, December 3, 2015 7:20 pm

In early November, the Students for Peace and Justice in Palestine (SPJP) was featured on the Humans of Virginia Tech Facebook page. The main theme of the tabling demonstration covered in the post was to blame Israel for all Palestinian hardship without any room for competing dialogue.

This post became a battleground for toxicity and name-calling and ultimately left no room for any type of discussion. As a Jewish student at Virginia Tech, I became disturbed at the flagrant misinformation being tossed around and the animosity in which this misinformation was being spread.

SPJP utilized manipulative tactics in this tabling effort along with factually incorrect information, most notably a map of the Middle East which showed the overhauling takeover of Palestinian land by the State of Israel. This map was shown and then retracted by MSNBC, which publicly admitted that this was a false depiction.

This map is utilized frequently in the rhetoric of anti-Israel discussion. I feel it is the obligation of the student body to provide context on the issues SPJP presented within this post. The SPJP cited the deaths of many Palestinians with no context and blamed these deaths on the alleged tyranny of Israel. They willfully omitted the important fact that a portion of these deaths were the result of Palestinian terrorist attacks—stabblings, stoning and running over pedestrians in vehicles (among other heinous acts)—targeted at Israeli men, women and children.

This kind of misinformation is poisonous and detrimental to having an open dialogue. Dialogue can only happen when there are two sides that have access to all of the true information. When one side withholds information, obfuscates the facts and lies while labeling everything coming from the other side as propaganda, it eliminates the opportunity for dialogue.

The pro-Israel point of view is demonized and delegitimized when any remark is accused of being pure propaganda. Virginia Tech is a great platform for making good use of freedom of speech and surfacing and conveying different ideas. With that being said, we need to make sure by having this type of platform that we allow both sides to convey their ideas equally and have open dialogue where one side is not subjected to being rendered manipulative, and therefore, meaningless.

If we are not careful, conversation at Virginia Tech can become anti-semitic very quickly, as it did in this incident. One commenter on Humans of Virginia Tech's post alluded to the "Zionist backlash" being the controlling force behind the removal of the aforementioned incorrect map. These kinds of

claims frame Israel (the only Jewish state on Earth) as an evil, coordinated power who manipulates the media and the people from learning awful truths.

This is reminiscent of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” promoted by a Jew hating, conspiracy pushing Tsarist Russia — which fabricated coordinated Jewish international efforts of subverting the morals of gentiles while controlling the press and media. The notions are one and the same.

I am a huge proponent of free speech and open dialogue, and I am empathetic to any hardships that are caused by this unfortunate conflict; however, if every time I try to discuss my side I get attacked and labeled as manipulative, and I am automatically vilified for simply being Jewish, Israeli or a Zionist, it is not a healthy environment — not just for me, but for all.

This should be a concern to students, faculty and all who consider the Virginia Tech campus a platform for freedom of speech and open dialogue.