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Desecrating Old Glory: Investigating How the Pro-Hamas Protests Turned National Park Service Land into a Violent Disgrace (12/10/24)

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee,

Here in the United States—the land of free speech—a well-funded network with ties to extremist groups is exploiting the freedoms that protect legitimate protest in order to advance dangerous ideologies. Their activities may well defy the legal guardrails Congress has established to assure transparency in our public square, to limit the political advocacy of certain nonprofits, and to prohibit the provision of material support to foreign terrorist organizations.

I am not an attorney; I am, however, an experienced open source intelligence analyst. The organization of which I am a part of, The Network Contagion Research Institute, studies cyber-social threats and we have produced research on extremism across the political spectrum, state-backed influence operations, child safety issues online, and more. I am here today to share what my research has disclosed about the violent July demonstration at Union Station, which resulted in vandalism and at least one assault, and other attempts to paralyze public bridges, train stations, airports, and other critical infrastructure. Although these demonstrations were meant to appear as spontaneous expressions of outrage, they were anything but. They were the product of a well-funded network operating on the outer edge of our laws if not beyond them.

A network of U.S. organizations, many of which either operate with non-profit tax-exempt status or are fiscally sponsored by groups that promote extremist ideologies and work to drown out genuine calls for peace and resolution, including for the two-state solution that so many in the international community advocate. They openly celebrate and support designated terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (or PFLP) all of which played a direct role in the October 7th attacks. They also advocate for the engagement of illegal activities, including the promotion of civil disobedience and organizing protests that intentionally break the law. If 501(c)(3)'s are found to be encouraging unlawful action, it could lose its tax-exempt status.

On October 7th, 2023, Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel that involved coordinated rocket strikes, rapes, mass shootings including the slaughter of families in their beds, and kidnappings. On that day, terrorists murdered roughly 1,200 people and took more than 250 people hostage.

On that same day, Breakthrough News, an outlet with close ties to the ANSWER Coalition, a key organizer for the demonstration we are discussing today, celebrated the atrocities perpetrated that day, framed them as “resistance,” and included an interview with a standing

member of the PFLP's politburo. As you may know, the PFLP is reported to have been complicit in holding hostages in Gaza.

In July, a protest at Union Station in Washington, DC, was organized by the Shut It Down for Palestine movement, with Brian Becker of the ANSWER Coalition listed as the "Person in Charge." While burning American and Israeli flags is protected speech, as is displaying the flags of terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the PFLP near our nation's capital, during this demonstration a police officer was assaulted and a public monument was vandalized.

Who is Brian Becker, the person in charge of the demonstration? He is a central organizer for the Party for Socialism and Liberation, an instructor for the [People's Forum](#), and the National Coordinator for the ANSWER Coalition. The People's Forum shares office space with Breakthrough News, which is run by his relative.

The ANSWER Coalition has repeatedly given voice to extremist groups, including the PFLP. Just months after the October 7th attack, Brian Becker hosted a PFLP leader, reinforcing the pattern of support for violent agendas. Videos on their online platform feature other members of designated terrorist organizations. Many of these videos are listed as fundraisers for BreakThrough News.

What we are seeing is not grassroots activism. The People's Forum, one of the organizations that participated in the July demonstrations, has received over \$20 million from Neville Roy Singham, a U.S.-born millionaire living in Shanghai who, according to a New York Times investigation, has been central to a global network promoting CCP talking points.

Before October 7, this global network focused on amplifying anti-American and pro-CCP content, including denying the CCP repression of Uyghur Muslims. After October 7, this network shifted to amplifying radical anti-Israel narratives and helped promote demonstrations like the one at Union Station.

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, the People's Forum called on followers to join the "All Out for Palestine" rally in front of the Israeli Consulate in New York City the next day. At that October 8<sup>th</sup> rally, as Israel was still counting the dead and the U.S. was determining how many Americans were killed or kidnapped, Eugene Puryear, a host on Breakthrough News, reported that "there was some sort of rave or desert party where they were having a great time until the resistance came in electrified hang-gliders and took at least several dozen hipsters." (Three hundred sixty-four people were murdered and many more were raped, injured, or tortured.)

At the same demonstration, Layan Fuleihan, the Education Director of the People's Forum, said approvingly that, "yesterday the world woke up to incredible news." That demonstration on October 8, was an explicit celebration of the murder and kidnapping of innocent civilians.

The Shut It Down for Palestine coalition, the umbrella group behind the Union Station demonstration, has not limited itself to disruptions in Washington, DC. They have orchestrated

disruptions to critical infrastructure in New York City, blocked roads to airports like JFK and LAX and caused bridge and tunnel closures. These illegal actions have created not only financial burdens for cities but also significant public safety risks.

One key group within the Shut It Down for Palestine coalition is Al-Awda, an organization with direct ties to designated terrorist organizations. Al-Awda's communications officer, Charlotte Kates, was recently seen in Tehran receiving an award alongside members of Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Her husband, Khaled Barakat, is allegedly a senior member of the PFLP, and along with Kates, run a sham charity that serves as an international fundraiser for the PFLP according to the U.S. Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC).

In July, Senators Rubio and Graham called on the Department of Justice to investigate 18 organizations tied to Neville Roy Singham for potential violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act. These include the People's Forum, ANSWER Coalition, Al-Awda, Samidoun, and Breakthrough News—all of which played a role in the Union Station demonstration. At least three of these organizations flagged by Senators Rubio and Graham—the People's Forum, ANSWER, and the Palestinian Youth Movement—have already begun mobilizing to disrupt Inauguration Day on January 20th, 2025.

The actions we are witnessing are not simply free speech. They are part of a larger web of extremist activism with connections to terrorism. I encourage Congress to investigate these organizations, trace their funding sources, and hold them accountable for any and all illegal activities in which they are engaged.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

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