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Clashes between Israeli forces, students at Palestinian university sparks concern at Brandeis

Posted by Matt Rocheleau February 5, 2014 04:21 PM

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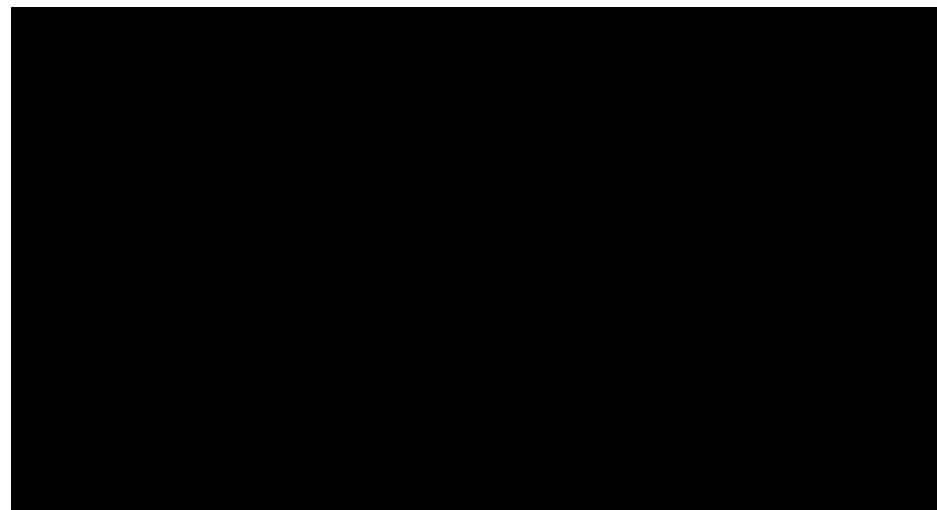
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(Al-Quds Educational TV / YouTube)

A video report by Al-Quds Educational TV posted to YouTube claims to show footage of the alleged Jan. 22 clash.

By Matt Rocheleau, Boston.com Staff

An alleged clash between Israeli soldiers and students at a Palestinian university that involved tear gas bombs, injured students, and damaged buildings last month has prompted concern among some administration and faculty at Brandeis University.

Brandeis, a nonsectarian, Jewish-sponsored university in Waltham, [suspended](#) its decade-old partnership with Al-Quds University in November after the president of the Arab university refused to condemn a demonstration on the Palestinian campus in which marchers reportedly flashed Nazi salutes and included banners of dead suicide bombers.

But some Brandeis faculty and administrators have maintained close ties with Al-Quds, including visiting the university in recent months. Meanwhile, Brandeis leaders said they have been [working to re-establish](#) a partnership with the college.

On Jan. 22, a clash broke out at Al-Quds' main campus in the West Bank village of Abu Dis.

Brandeis' student newspaper, [The Justice](#), was the first news outlet in the Boston area to report on the clash.

There are differing accounts of who started the confrontation and how it unfolded.

According to [Al-Quds](#), the [Palestinian Ministry of Higher Education](#), and Palestinian news agency [Ma'an](#), Israeli soldiers allegedly began checking student identifications at an Al-Quds campus gate before launching tear gas and rubber bullets into the campus. That prompted some students to throw stones back at the Israeli forces.

The Palestinian college said dozens of students were injured and several campus facilities were damaged.

"During the clashes, students and faculty members were stranded in their classes and offices looking for shelter, as it was unsafe to leave the university due to the heavy clouds of tear gas filling the air," Al-Quds' statement said. "For several hours nobody was able to exit the university campus from the front three gates, as they were occupied by Israeli soldiers and the university's security was trying to keep students away."

However, an Israeli Border Patrol spokesperson told the Israeli newspaper [Haaretz](#) that members of the Al-Quds campus community started the clash.

"During an operation, the officers encountered an unruly mob that threw firebombs and stones before fleeing into the campus," the spokesperson told Haaretz. "Officers entered the campus in order to arrest them. One suspect was arrested for throwing stones. It is important to note that any attempt to harm security forces will be dealt with severely, and suspects will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Any attempt to distort the facts and present the situation differently is untruthful."

Photos and videos claiming to show the alleged clashes have been posted online.

Haaretz reported that the Al-Quds campus has become "a hotspot for clashes: students say that Israeli Border Patrol officers provocatively take up positions around the campus, and wait for opportunities to pounce."

Officials from Al-Quds, Palestine's Ministry of Higher Education, two Brandeis faculty and a Brandeis administrator also said there have been numerous similar clashes at Al-Quds recently.

"Israeli military actions on and around the AQU campus have occurred frequently in recent months, including an incident involving tear gas and rubber bullets on November 17, 2013, that we experienced personally," said a statement from Brandeis administrator Daniel Terris and faculty members Susan S. Lanser and Daniel Kryder, [who have spoken out](#) in recent months to [urge](#) their university to lift the suspension and re-establish a partnership with Al-Quds.

Lanser said in an email that Al-Quds has allegedly been hit by 26 such incursions by Israeli Defense Forces since the 2013-2014 academic year began.

"As far as we know, Israeli officials have not provided any reasons for these actions," the professors' joint statement said. "These unexplained incursions significantly interfere with the university's mission of scholarship, education, and the promotion of democratic and pluralistic values."

"Although Brandeis University suspended the formal partnership between our two institutions in November 2013, we are pursuing individual projects and remain in close touch with our AQU counterparts," the professors' statement added. "We want to call attention to the events of January 22 and to express our concern for our Al-Quds University colleagues and other members of the AQU community whose personal security and pursuit of learning have been disrupted by these violent actions."

A Brandeis spokeswoman said in an email Wednesday that university President Frederick M. Lawrence is “saddened to hear about violence at Al-Quds University, which is highly disruptive to the educational and academic missions we value so highly.”

“As we continue to exchange information between our faculty and administrators in the hope that we can rebuild the partnership between Brandeis and Al-Quds University, we are dealing with numerous sensitive issues,” said the email from the spokeswoman, Ellen de Graffenreid. “These issues require broad input from our communities and open and honest communication that is difficult when our statements are being scrutinized by the public and the media.”

“President Lawrence is dedicated to keeping the lines of communication open between our institutions but also believes that reacting to events by issuing statements in the public media would not serve a useful purpose in advancing this communication,” her email added.

Palestine’s Ministry of Higher Education accused Israeli forces of initiating the Jan. 22 clash at Al-Quds and strongly condemned their actions “for desecrating the sanctity of the institution, obstructing the educational process, and for intentionally horrifying thousands of students and staff members by utilizing all terrorist means including random heavy firing.”

“The partnership between Brandeis and Al-Quds began formally in 2003 and has roots dating back to 1997. It has featured a number of faculty, administrative and student exchanges, “designed to foster cultural understanding” and to provide educational opportunities, according to Brandeis.

Soon after Brandeis announced its suspension, Syracuse University suspended its ties with Al-Quds, while Bard College announced it would maintain its partnership with Al-Quds.

Bard College issued a [statement](#) after the Jan. 22 clash at Al-Quds condemning the violence.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus](#) pages.



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