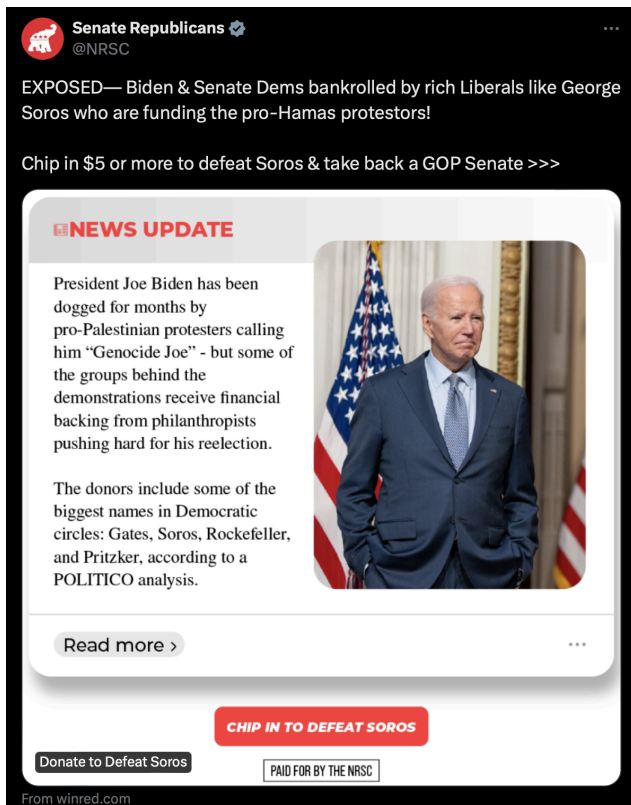


# From Anonymous Internet Forums to Members of Congress: How False Online Claims About Campus Protesters Became the Centerpiece of a Political Fundraising Campaign

Evolution of claim that major Democratic donors, including Soros, Gates, and Rockefeller, are funding “pro-Hamas” protests to destroy America

June 6, 2024



Senate Republicans @NRSC

EXPOSED— Biden & Senate Dems bankrolled by rich Liberals like George Soros who are funding the pro-Hamas protestors!

Chip in \$5 or more to defeat Soros & take back a GOP Senate >>>

**NEWS UPDATE**

President Joe Biden has been dogged for months by pro-Palestinian protesters calling him “Genocide Joe” - but some of the groups behind the demonstrations receive financial backing from philanthropists pushing hard for his reelection.

The donors include some of the biggest names in Democratic circles: Gates, Soros, Rockefeller, and Pritzker, according to a POLITICO analysis.

Read more >

**CHIP IN TO DEFEAT SOROS**

Donate to Defeat Soros PAID FOR BY THE NRSC

From winred.com

The U.S. response to the Israel-Hamas war has led to some of the [most widespread protests](#) by youth and university students seen since the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011 and Black Lives Matter Movement which began in 2013. The conflict has become a polarizing and divisive issue, and has been accompanied by an array of false and misleading narratives, which extremist actors – both foreign and domestic, and far-right and far-left – have sought to amplify for their own gain.

The American Sunlight Project monitored a collection of claims falsely accusing major Democratic donors of funding what bad actors have dubbed “pro-Hamas” protests. These actors claim the protestors have a goal of “destroying” America. This narrative first emerged in April when protests began on university campuses, and centers around progressive philanthropist George Soros,

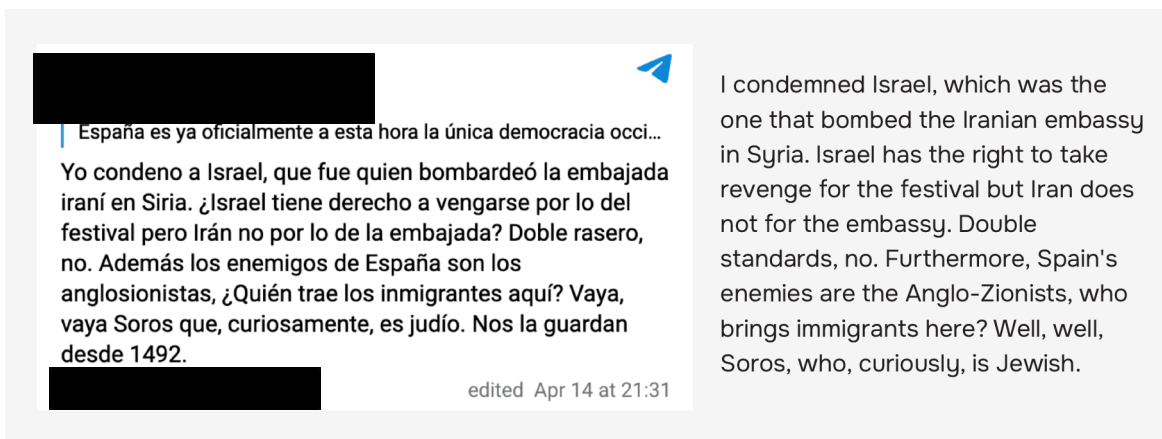
a Holocaust survivor and an [often-maligned figure](#) whom the far-right has fixated on for decades. Allegations linking philanthropists like Soros to funding protests echo deeply [antisemitic](#) tropes, such as those portraying Jewish individuals as secretive global influencers or “global elites;” these claims are no exception.

In this investigative brief, The American Sunlight Project pinpoints the origins of the narrative to anonymous online platforms, lays out the timeline of its spread, the information laundering process through which it morphed, and an overview of the key actors and platforms where it found engagement and amplification. In short, **extremist actors and potentially state-affiliated bot accounts, meticulously designed to play on pre-existing antisemitic tropes, conspiracy theories, and political divisions seeded and amplified the narrative as it moved from outlandish anonymous social media posts to communications from Members of Congress.**

## Planting the seed

Between April 12-15, 2024, anonymous social media users seeded narratives connecting George Soros to the pro-Palestine protests in online message boards, including Telegram, 4Chan, VK, and Reddit. The first incarnation of this narrative involved the tying of antisemitic, **Soros-centered conspiracies** to the actions of Israel in Gaza and the broader Middle East. Included in initial posts mentioning Soros were repudiations of “Zionists”, [years-old claims](#) that Soros singlehandedly coordinated flows of migrants to the West, and claims that Jews control the media. Key amplifiers of this narrative’s first incarnation appeared to be based in the U.S., Western Europe, and Russia.

- **Example post from Telegram, April 14, 2024:**



The image shows a screenshot of a Telegram post. The post is in Spanish and discusses Israel's actions in Syria and the role of George Soros. The text is as follows:

España es ya oficialmente a esta hora la única democracia occi...  
Yo condeno a Israel, que fue quien bombardeó la embajada iraní en Siria. ¿Israel tiene derecho a vengarse por lo del festival pero Irán no por lo de la embajada? Doble rasero, no. Además los enemigos de España son los anglosionistas, ¿Quién trae los inmigrantes aquí? Vaya, vaya Soros que, curiosamente, es judío. Nos la guardan desde 1492.

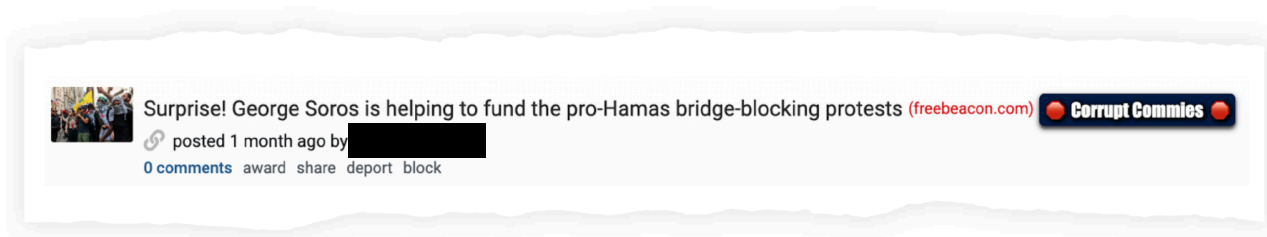
edited Apr 14 at 21:31

The translation of the post is provided to the right of the screenshot:

I condemned Israel, which was the one that bombed the Iranian embassy in Syria. Israel has the right to take revenge for the festival but Iran does not for the embassy. Double standards, no. Furthermore, Spain's enemies are the Anglo-Zionists, who brings immigrants here? Well, well, Soros, who, curiously, is Jewish.

Additionally on April 15, 2024, the Washington Free Beacon published an [article](#) which claimed the Tides Foundation was funding the bail of pro-Palestinian protesters arrested for blocking bridges and roads across the U.S. The Tides Foundation is a left-leaning philanthropic organization supporting racial, social, and economic equity through advocacy work. According to IRS filings, the Tides Foundation has received more than \$11M in grants from Soros' philanthropic organization, the Open Society Foundations, since 2017. This article **fell short of accusing Soros of funding the protests writ large**, only alleging Soros was funding the Tides Foundation's "bail and legal defense fund." This said, there is no publicly available evidence that any funds Soros directly contributed to the Tides Foundation were earmarked or specially designated to be allocated to the Tides Foundation's legal defense fund, nor was Soros directly paying protestors. However, anonymous online chat rooms began claiming that Soros was indeed doing so.

- **Example post from Partiot.win, April 17, 2024:**



## First evolution of the narrative

Two days after the initial seeding of this narrative, on April 17, 2024, Reddit and 4Chan users reposted out of context media coverage from<sup>1,2</sup> October 2023 which had previously linked Soros to the Tides Foundation. In the weeks following the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel, right-leaning media outlets insinuated, **but did not explicitly state**, that Soros' contributions to the Tides Foundation were used to fund the October 2023 protests against Israel. This reporting stated that Soros "funneled money to" and "funded" groups which then organized the protests. In actuality, even the Tides Foundation itself does not appear to have directly funded protests

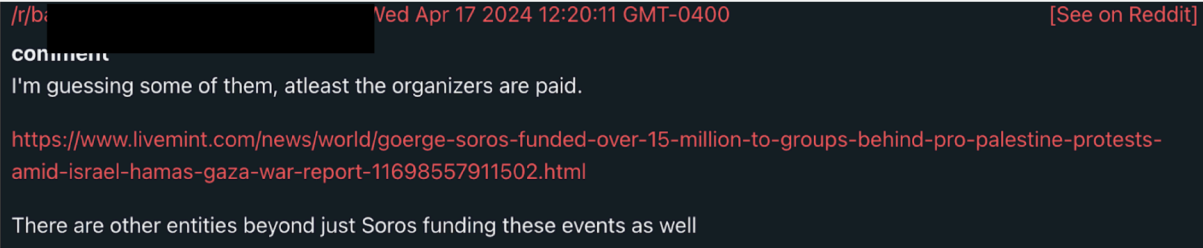
<sup>1</sup> Livemint, "George Soros Funded Over \$15 Million to Groups Behind pro-Palestine Protests: Report," *Mint*, October 29, 2023, <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/goerge-soros-funded-over-15-million-to-groups-behind-pro-palestine-protests-amid-israel-hamas-gaza-war-report-11698557911502.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Rich Calder and Matthew Sedacca, "Groups Behind Israel-bashing Protests Backing Hamas Attacks Got \$15M-plus From Soros," *New York Post*, October 28, 2023, <https://nypost.com/2023/10/28/metro/soros-funneled-15-m-plus-to-groups-rallying-for-hamas/>.

against Israel, although organizations which have received subgrants, donations, and sponsorships from the Tides Foundation have organized protests.

However, in reposting these articles, Reddit and 4Chan users **began to make unsubstantiated claims** that Soros was **directly paying protesters**. These social media users reposted the prior reporting deceptively, omitting important context that the Open Society Foundations – not Soros himself – distributed grants to the Tides Foundation and that the Tides Foundation then distributed subgrants to further organizations which organized protests. Moreover, many of the accounts posting these claims did so in malicious ways, including spamming multiple identical posts at the same time, oftentimes across multiple subreddits, while using antisemitic language.

- **Example post from Reddit, April 17, 2024:**



The ASP investigative team has since confirmed that at least three Reddit accounts which posted this out of context content have either been **suspended or permanently banned** for violating the platform’s terms of service, providing a strong indication that there was a degree of either coordinated inauthentic behavior or hate speech involved in the amplification of this narrative. The removal of these Reddit accounts, ostensibly for engaging in bot-like behavior, is a critical finding that helps to explain the rapid amplification of this narrative as it evolved.

## Second evolution of the narrative

One week after the emergence of the unsubstantiated claims made on Reddit and 4Chan that Soros was directly paying university protesters, two primary developments occurred. Firstly, **multiple right-leaning and far-right media outlets began reporting these claims as conclusive and evidence-based**. Many outlets, including [The New York Post](#), [Fox](#), [Breitbart](#), and [ZeroHedge](#), expanded their claims beyond just Soros, claiming

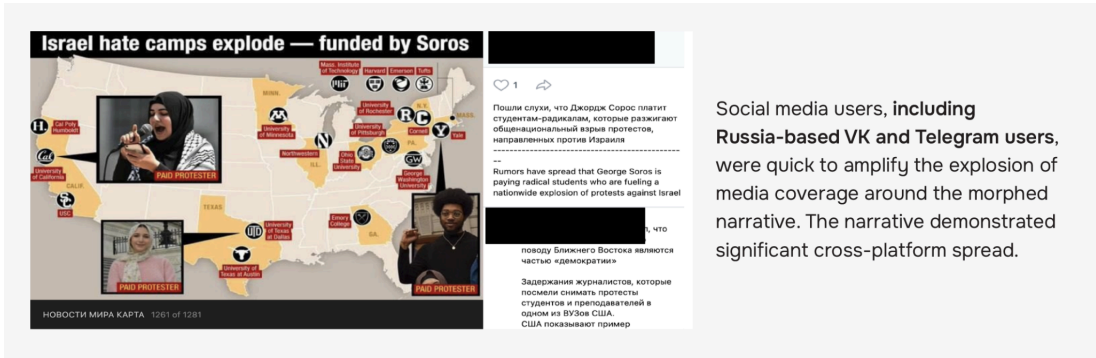
that other progressive philanthropists – including The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund – were also paying protesters directly. Like Soros and the Open Society Foundations, the Gates and Rockefeller foundations have distributed grants to the Tides Foundation, which in turn distributed subgrants to further organizations, some of which have organized protests against Israel. However, there remains no evidence to support the claim that George Soros, Bill Gates, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have ever directly paid any protesters involved in the pro-Palestine actions across America.

Secondly, the investigative team at WIRED [reported on](#) an **uptick in coordinated inauthentic behavior** surrounding this narrative on X. Antibot4Navalny, a research collective which has tracked the Kremlin-run bot network Doppelganger for several years, first identified the uptick. The group found that Doppelganger achieved more than **130,000 views** on X by amplifying this morphed narrative, using hundreds of bot accounts to post forged versions of real news websites, with deceptive URLs and fake headlines designed to create political uproar. One such headline featured on a fake version of the *Washington Post's* website was “shared by over 750 bot accounts multiple times, creating almost 6,000 retweets in total,” according to WIRED.

- **Example Doppelganger forgery:**

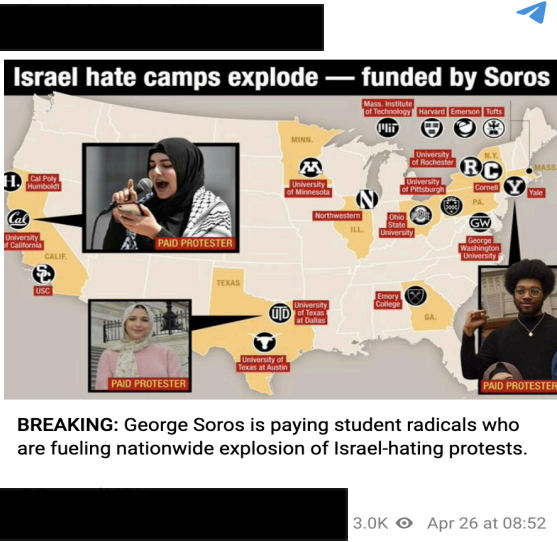


- Example post from VK, April 26, 2024:

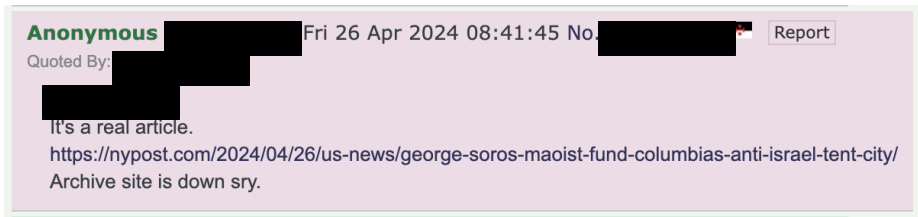


Social media users, including Russia-based VK and Telegram users, were quick to amplify the explosion of media coverage around the morphed narrative. The narrative demonstrated significant cross-platform spread.

- Example post from Telegram, April 26, 2024:

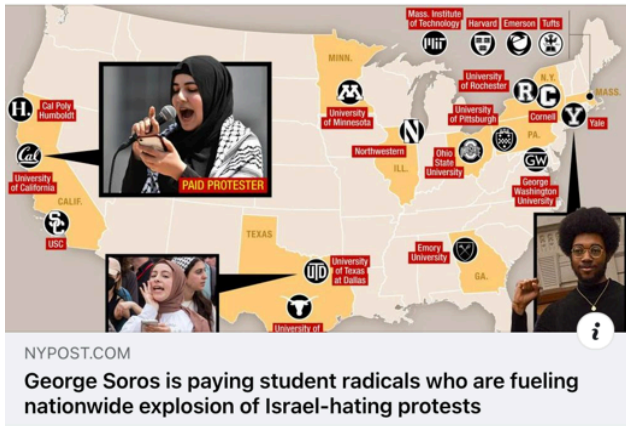


- Example post from 4Chan, April 26, 2024:



 **Congresswoman Beth Van Duyne** · April 26 at 10:47 AM · 🌐

America-hating, chaos-funding, George Soros at work again trying to destabilize our nation on behalf of Hamas terrorists. The correct response is what Texas did to stop these radical, paid agitators, who want Israel (and America) wiped from the Earth, from occupying space at our public universities.



In addition to Russia-based social media users, anonymous 4Chan users, and bot accounts associated with Doppelganger, The American Sunlight Project has identified at least six members of Congress to have either posted about or linked to media coverage of the false narrative in their official capacities. Following Rep. [Elise Stefanik's](#) (NY-21) reposting of the narrative on her personal campaign Facebook account, Reps. [Beth Van Duyne](#) (TX-24) and [Marjorie Taylor Greene](#) (GA-14) respectively posted about this narrative using their **official, taxpayer-funded** Facebook and X accounts (see image on following page). [Speaker Mike Johnson](#) (LA-04), Reps. [Mark Alford](#) (MO-04), [Nancy Mace](#) (SC-01), and [Ronny Jackson](#) (TX-13) discussed the morphed narrative in their official capacities during televised and printed news media interviews. Beyond

this, The American Sunlight Project has further identified an active fundraising campaign run jointly by the National Republican Senatorial Committee (see image on the first page) and National Republican Congressional Committee, which repeatedly states that Soros and other donors are directly funding “pro-Hamas protesters.”

## Conclusion

As the U.S. response to the Israel-Hamas war motivates one of the most volatile domestic political environments in recent memory, it is more important than ever that Americans know how and by whom the content surrounding the conflict is amplified. Malign actors – within the U.S. and abroad – stand prepared to exacerbate pre-existing societal fissures with false or misleading narratives, ready-made for the exploitation of such high-tension moments.

This investigative brief highlights the information laundering process, demonstrating how years-old conspiracy theories are recycled and adapted to current events, how coordinated inauthentic behavior and hate speech are used by foreign adversaries to reach hundreds of thousands of Americans online, and how evidence-free claims being reported as fact – by both news media and elected officials – damages U.S. interests.

**The American Sunlight Project will continue monitoring the information environment** for prominent malign narratives like those analyzed in this brief, and remains committed to ensuring that citizens have access to trustworthy sources to inform the choices they make in their daily lives.