



Published on *The American Task Force on Palestine* (<http://www.americantaskforce.org>)

[Home](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#) > [Printer-friendly PDF](#)

Partnering for peace Zionist, Arab groups share interns for summer

Media Mention of Alison Becker in Washington Jewish Week - August 20, 2008 - 12:00am
<http://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=4&ArticleID=11111> [1]

Every June, countless young people descend on Washington, D.C., and immerse themselves in the traditional internship experience: attending think tank briefings, conducting research at the office and, of course, networking at happy hours. This summer, Ben Schildkraut, Dana Montalto and Dana Pozza took part in this ritual, though it differed in some respects from the average internship program: They spent their time working to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and they did it on behalf of organizations on "each side" of the conflict.

Americans for Peace Now, a Jewish Zionist organization, and the American Task Force on Palestine, an Arab American organization, teamed up to sponsor the Partners for Peace internship program, with students splitting their time between the two organizations.

APN and ATFP have worked together for some time, said APN spokesperson Ori Nir, so it was not a huge leap for the two organizations to co-sponsor the program. "The idea was basically to send a message that a pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian organization can work together, can pool resources," he said, "and really try to give students a broader perspective of the conflict."

Both organizations advocate for a two-state solution, and Nir could not think of any major issues where the organizations disagreed. "We chose to work with ATFP because we agree with them, because our agendas are shared," he said.

Alison Becker, ATFP 's administrative coordinator, agreed. "There are some smaller issues where we wouldn't necessarily be giving the same messages," she said, but the overall goal is the same.

Schildkraut, 20, of Tenafly, N.J., is entering his junior year at the University of Virginia. His path to the internship began last year when he went on a Birthright Israel trip with the UVA Hillel. "It was a fantastic trip," he said, "and spurred my interest in Israel and the region in general."

In the spring, he took an international relations course focused on the Middle East, and when his professor told the class about the internship, he applied.

Montalto remembers studying ancient Egypt in sixth grade and wanting to go there, but hearing that the Middle East was dangerous at the time. Now 20 years old, the Arlington, Mass., resident and rising senior at Wellesley University said the complexity of the issue intrigues her.

"So many people have worked on this conflict over the years, and it still hasn't been solved," she said. "I think there is a solution out there, that if we keep working on it, that something will come out. And I would love to be another person working towards a peaceful solution."

Pozza, 23, is from Destin, Fla., and expects to receive her master's from the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky in December. But it was her interest in religion that led her to further explore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She later studied the Middle East and took Arabic.

After beginning an internship in Lebanon in summer 2006, only to be evacuated out during the Second Lebanon War, she knew that she wanted to do something in Washington to promote peace.

At APN, Schildkraut wrote several articles for the "Middle East Report," a weekly newsletter highlighting events that may have been missed by the major newspapers; at ATFP, he did some development work.

Montalto created a database for APN of all the Middle East-related actions taken by Congress since 2004. " 'Dear colleague' letters, any resolutions, bills that were passed" all went into the database, she said. "It was time consuming but it felt rewarding to see it" finished. At ATFP, she monitored the regional and international press on the conflict.

At ATFP, Pozza conducted research for the organization's president, Ziad Asali, while at APN, she wrote articles for the newsletter and helped create an APN presence on Facebook.

Working with other interns at the Middle East Institute, the trio planned three programs: a screening of Paradise Now, followed by a discussion with Philip Wilcox, president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace; an after-work cocktail party and intern networking event; and a career panel with staffers from the State Department, the House of Representatives, nongovernmental organizations and other advocacy organizations.

Schildkraut, Montalto and Pozza also became friends over the summer, they said, and created a strong sense of community. "We got to know each other pretty well over the course of 10 or 11 weeks," Schildkraut said. "We formed a connection."

Montalto agreed. "It was weird to say good-bye to them because I feel like I'm going to see them later on in my life," she said.

The group mostly talked about politics with little focus on religion. "We recognized the role that religion plays, but didn't really get much into discussions of faith," said Montalto, whose mother converted to Judaism when she was 7 years old. "At this point, I'm still searching."

Pozza attended church regularly through high school and college, she said, and most of her family members would consider themselves Christian.

Schildkraut, who grew up in a Reform temple and became a bar mitzvah at his grandparents'

Conservative synagogue, said that his connection to Judaism waned during his teenage years, but has been strengthened through his experiences with Birthright, Hillel and his studies of the conflict. "It has given me a new meaning of what it means to be Jewish and reaffirmed my Jewish identity," he said.

The interns expressed a nuanced view of the conflict and the potential for reconciliation. "Both sides have legitimate grievances and legitimate concerns," Schildkraut said. "I don't think it's a zero-sum situation. É I don't think either side is right or either side is wrong, but there are a lot of delicate issues that are so hard to resolve."

Pozza does not see an end to the conflict in the near future. "I think a lot of the right opportunities are in place," she said, "but I don't see much promise for it at this time."

Montalto is more optimistic. "The most important thing [for people to realize] is that with enough political will, there is a solution out there that we could find," she said. "It's there -- we just have to keep trying."

She also said that young people likely view the conflict differently than previous generations. "We didn't see the formation of Israel; we didn't live through '67 or '73; we have a greater awareness of the effects of globalization," she said. "Both those in the United States as well as the younger generation who is living through the conflict will view it differently from the generations who lived through it before."

Nir agreed. "I have the sense that the youngsters are much less ideological and are much more pragmatic in their approach."

Becker echoed this sentiment. "I really got a sense from them that they understand that, as much as there is a rich history of the conflict, what it is now is politics and that it's a solvable problem."

Based on his experience this summer, Schildkraut said he hopes to form a joint dialogue program between the UVA Hillel and the campus Palestinian group. "I plan to be pretty actively involved with [the issue] through the remainder of my stay in college and hopefully beyond," he said. "I definitely think it's going to stay with me wherever I end up."

TAGS:

[Events](#) | [Daily News](#) | [About Us](#) | [Resources](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Donate](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[!\[\]\(870f5d5e9c0d57485634be3ecf52f3ca_img.jpg\) Front Page Features](#) [!\[\]\(66b14d8ba452f6f18b47935355b6120a_img.jpg\) World Press Roundup](#) [!\[\]\(bcb9bfd69e5b89da3d817cb72bfcfd1e_img.jpg\) ATFP in the News](#) [!\[\]\(0eb6abbd70294475dc7cb6513507500d_img.jpg\) Policy and Analysis](#)
[!\[\]\(950a63716dc9b13d42fd48df07c70375_img.jpg\) Briefing Summaries](#)

Source URL (retrieved on Apr 8 2020 - 8:01pm):

http://www.american taskforce.org/in_media/mm/atfp/2008/08/20/1219204800

Links:

[1]

<http://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=4&ArticleID=9268&TM=41520.64>