



Students' Revolution

Shifting the Political Discourse in America



Issue Brief

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From the North to the South, students in American universities and colleges are protesting against the brutalities of the Zionist regime in Gaza and demanding their universities divest from companies that support Israel. Slogans like “Free, free, Palestine” and “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” are echoing across campuses where encampments have been set up. This movement is considered one of the largest protest gatherings since the civil rights and anti-war movements of the past.

Students have resorted to large-scale sit-ins, rallies, encampments, fasts, and other innovative methods to express their outrage against the ongoing genocide in Gaza and the complicity of the US. In recent days, encampments and protests have occurred at more than 150 colleges and universities across the country, with the number increasing daily. For many protesters, divestment means cutting endowment ties to companies associated with Israel or those that do business with Israel. Additionally, protesters are calling for their universities to terminate academic engagements with Israeli institutions.¹

America is witnessing a phenomenon that is shaping its future course of action not merely with respect to Israel but also concerning global governance frameworks and foreign policy conduct. The US was the first state to recognize Israel, doing so less than 24 hours after its creation in 1948. Throughout all the Arab-Israeli wars, the US remained a staunch defender of Israel. In the UN Security Council, the US has consistently employed its veto to block every resolution against Israel’s interests. The Israeli lobby in the US dictates national and international policies. From businesses to policymaking institutions, the Israeli lobby is powerful enough to get any bill passed in Congress and to shape public opinion.

Things began to change when Israeli brutalities in Gaza crossed the limit, and graphic images of the devastation, death, and injured Palestinians began to shake human conscience across the globe. Moved by the sheer negligence of human suffering by world leaders, young Americans started to question US foreign policy toward Israel.

The anti-Israel movement gained momentum in colleges while facing increasing resistance from university and city administrations. University administrators have responded with heightened surveillance of faculty members and student groups. Several college campuses have been overtaken by students protesting against Israeli atrocities. More than 2,000 students have been arrested by police forces, including 100 from Columbia University, the origin of these college demonstrations.²

The pro-Palestinian movement has become a significant campus movement of contemporary times. It is noteworthy because it is motivated by a love for humanity and is not driven by personal interests of the activists. Despite facing harsh reactions, the students have vowed to persist until educational institutions sever ties with companies that profit from the conflict.

The faculties and administrations have generally resisted students’ demands, but there have been some instances of concessions, such as at Brown University and Northwestern University. Unfortunately, in some universities, protesters have faced accusations of violating university disciplinary measures, despite their peaceful demonstrations. Police have forcibly removed campus encampments, dragging protesters and using tear gas to disrupt peaceful protests. The treatment of these peaceful protesters by police and other governmental authorities is deeply concerning. Even more alarming incidents have occurred at certain universities, where snipers were positioned on the roofs of several buildings, such as at Ohio State University and Indiana University.³

The pro-Palestinian protest serves as a litmus test for the US government. If the government suppresses the movement, the US risks losing its credibility to object to the suppression of human voices and the suspension of human rights in other regions of the world in the future. Protesters are exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, which are guaranteed to all Americans by the US Constitution under the First Amendment, extended to everyone residing in the US, regardless of

¹ Sam Cabral and Ana Faguy, “What do pro-Palestinian student protesters at US universities want?” BBC, May 3, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-68908885>.

² “Riot police and over 2,000 arrests: A look at 2 weeks of campus protests,” *The Washington Post*, May 3, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2024/university-antiwar-campus-protests-arrests-data/>.

³ “Snipers Spotted On Ohio State, Indiana Bloomingdale Rooftops Amid Anti-Israel Protests? University Clarifies After Video Emerges,” *Times Now*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.timesnownews.com/world/us/us-news/snipers-spotted-on-ohio-state-indiana-bloomingdale-rooftops-amid-anti-israel-protests-videos-emerge-article-109607893>.



birthplace. Throughout its history, the US has prided itself on being a country where everyone enjoys freedom of speech. Any harsh measures to crush the movement are likely to backfire in the age of globalization.

American Dilemma

In the realm of US political dynamics, a social experiment is unfolding as youthful protests denouncing Israel's actions collide with the unwavering support for Israel from the American power elite. In this clash, two significant forces have been weaponized. Mainstream media channels propagate propaganda in favor of Israel, influencing policies at local, state, and national levels. The accusation of anti-Semitism against protesters by mainstream media has been unfairly used to silence and demonize Palestinian voices, diverting attention from the US-enabled Israeli violence against the people of Gaza.

Decisive coalitions of young Americans, including Black, Arab, Hispanic, Muslim, Jewish, and members of local churches, labor unions, and native communities, have united. They have issued a warning: if the US continues to support Israel, they will not vote for Democratic candidates in the upcoming November elections. Initially, the US power elite disregarded criticisms from marginalized and young voices, but the proliferation of campus encampments nationwide has forced them to take notice.

The coverage of the campus encampments by the mainstream media has revealed its role as a primary actor in the powerful elite that supports Israel's genocide and attempts to silence Palestinian voices while demonizing those who support them. Commentators, hosts, and reporters have echoed the same phrases and words used by US and Israeli officials to smear protesters. The US media endeavors to prevent comprehensive, open, and public discussions on Israel's actions, instead shifting the focus of the public to insignificant accusations.

Students have been condemned and accused by figures such as Biden of using hate symbols and language, advocating for the destruction of Israel, endorsing terrorism, and employing anti-Semitic rhetoric, which has created fear among Jewish students on campuses. Media outlets have depicted

protesters in campus encampments using phrases like "anti-Semites at work", "terrorists being groomed", "collapsing and crumbling universities", and "Nazi soldiers in the making", often echoing statements from US officials without critical examination. Campus protesters have framed the genocide in Gaza as the "moral issue of our age".

There is a sense among students that staying silent in the face of Israeli-induced starvation and US-funded bombings in Gaza implicates them in these actions. When this moral stance was twisted by the media into a narrative of pro-terrorism and anti-Semitism, it became evident that the media's ability to speak truth in the face of the power elite is severely compromised.

Israeli Media Misrepresentation of Protestors

University protesters have been depicted as radicals by Israeli media, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accusing them of being anti-Semitic and of spreading hate in American society. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, these protestors may be remembered in the future in the same vein as the pro-Nazi protests of 1932.⁴

These pro-Palestinian rallies are being characterized as terrorizing events and a threat to the peace of American society. To garner support from the West, Israeli media is framing the attacks of October 7 as "an attack on Israel is an attack on the West and its values". Pro-Palestinian protestors have been accused of engaging in hate speech against Jews. The Israeli propaganda of labeling university students as "Nazi soldiers" is itself flawed, as many Jewish students are also part of the anti-Israel protests.

A Transformative Moment in the US

The momentum of pro-Palestinian protests has not been consistent. This protest movement, involving faculty, students, staff, and others, began to take root after the encampments started on US college campuses. The efforts of students and their supporters in recent weeks should be seen as an extraordinary victory, as they have rattled university administrations and American society at large. Furthermore, students have exposed the underlying violence that these colleges can unleash, despite proclaiming themselves as paragons of academic freedom and free speech.

⁴ "US radicals must understand they do not represent the USA," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 6, 2024, <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-799980>.



A global movement has been sparked, with protests extending to Europe and the UK. The Palestinian issue, linked with Israeli actions deemed genocidal, has become a mainstream topic of discussion in the US, now resistant to censorship. In recent weeks, pro-Palestinian protests have inspired similar demonstrations in Britain, France, Australia, Canada, Italy, and other countries. According to a Gallup survey, sympathy for the Palestinian cause in the US has risen from 12 percent in 2013 to 27 percent in 2024.⁵ This shift is also seen as generational, with individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 being three times more sympathetic to Palestinians compared to those over 65.

The question remains as to how this support will translate into the 2024 presidential election, which is still uncertain. What is clear, however, is that the US is undergoing a paradigm shift with significant implications for the world. While the intensity of the protest movement may wane in the future, students have undoubtedly raised awareness of Israel's ongoing genocidal and colonial policies.

The ultimate solution to resolve this tension lies not in silencing students, but in persuading Israel to implement a lasting ceasefire in Gaza and ultimately reach a just resolution for the Palestinian cause.

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⁵ "Americans' Views of Both Israel, Palestinian Authority Down," Gallup, May 1, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/611375/americans-views-israel-palestinian-authority-down.aspx>.



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