University Encampments on Palestine

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Historic Anti-War Encampments in US Universities



Historic Anti-War Encampments in US Universities

Columbia University

The largest anti-war encampments at US universities protested the Vietnam War and compulsory draft.¹ Similar to what we're witnessing today, Columbia University was the epicentre of anti-Vietnam war protests in 1968.² Then, the protests resulted in students seizing five campus buildings and even briefly taking the dean hostage.³

Around a week after the protest began on 30 April 1968, approximately 1,000 officers from the New York City Tactical Patrol Force were called in by Columbia President Grayson L Kirk.⁴ The police arrested nearly 700 people on charges of criminal trespass and disorderly conduct.⁵ In some buildings, the police used force, injuring 148 people.⁶

The protests forced Columbia to cut ties with a Pentagon institute which was doing research for the Vietnam War and won amnesty for demonstrators who had taken part in the protests.⁷

Harvard University

Students at Harvard also protested the Vietnam war. On the night of April 9 1969, a national student activist organisation, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), pinned a list of demands on the door of the Harvard president's house. The group were opposed, in particular, to Harvard's engagement with military policy – Dow Chemicals which supplied Napalm to the military had been invited to Harvard for a recruitment visit in 1967 – as well as the presence of the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) on campus.

The next day, student protesters occupied the University Hall and were arrested, leading to wider protests and an eight-day strike, according to Harvard magazine. As a result of the protest, ROTC left the university's campus.

Kent State University

On 4 May 1970, the Ohio National Guard shot dead four Kent State University college students and injured nine others during a protest by 300 students against the Vietnam war and its expansion into Cambodia.¹² They were also protesting the presence of the National Guard on campus.¹³

The shootings caused outrage and led to more than 4 million students taking part in protests and walk-outs at hundreds more colleges and high schools across the country.¹⁴

Parallels with Gaza solidarity encampments

"One of the things that's really striking is that in comparison to the 1960s, we are seeing much less aggression and radicalism of tactics on the part of the students," said Angus Johnston, historian of American student activism. 15 "We have seen very little physical injury or property damage. 16 The encampments are outside rather than for the most part taking over buildings. 17 Compared to the protests of the 60s, particularly the late 60s, these protests are actually very, very mild. 18 And yet they're being met with a really harsh in many cases, governmental and administration." 19

Historic Anti-War Encampments in US Universities continued...

Students and academics emphasise the parallels between the anti-war protests in 1968 and today, as well as between Israel to Apartheid South Africa, to push for wider demands of decolonisation and demilitarisation.²⁰

At the time, US President Lyndon B Johnson regarded the survival of the South Vietnamese government as essential to US security, even as the cost of defending it mounted both financially and politically for the US government.²¹

Similarly, anti-Vietnam war protests in 1968 coincided with an election year.²² Gaza, like Vietnam, is splitting the Democratic coalition along historic fault-lines of generation, race, and class.²³ Pro-Israel groups are expected to pour millions into this electoral cycle, targeting pro-ceasefire Democrats.²⁴

"One of the things that's really striking is that in comparison to the 1960s, we are seeing much less aggression and radicalism of tactics on the part of the students... Compared to the protests of the 60s, these protests are actually very, very mild. And yet they're being met with a really harsh in many cases, governmental and administration."

Angus Johnston

Historian, The City University of New York



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Occupations & Encampments for Palestine Before 7 October



Occupations & Encampments for Palestine Before 7 October

Since its founding in June 2020, the UK-based direct action group Palestine Action has carried out several occupations of weapons factories supplying arms to Israel.²⁵

Timeline

April 2021

Activists from Palestine Action occupied the roof and sprayed red paint over the buildings at the UK headquarters of Elbit Systems in the Aztec West business complex near Patchway, Bristol.²⁶ In the same month, activists also occupied the roof of Elbit Systems factory in Tamworth.²⁷

19 May 2021

During the 2021 protests in Sheikh Jarrah and attacks on Gaza, four members of Palestine Action climbed onto the roof of an Elbit Systems-owned drone factory in Meridian Business Park, Leicester. ²⁸ The occupation lasted six days, and 10 arrests were made for conspiracy to commit criminal damage and aggravated trespass. ²⁹

10 June 2021

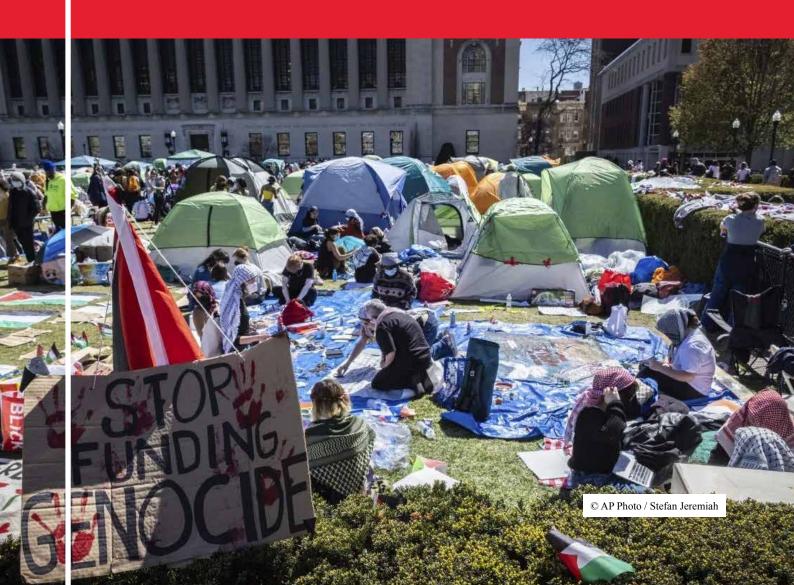
3 protestors from Palestine Action "stormed, scaled and occupied" an APPH drone factory in Runcorn.³⁰ Activists splattered red paint on the exterior, dismantled drone and aircraft machinery, and destroyed windows.³¹ The next day all three were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage and aggravated trespass.³²

14 June 2021

3 protestors occupied Arconic factory in Kitts Green, Birmingham, which provides materials for Israel's fighter jets.³³ The occupation ended when two activists were arrested on the roof of the building two days later.³⁴

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University Occupations & Encampments Since 7 October



University Occupations & Encampments Since 7 October

Since 7 October 2023, universities around the world have become the centre of occupations and encampments for Palestinian liberation.³⁵ Students have demanded a ceasefire in Gaza, Palestinian liberation, and that their universities divest from their ties to Israeli universities and corporations involved in the arms trade.³⁶







Arizona State University, USA

On 26 April 2024, students established an encampment at Arizona State University, demanding the university condemns Israel's attacks on Gaza and divests from Israeli firms.³⁷

Police attempted to clear the sit-in at Arizona State University, but prosecutors defiantly remained on a campus lawn after their tents were torn down and carried away by law enforcement.³⁸ Demonstrators attempted to gather what they could, and locked arms around a canopy that was left standing.³⁹





Brown University, USA

Around 80 students began an indefinite encampment on the Main Green, calling for the University to divest from companies linked to the Israeli government.⁴⁰







California State Polytechnic University, USA

Students at California State Polytechnic University, Humboldt, barricaded themselves inside a building for over three days, and the school shut down campus through the weekend and made classes virtual.⁴¹





Columbia University, USA

Students started setting up the Gaza Solidarity Encampment in the centre of Columbia's campus at about 4am on 17 April 2024, building tents on the campus lawn. ⁴² The student protesters said they would occupy the lawn until the university divests from companies with ties to Israel. ⁴³ Protesters at Columbia - partly organised by a group called Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD) - have called on the university to fully divest its finances, including its endowment, from companies and institutions that profit from Israel's occupation of Palestine. ⁴⁴

CUAD also calls on the university to cut links with Israeli institutions such as Tel Aviv University, to formally call for a ceasefire in Gaza, to end policing on campus and to "sever ties" with New York police (NYPD). After student arrests, another demand was added: amnesty for protesters who are facing disciplinary action from the university.⁴⁵ Some have lost their meal plans and housing, forcing them to find alternative accommodation.⁴⁶

Columbia president Minouche Shafik requested NYPD clear the encampment as it "severely disrupts campus life, and creates a harassing and intimidating environment for many of our students".⁴⁷ More than 100 students were arrested at the encampment over several days.⁴⁸ Many more students at Columbia have been suspended, and classes for the rest of the semester have been moved online.⁴⁹ U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Republican, called on Columbia president Shafik to resign "if she cannot bring order to this chaos".⁵⁰







Emerson College, USA

Boston police forcibly removed a pro-Palestinian encampment set up by Emerson College students on 25 April 2024, arresting more than 100 people.⁵¹





Emory University, USA

Students erected around 20 tents in an encampment for Gaza on 25 April 2024.⁵² The students demanded "total institutional divestment from Israeli apartheid and Cop City at all Atlanta colleges and universities". They added: "We are occupying Emory, not because it is the only institution that is complicit in genocide and police militarization, but because its ties are some of the strongest. Emory University, the Atlanta University Center Consortium, Georgia State University, and Georgia Tech have all intimidated and repressed students and employees who spoke out in support of Palestinians. These institutions have all refused to divest from Cop City and the Zionist occupation".⁵³

Several protestors have been detained so far, after police were called to campus within three hours of the encampment being established.⁵⁴





George Washington University, USA

Over 30 students set up tents at George Washington University on 25 April 2024, and over 130 students from Georgetown University marched to join them.⁵⁵ The students have called on the university to divest financial ties with Israel.⁵⁶







Glasgow University, UK

On 25 January 2024, student group Glasgow Against Arms and Fossil Fuels occupied the University of Glasgow's Hetherington building.⁵⁷ The activists vowed to remain there until the institution agrees not only to withdraw its investments in arms companies but to ban them from recruiting on campus.⁵⁸

In March 2024, Glasgow University students voted the Palestinian-British doctor and Glasgow alumni, Ghassan Abu Sittah, as rector.⁵⁹ Dr Abu Sittah performed operations in Gaza during the genocide and was a first-hand witness to Israel's violence and suffering.⁶⁰ His aims as rector are to give Glasgow University students the opportunity to declare their opposition to Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, to stand against the complicity of the UK government in solidarity with Palestine.⁶¹





Goldsmiths University, UK

Students at Goldsmiths, University of London, occupied part of a building to protest the college's response to Israel's war in Gaza. ⁶² The occupation of the two largest lecture halls on the lower ground floor of the Professor Stuart Hall building, where most of the media and communications teaching takes place, started on 20 February 2024. ⁶³ Student demands included: the university issuing a statement condemning the genocide, committing to assisting the rebuilding of Gazan educational infrastructure, committing to BDS, and revoking the IHRA definition of antisemitism. ⁶⁴





Harvard University, USA

Protesters set up a camp with 14 tents on 24 April 2024 following a rally against the university's suspension of the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee.⁶⁵







Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA

Starting 21 April 2024, MIT students organised a Scientists Against Genocide encampment, vowing to continue until the MIT corporation capitulates to their demands for the faculty to divest and adopt a clear, principled position on the genocide in Palestine.⁶⁶

MIT administration reacted harshly to student protests, reflecting the institute's long-standing ties to Israel. ⁶⁷ Since 2008, MIT laboratories have received millions of dollars in funding from the Israeli Ministry of Defence to conduct research in ballistics targeting, surveillance, cyberwarfare, and drone technology. ⁶⁸ The university also hosts events to connect students and faculty to weapon manufacturers like Elbit, Raytheon, Caterpillar, and BAE system, who supply the Israeli military with its drones, D9 bulldozers, fighter jets, and artillery. ⁶⁹ Lockheed Martin even sponsors a \$150,000 seed fund, administered by MIT, to connect students with its weapon laboratories and offices in Israel. ⁷⁰





New York University (NYU), USA

Students set up a Gaza Solidarity Encampment at New York University. Police have taken over 133 protesters into custody so far.⁷¹ Around 40 students at NYU Berlin and NYU Buenos Aires also occupied the main academic centres to support the students and faculty arrested at the Gaza Solidarity Encampment on the US campus.⁷² At both sites, protesters called on NYU to cut its ties with Israel, protect academic freedom, remove police presence from its US campus and pardon students and faculty facing disciplinary action for pro-Palestinian speech.⁷³





Northwestern University, USA

On 25 April 2024, students built an encampment at Northwestern University, where they plan to occupy the area until Northwestern stops supporting Israeli occupation and divests from Israel. 74 Protesters formed a human chain, locking arms to prevent police from pushing through to the encampment. 75







Ohio State University, USA

Around 21 students were arrested at an encampment at Ohio State University, where students are calling on the university to divest from its ties to Israel.⁷⁶





Princeton University, USA

Students began a Gaza Solidarity Encampment at Princeton University on 25 April 2024, called the 'Popular University for Gaza'.⁷⁷ The students' aim to "counter the bias of the educational system while building the movement for Palestinian liberation".⁷⁸ Two graduate students were arrested in the sit-in's opening minutes; tents were pitched in the courtyard for approximately six minutes before the arrests began.⁷⁹ Multiple professors held class in the courtyard, and protestors heard from a range of speakers from members of Faculty for Justice in Palestine (FJP), and from Larry Hamm, who participated in the 1978 sit-in in Nassau Hall to divest from South African apartheid.⁸⁰ The size of the crowd peaked at approximately 250.⁸¹





Rice University, USA

On 23 April 2024, Rice Students for Justice in Palestine launched a "liberated zone" on Rice campus, announced a two-day series of events and started construction on an "apartheid wall". 82 The protestors are "trying to liberate this space for a popular university where we can bring education that is not taught at Rice, bring education around the issues of the genocide we're seeing now, talk about the history of Palestine, the history of resistance, the history of occupation".83





Sciences Po University, France

Around 60 students started an encampment at one of the institution's Paris campuses on 24 April 2024. Within four hours, university administrators called in police to break up the sit-in after some students refused to leave. 84 Despite the police presence, protestors have resumed their encampment in the days since. 85 The protesters are demanding that Sciences Po stop funnelling endowment money to Israeli companies and other businesses, like weapons manufacturers, that profit from the war on Gaza. 86







Sorbonne University, France

Dozens of protestors camped out at a Gaza solidarity encampment at Sorbonne University in Paris, causing the university to close its buildings for the day.⁸⁷ The police then forcefully cleared the encampment.⁸⁸





Stanford University, USA

Students set up a 'People's University for Palestine at Stanford' and began a Gaza solidarity encampment. ⁸⁹ Protest organisers are demanding that Stanford divests from the arms trade, particularly any organisations with ties to the Israeli military. ⁹⁰





Sydney University, Australia

Students arranged tents, gazebos, and desks at the University of Sydney's Camperdown campus on 23 April 2024, forming a Gaza solidarity encampment. The protestors are demanding that the university cuts ties with arms manufacturers and Israel. 2





The New School in Manhattan, USA

Around 20 students at Manhattan's New School set up a Liberty Zone encampment at the Union Square campus on 21 April 2024.⁹³





Tufts University, USA

Tufts students also set up a protest encampment on 21 April 2024. Students are calling for their university to divest their financial interests from Israel, drop any charges against students protesting, and call for a ceasefire in Gaza.⁹⁴





University College London (UCL), UK

Dozens of students at University College London, the alma mater of the Palestinian poet and academic, Refaat Alareer, set up a Gaza solidarity encampment on 2 May 2024 to demand the university divest from Israel and end any potential complicity in Israel's war on Gaza.⁹⁵







University of Alberta, Canada

On 22 April 2024, students at the University of Alberta in Canada began a 'Liberated Zone' in solidarity with Gaza. ⁹⁶





University of Amsterdam (UvA), Netherlands

Students at the University of Amsterdam established an encampment on Monday 6 May, only to have police violently break up the student protest a day later. More than 120 students were arrested as police dismantled barricades set up by student protestors. Public broadcaster NOS shows police baton-charging protestors and smashing up tents at 02:00GMT on Tuesday 7 May. 153





University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada

About 80 students at the University of British Columbia set up an encampment on 29 April 2024, demanding an academic boycott of Israeli universities and that UBC divests from Israeli companies complicit in the oppression and genocide of Palestinians.⁹⁷





University of California (UCLA), USA

UCLA students and community members set up around 30 tents on 25 April 2024 to demand UC divestment. 98 The mobilisation's goals include UC divestment from companies that invest in weapons manufacturing for the Israeli military, transparent disclosure of UC financial records, severing UCLA's ties with LAPD, calling for a permanent ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, and boycotting Israeli academic institutions. 99





University of Chicago, USA

UChicago United for Palestine (UCUP) launched a Gaza solidarity encampment on 29 April 2024 to demand divestment from companies and organisations complicit in the genocide of Palestinians.¹⁰⁰







University of Bristol, UK

On 8 March 2024, Bristol students spent the night camped in a University of Bristol building as part of a sit-in to protest the university's complicity in Israel's genocide in Gaza. ¹⁰¹ Students are demanding the university call for an immediate ceasefire, cut ties with arms companies complicit in Israel's attacks and protect Palestinian students. The students continued to occupy the building for more than two weeks. ¹⁰²

On 1 May 2024, students resumed their encampment, restating their demands from the university. 103





University of Leeds, UK

On 8 March 2024, students from the University of Leeds began occupying a campus building in protest over the university's involvement with Israel. ¹⁰⁴ After pausing during the Easter holidays, students began a Gaza solidarity encampment on 1 May 2024. ¹⁰⁵





University of Melbourne, Australia

On 25 April 2024, pro-Palestine students from the University of Melbourne began their Gaza solidarity encampment with about 100 protesters fighting to have the institution cut ties with weapons manufacturers with links to Israel.¹⁰⁶

The Green MP for Brunswick Tim Read spoke at the encampment, expressing support for the students and condemning the University of Melbourne.¹⁰⁷





University of Michigan, USA

Students erected some two dozen tents in the middle of Michigan's central campus on 22 April 2024.¹⁰⁸ They plan to live in the encampments for two weeks to protest Israel's war in Gaza and pressure the university to divest its endowment from companies that support Israel or could profit from its war.¹⁰⁹







University of Minnesota, USA

On 23 April 2024 students set up tents as part of a Gaza solidarity encampment. Police arrested nine protestors after the students were told to disperse. 110





University of North Carolina, USA

On 24 April 2024, students at the University of North Carolina established encampments calling for their institutions of higher education to condemn Israel's war on Gaza and divest from Israeli firms.¹¹¹





University of Nottingham, UK

Demilitarise University of Nottingham began an occupation of the Trent building outside the vice chancellor's office. 112 "The university has taken over £43 million from arms companies. It has strategic research partnerships with companies such as BAE systems and Rolls Royce". 113

The students are demanding that "the university cuts its ties with these companies complicit in the slaughter of thousands of innocent people and commits to building partnerships with sustainable, ethical research companies instead".¹¹⁴





University of Newcastle, UK

Students began a Gaza solidarity encampment on 2 May 2024, protesting the genocide in Gaza. 115





University of Pennsylvania, USA

At the University of Pennsylvania, students began a Gaza solidarity encampment on 25 April 2024 following a wider protest that originated at Philadelphia city hall.¹¹⁶







University of Pittsburg, USA

Since 23 April 2024, students at the University of Pittsburg have organised an encampment demanding the University of Pittsburg divest from the Israeli government and any companies complicit in what they say are crimes of genocide.¹¹⁷





University of Queensland, Australia

Students at University of Queensland began a Gaza solidarity encampment on 29 April 2024. The students want disclosure of and divestment from all university activities that support Israel, as well as a ceasefire and the end of government ties to Israel. 119





University of Rochester, USA

More than a dozen students gathered at an encampment at the University of Rochester on 23 April 2024 to protest Israel's invasion of Gaza. 120





University of Sheffield, UK

On 1 May 2024, students at the University of Sheffield began a mass encampment in solidarity with the Palestinian people and in protest against what they view is their university's complicity in Israeli apartheid and the ongoing bombardment of Gaza.¹²¹





University of Texas (UTD), USA

Students at the University of Texas set up an encampment on campus 1 May 2024, joining the nationwide demonstrations over the war in Gaza. Similar to other campus protests across the USA, the group is demanding that UTD divest from corporations with ties to the Israeli military, and want the university to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, among other demands. In response to the encampment, hundreds of local and state police — including some on horseback and holding batons — bulldozed into protesters, at one point sending some tumbling into the street. Officers pushed their way into the crowd and made 34 arrests at the behest of the university and Texas Governor Greg Abbott. Police left after hours of efforts to control the crowd, and about 300 demonstrators returned to sit on the grass and chant.







University of Valencia, Spain

Students at the University of Valencia also began a Gaza solidarity encampment. 125





Vanderbilt University, USA

Vanderbilt University students set up an encampment on campus, in protest of the university administration's silence on genocide in Gaza, and in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza.¹²⁶





Warwick University, UK

On 26 April 2024, a group of students from 'Warwick Stands with Palestine' set up tents on the Warwick campus piazza and established a Gaza solidarity encampment.¹²⁷ They are calling for the University to cut ties with companies funding Israeli genocide in Gaza, in particular, Rolls-Royce, Moog, and BAE Systems.¹²⁸





Yale University, USA

On 28 April 2024, following a pro-Palestine rally that saw around 1,000 protesters marching through downtown New Haven and the Yale campus, around 250 prodivestment protesters set up a new Gaza solidarity encampment with around 40 tents on Cross Campus.¹²⁹

It was the second encampment to appear on campus in just over a week, following a three-night encampment on Beinecke Plaza that ended with the arrest of 44 student protesters and a nine-hour blockage of the intersection of College and Grove streets on April 22. 130

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Non-University Occupations & Encampments Since 7 October



Non-University Occupations & Encampments Since 7 October

Brighton Peace Camp, UK

On 16 March, a Peace Camp was set up on Lewes Road in Brighton. Activists are occupying the space to protest the nearby L3Harris weapons factory in Moulsecoomb and the manufacturer's role in Israel's genocide of Palestinians.¹³¹ It has lasted for more than a month so far, despite Brighton council' intention to dismantle the camp.¹³²

Glasgow City Chambers, UK

Activists of the Gaza Genocide Emergency Committee (GGEC) entered Glasgow City Chambers, occupying the lobby as they demanded that the council take a stand against Israel's ongoing massacre of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.¹³³

Gaza Solidarity Encampment outside the Scottish Parliament, UK

On 26 April 2024, activists set up a Liberated Zone outside the Scottish Parliament. Campaigners with the Gaza Solidarity Camp Scotland have said they are doing so in protest over the Scottish and UK government's complicity in genocide. ¹³⁴





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Police Brutality in the US & its Relationship to Israel



Police Brutality in the US & its Relationship to Israel

The brutality being displayed by police towards students participating in encampments and occupations is deeply connected to the violence of the Israeli Defence Forces, as US police departments go to Israel for training and are trained in the US by members of the Israeli military, particularly those stationed at the US-Mexico border.¹³⁵

Since 1997, law enforcement officers from up to 12 US states have visited Israel periodically in what are known as 'Police Unity Tours'. ¹³⁶ Upon their return to the US, these exchanges have been known to expand surveillance, and increase justifications in racial profiling and the suppression of public protests through use of force. ¹³⁷

Law enforcement officials from Baltimore, Florida, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, California, Arizona, Connecticut, New York, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Georgia, Washington state as well as the DC Capitol police have all travelled to Israel for training. Thousands of others have received training from Israeli officials in the US. Many of these trips are taxpayer-funded. 139

In September 2012, the New York Police Department opened an Israeli branch at the Sharon District Police Headquarters in Kfar Saba. ¹⁴⁰ The NYPD decided to open an Israeli branch because the Israeli police is one of the major police forces with which the NYPD maintains close relations and daily contact. ¹⁴¹

Many of the abuses documented by US police departments parallel violations by Israeli military, security and police officials. For example, US police departments have used unreasonable force during interactions, especially against those with mental health issues, juveniles, and people who present little or no threat against others, such as those already restrained. For years, Amnesty International has found Israeli military, security and police forces responsible for the same behaviour.

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Politicians' Reactions

US President Joe Biden condemned pro-Palestinian activists for acts of "blatant" antisemitism during protests at Columbia University.¹⁴⁵

The White House's Deputy Press Secretary, Andrew Bates, said: "while every American has the right to peaceful protect, calls for violence and physical intimidation targeting Jewish students and the Jewish community are blatantly antisemitic, unconscionable, and dangerous – they have absolutely no place on any college campus, or anywhere in the United States of America. And echoing the rhetoric of terrorist organisations, especially in the wake of the worst massacre committed against the Jewish people since the Holocaust, is despicable". 146

Israel prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the protests were "horrific", antisemitic and must be quelled.¹⁴⁷

Former US President Donald Trump has labelled the pro-Palestine campus protests as worse than the Charlottesville white supremacist rally.¹⁴⁸

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and top police officials blamed "outside agitators" for stirring up protests at Columbia and New York University and "really trying to use this as an opportunity to cause violence in our city". 149

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis described the situation at Columbia and other campuses as "inmates run[ning] the asylum." ¹⁵⁰

Texas Governor Greg Abbott, stated that the protestors "belonged in jail" and continued claiming that the protests were "hate-filled, antisemitic protests" and anyone engaging in them should be expelled.¹⁵¹

Footnotes

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