

American Paradox: Campus Protests in U.S. Universities

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Nearly seven months have passed since Operation Al-Aqsa Storm—a military-grade terrorist attack carried out by sunni Islamist terror outfit Hamas and supported by four other Palestinian terrorist groups. This dreaded terrorist attack resulted in tragic deaths of approximately 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals, and more than 240 people were taken hostage into Gaza from Israel, marking it as Israel's deadliest day since its founding in 1948. In response to the terrorist attacks, Israel vowed to annihilate Hamas, launching a series of airstrikes and subsequent ground operations inside Gaza. According to the latest reports from the Hamas-controlled health ministry in Gaza, at least 34,596 individuals have been killed in Gaza since then. Fast forward to today, in the aftermath of the attack and Israel's subsequent response, universities across the United States have become epicentres of heated debate, discord, and violence characterised by anti-Semitic and anti-Israel rhetoric. In the past month alone, escalating contentions at US universities have led to the arrest of over 1500 protesters across 30 U.S. campuses. This unfolding scenario casts a sobering light on the United States, a nation that brands itself as a global proponent of human rights and freedom of expression, underscoring the imperative for the U.S. to embody the principles it espouses, lest its credibility, be called into question.

Protests at US universities against Jews and the state of Israel began within a few hours of Hamas's act of terror in Oct 07, as fervent supporters of the Palestinian cause congregated in college common areas, their jubilation over the violence against Jews casting a shadow over humanity and ideals of inclusivity on US campus. Among the first, Harvard University, Columbia University, and Georgetown University thrust into the spotlight as pro-Palestinian academic staff and students voiced and expressed condemnation of Israel's response to Hamas's missile and land assault. This condemnation, often framed as a broader critique of Israel's policies resulted in harassment and intimidation of Jewish students, faculty and Israeli supporters. In the months that followed, with sporadic incidents reported throughout the country, concerns about the prevalence of anti-Semitism

on American campuses intensified. The escalation prompted a congressional hearing on December 5, 2023, revealing troubling undercurrents of anti-Semitism within academic circles. Testimony illuminated entrenched agendas within US academia, with some professors seemingly endorsing views that could be construed as justifying the genocide of Jews under certain "contexts". The hearing, during which former university presidents Claudine Gay of Harvard and Liz Magill of the University of Pennsylvania subsequently stepped down from their positions, and incumbent president Sally Kornbluth of MIT faced intense scrutiny, highlighted an overall lack of clear intent to address anti-Semitism within these top US educational institutions. Interestingly, despite five hours of congressional questioning, the university academicians stopped short of providing clear answers regarding whether calls for the genocide of Jews would violate their institution's policies, exposing deep-seated agendas driven within US academia and university structures, often bolstered by professors. Since then, US universities have been under scrutiny for anti-Semitic leanings, especially amidst the ongoing situation in West Asia vis-à-vis Israel and Gaza.

Amid the unfolding geopolitical events in West Asia, the narratives within U.S. universities against Jews intensified. This escalation was marked by increased calls for funding cuts, sanctions, and other measures targeting Jewish students and supporters of Israel. This heightened discourse, fueled by anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiments, saw parallels drawn by Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel strongly condemned these developments, describing them as similar to the anti-Jewish rallies that occurred in Germany during the 1930s, a period marked by the alarming ascent of the Nazi party prior to World War II and the Holocaust.

The latest escalation in US universities imploded after Congressional hearing on April 17, which served as a continuation of a previous session in December. The earlier session had already led to significant consequences, including the resignations of the presidents of Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania. In the April session, Nemat Shafik, the president of Columbia University, was called to testify. This inquiry, spearheaded by Republican legislators, aimed to investigate the prevalence of anti-Semitic activities in America's most politically active universities, Columbia in the heart of New York. Columbia University, positioned uniquely with the one of the largest Jewish student body in the U.S., a robust Middle East program, a significant Arab Muslim population, and a dual degree program with Tel-Aviv University, found itself at the crossroads of these debates. The university's historical commitment to activism dating back to the 1960s amplified its role in ongoing US university crisis. Taking cue from the earlier hearing, Shafik appeared to have come

highly prepared for this hearing and almost spontaneously fell in line what the legislators wanted to hear from her.

Upon returning to Columbia University, President Shafik faced immediate resistance when students, defying her authority, established a pro-Palestinian encampment or what they termed 'Liberated Zones' on campus. This protest was significantly funded by George Soros and other associated sources, with SJP receiving \$300,000 from Soro's Open Society Foundations since 2017 and \$355,000 from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund since 2019. The encampment involved groups like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), and Within Our Lifetime, all of which were subsequently suspended. The New York Police were called in, leading to clashes. Similar encampment protests, termed 'Liberated Zones,' emerged at Harvard, Yale, Berkeley, Ohio State University, and Emory, organised by branches of the Soros-backed SJP. These groups, which described a recent Hamas attack as "a historic win," leveraged their funding to sustain their activities, including providing tents purchased from Amazon, pizzas, and complimentary Pret a Manger sandwiches to protesters. Over 100 students were eventually arrested amid confrontations with police and reports of detentions of Jewish students in these highly hostile so called 'Liberated Zones'.

In conclusion, The United States, boasts itself as a beacon of human rights and democratic freedoms, is currently facing a profound critique from both within and outside its borders. This critique focuses primarily on the stark discrepancies between its international advocacy for human rights and the realities within its own domestic arena, particularly within the context of U.S. universities. Which have increasingly become hotbeds for intense ideological discord. These institutions once supposed to nurture informed debate and the free exchange of ideas; however, they are now scenes of divisive protests and agenda driven political activism. The pivotal role of faculty members in these dynamics cannot be understated—some educators have been accused of fostering a climate that tolerates or even incites anti-Semitic sentiments under the guise of political activism, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian situation. This has raised serious questions about academic neutrality and the propagation of extreme viewpoints that compromise the safety and inclusivity of the academic environment.

Moreover, the involvement of professional anarchists and their funding, as seen with contributions from likes of George Soros, Rockefeller Brothers Fund and involvement of corporates like Pret a

Manger, has added another layer of complexity. These influences often serve to amplify certain narratives while silencing others, thus skewing the discourse away from balanced exploration towards targeted activism. This scenario is emblematic of a larger systemic issue in the U.S.—the interplay of money, politics, and education in a way that can undermine foundational democratic principles.

The ongoing protests and the response of university administrations highlight a systemic failure to protect all voices equally. The rights and safety of Jewish students and other minority groups are increasingly jeopardised, leading to a situation where the academic freedoms of some come at the expense of others' right to a secure learning environment. This troubling trend is not just a failure of university governance but reflects a broader societal issue within the US where divisive rhetoric often overshadows constructive dialogue.

While the U.S. government is quick to highlight human rights concerns in countries like India, it struggles with parallel challenges at home—ranging from anti-Semitism, racial injustices to the suppression of free speech. This dichotomy between preaching and practice not only weakens America's diplomatic stance but also exposes U.S. of its hypocrisy. In essence, the United States is at a critical juncture. It must undertake a rigorous self-examination to resolve the contradictions within its educational institutions and broader societal structures before pointing fingers at others.