

II. United States

Biden and Congress Brush Aside 1st Amendment for Palestine Protests

by David Shavin

May 5—With President Joe Biden’s signal on May 2 that non-violent demonstrations against the U.S. participation in the mass murder in Gaza will no longer be tolerated, some more than curious developments in the United States need to be identified. There’s a dangerous dynamic that has taken over the rotten inner core of both parties, exposed by the explosion of demonstrations of students who, at their core, simply cannot stomach the type of adult world they are to enter—one where the American complicity in mass murder is so naked.

Biden’s May 2 speech first framed the issue:

There’s a right to protest, but not the right to cause chaos.... Shutting down campuses, forcing the cancellation of classes and graduations—none of this is a peaceful protest.... Threatening people, intimidating people, instilling fear in people is not peaceful protest—it’s against the law.

This sort of rhetoric masks a simple and ugly message: If you raise a controversial matter about which sections of the population are uncomfortable, you are unlawful, undermining peace, and causing chaos. There was a time when a threat actually had to be communicated, or some act of intimidation had actually to have been taken, to be against the law. Now there’s a new standard: “If I wish to stop your protest, I need say only that it makes me uncomfortable.”

Then, without citing a single instance of an actual anti-Semitic comment (that is, one made against Jews, not against the present government of Israel), much less a threat of violence against any Jew, Biden simply insinuated the same:

There should be no place on any campus—no place in America—for anti-Semitism or threats



White House/Katie Ricks



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A day after thugs attacked peaceful demonstrators at UCLA while police watched, President Biden on May 2 (left) attacked the First Amendment rights of peaceful demonstrators nationally with vile lies that they were “threatening people, ... instilling fear in people.” A week earlier, House Speaker Mike Johnson (right) had staged a personal confrontation with protesters at Columbia University and told the press he was not there to “coddle these people,” but to “stamp out” the protest and confront Biden over it.

of violence against Jewish students.... I understand people have strong feelings and deep convictions. In America, we respect the right and protect the right for them to express that, but it doesn’t mean anything goes. It needs to be done without violence, without destruction, without hate and within the law.



Wikimedia Commons/Author unknown

UCLA members of Faculty for Justice in Palestine brought their banner to the students' encampment May 1 to demonstrate their rejection of police-state lies and dirty tricks.

That led to his conclusion, in what appeared to be nothing less than a channeling of former President Richard Nixon. Biden said:

Make no mistake, as President I will always defend free speech, but I will always be just as strong in standing up for the rule of law.... In moments like this, there are always those who rush in to score political points. But this isn't a moment for politics. It's a moment for clarity. So let me be clear, violent protest is not protected, peaceful protest is.

A 'Clear' Presidential Lie

Biden's "clear" defense of peaceful protest came hours after the peaceful demonstrators at UCLA, who had been violently assaulted by masked thugs the day before, had had their encampment forcibly dismantled by the police. The day before, May 1, not one of the violent, hooded thugs who attacked the protest had been arrested. But on May 2, more than 200 protesters were taken into custody. Biden had not uttered a mumbling word about the violent attacks on peaceful protests the previous day.

What had occurred? UCLA Chancellor Gene Block had told alumni on that May 1 that things had been stable on campus until the counterdemonstrators attacked the pro-Palestine encampment, leaving at least 15 people injured. The "counterdemonstrators," some wearing black outfits and white masks, some waving

Israeli flags and chanting pro-Israeli slogans, had carried out assaults for several hours with baseball bats, firecrackers and chemical agents, undisturbed by campus security or police, in their attempt to dismantle the encampment. Student Aidan Doyle told *USA Today*:

I was dragged out into a group of counter-protestors. They hit me on the back with sticks, slashed my elbow with a metal rod, maced me and then threw a hammer at my leg.

Wednesday morning, Chancellor

Block stated:

However one feels about the encampment, this attack on our students, faculty and community members was utterly unacceptable.

But Block's tune changed suddenly, and Biden-like levels of hypocrisy broke out. Later that day, Block explained that, since the encampment had been attacked and was now "a bunker," it had to be dismantled. Then, on May 2, he elaborated:

Several days of violent clashes between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators put too many Bruins [UCLA students—ed.] in harm's way and created an environment that was completely unsafe for learning.

The "utterly unacceptable" assault upon a peaceful demonstration was now rebranded by Block as violence "between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators."

It is not difficult to expose the naked hypocrisy in Block's turn-around or, more significantly, in Biden's pronouncement. Beyond that, the dangerous dynamic afoot is the willingness of political leaders to apply the "Hitler big lie" technique—not simply against subjects such as Ukraine, Russia, China, but against large parts of the American population.

Deploying such a technique after two weeks of the mobilization—unleashed with the first encampment

at Columbia University on April 17, and grown to dozens and dozens of campuses by the time of Biden’s intervention—is a desperate gamble. Already, protest actions have spread to other campuses, to Canada, to Mexico, and even to American high schools.

Speaker Johnson Grabs the Bullhorn

Back on April 24, one week after the Columbia encampment began, House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), made a curious appearance at that university. He had spent the previous week pushing through the House a bill designed to send massive amounts of U.S. military hardware for Israel’s war on Gaza, along with the confrontations with Russia and China. After a private meeting to pressure the university president, Johnson chose to stage, for the cameras, a confrontation with the students. When asked by CNN’s Erin Burnett why he chose the confrontation, he replied that it was because

The Speaker speaks for the House of Representatives. I felt it was very important for that voice to be heard, not just about what happens in Columbia, but about what is happening right now around the country. We have to stand unequivocally for the right and the good, and I’m calling on all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to speak out against this, not to endorse it, not to coddle these people, but to say this has to stop.

When pressed about the unpopularity of his position with the crowd, Johnson noted that he was “not surprised that they didn’t welcome our visit, because we’re calling out their activities.” But, in fact, he wasn’t “calling out” any activities. He was there to “stamp out” the demonstration, and to confront Biden on the matter. As he explained:

We met briefly with the president [of Columbia—ed.] and her top officials right before we came out on the steps here. We encouraged her to take immediate action and stamp this out....

My intention is to call President Biden after we leave here and share with him what we have seen with our own two eyes, and demand that he take action.

The performance immediately elicited Johnson’s minimal goal. He was giving the Republicans who had opposed funding proxy wars, and who thought Johnson had sold them out with \$100 billion more in military aid to those wars, an “enemy” in common with him: students who support human rights for Palestinians.



CC/Darlene L, Matt Baretto

Los Angeles Police arrest student protesters, May 2.

For example, Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX) wrote on X:

I’ve had my strong disagreements on spending/foreign aid—but I applaud @SpeakerJohnson for going to Columbia.

But the staged confrontation was the model for turning a deaf ear to mass murder. Any college president or American legislator actually concerned about demonstrations on campus could have done the obvious thing, which is to sit down with the protesters and respond to what they are saying. Several institutions, such as Brown University and the University of California at Irvine, have taken that route—resulting in no encampments, no disruptions, and joint actions of students and administrators to look

into the institution’s involvement in funding the mass murders.

Can Johnson’s curious performance succeed in using the tensions over the Gaza war to save his position as Speaker of the House, push a McCarthyite witch-hunt in the country, and hijack the 2024 election process? As with UCLA President Block and Biden, the curious behavior is symptomatic of an ugly dynamic. Since there’s no hiding that some Americans are standing up and saying that the horrendous scenes

The former adopted the International Holocaust Museum’s very broad definition of anti-Semitism as the basis for prohibitions or prosecutions under anti-discrimination laws, to include the “targeting of the state of Israel”; so that, for example, Jewish students in the United States who object to Israel’s Netanyahu government can be labeled as anti-Semites and suffer legal and educational restrictions and punishments. Rep. Jerry Nadler (D-NY) made the obvious point in debate May 1, but was ignored:



Wikimedia Commons/Author unknown

Tension builds at UCLA May 1 as police stage their forces to dismantle the Palestine Solidarity Encampment of unarmed demonstrators.

from Gaza, which all can see, are actually immoral, the issue has been put on the table. It’s one thing to ignore a great evil, but it is quite another to have the issue be put before the social conscience, and then to turn on the messenger. The insiders of both parties, with Biden and Johnson out front, have committed for a new level of debasement of the population.

U.S. House ‘Abridges the Freedom of Speech’

The U.S. Congress went well beyond anything President Biden said, with the House passage (by a 320-91 vote) on May 1 of the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act, and Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries’ (D-NY) advancement of the Countering Anti-Semitism Act.

Speech that is critical of Israel alone does not constitute unlawful discrimination. By encompassing purely political speech about Israel into [the anti-discrimination law’s] Title VI’s ambit, the bill sweeps too broadly.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution says [emphasis added]:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; *or abridging the freedom of speech*, or of the press; *or the right of the people peace-*

ably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Following the mass police actions against scores of university campuses and thousands of students at the end of April, *faculty* at numerous campuses took up the protests, denouncing the arrests and violence against the students. Both Columbia and affiliated Barnard College faculty voted “no confidence” in their university presidents.

A statement issued May 2 by the Columbia University chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) read:

A vote of no confidence is the only way to begin rebuilding our shattered community and re-establishing the University’s core values of free speech, the right to peaceful assembly, and shared governance.

A Moral Solution

This ferocious “all of government” mobilization to suppress Americans’ right to speak for Palestinians’ rights, runs up against a very interesting and healthy dynamic, one of the United States regaining its moral identity as a “temple of liberty and a beacon of hope” for the world. Within 24 hours of the police being ordered into Columbia University and UCLA to silence the protests, in Gaza, Palestinian doctors, nurses, medical staff, and children, after all they’ve endured, paused to send a message to the protesting American students, thanking them for simply recognizing that, in Gaza, there are human beings, and that they have been suffering. Children addressed the camera, personally thanking the students at Columbia and other U.S. schools. One of their mothers, Nadia Al-Dibs, told CNN:

Arab populations haven’t cared about us, while students at American universities have felt with us, have felt the blood that spills from us, our buildings that get struck and our kids whose lives get destroyed ... a thousand thanks to them.

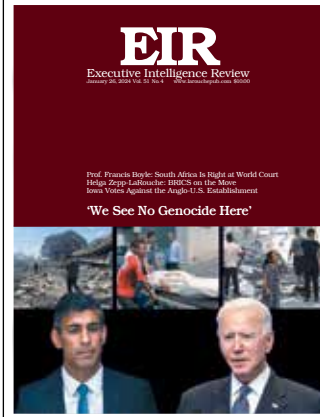
The most direct way to fan those feeble flames is to ground such hopes for the region in what has always been the basis for Jews and Muslims, survivors of Nazism and of the Nakba, to conquer the desert, as proven in the LaRouche “Oasis Plan.” It means, among other things, plenty of fresh water for irrigation

projects to green the desert, plenty of education and jobs for Israelis and Palestinians—plus the region’s whole Arab population—to provide for their families without lusting for their neighbor’s land. Further, the economies and populations of the United States and Europe stand to benefit from investing in, and providing machinery and technology for, such a development. There is so much potential involved in such an approach that even some Western banks might be saved from their advanced disease of speculation in junk paper.

The “Oasis Plan” is not only objectively the solution. The hope for, and deliberation over it is the pathway to actually achieve that solution. Demonstrators need the “Oasis Plan” to outflank agent provocateurs, those who will seek to turn frustration into violence. Americans need it to avoid descending into rival gangs, arguing over who can best pretend to defend Jews from non-attacks. Politicians throughout the Western world desperately need it, as they are pushed more and more to defend a police state.



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