

The Disgrace and Fall of the American Elite Campus

By Victor Davis Hanson

Anti-Israel/pro-Hamas campus protests have engulfed hundreds of college campuses. But the more coastal, blue-state, and supposedly elite the campus was, the more furious the violence that sometimes followed these demonstrations.



Even rowdier and more vicious street analogs shut down key bridges, freeways, and religious services. Protestors often defaced hallowed American monuments, national cemeteries, and iconic buildings. Visa-holders were among the worst perpetrators, adding ingratitude to their criminality.

The vast majority wore masks, not to protect from infection but to hide their identities. It is received wisdom, however, that those who wear masks do so for obvious reasons: so authorities cannot identify and punish those who commit crimes (e.g. the Klan, antifa, bank robbers, criminal gangs), or so that anonymity can help incite mob furor, given that participants feel that their vehemence increases once it cannot be traced.

More mundanely, why don't the students simply identify themselves, insist they want their "resistance" to be known,

and then hope their arrests will be proof of their courage to galvanize like-minded people to join them?

Why? One, because the students are sunshine and careerist revolutionaries. They see no inconsistency between shouting "Death to Israel," "Global Intifada," or "River to the Sea" one day and then the next, applying for a top spot at Goldman Sachs, a tony university, or a federal bureaucracy. Jacobin professors protest like it is 1793, but when politely arrested, they collapse into fetal positions and scream hysterically that consequences cannot follow their illegality, given they are privileged, superior intellects and moralists, with titles and degrees no less.

Two, the protestors, deep down, know they are aligning with the murderers and rapists of October 7 and that their chants are Hitlerian. And so few wish for their performance-art antics to become part of their public personas.

Demonstrators claimed they were peacefully acting on behalf of Palestine rather than virulently pro-Hamas, anti-Semitic, and anti-Israel. But their own bloodthirsty words proved the contrary—to the anguish of embarrassed campus administrators. The latter finally concluded that the overt venom was a bit too much and certainly injurious to their own administrative careers, campus fund-raising, and alumni support.

Note that there was a long hiatus between the slaughter and hostage-taking of October 7 and the entry of the Israeli Defense Forces into Gaza to destroy Hamas. Nonetheless, campuses caught fire immediately after the slaughter. A professor at Cornell characterized the Hamas mass murders as "exhilarating." Efforts immediately followed to harass and embarrass Jewish students, not to protest the IDF in Gaza.

Black Lives Matter issued a poster glorifying the hang gliders who sailed over the Gaza border to descend, shooting women and children. Many of the campus protestors, in Pavlovian

fashion, were pro-death and pro-Hamas the minute they heard Jews were massacred.

At Stanford, on the first news of the mass murder, a giddy lecturer separated Jewish students in his classroom from others. Such unthinkable faculty behavior soon became commonplace nationwide. Again, existentialist chants "From the River to the Sea" and "Global Intifada" were initially not predicated on anything Israelis did except die en masse.

But why did students scream at Jews, "Go back to Poland?" Almost no students were born in Poland and most had probably never even visited there. The point was instead likely that Auschwitz was in Poland. If a Jewish student had more mildly retorted "Go Back to Gaza," he would likely have been reprimanded, if not suspended, for "hate speech."

Again, the news alone of the slaughter and hostage-grabbing thrilled many faculty and students with dreams of the complete destruction of the Jewish state. None of them knew or cared that it was illegal for an Israeli or Jew to reside in Gaza, while two million Arabs are content citizens of Israel.

The other slogan, "Global Intifada," was simply a call to spread anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish violence throughout the Western World. And it soon did, reminding the West that their elite students had now out-Klanned the Klan in their Jewish hatred, with more imaginative masks and hoods, and with the fillip that the victimized crowd could pose as the self-declared oppressed even as they boasted, "*October 7* is about to be every day."

Of course, after the October 7 IDF entry into Gaza, the demonstrations became far bolder and more numerous, but *not* really different in their aims and rhetoric. More often, Jewish students were chased and assaulted. Few if any protestors asked whether supposedly identifiable Jewish students were pro- or anti-Israel, but simply harassed any who

seemed Jewish.

Why did the patently illegal occupation of campus property spread? Why the escalation to medieval anti-Semitic threats to Jews and various takes on the "Final Solution?"

One, throngs of poorly educated American students—many of them part of the diversity/equity/identity movement—saw Gaza as fuel for their Marxist-themed binary of oppressed versus oppressors. So they eagerly plugged Israel into the tired role of a white, interloping, neo-colonialist, and "settler" state—on the correct assumption that they had grown up with the assurance that smearing whites in racist fashion was not only tolerated but encouraged as a blow against white "privilege," "supremacy," or "rage."

These settler and colonialist smears were ahistorical. Jewish "settler" culture and civilization date before 1200 B.C.—some 1800 years prior to the Arab invasions that displaced Byzantine control of the Middle East. But then again, remember, we are dealing with the supposed moral and intellectual elite of America who have no idea what "Palestine" means or where it came from and certainly could not identify Gaza on a map. They often charge America with genocide, but otherwise they were not too bothered by the medieval-style beheadings, rape, and mutilations of October 7.

The students also know little of the "Final Solution" or what their prompters meant by "Go Back to Poland" (again, the ovens of Auschwitz). Instead, clueless, indulged students provide the American-citizen fodder for the protests. They know how campus unrest unfolds and the predictable Munich-like responses of campus administrators and blue-city mayors and governors.

At 11 million, Israel's population is vastly outnumbered by some 500 million Arab and Muslim neighbors, many of whom are existentially hostile. So the idea of an imperial overdog or

colonialist oppressor Israel is absurd. Most of the hatred in the Arab world and its expatriates on Western campuses toward Israel is driven by envy and frustration that Israel is a humane, free, prosperous, and lawful constitutional state in a way most Arab nations are still not. Add that the Arab world has prompted five or six serial wars against Israel, lost them all, and on spec resorted to terrorism to gain what their militaries could not—and yet Israel still prospers while its neighbors do not since that would mean to dismantle autocracy, tribalism, gender apartheid, religious intolerance, anti-Semitism, and inert socialist economies.

Two, the tip of the spear of campus unrest is from the Middle East. Such partisan foreign students and activists organize the rallies, often with planning and money provided by Palestinian front groups. They provide the keffiyeh props and the occasional Hezbollah and Hamas flags and logos.

Student guests in the U.S. are not shy about siding with the Hamas eliminationist agenda. Indeed, their protests were not just anticipated by, but integral to, Hamas' October 7 strategies. Hamas' murderous plan was always to retreat back to Gaza with hostages, which, along with their own Gazan civilians, would ensure the killers could murder another day. So they were to descend into a \$1 billion, Morlock-like tunnel complex—using thousands of Gazan civilians above in hospitals, schools, and mosques as collateral deaths to protect the terrorists beneath. Note the sick asymmetry: the entire strategy hinges on a humane Israel seeking to avoid killing civilian shields, a fact accepted by Hamas, which tries its best to sacrifice them.

The resulting surety of collateral civilian damage could then be reduced to Israeli-induced “genocide.” From there, useful idiotic American student unrest, along with Middle Eastern voters, would pressure American institutions and politicians to limit Israel's options and responses. And, presto, Hamas would emerge from the rubble intact and ready to plan its next

murder spree.

Middle Eastern students would also airbrush the nihilist agendas of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas as benign efforts of “resistance” and “liberation.” American students nodded, as if they could sanction baby burning, mass rape or an extinct Israel if packaged correctly as anti-Western violence. Moreover, the protests took off because American students assured Middle Eastern activists that in Joe Biden’s America, their lawbreaking would not be punished—no expulsions, no jailing, but instead likely covert support from sympatric officials. Their proof was the summer-long, violent 2020 riots, arson, violence, and assault of police.

Middle Eastern protestors, both students and not, assured that they were exempt from consequences, added contempt to their general dislike of their magnanimous American hosts. All knew that if American students in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank or Egypt, *mutatis mutandis*, had decided to lead pro-Israeli, anti-Arab protests on their hosts’ campuses, they would be imprisoned or, more likely, “disappeared.”

The students talked grandly of “justice” as they violently rampaged, vandalized, and exuded hate. None felt any would be deported or even suspended from university, much less jailed for criminal offenses. They proved prescient.

A final note: clueless elite universities have scant idea of the enormous damage done to their reputations by the repulsive optics on their campuses—the eliminationist chants, the overt anti-Semitism, the passive-aggressive violence, the unapologetic solidarity with a venomous Hamas, the unconcern with American hostages, the disdain shown to middle-class cops, maintenance and janitorial workers tasked with cleaning up the elite students’ often pigsty-like encampments, vandalism, graffiti, and trash, and, above all, the sheer ignorance of supposedly brilliant students who appear to know nothing of even rudimentary history, geography, or current

affairs.

These infantile campuses have a rendezvous with adult accountability, both public and governmental. And they won't like what is soon coming.

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