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Dear National Review:

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I write in response to the article *What it will take to fight campus antisemitism* by Solmonson and Fortgang in the May, 2025 issue.

After the Oct 7 Hamas attack, anyone with a heart could sympathize with the Israelis mourning the friends and family members killed and those anxiously awaiting word about the kidnapped. One could share the rage and the bated anticipation of the upcoming response. The Hamas operation was clearly going to be a disaster for the Palestinians, given the inevitable collateral damage of even a careful response by a moderate Israeli government. But the current government is not moderate. Anyone with a brain could expect that the Netanyahu regime would use the moment to rain horrific violence upon Gaza, finding an opportunity for a scorched-earth solution to the Palestinian problem. So it has proved.

Then came the protests. Do you really think that all those students, many Jews among them, turned into NAZIs overnight? Do you espouse a critical anti-semitism theory that anti-semitism lurks ineradicably beneath a portion of the American psyche, emerging anew given the opportunity? Clearly, many of the chants and violent actions have been odious. As someone once said (Stalin?) "Every political movement consists of idealists, opportunists and thugs." Certainly, with their gleeful support of Hamas violence and enthusiastic calls for the destruction of Israel, the thugs capture most of the publicity. Such people might as well be in the pay of Netanyahu so successful are they at deflecting attention from the real purpose of the demonstrations which is to publicize and condemn the mounting death toll in Gaza. Thanks to their narcissistic virtue-signaling the whole protest movement can be dismissed as a mob of hate-mongering anti-semites. So it has proved.

What should the universities be doing? First of all, independent of the current situation, the university must defend its students and staff against assault, harassment and intimidation. Sanctions for such unacceptable behavior should include criminal prosecution where appropriate. As your authors point out, many universities have been

failing in this fundamental task and deserve the condemnation they meted out. This is elementary, but does not touch upon the special role of the university. Based on my readings, I am of the opinion, shared by a large number of other Jews, including a fair number of Israelis, that attempted genocide is the appropriate label for current Israeli actions in Gaza and settler-colonialism accurately describes the situation in the West Bank. But I could be wrong. This is where universities should be acting. A university is not a place where political problems are solved. It is, or should be, a location where political issues are examined, discussed and vigorously debated. The academic response to the Middle East situation should be colloquia, conferences and discussions in which speakers with all points of view are actively solicited and heard, including supporters of Hamas as well as those who regard Netanyahu as "the Churchill of the Middle East" (Claremont Review). Students and others should be free to protest speakers or events, but disruption of events and the shouting down of speakers should be forbidden and punished. Again, when the offense is serious enough criminal prosecution is warranted. All this is what a vigorous defense of free speech a la Chicago means.

I note that the authors of the above referenced article regard free speech as entirely a device to show that Israel is good and that its critics are mistaken. In contrast with their laudable sympathy for Jews on campus, the term "Palestinian" never appears in their discussion.

Of course, after years of indulging cancel culture, the about-face I am proposing will require a courage and firmness of will which has previously been lacking among many administrators. Perhaps as they man up to defend their institutions against President Trump's financial attacks, they will find the strength to defend some principles. In fairness I should say that at my own school, CCNY, everyone, students as well as administrators, are, I believe, handling things well.

To motivate the demand for tolerance and to teach students to attend to opposing views, my fellow faculty members could point out that the bad behavior we are seeking to ban defeats the purpose of any popular protest movement, which is to enlist broad support from the populace at large in order to effect political change.

What about the protests themselves? Peaceful, non-obstructive protests should not merely be accepted, but defended, as is true for counter-protests as well. As for individual statements, there are understandable limits on what a faculty member may say in class, but social posts should be regarded as protected free speech. This includes vitriolic attacks on Israel as well as enthusiastic statements of support for Israeli policy. All such are legitimately subject to criticism, but should not be

subject to sanction. Within many universities the Palestinian cause is popular and defenders of Israel require and deserve stout defense against internal attack. Outside the university, at least among various government institutions, the reverse is true and it is the critics of Israel that require and deserve defense against external attack. In contrast, the more craven campuses have caved in to the external pressure and joined in attacking those with pro-Palestinian views, essentially the opposite of what they should be doing. Of course, when government agents show up to arrest those with unpopular views, labeling them terrorist sympathizers, the university can offer only limited protection though it should do what it can. Probably legal help from groups like FIRE or the ACLU will be needed.

While it is hard to imagine its realization at the moment, the goal for the region is clear enough: A world where Israelis can thrive in their country without fear of suicide bombers or rocket attack and where Palestinians can live in Gaza and the West Bank without fear of tanks flattening their homes and persons, or a neighbor telling them to "leave or die".



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