

# [***White House unbowed on support for Israel despite growing frustration from progressives and unrest on campuses***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BWJ-KSD1-JBSS-S06X-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

New York City (CNN) &#8212; When President Joe Biden visited Virginia to [*commemorate Earth Day on Monday,*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/22/climate/biden-earth-day-climate/index.html#:~:text=President%20Joe%20Biden%20traveled%20to,popular%20with%20youth%20climate%20groups.) he was joined by Sen. Bernie Sanders, a key architect of the clean energy proposals that Biden was rolling out. But those weren't the only items on the Vermont independent's mind.

Sanders, according to people familiar with the conversation, used the rare private time with Biden - a longtime Senate colleague who was once his rival in the Democratic presidential primary - to relay concerns about the administration's handling of the humanitarian situation in Gaza and to urge Biden to use [*newly authorized funding as leverage over Israel.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/24/politics/biden-signs-foreign-aid-bill/index.html)

"The main message was: 'You're going to have it in your pocket ... you need to hold it and condition this funding," Faiz Shakir, a longtime adviser to Sanders and executive director of More Perfect Union, told CNN. The money "cannot come in and just go right out."

The demands from the progressive flank of the president's own party come as protests over the humanitarian crisis in Gaza grow in number and intensity, most notably on college campuses, where protesters have decried the stance of "Genocide Joe." But where the domestic ***politics*** of the situation are concerned, the president and his administration remain unbowed.

This [*week's rapid spread of college*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/23/politics/joe-biden-morehouse-college/index.html) campus encampments meant to protest the war has ratcheted up the pressure on the US over its support for Israel. [*The temperature has been raised on campuses*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/25/us/college-protests-what-is-happening/index.html) across the country as the protests are met with [*concern about antisemitic comments that Jewish students have heard at some of the protests*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/21/us/columbia-university-jewish-students-protests/index.html) and clashes between protesters and police officers sent to break up the encampments.

Columbia University, the epicenter of the campus protests, has transitioned classes into hybrid mode until the end of the semester as the unrest reaches a fever pitch. Second gentleman Doug Emhoff spoke by phone with two Jewish leaders on campus, a White House official said, to discuss the immediate need to address antisemitism on college campuses.

Despite being just miles from Columbia and the most tense scenes of the protests, Biden will not be making a visit to campus as he holds events in the New York area Friday. Aides never seriously considered a visit by the president to campus, acknowledging the security situation and political calculus presented challenges too steep.

Speaker Mike Johnson, the top Republican helping to shepherd the foreign aid package through the House of Representatives, used his visit on Wednesday in part to demand action from the Biden administration in protecting Jewish students. Johnson, speaking publicly during his visit, said he planned to call Biden following his visit and demand action, including a plan for a potential mobilization of the National Guard.

"We have to bring order to these campuses. We cannot allow this to happen around the country," Johnson said. "We are better than this."

Biden, for months, has taken the pro-Palestinian demonstrations in stride - including at many of his public events - and advisers say there's no plan to change course. A lifelong politician, Biden understands there will always be some people who disagree with him, and those people have a right to voice their discontent.

But one of those advisers acknowledged the explicit threats targeting Jewish students has been particularly alarming.

"Protest the war all you want," the adviser told CNN. "What you don't have the right to do is target Jewish students."

Some senior advisers to the president - closely monitoring the growing unrest - are making the case that the protestors comprise a very small percentage of the student body and do not represent the views of the majority.

[*Recent polling*](https://iop.harvard.edu/youth-poll/47th-edition-spring-2024) conducted by the Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of ***Politics*** would seem to support that view. While just 18% of voters aged 18-29 approved of Biden's handling of the situation in the Middle East, it ranked near the bottom of issues that mattered most to them - with the economy overwhelmingly top of mind. And the young voters polled sympathize in equal numbers with the Israeli and Palestinian people.

But the optics of the situation remain challenging for Biden, who this week signed into law an aid package granting $16 billion in additional military funding for Israel as the protests raged on. While the White House has been dissatisfied with how [*Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is carrying out the war against Hamas*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/04/politics/biden-netanyahu-call-wck-deaths/index.html) and the volume of humanitarian assistance to Gaza thus far, it remains unclear whether that will materially impact what has so far been unwavering support for Israel from Biden.

In February, Biden [*released a national security memo*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/08/politics/us-military-aid-standards-memo-biden/index.html) stating that partners receiving military aid from the US must adhere to international humanitarian law. The White House must by May 8 certify whether Israel is complying. While the administration intends to meet that deadline, officials have not reached a conclusion, CNN has learned.

During a phone call earlier this month, Biden told Netanyahu the US could be forced to make changes to free-flowing support if Israel did not make immediate moves to allow more humanitarian assistance into Gaza, [*CNN has reported*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/06/politics/biden-netanyahu-israel-gaza-war-phone-call-details/index.html).

If the US concludes that Israel is impeding aid and not adhering to human rights laws, the White House could pursue a response that slows military provisions, curtails monetary assistance, or drastically ratchets up the [*public pressure on Netanyahu by the president. No*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/09/politics/biden-trump-threat-to-democracy/index.html) decisions have been made, officials have said.

And while Sanders sought assurances from Biden on how he was approaching the situation, the president remained characteristically diplomatic, Shakir, the Sanders adviser said.

"The question for a lot of progressives is, is there any accountability?" he asked.

CNN's Sam Fossum contributed to this report.

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