

# [***Did College Protesters Sway Joe Biden?***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0C-CMM1-JBR6-900M-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Length:** 939 words

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**Highlight:** The Biden administration halted a shipment of 3,500 bombs last week amid concerns Israel will use them on the Gaza city of Rafah.

**Body**

A week ago, President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*said*](https://twitter.com/atrupar/status/1786052619988857220) nationwide student protests had not made him reconsider any of his policies regarding Israel's actions in Gaza.

Biden had long rejected conditioning military aid to its ally despite the mounting death toll of Palestinians and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza since Israel launched its war following [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)' October 7 attack on Israel, which killed 1,200 people. Nearly 35,000 Palestinians, two-thirds of them women and children, have been killed since then, The Associated Press reported, citing the local health ministry.

In recent days, it emerged that the Biden administration [*halted a shipment of 3,500 bombs*](https://www.newsweek.com/john-fetterman-attacks-joe-biden-fox-news-rafah-1898239?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) last week amid concerns about Israel's plan to launch a full-scale assault on the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

And in an interview with [*CNN*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cnn?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Wednesday, Biden said that the U.S. would not supply Israel with weapons that could be used to invade Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering. However, he said the U.S. was still committed to Israel's defense and would supply Iron Dome rocket interceptors.

"I made it clear that if they go into Rafah—they haven't gone into Rafah yet—if they go into Rafah, I'm not supplying the weapons that have been used historically to deal with problems," Biden said. He also acknowledged that U.S. bombs had been used to kill Palestinians in Gaza.

The ongoing pro-Palestinian campus demonstrations played a large part in moving Biden to act, according to some political analysts and activists.

"President Biden announced today that he won't supply certain weapons if Israel attacks Rafah. Even if this policy shift saves only one life: still, that one life might be your own," Norman Finkelstein, a political scientist and notable Jewish advocate for Palestinian rights, [*wrote on X*](https://twitter.com/normfinkelstein/status/1788425323555484104), formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

"IT WAS PRIMARILY THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS THAT FORCED THIS CHANGE."

Ralph Young, a history professor at Temple University in Philadelphia and expert on dissent and protest movements in America, said the student protests likely influenced Biden to act.

"We can't know exactly what Biden is thinking," Young told *Newsweek*. "I do suspect that he is genuinely concerned about the deaths and the ongoing humanitarian crisis. I think it's partially his concern for the innocent civilians in Gaza, but the student protests probably did have a significant influence in getting him to act."

The White House has been contacted for comment via email.

Student protests over the war in Gaza began on Columbia University's campus in mid-April. Students erected an encampment and demanded the school divest from companies profiting from Israel's military operations in Gaza, including weapons manufacturers.

Columbia called in police to clear the encampment and arrest more than 100 demonstrators. That only served to inspire demonstrations at universities across the country and abroad.

Some schools have agreements with protest organizers, but others have seen violent police crackdowns, mass arrests and students suspended. More than 2,800 people have been arrested at college campuses across the U.S. since the first arrests at Columbia on April 18, according to a tally by The Associated Press.

Biden's handling of the war has divided [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and put him on shaky ground with [*younger, more progressive voters*](https://www.newsweek.com/donald-trump-beats-joe-biden-among-young-voters-1875391?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), who have historically been a key demographic in their electoral base.

He has condemned pro-Palestinian protests on college campuses that have turned violent or led to property destruction, saying Americans only have the right to protest if it remains peaceful. "Dissent must never lead to disorder," [*he said in an address*](https://www.newsweek.com/biden-slammed-being-authoritarian-after-protest-comments-1896818?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) last Thursday.

But his support for police crackdowns on student protests risks further alienating the same young voters he needs to defeat former President [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), the presumptive [*Republican*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republican?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) nominee, in November.

He may have been swayed to act after realizing that his Israel policy could see more young voters abandon him in November, said Yousef Munayyer, head of the Palestine/Israel program and senior fellow at Arab Center Washington, D.C.

"I think that for months, Biden, a committed Zionist no doubt, has been either in denial about or mislead about how devastating his Israel policy could be for his election chances," Munayyer [*wrote on X*](https://twitter.com/YousefMunayyer/status/1788396135570112587). "The student uprising that swept campuses across the country made it undeniable. Keep it up."

Young said students in his classes "have voiced strong objections about Biden's support of Israel," including some who said they won't be voting for him in November.

"I'm sure Biden is aware that his support among the 18-28 age group is weak and dropping precipitously, and this will affect his chances for reelection," he said. "So, this probably entered into his thinking when he decided to withhold some weapons shipments to Israel."

But others say student protesters and their supporters are unlikely to have much impact on the 2024 election, making up just a small fraction of the more than 40 million Gen-Z voters in 2024.

"Biden has been emphatic that he's not taking policy cues from campus protesters, and there's no reason to think he's changed his mind on that position," Thomas Gift, who heads the Centre on U.S. ***Politics*** at University College London, told *Newsweek.*

"Campus protesters constitute a small fraction of college students and young voters more generally, so making political calculations to appease this constituency would only harm him.

"If anything, the greater risk for Biden is being seen as not taking a hard enough line against campus protesters, which Trump has exploited as a 'law and order' issue under the current administration."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2390567/pro-palestinian-demonstrators-hold-short-rally.jpg)

**Graphic**

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators hold a short rally

Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images

Pro-Palestinian demonstrators hold a short rally after marching around the "Gaza Solidarity Encampment" in the West Lawn of Columbia University on April 29, 2024 in New York City.

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