

Massachusetts Peace Action: Cambridge City Council Fails to Approve Call for a Humanitarian Ceasefire in Gaza

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Body

Massachusetts Peace Action issued the following news on Nov. 29, 2023:

By John Roberts and Jackie King

In a move that stunned and angered hundreds of residents, the Cambridge City Council on Nov. 20th failed to approve a Policy Order calling for an immediate ceasefire in war-torn Gaza. Passage of the order would have allowed Cambridge to join cities across the country - such as Detroit, Akron, Atlanta, Wilmington, Providence, and many others - that are raising their voices for an end to the violence.

The Cambridge order was introduced by Councilor Quinton Zondervan and Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui, who cast the only two "yes" votes approving the resolution; the other seven councilors voted "present," which prevented its passage. That outcome followed a maneuver by Councilor Patty Nolan that forced an up-or-down vote by the Council, with no chance for discussion or amendments. The undemocratic nature of this procedural sleight of hand left many residents feeling disrespected and dismissed.

For more than three and a half hours, following a rally outside City Hall, some 140 people at the Council meeting provided passionate testimony for and against the Policy Order.

The Order as submitted read:

ORDERED: - That the Cambridge City Council calls upon President Biden to use his extensive political and financial leverage to demand an immediate ceasefire and the immediate deployment of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the immediate release of all hostages and prisoners of war; and be it further

ORDERED: - That the Cambridge City Council calls on everyone to respect the rights of freedom of speech and peaceful protest, and to not retaliate against anyone for expressing solidarity with the human rights of Palestinians or Israelis; and be it further

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ORDERED: - That a copy of this resolution be sent to the offices of The President of the United States, Joseph Biden, Senator Elizabeth Warren, Senator Ed Markey, and Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley.

This Order was carefully crafted to be a non-political, humanitarian call to stop the massive bombing of Gaza that, at the time of this writing, had already killed over 14,800 and wounded over 27,000 people, more than two thirds of whom are women and children.

One of the major reasons voiced for opposing the order was that it did not explicitly condemn the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on Israel. True, it did not. But neither did it condemn Israel for its role in the ongoing bombing. The Policy Order was attempting to avoid politics and blame, to whatever extent possible, and to simply cry for a stop to the slaughter of thousands of civilians with nowhere to go while hemmed into the Gaza strip.

Some people objected to the City Council taking any positions on national or international matters, saying that councilors should remain focused solely on local issues. Yet historically, Cambridge city councilors have proudly taken stands on issues of import beyond the city's borders. For example, they have voted to oppose apartheid in South Africa, to divest from companies that produce nuclear weapons systems, and to support the Back from the Brink campaign to abolish nuclear weapons.

Not a local issue? Our tax dollars are paying for the bombs that are destroying Gaza, dollars which could be used here in Cambridge for affordable housing, education, or health care. Companies within our borders are designing some of those weapons systems. Young people in Cambridge who protest our government's policies are being followed, doxed, threatened with losing their jobs or being blacklisted. Both Jewish and Muslim residents are feeling threatened by rising anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Yet our elected officials choose not to take a public stand?

Local bodies of government taking positions to influence higher bodies of government is a time-honored tradition in our country. While one small city on the East Coast of the United States will not influence what Benjamin Netanyahu's government decides to do, dozens or hundreds of cities in the US taking a stand can influence our own federal government, which up until now has provided financing and diplomatic coverage for continued violence in Gaza.

In Cambridge last week, those larger concerns were not addressed by the majority of our councilors. After hours of impassioned comment by the public, the City Council's votes were remarkably swift. Councilor Nolan immediately called the question, six of the nine councilors voted in favor, and further discussion and amendments were blocked. That led to an up-or-down vote on the Policy Order itself. Mayor Siddiqui and Councilor Zondervan voted "yes", Councilors Azeem, Carlone, Mallon, McGovern, Simmons, and Toner voted "present" and the order was defeated. (Later, some councilors deplored the lack of opportunity to express their views and possibly amend the document. In that case, why did they vote in favor of calling the question?)

What can one say to a City Council that will hide behind a "present" vote to defeat a Policy Order aimed at stopping the carnage in Gaza with an immediate ceasefire, delivery of humanitarian aid to a besieged people, and release of all hostages and political prisoners?

Praise be to our US Rep. Ayanna Pressley, who has been standing steadfastly with the rest of The Squad in Congress to call for a ceasefire, despite coming under intense pressure. Thanks to Mayor Siddiqui and Councilor Zondervan for their policy order. Would that our entire City Council could summon such courage.

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John Roberts is a retired longtime executive director of ACLU Massachusetts. Jackie King is a Board member and newsletter editor of Mass. Peace Action. Both are Board members of the Cambridge Residents Alliance. (Organizations listed for identification purposes only.)

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Gaza

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[Category: Political]

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Time for an Israel-Palestinian Ceasefire Here at Home | Opinion

Newsweek.com

December 1, 2023 Friday 1:28 PM EST

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The Newsweek logo is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif font against a solid red rectangular background.

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Byline: Lee Michael Katz

Highlight: A conflict overseas that hasn't greatly involved U.S. troops has still permeated American life from city streets to suburban shopping malls.

Body

Two deaths have already been linked to Mideast violence right here in America. Despite the new hostage releases, Paul Kessler and Wadea Al-Fayoume will never be coming home. The Jewish senior citizen and the 6-year-old Muslim boy weren't killed in the carnage stemming from the Oct. 7 Hamas massacre or the Israeli response, but in California and Illinois.

Their deaths are senseless collateral damage from a war thousands of miles away whose reverberations are tearing a fragile America even further apart. And while we celebrate the fragile ray of hope the temporary ceasefire and hostage and prisoner exchange brought, it's time to assess what the Israel-Hamas war has done here in the United States.

A conflict overseas that hasn't greatly involved U.S. troops has still permeated American life from city streets to suburban shopping malls, transportation hubs to campuses, along with our politics and social media. Both the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security have issued ominous warnings about homegrown terrorist attacks stemming from the conflict in Gaza.

Jews have been greatly threatened. A Pro-Palestinian group published a map of New York areas they claimed are somehow related to Israel's action in Gaza with a chilling title, "Globalize the Intifada: Zone of Operations." These include not only Jewish-owned businesses and organizations, but such crowded areas as Grand Central Station and the Museum of Modern Art.

The Mideast has even thrown a wrench into the 2024 presidential race, with some political handicappers speculating President Joe Biden's strong initial pro-Israel stance could endanger his prospects among young voters, as well as Muslims.

Anti-Israel protesters attempted to physically hem in members of Congress in an effort that no doubt brought echoes of Jan. 6 to the minds of Capitol Police. A California Democratic convention came under siege by demonstrators. The pro-Palestinian protests have shut down critical modes of transportation from the Bay Bridge in San Francisco to Union Station in Washington, DC.

Even cherished traditions like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade couldn't escape anti-Israel protesters who glued their hands to the street along the parade route. Even more paralyzing protests are planned during the busy holiday season to hold everyday American life hostage to pro-Palestinian policy concerns over deaths in Gaza.

Peaceful protest is a cherished American value, but obstruction and violence threaten all of us.

Jews are accosted or threatened at colleges, synagogues and on social media. Many are afraid to display any identifying signs of their religion. When students found out a New York Jewish high school teacher displayed sympathies with Israel after the Hamas massacre, she was evacuated from her classroom after being targeted while students stormed school halls. New York City Mayor Eric Adams called it "a vile show of antisemitism...motivated by ignorance-fueled hatred."

In 2023 America, Jews now have a visceral understanding of life in Germany as the Nazis came to power in the early 1930s. Even more frightening is how profound misunderstanding of the Middle East is roiling an already starkly divided America.

Our once-proud sense of American values has been so warped that posters of hostages

held by Hamas, including U.S. citizens, are angrily or gleefully ripped down by those citing suffering Palestinian civilians. College students who declare genocide is happening in Israel's response to the terrorist attack, proudly chant a slogan proclaiming a free Palestine "from the river to the sea." That implies a genocide of Jews living in Israel now. Perhaps logic is no longer a college course.

Deep misconceptions are cited as the cause for the attacks. None of the babies, children and Holocaust survivors killed or kidnapped, women raped, or anyone beheaded by Hamas was on occupied land. They were within Israel's longtime borders.

I've tried to motivate American interest in both sides of the incredibly complex Middle East situation since well before it was reduced to misleading memes and hashtags. Yet until Oct. 7, if it didn't happen in the U.S. or involve our troops, it didn't have a lasting effect.

But now, fueled by what charitably might be the right reasons, but the wrong facts, it has embedded itself, at least temporarily, in America.

The concern that Biden's swift and certain siding with Israel in the wake of Oct. 7 is overblown. Despite all the political navel gazing, as I've learned sitting in the newsroom waiting for an assignment on election nights, Americans rarely vote on foreign policy.

Despite the collapse of the recent ceasefire into acrimony and death, the United States is different, with different traditions of civil disagreement. Regardless of the latest events in the Levant, we can and should call a ceasefire here.

Perhaps we can once again show the world how Americans can peacefully handle policy differences.

Lee Michael Katz is an award-winning journalist, analyst and author. Currently a freelance writer, Katz is the former senior diplomatic correspondent of USA Today and international editor of UPI News Service.

The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.

Link to Image

Graphic

Protest

ALI KHALIGH/Middle East Images/AFP via Getty Images

Thousands of pro-Palestine demonstrators attend a "Free Palestine" rally in Washington DC on Nov. 4.

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Trump embraces the Jan. 6 rioters on the trail. In court, his lawyers hope to distance him from them

Trump embraces the Jan. 6 rioters on the trail. In court, his lawyers hope to distance him from them

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THE CANADIAN PRESS 

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Byline: Eric Tucker And Alanna Durkin Richer, The Associated Press

Body

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump has embraced the rioters who attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 as patriots, vowed to pardon a large portion of them if he wins a second term and even collaborated on a song with a group of jailed defendants.

In his election interference case in Washington, his lawyers are taking a different tack.

Despite losing a bid to strike from the indictment references to that day's violence, defense attorneys have made clear their strategy involves distancing the former president from the horde of rioters, whom they describe as "independent actors at the Capitol." At the same time, special counsel Jack Smith's team has signaled it will make the case that Trump is responsible for the chaos that unfolded, and point to Trump's continued support of the Jan. 6 defendants to help establish his criminal intent.

The competing arguments highlight the extent to which the riot serves as an inescapable backdrop in a landmark trial set to begin on March 4 in a courthouse just blocks away from the Capitol.

It also reflects a point of separation between Trump and his legal team in the case accusing the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss. While Trump's glorification of Jan. 6 defendants may boost him politically as he vies to retake the White House in 2024, his lawyers' approach lays bare a concern that arguments linking him to the rioters could harm him in front of a jury.

Though Trump is not charged with inciting the riot, any success he hopes to have at trial may turn in part on his defense team's ability to neutralize, or at least minimize, the ghoulish images of the violence that prosecutors cite as a natural extension of the former president's repeated lies about a stolen election.

Much may depend as well on the evidence permitted by U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. Trump's lawyers have signaled they will try to block prosecutors from presenting at trial evidence related to the actions of the rioters, who shattered windows, beat police officers, and sent lawmakers running into hiding.

"What's likely to happen here is for the judge to strike some type of reasonable balance, which will allow prosecutors to admit some portion of the evidence about the conduct and some of the violence that went on during

Trump embraces the Jan. 6 rioters on the trail. In court, his lawyers hope to distance him from them

that day, but will put some kinds of limits on just how far prosecutors can go in presenting evidence of violent conduct," said Robert Mintz, a defense attorney and former federal prosecutor in New Jersey who has followed the case.

Trump has denied any wrongdoing in the case, which he has characterized as politically motivated.

In separate civil cases seeking to hold Trump liable for the Capitol attack, his lawyers have argued he encouraged his supporters to peacefully protest the results of the election and never called for any violence. The federal appeals court in Washington is currently weighing whether Trump can be sued by lawmakers and police officers, who have accused him of inciting the riot.

Trump will stand trial in the same courthouse where roughly 1,200 of his supporters have been charged in the largest investigation in Justice Department history. More than 800 of them have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial of federal crimes stemming from the riot, including seditious conspiracy and assaulting police officers. About two-thirds of those sentenced so far have received prison time.

The former president often speaks on the campaign trail about what he says is the mistreatment of those defendants, many of whom have argued in court that they were following his instructions to go to Washington and to the Capitol on Jan. 6. Judges and juries, however, have rejected the argument that rioters who said they were acting at Trump's direction can't be held responsible for their crimes.

At a recent rally in Houston, Trump took the stage to a song titled "Justice For All," featuring a choir of jailed Jan. 6 participants and Trump reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. He told the crowd: "I call them the J6 hostages, not prisoners."

In court, however, his lawyers argued that references to the rioters' conduct are irrelevant and that details of that day's violence would only prejudice the jury against their client because they "may wrongfully impute fault to President Trump for these actions." They are also seeking to force prosecutors to hand over the defense statements by prosecutors in Jan. 6 rioters' cases they say undercuts Smith's argument that Trump is responsible for the violence.

Judge Chutkan recently rejected Trump's bid to strike references to the riot from the indictment, saying he "has not satisfied his burden to clearly show that they are prejudicial."

Smith's team has previewed how prosecutors will make the case that Trump used the angry mob as "a tool" in his campaign to pressure then- Vice President Mike Pence and obstruct the certification of Biden's victory in a bid to desperate bid to subvert the will of voters.

Prosecutors have suggested they will show jurors the video of Trump's speech before the riot in which he urged the crowd to go to the Capitol and "fight like hell." They have also indicated they may seek to call rioters as witnesses, saying they will provide testimony that people who were at the Ellipse when Trump told them to "fight" went on to violently attack the Capitol. And they plan to highlight Trump's continued embrace of the rioters to make the case that he intended for the chaos at the Capitol that day.

"There is a robust public record of how rioters' actions at the Capitol on January 6 were extraordinarily violent and destructive, including attacks on law enforcement officers with flag poles, tasers, bear spray, and stolen riot shields and batons," Smith's team wrote in a recent court filing. "Despite this, the defendant has never wavered in his support of January 6 offenders."

Though it's easy to see why the defense team would push to limit such references, it's also clear why prosecutors would see his encouragement and supportive words for the rioters as incriminating evidence that speaks to a criminal intent about his desire to overturn an election he had lost, said Tim Belevetz, a Washington attorney and former Justice Department prosecutor.

Trump embraces the Jan. 6 rioters on the trail. In court, his lawyers hope to distance him from them

"The charges in the indictment require proof that President Trump acted knowingly and corruptly to overturn the election results," he said, adding that from the Smith's team perspective, "the actions at the Capitol that day are relevant to his state of mind, his intent and motive," he said.

Richer reported from Boston. Associated Press writer Michelle Price in New York and Michael Kunzelman in Washington contributed to this report.

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Campus response to Israel/Palestine conflict lacks nuance

The Miscellany News: Vassar College

November 29, 2023 Wednesday

University Wire

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Section: OPINIONS; Pg. 1

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Byline: Lev Winickoff

Body

As a Jew, I do not believe that advocating for Palestinian lives is antisemitic. The nation-wide organization Students for Justice in Palestine is committed to advocacy despite being accused of antisemitism by the U.S. Senate. Senator Josh Hawley of Missouri's resolution stated, "That the Senate...denounces the rhetoric of anti-Israel, pro-Hamas student groups as antisemitic, repugnant, and morally contemptible for sympathizing with genocidal violence against the State of Israel and risking the physical safety of Jewish Americans in the United States." The resolution was passed by the Senate on Oct. 26, 2023.

Since then, a host of schools have banned or censored their chapters of SJP and Jewish Voices for Peace for "antisemitic" acts. On Nov. 6, the Brandeis chapter of SJP was completely banned by the administration without a warning or consultation with its student union, per NBC Boston. According to NBC, George Washington University suspended their chapter of SJP after students projected statements that were critical of the Israeli government, such as "Divestment from Zionist Genocide now," on the wall of their library. After Columbia University's SJP and JVP organized what they described as a "peaceful protest art installation" about the loss of innocent Palestinian life, the institution suspended both organizations, according to Inside Higher Ed.

It is this political atmosphere, one committed to the silencing of Palestinian voices, in which Vassar's chapter of SJP attempts to have its voice heard by peers and the administration. Although their activism is not perfect, SJP's message is extremely important and deserves a space on campus.

On Oct. 25, Vassar SJP led a peaceful walkout and march across the campus. The demands of the march, according to SJP's Instagram, fundamentally highlighted the need for peace; the organization demanded that the Vassar administration call for a ceasefire in Gaza, an important step considering what The Washington Post identifies as a large and growing number of deaths among Palestinian civilians in Gaza. In addition, the protestors called for Vassar to divest from Israeli weapons manufacturers and boycott funding for the Israeli government by canceling abroad programs in Israel. This protest caused the administration to issue Level Two warnings to the organization leaders on the grounds that they violated Sections 5.01 and 10.04 in the student handbook, consisting of "Substantially interfering with the living, learning, or working environment of another individual; regardless of intentionality," and "Failing to comply with a reasonable mandate or restriction given by a college official." This result was upheld by the administration despite SJP's 12-page appeal that reaffirmed the organization's claim of innocence and offered evidence to corroborate it.

Campus response to Israel/Palestine conflict lacks nuance

To assume that Palestinian advocacy is antisemitic is to completely misinterpret the movement in harmful and polarizing ways. It is to have a preconceived idea of the purpose of SJP, and it functions to silence the voices of the oppressed.

The biggest issue, from my perspective, is a lack of nuance in the viewpoint of the administration that has led them to begin placing restrictions on SJP. The more voices are silenced, the less space there is for nuance, so the failure to acknowledge nuance in the first place is compounded.

Nuance, of course, is important in both "sides" of the argument. It is important for people to be able to understand the difference between Hamas and Palestinian civilians and between Jews and the government of Israel. Oversimplifications of the situation are not just reductive and inaccurate but extremely harmful, perpetuating Islamophobic stereotypes that all Palestinians are antisemitic terrorists, and antisemitic stereotypes that Jews are always the rich beneficiaries of oppression. These are identified as extremely common stereotypes by the United Nations and the Louis D. Brandeis Center, respectively. According to NBC, "The ADL [Anti-Defamation League] and the Council on American-Islamic Relations have both documented spikes in hate incidents targeting Jews and Muslims across the U.S." This is precisely why it is necessary for people to have informed understandings of this complex situation. SJP promotes fact-based understanding on their Instagram; multiple posts refer to educational opportunities for students to learn about the history of the area, such as the "collective teach in on Palestine/Israel" held on Oct. 31 and a "Brief History of Palestinian Resistance" on Nov. 5. I have witnessed that complacency is often rightfully condemned by students on their Instagram stories as cowardly, but people must remember that it is just as cowardly to follow one viewpoint without the critical examination that can only come from education.

That being said, I think there is room for improvement when it comes to SJP's strategy of advocacy. After speaking with representatives of SJP who wish to remain anonymous, they revealed that while they themselves are educated about Hamas, the organization had not explicitly engaged in org-wide education relating to Hamas. Not acknowledging that Hamas is an antisemitic terrorist group is an oversimplification of the situation, and a dangerous one. Even though Hamas is not the focus of the organization, failing to acknowledge the group's actions at all risks misinterpretation and the dismissal of the whole movement. When I discussed this with members of SJP, they were open to implementing more education, and this open-mindedness distinguishes the attitude of the organization from that of the College administration.

Contrary to antisemitism, SJP acknowledges that the position of Jews in this conflict is critical. Our people have felt the effects of genocide and thus it is our duty to advocate for collective liberation of all who are oppressed.

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