

# Confronting the Woke-Left and Jihad-Enthusiast Alliance

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Peter Berkowitz



## COMMENTARY

Following Hamas' bloodthirsty Oct. 7 assault on Israel's southern border communities, woke leftists and jihad enthusiasts on campuses and beyond formed a perplexing alliance. The left advocates social justice; celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion; and professes special concern for historically oppressed minorities. Meanwhile, Gaza's Iran-backed jihadists torture and kill based on race, ethnicity, and sexual preference; loathe and wage war against Israelis, Jews, Americans, and the West; and, by all available means, seek to establish Islamist theocracy. What could unite two such seemingly mutually exclusive camps?

Not for the first time a common enemy makes allies out of adversaries. A shared disdain for the United States and Israel draws together woke leftists and jihad enthusiasts. Sustaining their cooperation is a common resentment of the principles that the United States and Israel embrace – individual freedom, democratic equality, free-market dynamism, toleration of a diversity of beliefs about faith and human flourishing – and an antipathy to Israel's character as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

The shared disdain and common resentment and antipathy give rise to more puzzles.

Some of these concern students. How in the space of only a few years have numerous leftist students moved from trembling in fear and rage at opinions with which they disagree to donning masks and keffiyehs, occupying prime campus real estate, and siding with terrorism and religious war? How have they gone from insisting that all women must be believed to serving as apologists for Hamas' raping of Israeli women? How have they set aside the dogmas that speech and even silence are violence in favor of harassing fellow students by openly celebrating the perpetration of mass atrocities and publicly chanting slogans that call for Israel's destruction?

Other puzzles concern America's institutions of higher education and those who run them and teach there. How have our elite universities become ground zero of the alliance between leftism and jihad? Where are the responsible educators – administration officials and faculty – who will day in and day out soberly explain the difference between peaceful protests subject to reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, and disruptive demonstrations that impair the university's mission, which is to acquire and transmit knowledge, enliven the moral imagination, and cultivate independent thought? What steps should be taken to correct course so that instead of inculcating campus orthodoxies that condemn the United States as a uniquely awful regime and that deem dissent from institutionally approved narratives as proof of ignorance or bigotry, our universities foster civility, toleration, curiosity, and intellectual acuity, and teach a reasoned, historically informed understanding of constitutional government in America?

In "[The Woke Jihad](#)," Commentary Magazine's June cover story, Abe Greenwald brings these puzzles into sharper focus with essential background and incisive analysis. His rhetoric occasionally overheats. Then again, the provocation is severe – the routinization of antisemitism and anti-Americanism on campus. And the stakes – the future of our educational institutions and hence the nation's future – could hardly be higher.

A "hybrid enemy of the West," the alliance between woke leftists and jihad enthusiasts that burst out into the open following Hamas' Oct. 7 massacres, Greenwald reports, "won't stop soon, as it is well funded and impressively organized." Moral impulses that higher education has long incubated, moreover, fuel the partnership. Even after colleges and universities remove the pro-Hamas encampments, the alliance will live on in the hearts and minds of many students, and in those of the professors and administrators who have accommodated or endorsed them.

According to Greenwald, the allies "enjoy a valuable symbiotic relationship." The woke left needed a new cause. Three years had passed since protesters, prompted by the May 2020 killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers, established encampments in many cities. Many were peaceful. Many, though, were not, leaving behind more than a billion dollars of damage. And "with the liberal rank and file no longer interested in police-defunding,

the public turning against DEI schemes, whistleblowers revealing the horrors of ‘gender-affirming care’ for trans kids, and the term woke a source of liberal embarrassment,” the woke left found a new calling in coming to Hamas’ defense. Meanwhile, “the jihadists needed the American left for tactical purposes: to propagandize for their cause and fit anti-Semitic terrorists – alongside gays, the transgendered, and African Americans – into the intersectional left’s pantheon of victims.”

The allies’ feelings toward one another do not match. Woke leftists, Greenwald writes, “love the jihadists ... for their ferocity and exoticism as much as for their bottomless self-pity.” In contrast, fidelity to core beliefs impels the jihadist to experience “disgust for the unchecked females, sexual libertines, heathens, and even Jews he’s been forced to instrumentalize in the cause of Islamist domination.”

At the same time, woke leftists – “Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ groups, intersectional feminist organizations, and others” – converge politically with jihad enthusiasts to “salute October 7 as righteous resistance and condemn the Israeli response as genocide.” Both revel in violence and victimhood, maintains Greenwald, and both denounce the West as essentially exploitative, Jews as quintessential exploiters, and Israel as the epitome of Jewish exploitation.

The woke left cloaks its revolutionary aims under appeals to justice that resonate with decent people. If Black Lives Matter focused on saving black lives, asks Greenwald, why would it “have seized on a statistically tiny number of police killings as justification to rid black neighborhoods of police?” If the trans movement was principally concerned with equality, why would it lavish energy on “denying solid biological reality, throwing kids into emotional disarray, scaring the hell out of parents, endorsing ruinous medical procedures for minors, and trolling everyone who’s not convinced”? And if Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion aimed to overcome differences and bring people together, why do DEI programs intensify animosity, not least by classifying all white people and all Jewish people as oppressors? Rather than pursuing equality under law, the woke left endeavors to replace American principles and remake the nation’s norms and institutions.

Similarly, the pro-Palestinian campaign on campus does not serve Palestinians’ reasonable interests. If it did, it would not support Hamas, whose theocratic dictatorship deliberately uses noncombatant Palestinians as human shields; employs Palestinian homes, schools, and mosques as military facilities; and steals humanitarian supplies meant for noncombatants. All this the jihad enthusiasts overlook. Instead, they concentrate on turning worldwide public opinion against, and spurring the imposition of economic and legal sanctions on, the Jewish state. By damaging Israel, which they regard as an outpost of Western imperialism in the Middle East, they strive to weaken and fundamentally transform the United States.

Several revenue streams fund the anti-Israel and anti-American lawlessness besetting American campuses. One stream, according to Greenwald, flows from pro-Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) groups like American Muslims for Palestine, the principal backer of Students for Justice in Palestine. Another, he reports, comes from left-wing philanthropies including the Tides Foundation, the Gates Foundation, George Soros' Open Society Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Susan and Nick Pritzker. Hamas patron Qatar provides a third major source of financial backing, giving "\$4.7 billion to multiple American colleges and universities between 2001 and 2021."

The money is effective not only because of its quantity. In addition, elite universities have for decades tilled the intellectual soil out of which the woke jihad has arisen. "Dominant academic trends such as intersectionality, critical race theory, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism," observes Greenwald, "have turned millions of young minds into a moral fun-house mirror in which racists are reflected back as angels, colorblindness as racism, one sex as the other, democracy as tyranny, tyranny as paradise, freedom as bondage, refugees as colonialists, Jews as white oppressors, and terrorists as saints."

Greenwald, nevertheless, finds hope amid the bleakness. "In joining forces, the woke and the Islamists may have compounded their resources, but they've also compounded the disgust that the public already harbored for each group individually," he writes. "The spectacle of their blended pathologies will be, and already is, their discrediting and their undoing. Not ours."

Woke jihad's self-discrediting and undoing, however, are not enough. The university culture that has fostered woke-leftism and jihad enthusiasm has staying power.

Responsible remedies to the debasement of liberal education are not likely to originate with or receive vigorous endorsement from members of the faculty and administration. A large majority of them have either encouraged, or stood by in silence during, higher education's long descent into obscurantism and sectarianism. Finally taking notice of the pathologies plaguing higher education, some wealthy donors have begun to suspend donations. But universities will not implement reforms of lasting significance until trustees and governing boards hire, and back fully, university presidents who understand, and realign their universities with, liberal education's structure, content, and purpose.

Reform-minded presidents by themselves can't fix universities. They must find fellow reformers, few and far between though they may be, among today's professors and administrators. These colleagues will be throwbacks, eccentrics, and dissenters. Some will be brash, others soft spoken. To accomplish the task, they must, while respecting partisan political differences, join forces – to defend the equal liberty for all on which the American constitutional order rests and to rebuild the liberal education that secures freedom and democracy.

*Peter Berkowitz is the Tad and Dianne Taube senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. From 2019 to 2021, he served as director of the Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. State Department. His writings are posted at [PeterBerkowitz.com](http://PeterBerkowitz.com) and he can be followed on Twitter [@BerkowitzPeter](https://twitter.com/BerkowitzPeter).*