

Israel-Hamas war

New York police storm Columbia University and arrest pro-Palestinian protesters

Hundreds of officers in riot gear detain students who occupied campus building for nearly 24 hours



New York City police officers arrest protesters after entering Hamilton Hall at Columbia University on Tuesday © Stephani Spindel/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Andrew Jack and **Joshua Chaffin** in New York 6 HOURS AGO

New York City police stormed Columbia University's campus on Tuesday night, arresting dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters in an attempt to quash unrest that has spread to campuses across the nation and inflamed US divisions over the war in Gaza.

The incursion by hundreds of police officers, many in riot gear, was prompted by protesters' seizure of a university building overnight, an act reminiscent of anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in 1968, when students took control of the [Columbia](#) campus.

The arrests marked the culmination of a stand-off that began more than a week ago, when students pitched tents on a lawn in the centre of campus and demanded that the university divest from companies that have profited from Israel.

The Gaza Solidarity Encampment, as they dubbed it, has tested the resolve of the university's president, Minouche Shafik, and intensified a debate about the boundaries between free speech and harassment and antisemitism at a university renowned for its social activism.

Police breached the occupied building, Hamilton Hall, at about 9pm on Tuesday through a second-floor window. They lined up dozens of students with tied wrists on

Amsterdam Avenue to the south of the campus and had prepared vans to take them away. Police also detonated flash grenades, according to CNN, and used pepper spray.

As they did so, protesters behind barricades blocking nearby streets chanted “Palestine will be free”, “let the students go” and “NYPD-KKK”. It was unclear how many were affiliated with the university. There were no immediate reports of injuries.



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New York police enter Columbia University's Hamilton Hall amid pro-Palestine protests © WABC/Reuters

University officials said police intervened at their request. “After the university learned overnight that Hamilton Hall had been occupied, vandalised, and blockaded, we were left with no choice. Columbia public safety personnel were forced out of the building, and a member of our facilities team was threatened,” the school said.

Columbia has been a focal point of demonstrations triggered by the war between Hamas and Israel, which started on October 7. An [earlier decision](#) by its administration to suspend students and call in the police to arrest them sparked widespread copycat occupations and clampdowns in the US and at universities abroad.

The administration turned to negotiating with the students in the hope of resolving the situation before graduation in mid-May.

But those talks broke down on Tuesday, with about 60 students taking control of Hamilton Hall, a century-old academic building on the corner of Columbia’s campus named after one of the school’s most famous alumni, Alexander Hamilton.

Columbia responded with warnings that students would face expulsion and that the administration was “exploring options” to restore security. The White House also weighed in, with President Joe Biden condemning the students’ actions.

The university said on Tuesday: “We believe that the group that broke into and occupied the building is led by individuals who are not affiliated with the university.

“The decision to reach out to the NYPD was in response to the actions of the protesters, not the cause they are championing. We have made it clear that the life of campus cannot be endlessly interrupted by protesters who violate the rules and the law.”

The campus was virtually crippled by Tuesday, with security guards ringing the perimeter and authorities asking all but essential employees to stay away. Crowds of keffiyeh-clad, pro-Palestinian protesters gathered by the gates outside the campus, waving flags and chanting now-familiar slogans: “There is only one solution . . . intifada revolution!”

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