**[Vietnam moment?](https://www.dawn.com/news/1829656/vietnam-moment)**

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IT has been half a century since the humbling of the world’s mightiest military, the US army, by Vietnamese guerilla warriors. It was, by all accounts, the most tumultuous defeat in the history of modern empire. If the Viet Cong routed US troops in the trenches, Washington lost the battle for hearts and minds at home. The [anti-war movement](https://www.dawn.com/news/910962/1968-a-most-turbulent-year-in-us-history) which raged on American university and college campuses for a decade from the mid-1960s was amongst the biggest popular mobilisations in US history. The movement signified a moral defeat for US imperialism arguably as significant as its military defeat on the actual battlefield.

The eruption of student protests on American university campuses against the US-backed [Israeli genocide of Palestinians](https://www.dawn.com/news/1825879) in Gaza has invited comparison with the Vietnam antiwar movement. A violent clampdown on peaceful students at Columbia University has triggered a wave of uprisings across the country, magnifying the extent to which young Americans oppose the Biden administration’s unconditional support for Zionist pogroms.

Peaceful protests against the Israeli war machine and complicit Western governments have been ongoing in many Western countries, but the violent reaction of university administrators and the state’s coercive apparatus in recent days makes the current moment feel increasingly like that of the iconic late 1960s. That moment was generational: young people in the ‘advanced’ Western world were mobilising not only against imperialist war in Vietnam and other theatres of the Cold War, but also in support of revolutionary movements and decolonisation in Latin America, Asia and Africa, whilst rebelling against racism, sexism and capitalism at home. The violent reaction of the US and other Western states to these movements was complemented by an all-out vilification campaign by corporate media.

Similarly, beatings and arrests of student protesters — and many faculty members — in the US right now have been accompanied by a media campaign decrying them as anti-Semite. This trope has been commonplace since the latest ethnic cleansing operation began in Gaza, but has ratcheted up significantly of late.

Benjamin Netanyahu himself put out a video message spewing a series of orchestrated lies about attacks on Jewish students and the congruence between the current protests and those on campuses in Nazi Germany. The Israeli state has a matchless capacity to produce outrageous propaganda, but this feels different — the campus protests have rattled Tel Aviv and Washington. Indeed, the Columbia-inspired student movement confirms that peaceful protests are not dissipating, the panicked and violent reactions provoked suggesting weakness rather than strength.

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Time will tell whether pro-Palestinian sentiment can match the longevity of the Vietnam antiwar movement, but the global movement in solidarity with Palestine is coeval with deepening politicisation on many systemic issues that make ruling classes everywhere tremble.

Take the climate crisis. A wide cross-section of young people are resisting the various forms of capital accumulation destroying ecosystems and threatening the future of human life. Youth icons like [Greta Thunberg](https://www.dawn.com/news/1826135), who was until recently perceived to articulate a relatively harmless environmentalist position, has come out strongly in favour of Palestinians — and, it should be noted, our very own Baloch long march — thus underlining the growing pull of anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist internationalism.

History never repeats itself in linear fashion, so there can be no question of seamlessly mapping our current moment onto the late 1960s and ear­ly 1970s, especial­ly given the widesp­read appeal of right-wing politics in our times. But alongside the emergent student movement in the US, a not insignificant number of governments have also called out Israel’s genocidal war against the Palestinians, and in some cases, like Iran, openly defied the so-called liberal world order. Much, however, remains to be done, because domestically Iran and others opposing Israel and its imperialist patron are not pro-people havens to be championed.

In Pakistan too, young people are increasingly politicised about the entrenched military-industrial-media complex and mainstream parties that meekly take on and then are deposed from power.

If nothing else, the Feb 8 poll suggests that one can protest via the ballot, and there appears every chance that this is what ordinary Americans opposed to Washington’s support for Israel will do in the US presidential elections. The problem is that defeat for Genocide Joe would bring another staunch friend of Zionism, Donald Trump, back to power. To truly make the present one a Vietnam moment, the world’s oppressed will need to break this and many other similar vicious cycles.

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