

The Columbus Dispatch

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Ohio State owes us answers. Commitment to free speech shattered when it comes to Israel.

Letters to the Editor Columbus Dispatch

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We are owed answers about student arrest, police presence

I am appalled by news that two [Ohio State University](#) student protestors [were arrested Tuesday](#), on charges of “*being too loud.*”

I was not present at the protest, but the news coverage raises serious questions that deserve a better explanation from [Ohio State](#).

First, was there violence or a threat of violence that was credible enough to warrant police officers? I have seen no reporting to indicate this was so.

The presence of armed police elevates rather than diminishes the likelihood of violence and should always be a last resort to protect public safety.

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Second, is law enforcement the best means to deal with a noise violation? Absent further clarification, it's plausible to suspect that "noise violation" is a ruse to disguise a political agenda.

Although Ohio State spokesperson Ben Johnson took pains to emphasize the university's "[unwavering commitment to freedom of speech](#)," I cannot help but wonder if this is really an example of the "Israel exception" to free speech, whereby individuals who are otherwise ardent defenders of free expression change their tone completely when that speech involves criticism of Israel or discussion of divestment, as Tuesday's protests were reported to involve.

(A corollary is that any criticism of Israel is reflexively labeled as anti-Semitism by those same individuals.)

Recent, politicized scrutiny of pro-Palestinian protests on the campuses of Columbia and Berkeley has undoubtedly been noticed by Ohio State administration, and I wonder what role that might have played in the decision to have a police presence at what was apparently a peaceful protest.

More: [Over a dozen arrested after police break up 6-hour Israel protest at Ohio State University](#)

Regardless of motive, two students are facing criminal charges as well as administrative sanctions for publicly voicing opinions that Ohio State administrators didn't want to hear.

Those are steep penalties for a noise violation. *John M. Herbert, professor, Ohio State University*

Is OSU's aggressive response to protestors about politics? Seems to be.

<https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/letters/2024/04/26/ohio-state-protests-pro-palestinian...>