

*UCLA protesters violently
attacked by pro-Israeli mob using
pepper spray and metal bars*

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Los Angeles, May 1 (RHC)-- A demonstration against Israel's war on Gaza at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) turned violent when a vigilante pro-Israel mob attacked a solidarity encampment occupied by peaceful pro-Palestinian protesters.

Witnesses said the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) only intervened after nearly four hours of the attacks, which started overnight into Wednesday when masked pro-Israel counter-demonstrators, who appeared in their hundreds from outside the university campus, hurled fireworks into the encampment.

The attackers, carrying Israeli flags, then tried to tear down the pro-Palestinian camp, assaulting students with pepper spray, sticks, stones and metal fencing. Police stood by, failing to protect students, who re-commandeered the metal fencing thrown at them to shield themselves, said Joey Scott, an investigative journalist speaking to Al Jazeera from the scene.

Before the police arrived, a group reportedly piled on one person who lay on the ground, kicking and beating them until others pulled them out of the scrum.

Eventually, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass issued a statement on X early on Wednesday morning that police were responding to requests for support from the UCLA administration. LAPD confirmed their intervention at about 2 a.m. (09:00 GMT).

“Horrific acts of violence occurred at the encampment tonight and we immediately called law enforcement for mutual aid support,” Mary Osako, a senior UCLA official, told the campus newspaper the Daily Bruin.

Reporting from Los Angeles, Al Jazeera’s Rob Reynolds said the student protesters had stood their ground. The number of injured was not yet known, but reports on social media indicated that some people have been led away with injuries, he said, as he described the “really shocking and ugly scene of violence.”

The vigilante mob appeared to come from outside the campus. “They appear to be all largely people who are not of student age and they’re not from the UCLA campus, but what they’re doing is trying to harass and attack the pro-Palestinian demonstrators,” said Reynolds.

Bass called the violence “absolutely abhorrent and inexcusable.”

The antiwar group said that “law enforcement simply stood at the edge of the lawn and refused to budge as we screamed for their help. The only means of protection we had was each other” as the attack went on for more than seven hours.

“The university would rather see us dead than divest,” it added in a statement posted on X.

The UCLA attack is the latest escalation in two weeks of demonstrations against Israel’s war on Gaza that have spread to universities across the United States, and to some universities in other countries.

Pro-Palestinian students at UCLA had occupied campus grounds for the past two days, calling for the divestment of the university’s financial ties to Israel.

Late on Tuesday, New York City police arrested dozens of pro-Palestinian demonstrators holed up in an academic building on the Columbia University campus in Manhattan and removed a protest encampment that the Ivy League school had sought to dismantle for nearly two weeks.

Columbia’s police action happened on the 56th anniversary of a similar move to quash an occupation of Hamilton Hall by students protesting against racism and the Vietnam War.

Just blocks away from Columbia, at The City College of New York, demonstrators were in a standoff with police outside the public college’s main gate. Video on social media showed officers shoving people around as they cleared them from the street and pavements. Many arrested protesters were driven away on city buses.

Scott said he believed the delayed police response to the UCLA violence would serve as “inspiration” to potential attackers, seeking to force pro-Palestinian protesters to drop their demands.

“If they are trying to quell future violence, they have done a terrible job of that because it appears to be fully endorsed,” he said.

Al Jazeera's Reynolds said the mob at UCLA reminded him of "settler violence on the [occupied] West Bank without the use of as much lethal force, but this is clearly a violent, uncontrolled mob that is bent on mayhem".

One member of the pro-Israel mob carried a large yellow flag with a crown and, emblazoned with the word "Messiah." "These are symbols of radical, far-right Jewish groups," said Reynolds.

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