Trump Admin Wants to CONTROL COLUMBIA?

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): We've obviously been covering, because it's one of the things that we cover most, the extraordinary attack on free speech that has been ushered in by the Trump administration, specifically Homeland Security's arrest of a Columbia University student who was the holder of a green card, which is supposed to bestow and confer permanent resident status. He has that because he's married to an American citizen who happens to be eight months pregnant. And he was arrested – not because he's been charged or accused of having committed any crime, but because the State Department under Marco Rubio in secret with no process, no evidence presented invalidated his green card. And the minute they did so they declared him to be on US soil illegally, and sent ICE agents to detain him. There is a court hearing that is now taking place. In the meantime, there's an injunction preventing him from being deported. But there are all other kinds of students being targeted for arrest. A second one was arrested today at Columbia. And the implications of those kinds of assaults on free speech, arresting and deporting people who are in the United States illegally as a result of their views on Israel or their protest and activism against the war of Israel or against the Biden administration's funding and arming of that war are obviously very significant. We've spent the week analyzing those.

But today, there was a much more serious escalation, one that I have to say, I can't say I was expecting, one that genuinely astonishes me. And rather than tell you about it, I just want to show you the letter that was sent by three different government agencies inside the Trump administration, the United State's Department of Education, the Health and Human Services Department, as well as the General Services Administration. It was sent to Columbia University. And there you see the letter. It's dated March 13th and it is addressed to the Interim President of Columbia, Katrina Armstrong, as well as David Greenwald. No relation, at least, that I know of. And Claire Shipman, co-chairs of the Columbia Board of Trustees. Yeah, I think if I had a relative who was the co-chair of the Columbia Board of Trustees, that's something I would know and I don't. So, anyway, this is a letter sent to them and this is what it says, quote: "Please consider this a formal response to the current situation on the campus of Columbia University and a followup of our letter of March 7th, 2025, informing you that the United States government would be pausing or terminating federal funding.

Since that date, your council has asked to discuss, quote, 'next steps'." And here are the next steps. It says US taxpayers invest in colleges, and therefore we want to tell you that these are the things that you have to do as preconditions for even having conversations with us about the possibility of restoring your funding. And just a reminder, the reason the United States government provides funding to universities isn't that they pay for the salaries of the professors. It's because that's where a lot of research takes place. Research into science, research into technology, into medicine, into all sorts of things. It supports hospitals and medical facilities. It allows people who don't come from extremely wealthy families to be able to go to our best colleges based on merit. And this is the lever, the leverage, that the US government is now using for the first time in a very long time, not just to dictate to universities what their policies have to be regarding their students, but even to start compelling them to make changes to their curricula that aligns it with the ideology of the current administration.

Particularly you'll be unsurprised to learn in the Middle East Studies program at Columbia, which is the program that teaches about the Middle East, about the Israeli-Palestine conflict and other hot-button political issues in the Middle East. This is a list of what the US government is saying Columbia is required to do, just as a precondition to even talking about the possibility of restoration of their funding. First, "enforce existing disciplinary policies. The university must complete disciplinary proceedings for Hamilton Hall and encampments. Meaningful discipline means expulsion or multi-year suspension." So they're requiring that everybody who participated in the encampment against the war in Israel, the war in Gaza by Israel rather, or the protest at Hamilton Hall, face either expulsion or multi-year suspension. Is this the sort of thing that you think the federal government ought to be doing? Micromanaging private universities inside the United States, micromanaging their student disciplinary decisions? The next item on the bulleted list: "Primacy of the president in disciplinary matters. Abolish the university judicial board, and centralize all disciplinary processes under the Office of President. And empower the Office of the President to suspend or expel students with an appeal process through the Office of the President." So they're actually dictating the bureaucracy, the bureaucratic structure of the student discipline process at Columbia.

And obviously, every other school in the country is monitoring very closely what the US government is doing to Columbia. That's part of the point is to then signal to them what they have to do, too, unless they want to come under the scrutiny of the US government in the way that Columbia has. The next item on the list: "Time, place, and manner rules. Implement permanent comprehensive time, place, and manner rules to prevent disruption of teaching, research, and campus life." In other words, free speech zones, as the US government has called them. In other words, if you want to protest, you're free to do so. You can do so from 8 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and then 5 in the afternoon until 6:30 at night, you can do so only in this fenced off area over here. It's a way of pretending to allow protest but making sure the protests are invisible or as completely inconsequential as the government wants them to be. Next item on the list: "Mask ban. Ban masks that are intended to conceal identity or intimidate others. With exceptions for religious and health reasons, any masked individual

must wear their Columbia ID on the outside of their clothing. This is already the policy at Columbia's Irving Medical Center." So you have no right to participate in a protest anonymously. You have to be identifiable at all times so that the government, if they want to, punish you for your participation in that protest, will have no trouble identifying you. They can use facial recognition technology, which is now extremely sophisticated and pervasive. In fact, I don't know how many of you know this, but if you arrive at various ports in the United States, entry points, including at the airport, you no longer show your passport at customs the way you used to. You just walk through, stand in front of the camera for about a second, and all the information that they want about you, your name, your date of birth, where you live, where you've been, just all appears immediately based on facial recognition because all our faces are in a database. And so the requirement that if you want to participate in a political protest, you can't cover your face – it is to ensure that the government can identify every who still participates, even if it's not on their property, if it's on a private property like Columbia.

Next item: "Deliver a plan to hold all student groups accountable. Recognize student groups and individuals operating as constituent members of or providing support for unrecognized groups engaged in violation of university policy must be held accountable through formal investigations, disciplinary proceedings, and expulsions as appropriate." Here's the next one: "Formulize, adopt, and promulgate a definition of antisemitism. President Trump's Executive Order 13899 uses the IHRA definition." That's the definition that is radically and aggressively expanded. It was promulgated by the Israeli government to include a whole long list of criticisms of Israel that are now officially declared to be antisemitism. Many states in Europe have adopted this expanded definition and now as a result, the examples of antisemitism include things like saying Israel is a racist project or comparing Israel to what the Nazis did or applying so-called double standards to Israel that you're not applying to other countries – all of this is formally regarded now as antisemitism. Under the definition that President Trump adopted, it's also the definition that the House of Representatives last year adopted in order to radically expand the definition of antisemitism to make it essentially illegal on college campuses to express a whole wide range of criticisms of Israel.

The letter goes on, "anti-Zionist discrimination against Jews in areas unrelated to Israel or the Middle East must be addressed." No more anti-Zionist statements allowed, no more anti-Zionist protests that are unrelated to Israel or the Middle East. It is so ironic that this is the same movement that has spent a decade at least endlessly whining about woke-ism on colleges and how it's being used to constrain what is permissible or impermissible to say on college campuses that is now not just using societal pressure or even administrative action the way that liberals have done over the last 10 years on college campuses. They're using the power of the state, Homeland Security specifically, to dictate to our private universities, our most consequential and prestigious universities in the Ivy League and elsewhere, what can and can't be said on college campuses and what types of discipline and punishment are required for those who do.

Next item: "Empower internal law enforcement. The university must ensure that Columbia security has full law enforcement authority, including arrest and removal of agitators who

foster an unsafe hostile work or study environment or otherwise interfere with classroom instructions or the functioning of the university." And then here is arguably what is the most remarkable, the most invasive of academic freedom and of government attempts to control what professors at private universities are and are not permitted to teach. The whole idea of academic freedom, you go to college, people on faculties have academic freedom and tenure precisely because they're supposed to be able to question anything, talk about anything, teach anything. Academic institutions only have value if they are a free venue for unlimited discourse. That's one of the reasons why I've been so opposed to liberal attempts to constrain what can be taught, what can be said, what ideas can be expressed in academia because it destroys academia. And it's at least as true, probably more so when the government is doing things like this. Regarding the Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies Department, MESAAS Department. The government is requiring Columbia to put that department under, quote, "academic receivership". And here is the relevant language. "Begin the process of placing the Middle East, South Asian and African Studies Department under academic receivership for a maximum of five years. The university must provide a full plan with date certain deliverables by the March 20th 2025 deadline.".

We're going to talk to our guest Alex Abdo in just a little bit about all of this including exactly what that means when you place a academic program at a university under receivership but essentially it's designed to limit and restrain and place under outside control, the entire management and operation of that department. This department, the Middle East Studies Department at Columbia, has long been a primary target for Israel loyal fanatics inside the United States. It is, for example, the place Bari Weiss got her start, as we'll show you in just a little bit at Columbia. I actually wrote about this when The New York Times hired Bari Weiss: *The New York Times newest op-ed hire, Bari Weiss, embodies its worst failings and its lack of viewpoint diversity.* And I described there how under the guise of viewpoint diversity, they were actually hiring somebody, Bari Weiss, who had spent her time at college, at Columbia in particular, trying to get professors fired for the crime of criticizing Israel too much, usually Arab or Muslim professors, of course. That's the queen of free speech and free discourse in the battle against illiberalism as she calls it. This has been a long-standing dream of Israel fanatics in the United States to get control of what Columbia teaches about the Middle East. And that is exactly what the Trump administration is now attempting to do and it is now succeeding in doing.

And then the letter finally says: "Deliver a plan for comprehensive admissions reform. The plan must include a strategy to reform undergraduate admissions, international recruiting, and graduate admission practices to conform with federal law and policy. We expect your immediate compliance with these critical next steps." So you have all these people on the right who have spent so long complaining about attempts to limit speech in general, but limit speech in particular, on college campuses in the name of protecting certain minority groups and keeping them safe, who two months after being inaugurated to power are using every arm available of the federal government to try and control academia, private universities. And obviously focused most on what can and can't be said about Israel. There's a reason Miriam Adelson, who before the election we devoted a whole show to examining, gave $100 million

to the Trump campaign. It was exactly for things like this. This is being done because there's been polling data that we showed you earlier this week that support for Israel in the United States is at an all-time low. Not surprising. People have been watching Israel blow up children and families and schools and mosques and hospitals for a year and a half using American-made weapons and American money that paid for all of it. So unsurprisingly, people who have been watching that on places like TikTok, which is why they started to think more about banning TikTok and then ultimately did – it's a desperation to try and stem the tide of that declining support for Israel. And the two places where they think it's most happening are online and in academic institutions. And so that's exactly what they're targeting. Here is the Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche at the Justice Department today where President Trump also spoke, expressing theories about how they're gonna escalate even further, their attempt to gain control of Columbia to punish people who participate in protests against Israel using terrorism laws. Not even Bush and Cheney tried this. Here's what he had to say.

Todd Blanche: The President promised that under his watch, we will no longer stand by while universities tolerate and facilitate antisemitism and support of terrorism on their campuses.

GG: So just to be clear here, whatever your views are on all of this, this is the United States government promising to ban antisemitism on college campuses. This is exactly what the American right has been shrieking about for years now. The idea that, oh, if you believe certain speech or activism can be classified as racist or xenophobic or transphobic or Islamophobic or misogynist, it means that you can censor it. And now they're turning around and saying, oh, yeah, all of those kind of claims, racism and xenophobia, transphobia, that's all nonsense, but antisemitism, that's the real bigotry and we need the government to go in and stop it by curbing speech in the way that we just showed you in that letter, like they're attempting to do at Columbia. And obviously, again, other universities are looking at that. There's already reports of UCLA canceling in its public health school a class on the health crisis from the Israeli war in Gaza for Palestinians – no teaching about that, no examining that, no allowing professors fn the faculty of public health to teach a course on one of the worst humanitarian disasters on the planet and the health implications of it because it might make the Trump administration angry. And we have to make sure that the curricula at all our universities are aligned with the Trump administration's ideology, in particular, their pro-Israel fanaticism that is generated by huge numbers of people throughout the government who revere Israel, are devoted to Israel, are loyal to Israel, and want to use every arm of the government to ensure that everybody else has similar loyalties, including censoring on our academic campuses. And then to call it terrorism, to say that if you protest against Israel, if you express opposition to the war in Israel, if you believe the Zionist state is whatever you want to say as an American, you have the right to say whatever you want – if you're on American soil legally as a green card holder or student visa, you do as well – to say they're committing genocide or they're racist, whatever you want to say. You can say the United States is racist. You can say China is racist. You can say Iran is a terror state. Certainly, you can say that about Israel as well. But the Trump administration, as you just heard, wants to

characterize that now as advocacy for terrorism and use terrorism laws against people in American universities who are criticizing Israel.

The escalation is reported by The Atlantic: *There is a Second Name on Marco Rubio's Target List*, already. Marco Rubio has promised there's going to be a lot of other names. There you see the Trump administration has identified another green card holder it wants deported in addition to Mahmoud Khalil. And I want to be careful how I say this because I don't want to disclose things that I shouldn't disclose but in the course of our reporting on the protest movements, the students who were involved in it and the like, and the student groups involved, we have heard from many people who exercised what are their constitutional rights to protest, they're not charged with any crimes, but they are living in great fear that they will now be targeted by ICE, by Homeland Security, by the FBI – including American citizens because part of the promise of the Trump administration is it's not just deportation, but imprisonment for people who protested against Israel. They're talking about using terrorism laws to do so. And obviously, there is immense fear. And that's what is intended is, look, if you know what's good for you, if you don't want trouble, keep your mouth shut about Israel. Don't criticize Israel, don't question our financing of Israel. That's what all of this is for. From a political movement that just three weeks ago cheered when J.D. Vance went to Europe and castigated the Europeans for waging war against liberal values and European values by imposing censorship regimes. This is infinitely worse than anything that Europe has done. Infinitely worse.

Here is Axios today reporting, and this has been reported by multiple outlets around the country: Columbia expels students involved in building takeover in the 2024 protests. Here from AP. Also this was last week: *Facing Trump's threats, Columbia investigates students who are critical of Israel.* Quote, "Columbia University senior Maryam Alwan was visiting family in Jordan over her winter break when she received an email from the school, accusing her of, quote, 'discriminatory harassment'." Her supposed top offense? What is the offense that caused the Trump administration and Homeland Security to notify her she was under formal investigation? "Writing an op-ed in the student newspaper that called for divestment from Israel." Actually, this was an email where the school was accusing her of this, obviously operating under pressure from the Trump administration and their threats. Her crime was that she wrote an op-ed in the student newspaper advocating divestment of university funds from Israel.

If you have spent any amount of time parading around as a free speech advocate or somebody opposed to censorship and you are now at the point where this is something that you support or this does not bother you, please just give up that fraud, that pretense. The AP went on: "In Alwan's case investigator said the unsigned op-ed in the Columbia Spectator, which also urged the school to curtail academic ties to Israel, may have subjected other students to, quote, 'unwelcome conduct' based on their religion, national origin, or military service. They promised a thorough investigation with sanctions raging from a simple warning to expulsion." In other words, what the school is saying is that if this op-ed made anybody uncomfortable, then by definition, it was harassment, because she expressed views that made

supporters of Israel uncomfortable. This is the sort of thing that is being fostered deliberately by the Trump administration. They promised to do exactly this, and they have been doing it. I'm happy to say that there are some groups that have been standing up in protest, including Fire.org, which has become an aggressive advocate of free speech, both defending conservative students who have been the target of censorship but also the Palestinian groups that have long been targeted with that. And it is important that anybody who purports to believe in free speech at all is somebody who is willing to take that stand.

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