



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Situation Assessment | 25 October 2023

The Biden Administration's Response to the War on Gaza: How Can Its "Calculated Bias" be Explained?

Unit for Political Studies

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Series: [Situation Assessment](#)

25 October 2023

Unit for Political Studies

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The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

Al-Tarfa Street, Wadi Al Banat

Al-Dayaen, Qatar

PO Box 10277, Doha

+974 4035 4111

www.dohainstitute.org

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As Operation Al-Aqsa flood played out on the morning of 7 October 2023, President Biden's administration expressed its sweeping condemnation of the Hamas offensive, which the White House described as an act of terror, along with its full support of the Israeli state and its "right to self-defence".¹ In his 10 October speech, Biden equated Hamas with Al-Qaeda and ISIS, describing its actions as "sheer evil". Meanwhile Biden reaffirmed his praise of Israel and the US-Israeli friendship of more than 50 years, without mentioning the brutal impact of the Israeli aggression on the Palestinians in Gaza. He only mentioned the Palestinians to further claim that "Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian people's right to dignity and self-determination."²

Unwavering Bias

Biden established his support for the Israeli version of events early into the Hamas attack on military targets and settlements around the Gaza Strip on 7 October. This included repeating fabricated allegations about Hamas militants beheading Israeli babies, photos of which Biden wrongfully claimed to have seen. US media outlets, equally sympathetic to Israel, and the White House itself, later retracted these fabricated reports,³ but Biden is yet to apologize for his statements. When Israel bombed the al-Ahli Baptist hospital on 17 October, massacring hundreds of civilians, Biden and the White House were quick to adopt the Israel narrative, claiming the real source of the blast was a misfiring Islamic Jihad rocket.⁴

Biden's support of Israel's policies went as far as giving the green light to Israel to continue in its genocidal campaign against over 2 million Gazan civilians, after telling Netanyahu that had the US faced such an attack, the response would be "swift, decisive, and overwhelming."⁵ A leaked internal memo from the US State Department included a directive to refrain from using phrases like "de-escalation/ceasefire," "end to violence/bloodshed" and "restoring calm."⁶ Instead, the Biden administration, in line with Israeli objectives, determined the "elimination" of Hamas to be its primary goal.⁷ Biden is also the first US president to visit Israel during active wartime and meet with the Israeli War Cabinet, on 18 October, making the US a partner in the War on Gaza.

Washington's support of Israel is manifested in three main forms:

- 1 "Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel," The White House, 7/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2mnnwupw>
- 2 "Remarks by President Biden on the Terrorist Attacks in Israel," The White House, 10/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3hspnhfn>
- 3 Peter Alexander, Summer Concepcion & Megan Lebowitz, "White House Clarifies Biden's Claim He Saw Photos of Terrorists Beheading Children in Israel-Hamas War," *NBC News*, 11/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2474ksje>
- 4 "Remarks by President Biden and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel before Expanded Bilateral Meeting | Tel Aviv, Israel," The White House, 18/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/bdekn68m>
- 5 Toluse Olorunnipa, "Biden Sends a Pointed Message with His Impassioned Embrace of Israel," *The Washington Post*, 13/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4pkawkdv>
- 6 Akbar Shahid Ahmed, "Stunning State Department Memo Warns Diplomats: No Gaza 'De-Escalation' Talk," *Huffington Post*, 13/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3nnp47x3>
- 7 Lloyd Lee, "Biden Says a Palestinian State Should be Established and Hamas Eliminated Entirely," *Business Insider*, 16/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://.com/5eh3dnu3>



1. Diplomatic and Political Support

Five days after the Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken arrived in Israel in a display of solidarity, from where he embarked on a tour of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and Egypt, to pressure Arab representatives to condemn the Hamas attack, and to request help in releasing US nationals taken as hostages to the Gaza Strip, in addition to demanding Arab efforts to prevent any expansion of the conflict.⁸ According to the US State Department, 29 US citizens were killed in the Hamas operation, and a further 12 - 15 taken hostage.

The Biden administration did not draw attention to the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip, especially after Israel's decision to cut off the entry of water, food, fuel, and medicine the warning it directed to more than 1.1 million Palestinians (almost half of Gaza's population) in the north to move south, until pressure exerted by Arab countries and humanitarian organizations to take notice that a real disaster was unfolding.⁹ The Biden administration began coordinating with Egypt and Israel to open the Rafah crossing and allow the entry of essential aid, the first batch of which entered on 21 October in 20 trucks, and the next the following day in just 14 trucks. But this covers less than 5 percent of real needs, with the White House stipulating that Hamas was not to receive any of this aid. Since 13 October, Biden and members of his administration have also begun to allude to the need for Israel to respect international law and international humanitarian law, but remain adamant in their refusal acknowledge that Israel's brutal bombardment, which has killed thousands of civilians, mostly children and women, and displaced hundreds of thousands, as well as basic infrastructure, constitutes a war crime. The Biden administration argues that it is not possible to determine the truth of what is happening in the Gaza Strip because of what it calls "fog of war."¹⁰

The Biden administration is also actively working to undermine any international effort calling for a "humanitarian pause" to allow humanitarian aid to enter the besieged population of the Gaza Strip. In this context, the United States used its veto in the United Nations Security Council against two draft resolutions, the first submitted by Russia, and the second submitted by Brazil, on the pretext that they do not clearly indicate Israel's right to defend itself. On 21 October, Washington submitted a draft resolution to the Security Council that stipulates "Israel has a right to defend itself and demands Iran stop exporting arms to 'militias and terrorist groups threatening peace and security across the region.'" The draft resolution "calls for the protection of civilians - including those who are trying to get to safety - notes that states must comply with international law when responding to 'terrorist attacks', and urges the 'continuous, sufficient and unhindered' delivery of aid to the Gaza Strip."¹¹

⁸ Peter Martin, Jennifer Jacobs, & Courtney McBride, "As Israel Readies Gaza Invasion, US Sees No Plan for What's Next," *Bloomberg*, 13/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mrk8s7um>

⁹ Paul Blumenthal, "Joe Biden Finally Acknowledges 'Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza' As Priority," *Huffington Post*, 13/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/27j22y7k>

¹⁰ Miranda Nazzaro, "Sullivan Blames 'Fog of War' over Israel's Targeting of Basic Infrastructure in Gaza," *The Hill*, 15/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/yhat57da>

¹¹ Michelle Nichols, "US Pushes UN to Back Israel Self-Defense, Demand Iran Stop Arms to Hamas," *Reuters*, 21/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ysek8y2>



2. Military Support

As soon as the news of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood spread, Biden ordered emergency military aid to be sent to Israel, which included ammunition and interceptor missiles for the Iron Dome. He deployed the US carrier strike group armed with guided missiles, led by the USS Gerald R. Ford, which is the most advanced in the US fleet, carrying more than 5,000 Marines, and additional US special forces, intelligence gathering equipment, and attack aircraft, anchored in the eastern Mediterranean.¹² The second Carrier Strike Group, USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, was deployed in the Arabian Gulf, with the aim of deterring Iran, contrary to initial orders for it to sail towards the eastern Mediterranean.¹³ Together they provide about 80 aircraft with attack capabilities, as well as cruisers, destroyers and submarines equipped with Tomahawk missiles. They could also help Israel fend off potential Iranian medium-range ballistic missile attacks. Washington says that this is to prevent any third party from engaging in the conflict, thus opening new regional fronts against Israel, in reference to Iran and its allies in the region, specifically Hezbollah in Lebanon.¹⁴

In addition, 2,000 members of the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit, a rapid reaction force capable of carrying out special operations, were placed on high alert, preparing if needed to support a large-scale evacuation of US citizens or prisoners held by Palestinian factions.¹⁵ Another group of more than 4000 sailors and marines, will join the US fleet off the coast of occupied Palestine.¹⁶ The Biden administration denies any intention to deploy these forces on the battlefield.¹⁷

On 19 October, Biden announced that he would ask Congress for \$100 billion in aid to Ukraine, Taiwan, and Israel, in addition to budget allocations to protect the US border with Mexico. The White House reported that Israel will receive \$14 billion, in addition its usual annual funding which amounts to at least \$3.8 billion of US military aid. Over the decades, Israel has received more than \$154 billion in military aid from the United States. Taking inflation into account, Israel received approximately \$245 billion from the United States from 1946 - 2022.

US Bias in Context

The unprecedented support of the Biden Administration for Israel can be explained by several factors:

¹² Brian Bennett, "Biden Faces Hard Choices on American Hostages in Gaza," *Time*, 10/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mrxccapx>

¹³ "Statement from Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on Steps to Increase Force Posture," U.S. Department of Defense, 21/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/avwx75x4>

¹⁴ "Blinken Says US is Ready to Respond to Escalation or Targeting of US Forces during Israel-Hamas War," *The Times of India*, 22/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/7p5uzryk>

¹⁵ Oren Liebermann & Natasha Bertrand, "US Sends Second Aircraft Carrier to Mediterranean as Israel Prepares to Expand Gaza Operations," *CNN*, 14/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/25svk4j4>

¹⁶ Peter Martin & Jennifer Jacobs, "Biden's Carriers and Troops Send a Signal of Force if Diplomacy Fails," *Bloomberg*, 19/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/muvw449b>

¹⁷ Liebermann & Bertrand.



1. Biden's personal zeal for Zionism and Israel. He has repeatedly brought up a statement he made years ago bragging about his Zionism, "You don't need to be a Jew to be a Zionist."¹⁸ He has also declared once again that He has "long said if Israel didn't exist, we'd have to invent it."¹⁹ He reiterated these positions in his speech on 10 October, demonstrating his absolute alignment with Israel.
2. Political calculations as the approaching 2024 presidential elections require Biden and the Democrats to present themselves as strong supporters of Israel and its security, after years of tension with Netanyahu and his right-wing government. Meanwhile the Republicans exploit these tensions to accuse Democrats of abandoning Israel, especially in light of the Biden administration's efforts to revive the nuclear agreement with Iran. Opinion polls show a decline in Democrat support for Israel, specifically among the progressive wing of the party.²⁰ Biden's relations with Netanyahu have, this year in particular, soured against the backdrop of the latter's government's insistence on passing a package of "judicial reform" laws, causing sharp Israeli division. Republicans claim that the prisoner exchange deal between Iran and the United States, last month (September), and the conditional release of six billion frozen dollars belonging to Iran, contributed to financing the Hamas operation, despite Iran not yet receiving the money. The Biden administration also found itself having to defend its Middle East policy as some experts held Washington responsible for 7 October, claiming it as evidence of the failure of its approach to the Middle East, which was based on expanding the Abrahamic Accords, initiated by the Donald Trump administration, for normalization between Arab countries and Israel, while ignoring the Palestinians. Critics here cite a statement by the US National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, on 29 September 2023, in which he praised the administration's approach to the Middle East, saying: "the Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades."²¹ The prevailing assumption is that this kind of peace agreement between Arabs and Israel would corner Palestinians, forcing them to accept whatever Israel wants to impose on them, after finding themselves isolated in the shadow of Arab Israeli economic and political normalization. But recent events show that it is not possible to overlook the suffering of Palestinians, nor their legitimate demands for freedom, dignity, and independence.
3. The historical US-Israeli friendship. Washington views Israel as its key regional ally the cornerstone of its Middle East security approach. However, the security and military fragility that Israel appeared to exhibit on the morning of 7 October took Washington by surprise and shook its confidence. In this sense, direct US intervention aims to prevent any possible

¹⁸ Lahav Harkov, "Biden in Israel: You don't Need to be a Jew to be a Zionist," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13/7/2022, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/568th5np>

¹⁹ Kathryn Watson, "Biden Tells Israel, 'You're not Alone'; Says Military Data Show Gaza Militants to Blame for Hospital Explosion," *CBS News*, 18/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/yeyvjj23>

²⁰ Lydia Saad, "Democrats' Sympathies in Middle East Shift to Palestinians," *Gallup*, 16/3/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mu2swmcw>

²¹ Zachary Basu, "Sullivan Denies White House Took 'Eye off the Ball' before Hamas Attack," *Axios*, 15/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4zn69hxb>



Israeli collapse if the conflict expands, and the resulting repercussions on US strategic calculations. Since the Biden administration came to the White House declaring that China was the “most consequential geopolitical challenge” to the US, ahead of Russia,²² it sought to reduce US commitments in the Middle East. Biden was thus attempting to build on the Trump administration’s expansion of Arab-Israeli normalization, especially between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and to build a new regional security structure linked to this normalization. This was to be strengthened by an economic component, manifested in the planned corridor between India, the Middle East, and Europe, proposed in New Delhi last month, to compete with China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The Biden administration assumed that Israel would serve as a lever for its Arab allies to offset Iranian influence and capabilities in the region, but this seems to be crumbling since the recent Hamas attack, prompting Biden’s return to the region to enable Israel to restore its image of deterrence, which had suffered a major blow, and to prevent the opening of new fronts that could ignite a regional war that Israel may not be able to confront.

Conclusion

The ability of Hamas to strike on 7 October and the White House response threaten to undermine US strategy in the region. Israeli failures in the first hours of the offensive and the increased US military presence in the region, seeking to deter Iran and its satellites from opening any new front with Israel, may drag the US into an unpopular regional war that distracts Washington from confronting China. In addition, the absence of a clear US vision for the region and the tense situation there may destabilize some Arab allies, who fear popular protests. Furthermore, Egypt and Jordan are concerned Israel will push new waves of Palestinian refugees over their borders. While Biden’s absolute stance with Israel in its brutal aggression against the Gaza Strip, may benefit his relationship with the pro-Israel lobby in the United States, it may cost him dearly in support, and votes, from the Democrat party’s progressive and youth. His electoral calculations also need to factor in Arabs and Muslim votes in swing states such as Wisconsin, Georgia, and Arizona, which could turn the tables for him.²³ The Biden administration’s excessive display of bias towards Israel and its disregard for the suffering of the Palestinians, has resulted in resignations and widespread dissatisfaction in the State Department. This dissatisfaction has expanded to include employees and members of Congress, specifically from the progressive wing of his party. It has even deepened divisions in society, in universities, going so far as to cause ruptures in Silicon Valley and Hollywood.²⁴

²² The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, October 2022), p. 8, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ytnz96rs>

²³ Will Bunch, “Will Biden’s Resolute Stance on Israel Cost Him the 2024 Election?,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2efh5534>

²⁴ Joe Flint & Sabrina Siddiqui, “Israel-Hamas War Sows Division within Entertainment Industry,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 22/10/2023, accessed on 24/10/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/hytfh6y4>