

Special Project – One Month to the Swords of Iron War The United States' Role in the War: Interests and Involvement



President Biden meets Prime Minister Netanyahu during his visit to Israel, being the first US President to do so in a time of war (October 18, 2023) | Photo: Avi Ohaion, GPO

A war that directly involves US national security interests

Since the very outset, the United States has shown unequivocal support for Israel in its war against Hamas. Israel has been benefiting from American military aid and show of force, financial support, and diplomatic pressure on its enemies. The

understanding is that the October 7 massacre was not only an attack on Israel but also against the US and its interests. The apparent appreciation that the US leadership has that is war cannot merely be viewed through the narrow Israeli-Hamas prism, but rather a wide-scale conflict with global implications

gravely impacting American interests, constitutes a strategic asset for Israel.

President Biden was quick to make multiple statements in support of Israel's right to defend itself and in condemnation of Hamas and Iran, while underscoring his administration's commitment to Israel's security, including by expressing support for extensive Israeli military responses. He made two live statements in the days following the attack, then an unprecedented 7-hour visit to Israel – the first American President to visit Israel during a time of war – followed by an Oval Office address. Such a broadcast is usually reserved for critical junctions in US history, and the President did so while stressing the gravity of the hour and making an appeal to Congress to provide Israel with critical funding.

Notably, the US has been outspoken about the gravity of this attack and the risk it poses to global security, and made sure it radiated its stance toward the international community, Iran, and US adversaries Russia and China. Since the very outbreak of this war, President Biden has been vocally supportive of Israel, kept in direct touch with Prime Minister Netanyahu on an almost daily basis, and directed his senior officials to be intimately involved in supporting Israel's efforts in this war. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Israel shortly after October 7 and more than on one occasion, with Blinken and his team even spending hours in intimate Israeli war cabinet discussions, an unprecedented move. The United States is making clear that it stands along the same front with Israel.

Public remarks

President Biden and top American officials have been clear about their unequivocal support for Israel, expressing both their conviction in its right for self-defense and their disgust and reprehension by Hamas' actions, going into graphic detail of the unprecedented massacre. President Biden emphasized on a number of occasions, “we stand

with Israel.” He described the Hamas massacre as “pure, unadulterated evil” and “brings to mind the worst rampages of ISIS”. He continued, “There is no justification for terrorism. There is no excuse. The loss of innocent life is heartbreaking. Like every nation in the world, Israel has the right to respond — indeed has a duty to respond — to these vicious attacks.” This point was also highlighted by secretaries Blinken and Austin. The President also condemned the uptick in anti-Semitic attacks across the United States against the Jewish community.

Most notably, President Biden underscored that this war does not only involve Israel, but is viewed as a crossroads in global security and directly impacts American national security. In the President's words, “This is not about party or politics. This is about the security of our world, the security of the United States of America.”

Famously, he indirectly warned Hezbollah, Iran, and other actors from intervening: “To any country, any organization, anyone thinking of taking advantage of this situation, **I have one word: Don't.** Our hearts may be broken, but our resolve is clear.”

In his visit to Israel, President Biden emphasized that “I come to Israel with a single message: You are not alone. As long as the United States stands — and we will stand forever — we will not let you ever be alone.” While speaking about the Holocaust he said, “The world watched then, it knew, and the world did nothing. We will not stand by and do nothing again. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.” He referred to the Israeli hostages as a top American priority. Underscoring Israel's right to self-defense he said, “I have long said: If Israel didn't exist, we would have to invent it. ... My administration has been in close touch with your leadership from the first moments of this attack, and we are going to make sure you have what you need to protect your people, to defend your nation.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu thanked the President for his support and his “moral clarity”, saying, “I've seen your support every day in the depth and breadth of cooperation that we have had since the beginning of this war, a level of

cooperation that is truly unprecedented in the history of the great alliance between our two nations.” He reiterated Israel’s objective in this war as defeating Hamas.

Both the President and his Secretaries used the word “slaughtered” deliberately, not “killed” to underscore the gravity of this terrorist attack. Secretary of State Anthoy Blinken, visiting Israel twice and fiercely advocating for its cause in the media and in the Senate hearing, said to Israel, “You may be strong enough on your own to defend yourself, but as long as America exists, you will never, ever have to. We will always be there by your side. Hamas has only one agenda- to destroy Israel and to murder Jews. No country can or would tolerate the slaughter of its citizens or simply return to the conditions that allowed it to take place.” He added, “Hamas would not be Hamas without the support that it’s gotten over many years from Iran.”

In his visit to Israel, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin remarked, “As a former commander of Central Command, the deliberate cruelty of Hamas vividly reminds me of ISIS: bloodthirsty, fanatical, and hateful. And like ISIS, Hamas has nothing to offer but zealotry, bigotry, and death.” Like President Biden, he sought to clarify that the US remains committed to both Israel and Ukraine: “The United States is the most powerful country in the world. And we remain fully able to project power, uphold our commitments, and direct resources to multiple theaters. So, we will stand with Israel even as we stand with Ukraine.”

US officials also nuanced their positions by underscoring the following:

- Israel must act **in accordance with international law** as it defends itself;
- **Humanitarian aid to Gaza** should be provided - and to that end, President Biden has allocated \$100 million USD in funding for the Palestinians and participated in the airlift of humanitarian assistance designated for civilians in Gaza (even though, previous experience shows much of

that assistance ends up in the hands of Hamas);

- **Hamas, they claim, does not represent the Palestinian people** and does not come in conflict with the US stated goal of striving to reach a **Two State Solution**.

American interests in this war

The US administration has been leading an unprecedented effort to make clear to anyone involved that it has a stake in this war and that the Israel-Hamas conflict is directly impacting critical American national security interests. Weakness on the Gaza front will be immediately translated into a further collapse of regional deterrence against Iran and its proxies, directly threatening the security and stability of central US partners in the region; and vice versa – resolute victory on the Gaza front will be translated into enhancing critical American interests in the region. That would evidently mean the following interests:

- **The stability of Israel and that of pragmatic Arab countries**, that constitute the edifice of the American sphere of influence in the region.
- **The immediate safety of American citizens as well as US military personnel in the region** – most notably in Israel, in Doha, Qatar, and around Syria and Iraq, as well as US embassies around the region.
- **Assuring the security of naval routes critical for the proper functioning of the global supply chain** through the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Red Sea and elsewhere.
- **Assuring the continued flow of petroleum and crude oil imports from the Gulf region**, that constitutes 12% of the US energy consumption (2022).
- **Enhancing the prospects of an American-led Israeli-Sunni coalition against Iran and its allies**, with the understanding that actors who project strength are more likely to

become relevant peace partners in the region. The expansion of the Abraham Accords is front and center to the US foreign policy agenda.

- **Countering the Russian-Chinese-Iranian axis** that has been metastasizing in recent years, putting American interests at risk and forming a global front against the US and its allies. Success in the Gaza front will directly impact America's stance vis-à-vis this axis.
- **Prevention of copycat attacks on US soil** inspired by Hamas' October 7 massacre by enhancing American deterrence.

The US is also committed to this war not only because of geopolitical and national security reasons, but also given the fact that **at least 10 American citizens are among the 240 held hostage in Gaza by Hamas**, and as Secretary Blinken confirmed in a Senate hearing, **some 400 Americans and their families - around 1,000 people - are trapped inside of the Gaza Strip** since Hamas would not let them out, alongside some 5,000 people of foreign nationalities.

Main US efforts

The prospects for a ceasefire

Despite rumors of American requests from Israel to delay the ground invasion in order to improve the chances of a "prisoner swap" deal with Hamas over the return of the hostages, the United States has been consistent in its position that a **ceasefire would be detrimental to obtain the joint Israeli-American objectives of this war**. While the idea might be appealing in theory, in particular given the images coming out from Gaza and the ensuing international pressure on Israel, **ceasefire would mean allowing Hamas to resume its force buildup, remove the pressure on Hamas regarding the hostage release, and effectively surrender to Hamas' demands by allowing it to dictate the timeframe of the fighting**.

This position was best expressed by Secretary Blinken during an October 31 hearing in the Senate. In response to a question by Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), Secretary Blinken described in detail the horrors of October 7, including graphic images from one of the houses in the kibbutzim. He then said, **"when it comes to a ceasefire in this moment... that would simply consolidate what Hamas has been able to do and allow it to remain where it is and potentially repeat what it did another day. And that's not tolerable. No nation would tolerate it."** While considering the idea of humanitarian pauses, he opposed "a reversion to the status quo" with going back to "Hamas being responsible for the governance and so-called security of Gaza because that's simply an invitation to repeat what happened. And again, no nation would tolerate that."

The US administration has made it clear that it is fully supportive of this position. On October 18, **the United States vetoed a Brazilian-led UN Security Council resolution** that called for "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting in Gaza, the only "no" vote while 12 of the 15 members voted in favor, and Russia and the UK abstained. Russia proposed an amendment that would have called for an "immediate, durable and full ceasefire, and to stop attacks against civilians", which was subsequently rejected.

US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, claimed that "this resolution did not mention Israel's right of self-defense."

The United Nations General Assembly later adopted a resolution calling for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce" with 120 votes in favor, just 14 against and 45 abstentions. The US was among the only countries voting in support of Israel and against the Jordanian-led resolution, alongside Austria, Czech Republic, Croatia, and Paraguay. It is worth noting that **the US is leading the effort to legitimize Israel's right for self-defense in a mostly hostile and seemingly irrelevant effort by the United Nations**.

US Assistance to Israel

Financial: President Biden pledged Congress \$14 billion USD in security assistance for Israel. While the President aimed for tying the aid package to Israel and Ukraine together, saying “making sure Israel and Ukraine succeed is vital for America’s national security”, the new Speaker of the House, Rep. Mike Johnson has decided to push for two separate bills. The division between Republican lawmakers on whether to present the aid packages together or separately, is largely due to waning support for additional American funding to Ukraine. Yet, these two approaches are set to create a collision between the two factions in the Senate which may hinder the passing of any aid to Israel. Secretaries Austin and Blinken appeared before a Senate hearing insisting that Republicans would pass assistance to both countries as they are closely linked and should not be decoupled.

Meanwhile, the House of Representatives passed a resolution in support of Israel shortly after the election of Rep. Mike Johnson as the new speaker. Speaker Johnson was proud to underscore that this was the first bill he presented to the House as speaker.

The resolution passed in an overwhelming majority of 412-10, with six voting present, and reaffirmed Israel’s right to self-defense; recommitted the U.S. to Israel’s security, including through emergency weapons resupply and intelligence sharing; urged all nations to unequivocally condemn the Hamas terrorist attack; demanded Hamas immediately release the roughly 220 hostages; and condemned Iran’s support for regional proxy groups like Hamas and urged the full enforcement of US sanctions against Tehran.

On November 3, the House adopted 226-196 the request for a \$14.5 billion USD aid package for Israel.

Military: The US sent two of its aircraft carriers with their striker group to the Mediterranean to deter any possible escalation of the conflict by having Hezbollah and other proxy groups joining the war,

also possibly as a gesture to showcase its regional presence facing Russia and China, its adversaries to the fight over regional influence. Aircraft carriers USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower were deployed in the eastern Mediterranean, “to deter hostile actions against Israel or any efforts toward widening this war following Hamas’s attack,” according to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

It should be noted that the USS Carney, that had already been present in the Red Sea, helped with intercepting a barrage of cruise missiles and attack drones coming from the Houthi regime in Yemen during the month of October, in a critical move to shield Israel from such attacks, with American air defense systems deployed in Saudi Arabia intercepting others. Israeli air defense system Arrow 3 intercepted other attempts.

The US intelligence service also continues their cooperation with their Israeli counterparts, and as per President Biden, it has also deployed hostage recovery experts to advise Israeli security services in freeing the hostages.

Airlift: Aircraft loaded with **US weapons and other munitions** have already begun arriving in Israel. It received its 45th cargo plane from the US, carrying 1,000 tons of armaments. Among other things, they are designated to fully supply any underequipped Israeli military units and civil protection units. Additionally, the US contributed by sending a cargo shipment of armored vehicles to replace those damaged in the conflict.

U.S. defense officials say the administration has already given Israel **small diameter bombs, other munition and interceptor missiles for its Iron Dome air defense system**, and more will come. The U.S. is also getting defense companies to expedite weapons orders by Israel that were already on the books, including munitions for the Iron Dome. In his Oval Office address, President Biden pledged to send ammunition and interceptors to replenish Iron Dome and that Israel will “have what it needs to defend its cities and citizens.”

The Pentagon has also ordered **additional warplanes to bolster A-10, F-15 and F-16 squadrons** at bases throughout the Middle East.

The Iranian military threat on the United States

While the United States has been deploying its military personnel and sending an airlift of equipment to assist Israel, it is also keeping an eye out on the **Iranian efforts to possibly draw America into this war**. Top Iranian officials scolded the United States for their backing of Israel, calling it “complacent with the genocide in Gaza”. Such remarks came from Iranian Leader Ali Khamenei, President Ibrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, as well as direct military threats from the IRGC spokesperson, Ramezan Sharif.

Reportedly, US officials confirmed **23 attacks on American bases in Iraq and in Syria were carried out since October 7**. An official said, “we are concerned about all elements of Iran’s threat network increasing their attacks in a way that **risks miscalculation or tipping the region into war**.” In a

Department of Defense briefing, an official referred to US strikes against Iranian targets in Iraq and in Syria, and said, “Iran is responsible.” He added, “the United States does not seek conflict, nor do we desire further hostilities. However, the Iran-backed attacks against U.S. forces are unacceptable and must cease. It’s crucial to understand that these actions are not related to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas.”

Foreign Minister Abdollahian said on the UN podium, that given the US support for Israel, “they will not be spared from this fire”. IRGC spokesperson said, “we have their bases in our crosshairs”. On October 30, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani **practically admitted Iran was behind the attacks on American bases**, saying “the attack on American bases in the region, especially in Iraq, is the result of wrong American policies in the region, which we hope it will correct.” He said the attacks were carried out by proxies that oppose “US presence in the region” and “American support for the crimes of the Zionist regime.” He added, “you reap what you sow.”



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken meets with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the War Cabinet (October 16, 2023) | Photo: Haim Zach, GPO