



# Biden's October 18 Visit to Israel: An Opportunity to Change Policy on Iran

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*President Joe Biden arrived in Israel on Wednesday, October 18. The visit is the latest demonstration of staunch U.S. support for Israel as it seeks to eliminate the threat from Hamas, the terrorist group that carried out the horrific October 7 attack. But Hamas alone is not responsible for that attack; it would not have been possible without Iranian support. In addition to U.S. support for Israel's operation in Gaza and defending Israel against spurious accusations of war crimes, like the recent hospital explosion in Gaza, President Biden should use his visit to Israel as an opportunity to announce a change in U.S. policy on Iran—away from accommodation and toward regime collapse.*

## What Happened?

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced that President Biden will be visiting Israel this Wednesday, October 18, to “[demonstrate](#) his steadfast support for Israel in the face of Hamas’s brutal terrorist attack and to consult on next steps.” He outlined five goals for President Biden’s visit:
  - » “Reaffirm the United States’ solidarity with Israel and our ironclad commitment to its security;”
  - » “Underscore our crystal-clear message to any actor, state or non-state trying to take advantage of this crisis to attack Israel: Don’t” – adding that it is for this reason that the United States deployed two aircraft carrier groups and “and other military assets to the region;”
  - » “Coordinate closely with our Israeli partners to secure the release of hostages taken by Hamas;”
  - » “Receive a comprehensive brief on Israel’s war aims and strategy;” and
  - » “Hear from Israel how it will conduct its operations in a way that minimizes civilian casualties and enables humanitarian assistance to flow to civilians in Gaza in a way that does not benefit Hamas.”
- Upon arriving in Israel, and examining evidence from the October 17 explosion at Al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City, President Biden clearly stated that that Israel was not responsible, [telling](#) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, “I was deeply saddened and outraged by the explosion of the hospital in Gaza yesterday, and based on what I’ve seen, it appears as though it was done by the other team—not you.”

## Why Is It Important?

- President Biden's visit, like his swift action and strong rhetoric in the aftermath of the barbaric 10/7 attack, is an important demonstration of American support for Israel and continued U.S. commitment to leadership and stability in the Middle East. However, the threat to Israeli, and U.S. security, comes not from Hamas alone, but from their Iranian backer. U.S. policy needs to change to prevent Iran from being able to fund and foment such violence again.
- The visit follows strong messaging by the President and his cabinet, a week of consultations with counterparts in the region, and a robust and immediate deployment of U.S. assets to the region.
  - » On October 8 the Department of Defense [announced](#) the deployment of the *USS Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group, F-35, F-15, F-16, and A-10 fighter squadrons in the region and supplies of munitions and equipment needed.
  - » On October 14, the Department of Defense [announced](#) the deployment of a second Carrier Strike Group, based around the *USS Eisenhower*, to the Eastern Mediterranean, as “part of our effort to deter hostile actions against Israel or any efforts toward widening this war following Hamas’s attack on Israel.”
- Israel's security, however, will not be restored merely by defeating Hamas, nor will U.S. deterrence and these recent enhancements to its Middle East force posture automatically prevent Hezbollah or Iran from escalating the conflict. As important as U.S. support for that war effort is, and will remain, America's “ironclad commitment” to Israel's security must also address the primary threat to the entire Middle East and ultimately the driving force behind 10/7: Iran.
- In contrast to its clear support for Israel in the wake of October 7, the Biden administration seemingly seeks to play down Iran's role in the attack. This reticence suggests the administration remains reluctant to pivot away from accommodationist policies that [enriched](#) and emboldened Iran and its proxies to ramp up their threats to Israel. For almost three years, the United States has let Iranian-backed [attacks](#) on U.S. troops, regional partners, and commercial shipping go largely unanswered.
  - » Moreover, conspicuous under-enforcement of U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil [sales](#), primarily to China, plus billions in hostage ransoms and Iraq sanctions waivers, enabled Iran to refill its war chest as the United States looked the other way.
- No amount of U.S. assets and support will deter Iran if it is not directly implicated in the October 7 and in the escalation since then, and if a clear commitment by the United States and its partners around the world does not exist to address the systemic threats Iran poses around the region and around the world.
  - » In recent days Iranian officials have [dialed](#) up their escalatory rhetoric, saying it would be a “strategic mistake” for the United States to become militarily involved, and that the U.S. would become a “legitimate target” for Iran and its proxies.

## What Should the United States Do Next?

- President Biden should deliver an address outlining a change in policy towards Iran, which replaces the current unworkable and counterproductive attempts at détente with a policy of [regime collapse](#). Using his visit to announce a change in policy towards Iran would be the most powerful show of support by the United States at this critical hour. The key [aspects](#) of this policy would include:

- » Doing nothing that strengthens the Tehran regime, including sanctions relief or paying ransom.
- » Restoring and enforcing punishing economic sanctions.
- » Rolling back Iran's regional footprint, such as by interdicting weapons supplies to its proxies, and retaliating against its attacks on us.
- » [Supporting](#) regime opponents in any way possible.
- » Ensuring that Iran cannot achieve nuclear weapons capability.
- » Giving Israel the weapons to counter Iran and prevent a nuclear Iran, so we won't have to as much or, more likely, in case we won't at all. We could further deter Iran by concluding a mutual defense pact with Israel, as JINSA first raised in 2018.
- Biden should [clarify](#) how the Israeli Defense Forces adhere to the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) while Hamas intentionally abuses it.
- Biden should use his bully pulpit in Israel to put supposed U.S. regional "partners" on notice that they can either support Hamas, financially, politically, rhetorically, or they can enjoy good relations with the United States, but not both.
- On the other hand, Biden should offer unwavering U.S. support to regional countries that will have to courage to stand with Israel.
  - » Specifically, he should announce that – like Secretary Blinken – he will personally travel to regional capitals, especially Riyadh, to reassure leaders of America's commitment to the Middle East and make the case for continuing to expand the Abraham Accords.