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Too Little; Too Late



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After five months of doubling down with Israel against Palestinians in Gaza, the Biden administration now finds itself walking in two directions. On the one hand, it continues to supply U.S. bombs that fall indiscriminately on both northern and southern Gaza. At the same time, it air drops food parcels for the hungry. While President Biden now acknowledges that the Israeli response to the October 7 massacre is “over the top,” last weekend he reaffirmed his unconditional support of Israel, declaring: “I am never going to leave Israel.”

In response to the October 7 massacre, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his plan to eliminate Hamas through an exterminating war of retribution against

Gaza. When Biden endorsed that plan on October 10 and promised more weapons, he must have known that Hamas could not really be eliminated so long as the Israeli oppression continued. He must have known that a scorched earth campaign in the densely populated Gaza Strip would be a war on the Palestinian population, not just Hamas. He must have known that in aiding Israel his administration would be condemning innocent Palestinians to extreme suffering and death.

Not only did the Israeli war cabinet launch a relentless bombing campaign in Gaza, but it also barred the entry of food, clean water, fuel, and other human necessities from entering the Gaza Strip. As its starvation war tactic pushed Gazans to the brink of famine, Israel began to allow some humanitarian aid, but it has fallen far short of what is required to meet the needs of more than two million war-traumatized population.

By early January, UN officials and academic experts were warning that Gaza was “on the brink of famine.” Yet Israeli plans to invade Rafah (where more than a million Palestinians had sought refuge), “day after” issues, and unsuccessful hostage negotiations were the stories favored by the press. Almost nothing about famine in the major journals. Meanwhile, Israel has continued to bomb and attack targets in both north and south Gaza, raising the death toll to more than 31,000.

Only in February did the Biden administration wake up to the possibility of widespread famine. In various diplomatic meetings, it urged Israel to allow more food trucks to enter Gaza and to take steps to reduce civilian casualties. The IDF responded with bombardments of Rafah and targeted attacks on hungry Gazans surrounding food trucks. Both Israeli citizens and some soldiers have blocked aid convoys at some entry points.

Instead of withholding arms, restricting them, or breaking relations with Netanyahu, the Biden team came up with two unilateral schemes that were designed more to allay concerns of constituents than to meet the immediate needs of hungry Palestinians. The first was to deliver parcels by air, an inefficient and costly method as compared with deliveries by truck convoys. The air drops have proved to be dangerous as well, killing some on the ground when parachutes fail to inflate. The second is to construct a floating pier that can receive food deliveries by sea.

The pier idea may have been a good one two or three months ago. Now it appears as a cruel joke because thousands of intended beneficiaries will likely die of starvation before the pier is operational two months from now. From the outside, Biden’s policy is manifestly inconsistent. It calls for humanitarian assistance while allowing U.S. bombs and bullets to kill Gazans. What is Biden’s goal?

As pro-Palestinian protests (largely ignored by the media) erupt around the world, the U.S. President has moderated somewhat his adamant pro-Israel position and even endorsed Senator Schumer's criticisms of Netanyahu. Yet his actions to support Israel speak louder than his calls for Israeli moderation. Indeed, his words and actions are both too little and too late.

If President Biden really wants to stop the killing in Gaza, here is what he could do:

- Suspend all military aid and weapons transfers.
- Accept the UN Security Council's call for a ceasefire.
- Threaten to break diplomatic relations.
- Impose sanctions on War Cabinet members.
- Negotiate a temporary refuge for Gazans in Egypt.
- Support legal accountability for war crimes.

Sadly, none of these steps are likely to occur in the current administration; and even if carried out would be too little and too late to save the many thousands who have already perished from Israeli bombings. Yet they are better than nothing to protect those who still live.

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