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## Biden Can Halt Wider War: Stop Sending Arms

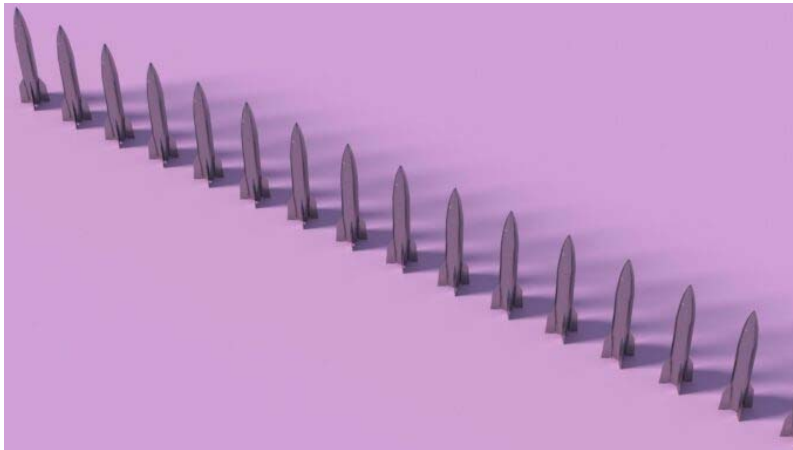


Image by Alexander Mills.

Israel's violence toward its neighbors, long out of control in its destruction of Gaza, now threatens to open new fronts, involve new nations, and even drag the United States into direct conflict. Promises of a ceasefire from the Biden Administration have come to nothing. Soft, behind the scenes diplomacy has failed to achieve peace.

In response, "Ceasefire," the first demand of the peace movement since Israel's destruction of Gaza began, has evolved. The actions of the Israeli military and government, the indiscriminate killing of women and children with US weapons, and appropriate frustration from activists in the street have created a new demand: an American arms embargo against Israel. For President Biden and his administration, it may be the only way out of a new quagmire in the Middle East.

But instead of de-escalating the war and reaching a lasting peace with the Palestinian people, Netanyahu's Israeli government is expanding the war to new fronts. On September 23rd the

Israeli Defense Force launched a barrage of attacks on Lebanon, killing over 600 people and wounding thousands.

It is now threatening a ground invasion. The previous week it simultaneously detonated electronic devices across Lebanon killing dozens and maiming thousands, including civilians and children. Commenting on that attack, former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said, “I don’t think there’s any question that it’s a form of terrorism.” These terror attacks in Lebanon were perpetrated *just one day* after a senior Biden advisor warned Netanyahu not to expand the war.

These are only the latest examples of a pattern of escalation by Israel. In January an Israeli strike killed a top Hezbollah commander in Beirut, Lebanon. In April Israel destroyed the Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria. In late July they assassinated the political leader of Hamas, and lead negotiator in the ceasefire talks, in Tehran, while he was attending the inauguration of Iran’s new president. Israel has also escalated the scale of violence in the West Bank, killing over 500 civilians in the past year and launching a major military operation there in August.

Israeli officials have recently described their strategy of expanding the war to include Lebanon as “de-escalation by escalation” – an oxymoron that flies in the face of the Biden Administration’s long stated goal to prevent a wider, regional war.

This diplomatic failure on the part of President Biden and his foreign policy team threatens to drag the United States into another war in the Middle East. The Pentagon announced that the US is sending additional forces, adding to the 40,000 US servicemen and women already in the region. Another aircraft carrier, the USS Truman, and accompanying ships is now headed to the area to join the USS Abraham Lincoln, sending thousands more sailors to the region as well, at considerable expense—and risk.

More direct US involvement in Israel’s wars threatens not only those US personnel, but also the political situation at home. A major foreign policy failure so close to the November presidential election could have the effect of bolstering former President Donald Trump’s bid to retake the White House. Trump has consistently criticized Biden for not supporting Israel enough, saying he should let them “finish the job” in Gaza. No friend to the Palestinians, Trump even used the term “Palestinian” as an insult and slur on the debate stage with Biden. Despite repeated signs that the Israeli PM is not a trustworthy partner for peace, President Biden has failed to use his leverage to rein him in. In a recent statement Netanyahu declared he will not entertain diplomatic ideas on Lebanon and will not engage in ceasefire talks for 45

days. The fact that the statement came 45 days before the US presidential election is a clear signal of Netanyahu's political desires and motivations.

So what can Mr. Biden, his administration, and presidential hopeful VP Harris do? They can change course and finally put their foot down with Netanyahu and his right-wing government. The planned introduction of a Joint Resolution of Disapproval by Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont provides an opportunity to do so. This privileged resolution requires the US Senate to take a vote on the sale of \$20 billion dollars of military equipment to Israel. More than \$18 billion comes in the form of high tech F-15 fighter-bombers, but the sale also includes tank munitions, mortar shells, and precision bombs.

Biden could preempt the vote by announcing a pause to at least some weapons to Israel in light of the expanding war he has long opposed publicly. This move could also shield the Biden Administration from forthcoming reports from inspectors general investigating human rights violations committed by Israel using US weapons, a breach of US law.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has certainly given President Biden cause to stop sending US arms to his right wing government. The assault on the people of Gaza is nearing its one-year anniversary. Tens of thousands of Israelis are protesting their government's failure to get back hostages taken by Hamas during its attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023. Former Israeli Prime Ministers Barak and Olmert have criticized Netanyahu's prosecution of the war and blamed him for strategic failures that led to October 7th. President Biden could embrace these more reasonable forces in Israel, framing his arms stoppage as a message to Netanyahu personally and an effort to retrieve the hostages.

He's done it before. In one of President Biden's first foreign policy moves as president he announced a pause in offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia. The kingdom had been using such weapons to destroy its neighbor to the south, Yemen, since 2015. Biden's move helped pave the way for negotiations leading to a ceasefire in Yemen that has largely held since 2022. His example of presidential leadership, while not perfect, illustrates a clear roadmap.

There's historical precedent too. Presidents Eisenhower, Reagan, and George H.W. Bush also leveraged US arms to Israel. Want a ceasefire to end or prevent humanitarian disaster? *Stop providing the fire.*

President Biden's strategy to achieve a ceasefire and end the destruction of Gaza has, so far, failed. His strategy to prevent a wider war in the Middle East is currently failing. It's time for a tougher, clearer tack. There is still time to prevent the complete destruction of Gaza and to avert another disastrous regional war. There is time for Biden to avoid a political blunder that will permanently damage his legacy as president. There is time to energize young voters and

Arab-American and Muslim-American voters who fear a return of Trumpism but can't stomach a vote for an administration they see as complicit in genocide.

*But there isn't much time.*

The Not Another Bomb Campaign, launched by the Uncommitted movement that successfully mobilized over 700,000 voters to express their discontent with Mr. Biden's Gaza policy in the Democratic Primary, has the correct framing. "It is crystal clear: In order to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, the U.S. must immediately stop arming Israel."

Satisfying this new demand can also stop the expansion of violence into Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, preventing the loss of American lives. Heeding it might be the only way to stop the horror.

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