

US Elections Unveiled: A Media Roundup



A Periodic Overview of Major US Newspapers

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October 7, 2024, the Hamas attack marked one of the most devastating and coordinated assaults on Israel in recent history. Hamas launched a multi-pronged offensive, including large-scale rocket fire, cross-border incursions, and ground assaults. The attack took place during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, taking Israel by surprise. One year later, more than 42,000 Palestinians are dead, and most of Gaza is in ruins, with its 2 million inhabitants facing one of the worst humanitarian disasters of this century. Israel has failed to achieve its stated goal of eliminating Hamas, and some 100 hostages remain captive in Gaza. Meanwhile, U.S. sponsored cease-fire talks between Israel and Hamas have all but collapsed, even as the war has now spread to Lebanon, and the threat of a wider war with Iran looms on the Horizon. One can't help but wonder what the U.S. political goal is with this current Middle East conflict. This paper hopes to provide some insight into what is going on in Washington D.C. as tensions in the Middle East escalate.

Senior White House figures privately told Israel that the U.S. would support its decision to increase military pressure against Hezbollah even as the Biden administration publicly urged the Israeli government to curtail its strikes according to American and Israeli officials. Not everyone in the Biden administration was on board with Israel's shift from Hamas in the South to Hezbollah in the North, despite support inside the White House, the officials said. The decision to focus on Hezbollah sparked division within the U.S. government, drawing opposition from people inside the Pentagon, State Department and intelligence community who believed Israel's move against the Iran-backed militia could drag American forces into yet another Middle East conflict. This latest fight with Hezbollah began the day after Oct. 7, 2023, when the group began firing rockets from Lebanon into Israel which eventually forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee the area on both sides. Hamas launched its war on Israel from Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023. The U.S. officials knew little of exactly what Israel was planning, but even as they supported Israel pressuring Hezbollah, they urged caution. They warned that if Israel went too far it could risk escalating the situation into an all-out regional war which is something the Biden administration has been trying to avoid for nearly a year.

The U.S. also stressed that the only way to end the conflict was through a negotiated diplomatic agreement. Some in the administration say that what looks like a rift is just the United States pursuing multiple routes at once. "Both things can be true — the U.S. can want diplomacy and support Israel's larger goals against Hezbollah," a senior U.S. official said. "There's clearly a line that the administration is toeing, it's just not clear what that line is." Behind the scenes, other top U.S. national security officials are describing Israel's Lebanon operations as a history-defining moment that will reshape the Middle East for the better for years to come. The thinking goes: Israel has obliterated Hezbollah's top command structure in Lebanon, severely undercutting the group's capabilities and weakened Iran, which used Hezbollah as a proxy and power projector. People within the Biden administration agreed that the conflict, while fragile, could offer an opportunity to reduce Iran's influence in Lebanon and the region. The Biden administration wants to support Israel's actions against a U.S.-designated terrorist group that has killed Americans and threatens

the region. However, it is not comfortable endorsing Israel's campaign completely or publicly because it is worried Israel will creep too far into Lebanese territory, instigating an all-out war, one of the U.S. officials said. When questioned about the situation, the U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken said, "With regard to Lebanon, what's the best way to achieve the stated objective of creating an environment in northern Israel that gives people confidence to return to their homes? As I said, we believe the diplomatic course is the best one".

On October 7, 2024 Iran launched 200 missiles toward Israel with the United States vowing "severe consequences" for the action. Around 7:30 pm local time in Israel, Iran was assessed to have launched missiles with sirens sounding across Israel, according to Israeli military. Israel was "able to intercept the majority of the incoming missiles", with two US naval destroyer ships firing approximately a dozen interceptors to assist, according to Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder. According to Ryder, there was "minimal damage on the ground" in Israel.

The United States appeared eager to tamp down regional tensions following the attack, even as it stressed that Iran's actions warranted "severe consequences". Jake Sullivan, White House national security adviser, addressed reporters and stated "Obviously, this is a significant escalation by Iran, a significant event, and it is equally significant that we were able to step up with Israel and create a situation in which no one was killed in this attack in Israel, so far as we know at this time". Sullivan added "We are now going to look at what the appropriate next steps are to secure first and foremost American interests, and then to promote stability to the maximum extent possible as we go forward". President Biden reiterated Sullivan's comments and stressed his administration's unwavering support for its ally by emphasizing a strong correlation between the "defeated and ineffective attack" with Israeli military capability along with "intensive planning between Washington and Israel". Vice President Harris monitored the strike developments from the White House situation room with Biden and condemned the attack "unequivocally" and called it "reckless and brazen"

Former President Trump quickly took to social media to blame the Biden administration for the attacks. On Truth Social, Trump posted "Look at the World today — Look at the missiles flying right now in the Middle East, look at what's happening with Russia/Ukraine, look at Inflation destroying the World. NONE OF THIS HAPPENED WHILE I WAS PRESIDENT!". Trump later said that the Iranian attack happened because other nations "don't respect our country anymore," using an often-repeated line of attack on Biden and Harris, claiming the pair are weak on foreign policy suggesting that it has led to more world conflict.

Washington had for months attempted to have Israel reach agreements to end the war in Gaza. One week before the Iranian missile strike, there was an unsuccessful scramble to secure a deal between and Hezbollah to stop fighting. At the time, Secretary Anthony Blinken warned that diplomacy was the best option to “avoid a full-blown war” in the region. Israel had repeatedly ignored U.S. efforts and pressed forward; aware it has Hezbollah on the back foot in wiping out much of its leadership. U.S. and French officials received enough positive signals from Israeli and Lebanese counterparts to release a joint U.S.-French statement calling for a 21-day cessation of hostilities. U.S. officials touted the statement to reporters as a “breakthrough”. The optimists in Biden’s inner circle thought a cease-fire in Lebanon could open a backdoor to one in Gaza, ending hostilities just before the U.S. presidential election. Meanwhile, Netanyahu instructed his armed forces to “continue fighting at full force” in remarks that embarrassed U.S. officials who leaned on the prime minister’s top aide, Ron Dermer, to issue a statement in support of the cease-fire discussions. French and Lebanese officials believed the various sides were close to entering a truce while U.S. officials said they were still days away from implementing an agreement due to discrepancies, including rules for Hezbollah and Israeli troops movements. Then on Sept. 27, a fleet of Israeli F-15s dropped dozens of bombs on a building in the southern suburbs of Beirut, killing Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah and his top aides. The attack eliminated one of Israel’s most ruthless foes, a dominant political and military figure in Lebanon for decades. It also killed any chance for the U.S.-France cease-fire proposal.

Leaders in the United States cast Israel as a morally good democratic nation surrounded by countries hostile to its existence. They are very wary of Iran gaining power and influence in the region and U.S. leaders imply that almost any Israeli military action is justified both because of the depravity of Oct. 7 and because of the continued threat to Israel from Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran in particular. Joe Biden’s overriding concern was preventing an all-out conflagration in the region. Yet as he has sought a path for long and short-term peace and stability for Israel, Biden was undermined at several turns by Benjamin Netanyahu’s conduct of the Gazar war, his refusal to consider establishment of a Palestinian state, and the territorial ambitions of his right-wing government in the occupied territories. At home, Biden’s diplomatic backing for Israel divided his Democratic Party and sent protesters onto city streets and university campuses, even as Republicans condemned the president as insufficiently supportive of Netanyahu. Repeatedly over the past year, in tones ranging from supportive sympathy to cold fury, Biden has called on Netanyahu to focus on a strategic plan for peace rather than tactical military and political victories. He has appealed to the Israeli leader, in public statements and private conversations, to temper rather than feed the Israeli people’s justifiable desire for revenge.

But Netanyahu has publicly rejected U.S. entreaties and proposals for a cease-fire, both in Gaza and now in Lebanon. He has accused Biden of slow-walking arms shipments. Time and again, according to U.S. officials, Israel has blocked or delayed humanitarian aid in Gaza, often while denying it has done so. Under the security of a U.S. defense guarantee, it has carried out attacks in

Gaza, the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Iran without telling its American allies in advance and despite U.S. warnings against escalation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had informed the U.S. that Israel would target Iranian military sites instead of oil or nuclear facilities in response to recent missile attacks. The U.S. is urging Israel not to strike any of Iran's energy or oil sites, or nuclear facilities because they fear that attacks on such valuable sites could draw a heightened Iranian response, destabilize the global economy (sky-rocketing energy prices), and potentially set off an all-out regional war that would draw in the United States. President Biden stated that he does not support Israel launching strikes on Iranian nuclear sites. When asked if Israel might carry out such attacks, Biden responded, "The answer is no." While the U.S. and its G7 allies agree Israel has the right to respond to threats, Biden emphasized that any response should be proportional. Netanyahu communicated this approach to President Biden during their first call in over seven weeks. U.S. officials expressed relief at this decision, especially with the U.S. elections approaching. Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has vowed a "precise, painful, and surprising" response to Iran's missile attacks, but with the intent of avoiding opening new conflict fronts. Netanyahu is balancing U.S. appeals for restraint with Israeli public demands for a strong response, though he has not officially authorized the attack, keeping the timing flexible. Despite coordination with the U.S., Netanyahu retains full decision-making authority on when and how Israel will respond to Iran, emphasizing that while consultations with Washington are ongoing, Israel's national interests will guide the final decisions.

Israel ended up retaliating on October 26, 2024 when it launched a series of airstrikes on Iran's air defense systems near key energy sites. These strikes targeted defenses around significant oil and gas facilities, including the Bandar Imam Khomeini petrochemical complex and the Abadan oil refinery, without hitting the facilities themselves. Iranian officials expressed alarm at their vulnerability following these attacks, particularly given the deteriorating economic situation in Iran, heavily reliant on these energy sites. According to a senior U.S. official and two Israeli defense officials, the Israeli airstrikes hit a dozen or so fuel mixers and took out the air defenses that protected several critical oil and petrochemical refineries. Without the capability to mix fuel, Iran cannot produce more of the type of ballistic missiles that it launched on the October 1st attack. It could take more than a year to replace them from China and other suppliers. Following the attack, American and Israeli officials were claiming a major success, but longer-term worry has begun to grow inside the White House despite the tactical gains. With Iran's Russian-produced air defenses smoldered, Iranian leaders may conclude that they have only one defense left: racing for an atomic weapon. Iran currently has larger stocks of near-bomb-grade uranium than at any time since it began experimenting with small nuclear reactors. Based on reports from the International Atomic Energy Agency, a United Nations-created inspection body, Iran now has enough medium-enriched uranium to produce three to four weapons. However, it would take over 18 months to fashion that fuel into a warhead, assuming that Iran does not get help from an established nuclear power like Russia, its biggest customer for drones, or North Korea, with whom Iran has worked with closely

on ballistic missile technology. As of right now, American officials say that they see no evidence of a Iranian political decision to race towards a nuclear weapon but officials within the Biden administration fear that increased Iranian vulnerability could potentially affect the situation. Joe Biden's own aides suspect that Iran's leaders, partly out of injured pride, will not simply let the counterattack pass. Biden ordered American troops in the region to be on higher alert, especially those in Iraq and Syria who could be targets for Iranian retaliation.

Furthermore, The U.S. decided to deploy an advanced missile defense system, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), to Israel, along with around 100 troops to operate it. This move follows increased tensions in the Middle East, including the missile attack from Iran on Israel on October 1, 2024. The THAAD system is meant to provide additional defense against ballistic missiles as Israel prepares potential retaliatory strikes against Iran. President Biden authorized the deployment, underscoring the U.S.'s commitment to Israel's defense.

The deployment marks the first U.S. troop presence in Israel since the Gaza conflict began in October 2023, with the intention of protecting both Israel and American personnel in the region. Pentagon officials have been weighing whether the growing U.S. military presence is helping contain the conflict or exacerbating tensions, as Israel's actions against Hezbollah in Lebanon have intensified.

Additionally, there are broader U.S. military activities in the region, such as a temporary pier constructed to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza and recent airstrikes on Hezbollah targets in Lebanon. Concerns have been raised about how this presence might affect the U.S.'s readiness for other potential conflicts, such as those with Russia or China. The U.S. defense officials are trying to balance support for Israel while managing the risks of escalation in the broader Middle East conflict.

The THAAD missile defense system is a sophisticated, mobile interceptor designed to neutralize incoming ballistic missiles both within and outside the Earth's atmosphere. Each THAAD battery consists of multiple components, including interceptor missiles, launchers, radar, and command-and-control platforms. It operates by using kinetic energy to destroy targets on impact, rather than relying on explosive warheads. This advanced system significantly enhances air defense capabilities, making it crucial for intercepting threats from adversaries like Iran and their allies.

The Biden administration continues to fund Israel, despite growing tensions between President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for several strategic, political, and historical reasons. The first reason is Israel's impact on U.S. Middle East policy. The U.S. continues to fund Israel due to its strategic importance in the Middle East, even amid tensions between President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu. Israel plays a vital role in maintaining regional stability, particularly in countering the influence of Iran and militant groups and terrorist organizations like Hezbollah and Hamas, which are seen as threats to U.S. interests and allies. The U.S. views Israel

as a critical partner in intelligence sharing, military operations, and counterterrorism efforts. In addition, Israel's advanced military capabilities and intelligence infrastructure provide significant value in addressing threats from hostile actors, including Iran. Geography also plays a significant impact given Israel's proximity to critical areas like the Suez Canal, Persian Gulf, and major oil routes which makes it an indispensable ally for protecting energy supplies and managing regional conflicts. This strategic location ensures that the U.S. has a strong presence in the region. Despite political disagreements, the U.S. and Israel share a commitment to democratic governance, which the U.S. often emphasizes as a pillar of its foreign policy. The Biden administration continues to prioritize containing Iran's nuclear ambitions and regional influence. Israel is a key player in this effort, given its direct threats from Iran and its military capabilities. U.S. funding strengthens Israel's ability to act as a buffer against Iranian aggression. Finally, the U.S. relies on Israel to participate in and influence peace negotiations involving Palestinian territories and broader Arab-Israeli relations, often tied to U.S. diplomatic goals.

The second reason is that there is a considerable amount of congressional support for Israel in U.S. congress. While Biden may have personal disagreements with Netanyahu's policies, U.S. financial support for Israel is backed by a wide majority in Congress, ensuring that aid continues. In 2021, after violence between Israel and Hamas escalated, Congress overwhelmingly approved an additional \$1 billion to replenish Israel's Iron Dome system, despite some progressive opposition. This bipartisan support underscores the political reality Biden faces when shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Israel. Furthermore, The Biden administration is honoring a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding signed under President Obama in 2016, which guarantees Israel \$3.8 billion annually in military aid from 2019 to 2028. This agreement, which Biden supports, is viewed as a strategic commitment to maintaining Israel's military edge, irrespective of personal differences between leaders.

Continued funding allows the U.S. to maintain influence over Israel's actions, particularly in times of conflict. Biden's administration has voiced increasing frustration with Netanyahu's approach to the Gaza humanitarian crisis, captured in the "hot mic" moment when Biden mentioned needing a "come to Jesus meeting" with Netanyahu. Despite these tensions, the U.S. uses aid as leverage to push for more humanitarian considerations in Israeli actions, urging Israel to open crossings and allow more aid into Gaza. One recent example of this is the 30-Day Deadline.

The Biden Administration, in an October 13, 2024 letter from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken, gave Israel 30 days to improve the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza. This includes access to food, medicine, and other essentials for Palestinian civilians. The letter, addressed to Israeli officials Yoav Gallant (Defense Minister) and Ron Dermer (Minister for Strategic Affairs), does not explicitly threaten to cut off military aid but strongly implies that U.S. assistance could be curtailed if conditions do not improve. The timing of the ultimatum is significant, as it extends beyond the U.S. presidential election, suggesting the Biden administration wants to avoid immediate political fallout. The letter specifically outlines U.S. expectations which

include allowing 350 aid trucks into Gaza daily, establishing humanitarian pauses to enable aid delivery, restoring access to northern Gaza and stopping its isolation and enabling aid deliveries through Jordan. The letter also calls for Israel to ensure a bill before the Knesset (Israel's parliament) that would ban government contact with the U.N. Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) does not pass.

This isn't the first time the U.S. has expressed frustration with Israel's handling of the Gaza conflict. President Biden previously halted a shipment of U.S. weapons to Israel in May, citing Israel's insufficient efforts to facilitate aid. Despite past temporary improvements in aid flows, the situation in Gaza has worsened, especially in northern areas, where residents face displacement, food shortages, and increased violence. The United Nations (U.N.) reports that no food has entered northern Gaza since early October, amplifying fears of famine. Israeli authorities deny blocking aid but blame Hamas and other criminal elements for disrupting supplies.

Biden's approach is partly driven by political considerations ahead of the 2024 U.S. election, where the conflict has become a significant liability, especially within the Democratic Party. Critics argue Biden hasn't done enough to pressure Israel into compliance. The U.S. provides Israel with \$3.8 billion in annual military aid, making it Israel's largest external backer. However, U.S. laws such as the Arms Export Control Act and the Foreign Assistance Act require compliance with the laws of war and humanitarian considerations for arms transfers and military assistance. If Israel does not comply with the U.S. demands, this legal framework could be invoked to suspend or limit military aid, although U.S. officials have so far avoided making explicit threats.

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