



EXPERT INSIGHT | Center for American Security

HOW AMERICA SHOULD RESPOND TO ISRAEL'S 9/11

By Lt. General (Ret.) Keith Kellogg and Fred Fleitz

TOPLINE POINTS

- ★ The massive air, sea, and land attack on October 7, 2023, by Hamas terrorists against Israel was a major escalation of its longtime threat to destroy the State of Israel and kill Jews.
- ★ The sophistication of this attack and the failure of Israeli and U.S. intelligence to detect planning for it strongly suggest Iran was behind the attack.
- ★ The Biden Administration's national security policies, especially the decision to increase financial resources available to Iran and Hamas, probably enabled the Hamas attack.
- ★ The seriousness of the Hamas attack, its threat to Israel's security, and the risk that the Hamas attack could inspire similar terrorist attacks in the Middle East and throughout the world require decisive U.S. leadership to stand with Israel and for the Biden Administration to reassess its Middle East policies, especially by ending its appeasement of Iran.

The Hamas attack on October 7 was the most serious breach of Israel's borders since the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and has been referred to by some Israeli officials as "Israel's 9/11." The sophisticated air, land, and sea attack by the terrorist group Hamas against Israel reportedly involved 1,500 Hamas terrorists.

The Hamas terrorists entered and attacked Israeli communities and military installations, killing at least 1,300 Israelis and 27 Americans. The terrorists engaged in depraved violence, killing and raping women, as well as killing children and the elderly. Israeli

civilians and soldiers were beheaded. Children were found butchered. At least 260 Israelis were killed at a music festival held in a Gaza border town.

The Hamas terrorists took 100 to 150 hostages, including children, and brought them back to Gaza. Many reportedly are being held in underground tunnels where Hamas stores its missiles. There are some non-Israeli hostages. In addition to the 27 American citizens killed in the attack, 20 Americans are reported missing. Some of them are now being held hostage.

Although Israeli Defense Forces regained control of the towns and military bases seized by the Hamas terrorists by October 10, rocket fire continued through Wednesday. Israeli officials are concerned about Hamas terrorists who could still be at large in Israel as well as Hamas' threats to kill hostages in response to Israeli airstrikes on Gaza.

Motivations for the Attack

Many experts believe the Hamas terrorist attack was intended to derail a possible future agreement to normalize relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Hamas is a terrorist proxy of Iran, and both of them strongly oppose such a test agreement.

The perception of American weakness and foreign policy failures of the Biden Administration probably contributed to the decision by Hamas leaders to launch the attack.

Biden Administration policies regarding the Palestinians also likely helped set the stage for the Hamas attack. The Biden Administration eased the Trump Administration's isolation of the Palestinians as well as treated the official government of the Palestinians, the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas—which controls the Gaza Strip—as players they can do business with. Despite internal assessments from the State Department and other agencies that the funding could flow to Hamas, the Biden Administration resumed sending hundreds of millions of dollars to the Palestinian Authority every year—payments that President Trump halted.¹ U.S. payments to the Palestinian Authority resumed during President Biden's first month in office and have continued consistently ever since.

The Biden Administration also attempted to open a consulate for the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem. Israel vetoed this plan.

Tension between the Biden Administration, the Israeli government, and Prime Minister Netanyahu also likely emboldened Hamas leaders to stage their attack against Israel. Biden Administration officials have frequently criticized the Israeli government and Netanyahu over domestic Israeli matters such as judicial reform and settlement policies.

President Biden did not make his first phone call to Netanyahu until nearly a month into his presidency. He also snubbed the Israeli Prime Minister by refusing to invite him to the White House. U.S.-Israel relations also have been tense because the Biden Administration has pursued policies that Israel believes endanger its security, such as easing pressure on the Palestinians and attempting to revive the nuclear deal with Iran (the JCPOA), an agreement President Trump withdrew from in 2018.

The most important motivating factor for the Hamas attack on Israel and its ongoing barbarism is probably the organization's commitment in its charter to destroy the State of Israel and kill Jews. Hamas does not and has never wanted an Arab-Israeli peace plan or a two-state solution. Instead, it is committed to its fanatical, genocidal mandate.

An Intelligence Failure with Outside Support

The Hamas attack was a sophisticated air, land, and sea campaign. Most of the terrorists crossed through breaches in security barriers, some riding motorcycles. Hamas used bulldozers and explosives to create breaches along the border. Some of the terrorists flew across the border on motorized hang gliders. Others infiltrated Israel by sea from motorboats.

The attack included extensive efforts to take out surveillance equipment along the Gaza border and disrupt military communications. Attack drones destroyed cameras and sensors along the border. Hamas terrorists targeted military bases along the border. A Hamas commando unit reportedly attacked the Israeli army's headquarters near Gaza and jammed its communications.

This was a major intelligence failure by Israeli and American intelligence agencies, which failed to detect planning for the attack and provide warning to prevent it. This was especially true for Israeli intelligence, which has human sources in Gaza, conducts extensive electronic surveillance of this enclave, and uses other intelligence sources.

Overall, the attack was a far more sophisticated operation than Hamas had attempted in the past and therefore strongly suggests Hamas had substantial assistance from a nation-state: Iran.

The Biden Administration Tries to Deflect Blame for Attack from Iran

Despite President Biden's remarks following the attack on Israel in which he communicated America's total commitment and support to Israel, the Biden Administration has created new questions by denying Iran's role in the attacks.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on October 6 that Iran helped develop and fund the Hamas attack and gave Hamas the green light to launch it.² A Hamas spokesman told the BBC on October 8 that Hamas had direct support from Iran.³ However, although Iranian leaders praised the attack, they claimed that Iran was uninvolved in it. A senior Hamas official then backed up this claim on October 9 by saying that Iran and Hezbollah, its Lebanese terrorist proxy, were not involved in the Hamas terrorist attack.⁴

Although the Biden Administration acknowledged that Iran provides funds and weapons to Hamas, Biden Administration officials have repeatedly said that they have seen no evidence and no intelligence indicating Iran's involvement in the Hamas attack. The Biden Administration has been heavily criticized for playing down Iran's possible role in planning and executing the Hamas terrorist attack against Israel.

Moreover, the *New York Times* reported on October 11 that U.S. intelligence officials said early intelligence indicates key Iranian officials were surprised about the Hamas terrorist attack. The *New York Times* article said this finding cast doubt on whether Iran played a direct role in the attack.⁵

Right on cue, the U.S. Intelligence Community [released](#) unclassified information on October 11 that supported the Biden Administration's position. According to NBC News, U.S. intelligence obtained "exquisite" intelligence showing that Iranian leaders were surprised by the Hamas terrorists, according to an unnamed source "with direct knowledge of the matter." NBC said a second source described the intelligence as "good evidence."

Predictably, the *New York Times* said this finding cast doubt on whether Iran played a direct role in the attack.

The *New York Times* also [reported](#) that a senior U.S. intelligence official told members of Congress in a briefing on Tuesday that there was no direct link between Iran and the Hamas attack but added that U.S. agencies had intelligence with contradicting assertions that Iran had helped plan the attack.

However, this intelligence finding did not comment on the alleged October 2 meeting in Beirut between Iranian and Hamas officials. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, this meeting is when Iran reportedly approved the October 7 terrorist attack.

Biden Administration officials also tried to deflect allegations of Iran's involvement by talking at length about why a \$6 billion payment to Iran to free U.S. prisoners, a payment that some critics have referred to as ransom, could not have been used to finance the Hamas attack. As part of its reasoning, these officials have said it could not be used for

that purpose because Iran has not yet accessed these funds, which are being held in a Qatari bank.

This is a false argument because funding support to Iran and Hamas is not limited to the \$6 billion payment in question. Other Biden Administration policies have resulted in a surge of revenue for Iran and Hamas since 2021.

Regardless of whether that money was used in the attack, revenue for Iran and Hamas has surged since 2021 due to other Biden Administration policies. The Biden Administration resumed sending hundreds of millions of dollars to the Palestinian Authority in 2021—funding cut off by President Trump—even though administration officials assessed that these payments would boost Hamas. Additionally, Iranian oil revenue surged from \$6.6 billion in 2020 to \$30 billion in 2022 because the Biden Administration has refused to fully enforce U.S. oil sanctions on Iran.

After bipartisan demands that the Biden Administration hold Iran accountable for the Hamas terrorist attack, Biden Administration officials began equivocating. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said on October 11 that Iran was “complicit” in the attack, but the U.S. did not know if Iran helped plan or direct it.

The next day, on October 12, National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby made a similar statement when he said:

“Hamas wouldn’t have been able to function at all had it not been for propping up by the Iranian regime. But we haven’t seen any specific evidence that tells us they were wittingly involved in the planning or involved in the resourcing and the training that went into this very complex set of attacks.”

There was a more dramatic Biden Administration policy shift on October 12, when U.S. and Qatari officials agreed to stop Iran from accessing the \$6 billion held in a bank in Qatar. At least six Senate Democrats had called on the Biden Administration to freeze these funds, including Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT), who said,

“The world just changed, and it changed because Iran has built a barbaric terrorist organization inside Gaza that just raped and murdered hundreds of Israelis.”

Despite news of the freezing of the \$6 billion, Florida Congressman Michael Waltz (FL-6), in an October 12 statement to the Fox News program “Special Report,” expressed skepticism that these funds were actually frozen and said he thought this announcement was a hoax by the Biden Administration to quietly transfer the funds to Iran at a later time.

If true, freezing the \$6 billion will infuriate Iran and could block future U.S.-Iran negotiations on Iran's nuclear program. This would be a good thing, given the huge and dangerous concessions the Biden Administration made to Iran in these negotiations earlier this year.

Although freezing the \$6 billion may be a positive sign, the Biden Administration made this move only because it was forced to by Congress. Biden Administration officials have given every indication that they want to continue to appease Iran to get a weak nuclear deal and placate Tehran during the course of their administration. They also likely want to avoid the resumption of tough oil sanctions on Iran that could cause gasoline prices in the U.S. to surge in 2024.

President Biden Pledges Unequivocal American Support for Israel...

President Biden was justifiably praised for his remarks on October 7 and 10 pledging “rock solid” American support for Israel and strongly condemning the barbaric terrorist attack against Israel by Hamas, an Iranian terrorist proxy. President Biden spoke passionately, calling the Hamas violence “pure unadulterated evil” and a “violation of every code of human morality.”

The President then ordered two U.S. aircraft carriers, the USS Gerald R. Ford and the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, to the eastern Mediterranean. The U.S. aircraft carriers are being sent off the coast of Israel as a deterrence to discourage Iran or Hezbollah from entering the conflict.

Additionally, the U.S. reportedly has sent some special operation forces to work with the Israeli Defense Forces to strategize on hostage rescue operations. Other U.S. special operation troops reportedly are on standby.

The Biden Administration also has taken several steps to send arms to Israel. This effort reportedly will include \$2 billion in supplemental funding. The Biden Administration is also working to send weapons currently in the U.S. arms inventory to Israel, and press U.S. defense firms to expedite the delivery of pending Israeli orders for military equipment.⁶

... But Biden May Have Begun to Hedge His Support

President Biden's vow of “rock solid” support for Israel after the Hamas terrorist attack was followed last weekend by public warnings to Israel not to attempt to occupy Gaza and statements endorsing a two-state solution—a Palestinian state and the Palestinian

Authority, which exercises partial authority over the West Bank.¹ Biden also urged Israel to “uphold the law of war.”

This week, the Biden Administration reportedly has been pressing the Israeli government to create humanitarian safe zones for refugees in south Gaza and corridors to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza. According to press reports, President Biden accepted Prime Minister Netanyahu’s invitation to visit Israel only on an explicit commitment from Netanyahu to open Gaza for humanitarian aid.⁷ On October 16, Israel agreed to work with the U.S. and other nations to develop a plan to get humanitarian aid to Gaza. In addition, on October 16, President Biden named veteran U.S. diplomat David Satterfield as his Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues. Satterfield previously served as President Trump’s Ambassador to Turkey and served as Ambassador to Lebanon in the Clinton and Bush administrations. The decision to name Satterfield as special envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues and not Middle East peace suggests a change in emphasis on the war by the Biden Administration.

Such public admonishments and statements to a U.S. ally, especially at a time of war, were inappropriate and should have been made in private. It is worth noting that President Biden has never made such comments to Ukrainian President Zelinsky. President Biden’s decision to endorse the corrupt and inept Palestinian Authority and the all-but-dead two-state solution idea was extremely unwise and will undermine his credibility with the Israeli government.

Furthermore, by publicly lecturing Israel with the above comments, President Biden could intensify criticism of it in the U.S. and abroad when Israel launches a ground offensive against Gaza. These statements also may suggest the President is giving Prime Minister Netanyahu only qualified support.

Issues and Recommendations

In order to respond quickly and effectively to the war in Israel, the U.S. should pursue the following courses of action.

1. After the barbarous Hamas attack on Israel, President Biden and Congress must work closely together to provide the Israeli government with all the weapons and funding it needs to destroy Hamas as a terrorist organization and as the governing authority of the Gaza Strip. This will require our elected officials to resist strong pressure that will be coming from many nations, the United Nations, the mainstream media, and progressive groups to push for a ceasefire and peace talks before Israel does what it must do to

¹ The Fatah Party-led Palestinian Authority has partial authority of the West Bank under partial delegation of civil powers by the Israeli government. A Fatah-Hamas unity government briefly governed the West Bank and Gaza until Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007 after a year of violent conflicts between Fatah and Hamas.

eliminate new threats to its security.

2. Standing with Israel will become more difficult as Hamas and its supporters flood the Internet with photos of dead civilians in Gaza allegedly killed or maimed by Israel. This is already happening with strongly anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian coverage by the major news networks. Pro-Hamas supporters are sure to accuse Israel of a “disproportionate response” as it conducts its ground operation and urban warfare in Gaza. U.S. officials and Congress must be prepared to not be manipulated by this propaganda and should instead demand truth from the media’s coverage of the war. The American people should also continue to provide support for U.S. policymakers who are committed to standing with Israel.

3. President Biden is to be commended for his strong and unequivocal statement of support of Israel at this dire time in its history and his forceful condemnation of Hamas for attacking Israel and committing unspeakable acts of terrorism. It is also commendable that President Biden has taken steps to send needed arms to Israel swiftly and press defense firms to accelerate the production and shipment of weapons requested by Israel. However, there are already signs that President Biden may be qualifying his support for Israel by raising irrelevant and counterproductive ideas and proposals, such as a two-state solution and endorsing the Palestinian Authority. Strong bipartisan pressure is needed from Congress to keep President Biden firm in his support for Israel and not let his policy toward Israel be diluted or distracted with statements and proposals that undermine Israel and its efforts to defend its security.

4. President Biden must present, possibly in a classified form to Congress, a complete description of his strategy for U.S. forces in the Israel crisis. Specifically, he must explain:

a) Under what circumstances will President Biden send American ground troops, military advisers, trainers, and other U.S. personnel into this conflict, including to Gaza, Israel, and other places?

b) What is America doing relative to using special forces hostage negotiators to win the release of American citizens being held hostage by Hamas in Gaza?

c) What was the purpose of sending two aircraft carriers to the eastern Mediterranean? Under what circumstances will these carriers be used to conduct offensive operations? Could these carriers be used to attack Hezbollah forces in northern Israel, Syria, or Lebanon? If President Biden decides to use military force against Hezbollah in Lebanon or anywhere in the region, will he consult with Congress before committing U.S. forces? What would the legal authorization be for such a use of U.S. military force?

5. It is urgent that the U.S. Congress obtain a clear public answer from the Biden Administration as to whether the \$6 billion being held in a bank in Qatar has been frozen permanently or whether those funds are being held temporarily. Congress should know whether those funds will be released to Iran in a few months in conjunction with a restart of talks on its nuclear program. On a bipartisan basis, Congress must demand that the Biden Administration's nuclear talks with Iran and related appeasement be halted permanently because of Iran's role as the primary benefactor of Hamas and the likelihood that it was behind the recent terrorist attack against Israel. Instead, the Biden Administration's efforts to appease Iran and revive the JCPOA should be replaced with "Maximum Pressure," the successful strategy used against Iran by the Trump Administration. This strategy called for severe economic sanctions against the Iranian regime as well as banning Iranian diplomatic envoys from the United Nations.

6. The U.S. must thoroughly investigate the failure of U.S. and Israeli intelligence to predict and issue warnings of the Hamas terrorist attack. The White House and Congress need to know as soon as possible the nature of this intelligence failure and the intelligence vulnerabilities that Hamas exploited that could be used again to conduct future major terrorist attacks, possibly against the U.S. Israel will conduct a similar investigation, and both states should share their findings. As the war in Israel continues, America's support to Israel should remain consistent and steadfast.

These recommendations offer the U.S. a clear pathway in how to best support Israel and demonstrate America's commitment to our ally during this time of war.

¹ Adam Kredo, "US Taxpayers Sent More Than \$400 Million to Gaza Since Hamas Takeover," Washington Free Beacon, October 11, 2023 <https://freebeacon.com/national-security/u-s-taxpayers-sent-more-than-400-million-to-gaza-since-hamas-takeover/>; Adam Kredo, "Biden Admin Raised Concerns Palestinian Aid Would Boost Hamas. It Went Ahead With Aid Anyway," Washington Free Beacon, August 16, 2023. <https://freebeacon.com/biden-administration/biden-admin-raised-concerns-palestinian-aid-would-boost-hamas-it-went-ahead-with-aid-anyway/>

² Summer Said, Benoit Faucon, and Stephen Kalin, “Iran Helped Plot Attack on Israel Over Several Weeks,” Wall Street Journal, October 8, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/iran-israel-hamas-strike-planning-bbe07b25?mod=e2tw>

³ “Israel faces 'long, difficult war' after Hamas attack from Gaza,” BBC.com, October 8, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67044182>

⁴ Bammem Mroue and Sarah El Deeb, “Hamas official says Iran and Hezbollah had no role in Israel incursion but they’ll help if needed,” Associated Press, October 9, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-palestinian-hamas-hezbollah-iran-2ccfaa49139358e6d2add89878a0cfe4#lnlz7y76qisck8eh8sr>

⁵ Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes and Jonathan Swan, “Early Intelligence Shows Hamas Attack Surprised Iranian Leaders, U.S. Says,” New York Times, October 11, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/11/us/politics/iran-israel-gaza-hamas-us-intelligence.html#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20has%20collected,according%20to%20several%20American%20officials.>

⁶ Eric Cortellessa and Brian Bennett, “Biden and Congress Craft \$2 Billion Aid Package as Israel Vows to ‘Crush’ Hamas,” Time.com, October 11, 2023 <https://time.com/6322820/israel-aid-biden-congress-hamas/>; Connor O’Brien, Joe Gould, Paul Mcleary, and Lara Seligman, “Planes have already taken off: U.S. sends Israel air defense, munitions after Hamas attack,” Politico, October 9, 2023. <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/09/israel-seeks-weapons-missiles-artillery-from-us-00120587>

⁷ Phil Mattingly, Kevin Liptak, Kayla Tausche, MJ Lee, Jennifer Hansler and Alex Marquardt, “How Joe Biden got on board with a wartime trip to Israel – and what he hopes to accomplish,” CNN.com, October 17, 2023 <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/17/politics/inside-joe-biden-israel-trip-planning/index.html>