

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 5, 2023

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear President Biden,

In the wake of Hamas' horrific October 7th terrorist attack on Israel, you have rightfully demonstrated the United States' commitment to supporting our closest ally in the Middle East. We stand united with you in your support of Israel's right to defend itself, to eliminate Hamas' operational control, and to secure the release of those still held hostage.

The barbaric October 7th attack on Israel was not only heartbreaking to watch unfold, but reminiscent of our nation's own harrowing experience on September 11, 2001. In response to those attacks, we waged our own war on terror which lasted so long that it came to be fought by servicemembers who had not yet been born on September 11th. We still live with the weight of the moral, political, military, and humanitarian consequences of that decision.

We are grateful for your leadership and diligent diplomacy to establish the week-long pause in fighting. This pause was monumental in facilitating the release of over 100 hostages, including American citizens, and increased distribution of critical humanitarian aid such as food and medical supplies. We support your continued efforts to seek the release of remaining hostages and distribute aid.

In our roles on the House Committee on Armed Services, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, and Committee on Foreign Affairs, we have a responsibility to conduct oversight of our support for U.S. allies. In this case, we feel particularly compelled to share our concerns for Israel's ultimate success and lasting security.

We believe efforts to stand with Israel begin with our own commitment to Israeli defense. We support the rapid delivery of key defense aid to Israel, particularly air defense systems, which are critical to protecting civilians from attacks by Hamas and other terrorist organizations. We also support your actions to protect our own military personnel by deploying defensive systems to the U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) theater. These measures are crucial amidst increased threats to our servicemembers and military assets in the region. We firmly believe that our current force posture in the theater supports our allies while deterring a larger regional war.

Amidst this second phase of military operations, we urge you to convey our successes and failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and press Israel to adopt strategic methods that utilize precise targeting, reduce civilian harm, and work toward winning the peace in its own operation to defeat Hamas. Our nation has come to understand the costs associated with losing sight of these principles firsthand. Over our last two decades of war, we sacrificed time, lives, and goodwill by being too slow to focus our efforts on the politics of winning the peace, not just the military operations to take terrorists off the battlefield. For too long, we failed to have a viable and realistic endgame for our military and political strategy. And at times, we failed to recognize that force alone cannot bring about victory - in many cases, it makes victory harder to achieve, serving as a rallying cry for the opposition.

These principles are essential to military success, lasting security, and pursuit of a two-state solution. We want Israel to succeed in eliminating Hamas' operational control and achieving lasting peace and security for all civilians. Many see a false choice in this divisive conflict between ensuring Israeli security and Palestinian rights. We believe that lasting peace will only be realized when both Israelis and Palestinians have security, prosperity, and self-determination.

We must stand firm in our democratic commitment to upholding human rights and ensure we conduct ourselves accordingly. These commitments are especially important for lethal aid provision and are directly reflective of our nation's credibility on the world stage. We ask you to continue to seek public assurances that Israeli operations abide by the laws of armed conflict, respect international law, and actively seek to minimize civilian deaths. Use of U.S.-provided systems and equipment must also abide by U.S. and international law. We believe the execution of these priorities and their public elevation are key in combating support for Hamas and other terrorist groups. This effort goes hand in hand with urging both Israeli officials and the Palestinian Authority to commit to protecting and stopping violent acts against civilians in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

We respectfully request a briefing to our committees on your assessment of the likelihood of success of Israel's current military strategy. We ask this briefing address Israel's publicly outlined mission, current operational and political effectiveness of Hamas, readiness of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), as well as impacts to ongoing hostage release efforts and the civilian population. We must also understand how current strategy will impact the political and diplomatic framework to establish a two-state solution between Israelis and Palestinians, the only path to lasting peace.

Furthermore, we request an assessment of how Israel and the United States are addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Congress must ensure defensive aid to our ally is provided in tandem with the necessary humanitarian supplies to mitigate the already catastrophic impacts to civilians. We must ensure the continued and consistent supply of food, medical supplies, fuel, and restoration of critical utilities to sustain humanitarian response efforts. Secure aid delivery to Palestinian civilians is critical, and we must understand how we may bolster successful aid distribution as Israel's offensive continues and Hamas continues to intentionally accept civilian risk, injuries, and deaths.

Mr. President, it remains our collective responsibility to prevent the already horrific civilian death toll from growing, which is sure to have far more devastating consequences to Palestinian and Israeli populations, increase the risks of wider regional conflict, and imperil the security and stability of the larger Middle East, as well as our own. The last two decades have taught our country many hard lessons. We hope you keep those lessons, and the human costs associated, in mind as you continue to engage in diplomacy that is centered on our principles of freedom and democracy. As the American public, our adversaries, and the entire world watch this devastating war carry on, we urge you to continue to lead on the global stage with that memory in mind.

We thank you for your steady and diligent leadership.

Sincerely,



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress



André Carson
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JM Tokuda
Member of Congress



Madeleine Dean
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



John Garamendi
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Readiness



Elissa Slotkin
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Cc: The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense

Cc: The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State