

Despite what American Left may want

# Biden will continue his support for Israel



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## OPINION

Iran's brazen attack on Israel was thwarted, but it remains unclear if Israel will retaliate.

President Joe Biden purportedly warned Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu not to, telling him to "take the win" instead. This has raised the hopes of some in his party that Biden can prevail on Israel to restrain its response, and that he might even break with Netanyahu if his request goes unheeded.

That is extremely unlikely. Biden is a very unpopular president and needs all the support he can muster. It's clear that both within his own Democratic Party and among voters at large, Biden ultimately will have to back Israel even if it launches an attack that Biden doesn't like.



US President Joe Biden (C) listens to members of Chabad Jewish movement during his visit to Florida in July 2021.

It's easy to see why when one looks at polls. A recent New York Times/Siena College poll taken right before Iran's attack found that American likely voters backed Israel over the Palestinians in their ongoing dispute by a nearly 2-1 margin.

That result is heavily tilted by Trump backers' heavy support for Israel, but roughly a quarter of Biden's voters and 23 percent of those who currently back other candidates also favour Israel over the Palestinians. Cutting off aid or backing away from Israel after it has been assaulted by Iran — a nation widely viewed unfavourably across the American political spectrum — would risk alienating people he needs to beat Trump.

That's particularly true among the Jewish population. Much has been made of the influence Arab voters can wield in marginal Michigan.

But Jewish voters wield greater influence

in many more swing states. They comprised three percent of Arizona's, Nevada's, and Pennsylvania's 2020 voters, and two percent of Georgia's.

Jews even outnumbered Muslims in Arab-heavy Michigan. Biden will not risk losing Jewish votes in five key states to placate Arabs in one.

This is a political explanation for why Biden has continued to provide military aid to Israel during the Gaza war despite his regular statements and insinuations that he wants the war to stop.

Jewish Democrats in America tend to be anti-Netanyahu and would prefer to see Israel prevail over Hamas without causing the civilian casualties its current effort has produced.

But they will not countenance cutting off supply to Israel, even if that means sustaining the invasion they largely deplore. Cutting Israel's lifeline is simply not something

they will countenance, and Biden knows it. Biden thus faces the opposite domestic political situation of nearly every major European leader: YouGov polled seven Western European countries about citizens' views regarding Israel and the Palestinians.

Prior to Hamas's October 7 attack, respondents in every country either marginally favoured the Palestinians or were roughly neutral. Support for Israel soared in the wake of the massacres but started to wane as Israel launched its invasion. Six months into a war with little end in sight, it's doubtful pro-Israel attitudes have remained as high.

European leaders also have to deal with much larger Muslim populations than does the United States.

The Pew Research Center estimated in 2017 that Muslims comprised between five and nine percent of the population in Britain, Germany, France, and other rich

Northern European nations. That share is surely higher today given migration and differentials in birth rates and mortality.

By contrast, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research estimated in 2020 that Jews did not comprise even as much as one percent of the population in any of these European nations.

Biden's political sweet spot lies in convincing Israel to unilaterally halt conflicts that threaten to embroil the US in broader, more public, and potentially controversial support.

He has largely failed thus far in Gaza, although one could say his pressure has slowed down an Israeli invasion of Rafah. It's even less likely he will succeed on Iran, especially when the normally hawkish Israeli public opinion is taken into account.

Indeed, Biden is not the only national leader leaking to the media. Israeli opposition leader Benny Gantz, who joined Netanya-

hu's war cabinet in a show of national unity soon after October 7, reportedly wanted to strike Iran immediately after its attack ceased. When Netanyahu is the dove in the war cabinet, it's clear Biden will not get his wish.

And that brings us back to Biden's dilemma. He's between the rock of Arab and progressive opinion, which wants to move America away from Israel, and the hard place of Jewish and moderate opinion, which wants America to stand behind its ally.

When push comes to shove, Biden will have to go along with the majority, no matter how much he wishes he did not have to make that choice. The alternative — endangering an already uphill re-election battle — is not an option he'll entertain.

The article first appeared on Brussels Signal.

## Price of keeping Netanyahu in power too high



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## OPINION

It does not bode well when extremist members of the Israeli or Iranian governments recommend "going crazy" as a policy gambit toward the other. The result would be a major war in the Middle East, the immediate effect of which would be to send the price of oil through the roof were the Straits of Hormuz to be blocked in addition to ongoing problems in the Red Sea — problems that Western intervention has made worse.

Iran conjured up that prospect last week by landing Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commandos on an Israeli-owned container ship which was taken back to Iran after "maritime infractions". Each discreet event contributes to the final jigsaw. After Israel assassinated two IRGC generals in Iran's Damascus consulate on April 1, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei publicly and repeatedly committed his country to an armed response. He did this at filmed mass rallies. No resiling there then.

But the eventual Iranian response on Saturday was carefully announced in advance (even to the US via their Swiss diplomatic surrogates), with about 300 projectiles crossing the region towards targets in Israel. Flying at about 100mph, the primitive drones took six hours to arrive on targets, which did not include major

cities like Haifa or Tel Aviv. Ninety-nine percent of all Iranian projectiles were downed either by allies (US, Jordanian, and UK ships and planes) or by Israel's own multi-layered anti-missile defences. The only (non-fatal) casualty was a seven-year-old Bedouin child, though a couple of military bases received trivial damage. Both sides can claim a win. Israel showed the resilience of its pan-regional Middle East Air Defence, and would have been pleased with the alacrity with which countries that have been critical of its Gaza campaign of late stepped up to militarily support her. The allies seemed to overlook the fact that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had not given them any advance warning of the Damascus strike, which touched off this latest cycle of violence in the first place.

Even better, from Netanyahu's point of

view, the allies swiftly exchanged their moralising crocodile tears about war crimes in Gaza for collective ingestion of the crudest Israeli propaganda about Iran and all its works. Just listen to how an allegedly stern critic of Israeli war-making like Lord Cameron sounded like any old Iran hawk on Radio 4's Today programme.

But just because very few of Iran's projectiles got through does not mean that Iran can't book some profits too. Technically, it may now have a better understanding of where Israel's anti-missile defences are deployed, and how to overwhelm them in a bigger swarming attack. Iran's spokesmen keep stressing that Israel had to expend \$1bn in expensive American munitions to stop drones, which are like flying lawnmowers and are as cheap as chips. It has also altered the rules in

the shadow war that has been waged for decades. Any further Israeli assassinations of IRGC personnel — or engineers and scientists — will trigger a direct response from Iran against Israel itself.

There was also a clear warning that any nation that aids and abets such activities will also be struck — a clear signal to the US, which has a lot of military bases around the Middle East. No wonder that Joe Biden has explicitly warned Israel not to escalate this current bout further, up to and including stating that if Israel achieves a larger war with Iran, the US won't be facilitating it. That is crucial since without US aerial refuelling tankers, Israeli pilots won't be returning home after bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

Reaching Fordow or Natanz is not like hitting such a target in Syria or Iraq. Is-