

Biden, Trump debate who's more supportive of Israeli war crimes



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PERSPECTIVE

This week, the *Washington Post* reported that the United States has sent \$6.5 billion in military aid to Israel since October, a mind-boggling amount of help for a cabinet that is committing a genocidal assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza. The previously undisclosed sum includes \$3 billion alone in May of this year, the same month that Israel began attacking Rafah, an area densely packed with civilians who had been told it was safe.

Despite the majority of Americans disapproving of Israel's extermination campaign, the US government remains firmly on the side of the Israeli state, willing to shred the long-standing pretense of a rules-based international order and even allow Israel to expand the war into Lebanon for the sake of maintaining its strong ties with its key ally in the Middle East.

It's a demoralizing reality and one that was boldly on display in this week's presidential debate. The proof of this elite consensus on Israel came before either Donald Trump or Joe Biden uttered a word, evidenced in the choice of moderators: CNN's Jake Tapper and Dana Bash.



US President Joe Biden (R) and Republican presidential candidate former US president Donald Trump participate in the CNN Presidential Debate at the CNN Studios in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 27, 2024. The image of Palestinians walking through a destroyed street in Gaza that is displayed above the candidates, was photo-edited post-debate.

● CNN

Shameless propaganda

The two television anchors have distinguished themselves as some of the mainstream media's most rabid supporters of Israel, which means clearing a very high bar. In May, as a pro-Israel mob violently attacked pro-Palestine UCLA students and the New York Police Department flooded the campus of Columbia University to quash pro-Palestinian student protests, Bash produced a disgraceful piece of propaganda. In the CNN segment, she muddled the waters on who, exactly, was responsible for the violence on campuses; then she delivered a remarkable monologue in which she compared the violence at UCLA to "the 1930s in Europe". Bash didn't mean, of course, that the pro-Israel attackers were fascist brownshirts — she was saying that the people they attacked were.

Tapper reported a segment in October concerning allegations that Hamas systematically engaged in sexual violence on October 7. Much of that reporting relied on sources whose reliability has since been called into question, and several of the experts quoted had significant ties to the Israeli state, relevant histories that Tapper failed to disclose. One of the highest-profile media figures in the country, Tapper has since been quick to amplify allegations of widespread antisemitism among protestors critical of Israel's wanton violence, which has now killed more than 37,000 Palestinians (surely a dramatic undercount as Israel has so weakened Gaza's civilian infrastructure that it can no longer process the death toll).

And those are just the moderators. As for the two men vying to control the vast US military apparatus that is propping up the Israeli cabinet, ensuring it can keep killing people en masse, the subject only came up briefly. The overwhelming majority of post-debate coverage has rightly

been about how the event revealed Joe Biden's unfitness to serve another four years in office — a fact that Democratic Party insiders have been whispering about for a while. But given that the United States is currently party to one of the most horrific acts of violence in human history, it's worth asking what Biden and Donald Trump had to say about it.

Who's more enthusiastic about genocide?

Bash introduced the topic, correctly stating that after Hamas's attack on October 7, Israel's response has not only killed thousands of Palestinians but created a humanitarian crisis (two million Palestinians are now facing famine). Noting that Biden's approach has neither resulted in the release of the remaining captives nor reined in Israel's violence, Bash asked the president, "What additional leverage will you use to get

Hamas and Israel to end the war?" It's a good question. The United States has immense power over Israel should it choose to exercise it; if you don't believe me, take it from Ronald Reagan. But the Biden administration refuses to cut off weapons transfers and military assistance to Israel, even though this would immediately affect its war effort. Too bad we didn't get a real answer. Instead, Biden claimed that the Israeli cabinet, Benjamin Netanyahu included, has endorsed his cease-fire proposal. In reality, the Israeli prime minister's support for the plan has proven fickle, to say the least. Biden then asserted that "the only one who wants the war to continue is Hamas," even though Hamas had agreed to a version of Biden's cease-fire proposal in May. Then the president was off to what he clearly believes is the only relevant issue in the campaign: proving his pro-Isra-

el bona fides.

"The only thing I've denied Israel is two-thousand-pound bombs because they don't work very well in a crowded area; they kill a lot of innocent people," the president stated, referring to the temporary hold the administration has put on those bombs as it conducts a review. "We're providing Israel with all the weapons they need and when they need them."

"We are the biggest producer of support for Israel of anyone in the world," Biden said (and people say this country doesn't make stuff anymore!). The president did not mention the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza or use the word "Palestinian". "He said that the only one who wants [the war] to keep going is Hamas. Actually, Israel is the one, and you should let them go, and let them finish the job," Trump responded. Coming amid a flood of outrageous

lies, it was one of the most honest statements the former president made all night. Israeli elected officials have long made it clear that they are waging a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Gaza Strip, with the aim of forced relocation for the millions of Palestinians inside the enclave. Again, it is Hamas who has been more willing to accept cease-fire proposals, not Israel.

Trump's support for those aims is no secret. The Israeli right is full of Trump supporters who understand that the former president would be even less critical of their genocidal campaign than the Biden administration. As many have argued, Netanyahu is a Trump guy, seeing him as more hands-off and belligerently racist than Biden, and that preference seems to be shared by Israelis in general. When Trump says he believes you should let Israel keep waging war, he means it.

"He's become like a Palestinian," Trump continued, referring to Biden, using the nationality of a people facing genocide as a slur. "But they don't like him because he's a very bad Palestinian. He's a weakone."

Biden rolled his eyes at Trump's statement, and the candidates moved on. Bash did try to bring the discussion back to the topic, asking Trump if he'd support the establishment of a Palestinian state, but all she got was a noncommittal "I'll have to see."

There you have it. Unresponsive to public opinion and impervious to criticism, unaffected by the laundry list of humanitarian agencies that have called Israel's actions "genocide," the US war machine rolls on. Rather than serving as the oft-mentioned adult in the room, the United States is aiding and abetting genocide and will keep doing so — and the liberal president who is doing it now feels no need to offer justifications. These are the two candidates: a racist maniac and a guy who should be retired and in slippers. Whether it's Trump or Biden in the White House — and it's certainly looking like it'll be Trump — the United States will be there to lend a helping hand (and many, many weapons) to Israel. That is not news, but that doesn't make it any less tragic for the world.

The full article first appeared on Jacobin.



The illustration shows the last four presidents of the United States against a backdrop of military drones flying, with their respective signatures and the word "approved" written above them. From left to right: George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump.

● ELISE SWAIN/THE INTERCEPT

Despite the humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Gaza, the topic of Israel's genocide came up only briefly in Thursday's presidential debate. But Trump and Biden said enough to make it clear that they're competing over who's more pro-Israel.