

# POLICY FOCUS

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## Israel

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### HIGHLIGHT

On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorized Israel. This well-coordinated attack resulted in significant loss of life, and Israel is now dismantling Hamas. These events led to a geopolitical shift, with increased drone and rocket attacks on U.S. forces in the region and heightened military posture. This conflict highlights the instability in the region and the U.S.'s crucial role in supporting Israel.

### INTRODUCTION

The attacks on Israel by the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas from Gaza on October 7, 2023, represent a significant escalation in regional tensions and pose profound implications for the Middle East and the United States.

The meticulously orchestrated attacks by Hamas targeted Israel with an unprecedented level of violence and coordination. [Women](#), children, and the elderly were victimized and the Israeli police are opening [investigations](#) into widespread

sexual violence that occurred during the terror attack. In total, over **1,200 were killed, 3,200 wounded, and 240 taken hostage**. The ensuing conflict—the most devastating in Israel since 1973—has led to massive casualties and a humanitarian crisis.

Policy leaders and those commenting on the crisis often note that these attacks by Hamas need to be seen in the context of the decades-long tensions and violence between Israel and neighboring states. Indeed, it is critical to fully understand the long history of violence that Israel and the Jewish people have faced which necessitated the country's founding.

Notably, Hamas has governed the Gaza Strip since 2007 and has continued to advocate for the establishment of an Islamic state and **the destruction of Israel**. The group has engaged in numerous conflicts with Israel, launching thousands of rockets and executing various lethal attacks. Israel has countered these actions with frequent air strikes and military incursions into Gaza in 2008 and 2014. Both Israel and Egypt have maintained a blockade on the Gaza Strip since 2007, citing security reasons. Hamas, including its military faction, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades, is classified as a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, the European Union, the UK, and other nations. The group receives support from Iran in the form of funding, weapons, and training.

Rightfully, following this recent attack, Israel has set out to eradicate Hamas from Gaza and, as part of that objective, **must destroy** Hamas's tunnel system. This approximately **186-mile-long** intricate system is used by Hamas and other militant groups to store weapons, gather, plan and move underground, communicate, train, launch offensive attacks, transport hostages, and

retreat without being detected by Israeli or Egyptian authorities.

The monstrous nature of October 7, 2023, Israeli resolve to neutralize the existent or emergent capability of militant threats, and the significant uptick in drone and rocket **attacks launched at U.S. forces** by Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria have significantly reshaped the geopolitical landscape.

The repercussions of these attacks have extended far beyond the immediate conflict zone. In the United States, they have spurred a series of responses ranging from high-level diplomatic engagements to massive military maneuvers and shifts in public sentiment, as evidenced by protests and a **surge** in antisemitic incidents.

This policy focus will provide a brief history of Israel, Israel's status as the standalone democracy in the Middle East, the ongoing conflict, and the suggested role of the United States.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISRAEL

The history of Israel is deeply intertwined with religious narratives and ancient history. As described in sacred texts like the Torah and the Christian Bible, the region known as Israel has roots extending back to antiquity. The biblical narrative traces this **history** to Abraham, a figure revered in both Judaism and Islam as a patriarch through his sons Isaac and Ishmael. His descendants, after a period of enslavement in Egypt, **settled in Canaan**, now known as Israel. The name "Israel" comes from Jacob, Abraham's grandson, who was renamed by the Hebrew God. The biblical kings David and Solomon, with Solomon building the first holy temple

in Jerusalem, further cemented the region's **historical** and religious importance.

The land of Israel experienced numerous changes in sovereignty over the centuries. From 1517 to 1917, it was under the Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath of World War I, there was increased discussion and support for a potential Jewish homeland, including with the **Balfour Declaration of 1917**. The **Zionist movement**, advocating for a Jewish state, gained momentum, particularly due to Jewish persecution during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. The "**Final Solution**" saw the orchestrated genocide of approximately **6 million Jews** during this period and highlighted the need for a safe homeland for the Jewish people.

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In 1947, the United Nations proposed **partitioning Palestine** into Jewish and Arab states, a plan **rejected** by Arab countries. In May 1948, Israel declared independence under Prime Minister **David Ben-Gurion**, leading to the **1948 Arab-Israeli War**, with several Arab nations attacking the new state. Despite the conflict, Israel survived.

The establishment of Israel was a critical moment in Jewish history, symbolizing a return to an ancestral homeland and the fulfillment of a long-held dream for self-determination and security.

However, the creation of Israel in 1948, celebrated as a moment of triumph and independence by Israelis, is viewed starkly

differently by Palestinians, who refer to it as the **Nakba** or "catastrophe." This event marked a significant turning point for the Palestinian people, leading to widespread displacement and disruption of their aspirations for statehood.

During the conflict that ensued after Israel's declaration of independence, approximately **700,000 Palestinians**, constituting about half of the Arab population in then-British-ruled Palestine, were either forced to flee or chose to leave their homes. These displaced Palestinians found refuge in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, as well as within the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Approximately **150,000 Palestinian Arabs** chose to stay in

Israel and live as part of the Jewish state. Today, there are approximately **1.6 million Israeli-Palestinian citizens**, about 20 percent of the total Israeli population.

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This was not the last challenge to Israel's sovereignty. In the last seven decades, Israel has faced repeated and significant challenges to its safety and security. Until this most



recent conflict, the [Yom Kippur War](#) in 1973—the fourth Arab-Israeli war initiated by Egypt and Syria—was the most bloody and violent.

The conclusion of the 1973 war marked a strategic victory for Israel, but it came with significant repercussions for the United States. While the war itself did not derail the détente—a period of eased geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union—it [heightened tensions](#) to a level not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. This escalation brought the United States and the Soviet Union [perilously close](#) to a nuclear standoff.

There are significant parallels today, and while no evidence has yet to emerge that Russia directly involved itself with the October 7th attacks, the current crisis brings the United States closer to direct confrontation with at least one major ally of Russia and one major enemy of the U.S.—Iran.

## ISRAEL: THE LONE DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Israel—as a robust, secular democracy—presents a striking contrast to the oppressive Islamist regimes prevalent in the Middle East, like Iran. While the Middle East remains a region with very [high concentrations](#) of authoritarian regimes, the Arab Spring did allow for some reconsideration of authoritarian robustness in this part of the world. In the eight nations where pro-democracy uprisings took place—Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and Algeria—there was success in the overthrow of long-term dictators in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011. However, not too long after the revolutions, authoritarians made brutal, bloody [successful power grabs](#) in both Tunisia and Egypt.

Subsequently, the necessity of U.S. support for the only democracy in this region cannot be overstated. This is a mutually beneficial partnership that advances our national security framework in a tumultuous region without requiring Americans to serve in harm's way. Acting as a vital ground presence in a high-risk region, Israel's military strength and strategic location are key in deterring regional adversaries of the U.S. Additionally, the crucial intelligence sharing between the two countries plays a significant role in safeguarding Americans both within the country and overseas.

In contrast, Israel's governance operates under a parliamentary democracy framework, with the Prime Minister serving as the government's leader and heading a system that accommodates multiple political parties. Executive authority is held by the cabinet, while the Knesset—Israel's legislative body—wields legislative power.

Israel employs a nationwide proportional representation system for its [elections](#). Essentially, the number of seats each party secures in the Knesset directly correlates with the percentage of votes it receives. This system is applied more stringently in Israel compared to many Western democracies, with the primary condition for a party's entry into the Knesset being surpassing a qualifying threshold. Currently, this [threshold](#) stands at 1.5 percent, which was raised from the previous 1 percent limit used until the 13th Knesset elections.

The foundational principles and political structure of Israel are outlined in the [Basic Laws](#), substituting for a formal written constitution. This structure ensures a balance of power and delineates the roles and responsibilities of each branch of government.

Distinctly, Israel's judiciary functions independently from both the executive and legislative branches. Israel's legal system, which comprises both secular and religious courts, upholds the principle of legal equality, ensuring that the law is applied uniformly to all citizens, regardless of their religious or ethnic backgrounds. This secular approach to justice contrasts markedly with the situation in many Islamist regimes, where legal systems are often heavily influenced by religious doctrine, potentially leading to the marginalization of minorities and the suppression of individual rights, particularly those of women.

**Israel's commitment to secular governance, while maintaining respect for religious diversity and religious freedom, further underscores its democratic nature. Unlike many Middle Eastern regimes where religious laws are imposed as state laws, Israel's secular government operates alongside separate religious courts, reflecting its commitment to both religious freedom and secular governance. This approach allows for the harmonious coexistence of diverse religious practices.**

Another significant aspect of Israel's democracy is its electoral process. The use of party-list proportional representation in legislative elections ensures that all segments of Israel's diverse society, including various religious and ethnic groups, are fairly represented. This inclusive electoral system is quite different from the electoral processes in many Middle Eastern countries, where elections, if held, often lack transparency and fail to reflect the will of the people, thereby perpetuating authoritarian rule.

As a result of this vastly more open and transparent electoral system, the Western embrace of free speech, freedom of association, and other democratic norms is prevalent. This includes **women's right** to vote and live full lives and more advanced **LGBT rights** than in any other country in the Middle East.

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in many neighboring countries. Tragically, harmonious coexistence with bordering nation-states is less assured.

## **THE CURRENT CONFLICT WITH HAMAS**

The latest chapter of conflict opened in extraordinarily gruesome ways on October 7, 2023. In a stunning Israeli intelligence failure, Hamas was able to infiltrate Israel by land, air, and sea in a disciplined, concentrated, and orchestrated fashion. Using vehicles, mechanized hang gliders, and motorcycles, Hamas **stormed** and overwhelmed communities caught completely unaware.

To counter denials of its brutality, Israeli authorities released explicit photos and video showing the aftermath of Hamas's attacks,

including images of bloodied and burned babies, and children's rooms covered in blood and gunpowder. These **images** were shared on official Israeli social media accounts and were **shown** to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In response, he **said**: "It's simply depravity in the worst imaginable way. Images are worth a thousand words. These images may be worth a million." Hamas also **hacked** into victims' social media and live-streamed their attacks to spread terror.

Reserve Colonel Golan Vach, head of Israel's National Rescue Unit, reported finding a **decapitated baby** among the casualties in Kibbutz Be'eri, near the Gaza Strip. Members of his team also found more decapitated children.

Israeli Police Commissioner Kobi Shabtai **stated** that the police's ongoing investigation into rape and sexual violence has yielded "evidence indicating rape [and] amputation of organs," including breasts. The police also released a video showing the aftermath of the Hamas attack at an outdoor festival where over 260 people, mostly young adults, were killed. The footage included a survivor's account, identified as "Witness S.," who described witnessing terrorists in olive green uniforms committing gang rape, mutilation, and murder. In one particularly horrifying recount, the witness describes the terrorists, disguised as Israeli soldiers, assaulting a young woman, who was still alive during the attack and then murdered. She **describes**, "Someone really penetrates her and shoots her in the head before he finishes. It's not like he ejaculates and picks up his pants... He shoots her in the head while he's still inside of her." The police have since identified the deceased victim of this brutal incident.

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are currently engaged in intensive military operations in the Gaza Strip. The IDF has deployed a **significant number** of troops, including 300,000 reservists, supplementing its regular force of 160,000. The operation involves aerial bombardments by warplanes, missile strikes, and ground incursions, especially in the northern parts of Gaza.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has outlined Israel's objective to **dismantle Hamas's military** and governance structures and to secure the release of hostages. Netanyahu has stated that a ceasefire is contingent on the release of these hostages and has declared Israel's intention to maintain "overall security responsibility" but **not occupy Gaza** post-conflict. This stance has led to warnings from the United States against a reoccupation of the territory.

The IDF estimates that Hamas's military wing comprises around **30,000 members**. Since the conflict's inception, the **IDF reports** conducting over 4,300 strikes, targeting a variety of Hamas's military assets, including anti-tank missile sites, tunnel networks, and other infrastructure designated as terrorist facilities. The ground operations have resulted in the deaths of **46 Israeli soldiers** at the time of this writing.

The IDF has issued warnings to Palestinian civilians in northern Gaza, advising them to relocate south of the Wadi Gaza River for their safety. Following these warnings, the United Nations reports that **approximately 200,000 people** have fled the area since November 5th. However, concerns are growing about the **humanitarian situation** in the south, including issues related to

overcrowding and limited access to essential resources like shelter, food, and water.

While the world laments the loss of civilian lives in Gaza and urges Israel to seek to minimize loss of life, Hamas **intentionally embeds** its military operations among civilian centers—including daycare and hospital facilities. They seek to maximize the loss of Palestinian lives in order to undermine support for Israel.

The IDF has **paused its military operations** eight times in the past five days, mainly in the areas northeast of Gaza City and near Rafah in the south, to allow for humanitarian movement. The Rafah border crossing into Egypt remains the primary functional route for the movement of people and goods in and out of Gaza.

**Many Americans rightly fear an escalating conflict and, especially after other foreign wars of the 20th century, are hesitant to get involved. However, as Israel's most important ally, and as a defender of freedom and Western civilization, the U.S. has a role to play in supporting Israel and deterring the spread of war.**

## **THE ROLE OF THE U.S.**

Many Americans rightly fear an escalating conflict and, especially after other foreign wars of the 20th century, are hesitant to get involved. However, as Israel's most important ally, and as a defender of freedom and Western civilization, the U.S. has a role to play in supporting Israel and deterring the spread of war. This is particularly important as Hamas is only one of several **Iranian-backed militant groups** operating in the region seeking to undermine both Israel and the U.S.; there is also Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. If Hamas is seen

as succeeding, more of these terrorist groups will be emboldened and continue to target U.S. assets, as evidenced by the increased attacks on U.S. forces by these groups in the last 30 days.

Here the current administration seems to get it right. The **massive deployment of military naval might** to the eastern Mediterranean projects substantial hard power with the goals of (1) providing strategic support to Israel as needed; (2) deterring Hezbollah in Lebanon from opening another front in the war; and (3) providing combat air superiority if needed.

However, the administration is failing to address the necessity of protecting our own direct interests abroad with equal vigor. **Houthi rebels shot down a U.S. MQ-9**

**Reaper drone** off the coast of Yemen last week. Moreover, the attack by Hamas has emboldened Iranian proxies to such a degree that there have been nearly 60 attacks on U.S. bases in Iraq and Syria **in the last month**. Most of the attacks have been **disrupted** by the U.S. military or failed to reach their targets, but still others caused injuries ranging from shrapnel wounds to perforated eardrums and traumatic brain injuries. Department of Defense officials state that **59 U.S. personnel have been injured** as a result.

President Biden's response to the attacks on American bases has been limited strikes like the most recent one on a **Syrian**

**weapons warehouse.** Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo **criticized this** as a weak reaction, implying it could be interpreted by Tehran as a tacit approval to continue aggressive actions. The number of attacks has only continued—raising serious questions about the efficacy of the U.S. response. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s **assertion** of prioritizing U.S. personnel safety is contradicted by Biden’s seemingly hesitant and inadequate response, potentially putting U.S. personnel at greater risk in the region.

**In light of the escalating conflict and the recent brutal attacks by Hamas, it is imperative for the United States to adopt a robust and decisive stance.**

Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei is banking on President Biden maintaining his characteristic passive stance—seemingly driven by a paralyzing fear of escalation. Biden’s actions mirror the “**escalation paralysis**” that continues to constrain his decision-making in Ukraine, prolonging the conflict and the suffering of innocents.

The Biden administration, and all Americans, needs to consider what a further emboldened Iran and the weakening, even erasure, of Israel would mean for the world and for the United States.

## **CONCLUSION**

In light of the escalating conflict and the recent brutal attacks by Hamas, it is imperative for the United States to adopt a robust and decisive stance.

U.S. policymakers should consider the following recommendations:

### **Intensify Military Support**

Increase military aid to Israel, ensuring they have the necessary resources to counter Hamas and other militant threats effectively. This includes advanced weaponry and intelligence-sharing.

### **Direct Action Against Hostile Entities**

Conduct targeted operations against Iranian-backed militias that threaten U.S. interests in the Middle East, demonstrating a firm response to aggression.

### **Diplomatic Pressure**

Tragically, the Biden administration just allowed Iran access to another \$10 billion via the granting of a **four-month waiver to Iraq**—undercutting previous U.S. sanctions. The U.S. must freeze all access and leverage diplomatic channels to isolate and penalize Iran and its proxies for their support of terrorism. This includes enforcing stricter sanctions and rallying international support against these groups.

### **Enhance Homeland Security Measures**

Bolster domestic security to protect against potential retaliatory actions by sympathizers of these militant groups within the U.S. This includes securing our border.

These measures will demonstrate the U.S.’s unwavering commitment to Israel, combating terrorism, and protecting our interests at home and abroad—thereby strengthening our position as a defender of freedom and democracy in the global arena.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

### Get Informed

Learn more about Israel and the current conflict with Hamas:

- [A Quick Primer on Understanding 21st-Century Israel](#)
- [Israel's jihad Remains My Jihad, the IDF My Soul Soldiers](#)
- Daily Updates on [Operation Swords of Iron](#)

### Talk to Your Friends

Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Share this information, tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

### Become a Leader in the Community

Start an Independent Women's Network chapter group so you can get together with friends each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.

### Remain Engaged Politically

Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

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