



Forum for American Leadership

How the U.S. Can Support Israel's Self-Defense

October 12, 2023

The barbaric and unprecedented air, land, and sea attack by Hamas terrorists against Israel on October 7 killed more than 1,300 Israelis, including at least 25 American citizens, and left thousands wounded and at least 100 held hostage in Gaza. **The United States must support Israel's military campaign for as long as it takes and continue to send a clear signal to Iran and its proxies that the United States will not tolerate any attempt to escalate the crisis. It is critical to U.S. national security that Israel fully defeat Hamas.**

This Forum for American Leadership brief outlines steps the United States should take to stand by Israel as it exercises its right to self-defense in response to this horrific attack.

- 1. Show unwavering, bipartisan support for Israel's military campaign:** The United States must provide sustained backing for Israel's war against Hamas.
 - **U.S. Force Posture:** The Biden Administration made the right decision in [sending](#) the USS Ford Carrier Strike Group to the Eastern Mediterranean and additional fighter aircraft to the region to bolster deterrence against Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies. To restore military deterrence in the region, the direct use of U.S. military force in support of Israel should not be taken off the table.
 - **Military Assistance:** The Pentagon should continue to surge [military assistance](#) to Israel and provide intelligence support to the IDF. Congress must also ensure that the Pentagon has the authorities and funding it needs to [provide](#) Israel with additional precision-guided munitions, air defense interceptors, and other needs, both for war in Gaza and to deter a broader regional crisis. This should include the replenishment and modernization of the U.S. weapons [stockpile](#) in Israel.
 - **Diplomatic Support:** In the coming weeks, the Administration and Congress will likely face calls at home and abroad to pressure Israel to “de-escalate” and scale back or end its campaign. They should forcefully and publicly refuse to heed those calls and work to maintain international support for Israel's right to self-defense.
- 2. Hold Iran accountable for its support of Hamas:** Iran's extensive financial and military support of Hamas is [well-documented](#). The regime must be held accountable for its sponsorship of the perpetrators of this attack, regardless of whether it provided operational support. Reporting from the [Wall Street Journal](#) and [Washington Post](#), however, indicates Iran potentially had an extensive and direct role in the planning of the Hamas attack.
- 3. Prevent Iran from accessing \$16 billion in recently unfrozen assets and fully enforce sanctions against its energy sector:** One of the most effective ways to deny resources to Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Iranian-backed terrorist groups is to force difficult budget decisions in Tehran. To date, the Biden Administration's Iran policy has provided far too many lifelines to the regime and that must end. This attack makes clear that the Iranian

regime only responds to credible military deterrence, not endless attempts at diplomatic engagement and economic inducements.

- **Frozen Assets:** This summer, the Biden Administration issued waivers to [give Iran access](#) to \$10 billion in Iraqi payments for Iranian natural gas and \$6 billion in frozen assets in South Korea as ransom for five American hostages. The United States should act immediately to prevent these funds from going to Iran. Congress should also explore other uses for frozen Iranian assets, including for claims under the [Justice for U.S. Victims of State Sponsored Terrorism Act](#).
 - **Energy Sanctions:** Since President Biden took office, Iran has received an estimated [\\$80 billion](#) in illicit oil revenue. Constraining Iranian oil exports, which reached an [estimated 2.2 million barrels per day](#) in August 2023, would deprive the regime of a crucial revenue source from buyers like China. That's why all statutory U.S. sanctions against Iran, including on energy, must be enforced to maximum effect.
- 4. Increase diplomatic pressure on Hamas' state sponsors:** U.S. allies Qatar and Turkey provide safe havens for Hamas officials and political legitimacy that enables the group's terrorist activities against Israel. For example, Qatar [provides](#) a monthly \$30 million grant to the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, while there is [evidence](#) weapons have flowed from Turkey to Gaza. Both countries must cut ties with Hamas, including the closure of Hamas offices and an end to financial support, or face the threat of U.S. sanctions.

In one of Israel's darkest hours, the United States must stand with the IDF and Israeli people as they fight against terrorists bent on their destruction. The U.S. role here is clear: ensure Israel has the military resources it needs for the conduct of this war and use American military, economic, and diplomatic strength to, respectively:

- Re-establish military deterrence in the region.
- Degrade Iran's financial support for Hamas and other terrorist groups, as well as Hamas' other sources of support.
- Pushback against likely efforts to pressure Israel to end military operations before its security is restored.

Additional Resources

- Critical Threats Project and Institute for the Study of War [Iran Updates](#)
- FAL Brief: "[Recommendations for U.S.-Iran Policy](#)"
- Foundation for Defense of Democracies [Overnight Brief](#)
- Jewish Institute for National Security of America [situational updates](#)

This paper is a product of FAL's [Middle East and North Africa](#) Working Group.

The Forum for American Leadership (FAL) is a non-profit organization that presents expert analysis and national security recommendations to policymakers in Congress and the Executive Branch.

