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The Root Causes of Israel's Declining International Support

By Darren G. Spinck

Introduction

At the September 2023 Atlantic Festival, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan proudly proclaimed “the Middle East region is quieter today than it has been in two decades.” A week later, Iran-backed Hamas terrorists attacked Israel by air, land, and sea, killing, sexually assaulting, and abducting civilians, including the murders of 36 children. An estimated 1,200

Israelis were killed during the military-style assault and 135 still remain hostages, held by Hamas in the vast tunnel structure underneath Gaza. Iran, which, according to the Stimson Center, supports Hamas as one of Tehran's primary vehicles to confront Israel on multiple fronts, has proceeded to use its militias to attack US forces over 90 times since mid-October 2023 in Iraq and Syria. Iran-supported Houthi rebels in Yemen have launched multiple drone attacks

on US and UK naval vessels and commercial ships in the Red Sea, in a provocative move which risks further expanding the conflict.

Since the October 7 Hamas terror assaults, the worst civilian attack in Israel's history, Israel launched a military strike against terrorists in Gaza, a "second independence war" according to Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, to "destroy the military and governmental capabilities [of Hamas] and bring the [Israeli] hostages home." Israel has since experienced its largest military casualty figures from any previous Gaza ground offensive, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, with 115 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) killed in action and approximately 600 injured.

With Israel's military response to the Hamas attacks intensifying, there have been increased calls for a permanent ceasefire, including from American Jews rallying in eight cities on the eighth night of Hanukah. However, without a clear, alternative plan to dismantle Hamas's existing leadership and destroy its military capabilities, Israel's security would remain at risk. Hamas has not only demonstrated a lack of civility toward Israeli civilians, but a wanton disregard for innocent Palestinians caught in the crossfire from the Israeli military response as well. As *The Washington Post* editorial board observed, Hamas "has consciously exposed

noncombatants to danger by provoking Israel militarily – while protecting its own leaders and fighters in tunnels." While Hamas's political leadership, worth an estimated \$11 billion, have enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle while hiding in Doha, Qatar, it is believed 280 Palestinians die daily because of Israel's retaliation to the Hamas atrocities perpetrated against Israelis.

In the aftermath of the Hamas attacks and Israel's response, the US initially emerged as Israel's most stalwart supporter. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken repeatedly stated Israel has a right to defend itself, America sent two carrier strike groups and other naval assets to the region to deter other actors from joining the fray, and Washington provided military aid to the Israelis including 3,000 Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) guidance systems. In addition, the United States, along with other countries including Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Paraguay, supported Jerusalem during the initial stage of the Israeli military campaign, when the United Nations (UN) passed a resolution urging a ceasefire.

Position of the United States

But, with pressure against continued support for Israel growing domestically and internationally, US support for Israel's military

operation seems to be waning somewhat. The Eurasia Group's Ian Bremmer believes US President Joe Biden is now as isolated on the world stage vis-à-vis Israel, as Vladimir Putin was when Russia first invaded Ukraine. Biden, coldly dismissing Israel's national security concerns as he drops in the polls before next November's US presidential election, recently labelled Israel military strikes "indiscriminate" and attacked Netanyahu's government as "the most conservative government in Israel's history."

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Biden's response, however, should come as no surprise. An "Atlantacist", Biden likely sympathizes with his European counterparts who have long desired warmer ties with Iran. In 2019, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom deliberately skirted US sanctions imposed against Tehran during the Trump Administration, developing a special purpose vehicle (ISNTEX) to "maintain non-dollar trade with Iran." Europeans seeking to expand trade with Iran were seething when Trump pulled out of the Obama-negotiated Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA). Less than a month before the Iran-funded Hamas slaughter of innocent Israelis, the

Biden Administration, seemingly eager to re-enter the JCPOA, agreed to unfreeze \$6 billion in Iranian oil revenue. Critics of the White House decision, such as House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, believe the \$6 billion provided Tehran with financial flexibility to finance the October 7 attacks. However, as US historian Victor Davis Hanson has noted, unfreezing the billions of Iranian oil money was likely not even needed for the heinous assault on Israel, as Palestinians have fooled American and European "naïfs" into sending billions of dollars of aid to Gaza, which were "used to tunnel into Israel, to obtain a huge rocket arsenal and to craft plans to wipe out Jews."

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During Israeli President Isaac Herzog's address to a joint session of the US Congress to commemorate Israel's 75th Independence Day, he referred to America as Israel's "greatest friend." This is reflected in December 2023 polling which found 55 percent of American respondents supported Israel's right to defend itself and preventing another Hamas attack the Jewish state. Immediately following the Hamas attack, there was bipartisan support in Congress

in support of Israel, with the US Senate voting 97-0 for a resolution condemning Iran for its support of global terrorism, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. A US House of Representatives resolution supporting Israel had an “unheard of” 400 co-sponsors.

However, domestic politics in the run-up to the November 2024 US presidential election is already beginning to erode some of the existing US support for Israel’s military actions. In a separate Pew Research Center survey, less than half of polled Democrats approve of the Biden Administration’s Israel policies. Respondents under the age of 30-years-old were particularly critical of US policy toward Israel, with only 19 percent in support. Opposition to support for Israel has mounted within the US foreign policy “blob”, with State Department officials drafting a dissent memo calling for US support of a ceasefire and for the Biden Administration to publicly criticize the Israeli government for perceived mistreatment of Palestinians during bombings of Gaza to eradicate Hamas terrorists and weapons depots. State Department officials used Foggy Bottom’s 50-year-old dissent channel, which allows American diplomats to criticize US foreign policy, and wrote, “we must publicly criticize Israel’s violations of international norms such as failure to limit offensive operations to legitimate military targets.” Since the release of the dissent memo,

the Biden Administration has shared intelligence with Congress and relevant US Senate/House committees, detailing Washington’s concerns with Israel’s adherence to laws of war, which, in turn has led to leaks to American media outlets criticizing Israel. President Biden has since referred to Israel’s retaliation as “indiscriminate bombing” in Gaza and CNN has reported that half of the munitions the Israeli military has dropped on Gaza are “imprecise dumb bombs”.

Opposition to support for Israel has mounted within the US foreign policy “blob.”

Why has Washington begun to openly criticize Israel? First, as noted earlier, Biden is facing increasing isolation on the world stage for America’s support. The most recent UN resolution approving a demand for a ceasefire in Gaza only had eight “no” votes in addition to America and Israel. Second, polling numbers in the Democratic Party supporting the White House’s policies vis-à-vis Israel are declining, with only 19 percent of registered Democrats supporting Israel in a recent Public Policy Institute of California poll (compared to 59 percent of Republicans). Third, the activist left in America, which the Democratic Party has weaponized in the past, ranging from Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests to support for a

radicalized pro-trans agenda, has turned on the Biden White House for its support of Israel. BLM Chicago, apparently fearing no blowback, posted on the X social media platform a photo of a paraglider, which were used by Hamas to launch an attack on innocent partygoers at an Israeli music festival, along with the message “I stand with Palestine.” This reflects a rise in a “broad battle over colonialism,” according to the *New York Times* Roger Cohen, who wrote pro-Palestinian groups “have denounced a ‘settler colonial’ Israel, with Palestinians cast as the dark-skinned indigenous people and Israelis as white oppressor interlopers.”

Leftists tore down posters of women and children held hostage by Hamas, protests in Washington supporting Palestinians have outnumbered pro-Israel ones by nearly three-to-one, and anti-Semitism in the United States has risen an astonishing 400 percent since the October 7 Hamas attack according to a report. Only a week after the Hamas attack, thousands marched in New York, chanting “free Palestine” and “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” a call for the destruction of the Jewish state. The rise of anti-Israel sentiment on American university campuses was best illustrated during a US Congressional hearing on confronting anti-Semitism, when the presidents of Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, and MIT – perhaps out of fear about a possible progressive backlash

- would not forcefully condemn hate-speech calling for the genocide of Jews.

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Support for the Israel in the United States could face a further, long-term decline, as 51 percent of Americans aged 18-24 polled in a recent Harvard-Harris survey, shockingly call for support to “Israel to be ended and given to Hamas and the Palestinians.” Nearly one in four polled in this age range do not believe Hamas raped or committed other crimes against women on October 7. In the UK, support for Israel’s policies amongst younger voters is declining as well, with an Ipsos Mori poll finding just 7 percent of Britons aged 18-34 wanting the United Kingdom to back the Jewish state.

Russia and China

Perhaps the biggest beneficiary of the crisis unleashed by the “sheer evil” of the Hamas attack and the world protesting the Israel military response is the “no limits” partnership of China and Russia. Moscow, particularly, benefits from the world shifting its attention from Ukraine to Israel. With America juggling multiple foreign policy crises simultaneously, Russia, China,

and Iran can better exploit America's struggle to maintain unipolarity. As the United States becomes increasingly over extended in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific, American defense officials are facing policy challenges related to doling out finite weapons and ammunition supplies. Dak Hardwick, a lobbyist for the Aerospace Industries Association stated soon after October 7, "there has not been a time in the past 30 years where you essentially have had two real conflicts at the same time, with a potential third one [Taiwan] in three different regions of the world."

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The US government has struggled mightily with the global demands for weapons systems and ammunition, with a forthcoming US National Defense Industrial Strategy Report warning America's defense industry "does not possess the capacity, capability, responsiveness, or resilience required to satisfy the full range of military production at speed and scale." America's arming of Ukraine drained US weapons stockpiles so rapidly, that it was reported in January 2023 that the United States was sending a "sizeable portion" of the one million 155-milimeter shells that the Biden Administration pledged to Ukraine from

an existing stockpile in Israel. Following the Hamas attacks, the IDF requested that tens of thousands of the 155-millimeter shells which the Biden Administration had removed for use in Ukraine, then get returned to the Israeli emergency stockpiles. In addition to Ukraine and Israel (and Taiwan) requiring howitzer shells for their respective defense, both the Israeli and Ukrainian militaries also need US-manufactured smart bombs and stinger missiles.

Besides the cold, harsh reality of America's overburdened defense industrial base, Russia has benefitted from the US Congress prioritizing the Israel defense effort over Ukraine, with the Speaker of the House Mike Johnson voicing concerns over the Biden Administration not clearly articulating what Ukraine's strategy for winning is and Congressional calls to limit Ukraine's funding following Ukrainian General Valery Zaluzhny's assessment that the war with Russia is a "stalemate." Both Russia and China have also been adept at rallying the Global South during the conflicts in Ukraine and Israel. While Russia has faced significant economic sanctions from the US, EU, UK, and other countries since the Kremlin ordered an invasion of its neighbor, two-thirds of the world's population has not. As noted in a recent Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) analysis, non-compliance by the Global South of the US-led sanctions

regime results from “widespread suspicion of unilateral sanctions” and “historical anti-Western sentiments.” China, has weaponized the suspicion of American sanctions overuse and distrust of the West through de-dollarization and the expansion of the BRICS economic bloc, with over 60 countries attending the XV BRICS Summit in Johannesburg. Anti-western sentiments further the aforementioned ideological battle over colonialism, which has resulted in a backlash against Israel.

China has weaponized the suspicion of American sanctions overuse and distrust of the West.

Finally, the Kremlin and China are poking holes in the Biden Administration’s “democracy versus autocracy” worldview. As noted by *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Yaroslav Trofimov, “China, Russia, and lesser autocracies like Iran increasingly exploit the [Israel] tragedy to claim a moral high ground – posing a strategic challenge to the US and its allies who have framed their support for Ukraine in stark moral terms.”

Europe’s position

The European Union (EU) agrees with Arab states that a two-state solution is the only

pathway to peace between Israel and the Palestinians territories. European support for Israel is slowly diminishing, with only Austria and the Czech Republic supporting the Israeli position during the December 13 UN resolution vote on a ceasefire. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo has stated “...the destruction of Gaza is unacceptable.” This reluctance to support Israel’s military retaliation unconditionally following the Hamas attack can likely be attributed to two causes, a sizeable Muslim population and anti-Israel sentiment in Europe’s left-wing politics. While there still remains commercial interests in Europe which wish to increase business ties with Iran, politicians in Europe have continued to prioritize regional security regarding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. It is expected that as long as the war in Ukraine continues, and Iran supplies Moscow with drones to attack Ukraine, European leaders, particularly in the east and central regions of the EU, will likely give pause to deepening ties with Iran if such drone technology could be used against them if Russia were to expand its offensive military campaign past Ukraine’s borders.

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Europe has also experienced a considerable Muslim influx into Europe, with estimates that 14 percent of Europe's population will be Muslims by 2050. Unlike the United States, which has the largest population of Jews outside of Israel, Europe's Jewish population is dwarfed by the number of Muslims. In the United Kingdom, for example, there are 14 times more Muslim residents than Jews. While the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak quickly travelled to Israel and declared to Netanyahu, "we want you to win," London's tune has since changed. Sunak has criticized Israeli military action, calling for a "sustainable ceasefire" and saying too many civilians have died in Gaza, while former British Defense Minister Ben Wallace called the Israeli response to the October 7 terror attacks, a "killing rage." In France, which has the largest Jewish population outside of Israel and America, there are approximately 500,000 Jews, but has the largest Muslim population in Europe, with approximately 5.7 million.

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Since the Hamas attacks, Europe has experienced several Islamist terror attacks,

including the December 3 murder of a German tourist in Paris, by an attacker shouting "Allahu Akbar", the October 17 arrest of two Islamic State members in Italy, and the December 14 arrest of four Hamas operatives in Denmark who plotted attacks on Jewish and Israeli targets. Ylva Johansson, the EU's home affairs commissioner, warned Europe faces a "huge risk of terrorist attacks," due to the war between Israel and Hamas. Like the United States and United Kingdom, younger voters in Europe assign blame to Israel for the ongoing conflict. In Germany, younger voters aged 18-24 hold Israelis more responsible than Hamas. While German chancellor Olaf Scholz has voiced public support for Israel since the Hamas terror strike, Humboldt University professor Anselm Hager found that German politicians listen to polling and shape public opinion to match public sentiment. Already, German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock has agreed with her British counterpart, David Cameron, that a "sustainable ceasefire" is needed.

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France also demonstrates a significant

disparity amongst generations, with 10 percent fewer polled French, aged 18-25, supporting Israel than those polled aged 60 and older. In addition, France, like the United States, has a large ideological divide supporting Israel, with 60 percent of France's liberal-conservative (The Republicans) supporting Israel, while only 27 percent of French Insoumise (left-wing populist) do. In Spain, Ione Belarra, the leader of the leftist Podemos party, called Israel's retaliation against Hamas "genocide".

Conclusion

Israel's international support for maintaining its campaign to eradicate Hamas and destroy the Iran-backed terrorist group from having the capability to attack Israel is quickly ending. Already, Washington has "rebuked" Israel for expanding its military strikes over Lebanon's border. While likely targeting Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, 34 Israeli strikes have instead hit the Lebanese Armed Forces.

An anonymous US diplomat signaled American support is no longer unwavering, when stating "diplomatic cost can be an intangible thing... when public opinion in so many countries is hostile, it makes it harder to win support. Within the White House, the progressive worldview

of Vice President Kamala Harris and her calls for a "tougher" approach toward Netanyahu and a two-state solution appear to be gaining favor. *Telegraph* columnist David Kaufman has observed Biden is facing difficulties keeping his "increasingly outraged progressive base" at bay, while balancing US support for Israel. Josep Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, stated "All EU Member States back immediate pauses in hostilities." Borrell has stated the EU will not accept Gaza's permanent control by the IDF and the installation of an interim Palestinian authority.

While the US may pressure Israel to "ramp down fighting in the months ahead," Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has been clear that the military campaign to eradicate Hamas "will last more than several months." Despite the deaths and brutalization of its citizens, Israel will undoubtedly face growing international pressure due in large part to concerns over Islamist terror blowback in the United States and Europe, as well as a growing progressive base which kowtows to the whims of an uninformed progressive base. Douglas Murray was spot-on, when he observed that "Israel is the only country which is expected to accept with equanimity the mutilation of its citizenry."

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