

## Biden Visit Ties US to Israeli Invasion of Gaza

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*Evan Vucci/AP*

With his visit to Israel this week, President Joe Biden has tied the US to a widely expected Israel ground invasion of the Gaza Strip to root out Hamas following an unprecedented attack earlier this month, geopolitical analysts told the Energy Intelligence Forum 2023 on Thursday.

Israeli officials have warned of a long and difficult war to destroy Hamas, in an operation that would involve complex urban warfare in the densely populated strip, potentially causing untold civilian death and destruction that will reflect on the US across the region.

“America is wholly invested now in Israel and its plan for Gaza, but many senior Americans

are also really frightened and anxious that it is going to be a disaster and mayhem once the Israeli forces go into Gaza and start urban warfare,” Alastair Crooke, a former British intelligence official and director of Conflicts Forum, said at the Forum.

“The ground invasion is going to be not just messy but impossible,” Andreas Krieg, associate professor at King’s College London, told the Forum. “The US is complicit in whatever happens next.”

The Biden administration has spent the last week engaged in diplomacy hoping to protect civilians, secure the release of hostages and prevent the conflict from spreading. Contradicting those efforts, the US on Oct. 18 vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas to allow humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

## **Mass Protests**

The explosion at Al-Ahli Arab Hospital that the Gaza Health Ministry said killed hundreds of people underscores the precarious position of US diplomacy. The blast, with Israel and Palestinian militants blaming each other, sparked mass protests around the Mideast and prompted Arab leaders to cancel their planned meetings with Biden that were set to take place in Amman, Jordan, after the president’s visit to Israel.

Returning from Israel, Biden told reporters on Air Force One on Oct. 18 that based on intelligence it was “highly unlikely” Israel carried out an airstrike on the hospital, but that he “can understand why” people across the region wouldn’t believe it. Israeli officials have blamed a misfired Islamic Jihad rocket.

The conflict has already caused thousands of Israeli and Palestinian deaths, triggering protests against Israel and the US across the Mideast, underscoring how the conflict is shifting regional and global fault lines.

Mideast Gulf states have sided with the Palestinian cause and condemned Israel. Krieg said Mideast Gulf states are acting independently of US pressure and following their own principles and interests.

Meanwhile, Iran and Saudi Arabia, longtime foes that have become closer under a Chinese mediated deal to restore ties, have been in regular contact, seeing mutual benefit in not escalating tensions in the Mideast Gulf that would impact their economic and trade interests. And Russia and China, seeking to differentiate themselves from the US and West more broadly, have aligned themselves with the Palestinian struggle and Arab views.

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the US has tried to rebuild credibility and legitimacy, Krieg said. Now, with the US fully backing Israel, “Twenty years of rebuilding legitimacy, credibility has been destroyed in the Arab world in particular and the Global South more broadly.”

## Real Test

The real test may come if the conflict spreads, with the US preparing for an Israeli ground operation that would have broad and unknown implications for the Mideast and the US role in the region.

There is a risk the conflict escalates to Lebanon, the West Bank, to Iran-aligned groups in Syria, Iraq, Yemen – or Iran itself. In recent days, there have been sporadic clashes between Israel and Hezbollah, the powerful Iran-backed Lebanese militant group that has threatened to intervene in the event of an Israeli ground operation on Gaza.

To deter Hezbollah, which is estimated to have more than 100,000 rockets and precision-guided missiles that could overwhelm Israeli missile defense systems, the US has ordered two aircraft carrier groups to the eastern Mediterranean and put 2,000 troops on heightened readiness to deploy to the region.

The Biden administration is also planning to ask Congress for an Israeli aid package, part of a \$100 billion request that would provide aid to Ukraine and Taiwan and strengthen the US-Mexico border.

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