

## **The Politics of the Gaza War: A Brief**

The war began on October 7, 2024, when Hamas attacked Israel killing 1,139 people, including more than 300 soldiers, and 200 people were taken as hostages. Many of them are still in captivity. The attack has prompted an unprecedented and massive military retaliation from Israeli forces. In the nearly eight-month Israeli war in Gaza, more than 34,596 Palestinians have been killed and 77,816 have been wounded. The majority of the dead are women and children. The tally includes at least 28 deaths on May 1, 2024.

Israel estimates 263 soldiers have been killed and 1,592 wounded since the launch of its military operation in Gaza. At least 34,596 Palestinians have been killed and 77,816 injured in Israel's military offensive on Gaza since October 7. 1

Gaza has been under Hamas control since 2007, while Fatah maintains partial administrative control in the Israeli-occupied West Bank through the Palestinian Authority. The armed wing of the Hamas-allied Islamic Jihad fired rockets into Israel on April 29, 2024, signaling the group was still able to launch rocket attacks.

Today, the situation in Gaza is very dire. There are an estimated 10,000 Palestinians buried under the rubble of buildings flattened by Israeli strikes in the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian Civil Defence has said. 2

It would take two to three years to recover all the bodies unless digging equipment, which has been destroyed by Israel, is urgently replaced, and allowed into the war-ravaged strip, it added. On April 30, 2024, the Civil Defence also warned of the spread of diseases from decomposed bodies. It said high temperatures in the summer will likely increase the threat of epidemics, as heat accelerates the decomposition of corpses. 3

After most Israeli troops pulled out from Gaza's populated areas on April 7, rescuers have been able to reach areas previously deemed inaccessible. They have recovered more than 700 bodies found in mass graves at al-Shifa Hospital and Nasser Hospital, the strip's two biggest health facilities. 4

There are an estimated 7,000 people under rubble who have not been recovered and therefore not recorded. The new estimate by the Civil Defence means the death toll could reach at least 44,500 once all bodies are recovered. The majority of those killed and buried under debris are children and women. Rescuers say they have not been able to quickly recover dead bodies mainly due to the Israeli targeting of crew members and their heavy equipment. At least 67 of its members have been killed in Israeli air strikes since October 7. 2024. 5

Additionally, the widespread destruction of infrastructure and roads is complicating rescue efforts. The UN estimates there are 37 million tons of debris in Gaza left by the intense Israeli bombardment of residential buildings. It could take 14 years to safely clear the debris, according to the United Nations Mine Action Service. 6

An estimated 1.7 million people, more than 75% of Gaza's population, have been displaced, many of them forced to move repeatedly, according to the UN Palestinian Refugee Agency (UNRWA).7

The later Israeli ground offensive destroyed vast swathes of Gaza, pushing more than 1.5 million displaced Palestinians into southern Gaza where they are now sheltering from the war. Many have sought shelter in Rafah at the Egyptian border where the threat of an Israeli attack has loomed large for months, fueling concerns of an even bigger humanitarian crisis. The displaced have crammed into overcrowded shelters in or near UNRWA facilities such as schools, makeshift tents, and homes still existing.8

The conflict has damaged or destroyed roughly 62% of all homes in Gaza, or 290,820 housing units, according to a World Bank interim damage assessment published in March.9 There is now a crippling blockade of food, clean water, and medicine, according to the UN.10

The World Food Program (WFP) says that 1.1 million people in Gaza are suffering catastrophic levels of hunger. The situation is particularly dire in the north. The deputy WFP head said on April 25 that more aid must be delivered to avert famine in northern Gaza, despite what he described as an uptick in deliveries and some progress in accessing that part of Gaza. The Gaza health ministry reported on April 25 that at least 28 children, most of them no older than 12 months, had died as a result of malnutrition and dehydration since February.11

The World Health Organization (WHO), in a report covering the period up to April 20, said 2-4% of children had severe acute malnutrition, and 16-25% of them aged from 6-59 months have acute malnutrition in northern Gaza, while in southern Gaza, 3-7% of children have acute malnutrition, it said.12

The senior UN humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza Sigrid Kaag said on April 24 that the scarcity of food and other essential goods had led to a breakdown in the civil order, and there was no effective law enforcement.13

Israel, which imposed a complete siege on Gaza in the early days of the war, has faced growing international pressure including from its ally the US to let in more aid. American pressure on Israel mounted further after an Israeli attack killed seven World Central Kitchen aid workers on April 1. Israel checks all aid shipments before they enter Gaza.14

In early April, Israel pledged to improve aid access, particularly to northern Gaza. The Israeli army said on April 28 that the amount of aid going into Gaza would be increased very soon.<sup>15</sup>

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on April 29 there had been "measurable progress" in the humanitarian situation. But he said it still wasn't sufficient and said he would press Israeli officials to do more.<sup>16</sup>

In March, the EU foreign policy chief said Israel was provoking famine in Gaza and using starvation as a weapon of war. Israel's foreign minister rejected the accusation, saying it had let in "extensive humanitarian aid". Israel has also accused Hamas of stealing aid, and placed blame on UN agencies, calling them inefficient. which Hamas strongly denies Israeli accusations. <sup>17</sup>

The US and some of its allies also have air-dropped aid to Gaza. Several Palestinians have drowned or been killed by air-dropped aid. Deputy WFP chief Carl Skau, on April 25, welcomed Israel's commitments to improve aid access, saying some of them had been partly implemented while others remained to be implemented. The health infrastructure in Gaza has been decimated, Kaag said on April 24. The few hospitals still standing struggle to operate due to severe shortages of supplies and frequent power outages. The WHO says only 11 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are even partially functioning - five in the north and six in the south. Donors have set up 6 field hospitals in southern Gaza. UNRWA says that as of April 18, eight of the 24 health centers it operates in the Gaza Strip were operational. The WHO reported that in the dire situation, two medical points near the largest site for displaced people in east Khan Younis were inundated with daily cases of hepatitis, skin diseases, and diarrhea, and critically low on medical supplies when UN officials visited on April 9.<sup>18</sup>

The WHO said an estimated 9,000 critical patients need to be evacuated from Gaza.

Gaza had suffered a water crisis for years before the latest conflict. It has worsened markedly since the war began. Aid agencies warned in February that the majority of people had no access to clean drinking water and that sanitation services were wholly ineffective, with none of Gaza's wastewater treatment systems working.<sup>19</sup>

Outbreaks of diarrheal diseases and hepatitis A were among the indicators of dire water and sanitation. They urged sufficient fuel for the operation of critical water and sanitation plants.<sup>20</sup>

James Elder, UNICEF's global spokesperson, James Elder, in his informative article "In Rafah I saw new graveyards fill with children. It is unimaginable that worse could be yet to come," published in The Guardian, May 2, 2024, said:<sup>21</sup>

From looming famine to soaring death tolls, the latest fear is the much-threatened offensive in Rafah in southern Gaza. Can it get any worse? It always seems to. It has been six months and this war is breaking some of humanity's darkest records: reports state more than 14,000 children have been killed. But there is no slowing in the fighting's pace or ferocity. If anything, things are getting worse: with clear promises – threats – that this terrifying trajectory will continue. Rafah will implode if it is targeted militarily because there are more than 1.4 million civilians already there, suffering dire conditions. Most have had their homes damaged or destroyed. All have had their coping capacity smashed. There is simply nowhere left to go in Gaza. Water is in desperately short supply, not just for drinking but sanitation. In Rafah, there is approximately one toilet for every 850 people. The situation is four times worse for showers. That is, around one shower for every 3,500 people. Try to imagine, a teenage girl, elderly man, or a pregnant woman, queuing for an entire day just to have a shower. And a military offensive in Rafah will be catastrophic because it is a city of children – some 600,000 of them.... On 31 October, Unicef called Gaza a graveyard for children. Last month I saw new graveyards in Rafah being constructed. And they were filled. Every day the war brings more violent death and destruction. In my 20 years with the United Nations, I have never seen devastation like that I saw in the Gaza Strip cities of Khan Younis and Gaza City. And now we are told to expect the same via an incursion in Rafah.... Gaza needs an immediate and long-lasting humanitarian ceasefire. How many times have we said – indeed, pleaded for – that? And we must see the release of all hostages, safe and unrestricted access to humanitarian relief, and more crossings for that relief. People in Gaza are stunned that the horrors continue. In the north of the territory, close to where a Unicef vehicle came under fire last month, a woman clutched my hand and pleaded, over and over, that the world sends food, water, and medicine. I will never forget how, as I felt her grasp, I tried to explain we were trying, and she continued to plead. Why? Because she assumed the world did not know what was happening in Gaza. Because if the world knew, how could they possibly let this happen?

Very recently, there has been a burst of diplomatic activity, primarily American, Saudi, and Egyptian, aimed at resolving the Gaza war crisis. Secretary Antony Blinken traveled to the Middle East from April 29 to May 1 to meet with regional partners. Secretary Blinken discussed ongoing efforts to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza that secures the release of hostages. He also discussed the recent increase in humanitarian assistance being delivered to Gaza and underscored the importance of ensuring that the increase is

sustained. Blinken emphasized the importance of preventing the conflict from spreading and discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the region, including through a pathway to an independent Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel.

As the first part of his trip, Blinken visited Saudi Arabia on April 29, 2024, and participated in a Ministerial meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council to advance coordination on regional security. At the World Economic Forum's special meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth, and Energy for Development, the Secretary will coordinate with our partners to ensure continued progress on climate change mitigation and the global energy transition. To its credit, Saudi Arabia has emerged as the key player in the possible peace agreement to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Why is Saudi Arabia now pushing for a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians? A brief history should make it clear why the Saudis are now acting as they are. Firstly, there is a slight shift in the American position on the issue of Palestinian statehood. Notwithstanding, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's long-standing opponent of Palestinian statehood, the Biden administration now sees it as the only long-term solution after Israel's campaign to eliminate Hamas in Gaza.

Secondly, the Saudis see recent developments as an opportunity to pursue their national interests. Therefore, the Saudis are now earnestly talking with the Biden administration for their national interest. As a quid pro quo, the Saudis are shrewdly demanding their security partnership deal with the US. Much earlier, in September 2023, before Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel sparked the war, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) said that as we get closer to a Palestine-Israel peace deal that could also bolster the Saudi-US security partnership. MBS said the Palestinian issue was significant for Saudi Arabia, and that there was a need to ease the life of the Palestinians.

Riyadh has never recognized Israel and did not join the 2020 US-brokered Abraham Accords that saw its Gulf neighbors Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Morocco, establish formal ties with Israel.

Since Biden visited Saudi Arabia and met MBS in 2022, his administration actively pursued a Saudi Israeli deal that would build on the Abraham Accords, a foreign policy win for his predecessor Donald Trump.

The Saudis indicated they would want more than their Gulf peers got, bargaining hard for benefits like US security guarantees and assistance with a civilian nuclear program with uranium enrichment capacity.

In the months that followed, Israeli and American officials issued bullish statements, while the Saudis said characteristically little.

Saudi Arabia holds the most leverage on the Palestinians. It has consistently denounced Israeli forces' conduct in Gaza, accusing them of "unchecked heinous war crimes. In all reality, even without the Gaza war, sealing the Saudi-Israeli-US deal would be a tall order. However, the Saudis and the Americans are serious about a possible breakthrough on their specific agenda soon enough. That explains Saudi interest in the Gaza war right now.

On the initiative of Saudi Arabia, European and Arab foreign ministers met in Riyadh on April 29, 2024, to discuss a diplomatic push to bring an end to the Gaza war, and how to join forces on advancing a two-state solution. The foreign ministers in the meeting were from the UK, US, France, Jordan, and Egypt.

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Blinken aimed to discuss with Arab partners post-war Gaza and to press Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to take steps US President Joe Biden demanded in April 2024 to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Blinken was in Saudi Arabia for talks after the White House continued to press Israel not to undertake what it says would be a destructive incursion into Rafah.

Israel has "assured us that they won't go into Rafah until we've had a chance to share our perspectives and our concerns with them," national security spokesman John Kirby said on April 28, 2024, on a day when President Biden spoke with Netanyahu.

Blinken said in the meeting of the World Economic Forum in Riyadh that: 22

Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily, extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel. The only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas. They have to decide, and they have to decide quickly. I'm hopeful that they will make the right decision.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told the meeting that the kingdom is renewing its "commitment to finding a final solution to the conflict, recognizing the State of Palestine and drawing support for a two-state solution." He warned that a planned Israeli ground attack on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip would lead to a disaster.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, the Biden administration is now earnestly trying to work with the Saudis to push for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. To provide Israel with an incentive, Washington has hard-pressed the prospect of normalized relations with Gulf kingpin Saudi

Arabia. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on April 29 that the US is “nearly ready with a security package to offer Saudi Arabia if it normalizes relations with Israel”. He was seeking incentives for Israel to support a Palestinian state. The Biden administration has sought moderation from Israel “by dangling the prospect of formal relations with Saudi Arabia -- a potential game-changer because the Gulf state is the guardian of Islam's two holiest sites.”<sup>24</sup>

As part of any deal, Saudis are insisting on a path to statehood for the Palestinians as well as alliance-style security guarantees from the US.

Blinken explained in a meeting of the World Economic Forum in Riyadh that:<sup>25</sup>

The work that Saudi Arabia and the United States have been doing together in terms of our agreements, I think, is potentially very close to completion. But then to move forward with normalization, two things will be required -- calm in Gaza and a credible pathway to a Palestinian state.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who met Blinken in Riyadh, also said that US-Saudi agreements were “very, very close. Most of the work has already been done... (a pathway to a Palestinian state) was the only way it's going to work.”<sup>26</sup>

But before October 7, Netanyahu had viewed Arab normalization under the US-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020 which negotiated formal diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, as his very own legacy. Even if the Biden administration reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia, it would be hard selling for he requires approval from Congress. Previously, lawmakers, especially from Biden's Democratic Party, have been critical of Saudi Arabia on human rights grounds.

Particularly controversial have been Saudi Arabia's calls for civilian nuclear cooperation with the US, which critics have warned of a possible arms race with Iran.

On April 29, 2024, Blinken met with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. They “discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting regional peace and security, including through greater integration among countries in the region and enhanced bilateral cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia,” the State Department said in a statement.<sup>27</sup>

The two sides also discussed relations and cooperation, and regional and international developments, foremost in the Gaza Strip, including efforts exerted to stop military

operations in the strip, deal with their security and humanitarian repercussions, the urgent need to reduce tensions in the region, and normalization. 28

Blinken also underscored the need for sustaining an increase in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, reaching an immediate ceasefire that secures the release of hostages and preventing the possible further spread of the conflict. 29 They "discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting regional peace and security, including through greater integration among countries in the region and enhanced bilateral cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia," the State Department said in a statement.30

The US State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller said that:31

Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met today with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud in Riyadh. The Secretary underscored the importance of sustaining the increase in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, reaching an immediate ceasefire in Gaza that secures the release of hostages, and preventing the further spread of the conflict. The Secretary and the Crown Prince discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting regional peace and security, including through greater integration among countries in the region and enhanced bilateral cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia. The Secretary and Crown Prince also discussed the urgent need to reduce regional tensions, including a cessation of Houthi attacks undermining both freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and progress on the Yemen peace process.

Blinken stated on April 29 to foreign ministers of six Gulf Arab countries, that the episode "highlights the acute and growing threat from Iran but also the imperative that we work together on integrated defense".32

Blinken said the US would hold talks in the coming weeks with the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council on integrating air and missile defense and boosting maritime security. America already has strong military relations with all the Gulf Arab states, but relations among the six have seen their ups and downs.33

Blinken said the region had a choice on its future, including "one ridden with divisions and destruction and violence and permanent instability." Gulf Arabs, through their meeting with the United States, we're choosing "greater integration" and "greater peace", he said.34 Blinken was also trying to sell an integrated defense over Iran. It is Blinken's first trip to the region since the long shadow war between Israel and Iran broke out into the open. 35

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said here on April 29 that the United States nears finishing a security deal with Saudi Arabia.



He made the remarks while visiting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) General Secretariate, where he attended the joint ministerial meeting with the foreign ministers of the GCC countries.<sup>36</sup>

On April 29 Blinken met in Riyadh with the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as Palestine Liberation Organization Secretary General Hussein Al Sheikh. The Office of Spokesperson, US State Department's official statement on Secretary Blinken's Meeting with Arab Foreign Ministers stated that: <sup>37</sup>

They discussed the importance of a sustained increase in humanitarian assistance to address the dire situation in Gaza. The Secretary reaffirmed the United States' support for efforts to achieve lasting peace in the region, including through a pathway to a Palestinian state with security assurances for Israel. Secretary Blinken emphasized the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas. The Secretary also underscored the importance of regional coordination to prevent the conflict from spreading.

The two sides reviewed means to enhance relations and cooperation and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, including Rafah, the Saudi Press Agency reported. According to the report, they stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire and efforts to ensure the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.<sup>38</sup>

A separate meeting was held between Blinken and Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah at the GCC headquarters on efforts to promote bilateral ties and situations in Gaza.

During his trip to Riyadh, the top US diplomat also attended the World Economic Forum special meeting.<sup>39</sup>

On April 29, 2024 Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met today with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. Spokesperson Matthew Miller said: <sup>40</sup>

Secretary Blinken underscored the need to avoid further escalation in the region. The Secretary discussed ongoing efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire in Gaza that would secure the release of hostages held by Hamas. The Secretary discussed the recent increase in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and emphasized that the increase must be sustained. The Secretary and Foreign Minister continued discussions on regional and bilateral efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the region, including through greater integration among countries in the region and a pathway to a Palestinian state with security guarantees

for Israel. They also discussed efforts to resume negotiations under the Jeddah platform aimed at ending the conflict in Sudan and preventing further widespread civilian harm.

As expected, Saudi Arabia has demanded "irreversible" steps towards Palestinian statehood, which Netanyahu and many members of his hard-right government oppose.<sup>41</sup>

Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have been extremely critical of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and called for an immediate cease-fire. The US, UK, and EU are pressuring Israel to allow more aid into the Palestinian territory to ease its humanitarian crisis and prevent a famine.

They are urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to launch an offensive on the city of Rafah, which the Israeli military says is the last bastion of Hamas.

The Biden administration has also been frustrated by what it sees as a lack of Israeli planning for Gaza's post-war situation, and by Netanyahu's unwillingness to discuss steps toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar have signaled they're willing to help fund Gaza's reconstruction if Israel accepts negotiations on Palestinian statehood. US President Joe Biden broadly backs the plan.

In any case, Netanyahu has repeatedly made clear his opposition to a Palestinian state, saying last month that Israelis rejected any attempt to force a peace deal.<sup>42</sup>

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he expected several European governments to announce their recognition of a Palestinian state within the next month, including Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Slovenia, and Spain.

China meanwhile said that rival Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah had met in Beijing recently for "talks on promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation".<sup>43</sup>

Netanyahu again said Israeli forces would enter Gaza's southern city of Rafah regardless of whether a ceasefire deal is reached with Hamas.<sup>44</sup>

On May 1, 2024, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that an Israeli assault on Rafah would be an "unbearable escalation" that would be "devastating" for Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region. Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs said

“The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that.” 45

Meanwhile, Blinken met Netanyahu who declared a day before that he was determined to go into Rafah to launch an operation, whether or not there’s any sort of ceasefire agreement.

Earlier, Blinken urged Hamas to take advantage of what they called an extraordinarily generous proposal that would return 33 captives in exchange for 40 days of an initial ceasefire, followed by the potential of an extended period of calm. Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State said that: "Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily, extraordinarily generous, on the part of Israel. And in this moment, the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire is Hamas. They have to decide, and they have to decide quickly." 46

But Netanyahu’s comments seem to cloud that somewhat and now Hamas is having to consider a deal on the understanding that whatever happens, there’s still going to be some sort of an operation in Rafah.47

The US stance on the Gaza war is ambivalent and hypocritical, to say the least. President Biden is sending billions of dollars to back Israel’s war against Hamas, even as the destruction of Gaza and deaths of Palestinians fuel growing protests on college campuses. Very recently, a \$26 billion new aid to Israel was passed overwhelmingly in Congress and signed into law by Biden. Meanwhile, there is a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a looming Israeli invasion of the southern city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering. 48

While Democrats have expressed growing concerns about how Israel is carrying out its war in Gaza, they mostly supported sending more weapons to Congress.

American weapons to Israel remain inviolable in Washington, and the latest package was helped by rallying around Israel after Iran’s April 13, 2024, unprecedented attack on the country.

However, the aid package highlights a disconnect between Democrats in Congress and rank-and-file voters. There is now support for the Palestinian cause among the left and the Democrats. There is a clear trend that the Democratic party is moving gradually more and more toward aid conditionality.49

Blinken also addressed a potential normalization deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel, hinting it was imminent.

Blinken said a US-Saudi security pact that would be offered if the latter normalizes ties with Israel was near "completion." Blinken also said, "The work that Saudi Arabia and the United States have been doing together in terms of our agreements, I think, is potentially very close to completion." The US and Saudi Arabia have done intensive work over the last month on the deal, he added.<sup>50</sup>

When asked about the security pact negotiations, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said that bilateral agreements between the kingdom and the US were "very very close."

"Most of the work has already been done. We have the broad outlines of what we think needs to happen on the Palestinian front," Faisal bin Farhan said in a panel at the World Economic Forum special meeting in Riyadh.<sup>51</sup>

A normalization deal was reportedly in the works last year but was frozen after Hamas' deadly attack on Israel on October 7, which Israel says killed 1,200, mostly civilians, with some 250 taken hostage. Israel has in recent years normalized ties with other countries in the region, including the UAE and Bahrain.<sup>52</sup>

Blinken has expressed hope that the Palestinian militant group Hamas would "make the right decision" and accept the "extraordinarily generous" deal with Israel in Gaza.

Blinken was speaking in the Saudi capital Riyadh on April 29, while mediations with a Hamas delegation were ongoing in Cairo over an Israeli proposal to which the Palestinian militant group was meant to respond.

The deal could see a pause in the relentless offensive that has gripped the Gaza Strip for almost seven months, killing over 34,000 Palestinians, as per health officials in the Hamas-controlled enclave. It could also see the release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza since October 7.<sup>53</sup>

"Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily, extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel," Blinken said in Riyadh at the World Economic Forum. "They have to decide — and they have to decide quickly," Blinken said. "I'm hopeful that they will make the right decision."<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, Blinken reiterated Washington's opposition to the planned Israeli offensive on Rafah. He said the US has yet to see a plan from Israel regarding the offensive that "effectively" protects civilians.

Some 1.4 million Palestinians are estimated to be displaced in the city of Rafah, on the Egyptian border. Most are taking refuge there after having escaped the violence elsewhere in Gaza.

Blinken said that the US has seen "measurable progress" in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip over the past few weeks, though he urged Israel to do more.<sup>55</sup>

Speaking at a US-Gulf Cooperation Council meeting in Riyadh on April 29, Blinken said a cease-fire would be the most effective way to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He added that humanitarian aid will be the focus in the coming days. Blinken also stressed that the Iranian "threat" requires integrated defense.<sup>56</sup>

"This attack highlights the acute and growing threat from Iran but also the imperative that we work together on integrated defense," Blinken said, seemingly about Iranian strikes on Israel some two weeks ago. The US and the UK both supported Israel in countering the Iranian drone and missile strikes, alongside Arab neighbors such as Jordan.

The strikes were in retaliation for what Iran said was an Israeli strike on its embassy complex in Syria earlier in April, which killed several senior officers from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).<sup>57</sup>

Meanwhile, the Biden administration is now earnestly trying to work with the Saudis to push for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. To provide Israel with an incentive, Washington has hard-pressed the prospect of normalized relations with Gulf kingpin Saudi Arabia. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on April 29 that the US is "nearly ready with a security package to offer Saudi Arabia if it normalizes relations with Israel". He was seeking incentives for Israel to support a Palestinian state. The Biden administration has sought moderation from Israel "by dangling the prospect of formal relations with Saudi Arabia -- a potential game-changer because the Gulf state is the guardian of Islam's two holiest sites."<sup>58</sup>

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normalization, two things will be required -- calm in Gaza and a credible pathway to a Palestinian state.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who met Blinken in Riyadh, also said that US-Saudi agreements were "very, very close. Most of the work has already been done... (a pathway to a Palestinian state) was the only way it's going to work.<sup>60</sup>

But before October 7, Netanyahu had viewed Arab normalization under the US-brokered Abraham Accords in 2020 which negotiated formal diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, as his very own legacy. Even if the Biden administration reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia, it would be hard selling for he requires approval from Congress. Previously, lawmakers, especially from Biden's Democratic Party, have been critical of Saudi Arabia on human rights grounds.

Particularly controversial have been Saudi Arabia's calls for civilian nuclear cooperation with the US, which critics have warned of a possible arms race with Iran.

On April 29, 2024, Blinken met with Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

They "discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting regional peace and security, including through greater integration among countries in the region and enhanced bilateral cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia," the State Department said in a statement.<sup>61</sup>

The two sides also discussed relations and cooperation, and regional and international developments, foremost in the Gaza Strip, including efforts exerted to stop military operations in the strip, deal with their security and humanitarian repercussions, the urgent need to reduce tensions in the region, and normalization. <sup>62</sup>

Blinken also underscored the need for sustaining an increase in humanitarian assistance to Gaza, reaching an immediate ceasefire that secures the release of hostages and preventing the possible further spread of the conflict. <sup>63</sup> They "discussed ongoing efforts to achieve lasting regional peace and security, including through greater integration among countries in the region and enhanced bilateral cooperation between the United States and Saudi Arabia," the State Department said in a statement.<sup>64</sup>

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He made the remarks while visiting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) General Secretariate, where he attended the joint ministerial meeting with the foreign ministers of the GCC countries.70

On April 29 Blinken met in Riyadh with the Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as Palestine Liberation Organization Secretary General Hussein Al Sheikh. The Office of Spokesperson, US State Department's official statement on Secretary Blinken's Meeting with Arab Foreign Ministers stated that: 71

They discussed the importance of a sustained increase in humanitarian assistance to address the dire situation in Gaza. The Secretary reaffirmed the United States' support for efforts to achieve lasting peace in the region, including through a pathway to a Palestinian state with security assurances for Israel. Secretary Blinken emphasized the need for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas. The Secretary also underscored the importance of regional coordination to prevent the conflict from spreading.

The two sides reviewed means to enhance relations and cooperation and the latest developments in the Gaza Strip, including Rafah, the Saudi Press Agency reported. According to the report, they stressed the need for an immediate ceasefire and efforts to ensure the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to Gaza.<sup>72</sup>

A separate meeting was held between Blinken and Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah at the GCC headquarters on efforts to promote bilateral ties and situations in Gaza.

During his trip to Riyadh, the top US diplomat also attended the World Economic Forum special meeting.<sup>73</sup>

On April 29 Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met today with Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. Spokesperson Matthew Miller:

Secretary Blinken underscored the need to avoid further escalation in the region. The Secretary discussed ongoing efforts to reach an immediate ceasefire in Gaza that would secure the release of hostages held by Hamas. The Secretary discussed the recent increase in the delivery of humanitarian assistance to Gaza and emphasized that the increase must be sustained. The Secretary and Foreign Minister continued discussions on regional and bilateral efforts to achieve lasting peace and security in the region, including through greater integration among countries in the region and a pathway to a Palestinian state with security guarantees for Israel. They also discussed efforts to resume negotiations under the Jeddah platform aimed at ending the conflict in Sudan and preventing further widespread civilian harm.

As expected, Saudi Arabia has demanded "irreversible" steps towards Palestinian statehood, which Netanyahu and many members of his hard-right government oppose.<sup>74</sup>

Saudi Arabia and other Arab states have been extremely critical of Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and called for an immediate cease-fire. The US, UK, and EU are pressuring



Israel to allow more aid into the Palestinian territory to ease its humanitarian crisis and prevent a famine.

They are urging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to launch an offensive on the city of Rafah, which the Israeli military says is the last bastion of Hamas.

The Biden administration has also been frustrated by what it sees as a lack of Israeli planning for Gaza's post-war situation, and by Netanyahu's unwillingness to discuss steps toward a two-state solution with the Palestinians.

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar have signaled they're willing to help fund Gaza's reconstruction if Israel accepts negotiations on Palestinian statehood. US President Joe Biden broadly backs the plan.

In any case, Netanyahu has repeatedly made clear his opposition to a Palestinian state, saying last month that Israelis rejected any attempt to force a peace deal.<sup>75</sup>

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said he expected several European governments to announce their recognition of a Palestinian state within the next month, including Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Slovenia, and Spain.

China meanwhile said that rival Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah had met in Beijing recently for "talks on promoting intra-Palestinian reconciliation".<sup>76</sup>

Netanyahu again said Israeli forces would enter Gaza's southern city of Rafah regardless of whether a ceasefire deal is reached with Hamas.<sup>77</sup>

On May 1, 2024, UN chief Antonio Guterres warned that an Israeli assault on Rafah would be an "unbearable escalation" that would be "devastating" for Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region. Martin Griffiths, the UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs said "The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that."<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, Blinken met Netanyahu who declared a day before that he was determined to go into Rafah to launch an operation, whether or not there's any sort of ceasefire agreement.

A couple of days ago, Blinken urged Hamas to take advantage of what they called an extraordinarily generous proposal that would return 33 captives in exchange for 40 days of an initial ceasefire, followed by the potential of an extended period of calm.

But Netanyahu's comments seem to cloud that somewhat and now Hamas is having to consider a deal on the understanding that whatever happens, there's still going to be some sort of an operation in Rafah.<sup>79</sup>

The US stance on the Gaza war is ambivalent and hypocritical, to say the least. President Biden is sending billions of dollars to back Israel's war against Hamas, even as the destruction of Gaza and deaths of Palestinians fuel growing protests on college campuses. Very recently, a \$26 billion new aid to Israel was passed overwhelmingly in Congress and signed into law by Biden. Meanwhile, there is a deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and a looming Israeli invasion of the southern city of Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering.<sup>80</sup>

While Democrats have expressed growing concerns about how Israel is carrying out its war in Gaza, they mostly supported sending more weapons to Congress.

American weapons to Israel remain inviolable in Washington, and the latest package was helped by rallying around Israel after Iran's April 13, 2024, unprecedented attack on the country.

However, the aid package highlights a disconnect between Democrats in Congress and rank-and-file voters. There is now support for the Palestinian cause among the left and the Democrats. There is a clear trend that the Democratic party is moving gradually more and more toward aid conditionality.<sup>81</sup>

The Gaza war issue has also taken on political overtones in the run-up to the US presidential election in November. White House spokesperson John Kirby on April 29 called the occupation of campus buildings "the wrong approach."<sup>82</sup>

Critics of prevailing U.S. policy toward Israel have urged Biden to use Israel's desire for U.S. weapons as leverage to lessen the suffering in Gaza. While Biden has pushed for a hostage release and temporary cease-fire deal and has expressed frustration with the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, he has continued to unconditionally send more weapons to Israel, which is committed to fighting until Hamas is destroyed. That aim has placed a target on Rafah, a final Hamas holdout. The US has said it won't back an invasion of the city unless there is a safe civilian evacuation plan, but Israel has vowed to press ahead regardless of outside pressure.

Overall, support for Israel is still tremendously strong in Washington. The \$26 billion package is almost entirely earmarked for defensive and offensive weapons for Israel, with some funds for US forces in the Middle East.

Biden's commitment to Israel remains extraordinarily strong for he believes that the security of Israel is critical. Biden will always make sure that Israel has what it needs to defend itself against its enemies, like Iran.

Biden also underscored how the bill contains \$1 billion in humanitarian aid for Gaza, where the US military is airdropping in food and water and also constructing a port off the coast of the territory to get more assistance. That effort comes as Israel faces accusations it is still restricting aid trucks through land crossings.

On April 30 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to launch a ground offensive on the Gaza Strip's far-southern city of Rafah "with or without" a truce deal being agreed upon with Hamas. The hawkish premier issued the warning despite strong concerns raised by top ally Washington and hours before US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in Israel on his latest Middle East crisis tour.

Netanyahu, who has vowed to destroy Hamas over its October 7 attack, promised "total victory", and said stopping the war "before achieving all of its goals is out of the question". "We will enter Rafah and we will eliminate the Hamas battalions there with or without a deal," he said.<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, Hamas was weighing the latest plan for a truce proposed in Cairo talks with US, Egyptian, and Qatari mediators that had raised cautious hopes for an end to the fighting after nearly seven months. Hamas said it was considering a plan for a 40-day ceasefire and the exchange of scores of hostages for larger numbers of Palestinian prisoners. Israel will also decide soon.<sup>84</sup>

Meanwhile, the US has heightened pressure on all sides to reach a ceasefire. Blinken arrived in Jordan from Saudi Arabia. In Amman on April 30, Blinken called for the redoubling of aid efforts at a "critical moment in making sure that everything that needs to be done is being done".

He met with King Abdullah, who stressed the "importance of immediate action to stop the humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip and the need to protect innocent civilians". Blinken later headed to Israel for talks with Netanyahu and other officials on May 1, 2024.

Washington has strongly backed its ally Israel but also pressured it to refrain from a ground invasion of Rafah, which is packed with displaced civilians.

President Joe Biden, facing rising fury on US university campuses, urged the Egyptian and Qatari leaders on April 29 "to exert all efforts to secure the release of hostages held by Hamas".<sup>85</sup>

Biden called this "the only obstacle" to securing relief for Gaza's civilians, who the United Nations has warned are on the brink of famine.

As the Gaza war has roiled the region and its human toll has sparked international outrage, political momentum has built in the search for a post-war solution to the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Biden is playing politics as he is saying something and doing something else. He is showing concern about Israel's actions in Gaza but still giving it new weapons.

The increasing rhetorical criticism of Israel is just playing politics for domestic consumption and Biden's practical policy spells on continuing support to Israel regardless of its actions in Gaza.

In Congress, Democrats willing to oppose aid for Israel remain a small minority, even as concern about the humanitarian crisis mounts. In the House, which voted on separate aid packages for each nation, the final tally was 366-58, with only 37 Democrats against.

A growing number of Democrats have called to condition weapons to Israel after an Israeli strike killed seven aid workers with the charity World Central Kitchen, which Israel attributed to a mistake but still led to severe backlash in Washington.

In the Senate, only a small group of Democrats are actively calling to condition aid to Israel, including Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), who tried and failed to pass an amendment to the bill that would restrict offensive military assistance.

However, college students are forcing the issue, with growing protest encampments and pressure on university leadership. Some universities have cracked down on the protesters and arrested dozens of them.

The protests are heartening and could lead to more pressure on Democrats to act on Gaza.<sup>86</sup>

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken embarked on three days of uphill Middle East diplomacy on April 29, 2024, hoping to pause the bitter conflict in the Gaza Strip that is taking a heavy toll on civilians and inflaming anti-Israel sentiment in the U.S., complicating President Biden's path to re-election.<sup>87</sup>

The White House's immediate goal is to secure a cease-fire that would delay an Israeli invasion of Rafah, the city in southern Gaza where more than one million displaced

Palestinians are sheltering. The Israeli military says Rafah is the last bastion for Hamas battalions in the besieged territory. Washington hopes to delay an Israeli invasion of Rafah as protests rile U.S. campuses and Israel's isolation deepens<sup>88</sup>

The Israeli attacks come amid renewed international efforts to broker a ceasefire in the nearly seven-month-old conflict: a Hamas delegation including the Palestinian militant group's deputy Gaza chief, Khalil al-Hayya, was expected in the Egyptian capital, Cairo, on April 29, 2024, to respond to Israel's latest truce and hostage release proposal via Egyptian and Qatari mediators.

A senior Hamas official said on April 28, 2024, that the group had no "major issues" with the most recent truce plan, which essentially remains the same as the deal outlined in several failed rounds of talks since a week-long ceasefire collapsed at the end of November.

Israel's mounting preparations for a ground operation in Rafah, where more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million population has sought shelter from the fighting elsewhere, mean this week's talks may be the last opportunity to salvage a diplomatic solution to free hostages and pause or end the war.

Israel has said that Hamas's leadership, along with four battalions of fighters, are camped out in Rafah, using Israeli hostages as human shields, and that a ground operation is necessary to achieve Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise of "total victory" over the Palestinian militants and bring the remaining 130 or so hostages' home.<sup>89</sup>

But the long-threatened plan to attack Rafah has drawn intense opposition from Israel's allies, including the US, which says the overcrowded conditions could lead to thousands of civilian casualties as well as further disrupting aid deliveries entering from Egypt. Joe Biden "reiterated his clear" opposition to an invasion of Rafah in a conversation with Netanyahu on April 28, 2024.<sup>90</sup>

The latest ceasefire proposal appears to include compromises from Israel, which is under international and domestic pressure over the fate of the hostages and the humanitarian crisis its war has caused in Gaza.

Israel is reportedly willing to accept the release of fewer than 40 hostages in exchange for Palestinians held in Israeli jails, and a second phase of a truce that includes a "period of sustained calm" – a new response to Hamas's repeated demand for a permanent ceasefire.

It is also reportedly open to discussing the return of Palestinians to their homes in the northern half of the strip, and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from a central corridor that now divides the territory.

Netanyahu's ministers have publicly sparred on whether to go forward with a truce, with far-right members of his coalition threatening to quit the government if Israel is seen to "surrender" to Hamas's demands.<sup>91</sup>

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is pushing Hamas to promptly accept an 'extraordinarily generous' ceasefire proposal, saying they must describe 'quickly'.

Hamas negotiators were expected to meet Qatari and Egyptian mediators in Cairo on April 29, 2024, to deliver a response to the phased truce proposal that Israel presented at the weekend.

Israel's proposal entailed a deal for the release of fewer than 40 of the roughly 130 hostages believed to be still held in Gaza in exchange for freeing Palestinians jailed in Israel. A second phase of a truce would consist of a 'period of sustained calm' - Israel's compromise response to a Hamas demand for a permanent ceasefire. A tot.<sup>92</sup>

Blinken reiterated that the US - Israel's main diplomatic supporter and weapons supplier - could not back an Israeli ground assault on Rafah if there was no plan to ensure that civilians would not be harmed. Israel retaliated by imposing a total siege on Gaza and its authorities. Palestinians are suffering from severe shortages of food, fuel, and medicine in a humanitarian crisis territory. Blinken's comments come after Biden phoned Netanyahu to reiterate the 'clear position' on a Rafah invasion. 'The two leaders also discussed increases in the delivery of humanitarian assistance into Gaza including through preparations to open new northern crossings as there was a need for measures to assist civilians in Gaza. Biden emphasized "the need for this progress to be sustained and enhanced" in full coordination with humanitarian organizations.

Britain's Foreign Secretary David Cameron, who was also in Riyadh for the WEF meeting, also described the Israeli proposal as 'generous.' It included a 40-day pause in fighting and the release of potentially thousands of Palestinian prisoners as well as Israeli hostages, he told a WEF audience. 'I hope Hamas does take this deal and frankly, all the pressure in the world and all the eyes in the world should be on them today saying 'take that deal!'; Cameron said.<sup>93</sup>

Blinken reiterated that the United States - Israel's main diplomatic supporter and weapons supplier - could not back an Israeli ground assault on Rafah if there was no plan to ensure that civilians would not be harmed.<sup>94</sup>

More than a million displaced Gaza residents are crammed into Rafah, the enclave's southernmost city, having sought refuge there from Israeli bombardments. Israel says the last Hamas fighters are holed up there and it will open an offensive to root them out soon.

Blinken also said the US and Saudi Arabia had done 'intense work together' over the past few months towards a normalization accord between the kingdom and Israel - a goal that the Gaza war has disrupted.

'To move forward with normalization, two things will be required: calm in Gaza and a credible pathway to a Palestinian state,' he said.

In return for normalization, Arab states are pushing for Israel to accept a pathway to Palestinian statehood on land it captured in the 1967 Middle East war - something Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected.

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah also said on April 29, 2024, that an accord between Washington and Riyadh over normalization was 'very, very close'.<sup>95</sup>

There is now some fresh optimism that negotiations could lead to a cease-fire.<sup>96</sup>

Meanwhile, on April 29, 2024, British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said that there is a potential deal for a "sustained" 40-day Gaza cease-fire. Blinken called the proposal "extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel." A former Egyptian official with knowledge of the talks said the initial truce would involve the release of 33 hostages. Israel had originally demanded the release of 40.

On April 29, 2024, Secretary of State Antony Blinken was in Saudi Arabia for a meeting with Gulf region counterparts to discuss a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Blinken's visit was his seventh to the region since Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel. Saudi Arabia was the first leg of a regional tour that will also take him to Israel and Jordan. He was making a final attempt to secure a cease-fire agreement ahead of a possible Israeli ground operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million Palestinians have sought shelter in desperate conditions.

On April 29, 2024, Blinken said "The only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire" is Hamas, "Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel. "They have to decide, and they have to decide quickly ... I'm hopeful that they will make the right decision and we can have a fundamental change in the dynamic."<sup>97</sup> He said that the most effective way to "alleviate the suffering ... is to get a cease-fire and the hostages home." He added that the US was pushing Israel to take steps to protect civilians, improve humanitarian conditions, and keep aid workers safe.

Blinken described the latest cease-fire proposal as “extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel.” Meanwhile, On April 29, 2024, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that “the only thing standing between the people of Gaza and a ceasefire” was Hamas, an invasion in Rafah. “Hamas has before it a proposal that is extraordinarily generous on the part of Israel. “They have to decide, and they have to decide quickly ... I’m hopeful that they will make the right decision and we can have a fundamental change in the dynamic.” 98

There were some signs of progress on a peace deal between Israel and Hamas to halt fighting in Gaza and release dozens of Israeli hostages. This was widely seen as the last, best chance to prevent a return to full-scale war. It was reported that the initial truce would involve the release of 33 hostages. Israel had originally demanded the release of 40.99

On April 30, 2024, mediators expressed hope, once again, that there could be a peace deal when Israel softened its position.100

On April 30, 2024, President Biden urged the leaders of Egypt and Qatar to “exert all efforts” towards securing the release of hostages held by Hamas as part of negotiations for a Gaza ceasefire.

Hamas was considering Israel’s offer of a 40-day truce in the war in exchange for the release of scores of hostages.

The Biden administration, Qatar, and Egypt have been mediating for months to achieve a truce in Gaza.

Representatives from Egypt, Qatar, and Hamas met on April 29, 2024, in Cairo, with the Palestinian group expected to respond to a proposal for a second truce in Gaza, coupled.

British foreign secretary David Cameron has urged Hamas to agree to a deal for a sustained 40-day ceasefire in Gaza and the release of potentially thousands of hostages and prisoners. The foreign secretary also challenged Arab states to accept that the Hamas military leadership responsible for the attack on 7 October must leave Gaza.101

Meanwhile, Egyptian foreign minister Sameh Shoukry said on April 29, 2024, that his country was hopeful about a proposal for a truce and hostage release in the Gaza Strip. France’s foreign minister Stéphane Séjourné, visiting the region, said “Things are moving forward but you always have to be careful in these discussions and negotiations. The situation in Gaza is catastrophic and we need a ceasefire.



Meanwhile, Hamas officials have left Cairo after talks with Egyptian officials on a new ceasefire proposal in Gaza. Hamas delegation will return to Cairo with a written response to the ceasefire proposal, without saying when. While details of the proposed deal have not been made public in full, it is thought the outline involves Hamas returning between 30 and 40 vulnerable hostages including women, children, and those aged over 50, and Israel releasing scores of Palestinian detainees, accompanied by a pause in fighting for forty days.<sup>102</sup>

Netanyahu's cabinet includes people who are against a deal and in favor of Israel's military launching an assault on Rafah instead.

Blinken has left Saudi Arabia and is next headed to Jordan, where he will meet King Abdullah II, Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi, and the UN humanitarian aid and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag. Blinken will head to Israel later in the day.

Washington, Doha, and Cairo have been mediating for months to achieve a truce in Gaza which has endured relentless bombing by Israel in response to the deadly attack by Hamas against Israel on 7 October. Earlier, the representatives from Egypt, Qatar, and Hamas met on April 29, 2024, in Cairo, with the Palestinian group expected to respond to a proposal for a second truce in Gaza, coupled with a fresh release of hostages.<sup>103</sup>

On April 29, 2024, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was under rising pressure from all sides over his country's ongoing war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Far-right members of Netanyahu's cabinet have threatened to drop their support for his coalition government if he accepts a cease-fire deal with Hamas, but the U.S. and many Israelis are pushing him to strike an agreement to bring the remaining hostages home from Gaza and wind down the devastating war in the Palestinian territory.<sup>104</sup>

Blinken said on April 29, 2024, that a cease-fire would be the most effective way to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. But he stressed that civilians caught in the middle of the war can't afford to wait for that to happen, and he urged Israel "to take the necessary steps to meet the needs of civilians."<sup>105</sup>

Blinken acknowledged "measurable progress in the last few weeks, including the opening of new [border] crossings and increased volume of aid delivery to Gaza and within Gaza, and the building of the U.S. maritime corridor, which will open in the coming weeks. But it is not enough," he said.<sup>106</sup>

He said President Biden was adamant that Israel should take more specific, concrete, measurable steps to better address humanitarian suffering, civilian harm, and the safety of aid workers in Gaza — including in his most recent call with Netanyahu on April 28, 2024.<sup>107</sup>

In a statement provided after Blinken's Monday meetings with Qatari leaders, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller made it clear that the onus, as far as the Biden administration is concerned, was on Hamas to accept the latest deal.

Blinken and Qatar's prime minister "emphasized the need for Hamas to accept the significant proposal that is on the table," Miller said, adding that the top American diplomat had "also underscored our shared commitment to continuing to increase and sustain the provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance into Gaza."

United Nations humanitarian agencies have also acknowledged an increase in aid flowing into Gaza, but they continue to warn that tens of thousands of people face possible famine conditions in the territory, and the uptick in aid hasn't been enough to avert that.

The challenge for Netanyahu has been weighing the fate of about 130 remaining hostages — including five U.S. nationals still believed to be alive — and the rising pressure over the war's impact on Palestinian civilians, against his stated mission to destroy Hamas. He's said a Rafah incursion is the only way to meet that goal, as Hamas still has combat units hiding out in the city.

Calls from the families of the remaining captives to strike a deal have grown louder and angrier, however. They've led regular, massive rallies on the streets of Israel, accusing Netanyahu of failing the hostages. More than once the protests have ended in scuffles with police.

On May 2, 2024, the report by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) that at least 800 Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians since October 7. The report said that 84 incidents resulted in Palestinian casualties, 629 incidents led to damage to Palestinian-owned property, and 90 incidents resulted in both. According to the UN report, since the start of the war on Gaza on October 7, some 1,765 Palestinians, of whom 43 percent are children, have been displaced after their homes were demolished.<sup>108</sup>

In parallel with the war in Gaza, Israel, and Hezbollah have been engaged in escalating daily cross-border strikes over the past six months - and their increasing range and sophistication have spurred fears of a wider regional conflict. Hezbollah has amassed a formidable arsenal since 2006. Hezbollah has a network of tunnels to move fighters and weapons around. Its fighters have also been training for more than a decade with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's forces. Hezbollah has so far restricted its attacks to a strip of northern Israel, seeking to draw Israeli forces away from Gaza. Since October, more than

300 people have died in fighting in the border area, mainly Hezbollah fighters. Meanwhile, Hezbollah has built an estimated arsenal of over 150,000 rockets to target Israeli cities. Already 60,000 Israelis had to leave their homes in northern Israel and cannot safely return. This development is now prompting increased calls within Israel for firmer military action against Hezbollah. Across the border in Lebanon, some 90,000 people have also been displaced by Israeli strikes.<sup>109</sup>

Israel is ready to push Hezbollah back from the border. The Israeli military said in April 2024 that it had completed another step in preparing for a possible war with Hezbollah that centered on planning, including preparations for a "broad mobilization" of reservists.<sup>110</sup>

In addition to the Gaza war, Israeli atrocities continue in the West Bank. Earlier, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said that since October 7 some 469 Palestinians have been killed and 4,974 injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The figure includes people killed by Israeli security forces and Israeli settlers.<sup>111</sup>

Israel now stands accused of genocide by South Africa at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). An interim ruling in January 2024 ordered Israel to stop genocidal acts and take measures to guarantee that humanitarian assistance is provided to civilians in Gaza. Later, the ICJ on April 30 threw out Nicaragua's request for emergency measures to stop Germany from sending military supplies to Israel over alleged violations of the Genocide Convention.

Today, Israelis are not just worried about the open-ended war and its impact on the country's economy. They are also worried about the international image of Israel given the legal moves against it before the ICJ and the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Very recently, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz wrote that "Israel scrambles" as Netanyahu, Defence Minister Yaov Gallant, and Army Chief Herzl Halevi "face ICC warrants for war crimes" in the coming days.<sup>112</sup>

Both the Israeli and the US press have quoted sources in both countries who have said that Netanyahu is reaching out to US President Joe Biden for help. Relations between Biden and Netanyahu have been at "an all-time low over the reluctance of the Israeli prime minister to accommodate Biden's request to contain the humanitarian violations committed during the war on Gaza."<sup>113</sup>

On April 29, 2024, the US said that it does not support an ICC investigation into the complicity of Netanyahu, Gallant, and Israeli army chiefs in committing war crimes in Gaza. "We've been clear about the ICC investigation that we don't support it. We don't

believe that they have the authority,” White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.<sup>114</sup>

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz has also said that Israel will not bow to the ICC. Netanyahu has said that his decisions will not be influenced by it.<sup>115</sup>

Today, there is hope that a cease-fire deal could scuttle the plans for Netanyahu's promised invasion of Rafah. Meanwhile, there were three new Israeli strikes in the city on April 29, 2024, amid the renewed talk of a possible cease-fire. At least five more children were among the dead.<sup>116</sup>

On May 1, 2024, while in Israel Blinken again blamed Hamas for the current stalemate, and said that there should be “no delays, no excuses” in reaching a ceasefire deal, claiming the only reason it may not happen “is because of Hamas.”<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, at least two children have been killed in an overnight Israeli attack on a house in Rafah, while more reportedly died in an air strike on a residential building in central Gaza City.<sup>118</sup>

United Nations chief Antonio Guterres warns that an Israeli assault on Rafah would be an “unbearable escalation” that would be “devastating” for Palestinians in Gaza and the wider region.<sup>119</sup> Martin Griffiths, who is UN humanitarian aid chief, has said that Israel's assault on Rafah is “on the immediate horizon” despite the world “appealing to the Israeli authorities for weeks to spare” the Palestinian city where more than 1 million people are taking shelter. Griffiths said that Israel's plan to send ground forces into the last civilian refuge in the Gaza Strip will “spell even more trauma and death”.<sup>120</sup> He said:<sup>121</sup>

We are in a race to stave off hunger and death, and we are losing. For agencies struggling to provide humanitarian aid despite the active hostilities, impassable roads, unexploded ordnance, fuel shortages, delays at checkpoints, and Israeli restrictions, a ground invasion would strike a disastrous blow. The simplest truth is that a ground operation in Rafah will be nothing short of a tragedy beyond words. No humanitarian plan can counter that.

French foreign minister Stéphane Séjourné has spoken briefly to the media after meeting his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in an unscheduled extension to Séjourné’s trip to the region.

“We came to coordinate our efforts for a truce. The message given by France and its Arab partners in the region is that Israel pulls back on this offensive in Rafah,” said Séjourné, adding “It is a question of life and death for many people on the ground.”

Reuters reports he declined to say how optimistic he was of a deal being concluded or give details of where the negotiation stood.

France has three dual nationals still held hostage by Hamas after the group assaulted Israel on 7 October. “We would like them to be on this list if a truce were to happen,” he said.

He also stressed that a French proposal to defuse conflict between Israel and Lebanon’s Iran-backed Hezbollah needed to be high on the agenda should a Gaza ceasefire be agreed.<sup>122</sup>

As well as the protests at BAE Systems factories in the UK there is also a pro-Palestinian camp set up outside Scotland’s parliament in Edinburgh.

Among the campaign’s demands are that the Scottish government apply pressure on the UK government to enact an embargo on all Israeli arms sales, and that local pension funds and local Universities in Scotland divest from links to Israel.

Blinken has posted to social media about his earlier visit today with Israel’s president Isaac Herzog. The US secretary of state said the meeting was to “discuss our support for Israel’s security and efforts to reach a ceasefire that secures the release of hostages,” adding “We also discussed the urgent need to get more humanitarian aid into Gaza.”

What next?

Notwithstanding Israel’s stance, several very recent developments indicate a breakthrough in a ceasefire in Gaza is yet achievable.

On May 1, 2024, France’s foreign minister said that there was still work to be done to secure a truce between Israel and Gaza after he was updated by Egyptian officials in Cairo on the status of negotiations.

“We came to coordinate our efforts for a truce. The message given by France and its Arab partners in the region is that Israel pulls back on this offensive in Rafah,” Stéphane Séjourné said after meeting his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shukri.

He declined to say how optimistic he was of a deal being concluded but added that if there were a truce he hoped that three French-Israeli dual nationals being held by Hamas would be on the list for release.<sup>123</sup>

On May 1, 2024, The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Israeli leaders in his push for a cease-fire deal between Israel and Hamas to impress on them that “the time is now” for an agreement that would free hostages and bring a pause in the nearly seven months of war.

He said that Hamas would bear the blame for any failure to achieve a deal.

A truce could avert an Israeli incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are sheltering. Blinken on Wednesday also told families of hostages held in Gaza that Hamas needs to say yes to the deal.<sup>124</sup>

On May 1, 2024, Blinken said “The working visits come within the framework of Jordan’s efforts to reach an immediate and lasting ceasefire in Gaza and stop the humanitarian catastrophe in the Strip.”<sup>125</sup>

Egypt has proposed to Hamas a comprehensive framework for a ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement between it and Israel. The proposed agreement: <sup>126</sup>

#### Stage One: Temporary Ceasefire and Humanitarian Measures

The first stage of the proposed agreement entails a 40-day temporary ceasefire, with the possibility of extension, and the release of all civilian Israeli hostages held in the Gaza Strip.

Key provisions include:

**Mutual Cessation of Military Operations:** Both parties would agree to temporarily cease military operations for 40 days, with Israeli forces withdrawing to areas near the border, away from densely populated areas in Gaza.

**Humanitarian Measures:** During the ceasefire, Israeli military flights and reconnaissance missions over Gaza would be suspended for eight hours daily, with an extended suspension during hostage release operations.

Displaced civilians would be allowed to return to their homes, and humanitarian aid, including fuel and essential supplies, would be facilitated.

**Gradual Withdrawal of IDF Forces:** Israeli forces would gradually withdraw from key areas in Gaza as hostages are released, ensuring the safe return of displaced civilians to their residential areas.

#### Stage Two: Conclusion of Prisoner Exchange and Reconstruction Efforts

The second stage of the agreement focuses on finalizing the prisoner exchange and initiating reconstruction efforts in Gaza.

Key elements include:

**Prisoner Exchange:** The exchange of living Israeli soldiers for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons would be coordinated. Additionally, IDF forces would withdraw entirely from Gaza.

**Reconstruction Efforts:** Reconstruction efforts, including rebuilding homes, civilian facilities, and infrastructure destroyed during the conflict, would commence.

### Stage Three: Finalizing Reconstruction and Exchange of Bodies

The third and final stage of the agreement involves completing the reconstruction process and exchanging the bodies of individuals killed during the conflict.

Key components include:

**Exchange of Bodies:** Both parties would exchange the bodies of individuals killed during the conflict, following proper identification procedures.

**Long-Term Reconstruction:** A comprehensive plan for the long-term reconstruction of Gaza would be initiated, spanning five years, and encompassing housing, civilian facilities, and infrastructure projects.

The Palestinian side commits to refraining from rehabilitating military facilities.

### Guarantors of the Agreement

The proposed agreement identifies Qatar, Egypt, and the United States as guarantors responsible for overseeing the implementation of the ceasefire, prisoner exchange, and reconstruction efforts outlined in the agreement.

The proposal is certainly doable, and it is now primarily the responsibility of the US to get it somehow approved by Israel, and Hamas will surely follow. France and Saudi Arabia need to get involved, as it has some leverage in the whole matter of operationalizing the Hamas-Israel agreement. At least, it can help in footing the bill for the reconstruction of Gaza.

Meanwhile, what has changed the political landscape wasn't at all expected. In a perplexing and surprising development, an unprecedented and surprising wave of student demonstrations and encampments are underway at US universities, and elsewhere, in protest over the war in Gaza. Protesting students are also calling for their universities to divest from arms firms that supply to Israel and in some cases sever links with universities in Israel.<sup>127</sup>

Pro-Palestinian demonstrations and sit-ins are spreading at universities across the United States and on several campuses around the world.

Columbia University in New York, one of the most prestigious universities in the US, has emerged as the center for student activism since Israel's war on Gaza began more

On April 19, more than 100 protesters were arrested on the campus as police cleared an encampment set up by students.

On April 22, Columbia administrators announced that classes would be held in hybrid mode until the end of the spring semester.

Students maintain a protest encampment in support of Palestinians on April 26, 2024, at Columbia University in New York during the war on Gaza.

Large-scale protests on university grounds have spilled over to at least 50 other campuses around the world, including Yale University, Virginia Tech, University of Texas at Austin, University of California at Berkeley, American University, Arizona State University, Indiana University Bloomington, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Michigan State University East Lansing Campus, Morehouse College, New York University, Ohio State University, Rice University, Roosevelt University, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Stanford University, Swarthmore College, Temple University, The City College of New York, The New School, Tufts University, University of California Berkeley, University of California Los Angeles, University of Chicago, University of Colorado, University of Connecticut, University of Maryland Baltimore County, University of Michigan Ann Arbor University of Southern California in Los Angeles, University of Texas Arlington, University of Texas Austin, University of Texas Dallas, Washington University, and George Washington University

At least 900 students and faculty members have been arrested in the US over the past 10 days as protesters continue to demand a ceasefire in Gaza and divestment from companies enabling Israel's nearly seven-month war on Gaza. The protests have grown violent as law enforcement agencies have tried to remove students and faculty from encampments and protest sites.

Several students have been suspended, put on probation, and, in rare cases, expelled from their colleges. The protesting students received threats were subjected to abuse and received no protection from their institutions.

Some universities have had to cancel graduation ceremonies while others have seen their buildings, quadrangles, and courtyards occupied by the protesters and in some cases by encampments.128



College protests continue in the US. Clashes and arrests have occurred at UCLA and Columbia University. Meanwhile, campus demonstrations are intensifying across the US. Despite the pressure, the protests remain active and seemingly grow by the day.

By May 2, 2024, protests over the Israel-Hamas war have reached boiling point at US universities, leading to the arrests of hundreds of protesters on campuses across the country. Police have been involved in clashes with pro-Palestinian protesters who have set up encampments on dozens of campuses.<sup>129</sup>

The message from the students in encampments has been simple: they want their universities to stop doing business with Israel - or any companies that support its ongoing war in Gaza. The demand has its roots in the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, a decades-old campaign against Israel's policies toward the Palestinians.

But the specifics vary from each set of protesters at different universities. Among them are these key demands:

1. Be more transparent about what money is received from Israel and what it's used for.
2. Stop investing college endowments with money managers who profit from Israeli companies or contractors.
3. Stop doing business with military weapons manufacturers that are supplying arms to Israel. Stop accepting research money from Israel for projects that aid the country's military efforts.

As of April 30, there had also been protests at the following universities:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology, McGill University, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, Portland State University, Princeton University, Purdue University, Rice University, Swarthmore College, The New School, Arizona State University, Auraria Campus, Brown University, California State University, Sacramento, City College of New York, Barnard College, Cornell University, Emory University, University of New Mexico, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, University of Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh, University of Rochester, University of Utah, Vanderbilt University, Virginia Tech, Washington State University, Fashion Institute of Technology, George Washington University, Harvard University, Indiana University Bloomington Institute of Political Studies, Tufts University, Tulane University, University of Alberta, University of California Berkeley, University of Connecticut, University of Denver, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota Twin Cities,

A small handful of occupations and protests have sprung up at UK universities, which included the following as of May 1, 2024:

Warwick University, University of Leeds, University College London

What about other protests around the world?

There have been occupations and sit-ins at universities from France to New Zealand, including the following:

France: Paris Institute of Political Studies (Sciences Po), Sorbonne University

Italy: Sapienza University, Rome

New Zealand: University of Auckland

Australia: University of Melbourne, University of Sydney, University of Queensland, Australian National University in Canberra

Canada: McGill University, Concordia University, University of British Columbia, Vancouver

The unprecedented student demonstrations and the seriousness of the situation in Gaza are surely going to have an impact.

James J Zogby, in his insightful article “The impact of the student protests on Biden’s re-election,” published in the Washington Watch, published April 30, 2024, maintained that:130

Meanwhile, university student protests against US support for Israel’s war in Gaza have spread like wildfire. Last count, there have been sustained demonstrations on over 200 campuses. More recently, students have taken to establishing protest encampments in the center of some campuses. This began last week at Columbia University in New York. Ten days later there were encampments at almost four dozen universities. What’s been most striking is not only the way this effort has spread, but also the amazing diversity of the students involved in the demonstrations. There are Arab American students, to be sure, who’ve been joined by fellow students of every race and creed.

The leadership of the protesting students has been disciplined and eloquent in their demands for a ceasefire and an end to the genocide in Gaza. Many have also called on their universities to divest funds from entities contributing to the Israeli war

effort. The protesters were peaceful, though purposefully disruptive. At times they've occupied central locations on campus. They've also chanted, as demonstrators won't do. Yet, as noted by respected observers who've visited the protest sites, the protests have been peaceful and orderly...What's been ignored is that in most of the encampments, a disproportionately large number of the protesters are Jewish students. ...With the ire of the students directed not only at Israel's genocidal behaviors in Gaza but also at how the Biden administration has enabled this war to continue, the way these campus protests are playing out does not bode well for the President during this election year.... Through it all, the Biden White House has demonstrated only limited concern, apparently convinced that they'll weather this storm and still defeat Donald Trump in November. They dismiss polls showing the President losing support among young and "minority" voters. This is a dangerous miscalculation. As primary elections in several states have demonstrated, there is a hemorrhaging of support for the President's reelection. And as repression against student demonstrators continues, that opposition is solidifying. Should the war continue for several more months and the scene at this summer's Democratic Convention in Chicago be as ugly as it was in 1968, many young voters will be hard-pressed to vote for Mr. Biden. They won't vote for Mr. Trump. Most likely they'll either vote for a third party or not vote at all.

By May 1, 2024, protesters had assembled across a minimum of 30 US universities in the past month, frequently setting up tent encampments to voice their dissent against the escalating death toll resulting from Israel's conflict in the Gaza Strip. 131

Student protests are escalating in the US. The surge in protests across US campuses followed heightened tensions after Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7 and the extended Israeli military campaign in Gaza, resulting in significant Palestinian casualties. Students have rallied or set up tent encampments at dozens of schools across the US in recent days, expressing opposition to Israel's war in Gaza and demanding schools divest from companies that support Israel's government. Many of the schools have called in police to quell the protests.132

In a surprising development, student protests have been common across US campuses since the October 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel, and throughout the nearly eight-month Israeli war in Gaza.133

However, the latest surge in demonstrations began nearly two weeks ago amid outrage over Columbia University President Manouchehr Shafik's testimony to a US congressional committee, in which critics alleged she kowtowed to lawmakers while sidelining students at the university.

Among an array of demands, several protest movements have called for their schools to divest from Israel or weapons manufacturers related to the war. They have accused administrators across the country of weaponizing public safety and disingenuous claims of "antisemitism" to crack down on protests.<sup>134</sup>

The most recent bout of arrests also included 14 protesters at Tulane University in New Orleans, as well as arrests at the University of South Florida and the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

But the White House appeared to back the crackdown on the protesters on May 1, 2024, linking the demonstrations to anti-Semitism.

"They should not be able to disturb or disrupt the academic experience that students have," White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters.

"It is important that students and communities feel safe here. And at the same time, we are going to be forceful here and continue to underscore how anti-Semitism is hateful speech."<sup>135</sup>

Asked about pro-Israel protesters' attack on the student encampment at UCLA, Jean-Pierre declined to comment on the specifics. She said the White House rejects all forms of violence "broadly."

In Los Angeles, Mayor Karen Bass called the UCLA violence "absolutely abhorrent and inexcusable."

Meanwhile, the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) group condemned both the NYPD and Columbia University's actions.

Stefanie Fox, the group's executive director said, the school was on the wrong side of history once again as it was "in its oppression of the student anti-war movement of 1968, and wrong again in its oppression of the student movement against South African apartheid in 1985".<sup>136</sup>

After hundreds of arrests across American universities, tensions have been further escalated. Students are refusing to capitulate and end the stir over Israel's military actions in Gaza, with incidents of arrests in New York and clashes in California. In New York City, approximately 282 arrests were recorded by the NYPD at Columbia University and the City

College of New York from very early May 1, 2024. This crackdown coincided with the clearance of students who had occupied Columbia University's Hamilton Hall since April 30.<sup>137</sup>

Once a symbol of activism during South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, Hamilton Hall was dubbed "Hind's Hall" in memory of six-year-old Hind Rajab, tragically killed with her family by Israeli forces in Gaza. Many of those behind the protest were claimed to be "outside agitators" with no association with the university, according to New York City Mayor Eric Adams. Adams stated that young protesters "are being influenced by those who are professionals at radicalizing our children".<sup>138</sup>

Deputy Commissioner of Operations emphasized Columbia University's request for police assistance in reclaiming their campus for the NYPD, Kaz Daughtry, who stated that the police were "dispersing the unlawful encampment and persons barricaded inside of university buildings and restoring order."<sup>139</sup> Meanwhile, tensions soared at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) as pro-Israel counter-protesters clashed with pro-Palestine demonstrators. Witnesses reported attempts to dismantle the pro-Palestine encampment, leading to violence with objects being hurled and sticks wielded. In response to escalating violence at UCLA, intervention was made by the Los Angeles Police Department at the university's request, addressing multiple incidents of aggression within the encampment.<sup>140</sup> Despite the turmoil, pro-Palestine demonstrators at UCLA remained steadfast, with their resilience highlighted by reporter Rob Reynolds amid adversity. Arrests extended beyond New York, with 14 protesters being detained at Tulane University in New Orleans, alongside arrests at the University of South Florida and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, as per media reports. The violence at UCLA was denounced as abhorrent and inexcusable by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass. The police crackdown at Columbia University was defended by New York City Mayor Eric Adams, attributing the protests to individuals unaffiliated with the institution.<sup>141</sup>

These protests have "presented a dilemma for university administrators as they navigate between upholding free speech rights and addressing concerns of criminal behavior, anti-Semitic rhetoric, and hate speech."<sup>142</sup>

As pro-Palestinian protests continue to rock universities across the United States, the Biden administration, whose backing of Israel has sparked ire among many demonstrators, is also wrestling with finding a delicate balance on the issue.<sup>143</sup>

White House spokeswoman Karine Jean-Pierre on May 1, 2024, condemned “a small percentage of students” who have been disruptive after a night of clashes and arrests on several campuses. “Students have the right to feel safe. They have the right to learn... to do this without disruption. And they have a right to feel safe on campus,” Jean-Pierre told reporters, adding: “We are going to be forceful here and continue to underscore how anti-Semitism is hateful speech.”<sup>144</sup>

She also acknowledged the war in Gaza was “painful” and “assured that Biden supported the right to peaceful protest.”<sup>145</sup>

Law enforcement officers massed by the hundreds on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles after darkness fell on May 1, 2024, in preparation to clear out a pro-Palestinian protest camp attacked the night before by pro-Israel supporters. UCLA had canceled classes for the day following a violent clash on May 1, 2024, between the encampment's occupants and a group of masked counter-demonstrators who mounted an assault on the tent city with sticks and poles. The occupants of the outdoor protest camp, set up last week, had remained otherwise largely peaceful before the melee, which university officials blamed on “instigators,” vowing an investigation.<sup>146</sup>

The May 2, 2024 raid also came a day after police in New York City arrested pro-Palestinian activists who occupied a building at Columbia University and removed a tent city from the campus of the Ivy League school. Police arrested a total of about 300 people at Columbia and City College of New York, Mayor Eric Adams said. Many of those arrested were charged with trespassing and criminal mischief.<sup>147</sup>

The clashes at UCLA and in New York were part of the biggest outpouring of US student activism since the anti-racism rallies and marches of 2020. The protests follow the 7 October attack on southern Israel by Hamas militants from the Gaza Strip and the ensuing Israeli offensive on the Palestinian enclave. Students have rallied or set up tent encampments at dozens of schools across the US in recent days, expressing opposition to Israel's war in Gaza and demanding schools divest from companies that support Israel's government. Many of the schools have called in police to quell the protests.<sup>148</sup>

An article entitled “As student protests shake US campuses, Biden mum,” published in *Inquirer*, on May 2, 2024, aptly argued that:<sup>149</sup>

What does Joe Biden have to say about the rowdy student protests against Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza that have rocked American college campuses in recent weeks? Almost nothing. The US president has so far avoided the contentious subject as it is likely to complicate his reelection campaign...Biden's reluctance to weigh in on the biggest and most prolonged unrest to rock US campuses since the Vietnam war protests of the 1960s and 70s has not gone unnoticed by Trump....The protests put Biden in a difficult spot because for his coalition of voters from 2020, he relied heavily on young people in addition to Muslims and Arab Americans," said Alex Keena, who teaches political science at Virginia Commonwealth University. James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, said the White House is "apparently convinced that they'll weather this storm and still defeat Donald Trump in November." He added: "This is a dangerous miscalculation." Since the start of the war in Gaza, which was triggered by the unprecedented attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7, Biden has faced criticism for his unconditional support for Israel. When Biden travels, he is often met by demonstrators chanting "Genocidal Joe" and demanding a ceasefire. A Harvard University poll published last month showed Biden was more popular with Americans under 30 than his rival, with 45 percent of respondents intending to vote for Biden and 37 percent for Trump. But the eight-point difference is much smaller compared to a similar poll four years ago, when Biden led by 23 points. Biden could still win back the hearts of some young voters, if a ceasefire agreement coupled with the release of hostages held in Gaza is reached between Hamas and Israel...Washington has been pushing for a ceasefire deal for weeks. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Israel Wednesday on his seventh Middle East crisis tour since the war broke out, said "Hamas needs to say, 'yes' and needs to get this done." If the agreement falls through and campus unrest continues, that will cloud the Democratic National Convention in August in Chicago, where Biden will be officially nominated for president.

Fawaz Turki, in his excellent article entitled "Student protests in the US against Israel's Gaza War Evoke the spirit of '68" published in Gulf News, May 2, 2024, convincingly has argued that: 150

Since I was active in the Vietnam anti-war movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it may not seem surprising that news — not to mention striking images — of the pro-Palestinian student protests on campuses across the US represent for me, old geezer that I now am, not only a nostalgia for the absolutes of yore but also a time of reflection on the dynamic and relevance of student protests in social life. The round-the-clock tent encampments erected by students on quads and lawns at dozens of campuses across the country, all the way from Northeastern University in

Boston to Arizona State University in Tempe, 2,500 miles away, are now a common sight — and headline news. These nationwide demonstrations, held by students to express their opposition to Israel's genocidal war in Gaza, seem to have come out of left field soon after April 18 — all erupting, to everyone's surprise, seemingly simultaneously and as if in lockstep, though there was no steady hand at the helm directing them by any central body of student leaders. If you have wondered, as I have, how to explain the psychodynamic of this phenomenon, Omar Wasan, a professor at UC-Berkeley, who studies protest movements, has an answer. He was quoted in the New York Times on Sunday as saying that how protest movements spread is anchored in what is known in sociology as the "ovation model." In a theatre, he theorized, "if some people in the front start to stand up," to give a standing ovation, then other people start to stand up too, followed by a cascade throughout the auditorium. Well, we know that in this case the academic ovation was started by Columbia University, which was, as it were, the first academic institution in the front of the auditorium to stand up on that day in April. And I tell you, everything about this Ivy League university — which traditionally has required its students to encounter what it calls "cornerstone ideas and theories from across literature, philosophy, history, science, and the arts" — makes it the most likely place for that metaphoric ovation to begin. You see, Columbia has a storied history in protest folklore, a history that an old geezer like myself with a good memory can recall vividly...That was 1968, or if you wish, as called the era, the "Sixties", and I tell you that no string of words can recapture the inner excitement and the passionate adventure of spirit unleashed by the student anti-war movement at the time, one that Columbia helped, single-handedly, to unleash across the country. Light show right now from the Columbia encampment at Columbia University outside of Hind's Hall. Long live Hind's Hall, every fascist state will fall! Look, you, and I know that the idealistic dreams of those students were not realized then, have not been realized since, and will not likely ever be realized in the America of our time. But some defeats are as important as victories. Just as, say, the Paris Commune of 1871 — crushed in blood after barely seventy days — has lived on in historical and popular memory, the student uprisings in 1968 still represent a hope that, even if students' dreams (for human rights, racial justice, social equity, and a moral foreign policy) were not fulfilled, what they did was worth doing. Its memory would go on to teach and inspire. That is what happened in April 1968, almost exactly 56 years ago to the day, has bequeathed this new generation of students. It's a legacy they are replicating on their campuses across the country, however harsh police crackdowns on them will become. I say all the power to you, kids, rock on.



Pro-Palestine protests in US universities have intensified with violence reported on campuses and over 300 being arrested. In recent days, students have rallied or set up encampments at dozens of universities expressing opposition to Israel's war in Gaza and demanding institutes divest from companies that support Israel's government.<sup>151</sup>

On May 2, 2024, UCLA pro-Palestine protests continue after a stand-off with riot police. Law enforcement officers in riot gear massed by the hundreds on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles after darkness fell on May 2, 2024, in preparation to clear out a pro-Palestinian protest camp attacked the night before by pro-Israel supporters. The chaotic scenes at UCLA came just hours after New York police burst into a building occupied by anti-war protesters at Columbia University on Tuesday night, arresting over 300 protesters. Some of the activists on the UCLA campus were seen donning hard hats, goggles, and respirator masks in anticipation of the raid a day after the university declared the encampment unlawful, while others chanted “we’re not leaving.”<sup>152</sup>

Hundreds of police personnel gathered on the campus of the University of California at Los Angeles on May 2, 2024, while bracing to clear out a pro-Palestinian protest camp that was attacked the night before by pro-Israel supporters. Live television footage showed police in tactical gear filing onto the UCLA campus adjacent to a complex of tents occupied by throngs of demonstrators. There was an anticipation of the raid a day after the university declared the encampment unlawful.<sup>153</sup>

A second night of violence has been unleashed on the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) as police have begun to descend on a pro-Palestine encampment.

Students have been fortifying their barricades in preparation for another night of conflict as they attempt to hold their ground as a sign of protest. Those within the walls of the encampment are wearing helmets, and goggles and prepping medical aid – with student doctors reportedly on-site to Hellos Angeles Police have reportedly made a dispersal announcement to protestors in the encampment – thought to be in the hundreds. ‘You risk serious injury,’ one announcement reportedly said. ret hose within the walls of the encampment were heard chanting ‘We’re not leaving!’ and ‘Shame on you LAPD’ in response to the dispersal order, which threatened those inside with arrest. Earlier reports appeared to show snipers on surrounding buildings near the encampment as being in Royce Hall, next to the square where protestors are gathered. The protests on the UCLA campus have been going on for weeks.<sup>154</sup>

Student protests are also happening in Britain. Scores of Pro-Palestine students have also gathered in protest on university lawns across Britain to take a stand against Israel's war

in Gaza following violent demonstrations at campuses in the US. Tents have been pitched outside university buildings by protestors who are calling on their universities to divest from Israel in response to its military operation in the Gaza Strip.

Students from the University of Manchester (UOM) have filled Brunswick Park with banners, plaques, and Palestinian flags to call for the university to 'end its partnership with systems which support Israel'.

One banner read: 'UOM blood on your hands', while another said: 'UOM supports Israeli Genocide.'

In Bristol, hand-painted banners were erected between tents, emblazoned with messages of defiance as students lobbied their university to cut ties with arms companies and back calls for a ceasefire as the war rages on in the Levant.<sup>155</sup>

Large crowds have also been forming in Newcastle, as students say their protest will 'highlight the institution's investment strategy and its complicity in the Israeli military's war crimes in Gaza and the West Bank'.

Elsewhere, several students walked out of lectures at Sheffield University yesterday to take part in the demonstration and are refusing to leave until the universities meet their demands.

Leeds students also announced plans to camp 'indefinitely' outside their student union, occupying land opposite the building and pledging to remain until the university, in their view, is 'no longer complicit in the oppression of the Palestinian people'.<sup>156</sup>

Meanwhile, doubts grew on May 2, 2024, over the fate of a Gaza truce plan that, as the week began, had raised hopes of an end to nearly seven months of war between Israel and Palestinian Hamas militants. Senior Hamas official Osama Hamdan said that the movement's position on the truce proposal was "negative" for the time being.

The group's aim remains an "end to this war", senior Hamas official Suhail al-Hindi said. The Hamas goal is at odds with the stated position of Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>157</sup>

Regardless of whether a truce is reached, Netanyahu vows to send Israeli troops into Rafah against Hamas fighters there. The Biden administration "reiterated their opposition to such an operation without a plan to protect the civilians."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has urged the Islamist movement to accept the truce plan. " Hamas needs to say yes and needs to get this done," Blinken said on May 1, 2024, while in Israel on his latest Middle East mission. 158

In early April there had also been initial optimism over a possible truce deal, only to have Israel and Hamas later accuse each other of undermining negotiations.

Talks on a potential deal to pause the bloodiest-ever Gaza war have been held in Cairo involving US, Egyptian, and Qatari mediators. Hamas wants a permanent ceasefire baked into it and Israel's withdrawal from Gaza remained a likely point of contention. 159

Global public opinion matters, especially global youth, and will certainly shape politics in some manner. Israel is already bowing to growing outside public pressure and has made a concerted effort in recent days to show it's stepping up aid distribution in Gaza. There's pressure for a cease-fire, too, from college campuses across the US, which is Israel's most important ally and benefactor, and also parallel protests taking shape on European university campuses. The anti-war demonstrations have not gone unnoticed by displaced Palestinian students in Rafah, whose education came to an abrupt halt on October 7.

Meanwhile, the Palestinians continue to suffer from Israeli brutal offensives. The US isn't doing enough to stop Israel from destroying what remains of Gaza. Today, the humanitarian situation there is terrible. Israel must be stopped from invading Rafah as it would be indeed catastrophic. Israel's plans to eliminate Hamas must be scuttled by the Biden administration as it isn't doable. Hamas is much more than a military force. It is an idea of resistance in the popular Arab mind that cannot be ended now. Global public opinion has turned against Israel and is now calling for an end to the Gaza war. Therefore, there must be an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The world leadership must now move on to a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict. Only the US can force Israel to move in that direction. No one else has the leverage on Israel. As expected, the Biden administration is still playing politics with the whole Palestinian-Israeli conflict issue. That is most tragic and unfortunate but remains a hard reality, nonetheless. However, given the domestic pressure on the Biden administration because of the current and massive student demonstrations in the US may yet become enough significant political pressure to somehow turn the tide and affect the outcome of the Gaza war situation. The new globalist student movement is a product of new global political forces unleashed by global media, especially social media, 24/7 news, and global networking because of the Internet's global expansion, the like of which hasn't been seen before. The Biden and the Netanyahu administrations are clueless about the

power of this new phenomenon. They are grounded in old knowledge and decadent brick-and-mortar establishments and think tanks feeding them constantly. They will soon learn at their peril. The world is changing right before our eyes, an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal may be realized, sooner than later.

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