

# Biden Must Choose Between a Ceasefire in Gaza and a Regional War

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*In the topsy-turvy world of corporate media reporting on U.S. foreign policy, we have been led to believe that U.S. air strikes on Yemen, Iraq and Syria are legitimate and responsible efforts to contain the expanding war over Israel's genocide in Gaza, while the actions of the Houthi government in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Iran and its allies in Iraq and Syria are all dangerous escalations.*

*In fact, it is U.S. and Israeli actions that are driving the expansion of the war, while Iran and others are genuinely trying to find effective ways to counter and end Israel's genocide in Gaza while avoiding a full-scale regional war.*

We are encouraged by Egypt and Qatar's efforts to [mediate](#) a ceasefire and the release of hostages and prisoners-of-war by both sides. But it is important to recognize who are the aggressors, who are the victims, and how regional actors are taking incremental but increasingly forceful action to respond to genocide.

A near-total Israeli communications blackout in Gaza has reduced the flow of images of the ongoing massacre on our TVs and computer screens, but the slaughter has not abated. Israel is bombing and attacking Khan Younis, the largest city in the southern Gaza Strip, as ruthlessly as it did Gaza City in the north. Israeli forces and U.S. weapons have [killed](#) an average of 240 Gazans per day for more than three months, and 70% of the dead [are still](#) women and children.

Israel has repeatedly claimed it is taking new steps to protect civilians, but that is only a public relations exercise. The Israeli government is still using 2,000 pound and even [5,000 pound](#) "bunker-buster" bombs to dehouse the people of Gaza and herd them toward the Egyptian border, while it debates how to push the survivors over the border into exile, which it euphemistically refers to as "voluntary emigration."

People throughout the Middle East are horrified by Israel's slaughter and plans for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, but most of their governments will only condemn Israel verbally. The Houthi government in Yemen is different. Unable to directly send forces to fight for Gaza, they began enforcing a blockade of the Red Sea against Israeli-owned ships and other ships carrying goods to or from Israel. Since mid-November 2023, the Houthis have [conducted about](#) 30 attacks on international vessels transiting the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden but none of the attacks have caused casualties or sunk any ships.

In response, the Biden administration, without Congressional approval, has launched at least six rounds of bombing, including airstrikes on Sanaa, the capital of Yemen. The United Kingdom has contributed a few warplanes, while Australia, Canada, Holland and Bahrain also act as cheerleaders to provide the U.S. with the cover of leading an "international coalition."

President Biden has [admitted](#) that U.S. bombing will not force Yemen to lift its blockade, but he insists that the U.S. will keep attacking it anyway. Saudi Arabia dropped [70,000](#) mostly American (and some British) bombs on Yemen in a 7-year war, but utterly failed to defeat the Houthi government and armed forces.

Yemenis naturally identify with the plight of the Palestinians in Gaza, and a [million](#) Yemenis took to the street to support their country's position challenging Israel and the United States. Yemen is no Iranian puppet, but as with Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran's Iraqi and Syrian allies, Iran has trained the Yemenis to build and deploy increasingly powerful anti-ship, cruise and ballistic missiles.

The Houthis have made it clear that they will stop the attacks once Israel stops its slaughter in Gaza. It beggars belief that instead of pressing for a ceasefire in Gaza, Biden and his clueless advisers are instead choosing to deepen U.S. military involvement in a regional Middle East conflict.

The United States and Israel have now conducted airstrikes on the capitals of four neighboring countries: Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Iran also suspects U.S. and Israeli spy agencies of a role in two bomb explosions in Kerman in Iran, which killed about 90 people and wounded hundreds more at a commemoration of the fourth anniversary of the U.S. assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in January 2020.

On January 20th, an [Israeli bombing](#) killed 10 people in Damascus, including 5 Iranian officials. After repeated Israeli airstrikes on Syria, Russia has now [deployed](#) warplanes to patrol the border to deter Israeli attacks, and has reoccupied two previously vacated outposts built to monitor violations of the demilitarized zone between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

Iran has responded to the terrorist bombings in Kerman and Israeli assassinations of Iranian officials with missile strikes on targets in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. Iranian Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian has strongly defended Iran's claim that the [strikes on Erbil](#) in Iraqi Kurdistan targeted agents of Israel's Mossad spy agency.

Eleven Iranian ballistic missiles destroyed an Iraqi Kurdish intelligence facility and the home of a senior intelligence officer, and also killed a wealthy real estate developer and businessman, Peshraw Dizayee, who had been [accused](#) of working for the Mossad, as well as of smuggling Iraqi oil from Kurdistan to Israel via Turkey.

The targets of Iran's missile strikes in northwest Syria were the headquarters of two separate ISIS-linked groups in Idlib province. The strikes precisely hit both buildings and [demolished](#) them, at a range of 800 miles, using Iran's newest ballistic missiles called Kheybar Shakan or Castle Blasters, a name that equates today's U.S. bases in the Middle East with the 12th and 13th century European crusader castles whose ruins still dot the landscape.

Iran launched its missiles, not from north-west Iran, which would have been closer to Idlib, but from Khuzestan province in south-west Iran, which is closer to Tel Aviv than to Idlib. So these missile strikes were clearly intended as a warning to Israel and the United States that Iran can conduct precise attacks on Israel and U.S. "crusader castles" in the Middle East if they continue their aggression against Palestine, Iran and their allies.

At the same time, the U.S. has escalated its tit-for-tat airstrikes against Iranian-backed Iraqi militias. The Iraqi government has consistently protested U.S. airstrikes against the militias as violations of Iraqi sovereignty. Prime Minister Sudani's military [spokesman](#) called the latest U.S. airstrikes "acts of aggression," and said, "This unacceptable act undermines years of cooperation... at a time when the region is already grappling with the danger of expanding conflict, the repercussions of the aggression on Gaza."

After its fiascos in Afghanistan and Iraq killed thousands of U.S. troops, the United States has [avoided](#) large numbers of U.S. military casualties for ten years. The last time the U.S. lost more than a hundred troops killed in action in a year was in 2013, when 128 Americans were killed in Afghanistan.

Since then, the United States has relied on bombing and proxy forces to fight its wars. The only lesson U.S. leaders seem to have learned from their lost wars is to avoid putting U.S. "boots on the ground." The U.S. [dropped](#) over 120,000 bombs and missiles on Iraq and Syria in its war on ISIS, while Iraqis, Syrians and Kurds did all the hard fighting on the ground.

In Ukraine, the U.S. and its allies found a willing proxy to fight Russia. But after two years of war, Ukrainian casualties have become unsustainable and new recruits are hard to find. The Ukrainian parliament has rejected a bill to authorize forced conscription, and no amount of U.S. weapons can persuade more Ukrainians to sacrifice their lives for a Ukrainian [nationalism](#) that treats large numbers of them, especially Russian speakers, as second class citizens.

Now, in Gaza, Yemen and Iraq, the United States has waded into what it hoped would be another "US-casualty-free" war. Instead, the U.S.-Israeli genocide in Gaza is unleashing a crisis that is spinning out of control across the region and may soon directly involve U.S. troops in combat. This will shatter the illusion of peace Americans have lived in for the last ten years of U.S. bombing and proxy wars, and bring the reality of U.S. militarism and warmaking home with a vengeance.

Biden can continue to give Israel carte-blanc to wipe out the people of Gaza, and watch as the region becomes further engulfed in flames, or he can listen to his own campaign staff, who [warn](#) that it's a "moral and electoral imperative" to insist on a ceasefire. The choice could not be more stark.

*Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies are the authors of [War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict](#), published by OR Books in November 2022.*

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