

United States: Netanyahu Pushes Even the Most pro-Israel U.S. Democrats to Take Previously Unimaginable Measures

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent remarks reaffirming Israel's intent on maintaining security control over 'the entire area west of the Jordan' after the Gaza war, has led to rifts between a growing number of U.S. Democratic lawmakers and the Biden administration

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WASHINGTON - All signs indicate that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's repeated dismissal of a potential two-state solution could serve as one of the final blows to continued Democratic support for Israel's war in Gaza.

"We strongly disagree with the prime minister," said a statement this week by 15 Jewish Democrats, led by Rep. Jerry Nadler, the unofficial dean of Jewish House Democrats. "A [two-state solution](#) is the path forward," they said, responding to [Netanyahu's comments on the matter](#) before and after conversations with U.S. President Joe Biden.

One of the lawmakers on the statement, Rep. Brad Sherman, is among the most traditionally pro-Israel members of Congress. He made waves last year when [he criticized](#) Netanyahu's judicial coup and alliance with far-right lawmakers early on.

"First Netanyahu fails Israel by basing a highly inadequate portion of the IDF near Gaza in the months before [October 7](#). Then he ignores the warnings of October 6. Then this," he posted on X last week, sharing an article detailing Netanyahu's opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state.

Sen. Brian Schatz, a Jewish Democrat from Hawaii, told NBC that Netanyahu is "at every opportunity making things worse." Schatz will be introducing an amendment of his own to the national security supplemental specifically focused on the [two-state solution](#).

He is joined by 48 other senators on the resolution - illustrating the unanimity of opposition to Netanyahu's positions.

Sen. Ron Wyden noted that "a two-state solution is an essential condition to securing Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state at peace with its neighbors, while recognizing Palestinian aspirations

for a state of their own. I've said that for years. The policies of the Netanyahu government, however, have only driven the region farther away from a peaceful, negotiated solution."

Sen. Tina Smith, meanwhile, stated: "A two-state solution is the only viable path towards long-term peace and security, dignity, and opportunity for Israelis and Palestinians alike. President Biden and Secretary [of State Antony] Blinken have made it clear to Prime Minister Netanyahu and his extremist right-wing coalition that he must reverse his dangerous rhetoric and commit to the work of advancing a two-state solution that builds a just and stable future for all the region's people," added .

'We obviously see it differently'

Netanyahu, a day before his first call with Biden in nearly a month, said last Thursday that "Israel must have security control of the entire area west of the Jordan," adding: "it's a necessary requirement, and it clashes with the idea of sovereignty."

He continued: "This truth I tell our American friends. And I also obstructed an attempt to coerce us into a reality that would harm the security of Israel. An Israeli prime minister must be able to say no even to our best friends, to say no when necessary and to say yes when possible."

The White House attempted to minimize the gaps between Biden and Netanyahu before the two leaders' call, with U.S. National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby noting, "This is not a new comment by Prime Minister Netanyahu."

U.S. President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during Biden's visit to Israel, in October. Credit: Evan Vucci/AP

"We obviously see it differently. We believe that the Palestinians have every right to live in an independent state with peace and security. And the president and his team is going to continue to work on that," Kirby said.

The Biden-Netanyahu call last Friday - the first after a contentious call centered on ongoing disagreements concerning the Palestinian Authority, specifically [withheld tax revenues](#) - focused on Biden's "day after" plan for the region, which cannot be addressed "without discussing the Palestinian people's aspirations and governance in Gaza," Kirby stated.

On the subject of continued [inciteful rhetoric](#) from Netanyahu's far-right allies such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, Jewish Democrats have directly appealed to the Israeli Embassy in Washington and Ambassador Michael Herzog ([as first reported by Axios](#)) about the diplomatic damage their rhetoric has caused for Israeli support in the U.S.

While the behind-the-scenes frustration has only emerged via leaks to the media, congressional Democrats are taking all of the disagreements extremely seriously. This is leading to rifts between them and the Biden administration concerning Israel that are quickly becoming wider than ever.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, who has steadily emerged as a leading voice advocating for Palestinian rights in Washington, became the fourth senator to publicly call for a cease-fire this week. Sixty-four members of Congress - 12 percent of all U.S. lawmakers - have now explicitly issued similar calls, a gradually yet undeniable uptick that is diametrically opposed to Biden's position.

U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (center left) and Senator Jeff Merkley talk to the press as they visit

the Egyptian side of the Rafah border crossing with the southern Gaza Strip along with a U.S. delegation, this month.Credit: AFP

These lawmakers, too, include undeniably pro-Israel Jewish lawmakers such as Rep. David Trone, a major [AIPAC donor](#) and vocal anti-[BDS](#) advocate. “What happened on Oct. 7 was absolutely horrendous and incomprehensible. But what’s happened since then is also horrendous and incomprehensible,” Trone, who is currently running to replace Maryland’s retiring Sen. Ben Cardin in the Senate, told journalists recently. “We need a permanent cease-fire and the hostages released.”

Trone specifically flagged Netanyahu as “a large part of our problem,” adding that “he has to go.”

“He’s their Trump, really,” he continued. “I think we’ve got to think about where is the issue – and he is the issue, because he’s the one driving this thing relentlessly.”

Appealing to Biden on several fronts

The divisions, however, are not limited to rhetoric. They are manifesting in legislation relating to Israel’s war, and the general U.S.-Israel relationship at large, in ways that seemed unimaginable in recent years.

Eleven senators voted to advance Sen. Bernie Sanders’ resolution calling for an official investigation into Israel’s military campaign in Gaza, on the grounds that U.S. foreign assistance to Israel is in violation of U.S. law.

The numbers may suggest the would-be unprecedented measure was an undeniable failure, but progressives stress that the fact that over 20 percent of Senate Democrats backed Sanders’ efforts is an undeniable statement and trend line.

Eighteen senators, meanwhile, are backing an amendment led by Van Hollen, Schatz alongside Sens. Dick Durbin and Tim Kaine – two of the most senior and well-respected Democrats in Washington – requiring that [weapons received](#) by any country in Biden’s national security supplemental aid package are “used in accordance with U.S. law, international humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict.”

A U.S. C-17 at the Nevatim Air Base in southern Israel delivering crates of U.S. munitions for Israel, in October.Credit: Lolita Baldor/AP

Sen. Raphael Warnock, one of the co-sponsors, cited his faith behind his reasoning for supporting the move. “As a pastor I have a profound reverence for life,” he said, “and as we continue working with our allies to navigate wars in the Middle East and beyond, it is imperative that the United States ensures any country receiving our security assistance is using those resources in a way that is consistent with American values and international law.”

Fellow Georgia senator Jon Ossoff, whose floor speech several months ago helped set the path for the current Democratic consensus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, added: “Congress has an obligation to oversee how foreign governments are using American weapons. U.S. aid must be consistent with our national interests and our laws.”

Kaine is additionally proposing separate legislation that would force the Biden administration to continue the traditional processes of informing Congress of U.S. arms sales. This comes after Biden bypassed normal procedures twice in December in order to expedite weapons sales to Israel.

House Democrats, meanwhile, are appealing directly to Biden on several fronts. Sixty House Democrats, led by Reps. Ayanna Pressley and Jamie Raskin, urged Secretary of State Blinken to firmly oppose any Israeli plans that would lead to forced [population transfer](#) of Palestinians out of Gaza.

And given the developments of the past several months, and the fact that prior to October 7 congressional Democrats were already highly wary of any diplomatic initiatives reliant on rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Biden's administration apparent doubling-down on Israeli-Saudi normalization as its path out of the current Mideast conflict has caused further alarm.

According to [a report in the HuffPost](#), an initiative is in the works aimed against senior U.S. official Brett McGurk, over the plans he is spearheading aimed at prioritizing Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization as a means toward an end goal of a two-state solution.

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Washington

P.S.

- Haaretz. Jan 24, 2024 9:29 pm IST:
<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2024-01-24/ty-article/.premium/netanyahu-pushes-most-pro-israel-u-s-democrats-to-take-previously-unimaginable-measures/0000018d-3c3c-d02c-a79f-7fbdfa90000>