

Israel-Hamas war

Western rush to back Israel erodes developing countries' support for Ukraine

Backing for Israeli assault on Gaza angers 'Global South' after US and EU sought to build consensus against Russia

Henry Foy in Brussels 6 HOURS AGO

Western support for Israel's assault on Gaza has poisoned efforts to build consensus with significant developing countries on condemning Russia's war against Ukraine, officials and diplomats have warned.

The reaction to the October 7 attack on Israel by Islamist militant group [Hamas and to Israel's vow to hit back](#) against Gaza has undone months of work to paint Moscow as a global pariah for breaching international law, they said, exposing the US, EU and their allies to charges of hypocrisy.

In the flurry of emergency diplomatic visits, video conferences and calls, western officials have been accused of failing to defend the interests of 2.3mn Palestinians in their rush to condemn the Hamas attack and support Israel.

In the first days after Hamas's assault, some western diplomats worried that the US was giving carte blanche to Israel to attack Gaza with full force.

That had eroded efforts since [Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine](#) to build consensus with leading states in the so-called Global South — such as India, Brazil and South Africa — on the need to uphold a global rules-based order, said more than a dozen western officials.

The backlash had solidified entrenched positions in the developing world on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, officials said. They warned that this could derail future diplomatic efforts on Ukraine.

“We have definitely lost the battle in the Global South,” said one senior [G7](#) diplomat. “All the work we have done with the Global South [over Ukraine] has been lost . . . Forget about rules, forget about world order. They won't ever listen to us again.”

Many developing countries have traditionally supported the Palestinian cause, seeing it through the prism of self-determination and a push against the global dominance of the US, Israel's most important backer.

Some American diplomats are privately concerned that the Biden administration's response has failed to acknowledge how its broad support of Israel can alienate much of the Global South.



Vladimir Putin, left, and Xi Jinping at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday at the Belt and Road Initiative © Sputnik/Sergei Savostyanov/Pool/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock/Reuters

In the Middle East, many Arabs feel that the US and other western powers have never held Israel to account over its treatment of Palestinians, or paid enough attention to brutal conflicts in Syria, Yemen and Libya.

Russia and its ally China have cultivated warm ties with the Palestinians. Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, on Tuesday met with Chinese leader Xi Jinping in Beijing.

“What we said about Ukraine has to apply to Gaza. Otherwise we lose all our credibility,” the senior G7 diplomat added. “The Brazilians, the South Africans, the Indonesians: why should they ever believe what we say about human rights?”

Just four weeks before the Hamas assault on Israel, leaders from the US, EU and western allies attended the G20 summit in New Delhi and asked developing nations to condemn Russia's attacks on Ukrainian civilians in order to uphold respect for the UN charter and international law.

Since last Sunday, many of those officials told the Financial Times they have had the same argument read back at them in demands for condemnation of Israel's retaliatory assault on Gaza, and of its decision to restrict water, electricity and gas supplies there.

In recent days Russia has sought to pass a UN security council resolution condemning violence against civilians in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, without specifically mentioning Hamas. The council rejected its resolution on Monday.

“I mean, let’s be frank. This is a gift from heaven for Russia,” said a senior EU official. “I think it’s damaging what’s happening . . . because Russia is exploiting the crisis and saying, ‘Look, the global order that has been built after the second world war is not working for you,’ and addressing 1bn inhabitants in the Middle East or in the Arab world.”

Arab states, particularly Jordan and Egypt, have pressed western officials to harden their tone on protecting Gaza’s civilians. “If you describe cutting off water, food and electricity in Ukraine as a war crime, then you should say the same thing about Gaza,” said one Arab official.

They noted a shift in tone from some western governments in recent days. Since Sunday, the EU and UK have announced an increase in aid shipments to Gaza.

US president Joe Biden was due to visit Israel on Wednesday before meeting the leaders of Jordan, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority in Amman. The second leg of that trip [has been cancelled](#) after a deadly explosion at a Gaza hospital on Tuesday evening. The White House said he would “reiterate that Hamas does not stand for the Palestinian people’s right to dignity and self-determination and discuss the humanitarian needs of civilians in Gaza”.

In a sign of concerted efforts to maintain contact with developing countries, James Cleverly, UK foreign secretary, said on Tuesday he had spoken to the foreign ministers of Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, Morocco and Saudi Arabia in recent days.

At an emergency video summit of EU leaders on Tuesday, several leaders warned that failing to uphold the rights of Palestinians in Gaza risked exposing western states to the charge of hypocrisy, said multiple people briefed on the discussion.





Ursula von der Leyen, centre, European Commission president, visits the Kfar Aza kibbutz near the border of the Gaza Strip © Bea Bar Kallos/European Commission/dpa

That discussion was prompted by irritation across EU capitals over European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen’s decision to travel to Israel last week without a mandate from the bloc’s 27 member states or an agreed common position. Dublin, Madrid and Luxembourg were upset at her lack of reference to international humanitarian law when she spoke in Tel Aviv.

“What New Delhi, Jakarta and Brasília want to see is a common position on these issues, and consistency. And if they don’t see that . . . then on the major global issues there’s a certain danger EU, G7, Nato will not be taken seriously,” said Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, former Nato secretary-general.

“We, the west, do not call the shots any more, and the Global South says: ‘Please, we have a voice as well which you have neglected for some time,’” added de Hoop Scheffer, now chair of the Clingendael Institute, a Dutch think-tank.

Russia’s proposed UN security council resolution garnered support from only four countries — China, the United Arab Emirates, Mozambique and Gabon — but many western diplomats worry that an amended Russian resolution could gain the nine votes required to pass. The US, UK or France might then veto it, handing Moscow a propaganda victory.

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“We have to prevent Russia . . . supported by the Chinese . . . taking the initiative to use this against us,” said a senior western diplomat.

“There’s a risk that at the next vote in the [UN] General Assembly on supporting Ukraine, we’ll see a big explosion in the number of abstentions.”

France, in particular, is concerned about the risk of escalation in the Hamas-Israel conflict. It believes Russia is no longer playing the traditional “great power” role of

[for humanitarian relief](#)

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restraining its allies in the region, but instead sees an opportunity to consume US resources and distract from Ukraine.

“Russia has a huge stake in prolonging this conflict, given the distraction value . . . and the use in shifting the global narrative,” said

one western foreign minister.

EU and US diplomats will also use Friday’s summit in the White House between Biden, von der Leyen and EU council president Charles Michel, who represents the EU’s 27 national leaders, to forge a common position.

“Europe has to hold the line here,” the minister said. “We were a bit of a mess to begin with but I think we’re better co-ordinated now in terms of defending fundamental rights and making sure we see both sides.”

Additional reporting by Andrew England in London, Ben Hall in Paris and Felicia Schwartz in Washington

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