

**Israel-Hamas war**

**Arab world directs anger at US**

**and the west for Gaza**

**devastation**



Sweeping resentment driven by what many see  
as double standards over Israel-Hamas war

**Raya Jalabi** in Beirut 8 HOURS AGO

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Rashad has clashed with family about the US for as long as he can remember, defending America as a “force for good” when relatives railed against US military interventions.

When they complained that Washington pushed “liberal values” down Arab throats, Rashad replied that someone had to support human rights in an illiberal region. But “everything changed” after the October 7 attack on Israel, said the Lebanese-Saudi, as the US gave its staunch backing to the Jewish state’s retaliatory offensive in Gaza.

“That’s when I realised everything I’d been defending was a lie,” said the 26-year-old, who requested his surname be withheld. “America doesn’t care about human rights . . . Not only is it watching Israel commit genocide, it’s helping them do it. And then they have the audacity to turn around and lecture us about humanity.”

The comments reflect the feverish anger towards the US that has swept over the Arab world, fuelled by perceptions of Washington’s double standards over its support for Israel’s offensive as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza has spiralled.

Western and Arab officials fear that the US — long the dominant foreign power in the region — is alienating an entire cohort of young Arabs, likening the outrage triggered by the Gaza war to the regional backlash that followed the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

“We’re witnessing unprecedented levels of anger towards the west, and the US in particular,” said a western diplomat in the region. “This is worse than 2003, when [the west] lost so much of its moral authority. Now I fear we’ll lose the next generation.”

Israel has vociferously denied allegations of genocide in Gaza brought in a case at the International Court of Justice, and insisted its forces do not target civilians. They say their war goal is to destroy Hamas, the Gaza-based militant group responsible for the October 7 assault that Israeli officials say killed about 1,200 people, and to free the hostages seized that day.

Yet the millions of young Arabs who have followed five months of conflict have expressed shock and distress at the devastation in the territory, where the death toll has exceeded 30,000, according to Palestinian officials. They have watched the body count climb, as famine and disease have spread.

The Israeli offensive has forced the vast majority of Gaza’s 2.3mn inhabitants from their homes and reduced the strip to a wasteland. Israel has only allowed limited aid to reach the population, leading UN agencies to warn of the threat of famine.





A protest in solidarity with Palestinians in Baghdad, Iraq. Many Arabs believe Biden is still not pushing hard enough for Israel to halt its offensive © Alaa al-Marjani/Reuters

President Joe Biden’s administration has offered support for the Israeli offensive in Gaza, providing military aid and diplomatic cover amid growing international calls for a ceasefire.

Yet US officials have recently become more outspoken about their concerns, while pressing Israel to allow more aid into the strip. Vice-president Kamala Harris said on Sunday that “people in Gaza are starving”, in some of the strongest White House comments yet on the war.

“The conditions are inhumane and our common humanity compels us to act,” Harris said, as she called for an immediate ceasefire.

But many Arabs believe Biden is still not pushing hard enough for Israel to halt its offensive, in particular at continued arms sales to the Jewish state.

“They support freedoms and human rights and all of that, and then they’re fully supporting what Israel is doing,” said Ghadi Bou Kamel, a political science student at the American University in Beirut.

A recent Arab Opinion Index poll, which involved 8,000 people from 16 countries across the region, showed anger over the Gaza war and America's response at record highs, with 76 per cent of respondents saying their position towards the US had become "more negative". The pollsters said the survey showed "the Arab public has lost confidence in the US".

Young Arabs have boycotted US brands, [including Starbucks and McDonald's](#), over their alleged support of Israel, scrapped plans to study in the US and turned down jobs at US companies. Anti-US protests have been held, particularly in Yemen and Iraq, where the US has launched strikes against Iran-aligned armed groups.

Starbucks and McDonald's have issued statements saying they are "not funding or supporting any governments involved in this conflict".





Young Arabs have boycotted US brands, including Starbucks and McDonald's, over their alleged support of Israel © Nacho Doce/Reuters

Dana el-Kurd, a senior non-resident fellow at the Arab Center Washington, said another impact of the US's moral standing taking a battering in the region would be to undermine liberal Arabs and activists who have championed western democratic values in a region of autocrats, including improved human rights.

“What we've seen now during this war from the west has pushed the conversation back another generation,” Kurd said. “Now, democracy is on the chopping block, human rights are on the chopping block.”

Rym Momtaz, a consultant research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said Arab perception of the US's standing and the rules-based order began crumbling after the Iraq invasion, but “Gaza broke the system completely”.

The view in the Arab world is that western countries that built the UN system have been supporting Israel as it undermines them, she said.

“These countries suspended funding for UNRWA on the basis of Israel's allegations without requiring its evidence first,” she added, referring to the claim that members of the UN agency took part in the Hamas-led attack on October 7. “They attempted to undercut the work of the International Court of Justice when South Africa brought its genocide case,” Momtaz said. Arabs saw this as showing “the international rules-based order and its values do not apply the same way to them”.

For Arabs living in the west, meanwhile, the Gaza conflict has created a sense of profound crisis. The fact that many have dual citizenship has only added to the sense of disillusionment.

“I'm finding it increasingly difficult to identify with a country that has a foreign policy that's completely unjust towards the region where I'm from, and towards the religion I adhere to,” said one Arab investment banker in his 30s living in London.

The dilemma had made the dual British national reconsider his options, including leaving the UK. “I don't have to leave, but I want to,” he said. “I'm angry.”

*Additional reporting by Malaika Kanaaneh Tapper in Beirut*

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