

Israel-Hamas war

Obama and Clinton defend Biden's support for Israel's war in Gaza

Former presidents spoke at Democrat fundraiser in New York that was disrupted by protesters



Former presidents Barack Obama, left, and Bill Clinton, right, provide support to Joe Biden and his handling of the Israel-Hamas conflict in New York on Thursday © Reuters

James Politi in Washington 18 HOURS AGO

Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, the former US presidents, sought to bolster Democratic support for Joe Biden on his handling of Israel's war in Gaza — an area of angst and division within the party — ahead of the coming presidential election against Donald Trump.

At a star-studded fundraiser held at New York City's Radio City Music Hall on Thursday, Obama and Clinton backed Biden's leadership on the Middle East conflict, as protesters interrupted the event to criticise US support for Israel.

The turmoil in the Middle East was “one of the most important reasons to elect President Biden”, said Clinton, who repeatedly sought to broker peace in the region during his time in office between 1993 and 2001.

“He genuinely cares about preserving the existence of Israel, which Hamas doesn't. And he genuinely cares about giving the Palestinians a decent state of self governance and the support they need for self determination,” Clinton added.

Obama said Biden had shown “moral conviction and clarity”, adding that “he's also willing to acknowledge that the world is complicated and that he's willing to listen to all sides in this debate”.

The support from Clinton and Obama comes with Biden facing a wave of criticism from the left of the Democratic party — including Arab-American communities in key swing states, particularly Michigan — that has threatened to harm his re-election chances in November.



Protesters make their voices heard outside New York's Radio City Music Hall © Getty Images

Biden has been increasingly critical of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's conduct of the war recently, saying he was not doing enough to prevent civilian casualties in Gaza and ensure access to humanitarian aid in the enclave.

Israel launched its war against Hamas after the group killed 1,200 Israelis in an October 7 raid on the country last year. Israel's retaliatory offensive has so far killed more than 32,000 people in Gaza, according to Palestinian authorities, as well as displaced 1.7mn of its 2.3mn inhabitants and fuelled a humanitarian catastrophe in the enclave.

US officials have warned that Israel risked losing international support if it continued with its offensive without adequate plans to protect civilians. But Biden has still not endorsed a permanent ceasefire or the conditioning of US military aid to Israel, as some Democrats have been calling for.

“There are too many innocent victims, Israeli and Palestinian. We've got to get more food and medicine, supplies into the Palestinians. But we can't forget, Israel is in a position where its very existence as at stake,” Biden said during the

fundraiser.

Obama's support for Biden's stance on Israel is particularly significant because he had a more tense relationship with Netanyahu while in office between 2009 and 2017, and some of the former Obama administration had been warning that the Israeli prime minister had a history of ignoring US advice.

Biden's strategy at the beginning of the conflict had been to embrace Netanyahu publicly, while privately urging him to scale down the military operation in Gaza, but Israel has often defied US recommendations.

Biden has also been calling for Israel to accept a "two-state solution" at the end of the conflict, which Netanyahu has rejected, though the US president said it was still possible.

"I've been working with the Saudis and with all the other Arab countries, including Egypt and Jordan and Qatar. They're prepared to fully recognise Israel," Biden said on Thursday.

"But there has to be a post-Gaza plan, and there has to be a train to a two-state solution. It doesn't have to occur today, but there has to be a progression, and I think we can do that."

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