

Israel-Hamas war

Israel promises to open extra Gaza border crossing after Biden warning

US president tells Netanyahu that support for Israel's offensive would depend on efforts to ease humanitarian suffering



The White House said President Joe Biden 'underscored that an immediate ceasefire is essential' © Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

Felicia Schwartz in Washington and **James Shotter** in Jerusalem 4 HOURS AGO

Israel said it would open an additional crossing to allow aid into Gaza, after Joe Biden warned that US support for Israel's war with Hamas would depend on its efforts to address the humanitarian suffering in the enclave, and called for an "immediate ceasefire".

The US president's comments marked his strongest signal that Washington's backing for its ally's offensive against Hamas now hinges on Israel reducing the [war's](#) civilian toll — and his clearest call for an immediate halt in the fighting.

The warning drew an immediate response from Israel, which late on Thursday said it would temporarily reopen the Erez land crossing for humanitarian aid, allow its Ashdod port to be used to process aid shipments headed for [Gaza](#) and allow increased Jordanian aid shipments through another land border crossing.

"This increased aid will prevent a humanitarian crisis and is necessary to ensure the continuation of the fighting and to achieve the goals of the war," said an Israeli government official.

Speaking in Leuven on Friday morning, US secretary of state Antony Blinken welcomed Israel's announcement but said Washington would focus on results, including the number of trucks getting into and around Gaza and indicators of

potential famine in the Palestinian enclave.

Biden's message to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came during a telephone call, just days after Israeli air strikes [killed seven humanitarian workers](#) delivering food aid in Gaza, where aid agencies have warned of imminent famine.

"He made clear the need for Israel to announce and implement a series of specific, concrete and measurable steps to address civilian harm, humanitarian suffering, and the safety of aid workers," according to a White House account of the call. "He made clear that US policy with respect to Gaza will be determined by our assessment of Israel's immediate action on these steps."

Biden said the strikes and overall humanitarian situation were "unacceptable".

During the phone call, the US president also "underscored that an immediate ceasefire is essential" to stabilise the humanitarian situation. He urged Netanyahu to "empower" Israeli negotiators to conclude a deal for the release of hostages held by Hamas, according to the White House.

Former president Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee in this year's White House race, also urged a swift resolution to the war. He told conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt on Thursday that the Jewish state was "absolutely losing the PR war" and urged Israel to "get it over with and let's get back to peace and stop killing people".

The US continues to help facilitate the hostage talks, with CIA director Bill Burns involved, but the statement on Thursday indicated it considers the onus is now on Israel to make concessions to secure a deal.

Senior administration officials did not rule out that the US could make further military assistance for Israel conditional on its conduct of the war — a step Biden has been reluctant to take.

"I am not going to preview decisions that haven't been made yet," US National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said when asked about the possible conditions for further lethal aid. "What we want to see are some real changes on the Israeli side. If we don't see change from their side, there's going to have to be changes from our side."

Kirby added: "We're looking to see . . . a dramatic increase in humanitarian assistance getting in, additional crossings opened up, a reduction in the violence against civilians and certainly aid workers."

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In a separate interview with CNN, Kirby also said the US was looking into reports Israel had used artificial intelligence technology to help identify bombing targets in Gaza with little human oversight. Israel has denied the reports.

The Gaza Strip is in a deepening humanitarian crisis, with the UN warning hundreds of thousands of people there face imminent famine.

Hamas launched a surprise assault on Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people and taking about 250 people hostage, according to Israeli officials. Israel launched a massive military campaign in response, which has killed 33,000 people, according to Palestinian officials.

Analysts said that while Biden on Thursday had come closer than before in setting conditions on US lethal aid for Israel, he was still likely unwilling to do so.

“Biden is hoping that he is not forced to enforce these red lines,” said Aaron David Miller, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Rising tensions on Israel’s border with Lebanon would also make the president wary of sending any signals that the US was backing away from its ally, he said.

“I just think with the Israeli-Lebanese front very tentative . . . that the administration would want to be extremely careful and very risk-averse in sending signals that not only are we prepared to condition aid but restrict aid,” Miller said.

Additional reporting by Javier Espinoza in Brussels

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