

**Israel-Hamas war**

## **US encouraging Arab states to join multinational postwar force in Gaza**

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Western and Arab officials say Egypt, the UAE and Morocco are considering the initiative

**Andrew England** in London and **Felicia Schwartz** in Washington 7 HOURS AGO

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The Biden administration is encouraging Arab states to participate in a peacekeeping force that would deploy in Gaza once the war ends, in the hope of filling a vacuum in the strip until a credible Palestinian security apparatus is established.

The US has been discussing the plans with Arab states. Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Morocco are considering the initiative, but President Joe Biden is not willing to deploy American troops into [Gaza](#), western and Arab officials said.

“Arab states have said it should be US-led so the US is trying to work out how it can lead it without having boots on the ground,” said a western official. “Three Arab states have had initial discussions, including Egypt, the UAE and Morocco, but they would want the US to recognise a Palestinian state first.”

Other Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, have rejected the idea of deploying their forces, fearing they will be seen to be complicit with Israel. They are also wary of the risks of being sucked into an insurgency in the strip, which has been controlled by Hamas since 2007.

But they have become more open to the notion of an international force operating in Gaza, as western and Arab states struggle to come up with a viable alternative to Israeli troops remaining there.





US troopers dismount from a CH-47 military transport aircraft carrying American and Philippine troops in the Philippines. Washington does not want to put American soldiers on the ground in Gaza © Aaron Favila/AP

Another person briefed on the discussions said Washington had “been trying to build some momentum for a stability force, but the American policy is pretty firm that there will be no American troops on the ground, so it’s hard for them to make the argument that others should”.

“But there could be other ways to get there, and any effort has to be American-led,” the person added. “There’s a long way to go to see an Arab stability force in Gaza.”

It is also not clear what Israel would be willing to agree to, with the US and its allies frustrated by uncertainty over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s intentions for the [conflict](#).

This includes how long [Netanyahu](#) plans to keep troops in the shattered strip; who his far-right government would accept as an administrator; and how long Israel’s offensive will continue.

US secretary of state Antony Blinken told CBS’s *Face the Nation* on Sunday the Washington had “been working for many, many weeks on developing credible plans for security, for governance, for rebuilding” with Arab states and other allies.

But he added: “We haven’t seen that come from Israel.”

A state department spokesperson said Washington had held talks “with partners in the region about post-conflict Gaza”, and many share “a willingness to play a constructive role when conditions allow”.

“There will be an ongoing need for many nations to step up to support Gaza’s governance, security and humanitarian efforts,” the spokesperson said. “I’m not going to get ahead of those diplomatic discussions.”

Netanyahu has insisted that Israel will maintain overall security of the strip, and vociferously rejected the western and Arab-backed Palestinian Authority playing any role in the enclave’s administration.

He has also resisted any moves towards the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Some Israeli officials, such as defence minister Yoav Gallant, have expressed support for the idea of an international presence in Gaza after the war. But the lack of clarity

over Israel's position has exacerbated uncertainty over any postwar planning.

“Israel is refusing to talk to anybody about it, it's in denial. And everyone else is talking past each other,” the western official said. “The Arab states say the west has to recognise a Palestinian state, but very few of the major western states are really close to doing this.”

An Arab official, who confirmed the US had raised the idea of a peacekeeping force with its regional partners, said there were also differences between Arab states on plans for after the conflict. But he said the bigger issue was that “nobody knows what the day after will be like”.



A smoke plume rises during an Israeli bombardment in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip © AFP/Getty Images

Since Israel launched its offensive in Gaza in retaliation for Hamas's October 7 attack, civil order has broken down in the besieged strip and much of its infrastructure has been destroyed.

Netanyahu has vowed to eradicate Hamas and Israel has severely depleted its military capacity. But the US and Arab states have warned Israel that it will not be able to totally destroy the militant group, which is part of the Palestinian social fabric.

Arab states insist that to ensure a sustainable resolution to the crisis, the US and other western nations must pressure Israel to take irreversible measures towards a two-state solution to the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As part of this process, they want Gaza to be administered by a reformed Palestinian leadership that governs the strip, the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. But the weakness and lack of credibility of the PA, which oversees limited parts of the West Bank, complicate those aspirations.

The western official said the UN had advised that the existing police force in Gaza be kept in place to help provide some stability, with the potential involvement of PA security forces as a second layer.

“But it’s very challenging given capacity constraints and the need to win the consent of Hamas. The PA may be able to bring in forces from the West Bank over time,” the official said.

“The other issue is the international element of any force, which isn’t moving forward as neither the US nor the Europeans want to put boots on the ground,” they added.

Netanyahu has already angered Arab states by suggesting they could assist a government in Gaza.

UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan said last week that the Israeli prime minister “does not have any legal capacity to take this step”.

Sheikh Abdullah said the UAE would be prepared to support a Palestinian government that met the hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people, including independence.

But he added that the UAE “refuses to be drawn into any plan aimed at providing cover for the Israeli presence in the Gaza strip”.

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