

# [***Biden and Netanyahu speak for the first time in a month amid deepening rift***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BK9-1761-JBSS-S47S-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Washington (CNN) &#8212; President Joe Biden spoke by phone Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, [*their first known interaction*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/08/politics/joe-biden-benjamin-netanyahu-relationship/index.html) in more than a month as a rift deepens between [*the two men over the war in Gaza.*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/biden-netanyahu-israel-gaza/index.html)

During the call, the White House said the leaders discussed two key areas where tension has emerged in the relationship, i[*ncluding the necessity of getting more*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/11/middleeast/netanyahu-biden-rift-widens-rafah-gaza-mime-intl/index.html) humanitarian aid into Gaza and the pending Israeli operation in Rafah, where more than a million Palestinian civilians are sheltering.

Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, told reporters later that the president voiced "deep concerns" over Israel's plans for the Rafah operation during his conversation with Netanyahu.

Biden asked Netanyahu to send a senior delegation of military leaders to Washington to discuss the issue further and to lay out an alternative approach to go after Hamas in Rafah. Netanyahu agreed to dispatch such a group, and Sullivan said the meeting was likely to occur at the end of this week or early next week.

"A military plan cannot succeed without an integrated humanitarian plan and political plan. And the president has repeatedly made the point that continuing military operations need to be connected to a clear strategic end game," Sullivan said at the White House, noting that more civilians had died in Gaza than any previous conflict in the enclave and that "anarchy reigns" in parts of the strip.

In a statement afterward, Netanyahu said he told Biden that Israel was committed to achieving its goals in Gaza while also providing the necessary humanitarian aid to the enclave.

"We talked about the latest developments in the war, including Israel's commitment to achieving all the goals of the war: the elimination of Hamas, the release of all our hostages, and the promise that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel - while providing the necessary humanitarian aid that helps achieve these goals," Netanyahu said, according to the Prime Minister's Office readout.

Monday's phone call came days after one of Biden's top allies in Washington, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, called for new Israeli elections that would result in Netanyahu's ouster.

Biden called the speech "good" and said it reflected the concerns of many Americans, though did not explicitly endorse nor condemn the call for new elections in Israel.

Netanyahu on Sunday forcefully pushed back on Schumer's speech during an interview with CNN's Dana Bash.

"It's inappropriate to go to a sister democracy and try to replace the elected leadership there. That's something that Israel, the Israeli public does on its own, and we're not a banana republic," Netanyahu said on "State of the Union."

The Biden-Netanyahu relationship has devolved over the past several months as frustration inside the White House mounts over what American officials regard as Netanyahu's rejection of US advice on the war in Gaza.

After speaking on a daily or weekly basis at the onset of the conflict, Biden and Netanyahu now speak far less frequently. Their last phone call before Monday was on February 15 - the longest gap in calls since the October 7 terror attacks that launched the current conflict.

Tensions have emerged over allowing more humanitarian aid to enter the strip, steps to protect civilian casualties and the future of an eventual Palestinian state.

Netanyahu raised concerns over "a variety of things that have come out in the American press" during the call, Sullivan said. Speaking Monday, Sullivan declined to detail whether Netanyahu raised concerns about Schumer's speech. But he said Biden was not focused on the ***politics*** of the conflict.

"From President Biden's perspective, this is not a question of ***politics***. It's not a question of public statements. It's a question of policy and strategy. That's what he's focused on. That's what he was focused on in the call," he said.

Still, Sullivan noted a certain irony in Netanyahu appearing on American television to complain about political interference.

"You have the prime minister speaking on American television about his concerns about Americans interfering in Israeli ***politics***," Sullivan said. "And then your question is, should Americans be speaking into Israeli ***politics***, which, in fact, we don't do nearly as much as they speak into ours."

The White House has said an operation in Rafah should not move ahead without a credible plan to protect the civilians sheltering there. As of Monday, officials said they had not seen such a plan. Biden said in an interview last weekend that an invasion of Rafah would amount to a "red line," though did not delineate how he would respond and said he would never cut off support for Israel entirely.

Speaking with Netanyahu, Biden "explained why he is so deeply concerned about the prospect of Israel conducting major military operations in Rafah," Sullivan said.

He said those concerns fell within three areas: that civilians sheltering in Rafah have nowhere safe to go; that Rafah is an entry point for critical humanitarian assistance; and that neighboring Egypt has voiced serious concerns about a potential military operation there.

"Our position is that Hamas should not be allowed at safe-haven in Rafah or anywhere else. But a major ground operation there would be a mistake, it would lead to more innocent civilian deaths," Sullivan said.

Sullivan described the call as "businesslike" and it "did not end abruptly."

"It ended in a totally normal way when they had each gotten through all of their points," Sullivan said, adding the leaders "recognize that we are at a critical moment in this conflict."

He said Biden and Netanyahu "share a common objective that is for Israel to prevail over Hamas" but that they "have a different perspective on this operation and Rafah - and they went into some detail on that and had the opportunity to elaborate each of their respective views in a full-throated way, in the way they always do when President Biden and Prime Minister Netanyahu talk."

"So in that sense, I would say this call was much like a previous calls that the two of them have had, they each agreed to have the teams get together and then they agreed that the two of them would stay in touch as we go forward," he said.

Biden and Netanyahu also discussed negotiations for an immediate ceasefire for "several weeks" in return for releasing hostages held by Hamas and other militants in Gaza.

"We would look to build on that ceasefire into something more enduring and use the space created by a cessation of hostilities to surge humanitarian assistance," Sullivan said. "So far, the deal has been more elusive than we would have hoped, but we will keep pressing because we regard this as an urgent priority."

He stressed that Hamas could "end the crisis tomorrow" and called for more pressure on the group to end the conflict.

Sullivan said the two leaders had agreed to "stay in close touch" in the days and weeks ahead and that the US and Israel were in "daily contact on every element" of the crisis.

This story has been updated with additional developments on Monday.

By Kevin Liptak and Nikki Carvajal, CNN

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