

# [***Joe Biden's Rafah Red Line Upends US-Israel Relationship***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0C-2GB1-JBR6-900C-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** President Joe Biden has said that he will not supply bombs to Israel to be used in a ground assault on Rafah.

**Body**

President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s red lines on a potential ground offensive in Gaza may have upended the U.S.-Israeli relationship as Israel prepares for a possible assault on the city of Rafah.

Biden [*said on Wednesday*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-admits-us-bombs-have-been-used-killed-palestinians-1898657?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that he would not supply bombs to Israel that could be used to attack Rafah, and he acknowledged that U.S. bombs had killed Palestinians.

The president's remarks followed his decision last week to halt a shipment of 3,500 bombs to Israel, due to concerns they could be used in a ground assault into Gaza. The move has been heavily criticized by [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), as well as some [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). *Newsweek* has reached out to the White House via email for comment.

"Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs and other ways in which they go after population centers," Biden told [*CNN*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/cnn?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Wednesday.

"I made it clear that if they go into Rafah—they haven't gone in Rafah yet—if they go into Rafah, I'm [*not supplying the weapons*](https://www.newsweek.com/joe-biden-says-israels-gaza-bombing-just-wrong-1898626?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) that have been used historically to deal with Rafah, to deal with the cities, that deal with that problem," the president added.

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Gilad Erdan described what Biden said as a "difficult and very disappointing remark."

"Of course, any pressure on Israel is interpreted by our enemies as something that gives them hope. There are many Jewish Americans who voted for the president and for the [*Democratic Party*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democratic-party?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and now they are hesitant," Erdan told Kan public radio in Israel.

Gaza health officials say that more than 34,000 people have been killed since the war began, as cited by AP. Hamas' attack killed around 1,200 people and resulted in nearly 250 hostages being taken.

**Alienating Allies**

Thomas Gift, founding director of the Center on U.S. ***Politics*** at University College London, U.K., told *Newsweek* on Thursday that the president's interview was "not his finest political moment."

"Biden is managing to alienate both his domestic allies and adversaries with his rhetoric and policies toward Israel," Gift said.

"While the left thinks he hasn't done enough to force [Israel leader Benjamin] Netanyahu's government to address humanitarian concerns in Gaza, the right is now accusing the administration of hamstringing Israel in a war it can't afford to lose," Gift added.

"Biden's clumsy statement that the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] is 'going after population centers' will only escalate tensions with Israel's leadership, who predictably resent the White House's failure to offer Israel its full-throated support," Gift said.

"Biden is navigating a difficult political terrain with the Israel-Hamas war, but his bungled public statements aren't doing him any favors," he added.

**Biden's Red Lines**

The U.S. and Israel are key allies, and the Americans have long supplied arms to the Israelis, but Biden decided to pause a shipment that consisted of 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs.

It is the first-known instance of a pause in [*U.S. military*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/u.s.-military?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) aid to Israel since [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)' attack on the country on October 7.

"We're going to continue to make sure Israel is secure in terms of Iron Dome and their ability to respond to attacks that came out in the Middle East recently," Biden told CNN on Wednesday.

Biden suggested in his Wednesday interview that Israel had not yet crossed the administration's red lines after Israeli troops took control of Gaza's Rafah border crossing, which connects Gaza with Egypt.

The president said the Israelis "haven't gone into the population centers. What they did is right on the border." He added, though, that he had told the Israeli government "they're not going to get our support, if, in fact, they go in these population centers."

"But it's, it's just wrong. We're not going to—[*we're not going to supply the weapons*](https://www.newsweek.com/biden-faces-questions-israel-aid-block-roger-marshall-1897860?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and artillery shells used that have been used," the president added.

An unnamed official told [*BBC*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/bbc?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) News on Tuesday: "The U.S. position has been that Israel should not launch a major ground operation in Rafah, where more than 1 million people are sheltering with nowhere else to go."

The official added that talks with Israel were "ongoing and have not fully addressed our concerns."

**U.S.-Israel Relations**

Democratic Representative [*Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/alexandria-ocasio-cortez?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) praised Biden in a post on X, formerly [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships). She described his move as a "historic shift."

"President Biden enforcing conditions on US military aid and holding the Israeli gov to the same bar we hold all our allies to is the responsible, secure, and just thing to do."

"@POTUS 's historic shift to include Israel in US standards makes the world safer and our values clear," Ocasio-Cortez added.

Cliff Kupchan, chair of the Eurasia Group, told *The New York Times* on Wednesday that withholding weapons was Biden's "only real form of leverage" over [*Netanyahu*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/benjamin-netanyahu?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

"It's a low point for U.S.-Israel relations, as it begins to put Israeli security in play. Biden had no choice. The war is a drag on his election campaign, on Democratic Party unity and on U.S. standing in the world," Kupchan told the newspaper.

**Criticism**

Biden is facing criticism from both sides of the aisle, with Democratic Senator [*John Fetterman*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/john-fetterman?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*telling Fox News*](https://www.newsweek.com/john-fetterman-attacks-joe-biden-fox-news-rafah-1898239?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) on Wednesday: "I don't think we should be withholding any kind of munitions."

Fetterman spokesperson Carrie Adams told *Newsweek* that Fetterman has been "very clear that he fully supports President Biden." She added that the senator's "main message was that we can disagree on some ***politics*** and policy in this big tent party, but we can't disagree on who to vote for in the fall, that we've got to support Biden."

"As the leader of the free world, America cannot claim that its commitment to Israel is 'ironclad' and then proceed to withhold aid from Israel," wrote Democratic Representative Ritchie Torres in a Wednesday post on X.

"The mixed messaging makes a mockery of our credibility as an ally. No one will take our word seriously," Torres added.

Republican Senator [*Mitt Romney*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitt-romney?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) wrote on X on Wednesday: "We stand by allies, we don't second guess them. Biden's dithering on Israel weapons is bad policy and a terrible message to Israel, our allies, and the world."

Speaker of the House [*Mike Johnson*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mike-johnson?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) Minority Leader [*Mitch McConnell*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/mitch-mcconnell?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) wrote in a letter to Biden on Wednesday that "security assistance to Israel is an urgent priority that must not be delayed."

The letter asked that the White House responds "by the end of the week" and provides additional clarity on Biden's decision to pause the weapons shipment.

*Newsweek* reached out to the White House on Wednesday for comment on Johnson and McConnell's letter.

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2390431/joe-biden-speaks-white-house.jpg)

**Graphic**

Joe Biden Speaks at the White House

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

U.S. President Joe Biden speaks alongside Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala before a bilateral meeting in the Oval Office of the White House on April 15, 2024 in Washington, DC. Biden has said he will not send bombs to Israel that could be used in a ground offensive against Rafah,

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