

# [***U.S.-Israel Relations Are Teetering and Biden Is to Blame | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJ8-1PF1-DY68-1004-00000-00&context=1516831)

Newsweek.com

March 13, 2024 Wednesday 5:34 PM EST

Copyright © 2024 Newsweek Inc. All Rights Reserved



**Length:** 897 words

**Byline:** Joseph Epstein

**Highlight:** In the past week, relations between the Biden administration and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reached a new low.

**Body**

In the past week, relations between the Biden administration and Israeli Prime Minister [*Benjamin Netanyahu*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/benjamin-netanyahu?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) reached a new low.

Following his State of the Union speech, President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) was caught on a hot mic saying he [*told*](https://www.businessinsider.com/bidens-come-jesus-netanyahu-warning-caught-hot-mic-2024-3) "Bibi," as Netanyahu is ubiquitously known, that the two needed a "come to Jesus meeting." He also [*warned*](https://www.politico.eu/article/israels-netanyahu-says-he-will-defy-bidens-red-line-and-invade-rafah/) that an Israeli incursion into Rafah, [*Hamas*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/hamas?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships)'s last stronghold, would be a "red line." And most recently, he [*said*](https://apnews.com/article/biden-netanyahu-israel-hamas-gaza-civilians-ceasefire-2d4e5657db45ccbe2bb793f06f74c913) Netanyahu was hurting Israel more than helping the nation by not doing more to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Moreover, Biden administration officials are more frequently airing their frustrations with Netanyahu for not allowing enough aid into Gaza and not agreeing with the administration's post-war vision of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank run by a "revitalized Palestinian Authority (PA)."

The schism seems like a return to the pre-Oct. 7 nadir in U.S.-Israeli relations. Except this time, it's worse.

On Sunday, Axios [*reported*](https://www.axios.com/2024/03/10/biden-netanyahu-hurting-israel-red-line) that Biden was "break[ing] with Netanyahu but stick[ing] with Israel." Essentially, that the U.S. would not have a working relationship with the prime minister of one of its closest allies. On Friday, Vice President [*Kamala Harris*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/kamala-harris?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) said it is important to distinguish between the Israeli people and government, as if Israel was a dictatorship.

Nevertheless, Israel has submitted to many of Washington's demands. Jerusalem agreed to allow aid to be dropped into Gaza by the U.S. and Jordan, and for the Israel Defense Forces to provide security for a U.S.-built pier allowing aid delivered by sea. Additionally, following the Oct. 7 massacre, Biden [*convinced*](https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/how-biden-averted-a-second-front-by-convincing-israel-not-to-attack-hezbollah-on-oct-11-e14a0a3b) Netanyahu no to preemptively strike Hezbollah forces in Lebanon, even as the threat from the militant group [*caused*](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/dangerous-stasis-israels-northern-border-leaves-evacuees-limbo-2024-01-11/) the displacement of almost 100,000 Israelis. The Biden administration has also [*continued*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/29/politics/concern-rising-biden-officials-israel-lebanon-incursion/index.html) to pressure Jerusalem to deescalate its conflict on the northern border, despite Hezbollah's continuous barrage of missiles and [*refusal*](https://www.reuters.com/world/france-proposes-hezbollah-withdrawal-border-talks-israel-lebanon-truce-2024-02-12/) to retreat to the line agreed upon to end the Israeli-Lebanon war in 2006.

Although Netanyahu has been vocally opposed to Biden's post-war vision of a PA-run Palestinian state in Gaza, no mainstream Israeli politician on the right or left would act differently. Even Yair Lapid, the opposition leader of the Israeli center-left has [*said*](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/lapid-comes-out-against-pas-abbas-ruling-gaza-in-apparent-break-with-us/) that "no one in the world" would agree to hand over Gaza to the PA.

It is unlikely that another Israeli prime minister would give the Biden administration more.

So, what caused this recent schism in U.S.-Israel relations? It's mainly domestic U.S. ***politics***. It's an election year and the administration is worried about progressive and pro-Palestinian voters who are unhappy with U.S. support for Israel. In last month's Michigan Democratic primary, more than 100,000 people [*voted*](https://www.reuters.com/world/us/michigans-strong-uncommitted-vote-shows-israel-impact-biden-support-2024-02-28/) "uncommitted" to lodge their disapproval of the president. [*Senate*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/senate?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) have also [*stepped up*](https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-congress-joe-biden-war-8d5334a6ffbe36eb77301647affc4e01) their pressure on Biden to ease the suffering of Gazans.

***Politics*** isn't the only cause for Biden's change in course. The administration is ideologically committed to a two-state solution and wants to force this vision on the region despite the PA's vast [*unpopularity*](https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/02/08/facing-low-poll-numbers-pa-president-pushes-for-palestinian-statehood/#:~:text=In%20the%20intervening%20years%2C%20the,negative%E2%80%9D%20view%20of%20the%20PA.), [*support for terror*](https://jcpa.org/paying-salaries-terrorists-contradicts-palestinian-vows-peaceful-intentions/), [*continuous incitement*](https://www.newsweek.com/no-partner-peace-fantasy-moderate-palestinian-authority-opinion-1854268?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and [*crippling corruption*](https://jcpa.org/article/the-palestinian-authoritys-corruption-and-its-impact-on-the-peace-process/). Biden also ignores that [*72 percent*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/512828/palestinians-lack-faith-biden-two-state-solution.aspx) of Palestinians and [*65*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/547760/life-israel-oct-charts.aspx) [*percent*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/547760/life-israel-oct-charts.aspx) of Israelis are against a two state solution.

With this backdrop, Netanyahu and his right-wing government, which includes which includes far right members such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir, often provide the administration the perfect excuse to criticize Israel. By claiming that the schism in relations is either Netanyahu's or his coalition's fault, the administration can make concessions to progressives while claiming to still be "pro-Israel."

It is telling that the State Department was quick to [*condemn*](https://www.axios.com/2024/01/02/us-condemns-israeli-ultranationalist-smotrich-ben-gvir-gaza) Ben Gvir and Smotrich for their calls to relocate Palestinians from the Gaza Strip yet remained silent when senior PA Legislator Jibril Rajoub [*threatened*](https://www.algemeiner.com/2023/12/05/fatah-leaders-says-the-next-and-more-violent-explosion-will-be-in-the-west-bank/) another Oct. 7 massacre coming from the West Bank.

To be sure, there are good reasons to criticize Netanyahu.

His divisive ***politics***—such as judicial reforms that brought half the country into the streets—and policy of maintaining bad status quos instead of addressing problems—like allowing Hamas to maintain power in Gaza—were two of the driving causes of the Oct. 7 massacre. Had Israel been united and proactive in dealing with Hamas, the country would not be at war.

Yet to date, Netanyahu refuses to take any responsibility for Oct. 7 even though as many as 80 percent of Israelis [*believe*](https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/most-israelis-think-netanyahu-responsible-failing-prevent-hamas-attack-poll-2023-10-20/) that he should.

But despite his many flaws, foreign and domestic, Netanyahu is not a dictator running a banana republic. Israel is a sovereign nation with a democratically elected leader. And when it comes to destroying Hamas and not allowing a Palestinian state run by the PA on Israel's borders, the vast majority of Israelis are united behind him.

This current rift in U.S.-Israeli relations is indeed partly political, but under that veil lies an unmistakable possessiveness coming from Washington. The administration is not mad at Netanyahu's many flaws, but the fact he is not towing the U.S. line.

*Joseph Epstein director of legislative affairs for the Endowment of Middle East Truth (EMET).*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2361908/best-frenemies.jpg)

**Graphic**

Best of Frenemies

MIRIAM ALSTER/POOL/AFP via Getty Images

President Joe Biden sits with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the start of the Israeli war cabinet meeting, in Tel Aviv on Oct. 18.

**Load-Date:** March 13, 2024

**End of Document**