

'This is not a secure area': Prime Minister has no plans to visit Israel despite unrest



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### **Body**

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Anthony Albanese has confirmed he has no plans to visit Israel following pressure from the opposition to make a stop in the Middle East en route to the US.

Opposition foreign affairs spokesman Simon Birmingham on Friday echoed Opposition Leader Peter Dutton's calls for the Prime Minister to travel to Tel Aviv on his way to Washington, telling Sky News the move "would be a very important signal of **Australia's** support for Israel".

It comes after world leaders, including US President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, made recent visits to the country.

Mr Albanese said the leaders who visited were from nations that were permanent members of the Security Council. He also cited security concerns.

"The United States has a particular role in that, as does the United Kingdom, as does the other people who have visited there," he said.

"President Biden's visit produced outcomes of negotiating through with different states, but also was accompanied by a considerable security effort for President Biden. This is not a secure area.

"Our priority has been to engage and I've engaged, I've met personally with the Israeli ambassador. I had him to my residence and had a discussion."

The Canberra Times has contacted the Israeli embassy for comment.

Mr Albanese also sought to brush off claims his party was divided on its stance on Israel after Labor frontbenchers Ed Husic and **Anne Aly** raised concerns the Israeli government was collectively punishing Palestinians in Gaza for Hamas' atrocities.

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"Ed Husic, Anne Aly and my entire team voted for a resolution in the Parliament and indeed Ed and Anne spoke about it. That resolution was really important, it unequivocally condemned Hamas for the atrocities that it committed as a terrorist organisation, with its invasion of Israel," Mr Albanese said.

"We also acknowledged in that resolution, importantly, that the lives of innocent civilians needed to be protected."

On Friday morning, deputy Liberal leader Sussan Ley told Sunrise Mr Husic "stepped right out of line".

"He's got a chance today to correct those remarks, otherwise I think he should seriously consider his position," she said.

But she wasn't able to draw Education Minister Jason Clare, also on Sunrise, on whether he agreed with Mr Husic's term of "collective punishment".

"You know, the point to make here is that Israel, like any country like Australia, has got to comply with international law and that means doing everything that they can to make sure that innocent people aren't killed," he said.

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"If I wanted to, I could pull out the statements that you made when you were the chair of the Friends of Palestine that are in stark contrast with Peter Dutton, I'm not going to do that on live TV because I don't think it is in the national interest," he said.

The previous day, Ms Ley said Mr Husic's comments exposed "deep division" within Labor and "raised serious questions" about the government's official position on Israel.

On Friday, Labor Party president Wayne Swan also rejected the notion the party was divided over its stance on Israel in an interview with Channel Nine.

"I have had a look at the statements the minister has made and they don't depart in any way from the government's position," he said.

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