President Biden has responded to Hamas’s horrendous attacks on Israeli civilians with understandable outrage. In heartfelt terms, he called them “[pure, unadulterated evil](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/10/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-terrorist-attacks-in-israel-2/),” which they were. He spoke less powerfully about the Israeli government’s response, noting only that we “uphold the laws of war.” Unless the Israeli government heeds that advice, it will make a bad situation worse, which may well be exactly what Hamas [hoped to provoke](https://t.co/pCFRTWHzad) in a desperate attempt to revive the Palestinian cause.

Hamas’s random [slaughter](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/10/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-war-hamas-deaths-killings.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare) of Israeli civilians, its [abduction](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/10/israel-identifies-most-of-the-hostages-abducted-by-hamas-reports-suggest) of survivors as hostages, its indiscriminate [rocket attacks](https://abcnews.go.com/International/timeline-surprise-rocket-attack-hamas-israel/story?id=103816006) on Israel’s cities are all war crimes – egregious violations of international humanitarian law, which is [designed](https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/09/questions-and-answers-october-2023-hostilities-between-israel-and-palestinian-armed#Three) to spare civilians as much as possible the hazards of war. Using that legal framework is important because [it also binds](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/10/hamas-attack-israel-us-opinion-divided) the Israeli military, which is the best way to ensure that the civilian toll in Gaza from Israel’s aerial bombardment and possible ground invasion does not quickly surmount the deaths at the hands of Hamas.