**[Israel’s partner](https://www.dawn.com/news/1817450/israels-partner)**

[Touqir Hussain](https://www.dawn.com/authors/496/touqir-hussain) Published February 27, 2024

NO US policy shames its professed ‘value-based foreign policy’ as much as its Israel policy. Washington has been effectively sitting on the sidelines in contempt of world public opinion while some 30,000 civilians, mainly women and children, have been slaughtered in Gaza.

Seventy-five years of massive US military aid and financial assistance has been the bedrock of Israel’s national power. America’s absolute political support, especially its wilful advocacy at the UN, has shielded Israel from punishment for its wrongs, inciting more offences and more US support. Why should the US not be considered complicit in Israel’s inhumanity in Gaza?

We are mistaken if we attribute Washington’s iron-clad support simply to the work of the Israel lobby (AIPAC). Israel is embedded in America’s body politic, where its influence is pervasive and deep-rooted. Granted Washington needs a reliable ally to look after its strategic and economic interests in the Middle East. But over the decades, a bevy of high-profile Israel sympathisers in the think tank community, media and financial world have exaggerated Israel’s value as an ally and its vulnerability in the region, to make a case for the policy of endless US support and the risks of putting pressure on Israel.

Not just the executive branch but Congress as well has been over-committed to Israel as pressures of public opinion, largely formed by Israel sympathisers and their Christian right ally, and the lure of campaign funding, orchestrated by AIPAC, have hypnotised American politicians. Policy and politics have aligned to enhance American support for Israel and diminish Washington’s leverage. It is complete confidence in this support that has incited Israel’s intransigence.

The Gaza conflict has brought little change to the US position.

The blanket US protection and sympathy thus given have enabled Israel to violate Palestinian rights for its unrestrained expan­sionist policies — without any political cost. Acclaimed Harvard professor Stephen Walt summarised this well in his article ‘America is a Root Cause of Israel and Palestine’s Latest War’ in Foreign Policy.

The Gaza conflict has brought little change to the US position. Joe Biden, known to be the most pro-Israel president ever, has no empathy for the Palestinians. He is taking a minimalist approach by focusing only on the humanitarian issue, and even here, he is not putting enough pressure on Israel. He is fighting a tough election where he is under siege on many fronts: immigration, economy and perceived weakness in meeting foreign policy challenges.

In this fraught environment, the last thing Biden wants is to alienate the majority of voters by pressuring Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu will not yield to pressure anyway, hoping it will cause Biden to lose the Muslim vote in key swing states, and thus lose to Trump, his preferred choice. He may prolong the war till the elections.

To escape the dilemma of whether or not to put pressure on Israel, Biden is seeking Saudi help to hold out the promise of normalisation with Israel to get Netanyahu’s support for the two-state solution. The Saudis are not going to oblige without an irrevocable process of establishing a Palestinian home. And Netanyahu is not interested in normalisation. He has added the tragic events of Oct 7 to Israel’s long list of alibis to deny the Palestinians their rights and to resume his expansionist policies with a vengeance.

Moves in Congress by progressive politicians in the Democratic Party to attach conditions to aid to Israel in the Foreign Affairs Act will not succeed. Even if does, such conditions can always be waived by the president.Only the threat of unilateral US action will work. That won’t happen, not in an election year.

America does not realise how much influence it would have had in the region and the larger Muslim world had it not appended itself to Israeli expansionism. Washington’s ability to shape and influence events in the region is now challenged by China, menaced by Iran, rivalled by India and hindered by Saudi Arabia. On many issues, America is walking alone.

Both the US and Israel are locked in policies that are not only morally bankrupt but also go against their respective national interests. The Palestinian future depends on a change of policies within the US and Israel. It will be a different America and Israel where this change takes place. In America, policies have to recover the moral purpose the US always claimed but rarely measured up to. In Israel, as the Haaretz editor-in-chief said in a recent article in Foreign Affairs, “Israelis cannot expect stability if they continue to ignore the Palestinians and reject their aspirations, their story, and even their presence”.

*The writer, a former ambassador, is adjunct professor Georgetown University and Visiting Senior Research Fellow, National University of Singapore.*

*Published in Dawn, February 27th, 2024*