**[The worm turns](https://www.dawn.com/news/1781737/the-worm-turns)**

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THE Palestinians cannot be called worms. They aren’t oil-rich. They have proved repeatedly they are made of sterner stuff. What they did on Oct 7 stunned the world. This paper’s headline was superb: “Unparalleled raid stuns Israeli Goliath.” Unwritten in the headline was David.

The most harried and nervous person on earth is Joe Biden. It is not a second term that is in jeopardy; even the current presidency and the entire US establishment seemed panicky. The issue wasn’t to help Israel but to assure Benjamin Netanyahu that Biden was as loyal to Israel as ever and if Israeli intelligence was caught by surprise over the Palestinian blitz, America should not be blamed.

Assuring Israel of US support was a useless reiteration, given the existence of what is known as the president’s ‘drawdown authority’ under which the American leader can transfer any amount of military aid to any country without Congressional authority if he thinks a crisis situation needs a speedy transfer of military or non-military aid, though the defence secretary must formally inform Congress.

America’s aid-giving process need not be spelled out here. Briefly, every penny of the foreign aid programme must be processed by the two Houses and their special committees before the bill goes to the president to be signed. He has the right under the constitution to reject or kill it by using what is known as the ‘pocket veto’. Even after the president passes it, any American citizen can go to court to challenge its validity.

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However, one of the options with the administration is the drawdown authority. Under this, the secretary of state keeps the ball rolling by informing Congress of his decision to use the authority to provide aid to a given country in an emergency.

In 1994, the Clinton administration announced it was going to provide Israel 50 F-16s free, according to information given to Congress by State Department officials. There were no F-16s “in excess” with the US air force, but since Israel needed them Washington decided to provide them to the Jewish state by dipping into “the existing stock”, according to the transcript of a congressional hearing. At a hearing of the House Foreign Relations Committee’s Subcommittee for Europe and the Middle East, the chairman, Lee Hamilton, questioned State Department officials, besides the deputy director of USAID, and they made clear that Israel would get 50 F-16s from the drawdown authority.

Assistant defence secretary Fred Smith told the committee the drawdown authority was unique to Israel. Asked by Hamilton whether this constituted additional aid to Israel he said: “We are permitted, [and] authorised to take assets directly from active stocks in the United States, and after notification to Congress transfer to Israel.” When Hamilton asked what other countries benefited from this programme, he replied, “No other countries do, sir”. He said there were no F-16s in excess, and everything that was transferred under the drawdown came out of the existing stock.

However, things have changed since the decision to provide the jets to Israel. Recently the Biden administration has used the drawdown authority over 40 times to provide military assistance to Ukraine worth over $6.2 billion.

Irrespective of the drawdown authority, Israel has enough power to implement Netanyahu’s threat of vengeance and taking action that will “change the map of the Middle East”. What could this new Middle Eastern map be? Most probably, he will annex Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights (Tel Aviv has already ‘anne­xed’ the latter territory, though the move didn’t receive international endorsement), creating a Greater Israel, some­thing the Zionists have always dreamed of. He has declared repeatedly that a two-state solution was no more valid and there will never be a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Now he has mobilised 300,000 reservists and will most probably initiate a genocide of the Palestinian people.

In the ongoing conflict, Hamas will most probably be the loser, but will be remembered for fighting in spite of the odds. Living and working in tunnels, Hamas fighters appear to have surpassed in strategic planning and tactics those who plan wars with epaulettes, braids and red stripes in the comfort of military headquarters.

Pakistan has joined the ‘exercise restraint’ chorus, but what choice did it have, given the harsh reality that many Arab states are seen as Israel’s military allies? They are more interested in having allies against Iran than in reaching out to the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, very few people know what the acronym Hamas stands for. Hamas means Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Islamic Resistance Movement).

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