

Ukraine, the Pacific, the Middle East - How Many Wars Can Washington Endure?

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US Vice President Kamala Harris stated, in an interview with CBS, that American troops shall not be sent to Gaza or Israel and that Washington is merely providing Tel Aviv with diplomatic support, equipment, and some advice. She added that the "US is not telling Israel what to do."

However, it's been reported that both the Jewish state and the United States are discussing a multinational force to "govern Gaza" if Tel Aviv succeeds in ousting Hamas. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority (PA) should retake control of Gaza in this scenario, but a peacekeeping force including American soldiers could play an "interim role". There are at least two problems with this plan: Israel has been bombing not just Gaza, but also the PA-controlled West Bank, where Hamas has no presence, and the deployment of US troops to Palestine would only dramatically escalate frictions in the Middle East.

On 31 October, FBI director Christopher Wray, during a Congressional hearing, said that the escalation of tensions there is to inspire the greatest terror threat to the US since the rise of the so-called Islamic State (Daesh) terrorist group a decade ago. The turmoil in that part of the world has certainly raised the question of how many wars the US can fight and how many wars it can support.

Lawmakers in Washington seeking a ceasefire are increasingly concerned about US President Joe Biden's full support for Israel's military campaign and blockage there. They are not the only ones: American diplomats are reportedly preparing a "dissent cable", in a situation that some have [described](#) as a "mutiny" brewing within the State Department "at all levels". Amid such a context, Jack Lew has been approved as the next American envoy to Israel, his confirmation certainly having been fast-tracked by the current crisis. Having been nominated in September, it was then believed he could play a major role in US-brokered Israeli-Saudi talks about normalizing ties between the two Middle Eastern countries - a

scenario that has been put in the freezer after the ongoing quagmire broke out. Lew's mission now will focus on cooperating with Tel Aviv to neutralize Hamas, and securing the release of hostages, while suffering pressures to occasionally criticize some Israeli actions – the Jewish state's campaign after all is being globally denounced over its [indiscriminate targeting of civilian facilities and villages](#).

UN chief Antonio Guterres has recently voiced his dismay by the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and organizations such as Amnesty International have described Israel's actions as [war crimes](#). Tel Aviv already faces [increased hostility in Armenia](#) due to its role in the Turkey-backed Azerbaijan [ethnic cleansing](#) of Armenians [in Artsakh](#) (Nagorno-Karabakh), and is now itself being [accused](#) of conducting a [genocide](#) by a UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, among others. Chile, and Colombia have recalled ambassadors to Israel, with Bolivia cutting ties entirely, and massive demonstrations against Tel Aviv are taking place in many capital cities worldwide.

Last year, I [wrote](#) on the possibility of an Iran-Israel war coming into being, a scenario that now seems much closer, bringing with it the specter of a wider Middle Eastern war. It has been speculated Iran could have assisted Hamas in planning its attack against the Jewish state on October 7 (the event which prompted Tel Aviv's retaliatory campaign), even though both American and Israeli officials have stated that thus far there is no evidence whatsoever to that. In any case, there is much talk about an escalation of the ongoing crisis in Palestine spreading into the wider Middle East area. Unrelatedly, the Pentagon confirmed on Monday that Washington struck two facilities in Syria supposedly linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. On October 31, US defense officials said that American military bases in both Iraq and Syria have been attacked no less than 23 times over the past couple of weeks by Iran-backed groups.

Matthew Kroenig, a Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security vice president, has [stated](#) Washington needs “a two-major-theater planning construct”, possibly also covering Iran. He and his colleagues on the bipartisan Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States recommended just that to Congress earlier this month. Kroenig says the US needs to “deter and, if necessary, defeat major conflicts in the three most important geostrategic regions of the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East.” The question is: how many wars can the US fight? Andrew A. Michta, a Scowcroft Strategy Initiative director (at the Atlantic Council of the US) [writes](#) that Washington, with its “all-volunteer” force model is simply not ready for a war against great powers, “permanent stationing” in both Asia and Europe being needed.

A largely [overburdened](#) United States had been shifting its strategic interest away from the Middle East towards Eastern Europe (plus [Central Asia](#)) and the [Indo-Pacific](#), even while its naval supremacy seems to be [coming to an end](#). However, as I [wrote](#), in June, the US cannot simply “leave” the Middle East, it being a center of petrodollars and oil, not to mention its cultural significance. This is the dilemma an ever overstretched supower now faces. Some analysts, such as Kroenig and Michta, seem to want it all, with American politicians talking about [deploying Special Forces to neighboring Mexico](#) too over a national drug calamity, even as the superpower, short of recruits, faces a [military crisis](#).

Washington's eager support to Tel Aviv's current administration (facing heavy criticism globally), for one thing, highlights the hypocrisy about the US most vocal condemnation plus an unprecedented sanctioning campaign of the Russian military campaign in Ukraine which

started on 24 February 2022. Notwithstanding any criticism one might make of Moscow in this case, not even the most vocal critics have ever come close to describing it as a genocide of ethnic Ukrainians; in fact, on February 22, two days before today's confrontation broke out, an El Pais [piece](#) detailed the humanitarian catastrophe in Donbass, brought about about by Kiev, not Moscow.

On February 24, CNN [reported](#) that Ukrainian forces had "destroyed" a vast part of the region, with [schools](#) and [orphanages](#) evacuated under Ukrainian shelling, causing lots of Donbass residents to [seek refuge](#) in the Rostov Oblast (Russian Federation). The Ukrainian military campaign [against the Donbass](#) region started in April 2014, amid [chauvinistic](#) policies [against Russian-speaking populations](#). This (plus years of US-led [NATO expansion](#) and the rise of the [far-right](#) in Ukraine) provided [the context](#) for today's conflict.

Be it as it may, American hopes for a victory in its [proxy attrition war](#) in Ukraine are now low, and Israel is now in the spotlight. The Jewish State is increasingly isolated internationally, though, and the costs of American full support of it shall keep rising.

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