

# FOREIGN POLICY

## FOR AMERICA

### Prime Minister Netanyahu's Address to Congress - Background Memo

July 2024

#### Background:

On July 24, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will address a joint session of Congress for a fourth time (more than any other Head of State). While addresses by foreign leaders traditionally serve as nonpartisan celebrations of America's closest allies and partners, this address comes in the middle of the U.S. election season and in the face of significant international criticism of Israel's military offensive in Gaza. Many are concerned that Netanyahu will attempt to use this address to Congress for his own domestic political purposes and obtain buy-in for expanding military actions beyond Gaza. Members of Congress must set expectations now for what they want to hear from Netanyahu.

#### Key Points:

Israel faces undeniable threats from Hamas, Hezbollah, and other regional actors, which is why the Biden administration has been steadfast in maintaining America's historic and ironclad commitment to Israel's security. From increasing the U.S. military presence in the region in the immediate wake of the horrific October 7 attacks by Hamas to coordinating an [unprecedented multi-nation effort](#) to strike down more than 300 drones and missiles launched by Iran against Israel in April, the Biden administration has demonstrated unwavering support for Israel's defense while taking steps to reduce the risk of regional escalation.

There is no doubt that the Biden administration will continue to support Israel, but Netanyahu continues to fail to set out a clear and credible path toward bringing the Gaza operation to a close, securing the release of all hostages, scaling up the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and laying the groundwork for a future where Palestinians and Israelis can live safely and securely with freedom, dignity, justice, and prosperity.

Specifically, in his address to Congress, Netanyahu must:

1. Acknowledge the unprecedented support to Israel from President Biden and Congress in the wake of October 7 and continuing to this day.
  - Within days of the attack, President Biden visited Israel as a show of solidarity, becoming the first U.S. president to visit Israel during an ongoing conflict.
  - President Biden also sought, and obtained from Congress, over \$14 billion in emergency assistance to Israel.
2. Reaffirm his commitment to ceasefire negotiations, provide a strategy to end the conflict against Hamas, and outline a plan for the day after.
  - As an Israeli Defense Forces spokesperson [indicated](#), Hamas as an ideology cannot be defeated militarily. Netanyahu's pursuit of tactical victory risks strategic failure.
  - Nine months into the war, Netanyahu owes the world his vision for what comes next, including Palestinian governance and a roadmap for a two-state solution.
  - Netanyahu should also detail how his government is addressing increased settler violence in the West Bank, particularly given the recent news of a [significant expansion](#) of Israel's claim over parts of the area, contrary to calls by the United States and international community for Israel to halt these expansions.
3. Acknowledge the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and detail the steps his administration will take to prevent famine.
  - According to the [World Food Programme](#), aid to southern Gaza has been significantly reduced since the Israeli military took control of Rafah crossing.
4. Commit to exhausting all diplomatic means to address escalating tensions with Hezbollah.
  - In recent days, Hezbollah and Israel have [significantly expanded](#) their tit-for-tat strikes against each other, putting civilians on both sides at risk and [forcing](#) over 150,000 people around the border to flee.
  - There is a significant risk that an expanded confrontation between Hezbollah and Israel could turn into a broader conflict with Iran, which could spark a regional war. The casualties and the humanitarian catastrophe that would generate would be devastating and beyond what we are seeing now.
5. Speak to the broad majority of Congress who support Israel, rather than employ politically divisive rhetoric that damages the traditionally strong bipartisan consensus around the U.S.-Israel relationship.
6. Address legitimate concerns that any additional security assistance provided to Israel not result in U.S. weapons contributing to civilian harm contrary to the laws of armed conflict.

**Member of Congress should reject any attempts by Netanyahu to:**

1. Seek U.S. support for preemptively attacking Hezbollah or other proxy terrorist groups or expanding the conflict regionally.
  - It is not in the interests of the United States or Israel for this conflict to widen, and every effort should be made to limit the likelihood of escalation.
2. Build support for a military strike on Iran's nuclear weapons program, especially in this sensitive political transition period in Iran.
  - Next month, reformist candidate [Masoud Pezeshkian](#) will be sworn in as the next Iranian president. Pezeshkian campaigned openly on a commitment to improve relations with the West and secure sanctions relief through nuclear negotiations, potentially creating a rare diplomatic opening for the United States.
3. Conflate U.S. concerns over aspects of the Israeli military response with lack of support for Israel or its people.
  - Ultimately, the U.S.-Israel relationship will be sustained through honest, constructive dialogue centered on our shared values and interests.