

March 8, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned organizations, write to express deep concern about recent comments from the United States Ambassador to Israel. Addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations summit in Jerusalem on February 19, Ambassador Nides [told](#) the crowd, “Israel can and should do whatever they need to deal with [Iran] and we’ve got their back.” It’s critical that you clarify that these comments do not reflect U.S. policy towards Iran for the sake of regional stability, future diplomacy, and respect for Congress’ constitutional responsibility for war powers.

In both the United States and Israel, there is a vigorous debate about how best to ensure Iran does not secure nuclear weapons. Reports indicate that Israeli military planners are [seriously considering](#) the possibility of a bombing campaign against Iran - with or without the United States. As press [reports](#) of previous U.S. war games revealed, such Israeli action is likely to quickly escalate into a broader regional war – one that would be “[hell on earth](#)” if it pulled in the United States. In this context, publicly or even privately offering unconditional U.S. support for unspecified military action by Israel, or any ally, sets an extremely dangerous precedent and risks further escalation. If the failed Trump administration campaign of “maximum pressure” [opened the door](#) to the Iranian government increasing its enrichment activities, then a bombing campaign against Iran would only make certain that it eventually secures nuclear weapons, completely undermining a core U.S. security objective, while also setting back Iran’s grassroots movement for democracy and human rights. The United States must make its opposition to the military option known, publicly and privately.

Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution is clear. Only Congress has the authority to declare war. The framers gave Congress this power to ensure that the American people, through their elected representatives, have a say in the extraordinary decision of whether to choose war. Congress has not authorized military action against Iran, and Ambassador Nides’ loose talk raises concerns that the administration may again ignore Congress’ constitutional role, and the public’s [clear preference](#), by rushing into a conflict over which the people and their representatives have no say.

The human costs of a military operation that ignites a broader war would be staggering and tragic. Thousands of American troops are stationed in the region, many in the direct line of fire if Iran and its proxies were to mount large-scale retaliations in response to Israeli attacks. It was only two years ago when Iranian missile strikes battered a U.S. base in Iraq, seriously injuring more than 100 troops. Beyond U.S. casualties, such a conflict would threaten untold numbers of communities in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and possibly beyond – nations already in the throes of civil conflict, economic collapse, or both. If a wider regional conflict were to break out, many more civilian and military casualties would be certain to follow in Israel and across U.S. positions throughout the region.

Given Tehran's past aggression directed at American and allied assets and its ongoing threats to retaliate in response to military action, it is confounding, then, that Ambassador Nides implied that Israel's unilateral decision-making would bind U.S. foreign policy. The United States should never outsource its foreign policy to other states – to do so would be highly irresponsible and an abdication of the government's responsibility to protect the American people.

We are concerned the Israeli government will perceive these remarks as tacit approval for military action, even when such action most likely will damage U.S. national security interests, further embroil our military in regional conflict, and prevent future diplomacy. This month marks the 20th anniversary of the disastrous U.S. decision to invade Iraq, which should give policymakers real pause about the unforeseen consequences of a seemingly limited and short-term military operation. We therefore urge you to immediately clarify publicly that Ambassador Nides' comments do not reflect current administration policy and that the United States does not support Israel starting war with Iran.

Sincerely,

Action Corps
American Friends Service Committee
Americans for Justice in Palestine Action
Antiwar.com
Benedictines for Peace
Center for International Policy
Churches for Middle East Peace
CODEPINK
CommonDefense.us
Community Peacemaker Teams
Demand Progress Education Fund
Environmentalists Against War
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Freedom Forward
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ
Global Zero
Historians for Peace and Democracy
How would you like your org's name listed on the letter?
If Not Now
Just Foreign Policy
Justice Democrats
MADRE
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
MPower Change
National Iranian American Council (NIAC)
Neighbors for Peace
Partners for Palestine
Peace Action
Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA)
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Ploughshares Fund

Presbyterian Church (USA)
Progressive Democrats of America
Project South
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
ReThinking Foreign Policy
RootsAction.org
Secure Families Initiative
Sojourners
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
United for Peace and Justice
Win Without War
World BEYOND War
Yemen Freedom Council
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation