

Moving Toward De-escalation and Stabilization in the West Bank

The combination of the new Israeli government, the further deterioration of the security situation in the West Bank, and an increase in terrorism against Israeli civilians calls for the United States to play a more active role in helping to restore calm and stabilize the situation on the ground. In the wake of visits to Israel and the West Bank over the span of a few weeks by Secretary of State Tony Blinken, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, and CIA Director Bill Burns, we recommend that the Biden administration pursue the following policies:

Broker an agreement on security in Area A

IDF incursions into Area A have increased over the past year in response to increased terrorism and militant activity in the northern West Bank, reaching over 600 raids into Palestinian cities per month. While these raids are meant to be a response to the ineffectiveness or absence of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF)—particularly in Jenin and Nablus—they are also drivers of that ineffectiveness or absence by placing enormous political pressure on the PA and the PASF. The U.S. should work in tandem with the IDF and the PASF to restore full security coordination, limit IDF incursions into Area A, set up Palestinian Civil Police SWAT teams for Jenin and Nablus, and assist the PASF with operational planning and logistics in order to increase the PASF's presence in Palestinian population centers. Media reports that the administration is pressing the Palestinian president to accept and implement the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (USSC)'s plan for restoring PA control over Jenin and Nablus are encouraging. However, this plan has to include cooperation from Israel to reduce the IDF's presence in Area A over a set period to an agreed minimum and to ensure that IDF activity in Area A focuses on clear and imminent threats.

Coordinate joint condemnations of Palestinian terrorism

The PA's tacit support of terrorism through praise of terrorists and condolence visits to terrorists' families is grossly irresponsible and further inflames the situation by glorifying the murder of civilians. In addition to pressing the PA to cease such activity, the U.S. should coordinate joint condemnations of terrorism by the PA alongside Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, Bahrain, and Morocco. Doing so will provide the PA with some political cover, and such statements can also emphasize support for the Palestinian cause and Palestinian statehood.

Use influence with Likud ministers more attuned to American and regional concerns

There are already visible divisions within the Israeli government between Likud ministers such as Defense Minister Yoav Galant and Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, and non-Likud ministers such as Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir. Galant and Cohen are more receptive to U.S. concerns over how provocative actions in the West Bank

regarding settlement construction, settler violence, more aggressive rules of engagement, and home demolitions can destabilize the security situation even more and lead to unnecessary regional tensions. The administration should be aware of this dynamic and use it to its advantage by giving Galant and Cohen political cover to limit some of the more damaging moves being pushed by Smotrich and Ben Gvir.

Ensure civil coordination continues

The Biden administration should encourage the continuation of all civil coordination and current Israeli economic policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians, which include improved freedom of access and movement, work permits in Israel for both West Bank and Gaza residents, infrastructure projects, promotion of 4G networks, and the development of industrial zones. The U.S. should also suggest that Israel refrain from penalizing the PA through the mechanism of freezing and permanently confiscating tax revenue funds, which are an essential lifeline for the struggling PA.

Promote economic plans that target Palestinian youth

The U.S. should build a coalition of Arab countries to develop and implement an economic development plan targeting Palestinian youth. While the current Israeli economic policy toward the Palestinians is relatively permissive, none of the measures adopted over the last few years addressed the needs of the younger Palestinian generation. Morocco, which implemented a successful plan for its own youth, can be an important partner and role model. A more specific initiative the U.S. could undertake is supporting the Silicon Wadi plan in Jerusalem and parallel efforts to boost the Palestinian tech sector in partnership with the Israeli tech sector. Although this plan is for Jerusalem and not the West Bank, by providing Palestinian youth with a horizon, it could meet all sides' needs while mitigating political risks.

Mobilize support for international economic and developmental investment in the West Bank

The administration should utilize Arab countries' interest in economic projects to mobilize support for additional international investment in the West Bank. Such investment could be directed towards infrastructure, roads, wastewater plants, the Tarkumiyeh industrial zone, solar energy projects, upgrading the Allenby crossing, parking lots on the Palestinian side of checkpoints and crossings into Israel, and more. While the investment should be independent, the PA should be a partner in project planning.

The U.S. must continue demanding Palestinian Authority reforms

The administration should work with its European and Arab partners and use their collective leverage to demand a reform of the PA. This should include a reform of the security sector, eliminating barriers and creating incentives to build a Palestinian environment that is conducive to a flourishing private sector, and a political governance reform that would gradually improve services and restore public trust in the PA institutions.