

MEMMO

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America Supports Israel's Defensive Actions

American leaders on a bipartisan basis and other world leaders are voicing critical support for Israel's defensive actions in Gaza. Israel responded strongly this weekend to Hamas' abandonment of a six-month lull in fighting and its resumption of large-scale rocket barrages on Israeli civilians. Egyptian and Palestinian leaders also have squarely placed the blame on Hamas, which has cynically used its grip over Gaza to attack Israel rather than see after the needs of its own people.

The administration and the bipartisan leadership of Congress recognize Israel's right to defend its citizens from constant rocket attacks.

- **On behalf of the Bush administration, White House spokesman Gordon D. Johndroe** backed Israel's actions against Hamas, saying, "The United States understands that Israel needs to take actions to defend itself. ... Israel is going after terrorists who are firing rockets and mortars into Israel, and they are taking the steps that they feel are necessary to deal with the terrorist threat. Now, no one wants to see violence. But what we're going to need to see in order to end this is Hamas needs to stop firing rockets into Israel and we all need to get to a sustainable ceasefire."
- **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** said the United States "strongly condemn[s] the repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and holds Hamas responsible for breaking the ceasefire and for the renewal of violence there."
- **David Axelrod, senior adviser to President-elect Barack Obama**, reiterated Obama's statement made during a July visit to Sderot that Israel has a right to defend itself. "He did, as you said, visit Sderot in July, and he said then that he thought that when bombs are ... raining down on your citizens, it is—it's obviously unacceptable."
- **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)** said he strongly "support[s] Israel's right to defend its citizens against rocket and mortar attacks from Hamas-controlled Gaza, which have killed and injured Israeli citizens, and to restore security to its residents. Hamas' failure to stop these attacks only exacerbates the humanitarian situation for the residents of Gaza and undermines efforts to attain peace and security in the region."
- **Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)** said Gaza cannot be allowed to serve as a "sanctuary" for attacks on Israel and that "when Israel is attacked, the United States must continue to stand strongly with its friend and democratic ally."
- **House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)** said, "Israel is acting in clear self-defense in response to heinous rocket attacks from Hamas-controlled Gaza. As a sovereign nation, Israel has an

unequivocal right to take action to ensure the security and safety of her citizens.”

- **House Republican Whip Eric Cantor (VA)** said while Israel continues to strive for peace with its neighbors, it has “been forced to respond to terrorism with justifiable and understandable force to ensure their security. In contrast, Hamas has once again demonstrated its willingness to murder innocent Israelis and Palestinian civilians to achieve their political goals.”
- **House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Howard L. Berman (D-CA)** said “Israel has a right, indeed a duty, to defend itself in response to the hundreds of rockets and mortars fired from Gaza over the past week. No government in the world would sit by and allow its citizens to be subjected to this kind of indiscriminate bombardment. The loss of innocent life is a terrible tragedy, and the blame for that tragedy lies with Hamas.”
- **House Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)** said Israel’s response to indiscriminate rocket attacks “has been carefully calibrated to halt the rocket fire, aimed at surgically eliminating Hamas militants and the teams that are operating the rockets, while at the same time making every effort to limit civilian casualties.”
- **Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)** blamed Hamas for the current situation, saying the terrorist group “is abusing the people of Gaza by using their homes as a base for terror operations. The world should no longer tolerate a terrorist government in the Gaza Strip.”
- **Rep. John McHugh (R-NY)** said, “As a sovereign nation, it is clearly within Israel’s rights to act in its own self-defense against all terrorist actions. The safety and security of Israel’s citizens must be its preeminent concern, and indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks on Israeli civilians cannot be tolerated.”

Egypt and the Palestinian Authority blamed Hamas for the increased hostilities.

- **Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit** firmly placed responsibility for the breakdown of the calm on Hamas, saying he had warned Hamas about continued rocket fire at Israel. “For quite some time, Egypt has been warning,” Gheit said. “Whoever tried to confuse the understanding and [ignore] this warning, must bear the responsibility. The prime minister of Israel warned the Hamas and said: ‘You must stop, otherwise we will take measures in response.’ In response to what? To not renewing the calm, to the rocket fire.”
- **Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas** said he pressed Hamas to continue the six-month calm, which Hamas shattered by firing more than 300 rockets and mortars into Israel in the weeks leading up to Dec. 19, the official end date to the calm. “We spoke to them and told them ‘Please, we ask you not to end the cease-fire. Let it continue,’” Abbas said. “We want to protect the Gaza Strip. We don’t want it to be destroyed.”

Other world leaders also are backing Israel’s right to self defense and blaming Hamas for the current situation.

- **German Chancellor Angela Merkel** said responsibility for the conflict lies “clearly and exclusively” with Hamas. **German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier** said Hamas should “immediately and permanently stop the insufferable rocket attacks on Israel.”

- **British Prime Minister Gordon Brown** called on “Gazan militants to cease all rocket attacks on Israel immediately. These attacks are designed to cause random destruction and to undermine the prospects of peace talks led by President [Mahmoud] Abbas. I understand the Israeli government's sense of obligation to its population.”
- **Canadian Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon** said “Israel has a clear right to defend itself against the continued rocket attacks by Palestinian militant groups which have deliberately targeted civilians. First and foremost, those rocket attacks must stop.”