

Difference of principle or electoral opportunism?



Photo: The Jerusalem Post

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Washington has warned Israel that military aid could be restricted unless it takes steps to improve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. President Joe Biden's unconditional support for the Palestinian massacre in Gaza is threatening the Democratic candidacy. This explains the White House's eagerness to distance itself morally from Israel.

The State Department, the White House and the Pentagon confirmed that Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin had sent a letter on the subject to Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer.

Copies of the five-page letter, which included a long list of demands for Israel to meet, including assurances from the US that "there will be no policy of forced evacuation from the north to the south of Gaza", were circulated on social media on Tuesday. Washington also called on Israel to halt its actions against the

United Nations Relief and Works Agency, the main provider of humanitarian aid in Gaza. Israel has sought to close the agency, claiming that some of its staff belong to Hamas.

Washington said it shared Israel's concerns but did not believe the agency should be closed and expressed concern about Knesset (parliament) legislation that would prevent the agency from operating in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said the issue was related to a new US policy introduced in February under National Security Memorandum No. 20, which conditions military assistance "on compliance with international law and international humanitarian law".

The letter called on Israel to allow 350 truckloads of goods into Gaza each day and to establish "appropriate humanitarian pauses" to allow for the distribution of aid, stressing that the World Food Program's plan for roads, warehouses and staging areas should be implemented quickly. Miller said the letter made clear "our concerns about the level of humanitarian assistance that is reaching Gaza".

The US gave Israel 30 days to change the situation. A similar letter was sent to Israel in April, Miller said, explaining that the situation had improved for a time, but that aid levels had since declined. The House Foreign Affairs Committee asked the Biden administration for a briefing on the letter. Defense sources suggested that Israel would probably have no choice but to comply with US demands on the humanitarian situation in Gaza at the end of the 30 days.

The US-Israeli dispute over Gaza is flaring up in the midst of a bitter dispute over Lebanon, with the White House pressuring Israel to shift from a military campaign against Hezbollah to diplomacy. But with three weeks to go before the 5 November elections, experts say it is not clear whether the difference between Washington and Tel Aviv is real or just an appearance for electoral purposes.

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