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North Dakota leaders call for support of Israel in wake of Hamas attack

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North Dakota elected officials are issuing statements of support for Israel in the wake of a surprise attack from Hamas, an Islamic militant group which is in control of Palestine.

The assault, which included the deployment of around 1,000 troops alongside hundreds of rockets fired at Israel, is the latest escalation of a decadeslong conflict relating to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. It also marks the start of the fifth such war between Israel and Hamas since the latter took power in Palestine 16 years ago.

As of Monday evening, Israeli authorities had reported at least 900 deaths and more than 2,500 injuries as a result of the Hamas attacks, with at least 100 civilians and soldiers taken hostage. In Gaza, Palestinian authorities said at least 687 had been killed by Israeli retaliation, and 2,600 had been injured.

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Hamas launched its initial attack Saturday, with Israel responding in a series of retaliatory airstrikes. The Israel Defense Forces said over 1,500 military targets were hit in Gaza. American politicians have responded by affirming their support for Israel as the federal government prepares an initial round of aid to its longtime ally.

U.S. Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., condemned Hamas' attack against Israel, calling the move "horrific."

"We stand with our ally and remain committed to supporting Israel as it defends itself," Hoeven said in a statement. "Further, we must hold Iran accountable for its sponsorship of Hamas and other terrorist organizations."

The land rights conflict between Israel and Palestine stems from the 1922 Mandate for Palestine, which required "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" while also calling for the protection of non-Jewish communities in the region. The U.S. formally recognized Israel as a state after the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence, a declaration that also sparked the Arab-Israeli War that year. The war expelled many Palestinians from their homes.

Since the Six-Day War in 1967, which included Israel's capture of east Jerusalem from Palestinian control and marked its complete hold on the city, members of both parties have also reiterated competing claims over various holy sites in the region.

Israel and Hamas have been at opposition for the better part of two decades, with Israel and Egypt enforcing an ongoing land, air and sea blockade of the Gaza Strip after Hamas seized power over Palestine in 2007. Palestinian territory in the region has consistently decreased since Israel was first recognized as a state in 1948, while Israeli occupancy has expanded.

Gaza has been a **flashpoint** in this conflict, according to The Associated Press. Over two-thirds of the city's residents previously lived within Israeli borders or are descendants of those who were forced from their homes or fled in the wake of Israel's creation.

U.S. Sen. Kevin Cramer, R-N.D., also decried the attack on Saturday. Cramer, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, cast blame on longtime Hamas ally Iran. Senior Hamas official Ali Barakeh, however, **told The Associated Press** Monday that Iran was not involved in the planning of the attack.

"I stand with our ally in the face of this naked aggression by Iran and its pawn, Hamas, and condemn these terrorist acts," Cramer said in a statement. "The United States must unequivocally support Israel's right to defend itself from brutal terrorists and those who support their immoral actions."

Israel is the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. foreign assistance since World War II, according to **Congressional research**. It is the **15th-highest military spender** in the world as of 2022, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. America provides about \$3 billion in annual military aid to what it describes as its closest partner in the Middle East.

U.S. Rep. Kelly Armstrong, R-N.D., reiterated that commitment in a post on X, the website formerly known as Twitter, on Saturday, stating that "America stands with Israel."

President Joe Biden has already approved initial assistance for Israel that's to include a variety of military weapons. But any attempts at approving further aid may face a delayed approval process in the House of Representatives, which is currently without a Speaker of the House.

At least 11 Americans were killed in the initial Hamas attack on Israel, Biden said Monday, with others unaccounted for as residents and visitors alike attempt to flee the region. Among those looking to return to America is a group of **85 North Dakota residents** on a religious trip that is stuck in Palestine-controlled Bethlehem. The cohort includes many from Fargo, West Fargo and Grand Forks. The group has received multiple reports of potential departure timelines, but the evolving situation has left airlines in a state of flux as they navigate service to the region.

"We stand with our democratic ally Israel while lifting up in prayer the victims of these horrific attacks," Gov. Doug Burgum said in a statement Monday. "We also pray for the safe return of the priests and parishioners from North Dakota congregations who are anxiously waiting to board flights home."