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USA

# Israel-Iran Conflict Becomes Issue in U.S. Presidential Election

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**In a presidential election dominated by domestic issues, the Iran-Israel conflict pushes foreign policy to the fore. Still, Americans' concerns about the economy and immigration are likely to determine the outcome.**

Israel's bombing of Iran on October 26, a response to Iran's earlier firing of 300 missiles at Israel at the beginning of October, represents an expansion of Israel's wars on Gaza and Lebanon, threatens a regional conflict and raises the horrifying prospect of involving Israel's partner the United States and Iran's ally Russia, both nuclear powers. The conflict is now also an issue in the U.S. presidential election.

Vice-President Kamala Harris is once again tested on the question of her steadfast support for Joe Biden's commitment to Israel and Donald Trump has an opportunity to lambast the Biden-Harris administration for their foreign policy failures. Trump and Harris both view Iran as an enemy of Israel and the United States, and Trump has a particular animus against Iran since U.S. intelligence informed him that Iran was planning to assassinate him.

Following the Israel bombardment of Tehran, Harris stated once again, "We maintain the importance of supporting Israel's right to defend itself," but she added, "we are also very adamant that we must see de-escalation in the region going forward, and that will be our focus." This parallels the earlier Biden-Harris position of supporting Israel's right to make war on Hamas in Gaza, but calling for a ceasefire there and also later in Lebanon—while taking no action to bring one about.

As for Trump, he told Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu earlier this month, "Do what you have to do." Trump has been in regular communication with Netanyahu, and Biden has expressed concern that Trump might harm U.S. diplomatic efforts to prevent an expansion of the conflict. Yet Trump has also said, "They (Israel and Iran) are very close to global catastrophe," and, he added, "We have a nonexistent president and a nonexistent vice president who should be in charge. But nobody knows what's going on."

As vice-president, Harris had years of foreign policy experience, as did Trump as president, but it is Trump who says he will "Make America Great Again" both at home and abroad. His strongman appeal may win the argument.

Yet, while the debate over Israel's wars in Gaza, Lebanon, and now Iran rages in elite circles and among some voters, for most Americans, the priority is the U.S. economy, followed by immigration. Trump has through the past year driven the political debate first with Biden and then with Harris. Trump argues that America is a failing nation, that average Americans can't afford housing and basic necessities. And immigration, says Trump poses an existential threat to American life and national identity.

He and his running mate Senator J.D. Vance have argued that immigrants bring crime, disease, and "poison the blood" of the American people. Immigrants, they say, take Americans' jobs, especially from Black and Hispanic workers. Harris' call for an "opportunity economy" has not assuaged voters' anxieties and she has not—as Senator Bernie Sanders suggested—put forward a program for the working class.

International affairs—even the prospect of a regional war—cannot overcome Americans' historic disinterest in such matters, at least as long as the United States is not directly involved and U.S. lives are not threatened. The one thing Americans do want is that the United States be strong. Eighty years of U.S. global economic, political and military dominance lead Americans to presume that the United States is the "indispensable nation," as politicians, historians,

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and journalists have claimed. So, will they believe that Harris or Trump projects the greater impression of strength and power they desire?

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