

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 1, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Jake Sullivan
National Security Advisor
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

I write today to demand transparency from you regarding the approximately 500 Americans being held hostage in Gaza. In Sunday's *Face The Nation* interview, you stated, "*the challenge right now is the Egyptians are prepared to let Americans and other foreign nationals out of Gaza, the Israelis have no issue, but Hamas is preventing their departure and making demands.*"¹ On Monday, White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby reaffirmed that Hamas was making "a number of demands" to allow foreign nationals to leave Gaza.²

Federal law defines "hostage taking" as "the seizing or detention of an individual coupled with a threat to kill, injure, or continue to detain such individual in order to compel a third person or governmental organization to take some action."³ The reality is clear: by preventing the departure of additional Americans from Gaza in exchange for demands on the U.S. government, Hamas is holding these Americans as hostages. Continuing to make offhanded statements in the media, while refusing to acknowledge the dire hostage situation that 500 of our own citizens are facing, is egregious.⁴ The American people, already gravely concerned about the conflict in Israel, deserve to know the full truth about the impact of this conflict on our citizens.⁵ And the hundreds of U.S. citizens who are being forced to stay in Gaza under the control of murderous terrorists deserve the full support of their government.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time you have misled the entire government, as well as the American public, about the status of security threats in the Middle East. Just eight days before Hamas launched their barbaric surprise attack against Israel, you stated, "*the Middle East is quieter*

¹ Transcript: National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan on "Face the Nation," Oct. 29, 2023, CBS NEWS (Oct. 29, 2023), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/national-security-adviser-jake-sullivan-face-the-nation-transcript-10-29-2023/>.

² Alexandra Hutzler & Shannon Crawford, *US Wants to See Up to 100 Aid Trucks Enter Gaza Daily, Doesn't Support Cease-Fire*, ABC NEWS (Oct. 30, 2023), <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-100-aid-trucks-enter-gaza-daily-support/story?id=104490332>.

³ 18 U.S.C. § 1203.

⁴ Adriana Diaz, Adam Siddiq, Ahmed Shawkat, & Tucker Reals, *Families of Americans Trapped by Israel-Hamas War in Gaza Tell CBS News They're Scared and Feel "Betrayed,"* CBS NEWS (Oct. 26, 2023) <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-americans-trapped-families-scared-and-betrayed/>.

⁵ Barak Ravid, *Hamas Releases 2 American Hostages Held in Gaza*, AXIOS (Oct. 20, 2023), <https://www.axios.com/2023/10/20/hamas-release-hostage-americans-war-gaza-israel>.

today than it has been in two decades.”⁶ Yet, to date, over 1,400 Israelis have been killed, including 33 Americans murdered by Hamas.⁷

To get these people home, we cannot employ your usual strategy of appeasement of the Iranian regime. The United States should never negotiate with terrorists, especially those which seek to destroy Israel, our strongest ally in the Middle East. The Iranian regime is the world’s largest state sponsor of terrorism, and it has no qualms with funding terrorist groups throughout the Middle East, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. We have witnessed Iran-backed Hamas murder innocent civilians and we have seen evidence that Hamas beheaded babies and burned Israelis alive. Their abhorrent actions are an affront to the Western values we hold dear. We must do everything we can to rescue these Americans without engaging in appeasement of Hamas or other Iranian proxies, which will only embolden future campaigns of violence.

I ask that you provide a staff briefing no later than Monday, November 6, to answer the following questions:

- 1.) You stated that the United States is in regular contact with Americans in Gaza. How many Americans have been able to successfully reach out to the U.S. government, and what is the estimate of the number of Americans that remain in Gaza that have not been able to reach out?
- 2.) Does the United States acknowledge the statutory definition for “hostage taking”? If not, what is the definition the United States is utilizing to determine who is a hostage in Gaza?
- 3.) If the United States recognizes the statutory definition of “hostage taking,” why have you not categorized the Americans trapped in Gaza in your hostage estimates?
- 4.) What is the Biden Administration’s plan to secure the safe release of all Americans in the Gaza region?
- 5.) What specific steps is the Biden Administration taking to facilitate the safe release of all Americans in the Gaza region?
- 6.) Does the Biden Administration plan on engaging in negotiations or diplomatic discussions with Hamas to facilitate the release of the approximately 500 American hostages?

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator

⁶ Katie Rogers, *Jake Sullivan’s ‘Quieter’ Middle East Comments Did Not Age Well*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 26, 2023) <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/26/us/politics/jake-sullivan-foreign-affairs-israel-middle-east.html>.

⁷ Dov Lieber, *Israeli Hostage Count Rises to 240*, WALL ST. J. (Nov. 1, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-gaza-war-latest/card/israeli-hostage-count-rises-to-240-qS3abkXF0aKQNgBa1IKu#>.