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U.S. Strikes on Pro-Iran Militias Reveal Iran's Arms Trafficking Hub | Opinion

Seth J. Frantzman



CAPT. ROBYN HAAKE/US ARMY/AFP via Getty Images. This handout picture released by the U.S. Army shows U.S. Army Paratroopers assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, deploy from Pope Army Airfield, North Carolina on January 1, 2020.

U. S. airstrikes on Albukamal over the weekend were ordered against facilities used by Iran-backed militias.

In a statement from Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby, the Pentagon said that "the targets were selected because these facilities are utilized by Iran-backed militias that are engaged in unmanned aerial vehicle attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq."

Iran has increasingly turned the Iraq-Syria border region into a hub of influence that includes missile and drone bases and trafficking of weapons that threaten the entire region and key U.S. allies such as Israel.

Albukamal is a border town in Syria situated on the Iraqi border. It has become a key transit point for pro-Iranian militias in the last several years after [ISIS](#) fighters were defeated in the area in 2017.

By the summer of 2018, there was so much activity by Iranian militias in the area that they had built a headquarters in a large villa.

In June 2018, an airstrike hit the headquarters and the pro-Iranian groups said 22 of their members were killed. Iranian-backed militias blamed the U.S. and Israel for the strike, although it still remains unclear who bombed them.

The 2018 airstrike targeted a similar area as the ones over the weekend. This reveals the extent to which Iran has come to influence control over this key border area.

Albukamal is strategic because it sits on the Euphrates River and it has long functioned as a hub for terrorist groups moving back and forth between Iraq and Syria. Support for Saddam Hussein's regime was strong in this area on both sides of the border.

After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Assad regime in Syria enabled fighters to travel to Iraq through the area. And after ISIS was defeated, Iran began to view this as part of its desire for a road to the sea that stretches from Tehran through Baghdad to Damascus and Beirut.

To secure Albukamal and the border area, Iran turned to pro-Iranian militias in Iraq. These militias, with names like Kataib Hezbollah, resemble the Hezbollah terror army in Lebanon, but they are official paramilitary forces of the Iraqi government called Popular Mobilization Units. These units, such as Brigade 14 of Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, which was struck on June 28, are close to the nefarious Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iran.

Iran began moving ballistic missiles to Iraq in 2018 and it began building a base next to Albukamal to facilitate weapons transfers. This was a threat to Israel. Reports emerged showing satellite photos of the Iranian presence in 2018 and 2019, and the site was targeted numerous times in airstrikes that Syrian media reported were carried out by Israel.

The airstrikes on Albukamal coincided with a major rise in tensions in Iraq between the U.S. and pro-Iran groups. This culminated in dozens of rocket attacks on U.S. forces, the killing of an American contractor and January 2020 airstrikes by the Trump administration that killed IRGC Quds Force head Qassem Soleimani and Kataib Hezbollah leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

US Military Conducts Airstrikes On 'Iran-backed Militia Groups'
Muhandis had warned the U.S. in June 2018 that the U.S. would pay a price for attacking pro-Iran bases in Albukamal. "To the Americans, we say...we will not be quiet about this attack." In the end it was Muhandis who was killed, but the Albukamal bases remained and they continued to build up influence.

These groups have amped up their attacks against U.S. facilities in Iraq, increasingly using drones. They used drones to target on June 27 an area near the site for the new U.S. consulate under construction around Erbil.

The White House and Pentagon singled out the drone threat as the reason for targeting Albukamal. It remains to be seen if the airstrikes will actually deter Iran and its proxies.

What is important is that the airstrikes have once again pinpointed how Iran seeks to dominate Syria and Iraq through control of this key border area. Indeed, it is a key to the whole region for Iran's network of proxies.

The pro-Iranian militias in Iraq operate on both sides of the border, and groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon have moved forces to Syria in recent years, taking advantage of their alliance with the Syrian regime and the weakness of the Syrian and Iraqi governments.

Iran's use of Iraqi, Syrian, Lebanese and Yemeni soil to carry out attacks across the region, using missiles and drones, is a major challenge for Washington and regional partners such as Israel and the Sunni Gulf states. It's unclear if the Iraqi state will ever be able to reduce the role of the pro-Iranian militias, who now have an octopus-like hold on the government and its institutions.

A recent summit between Egypt, Jordan and Iraq notwithstanding, Iran appears to have put down roots in places like Albukamal that will be difficult to remove. In the absence of the ability to remove them, airstrikes against Iranian weapons trafficking and its drone bases amount to the only way to keep Tehran in check.

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The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.

Michael Reagan: Did I really hear Biden say that?

Michael Reagan - Making Sense

*Last week, did I hear the president of the United States say Americans need to get F-15s and nukes if we really want to keep the government in line?
I did hear it.*

Biden apparently was trying to make fun of us “gun nuts” who say Americans need the protections of the Second Amendment to own firearms in case we have to prevent the government from taking away our liberties.

It was garbled and choppy, because Biden went off the Teleprompter, but he said: “Those who say the blood of Patriots, you know, and all the stuff about how we’re gonna have to move against the government ... if you think you need to have weapons to take on the government, you need F-15s and maybe some nuclear weapons.”

Today I’m not sure if I should buy an F-15 or a bomb shelter – or both.

Biden’s address on how his administration intends to combat rising gun violence and soaring crime rates in our biggest cities was another big liberal gift to the gun industry.

It was filled with the usual stupid arguments and unchecked “facts” from the gun-control crowd.

Biden talked about responsible hunters knowing you don't need to outfit your deer rifle with 100-round clips – clips that don't exist on this planet.

He talked about how we need to ban AR-15 “assault rifles” (again) to reduce gun violence, even though more Americans are stabbed to death each year than are killed by rifles.

The vast majority of gun homicides – 20,000 last year, the highest in 20 years — are committed in cities with handguns – often stolen ones.

Few of those handguns were sold to the shooters by the rogue dealers whom Biden called “merchants of death” who “are breaking the law for profit.”

The idea that an up-and-coming gangbanger in the Latin Kings of Chicago stops by the corner gun store to pick up a new Glock on his way to kill a rival is a liberal myth that will not die.

Gun-control nuts, Biden and the liberal media still think buying a gun over the counter is as easy as buying a six-pack, but that's only because they've never had to buy one.

Here in California, where I live, buying any kind of gun – and ammo – involves a lot of paperwork and a three-day wait for the ATF to do its background check. My son Cameron and I buy what we need to hunt with all the time at the same gun store.

The owners know exactly who we are, but they aren't the ones who do the background check each time we buy a box of shotgun shells – it's the government.

The gun store sends the information in and when we're approved we go and pick up the shotgun shells. That's how it works in the real world.

It's pretty clear that people like Biden who are making these decisions have never hunted and never actually had to go out and buy a pistol for protection.

They don't have to buy a gun because the people around them – their bodyguards and private security – do it.

At the end of his address Biden said something about giving high school kids a job instead of a gun when they graduate.

That was a great soundbite, I guess, if you think guns are the main cause of crime.

But what Biden should be calling for is for kids in our cities to be given a proper public education instead of the horrible one they've been getting for half a century.

About 75 percent of black and brown kids in grammar school are reported to be unable to read or do math at their grade level, yet now they're being taught critical race theory and that the country was founded on racism.

Oops, sorry. I've got to stop. The contractor is here to see if I can fix up my garage to fit an F-15.

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The border crime surge undermines Harris's claims of 'progress'
Samuel Kim

Vice President Kamala Harris visited El Paso on Friday and claimed her team made "a lot of progress," completely ignoring the wave of drugs and migrants pouring across the border.



Provided by Washington Examiner

At the end of April alone, U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported multiple instances of human trafficking by smugglers. The agency also apprehended several migrants formerly convicted of sexual assault, rape, and attempted murder, among other offenses.

And the situation has gotten worse. In June, FBI Director Christopher Wray testified to Congress that the flow of the synthetic opioid fentanyl across the border could "fairly be described as an epidemic."

This year, CBP agents have seized nearly 6,500 pounds of fentanyl so far. This is more than the total seized in all of 2020. A CBP spokesman said that "criminal organizations shifted their operations" during the pandemic, citing increased seizures among U.S. citizens.

Human trafficking has continued on the Biden administration's watch. On June 24, Yuma Sector CBP agents *intercepted* four smuggling attempts in a single day. Two days earlier, a joint law enforcement operation in Laredo, Texas, *shut down* six "stash houses" and found nearly 150 undocumented immigrants, none of whom were wearing PPE.

Border agents have continued to encounter gang members and convicted criminals on the southern border. The Del Rio Sector in Texas has *reported* a 3,166% increase in arrests of convicted sex offenders since the beginning of fiscal 2021.

In addition to *apprehending* members of the transnational gang MS-13, CBP agents have allegedly *arrested* two Yemenis on the FBI's Terrorism Screening Center list at the border.

Even though the Biden administration has resisted calls from liberals to "abolish ICE," it has implemented policies that make enforcement more difficult. In interviews with the Washington Post, ICE officials *have said* they believe their work is being "essentially abolished" through restrictions on deportations and arrests.

Biden has also *ordered* an "immediate pause" on all border wall construction, despite the October 2020 DHS release *revealing* that new barriers significantly reduced apprehensions and illegal entries.

On June 16, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott *announced* that he will continue border wall construction, using an initial \$250 million in funding. This is a step in the right direction.

And officials will not even visit areas most affected by the border crisis. The vice president faced criticism for choosing to visit El Paso.

Rep. Henry Cuellar *told* the Washington Examiner, "Politically, it's safer to go [to El Paso], but if you want to get a real idea of what's happening at the border, you've got to go where the hot spot is, and that is the lower Rio Grande."

Rep. Veronica Escobar's *description* of El Paso as "the new Ellis Island" further demonstrates Democrats' ignorance of the present border crisis. Yes, there are "huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

But unlike the immigrants of the 1900s, many yearn to be free from the human smugglers and criminal gangs who exploit them. And they are the victims of this crisis, created by the current administration's misplaced priorities and gross negligence.

Antony Blinken Warns Russia 'We Will Respond' If Cyber Attacks Continue **Brendan Cole**

Secretary of State *Antony Blinken* has vowed a U.S. response would follow if Moscow targeted the U.S. with a cyber attack, as he reiterated his administration's concern about hacker threats as a major issue of national security.



Andrew Harnik/Getty Secretary of State Antony Blinken waves at Ciampino Airport in Rome to travel to Bari, Italy, on June 28, 2021. He said that the U.S. would "respond" to any cyber attack from Russia.

Blinken told the Italian newspaper La Repubblica that cyber hacking had been discussed during [this month's summit](#) between the U.S. President [Joe Biden](#) and his Russian counterpart, [Vladimir Putin](#).

The interview was published Tuesday after he visited Rome for talks about the global Islamist threat. In it, the Secretary of State referred to the attack on the [Colonial Pipeline](#) on the U.S. East Coast, which the [FBI has linked to DarkSide](#), a ransomware gang believed to be based in Russia, although not thought to be state-sponsored.

"We expect Russia to take action to prevent these cyber attacks from happening again," Blinken told the paper, according to a translation.

Blinken said that there were areas of national infrastructures of strategic interest that should be off limits, such as water, electricity and public transport, and these "must be protected from cyber attacks. We have made this clear to Putin."

The U.S. has sanctioned Moscow over the [SolarWinds attack](#) that compromised American government departments, carried out by hackers believed to be directed by the Russian intelligence service, the SVR. The Kremlin denies any involvement.

He said that as Biden had previously told Putin, the U.S. hopes to have a "more stable and profitable relationship" with Russia which includes co-operation on strategic issues such as arms control, cyber security, and regional crises.

He also referred to jailed opposition politician [Alexei Navalny](#). Last week, the U.S. announced it was preparing fresh sanctions against Russia for Navalny's near fatal poisoning linked to Moscow, although the Russian authorities deny responsibility.

"If Russia continues to attack us, or to act as it did with the SolarWinds attacks, the intrusions into our elections, and the aggression against Navalny, then we will respond," he said, according to Reuters.

"Not because we want conflict, but because we care about our values and principles," he said. "It is up to Russia to decide."

In a lengthy article for the newspaper Kommersant, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said the Biden-Putin summit had been "generally constructive" and said an "understanding" had been reached on issues including "consultations on cybersecurity."

He also repeated the accusations, made by Putin in an op-ed for Die Zeit last week that the U.S., NATO and the EU had supported a coup in Ukraine in 2014.

Newsweek has contacted the Kremlin for comment.

U.S. Military 'Under Multiple Rocket Attack' in Syria after Strikes, Fires Back *Tom O'Connor*

V. S. forces in Syria came under attack by multiple launch rocket systems in the wake of a series of airstrikes targeting suspected Iran-backed militias along the country's border with Syria, prompting troops to return fire.

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Specialist Trevor Franklin/Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve/U.S. Army U.S. Army soldiers assigned to the C/2-156th Infantry, 2nd Plt Charlie Battery/1-141 FA conduct crew training on a M777 Howitzer at the Conoco oil field in Syria on June 14. U.S. forces in Syria have supported the allied Syrian Democratic Forces retain control of key oil and gas resources despite protests from the country's government.

"At approx. 7:44 PM local time, U.S. Forces in Syria were attacked by multiple rockets," U.S.-led coalition spokesperson Army Colonel Wayne Marotto said in an initial statement Monday.

"There are no injuries and damage is being assessed. We will provide updates when we have more information."

In a follow-up message, he said the [U.S. military](#) had retaliated.

"Update: U.S. Forces in Syria, while under multiple rocket attack, acted in self-defense and conducted counter-battery artillery fire at rocket launching positions," Marotto said.

The exchange comes a day after the [Pentagon](#) conducted what Press Secretary John Kirby called "defensive precision air strikes against facilities used by Iran-backed militia groups in the Iraq-Syria border region."

"The targets were selected because these facilities are utilized by Iran-backed militias that are engaged in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks against U.S. personnel and facilities in Iraq," Kirby said.

"Specifically, the U.S. strikes targeted operational and weapons storage facilities at two locations in Syria and one location in Iraq, both of which lie close to the border between those countries."

He identified two of the groups targeted as Kataib Hezbollah and Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada, two Iraqi factions operation as part of the pro-Iran "Axis of Resistance." Kirby said the strikes demonstrated how Biden "has been clear that he will act to protect U.S. personnel."

"Given the ongoing series of attacks by Iran-backed groups targeting U.S. interests in Iraq, the President directed further military action to disrupt and deter such attacks," Kirby said.

"We are in Iraq at the invitation of the Government of Iraq for the sole purpose of assisting the Iraqi Security Forces in their efforts to defeat [ISIS](#). The United States took necessary, appropriate, and deliberate action designed to limit the risk of escalation—but also to send a clear and unambiguous deterrent message."

He argued that the U.S. was justified in taking action under international law "pursuant to its right of self-defense," and, on the domestic level, cited the White House's Article II authority granted in the wake of 9/11 to pursue designated terrorist organizations.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry condemned the recent airstrikes, which appeared to target the eastern areas of Al-Hury, Qasabat and As Sakik.

"The Syrian Arab Republic condemns the blatant U.S. aggression on the Syrian-Iraqi border region and considers it a flagrant violation of the sanctity of Syrian and Iraqi lands," the ministry said in a statement Monday.

"Syria renews its call to the U.S. administration to respect the unity of the land and people of Syria and Iraq and to stop these attacks on the independence of the two countries immediately."

The strikes were also condemned by Iraq despite the partnership between the two countries.

"The Ministerial Council for National Security expressed its strong condemnation and censure of the American bombing that targeted a site on our border with Syria," according to a statement sent to Newsweek on Monday by Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's office, "stressing that this attack represents a flagrant violation of Iraqi sovereignty, which is rejected by all international laws and covenants."

The council stated that it "is studying resorting to all available legal options to prevent the recurrence of such attacks that violate Iraq's airspace and territory, in addition to conducting a comprehensive investigation into the circumstances of the accident and its causes, and working to prevent it from recurring in the future."

The council also "affirmed that the government has continuous sessions of dialogue with the American side, which have reached advanced stages and to the level of discussing the logistical details of the withdrawal of combat forces from Iraq, the details of which will be announced later."

The Iraqi Foreign Ministry also condemned the strikes in a statement sent to Newsweek, as did the Defense Ministry and military Security Media Cell in separate messages shared that same day.

In Syria, the U.S. is considered an occupying force by the government, which is backed by both Iran and Russia in a decade-long civil war in which the U.S. once offered assistance to rebel forces.

Since 2015, the U.S. has allied with a largely Kurdish force known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, whose main focus is the defeat of the Islamic State militant group (ISIS).

Attempts to reconcile the differences between the Syrian government and Syrian Democratic Forces have yet to produce results, however, and tensions remain, especially as local and regional groups supported by Iran also in the anti-ISIS fight maintain a presence near U.S. lines of control.

These U.S. positions are largely based near oil and gas fields, prompting further criticism from Damascus and its allies, who accused Washington of stealing the country's natural resources and violating its sovereignty.

Opinion: UK-Russia naval flap shows Putin's on edge
David A. Andelman

Last week, Russian forces [spied the British destroyer HMS Defender](#) on routine patrol in the Black Sea. Specifically, a part of the Black Sea that's very sensitive to Russia: inside the territorial waters of Crimea. That's what Putin calls Russian territory, and much of the world [still thinks](#) belongs to the sovereign -- and pro-Western -- nation of Ukraine.



Georgian Interior Ministry via AP In this photo released by the Georgian Interior Ministry, British destroyer HMS Defender arrives at the port of Batumi, Georgia, Saturday, June 26, 2021.

Matters got a bit sticky when the Defender crossed into Crimea's territorial waters. The Russian military [says it fired warning shots](#) across the bow, and then 11 minutes later, two Su-24M bombers [dropped bombs](#) in the path of the ship. No damage was done. But the signal was sent.

And if there was any doubt at all, the Russian state news agency TASS and Russian television [proclaimed](#) it as part of a Western plot to encircle and undermine Russia, describing the action in vivid detail -- part of the Kremlin line suggesting Russia's most aggressive actions are simply defensive maneuvers to safeguard its interests.

Vivid but wrong, [according to the British navy](#), which claimed no shots were fired at the ship, and no bombs were dropped in its path -- although more than 20 Russian planes indeed buzzed overhead. As it happens, there were previously announced Russian [gunnery exercises](#) taking place some distance away.

If there had been shots fired in the direction of the British warship in the Black Sea, they would have been [the first](#) since the Crimean War in 1854 -- the very moment that the term "red lines" was coined by renowned British war correspondent [William Howell Russell](#) in his dispatch for The Times of London, referring to lines of

red-coated British troops confronting Russian Hussar cavalry. Years later, Russia is looking to draw a new set of lines.

Britain was demonstrating that most of the world still considers Ukraine the rightful owners of Crimea, no matter the territory Russian armed forces may have [seized seven years ago](#) and continue to hold. Indeed, the British defense ministry said its warship's path was part of a "[routine transit](#)" from the Ukrainian port of Odessa to Georgia through Ukrainian waters.

There even happens to be a [ferry route](#) from Odessa to Georgia, though it steers well clear of the southern tip of the Crimean peninsula.

Back in April, the United States [disclosed](#) it was even considering sending its own warships into the Black Sea, just to prove that it would in no sense consider ceding that entire waterway to Russia as its own backyard.

For years, China has been doing its best to claim its own [mare nostrum](#) ("our sea"), status for the South China Sea by taking over and fortifying scores of islands there.

In fact, to prove that's not acceptable, the British sent its newest aircraft carrier, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, and its entire carrier strike group [through the South China Sea](#) in April, just to show that its waters are open to all military as well as commercial shipping. As British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace [observed](#), it's exercising its right to freedom of navigation.

So, why all this sturm und drang if it might easily get quite nasty? Much of it would appear due precisely to the red lines that are very much in dispute and that Putin, as well as China in its own maritime disputes, seem quite clear in setting and maintaining.

Weeks before this month's G7 summit with US President Joe Biden in Switzerland, Putin was already [telling the Russian Federal Assembly](#), "I hope that no one will think about crossing the 'red line' with regard to Russia. We ourselves will determine in each specific case where it will be drawn."

So, is Putin on edge? Or does he just want to show Biden and the West who's really in charge post-summit, and establish who is indeed the master of all red lines encircling Russian interests? Or is this all simply Putin's post-summit posturing? Most likely, all of the above.

It's certainly not a very good position for the world as we wait to see how Russia plans to react with regards to Ukraine, Syria, Turkey, Iran and the nuclear agreement now under intensive [negotiation in Vienna, Austria](#).

The West, and especially the United States, still needs Putin to behave. Fortunately, Biden has the NATO allies, especially the British, very much behind him. Britain, at a most opportune moment, seems to have embarked on a new, aggressive military policy. The Royal Navy says the dispatch of its Queen Elizabeth carrier strike force is the nation's [most powerful naval deployment](#) in a generation.

And none of this is being discouraged by the Biden administration. Ukraine is also flexing its muscles -- hosting a [joint naval exercise](#) with NATO forces in the Black Sea from June 28 to July 10.

Of course, any senses that the country could be moving toward [NATO membership](#), joining the three Baltic Republics of the Soviet Union and most of the old Warsaw Pact military alliance, is calculated to send shivers up Putin's spine.

And that's not necessarily such a bad message. Indeed, Putin's own spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, [said](#) the day after the Biden-Putin summit that this would be a "red line" for Moscow, as well as even an action plan for first steps towards joining the alliance. Putin needs to see that the Atlantic alliance is standing together and standing firm in the face of any intimidation he can gin up.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken is making the rounds of NATO allies, most recently [Germany](#), then [France](#), to demonstrate America's spine. Blinken observed that the United States needed its allies to support a "rules-based international order."

The problem, of course, is that Putin -- not to mention China's Xi Jinping -- are doing their best to establish their own international order based on their rules. If it's simply a test of whose side is bigger and stronger, then the United States and its allies must simply stand together with even greater determination.

It's Time for the Real Joe Biden to Stand Up—And Show Some Spine
Matt Lewis

Joe Biden wants you to know that his comments last Thursday about conditioning the bipartisan infrastructure plan and [linking it with a more expensive Democratic-led reconciliation bill](#) did not blow up the deal. In fact, he has been able to "clarify" his position. But has he?



Provided by The Daily Beast Spencer Platt/Getty

As ABC News' Rick Klein notes, his clean-up-on-aisle-nine statement on Saturday "did not really solve the apparent disconnect." Next, Team Biden sent advisor Cedric Richmond to the Sunday shows, and even he couldn't give a straight answer.

On Monday, Press Secretary Jen Psaki likewise demurred. You can't blame them. As the president, Biden is responsible for casting a clear vision. He has the additional burden of representing a voice of clarity in a world of chaos. For the first time in a long time, Joe Biden isn't up to the job.

It's possible that this is just a momentary blip, and the deal will ultimately come together. But last week's flub suggests deeper, more fundamental problems, even as it exacerbates the issue at hand.

Biden stumbled while walking a high-wire, and that stumble left him vulnerable.

There are plenty of Republicans who would prefer not to give Biden a "win." Truth be told, if I were a Republican politician, I wouldn't like the idea that compromises and concessions I negotiated in good faith would be immediately rendered moot by a party-line vote.

Yoking the two bills together also creates the impression that Republicans have abetted the whole thing, but that's only part of the problem. Cleaning up the mess with Republicans now requires taking something away from progressives.

And Bernie Sanders is now saying, "No reconciliation deal, no bill." Blood is in the water, and sharks on both sides of the aisle are circling.

It's worth asking: Why did this debacle happen in the first place? Why can't Biden announce what should be a huge "win" for his administration without becoming embroiled in controversy? This is more than just a failure to communicate eloquently.

It's a symptom of a deeper problem. Biden still needs to decide who he wants to be. Only then will he be able to communicate a clear and coherent vision.

Let me state the obvious: Biden is caught between progressives (like Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) who want to spend many trillions and moderates (like Joe Manchin and Krysten Sinema) who don't. They have staked out mutually exclusive positions.

Yet, instead of assuming a leadership role, Biden remains mired in passivity. "We will let the American people—and the Congress—decide," he said in his statement. He's acting like a parent who refuses to intervene and hopes the kids will work it out on their own. Take it from me, that almost never works out.

Instead, Biden must decide who he wants to be and choose which faction he's going to lean on.

If Biden wants to be the progressive champion, then he risks losing Manchin.

If he wants to be the centrist that (I think) he ran as, then it's time to stand up to AOC.

Either way, the time to hesitate has passed. Now, he can communicate this diplomatically. Can Manchin be wooed, persuaded, and cajoled? Does AOC really want to take the blame for humiliating Biden and destroying his presidency?

If Biden forces this to come to a head, he may then be able to work out some mutually tolerable understanding.

Biden's worst option is to do nothing and watch time slip away. He may think that if he ignores this problem that it will go away and that things will just resolve on their own. And I can understand why he might think that way. When every other Democrat was falling for "woke" Twitter and touting slogans like "Medicare for All" and "Defund the Police," Biden resisted the temptation.

However, he never really confronted the left. He never really resolved this power struggle by standing up to them and having a "Sister Souljah" moment. Instead, he ran out the clock, skating by on strategic ambiguity. It's one thing to muddle your way through a presidential election—it's another thing entirely to try and extend that strategy for your entire presidency.

As a conservative, I'm admittedly biased about what direction I think he should go. It's clear that Biden does not have the votes to become FDR or LBJ, and he ran as a centrist who wanted to restore bipartisan cooperation and normalcy.

Biden's authentic brand, if you'll forgive the term, seems to be consistent with the policies I think he should pursue: bipartisan healing and compromise.

What Biden decides to do is less important than his decision to actually do it. It's time for him to pick a lane. Will the real Joe Biden please stand up?

Biden's and Harris's policies are crippling America
Rep. Andy Biggs

It was said of Winston Churchill in the interregnum between the two world wars, "His judgment is bad, but his instincts are good. He seems to know what is important." In this way, former President Donald Trump is similar.



Provided by Washington Examiner

Churchill intuitively understood that the storm that would become World War II, initiated by the fascists of Nazi Germany, was gathering. He attempted to alert the prime minister of the United Kingdom, but his warnings went unheeded.

Trump said in 2016, "I don't want China dictating to me." He reminded us of the abuses of China: its manipulation of currency, unfair trade practices, theft of American intellectual property, and bellicose expansion in the South China Sea.

Trump understood that the Chinese Communist Party seeks universal hegemony. Trump called upon the nations of the world to resist China's total war doctrine, which promotes Chinese power in all phases of the international system, including economic dominance.

Like Churchill, Trump gets what is important. Contrary to what his critics inveighed, Trump is a serious leader for serious times. He intuitively recognizes problems and solutions.

Unfortunately, America is being led by the cognitively challenged President Joe Biden and the frivolous Vice President Kamala Harris. Neither is up to the challenge because their judgment and instincts are terrible.

They have weakened us overseas. The G-7 meeting was a disastrous [embarrassment](#) to the United States and will embolden our adversaries.

Harris's [Guatemala trip](#) could not have gone worse. Even the Left recognizes the failure of these two on the international stage.

Domestically, the Biden administration has failed to lead. We still have rioting in some cities. It has allowed the growth of the "defund the police" movement and, with it, the surging criminal violence that accompanies the emasculation of the rule of law.

The Biden-Harris team has unabashedly fueled inflation and promises to continue the devaluation of our currency by flooding the market with dollars, creating an oversupply of cash.

Biden, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and the Left have put small-business owners in a bind by incentivizing workers to stay home and [receive unemployment bonuses](#) rather than go back to work.

The leftist cadre supports the surveillance state that permits spying on citizens by the federal police apparatus.

They energize their radical base by promoting the anti-American critical race theory. And when people rise up against this pernicious indoctrination, the Biden adherents, coupled with the lefties in the media, argue that there is no such thing as critical race theory.

Biden and Harris are so befuddled that the first thing they did after [promoting taxpayer-funded abortion on demand](#) was to dismantle the policies Trump had erected to bring our southern border under operational control.

We now have [record numbers](#) of people attempting to enter the country illegally.

Biden has given us a liar for a homeland security secretary. Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas claims with a straight face that [the border is closed](#), while he knows that we have record numbers flooding the border. He is attempting to find ways to give illegal immigrants amnesty, and he is seeking previously removed illegal immigrants to bring them back into the U.S. under parole procedures.

Unlike Churchill and Trump, who had great intuition on the serious issues of the day and how to address them, Biden and Harris do not. They have neither judgment nor intuition.

These are serious times. Unfortunately, our president and vice president are manifestly unserious people.

(Andy Biggs represents Arizona's 5th Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives.)

Putin hints at new Ukraine escalation

Tom Rogan

On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin hinted that he may escalate his military pressure against Ukraine.



Provided by Washington Examiner

Asked about the British deployment last week of its HMS Defender destroyer [within 12 nautical miles of Russian-occupied Crimea](#), Putin said that the Defender had been joined by a U.S. surveillance aircraft. He even provided what he said was that aircraft's tail number.

Lamenting this U.S.-British "provocation" in the context of what he said was Russia's greater respect for Western borders, Putin argued that his "more fundamental" concern rests with foreign military bases on Ukraine's territory. Putin appears to be referring to a U.S.-led military training center at Yavoriv, in far-western Ukraine. It's a game.

Fewer than 15 miles from the Polish border, the Yavoriv center poses no threat to Russia's flanks. Putin is using that center as an excuse to legitimate his broader intimidation of Ukraine. But Putin wasn't done. He suggested that the foreign military presence in Ukraine poses "significant security problems for us" and "really concerns the vital interests of the Russian Federation and the people of Russia ... we must think about it."

[It's vintage Putin, always the disregarded victim.](#)

Regardless, Putin's argument is farcical. The Yavoriv base is no threat. Moreover, Putin's suggestion that Russia does not exert military pressure against the West's periphery is absurd.

A Russian fleet has recently been operating off Hawaii, and there are indications that a Russian submarine [may have entered British territorial waters](#) during the recent G-7 summit in Cornwall. True, a U.S.-led sea and air exercise is underway in the Black Sea, but that exercise is long-standing.

I also understand that the Russians have been spoofing maritime traffic websites so as to make it appear that NATO warships have been acting aggressively. The top line: Russia wants to suggest that it is suffering deliberate and outrageous provocation.

Still, the timing and specificity of his rhetoric force us to ask whether Putin is simply ranting or preparing his people for further escalation in Ukraine.

*Contrary to reporting that Russian has withdrawn recently massed military forces from Ukraine's borders, Putin's ground forces **retain a significant operational presence** within a short drive of Ukraine.*

Putin has the means of short-notice military escalation.

Deeply frustrated by Ukraine's refusal to subject itself to a political settlement on Russian terms, Putin has the motive to use force to cajole Kyiv's acquiescence. And however fallacious it may be, Putin's referencing of a NATO buildup gives him the domestic casus belli to take action.

It fits the narrative of NATO as an offensive alliance. A narrative that carries weight, especially among the Kremlin security elite.

Contested Ukrainian territory and borders are worth watching closely in the coming days.

Who are the people still missing in the Miami condo collapse?

Dozens of people are still unaccounted for after the deadly June 24 collapse of part of a 12-story residential building in Surfside, Florida, authorities have said.



Provided by WPTZ Plattsburgh-Burlington

Search and rescue teams have been feverishly scouring the site since shortly after 55 of the building's 136 units fell.

Here's what we know about the missing.

Family of Paraguay's first lady

The sister and brother-in-law of Paraguay's first lady, Silvana López Moreira, were staying with their three children at the building, and Paraguay's ministry of external relations has not been able to locate the family, the ministry told CNN.

That family — including Sophia López Moreira and her husband Luis Pettengill — was in the U.S. to receive COVID-19 vaccinations, Paraguay's foreign minister said. The Paraguayan first lady, along with her parents and her brother-in-law's parents, arrived in Florida on Thursday after the collapse, the Paraguayan President's office said.

Six Paraguayans in all are unaccounted for, the ministry tweeted.

9 Argentines, including a couple and their daughter

Argentines Andrés Galfrascoli, 45, his partner Fabián Nuñez, 55, and their daughter, Sofía Galfrascoli Núñez, 6, are among the missing, according to a friend.

The three were on vacation in Florida, staying at the condo of a friend, Nicolás Fernández.

Fernández told CNN he spent time with the couple Wednesday night and made plans to meet up Thursday morning.

"We don't know anything, we don't have any closure and that's what hurts,"

Fernández told CNN.

Fernández has looked for his friends in local hospitals with no luck.

Nine Argentines were missing as of Thursday afternoon, the country's consulate in Miami [said on Twitter](#).

A relative of Chile's ex-president

The first cousin of former Chilean President and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet's father is among those missing, his daughter told CNN Chile.

Since the collapse, Pascale Bonnefoy has not been able to communicate with her father, who lived in the part of the building that fell, she said.

"We haven't been able to have specific information," Bonnefoy said, adding the whereabouts of her father's wife also aren't known. She did not specify his wife's nationality.

The Chilean consulate in Miami has offered to support the family in the search, Bonnefoy said. "I contacted the consul, and he offered his help, but since there is no information either, there is not much that can be done."

So far, Chilean authorities have not reported missing nationals after the collapse. CNN is trying to contact the Chilean consulate in Miami.

6 Colombians

Six Colombian citizens are unaccounted for following the collapse, Colombian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Camila Mugno told CNN on Friday.

It wasn't immediately clear whether they were inside the building at the moment of the collapse. Records indicated that the six had been staying there, the foreign ministry's office said.

The six Colombian citizens include a family of three from Medellin, and other travelers, Mugno told CNN.

Venezuelans also missing

"At the moment we are handling information from six Venezuelans not located in the collapse of the building in Surfside," Brian Fincheltub, Venezuela's consular affairs director, [tweeted](#).

Jewish community members are missing, rabbis say

Some members from The Shul of Bal Harbour synagogue are among the people unaccounted for, Rabbi Sholom Lipskar told CNN.

"This is something that transcends our capacity for understanding," Lipskar said about the collapse. "It's a reality, we accept it and we have to learn as we do in our culture of resilience to move forward."

"The only thing that helps in these times is kindness and empathy and togetherness, because you can't take away the reality," Lipskar said.

Members of the synagogue believed to be missing are Nancy Kress Levin, Jay Kleinman, Frankie Kleinman, Arie Leib, Yisroel Tzvi Yosef and Tzvi Doniel, according to Lipskar.

Rabbi Zalman Lipskar told CNN he believes at least 20 people associated with the Shul of Bal Harbour are missing. Their ages range from 20 to 60 years old.

He said he spoke with one woman who believes that she is missing seven or eight of her family members. He told CNN he also knows of a couple, both 26 years old, and a doctor who is a member of his synagogue, who are missing as well.

The rabbi said an older couple — the parents of his childhood friend — are also missing.

"It's just been heart-wrenching ... not knowing, and not being able to really deal with this magnitude of the tragedy that's unfolding," the rabbi said.

Rabbi Eliot Pearlson, who leads Temple Menorah, told CNN, "It's hard to explain. This doesn't happen in America. It's doesn't happen in Miami Beach. It doesn't happen in our homes. And it's very difficult to comprehend how it's possible."

Pearlson said that he saw people come together in compassion following the collapse, and his temple will host an emergency prayer service on Friday. Three generations of one family from his temple are among those unaccounted for, he said.

He added, "I have to tell you, when I walked past ground zero, there was row after row after row of firefighters who are literally waiting to rush into a building that could fall at any time."

Uruguayan citizens missing

Three Uruguayan citizens are among the missing, according to the consulate in Miami.

The consulate is in contact with local authorities and with the families of the people missing, said Consul General Eduardo Bouzout.

"The relatives are very concerned, of course, because they have not been able to contact them since they have knowledge of this tragic collapse," said Bouzout in audio shared by the consulate with CNN.

Doctor from Alabama

A central Alabama physician is among the missing in the collapse, sister station WVTM reports.

According to a family member, Dr. Gary Cohen was at the condo with his brother at the time of the collapse.

Missing mother and grandmother

A woman who said creaking noises woke her up in the building the night before the collapse is missing, her son, Pablo Rodriguez, said.

Both his mother and grandmother were in the section that collapsed first, and the family hasn't heard from them, Rodriguez told CNN.

"You always hold out hope," he said. "Until we definitively know, we are trying to stay hopeful. But after seeing the video of the collapse it's increasingly difficult, because they were in that section that was pancaked in, in the first section that fell in, and then the other building fell on top of it, so it's not easy to watch."

Rodriguez said he and his mother didn't really think anything about the creaking noise. "It was just a comment she made offhand, that's why she woke up, and then she wasn't able to go back to sleep afterward -- but now in hindsight, you always wonder," he said.

The family is still holding out hope for good news, Rodriguez said.

"We are praying for a miracle, but at the same time trying to be as realistic about it as possible," he said. "Until we definitely know, there is hope. It's just dwindling by the minute."

The Patel family

Vishal Patel, his wife Bhavna Patel, and their 1-year-old daughter Aishani Patel are believed to be among the missing, their niece Sarina Patel told CNN, adding that Bhavna Patel is four months pregnant.

Sarina Patel told CNN on Friday she last spoke to her family on Father's Day.

"I had actually called them to tell them I had just booked a flight to come visit because they've been asking me to come see their home and to meet their daughter I haven't met her due to the pandemic."

They were home at the time the collapse took place, Patel told Cuomo.

"We have tried calling them countless of times and there's just been no answers, text messages, nothing," she said. "They haven't contacted anybody."

Linda March

Among the missing was Linda March, who eagerly traded a cramped New York apartment for fresh air and ocean views after surviving a COVID-19 infection. She rented Penthouse 4, whose interior was exposed, with bunk beds and an office chair still intact, just inside the broken edge where the rest of the 12-story building crumbled into a pile of debris.

March had been using the second bedroom of the furnished apartment as her office, best friend Rochelle Laufer told The Associated Press on Sunday.

Another friend, Dawn Falco, said they had been talking on the phone until just two hours before the disaster, and immediately began searching for word on her friend, who she said never leaves the house “without a smile.”

“My heart is breaking as I see the office chair that she just purchased next to the bunk-beds,” Falco said.

Florida was a new start for the 58-year-old attorney. In the past decade, she’d lost her sister and mother to cancer, her father died a few years later and she and her husband divorced. She had no children.

“She would say to me, ‘I’m all alone. I don’t have family,’ and I would say, ‘You’re my sister, you don’t have to be born sisters. And I said you always have me’,” Laufer recounted through tears.

Laufer said March loved the ocean views and beach walks, but hated the incessant noise from nearby construction and had decided to break her lease. “She was looking for another apartment when this happened,” Laufer said sadly.

Still, Laufer had been planning to visit her friend this fall.

“I joked I’m going to take the top bunk when I visit,” she said.

Judy Spiegel

Kevin Spiegel, who lived in Champlain Towers with his wife, Judy, said he was on a business trip in California when the building collapsed. When he woke up in the middle of the night, he had an emergency notice on his phone, he told CNN, and he notified the rest of his family.

“We’re very hopeful that the community here will be able to find our loved ones,” said Josh Spiegel, Judy’s son, who lives in Orlando.

“My mom is an absolutely amazing person,” Josh Spiegel said. “She’s a fighter, and she fights for every single one of us, and we won’t stop ... fighting until we find her,” he said.

“We have a lot of hope that Judy is still alive, and still there,” said Kevin Spiegel. “She’s an amazing person.”

Her daughter, Rachel Spiegel, last received a text from her mother around 9 p.m. Wednesday — roughly four and a half hours before the collapse, she told CNN. That text was about a princess dress that Judy ordered for one of Rachel’s daughters. The family has been Judy’s main focus, Rachel said.

Judy has a bond with her grandchildren, and "the other kids that we hang out with, they love Grandma Judy -- everybody calls her Grandma Judy," Rachel said.

Cassandra Stratton

Cassandra Stratton, the wife of Michael Stratton, senior policy advisor with the law firm [Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck](#), is among those still believed to be missing, his law firm's spokesperson Lara Day told CNN.

Garciella Cattarossi and some of her relatives

Garciella Cattarossi, her daughter Estella and Cattarossi's elderly parents are missing after the collapse, Cattarossi's friend Mariela Porras told CNN on Friday. When Porras learned of the collapse and realized it was Cattarossi's building, she called Cattarossi but got no answer, she said.

She described Cattarossi as a talented photographer who has been working to get her real estate license and "is just a wonderful person trying to always do the right thing."

3 members of Velasquez family

Three members of the Velasquez family are also believed missing after the building collapse, according to family members.

David Velasquez posted on Facebook that his parents, Julio Cesar Velasquez, 67, and Angela Maria Velasquez, 60, live in the 12-story residential building.

His sister Theresa Velasquez, 36, had come to visit her parents and was staying with them at the time of the collapse.

David Velasquez's wife confirmed that they were missing in a text message to CNN. She said the family requests privacy at this time.

Parents say their son is missing

Ronit Felszer and Carlos Naibryf told CNN on Friday night that their son, Ilan Naibryf, is missing.

Ilan and his girlfriend were in town for a funeral and staying in the condo at an apartment her family had, Naibryf's parents said.

Describing him as a "loyal friend, a passionate, good, kind, generous young man," Felszer said their son is turning 22 in September and due to graduate the University of Chicago as a physics major next May.

Her father is missing

Debbie Hill says her father is also missing in the building collapse.

"Not knowing is the big issue," she told CNN on Friday.

"I have a relative who's down there at the center and he gets more information off the news than he does being down there."

"When they show the live views, you don't realize how massive this is until you see a person standing on the top of the pile," she said.

Hill said her father was in one of the top floors of the building.

"My dad was in air freight sales most of his life," she said.

*"He had a lot of friends throughout the country, throughout the world. He loved what he did, he enjoyed fishing, he liked to travel. He was just getting ready to retire."
"He was going to be training somebody that's replacing him in the fall and then we got the phone call and everything in our world changed," Hill said.*

An aunt and uncle missing

Bettina Obias also said her aunt and uncle, Maria and Claudio Bonnefoy, are also missing.

She told CNN that as soon as she heard about the collapse, she went to the site herself.

"As soon as I saw this, I fell apart," she said, referring to the rubble.

She said that while she's trying to be realistic, she also is holding on to "a sliver of hope."

"I know in my heart somebody there is still alive and if it's not my aunt or uncle, I hope it's somebody's father, or somebody's son," Obias said. "I'm hoping that there are many survivors."

She said her uncle was a retired United Nations legal counsel and her aunt was an International Monetary Fund budget official.

Gil and Betty Guerra

Gil Guerra and his wife, Betty Guerra, lived on the ninth floor of the building, his daughter said, and there has been no word from them since the tragedy.

"We're doing our best to stay hopeful," Michelle Guerra told CNN via Facebook Messenger Saturday. "That's what they would want."

Her father and stepmother were in the process of moving out of apartment 910 and had just gotten furniture at their new apartment on Monday, she said.

*The couple was renting, and the owner was in the process of selling the unit, according to Guerra, who said she said she last spoke to her dad on Father's Day
"This is all so horrific and bizarre. They are both such caring, hardworking people," Guerra said.*

"They only got married late 2017 and have been living it up like two teenagers in love traveling the world and eating all they can together," she said. "They lived a full time together."

Magaly Delgado

Magaly "Maggie" Ramsey missed a phone call from her mother on Wednesday night, thinking she could just call back in the morning. But she hasn't gotten the chance.

Ramsey's mother, 80-year-old Magaly Delgado, lived on the ninth floor of the building for more than 10 years. Ramsey said her mother was trying to "live her best life" in Champlain Towers South condos by the water.

"She loved the building, she loved the community," Ramsey said of her mother. Ramsey learned of the collapse on the news, she said.

"Never in a thousand years did I think that was her building or that her building is just not there anymore," she said. "But that's how we found out, so we quickly packed up and headed down."

Delgado, who was originally from Cuba, was a "woman of faith" who taught Ramsey to have faith as well, and while the family is "burdened with such despair," they have faith "in the miracles that God can create," Ramsey said.

"The worst thing is not to know," Ramsey said. "Knowing, whatever the outcome may be, you hope that they didn't suffer if something did occur. But knowing is a little bit healing in itself."

(The Associated Press contributed to this report.)

After a year of denial, North Korea admitted to a 'grave incident' from the pandemic

Aspen Pflughoeft

North Korea is one of the few places in the world to claim zero COVID-19 cases.



Cha Song Ho, Associated Press Staff of the Pyongyang Primary School No. 4 clean classroom desks in Pyongyang, North Korea, Wednesday, June 30, 2021

Experts have widely doubted this claim, but North Korean officials remained insistent that they had coronavirus outbreaks under control, says [BBC](#). As of Wednesday, North Korean Supreme Leader [Kim Jong Un](#) admitted the country faced a "grave incident" related to the pandemic.

[Here's what we know about COVID-19 inside North Korea.](#)

What has the COVID-19 pandemic been like in North Korea?

In January 2020, [North Korea](#) sealed its borders to prevent the coronavirus from entering the country. Eighteen months later, the border closure has damaged the economy and contributed to a [worsening food situation](#), reports the [Deseret News](#).

Still, North Korea claims it has had no COVID-19 cases, says [CNN](#).

According to reports from North Korean defectors and international aid workers via [CNN](#), the health care system in North Korea is weak, often lacking necessary supplies.

The system is unlikely to be able to handle mass COVID-19 outbreaks.

To prevent — or manage — outbreaks, the country instituted strict public health measures — so strict that at least two people were executed for failing to comply, reports [CNN](#). The measures have continued throughout the last year and a half.

What does Kim Jong Un's comment about the pandemic mean?

In a rare acknowledgment of the strain that COVID-19 has brought, Kim Jong Un spoke of a “great crisis” resulting from the negligence of senior officials, reports [The Associated Press](#).

What is the “great crisis”? Kim did not specify, leaving experts and officials to decipher the words, says [NBC News](#).

According to Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification, “something significant happened and it was big enough to warrant a reprimanding of senior officials. This could mean mass infections or some sort of situation where a lot of people were put at direct risk of infections,” per the [AP](#).

This could include a small break of quarantine, a mass outbreak — potentially along the porous North Korea-China border — or something else entirely, says [BBC](#).

What's next for North Korea?

Both China and South Korea have voiced their willingness to aid North Korea in the event of a major outbreak, reports [NBC News](#).

South Korean Vice Foreign Minister [Choi Jong-kun](#) said that “during this pandemic era we have publicly expressed our willingness to help, ranging from PCR tests to whatever you can imagine,” per [NBC News](#).

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Wang Wenbin](#) said that “if necessary, China will actively consider providing assistance to the DPRK,” per the [AP](#).

Kim's recent remarks could be laying the political groundwork to ask for additional assistance in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, says [NBC News](#).

'Repeat problem': Fingers point at Kamala Harris as history of staff unrest continues

[Katherine Doyle](#)

A toxic work environment that is alleged to be inside the office of Vice President Kamala Harris stems from the top, with complicating “power centers” plaguing her road to the White House.



Provided by Washington Examiner

“Look, this is a bottom-line business. And the bottom line is the vice president has challenges with staff— wherever she is,” one senior Democratic operative told the Washington Examiner.

President Joe Biden handed Harris a politically fraught [portfolio of issues](#), which could cause some strife within any official's staff, but the complaints are not new.

This source called the office discord a “repeat problem” for Harris, adding that the troubles are “not surprising.”

“The Harris inner circles, and I'll use that plural, because they've been different inner circles in California, in her Senate office, on her presidential campaign, and now in her vice presidential-campaign-in-office, they've always been rife with a lot of dissension, and a lot of infighting,” this person said.

“It's probably a little unfair to say it's just her. But she is a common denominator in all of these situations.”

“Being the junior senator from California, that's different to being vice president,” the person added.

“I don't think there have been any major dust-ups that you can't recover from. But I do think that this is endemic of a pretty uneven start to her time in this role.”

One report published Wednesday [detailed](#) a climate of fear inside the Office of the Vice President, including “a tense and at times dour office atmosphere.”

“Ideas are ignored or met with harsh dismissals, and decisions are dragged out,” the article read, with aides and associates pointing the finger at Tina Flournoy, a longtime Democratic Party operative and Harris’s chief of staff.

Two top advance staffers recently announced their departures, according to another report, [along with](#) Harris’s head of digital strategy, Rajan Kaur. Kaur was [welcomed](#) to Twitter by another Harris staffer just one month earlier.



Provided by Washington Examiner Rachel Palermo, Twitter Rachel Palermo, Twitter Symone Sanders, the senior adviser and chief spokesperson for Harris, rebuked the claims, saying in the first media report: “We are not making rainbows and bunnies all day. What I hear is that people have hard jobs, and I’m, like, ‘welcome to the club.’”

“We have created a culture where people, if there is anything anyone would like to raise, there are avenues for them to do so. Whoever has something they would like to raise, they should raise it directly,” she said.

“Power centers”

[Reports say](#) Flournoy walled off Harris from longtime friends, donors, and associates, a move that the Democratic operative defended.

“It does feel like the intentions of Tina Flournoy are good, which are to kind of clean up some of the mess and keep the hanger-ons away. And to establish some order and a standard, which is understandable,” this source said.

The source added: “The consistent thread with all of the infighting and dissension, with all of the different power centers of Kamala Harris, is Vice President Harris.”

In Guatemala last month, the former California senator was asked whether she would visit the southern border, a persistent question since Biden tasked her with stemming the migrant flow.

The vice president [threw cold water on the idea](#) during a press briefing, saying that she would focus on the root causes of migration from the region “as opposed to grand gestures” and repeating that in an interview with NBC.

Asked why she had yet to visit U.S. border states, Harris appeared frustrated by the question that has dogged her for months.

“And I haven’t been to Europe,” [she said](#).

"I don't understand the point that you're making. I'm not discounting the importance of the border."

The remarks drew blowback from political opponents and allies, and from the press, for seeming to dismiss concerns about what Republicans and some Democrats see as an accelerating crisis.

"Wake-up call"

Harris visited the border last week with a trip to El Paso, Texas, quieting some of the noise.

"Hopefully, this is a wake-up call," a Democratic strategist who used to work for Harris told the Washington Examiner, singling out what he identified as "self-inflicted wounds."

"She's taking on incredibly complex issues and is under the microscope like never before in her career. So, this sort of treatment comes with the territory," this person said.

"But she really can't afford any self-inflicted wounds as they will distract from the important work she has in front of her."

Allies said that Harris, who made history with her election as Biden's vice president, confronts challenges not shared by others who've held the role.

"There's a challenge that comes along with being the first woman in that position and the first woman of color in that position," the Democratic operative said.

"That doesn't mean that she and her team are above critique — they're not. But I think it would be naive to not consider that [in observing] kind of an uneven rollout of her time as vice president."

Reports of friction with donors and outside political forces are unlikely to plague her down the line, the other Democrat said.

"Is it going to matter in three years, if she's the nominee for president, or in seven years if she's nominee for president? Like, are they not gonna give her money? No, they're going to. They'll be there," the person said.

Exclusive: Russia Won't Risk 'Suicidal' NATO War in Black Sea—Ukraine Foreign Minister *David Brennan*

Ukraine's foreign minister has urged NATO not to allow Russia to extend its influence in the Black Sea, amid tensions that Kremlin critics say are a symptom of Moscow's plan to establish de facto control of the wider region.



Horacio Villalobos Corbis/Corbis via Getty Images Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba is pictured during a press conference in the Palácio das Necessidades on September 9, 2020 in Lisbon, Portugal.

Dmytro Kuleba told Newsweek that discussions about the Black Sea were central to Kyiv's expanding cooperation with NATO, a bloc Ukraine has been pushing to join since its 2014 revolution ousted a pro-Russian government.

Recent weeks have seen tense confrontations between NATO warships and Russian forces in the Black Sea. First, Russian jets reportedly fired warning shots close to British destroyer HMS Defender sailing close to Crimea—the peninsula annexed by Russia from Ukraine in 2014.

British defense officials, however, denied that HMS Defender came under fire.

This week, Dutch frigate HNLMS Evertsen was shadowed by Russian jets in the Black Sea, also while sailing close to the peninsula. Dutch officials complained that the jets conducted "mock attacks" on the vessel.

Despite the confrontations, Kuleba told Newsweek in a statement that Kyiv does not expect a sudden outbreak of serious violence in the Black Sea.

"I do believe Russia is ready to escalate some local tensions in the Black Sea region, but I do not see them being suicidal," Kuleba said.

"They may pinch and provoke here and there. But Russia will not risk a full-scale confrontation with NATO, clearly realizing they have no chances to succeed in it."

Newsweek has contacted the Russian embassy in Washington, D.C. to request comment on the recent tensions in the Black Sea.

Observers have long warned of the dangers of accidental escalation in the Black Sea, which is a vital conduit for Russian oil and gas trade, and Moscow's military power projection into the Mediterranean and around European coasts.

Confrontations between *Russian and NATO forces* are common in the area, at sea and in the air. Both sides also hold regular military drills in the Black Sea; this week marks the beginning of the multi-nation Sea Breeze naval exercises, which will run until July 10.

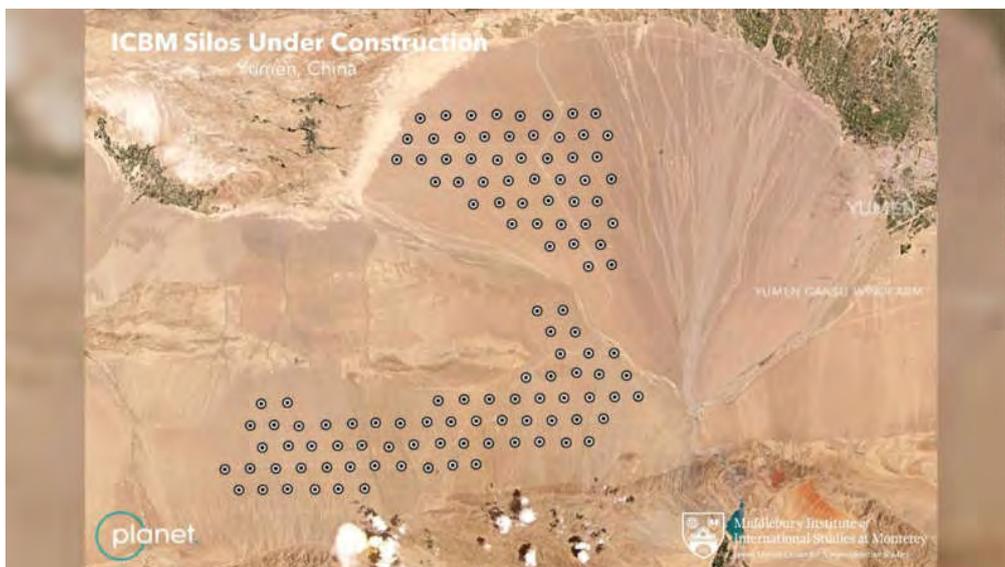
The Black Sea also serves as another front in the continuing Russia-Ukraine conflict. Moscow has been accused of trying to choke Ukrainian trade and freedom of navigation in the area—another means of undermining the anti-Kremlin government in Kyiv, which is fighting Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.

"In our conversations with NATO we are very frank on this: if things continue as they are, there is a risk that Russia may significantly increase its control over the Black Sea and further expand its influence in the region," Kuleba told Newsweek.

China is building a sprawling network of missile silos, satellite imagery appears to show

By Brad Lendon - CNN

China is building a sprawling network of what appear to be intercontinental ballistic missile silos in its western desert that analysts say could change the equation for US military planners in Asia.



Courtesy Planet Labs Inc./Center for Nonproliferation Studies The grid of new Chinese ballistic missile silos is purportedly shown in an image from commercial satellite company Planet Labs Inc.

The likely missile field, comprising 120 silos that could potentially house weapons capable of reaching the United States mainland, was documented by researchers at

the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies using satellite imagery supplied by commercial satellite company Planet Labs Inc.

The researchers compared satellite photos taken during the past four months with images captured within the past week, finding the missile site covering a grid of hundreds of square kilometers in China's Gansu province, said researcher Jeffrey Lewis, a Chinese nuclear weapons expert who examined the images with colleague Decker Eveleth, the first person to spot the silos.

The pair's findings were first [reported in the Washington Post](#). Lewis told CNN on Friday that most of the silo construction, which has yet to be completed, has likely occurred in the past six months.

"It's really a startling pace of construction," he said, adding that the scope of the buildup was also surprising.

"It's a lot of silos," Lewis said. "It's much larger than anything we expected to see."

Reports of the likely new missile field came just a day before [Chinese leader Xi Jinping said in a nationalistic speech](#) on the Communist Party's 100th anniversary that China's rise is a "historical inevitability" and it will no longer be "bullied, oppressed or subjugated" by foreign countries.

"Anyone who dares to try, will find their heads bashed bloody against a great wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people," Xi added, in comments that later appeared to be softened in the government's own English language translation.

New protection for China's ICBMs

Though researchers have identified 120 likely silos, there is no indication they are in use, or will be used into the future. However, analysts said the silos, placed in a grid pattern, at 3-kilometer (1.9-mile) intervals, could be used to house Chinese-made DF-41 intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The DF-41, also known as the CSS-X-20, is estimated to have a range of 12,000 to 15,000 kilometers (7,400 to 9,300 miles) and could be equipped with up to 10 independently targeted nuclear warheads, according to the Missile Threat Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.