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As continued mass protests swept the nation for the last several weeks, those events completely buried important news: US troops being sent to Gaza for a complex and poorly planned humanitarian mission in a combat zone, with the extreme risk of the US becoming intertwined in yet another war in the Middle East.

Last week, during the House Armed Services Committee Hearing on 30 April 2024, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin [admitted](#) that the US military supporting the Gaza pier project could defend themselves if fired upon. This simple statement demonstrates how the US is a razor's edge from being pulled into yet another conflict. A few days later, on 2 May 2024, Secretary Austin also [stated](#) that he saw no indications that Hamas might conduct any sort of attack. However, Secretary Austin failed to mention that at least one attack already occurred. **An attack on the US military constructing or operating the pier/causeway in Gaza is not a hypothetical situation, as there has already been at least one attack in the vicinity of the pier.** On 25 April 2024, five days before the HASC hearing, Pentagon Press Secretary Major General Patrick Ryder confirmed that there was an attack in the vicinity of the pier, [stating](#),

"So, there was this mortar attack today on shore. Right? So, what I said is that initial construction has begun of the causeway and the temporary pier at sea. So, they're not constructing that anywhere near the shore at this point in time, if that makes sense." [Note: Maj Gen Ryder did not confirm if the attack damaged any US or Israeli equipment.] The downplaying of any threat aligns with prior statements Maj Gen Ryder made in his initial press conference, in response to a question about whether Hamas would fire on US troops, when he [stated](#), "[T]hat's certainly a risk, again, but if Hamas truly does care about the Palestinian people, then again, one would hope that this international mission to deliver aid to people who need it would be able to happen unhindered."

Other news agencies, including Israel-based news outlets, [reported](#) on the same attack. These news agencies reported that the Israel Defense Force (IDF) was escorting visitors from the UN. The group was attacked by mortars coming from Gaza. The i24 News agency [reported](#) damaged engineering equipment and that one individual sustained minor injuries. The Associated Press [reported](#) that ", "A Hamas official told The Associated Press on [24 April 2024] that [Hamas] will resist any foreign military presence involved with the port project".

American troops have deployed to Gaza to support a humanitarian mission in a combat zone. There are indicators of potential threats via reporting and at least one attack on the pier. Downplaying the risk to troops or "hoping" that Hamas does not attack is a reckless approach to risking the lives of US servicemembers. Any time the USG deploys military soldiers to an active combat zone between nations or entities with whom the US is not at war and Congress has not addressed, there is good reason for concern. No one voted for this, and troops are in harm's way.

Representative Matt Gaetz (R-FL) was not alone in highlighting the risk to US troops and the nation. The United States Senate Armed Service Committee [wrote a letter](#) to the Biden White House expressing grave concern over the Gaza pier. SASC specifically highlighted the concern

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for the safety of US troops and urged the Biden admin to "redouble" negotiations for hostages without deploying troops, as well as noting the potential inefficacy of the pier.

Despite the statements made by President [Biden](#), Secretary [Austin](#), and Maj Gen [Ryder](#) about how there will be no US "boots on the ground" in Gaza, the troops are still at risk. They may have to engage with the enemy regardless of what they are standing on or what is under their feet. The troops are still within striking distance of Gaza.

The significant risk to the US military constructing the humanitarian pier/causeway in Gaza, a combat zone, cannot be overstated. The most recent large-scale military humanitarian operation led by the Biden Administration was both a tragedy and a disaster. The Biden Administration's decision-making led to the deaths of 13 service members who were providing military support to the humanitarian airlifts out of Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA), the International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan. The Biden administration's planning and execution of the pier mission has been disjointed and disorganized. The mission is exceedingly complex as it involves coordination between different US military elements, US Navy and US Army, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UN agencies, NGOs, private companies, and foreign military/entities (Israel, the UK, Greece, and Gaza). US Troops playing "[port authority](#)" in another Middle Eastern conflict have a great risk of dragging the US into another forever war. We must put pressure on our elected officials to stop this.

Additional Reading on the Gaza Pier:

Background:

Since the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel, the Biden Administration has committed a significant amount of resources to both Israel and Gaza. The US has staged air and naval assets in the region, and United States Central Command (CENTCOM), and the Royal Air Force of Jordan have [air-dropped humanitarian aid](#). At the State of the Union (SOTU) on 7 March of this year, President Biden announced that the US would launch a humanitarian aid operation via the US military into Gaza. At the SOTU, Biden [stated](#),

"The United States has been leading international efforts to get more humanitarian assistance into Gaza. Tonight, I'm directing the US military to lead an emergency mission to establish a temporary pier in the Mediterranean on the coast of Gaza that can receive large shipments carrying food, water, medicine, and temporary shelters. No US Boots will be on the ground..."

President Biden committed the United States military to deliver humanitarian aid via a temporary pier and causeway off the coast of Gaza. The humanitarian aid mission's task and purpose is to construct a "Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore" (JLOTS) pier, which will be used to deliver food and aid into Gaza. The pier is a modular military asset that can be used to create a pier where none exists and facilitate military operations.

See the below image from [3 MAY 2024 Department of Defense Press Briefing](#)

Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS)

- What is JLOTS:

U.S. Army and U.S. Navy forces organized and equipped to conduct joint ship-to-shore operations where fixed port facilities are inadequate or unavailable.

- What JLOTS can do:

Offload equipment and cargo in-stream (offshore) and deliver cargo to a restricted port, an expeditionary floating pier, or a bare beach employing shallow draft transport watercraft.



Per the [Department of Defense](#), "JLOTS was last used operationally to deliver humanitarian assistance following the magnitude 7.0 earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010." However, the units reportedly train extensively on this capability. Maj Gen Ryder [described](#) at his 8 March 2024 Pentagon Press Briefing that the pier/causeway, upon completion, will be approximately 1,800 ft (500m) long. Maj Gen Ryder also [explained](#) that the aid would move from a port in Cyprus to the floating pier where the supplies would be offloaded ([roll on/roll off](#)) into smaller vessels at the pier (such as logistics support vessels or LSVs), then shipped the remaining distance to the causeway (anchored to Gaza's shore) and then the vehicles will move the supplies via ground transport and distributed to Gaza (see a detailed graphic [here](#)). Though US officials have not confirmed who is driving the vehicles, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs)/non-profits, Israel, and unknown third parties (potentially the [United Kingdom](#), UK) will help facilitate the transportation of the trucks from the causeway into Gaza. Some US military will be sleeping aboard a [British naval logistics vessel](#). The initial cost estimate is at least [320 million US taxpayer dollars](#).

Timeline:

Within a week of the SOTU, the group of US military identified to construct the pier [began a piecemeal deployment](#) to the Mediterranean. The exact number of troops supporting the Gaza pier mission is unclear, though [Pentagon Press Secretary Ryder has stated](#) it would take over 1,000 troops to build the pier. Despite numerous delays and incidents, the pier construction began at the end of April, and as of 3 May 2024, [Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh reported](#) that the pier was 50% complete. Upon completion, the US military will work with partners to deliver the aid via the maritime corridor at a rate of 150 truckloads or [2 million meals](#)

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[a day](#). Deputy Press Secretary Singh would not comment on how long the Gaza pier and the US military will conduct the humanitarian operations. At the 29 April 2024 press conference, Deputy Singh [stated](#), "I'm just not going to put a timeline on [how long the pier will be operational], as you can appreciate, because that could change." The lack of a timeline means that troops can be endlessly extended, similar to what we have seen in the Middle East regarding the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. In July of 2023, Congress voted on the Emergency Powers for Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen, and they all [failed](#), which is why US troops are still deployed in the region. If US forces in Gaza become engaged in a conflict, the Gaza pier cannot be tied to any of these AUMFs and would likely result in another unconstitutional war.

Planning and Execution Issues and Failures:

Deployment of Maritime Vessels - The deployment of US Army and Navy assets to the Mediterranean was not without significant issues. Multiple vessels deployed were delayed, including one experiencing a major engine issue and another very delayed (reference: [here](#)). These incidents highlight systemic problems with readiness among US military maritime assets and expose the lack of prioritization/under-funding of these assets and the modernization of the US military as it relates to defense posture and future threats.

Weather Delays Mission - Besides numerous issues with older vessels, the weather has been problematic. On 2 May 2024, CENTCOM [announced](#) that they temporarily suspended operations due to unsafe conditions created by weather.

Planning, Coordination, and Risk- This operation is exceptionally complex. It requires coordination between the US Navy and US Army, USAID, UN agencies, NGOs, private companies, and foreign entities (Israel, the UK, Greece, and Gaza). The complexity and risk stem from planning to vessels' readiness, communications (including language barriers), emergency procedures/repairs, security, coordination between groups, and everything in between, and that's just for the operation. The people of Gaza are experiencing food shortages, which adds to the intensity and unpredictability of the situation, likely similar to what the world witnessed during the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The US should not underestimate the risk of the US-led humanitarian operation. An example of the risk is demonstrated by the deaths of aid workers from one of the original groups involved in recent Gaza aid delivery- World Central Kitchen. World Central Kitchen temporarily paused its operations from Gaza following the 1 April 2024 IDF strike on a humanitarian convoy that [killed seven World Central Kitchen](#) aid workers in Gaza. Despite coordination with Israel, the IDF struck the World Central Kitchen convoy. Over [200 aid workers](#) have been killed in Gaza since 7 October 2023. Even aid workers are suffering significant losses.

In closing, we have troops in harm's way across the Middle East, and this will not change unless we put pressure on our elected officials to prevent this country from getting sucked into another endless war.