



Ending the War and Ensuring Human Security in Israel-Palestine: Five Recommendations

October 29, 2023

Organizations and leaders in the progressive foreign policy community have strongly condemned the heinous and illegal acts Hamas perpetrated against Israeli civilians, as well as Israeli government actions that have killed and gravely harmed Palestinian civilians in violation of international law. It is also essential for progressives in the United States to propose and champion forward-looking recommendations for how the Biden Administration can help end the current war in Israel-Palestine and best ensure the security, rights and well-being of Israelis and Palestinians in the longer term.

The progressive foreign policy community is diverse in both its composition and views. Different groups and leaders will no doubt have their own specific prescriptions that go beyond those articulated here, but we hope the following recommendations can serve as a commonly supported basis for essential US action.

Recommendation #1: Push for a humanitarian ceasefire

A ceasefire or truce that begins as a temporary measure, but which could be extended, is vitally necessary to prevent further loss of civilian life on a mass scale. The delivery of needed humanitarian aid, additional efforts to secure the release of hostages, the re-establishment of water supplies and electricity and initial assessments of Gaza's reconstruction and resilience needs would all be made possible by a break in fighting. A ceasefire could also help calm tensions in the West Bank and elsewhere in the region, greatly reducing the risk of full-scale fighting moving to an additional theater or drawing in outside actors such as Iran.

While we hope such a ceasefire will be extended indefinitely, a ceasefire is not a peace treaty. It is an ad hoc measure under which combatants do not waive their right to resume military operations if other efforts (see recommendation #2, below) to permanently end an armed conflict fail.

Recommendation #2: Undertake intensive diplomacy to end Hamas attacks, secure release of hostages and end the Israeli siege

With a ceasefire in place, the Aqaba group (the United States, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and representatives of Palestine Liberation Organization) should convene with the addition of Qatar and Turkey – US security partners with channels to Iran and Hamas – with a goal to secure the release of all hostages and an end to the current war. A guiding objective of that process must be an outcome that does not restore the status quo ante, i.e., at a minimum, it must not allow Hamas to have a Gaza-based offensive attack capability, nor can it allow for continued blockade and functional imprisonment of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Consideration should also be given to beginning the process of appropriately addressing accountability for the brutality against, and mass casualties among, civilians on each side.

Recommendation #3: Refocus regional diplomatic priority from bilateral normalization efforts to multilateral efforts toward a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the end of occupation

Once a negotiated end to the current Israel-Hamas war is in place, the United States must finally get serious about diplomacy to justly resolve the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That means moving away from prioritizing the Trump/Netanyahu vision of piecemeal bilateral normalization agreements between Israel and Arab- and Muslim-majority autocracies that have given cover to metastasizing permanent Israeli control of the occupied Palestinian Territories and the inherently discriminatory denial of fundamental Palestinian national, political and human rights in violation of international law. It means championing the inherent benefits of Israel's full acceptance and integration in the Middle East, and moving away from an "arms for peace" model where recognition of Israel is bought with US weapons deals that increase militarization and instability in the region. It also means avoiding the previous and repeatedly failed model of meekly facilitating direct, bilateral negotiations between parties with a massive imbalance of military and diplomatic power.

Instead, the United States should lend its full diplomatic weight to helping construct a truly multilateral framework involving key regional players toward a just and comprehensive resolution of the conflict in accordance with international law. This would include universal normalization and recognition of the national rights of both Israelis and Palestinians – alongside ensuring the security and well-being of both peoples – as its northstar. Different models, such as the Arab Peace Initiative or recent confederation proposals – could be proposed by participants as terms of reference. Absent such an effort, the lack of a political horizon will only continue to feed despair, distrust, and extremism among both peoples.

Recommendation #4: Take meaningful anti-occupation, anti-annexation steps:

Permanent Israeli occupation and ongoing de facto annexation of Palestinian territory is incompatible with international law and shared human values. Failure to take concrete steps to counter permanent, undemocratic Israeli control in the territories would doom any diplomatic conflict resolution effort and continue to feed the current cycle of violence.

The United States must end its demonstrably inadequate practice of limiting itself to mild criticism of deepening occupation and instead take concrete steps to counter it. At a bare minimum, these include: reinstating legal guidance that settlements are inconsistent with international law; declining to use its veto in the United Nations Security Council to shield Israel from accurate and appropriate criticism for its settlement and annexation-related activities; and instituting a zero tolerance policy for the use of US-supplied or -financed arms in connection with violations of human rights or for other prohibited purposes by meaningfully enforcing existing US law on the misuse of aid and US-origin weapons.

Recommendation #5: Substantially expand support for the Palestinian people and Palestinian leaders who seek peace with Israel

The Biden Administration should strengthen the legitimacy of Palestinians seeking a peaceful path to conflict resolution by upgrading the United States' own bilateral relations with PLO, including by finally following through on its promise to reopen a consulate in Jerusalem serving Palestinians, exercising existing executive authority to terminate the decades-old legislative designation of the PLO as a terrorist organization, and working with regional and other international partners toward a major economic support program benefitting the Palestinian people.

Additionally, the United States must stop blocking international organizations and discouraging other countries from recognizing Palestinian statehood. While a comprehensive final resolution to their conflict can only be agreed between Israelis and Palestinians themselves, Palestinians are well within their rights as a nation to seek recognition of their state from international organizations and governments around the world. Binding themselves to the obligations of statehood and acceding to treaties that require responsible conduct is a non-violent, international law-affirming effort that should be applauded, not discouraged or penalized. The United States should therefore cease its practice of delegitimizing these efforts, and instead welcome them as bolstering the prospects for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.