



## CIP Welcomes Gaza Hostage Release; Identifies Steps for Extending and Making the Most of the Pause in Fighting

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The Center for International Policy welcomes news of an agreed pause in fighting between Israel and Hamas to include the release of around 50 women and children hostages. We hope they and their families can begin the process of healing from the horrors of their kidnapping and captivity – and that those who continue to be held by Hamas are also freed quickly, perhaps in connection with agreed extensions of this pause.

We must be clear that these hostages are being released thanks to diplomacy rather than military force. Those who cheered on Israel's bombardment of Gaza – which President Biden himself described as “indiscriminate” – while denigrating those seeking a halt to fighting were playing right to Hamas' desire for a maximalist response from the Israeli government. If the devastation of Gaza is indeed Hamas' goal, as the Netanyahu government and its backers have repeatedly said, it logically follows that it cannot also be used as leverage against it. While Hamas is entirely responsible for taking and terrorizing these hostages in violation of international law, the terrible reality is that delaying this deal only prolonged these hostages' release and increased the number of those killed in captivity, while subjecting thousands of Palestinian civilians to death and destruction; this type of collective punishment comes at great moral, legal and strategic cost.

Now that it is here, this pause in fighting creates opportunities to advance the human security of both peoples – opportunities that only grow the longer the halt in hostilities lasts. To make the most of this pause, and to increase the likelihood of its extension and possible transformation into a permanent ceasefire, the Biden Administration and its international partners should focus on the following objectives:

- 1) Maximizing delivery of humanitarian aid: The growing crisis of malnutrition, thirst and disease must be immediately and decisively arrested with the delivery of food, water, fuel and medical supplies that are unquestionably sufficient to meet the dire urgent need of civilians in Gaza. Further, those supply lines need to be made permanent and protected by mutual agreement of the combatants, even if fighting should resume. The establishment of medical facilities to treat the sick and injured – to temporarily replace facilities destroyed or rendered inoperable during the fighting – must be prioritized and similarly protected from targeting by combatants.



- 2) Diplomacy toward a sustainable ceasefire: Diplomatic avenues to achieving critical US and international objectives must be thoroughly explored during this pause – and the pause extended to accommodate discussions making progress. Decisively limiting or even eliminating Hamas’ Gaza-based offensive capabilities, major reconstruction of Gaza and alternative administrative frameworks for the territory will not be decided in the next five days, but negotiations benefiting the security and well-being of both peoples, neighboring states and international order must at least be initiated during this pause. Advances in any such talks would not only be an achievement in and of themselves, but could reinforce the prospects for further progress on a range of issues, especially if the pause is extended to facilitate such diplomacy.
  
- 3) Make clear that the US and international community will not tolerate further war crimes: While we hope that steps like those above will be taken to extend this pause, it is nonetheless time-limited until otherwise agreed. The United States and its international partners must make clear to the combatants that if hostilities do resume, they will be held accountable for violations of the laws of war such as continued holding of civilian hostages, indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas and collective punishment. The Biden administration specifically should draw clear red-lines around the use of US-supplied or -funded arms, and make clear concrete consequences for Israel’s failure to use such weapons in accordance with US and international law, including suspension of further offensive weapons shipments in the case of noncompliance.

For more detail on steps the United States and its partners should take beginning with this pause – including transitioning to initiatives to resolve the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict – see CIP’s paper [“Ending the War and Ensuring Human Security in Israel-Palestine: Five Recommendations.”](#)

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