



## Two Years Later: Five Recommendations for a Permanent Ceasefire in Gaza and Ensuring Human Security in Israel and Palestine

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This week marks two years since the horrific Hamas-led October 7, 2023 attack and atrocities in southern Israel, in which more than 1,150 Israelis were killed and 250 taken hostage, followed by the devastating and often indiscriminate Israeli assault on Gaza. Of the more than 65,000 Palestinians conservatively [estimated](#) to have been killed in Gaza during the war, more than half are women and children, with hundreds of thousands more at risk of acute malnutrition.

Despite Israel's own top security experts [insisting](#) that Israel has achieved the objective of eliminating Hamas' ability to pose a strategic threat to Israel, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has continued to subject nearly 2 million Palestinian civilians to restrictions on humanitarian aid, use of starvation as a method of warfare, forced displacement, continued bombardment, and other attacks on residences, hospitals, temporary shelters and aid sites. Israeli officials openly state their objective of ejecting many or even all Palestinians from the territory and colonizing it. A multitude of scholars and legal experts – many of them Israeli – have [concluded](#) that Israel is committing the crime of genocide in Gaza.

This memo sets out recommended steps for the United States to permanently end the war and the [atrocities](#) faced by Palestinian civilians and Israeli hostages, as well as ensuring the long term security, rights and well-being of Israelis, Palestinians and all people in the region.

### **Recommendation #1: President Trump should use all U.S. leverage to ensure the finalization of a permanent ceasefire and both parties' sustained adherence to it**

A full and sustained ceasefire and hostage release in Gaza is within reach that will end the war and a genocide in which the United States is deeply complicit as Israel's main arms [supplier](#). The Biden administration's efforts to secure a permanent ceasefire in its final months in office were hobbled by the continued unconditional supply of offensive weapons to Israel even as Netanyahu, [according to his own negotiators](#), obstructed ceasefire efforts

for months and later [broke](#) the early 2025 ceasefire achieved with help from the then-incoming second Trump Administration.

Similarly, Netanyahu's amendments to Trump's new 20-point plan, [reportedly](#) accepted by Trump without consulting key countries in the region that had endorsed the original version of the plan, would functionally allow Israel to retain much of Gaza and continue its subjugation of the territory indefinitely. Hamas accepted Trump's proposed framework for a ceasefire and hostage release, but is seeking further negotiation on issues such as governance and Israeli withdrawal. Netanyahu's [characterization](#) of Hamas' response as a rejection of the Trump Plan – at odds with both Trump himself and Israel's own negotiators – suggests that Netanyahu is again looking to obstruct or extricate himself from a ceasefire.

While the United States has applied significant sanctions and other forms of pressure against Hamas since October 7, 2023 and for many years prior, it has largely refused to use anywhere near the full scope of its leverage in pressuring Netanyahu to accept and adhere to reasonable ceasefire terms, or in response to decades of Israeli abuses and international lawbreaking in the occupied territories. President Trump needs to stand up for U.S. interests and his own deal by not hesitating to apply meaningful pressure to Israel if Netanyahu seeks to obstruct or unravel the Gaza peace plan. Such pressure should include making clear that the United States will halt arms deliveries if Netanyahu acts to frustrate diplomacy and continue the war.

## **Recommendation #2: Empower rather than undermine Palestinian leaders who seek a just peace with Israel**

The Trump Administration should join its closest allies in strengthening the legitimacy of Palestinians seeking a peaceful path to conflict resolution by upgrading the United States' own bilateral relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), including by reopening 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 and infrastructure support program benefitting the Palestinian people.

It is especially critical that the Trump Administration push back on Netanyahu's efforts to sideline and subordinate the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the reconstruction and governance of Gaza. Netanyahu's decades of [undermining](#) the PA – which even included helping ensure that Hamas had the resources to continue to challenge it and keep the Palestinian polity divided – have only led to disaster for both Palestinians and Israelis. Trump should reject Netanyahu's insistence on a hamstrung role for the PA in Gaza, and

instead support [governance structures](#) that account for Palestinian political realities and rights.

The Trump administration and U.S. lawmakers must also recognize and meaningfully act on the fact that paying mere lip service to Palestinian self-determination while blocking lawful, nonviolent initiatives toward Palestinian statehood only delays achievement of a negotiated peace. The United States must stop discouraging international organizations and other countries from recognizing Palestinian statehood, and must cease its [delegitimization](#) of international court proceedings involving Israel.

While a comprehensive, permanent 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 and enforcement of their rights from international organizations and governments around the world. Binding themselves to the obligations of statehood and acceding to treaties that require responsible conduct are non-violent, international law-affirming efforts 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 and just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Recommendation #3: Focus diplomacy toward a just resolution of the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict on multilateral rather than bilateral normalization efforts**

There is broad consensus in Israel, Palestine and globally that returning to the status quo that existed before October 7, 2023 is impossible. While the Trump administration has rightly emphasized the need for a resolution to the underlying Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it nonetheless continues to prioritize piecemeal bilateral normalization agreements between Israel and Arab- and Muslim-majority autocracies incentivized by massive U.S. arms sales.

Rather than increase stability and advance a just end to the conflict, these accords have given cover to the consolidation of 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. Israel-Gulf relations strained nearly to the breaking point as Israeli atrocities in Gaza mounted and its provocative strikes throughout the region proliferated. The vision of these so-called “Abraham Accords” as an anti-Iran security bloc has been undermined as Saudi Arabia and other gulf countries [improved](#) relations with Iran as a means of protecting their essential security interests.

A meaningful and viable effort to resolve the underlying conflict requires prioritizing Palestinian self-determination and championing the inherent benefits of Israel's full acceptance and integration in the Middle East, while moving away from an "arms for peace" model where recognition of Israel is bought with U.S. weapons and defense guarantees that tie the United States to autocrats and increase militarization and instability in the region. It also means avoiding the failed model of a peace process based on direct, bilateral negotiations between parties with a massive imbalance of military and diplomatic power.

Instead, the United States should seek to construct a truly multilateral framework involving key regional players with 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 North Star. Different models, such as the Arab Peace Initiative or recent joint Israeli/Palestinian proposals from [Holy Land Confederation](#) and [Land For All](#) could be introduced as terms of reference.

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

Unending, deepening Israeli occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory are incompatible with any serious effort to sustain a ceasefire and advance diplomacy to end the underlying conflict. Settlement expansion, settler violence, displacement of Palestinian communities and other state-supported acts in service of the Israeli government's open annexation agenda are war crimes that feed the cycle of deadly violence that has plagued generations of Israelis and Palestinians.

At the same time, continuing decades of bipartisan unwillingness to impose real consequences for official Israeli actions that violate international law in the West Bank – and regressive steps like reversing the Biden Administration's modest sanctions on violent settlers or rescinding National Security Memorandum 20 requiring Israel to use American-origin arms in accordance with international humanitarian law – undermines Trump's leverage and dooms any serious conflict resolution effort.

The administration should instead make good on the president's new [pledge](#) that he "will not allow Israel to annex the West Bank" by being clear about the U.S. support that will be withheld if Israel continues to move forward with annexation, whether those steps constitute *de facto* or *de jure* annexation moves. The full scope of offensive U.S. military aid and arms should be on the table, as should the blanket diplomatic protection the United States has provided Israel from even the mildest criticism or accountability in international fora such as the United Nations.

## **Recommendation #5: Recalibrate the U.S.-Israel relationship to better protect U.S. interests and regional security**

Views of the U.S.-Israel relationship are shifting dramatically across the political spectrum of American voters – a change inarguably catalyzed by two years of U.S.-enabled atrocities in Gaza. In particular, a [majority](#) of Americans do not want to see more of their tax dollars going to Israel.

The first priority in righting the U.S.-Israel relationship to align with American values and interests is to ensure that U.S.-subsidized or -supplied weapons are used in accordance with existing law. Both the Biden and Trump Administrations failed to uphold federal laws clearly broken by Israel, including Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act, which prohibits countries receiving military aid from restricting the delivery of U.S. humanitarian aid, and the Leahy Laws, which prohibit U.S. assistance to foreign security units engaged in a consistent pattern of gross violations of human rights. Ending this dereliction of duty by applying relevant law consistently and impartially to Israel will ensure U.S. aid and arms are being used appropriately, and not in ways which advance, rather than undermine, American and regional security.

Similarly, Israel's repeated violations of U.S. law means it would be irresponsible to commit American taxpayers to providing Israel with tens of billions of dollars in more aid when the current Memorandum of Understanding on such assistance expires at the end of Fiscal Year 2028. Obligating working Americans to subsidize any foreign country's military activities for a decade amid rising costs and shrinking budgets in the United States would be inadvisable – particularly if the country in question is a relatively wealthy one with a higher per capita GDP than each of Finland, France, Japan, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The United States should instead decide on Israel's actual military aid needs on a yearly or ad hoc basis – as we do with every other country – as the security environment, fiscal circumstances and Israeli compliance with relevant law merit.

Lastly, the administration and lawmakers should halt and unwind [steps](#) to penalize or even criminalize speech or other constitutionally protected political activity opposing Israel's policies or actions. Efforts to classify or codify legitimate criticism or boycotts of Israel as antisemitic not only hurts the fight against real antisemitism by obscuring understanding of what constitutes it, but has been used to defund and intimidate universities, deport foreign students without due process, and deny Americans essential government services in violation of their fundamental rights. The United States should not erode its adherence to the rule of law or sacrifice the core liberties of its citizens at the behest of a foreign state.