

May XX, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Blinken,

One year after the deadly 11-day war between Israel and the terrorist organization Hamas, and as a new wave of tension and violence emerges, we write with concern and urgency regarding ongoing developments that serve as flashpoints for escalating violence in the region and push a two-state solution further out of reach.

You have rightly identified the goals of ensuring that both Israelis and Palestinians experience equal measures of freedom, security, opportunity, and dignity, and can create the conditions for a negotiated two-state solution. In addition to your consistent engagement with the government of Israel, the Department also continues to press the Palestinian Authority to take steps conducive to achievement of those goals, including reforming its prisoner payments program, and better combat incitement against Israel and violence against Israelis. However, it is clear that more must be done. To that end, we condemn—in the strongest possible terms—the recent acts of terrorism that have taken the lives of at least 19 Israelis as of the date of this letter since late March.

We also appreciate the Biden administration’s diplomatic efforts to communicate concerns to the Israeli government about unilateral actions that would cause damage to the prospects for peace, such as Israeli construction in the E1 area of the West Bank, territory critical to preserving the contiguity of a future Palestinian state. We urge the administration to continue such diplomacy related to ongoing settlement expansions, evictions, and demolitions, particularly in highly sensitive areas like East Jerusalem, which threaten to serve as flashpoints for the kind of terrible violence Israelis and Palestinians suffered last year.

As you know, the increased rate of settlement growth¹ has been accompanied by an alarming spike in settler violence committed against Palestinians², encroachment on Palestinian grazing and farming lands, and continued investment in settlement infrastructure—all of which exacerbate an untenable political situation and undermine both the Palestinians’ aspirations for national self-determination and Israel’s own security and democratic interests.

With this in mind, we respectfully request an update on the concrete steps the Biden administration is taking to deter harmful actions, including:

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/biden-donald-trump-israel-middle-east-jerusalem-7ed6f9a159823b4dc1e8d340dcd3571b>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/12/world/middleeast/settler-violence-west-bank.html>

1. The rise in settler violence committed against Palestinians and Palestinian property, including instances of non-intervention³ or even aiding and abetting⁴ of such attacks by Israeli forces;
2. The increase in permits, tenders, and housing-starts approved by the Government of Israel for settlement construction, most recently the May 12th approval⁵ by the Civil Administration to advance 4,427 new housing units in the West Bank, as well as the retroactive legalization of outposts previously established without the approval of the Government of Israel;
3. The continued demolitions or threat of demolitions of homes, businesses, or infrastructure owned by or primarily serving Palestinians in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, especially in light of the recent Israeli Supreme Court decision⁶ paving the way for the eviction of 1,000 Palestinians in Masafer Yatta, alongside the inequitable rates of approval of building permits for Palestinians;
4. The reported growing level of financial expenditures by the Government of Israel in Israeli settlements in the West Bank⁷; and
5. The Palestinian Authority's (PA) ongoing prisoner payments program, which the PA has acknowledged a willingness⁸ to reform, but on which it has not taken meaningful action.

Like you, we strongly believe that two-state diplomacy remains critical. Dangerous flashpoints related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have a way of rapidly increasing tension and violence in the region without active U.S. leadership. As a result, the United States must harness its substantial influence to exercise leadership and continue its historical role as an honest broker in ending this conflict and serve as a clear, consistent voice for peace and human rights. It is therefore critical that the United States actively work to ensure both parties remain committed to halting counterproductive measures that undermine the viability of two states for two peoples. We look forward to hearing from you on these important issues.

Sincerely,

David E. Price
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Jennifer Wexton
Member of Congress

Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress

³ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-army-police-say-the-other-is-responsible-for-dealing-with-settler-violence-1.10595844>

⁴ <https://www.972mag.com/joint-attacks-israeli-settlers-soldiers/>

⁵ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-advances-nearly-4-000-west-bank-housing-units-for-jews-1.10796095>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/05/israeli-court-evict-1000-palestinians-west-bank-area>

⁷ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/business/.premium-israel-s-settlement-spending-rose-even-after-golan-heights-excluded-1.8283331>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/19/world/middleeast/biden-palestinian-prisoner-payments.html>