



A BOLD INITIATIVE FOR COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL SECURITY AND PEACE - GROUNDED IN US RECOGNITION OF PALESTINE

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The specific recommendations comprising this J Street initiative have been updated following the J Street Policy Center's February 13, 2024 symposium on "A Path Forward: Rebuilding Gaza and Creating a Political Horizon for Israel-Palestine." The full symposium report, including an Executive Summary of these recommendations, is available [here](#).

Summary of Recommendation

J Street calls on the Biden Administration to outline a bold diplomatic initiative promoting security, peace and hope for Israelis, Palestinians and their regional neighbors.

Central to this initiative would be an unprecedented offer of American recognition of the state of Palestine *prior* to such recognition by Israel and of security guarantees for Israel, Palestine and their neighbors. This offer - along with specification of conditions to reach that point - can jumpstart diplomacy that leads in a defined and limited time to resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to regional normalization between Israel and its Arab neighbors.

Background

In the wake of Hamas' horrific attack on October 7 and the devastating Israel-Hamas war that ensued, there is broad recognition that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict "cannot go back" to the pre-October 7 reality of never-ending violence, occupation and conflict management. For more than two decades, core tenets of American policy have been to envision recognition of Palestinian statehood only after or concurrent with Israeli recognition, and to separate Israeli-Arab normalization from Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution.

Even in the post-October 7 reality, the desire for normalization of relations between Israel and many of its Arab neighbors, in particular Saudi Arabia, remains strong. There is also a recognition that Saudi Arabia and other Arab states cannot normalize with Israel without the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Meanwhile, the Israeli people are coming to grips with the post-October 7th reality that endless occupation and so-called conflict management failed miserably in providing national and personal security.

That is why any significant new initiative for post-conflict diplomacy must provide both the Palestinian people a clear political horizon leading to statehood and the Israeli people with new guarantees of enhanced security. Major world powers - in particular the United States as the "indispensable player" - can jumpstart a serious diplomatic initiative to build a different future, by laying out a bold vision that offers recognition of Palestinian statehood and a new regional security architecture grounded in normalized Israeli relations with all its neighbors including the state of Palestine.

Specific Recommendations

The Biden Administration should chart a clear path out of the horrors of the current war, and it could do so in the following five steps. All aspects of this plan should be grounded in the end goal of providing security, dignity and self-determination to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Step One: Secure a stop to the fighting, the release of hostages, a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza – and lay out a comprehensive diplomatic initiative and vision

The most vital first step is to secure an immediate stop to the fighting in Gaza, the release of the remaining hostages, and a surge of humanitarian assistance desperately needed by Gaza's civilian population. The Biden Administration is actively engaged in the tough diplomacy necessary to achieve such an agreement. Given the unimaginable scale and extent of the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the difficulty of achieving a negotiated ceasefire, the Administration must meanwhile do everything in its power to facilitate a sustained surge of humanitarian aid into Gaza, including through enforcing applicable US law.

In parallel to bilateral ceasefire negotiations – or as soon as a pause in the fighting begins – we recommend a major presidential speech laying out a bold vision for the post-conflict future and a comprehensive regional diplomatic initiative to realize it. To be heard by the traumatized people at the center of this conflict, the initiative has to be rooted in promises of security and acceptance for Israelis and security, freedom, and self-determination for Palestinians. The speech should offer American recognition of a demilitarized state of Palestine as a key incentive for Palestinian participation and offer American help in achieving regional normalization and security as a key incentive for Israeli participation.

Step Two: Ask for parallel, unilateral steps by Israelis and Palestinians, and initiate measures to ensure long-term security

The President should ask each side to take a series of immediate, unilateral steps to demonstrate their interest in moving forward.

Israel should take the following steps:

- *Cease actions that undermine the Palestinian Authority and destabilize the West Bank:* The list includes ending efforts to weaken the Palestinian economy by releasing customs revenues to the Palestinian Authority and reactivating permits for Palestinian workers from the West Bank to enter Israel. It also requires ending home demolitions and stopping settlement expansion in Area C, while limiting military operations in Area A, such as cities in the northern West Bank and refugee camps ostensibly under PA control. Israel must crack down on settler violence and displacement of Palestinians, and ensure that violent settlers are not aided and abetted by security forces. In order to take steps to end the occupation of the West Bank, Israel should incrementally change the status of some land in Area C to B, and B to A, and begin evacuating illegal settlement outposts.
- *Facilitate humanitarian aid to Gaza and reconstruction efforts after the war:* Israel must restore adequate electricity, fuel, and water into the Strip; open additional crossings and expand hours of operation; clarify and ease policies banning goods; allow the entry of additional commercial goods; permit the use of the Israeli port of Ashdod for aid deliveries; and work collaboratively with the UN and aid agencies as they scale up operations, including through the implementation of a civil-military deconfliction mechanism. Following the war, Israel must also commit to allowing the rebuilding of Gaza – unlike after previous wars, when Israel's blockade of the Strip prevented adequate reconstruction.

The PLO/PA should in parallel take the following steps:

- *Establish a new government or Transitional Authority:* In consultation with all Palestinian factions, new government ministers should be appointed to serve alongside newly appointed Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa for an interim period, until elections are held. Appointments of public positions and promotions should be awarded not on the level of loyalty to the leadership, but on the basis of performance or professional merit. This nonpartisan leadership should set a benchmark for legislative and presidential elections. The leadership of Hamas and anyone involved in planning or executing the October 7 massacre can have no role in this new Transitional Authority, which must affirm its commitment to building a demilitarized state that will fight terror, recognize Israel, and commit to nonviolence.
- *Commit to and begin implementing reforms:* The revitalized PA should agree to, and the Transitional Authority should start implementing, a series of reforms – including in the areas of democracy and governance, finance, judiciary, combating corruption, overhauling the prisoner payment program, education, and incitement. To combat corruption, ensure transparency, and accountability, the PA should work towards the establishment of an independent parliament and judiciary with effective anti-corruption laws. The PA should also work to end state harassment of Palestinian civil society and media. Such reforms would help realize the vision to “promote a culture of partnership, dialogue, transparency, inclusiveness, and participation in decision-making among all components of society, ensuring public and private freedoms in accordance with the law, most notably freedom of opinion and expression.”
- *Agree to demilitarization of future Palestinian state:* The PA should commit to long-term maintenance of demilitarization in the state of Palestine, including preventing foreign militaries or armed groups from establishing themselves within Palestine and Palestinian forces operating outside the state, as well as to foregoing heavy weaponry (only weapons for internal security/policing), military, or military infrastructure. The PA should agree to the presence of a third-party verification mechanism to ensure that standards of demilitarization are being upheld.

The US should take actions to ensure the safety of Israelis and Palestinians:

- *Train and build capacity for Palestinian security forces:* While the Transitional Authority builds toward a demilitarized state, the US should train and build capable Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF), under the auspices of the United States Security Coordinator (USSC) as it has for nearly two decades. The PASF should ensure the new state’s internal security and cooperate with neighboring states, including Israel, in combating terror, and the US should commit to working with it to develop a strong internal police, border guards, and counterterror and other security forces. The PA and Israel should reiterate their agreements on intelligence-sharing and security cooperation.
- *Facilitate deployment of a Palestinian security presence in post-war Gaza:* As the PASF will not be able to step in immediately to secure Gaza, the US should support the gradual deployment of: 1) unarmed PA civil defense forces to aid in disaster response and reconstruction, and 2) Palestinian border and customs police. For a limited time, Palestinian forces should be supported by a US-incentivized international peace-keeping

contingent, including Egyptian, Jordanian, and other Arab forces. The Administration and Congress should ensure that the USSC has sufficient resources to support this process and consider placing USSC teams in the Strip as peace monitors alongside an international force, to reassure Israeli and international partners.

Step Three: Recognize Palestine and reissue the Arab Peace Initiative

In return for each side taking the unilateral steps outlined, the President should propose that:

- The United States and other partners – including European countries and other US allies that do not yet recognize Palestinian statehood – recognize the state of Palestine after the Palestinians have taken the unilateral steps asked of them. The President should also commit to seeking legislation from Congress that would address existing US restrictions relating to funding the PA and UN bodies, a necessary step for the US to support admission of Palestine to the UN, upon completion of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.
- The Arab League convene to reaffirm the Arab Peace Initiative after the specified steps have been taken by Israel and it has committed to entering negotiations over final status issues based on clear terms of reference.
- Leading Arab countries, the G7, and the EU, commit to participate along with the US in Marshall Plan-scale investment in redevelopment of Gaza and the West Bank through the new Transitional Palestinian Authority referenced above, with reconstruction and security overseen in partnership with Arab countries. This partnership would facilitate the immediate repair and reconstruction of utilities and other public works, as well as identify major projects, raise funds for them, and execute major project development. Saudi participation in the repair and reconstruction effort is key for the plan's overall success and can be framed as part of a commitment to reopening a path to Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking.
- A new regional security architecture will be developed encompassing Israel and Palestine as well as neighbors – including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Gulf states, and other willing partners – with meaningful American involvement and international support. This regional security architecture should be subject to the implementation of agreed security arrangements. This will greatly enhance security for Israelis and also for Palestinians – as the state of Palestine should receive meaningful guarantees regarding sovereignty over its own territory. Following a future peace settlement and subject to agreement by Israel and Palestine, the US should consider the possibility of a US-led international peace-enabling force deployed along the Palestinian borders with Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, and along potential borders in Jerusalem.

Step Four: Negotiate on two tracks – Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution and Israel-Saudi normalization

The President should propose that following US recognition of Palestine and the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative, the United States would lead a new UN Security Council resolution laying out the parameters for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and confirming the path to admission for Palestine as a full member state. The new resolution could be framed as an update to UN Security Council Resolution 242, and would enshrine the US and international community's commitment to the two-state solution in international law, while setting out parameters for resolving final-status issues.

Negotiations should be proposed on two tracks, toward two agreements between:

- The states of Israel and Palestine, guided by parameters laid out in the UNSC resolution on final status issues, with the active participation and facilitation of the United States and other international actors.
- Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States in which the US would make certain bilateral security commitments to both countries, Israel would confirm its intent to recognize Palestine and negotiate a final status agreement, and Saudi Arabia would recognize Israel. The US should reiterate its commitment to supporting Israel's defensive military capabilities and qualitative military edge, and to enhancing efforts to combat Iranian moves to destabilize the region, including Tehran's financing of terrorism and regional proxies.

The two tracks would move in parallel, and necessary US legislation to facilitate these agreements would be pursued as a package, hopefully attracting wide bipartisan support,

Step Five: Take Congressional action necessary to enable both sets of agreements and support Palestinian admission to the UN as a member state

Finally, when agreements are complete on both tracks, the President would bring to Congress the necessary legislation to facilitate both the Israeli-Palestinian peace and Saudi normalization agreements. The legislative package would include the removal of prohibitions regarding: US funding of the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and affiliated organizations following the admission of Palestine as a full member state; diplomatic representation in the US for the PLO or any "constituent group" or "successor" to it; and funding that confers a "direct benefit" to the PA.

These legislative changes would allow the United States to support the final step in this process: the admission of Palestine as a full member state in the United Nations.

Conclusion

The horrific attack by Hamas on October 7th and the disastrous war in Gaza that followed are the latest dire signs of the urgent need for an entirely new approach to Middle East diplomacy. The ideas that progress is impossible, that ambitions must be minimal and that this irresolvable conflict can be managed have been thoroughly discredited. The tragic suffering on both sides and the utter lack of hope call for a bold new vision and hard-nosed diplomacy to realize it.

We believe the best interests of the United States are served by laying out the choices all sides must make to create meaningful security and a future grounded in dignity and self-determination for the entire region. The President can and should urgently provide both incentives to, and a strong push on, the various parties to turn away from never-ending conflict toward a future built on diplomacy and security achieved through peace.