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# J STREET'S GAZA POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The most immediate and important priority that the US faces in regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is ending the war in Gaza and pursuing a post-conflict plan that breaks the perpetual cycle of fighting and suffering on all sides. Key US objectives for our Gaza policy should include two immediate and readily-achievable goals: 1) Keeping Israel secure and obtaining the release of all the hostages; and 2) Ending the suffering of civilians in Gaza. They should also include two longer-term objectives that will be much more challenging to achieve: 1) Removing Hamas from power in Gaza; and 2) Setting the conditions, over time, for a Palestinian state through the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

J Street adamantly opposes President Trump's proposal to displace two million Palestinians from Gaza and move them to other countries while rebuilding the territory. Forced displacement of an ethnic group from a given area amounts to ethnic cleansing, is morally reprehensible, and would transform Israel into a global pariah. It would also fail to achieve the objectives outlined above. While it is true that living conditions in Gaza are currently horrific, Trump's plan ignores the long history that displacement plays in the conflict and the trauma it has caused for Palestinians. There is simply not a scenario in which Palestinians, the Arab states, or the rest of the world acquiesce to this plan.

Instead, J Street recommends a plan that focuses on: ending the war and getting the hostages out; surging humanitarian assistance, economic recovery, and reconstruction aid; establishing security on the ground initially through an Arab-led international force, supported by the Palestinian Authority, and eventually handed off to the Palestinians; building a transitional governing mechanism in Gaza with a role for the Palestinian Authority; and eventually transitioning to a reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under one authority. These elements have been central to plans proposed both by the Arab League and by the Biden Administration, which we believe can be the basis for the start of a governance, security, and reconstruction plan that must ultimately be agreed to by Israel, Hamas, and the many other parties who would be involved in rebuilding Gaza.

Importantly, this plan cannot succeed if the situation in the West Bank continues to simultaneously deteriorate or if the Israeli government moves to annex territory — fundamentally undermining alternative governance options for Palestinians. A separate J Street policy memo will address the issues of the West Bank more comprehensively.

## **Prioritize completing all three phases of the hostage deal, getting the hostages out, and ending the war.**

The most important and immediate objective of US policy should be to continue to support a ceasefire agreement that brings the hostages home, surges aid to Gaza, and ends the war. In an ideal world, this agreement would also lead to an arrangement on post-conflict governance in Gaza, but if the parties cannot agree on that, the priority must be placed on sustaining the current deal to get all the hostages out and end the war. Israel's interests are not served by restarting the war. It has already set Hamas back enough to ensure another October 7th attack is not possible in the foreseeable future. Retrieving hostages through military operations has proved much less effective than through diplomacy, and in a number of cases hostages have been killed as a result of the fighting. Renewed fighting would generate new rounds of misery for Palestinian civilians causing both civilian casualties and less access to humanitarian aid. It would also continue to put pressure on the Israeli economy and society that is looking to heal, and lead to further isolation of Israel internationally. The only way to displace Hamas in Gaza is by starting to build an alternative — not by restarting the war.

## **Surge humanitarian assistance and begin early recovery.**

The United States has been the leading provider of humanitarian assistance into Gaza, thus far contributing \$1.2 billion in assistance. It must continue to lead the global humanitarian response, working closely with international relief organizations and the United Nations to deliver food, water, medicine, shelter, and provide other immediate humanitarian needs. The United States must never support Israeli cutoffs of aid to Gaza being used as a pressure tool in negotiations. This action is in direct violation of international humanitarian law and serves as collective punishment for the more than 2 million Palestinians living in Gaza. Instead, the United States should press Israel to ensure all crossings are open and operating at full capacity while improving the efficiency of aid routes. Part of this effort includes pressing the Israeli government to show necessary flexibility and cut through red tape. Alongside sufficient humanitarian aid, the US should also press Israel to permit entry of commercial goods to stabilize prices, reduce dependency on aid, and revitalize the economy. With the end of hostilities, an emphasis should also shift to removal of rubble and unexploded ordnance, and prioritization of investments in early recovery programs. Importantly, none of this is possible if the Trump Administration moves ahead with its plans to shutter USAID and cut off most foreign assistance — actions that J Street firmly opposes. Moreover, the United States must also encourage international donors — especially the Gulf states — to make significant financial contributions to humanitarian efforts and early recovery.

## **Establish a viable security alternative to Hamas inside Gaza, both in the near-term through a transitory Arab force in partnership with the Palestinian Authority, and in the long-term via the Palestinian Authority Security Forces.**

The long history of insurgency and counterinsurgency teaches that a vital element to reestablishing order inside of Gaza and, over time, displacing Hamas, is establishing a local force that can provide basic policing and security on the ground and has some legitimacy with the local population. In the immediate term, there is no viable Palestinian alternative to Hamas and this work cannot be done by Israel. Therefore, an international force is necessary in the immediate future. The country with

the greatest knowledge of Gaza and the greatest interests engaged in the conflict is Egypt — given that instability in Gaza threatens its borders. Egypt should play a lead role and also bring in others, including fellow Arab states and international contributors. This force can also obtain international legitimacy through the support of a UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR).

The mission for an international force would be to over time disarm Hamas, while providing basic security inside Gaza. The plan would have to include a geographically phased approach, as simultaneously taking security responsibility for the entire Gaza Strip is not feasible. Egypt and other international players would never accept such a role unless there is clarity on an end-state where they are no longer responsible for Gaza. Therefore, from the start, local Palestinians in Gaza and from the West Bank should also be part of this international force. Over time, the US Security Coordinator — who is already responsible for training Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF) for the West Bank — can take the lead in training 10,000 new PASF who would be inserted into Gaza and gradually take over responsibility from international forces over a number of years. Finally, this entire plan must also rest on the assumption that a part of a negotiated agreement to end the war will also include an agreement by Hamas to not actively fight this international force.

### **Establish an alternative governance structure to Hamas through a transitional council or technocratic government with a central role for the Palestinian Authority.**

In addition to an alternative security structure, there will also need to be an alternative governing entity to Hamas. Such an entity should start with the numerous municipalities and ministries (e.g. ministry of health, water, power, etc.) that functioned in Gaza prior to the war. Most of these local governing mechanisms are run by technocrats and professionals unaffiliated with a political party. On top of these existing local entities, there needs to be a transitional council or technocratic government that would provide political leadership and help administer recovery and reconstruction. This entity should be agreed upon by all the key Palestinian factions through negotiations that can be hosted by Egypt. For the Palestinian Authority to play a central role in taking over eventual security responsibility for Gaza, it would insist on also having a political role in this entity, but would not take on full governing responsibility. Hamas would need to acquiesce to this governing entity though it could have no formal role in it.

### **Support a major reconstruction effort administered for Gaza with roles for the Gaza Transitional Entity, the Palestinian Authority, the US, Arab states, and international partners.**

A third leg of a post-conflict Gaza strategy would need to be a massive global reconstruction effort. Ideally such an effort would include Palestinian, Arab, and international lines of effort — including from the United States. The Palestinian Authority would set up a Gaza reconstruction agency to work on local implementation together with the transitional governing authority. An international coordinator for Gaza reconstruction would work very closely with both the governing council and the commanding general of the international security force. This person's job would be to coordinate international contributions and investments coming in through the UN system, other international institutions such as the World Bank, international donors, and the Gulf States. The major contributions by the Gulf States would be a central component of

improving Israel-Gulf relations, eventually intended to lead to Israel-Saudi normalization and a peace agreement that leads to full recognition of Israel by the Arab States as well as the creation of a Palestinian state. The United States would also have to play a central role in generating the necessary international support for a major reconstruction effort. Finally, there would need to be a new, robust, and efficient monitoring mechanism for goods entering Gaza to replace the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism that addresses Israeli security concerns, prevents Hamas from reconstituting, and does not impede recovery efforts.

### **Transition to a unified Gaza and West Bank.**

Over time, as security responsibility increasingly shifts to the PA Security Forces, the transitional governing authority in Gaza would be merged with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The best way to do this would be to set a phased, performance-based process with target deadlines throughout the transitional phase, culminating in national Palestinian elections that would create one unified Palestinian government responsible for both the West Bank and Gaza. A less ideal alternative would be an agreement amongst the key political parties and factions on reintegration of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority, again through a phased, performance-based process with target deadlines.