



## America-Eurasia Center's Middle East Program

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### Pleas for a Pause or Ceasefire in Gaza but Israel Rebuffs



*US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas meet in West Bank on November 5. Photo Credit: Jonathan Ernst/Pool/Reuters*

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## Hope is Diminishing for Palestinians as the Death Toll Rises above 10,000



*An ambulance convoy is bombed in Gaza near al-Shifa Hospital that was taking patients to the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, which the Israeli Defense Forces took accountability for on November 3. Photo Credits: Palestine Red Crescent Society/X*

For the second time since October 7th, United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in the Middle East to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his war cabinet on Friday, and with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank on Saturday. Despite the Biden administration's continued urging for a pause in the fighting in order to allow humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu emphatically rebuffed these cease fire pleas, stating that the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) would not stop their military operations until Hamas freed all hostages taken on October 7.<sup>1</sup> Netanyahu says Israel will have 'security responsibility' for Gaza after fighting ends. The next day, Blinken met with Abbas to discuss the increased settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, as well as the future of Palestinian governance, in whose development he hoped that the PA would be a

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<sup>1</sup> Upright, Ed, and Christian Edwards. "November 5, 2023, Israel-Hamas War." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 6 Nov. 2023, [www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-05-23/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-05-23/index.html).

significant player. Abbas has called for the “immediate cessation of the destructive war.”<sup>2</sup> Blinken continued his Middle East tour, meeting with foreign ministers from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Qatar, Turkey, and Cyprus. In Cyprus, Blinken also met with President Nikos Christodoulides to thank him for helping Americans exit Gaza. According to the White House, over 300 Americans out of 1,000 stranded in Gaza have been able to exit.<sup>3</sup> Agreement was finally reached last week to permit foreign passport holders and some critically injured Palestinian civilians to depart through the Rafah border crossing.



*Colombians erase antisemitic graffiti outside Israel's Embassy in Bogota, Colombia, Oct. 9, 2023, Photo Credits: AP*

Leaders worldwide have pleaded for an immediate ceasefire. Pope Francis delivered a blessing at the Vatican on November 5 for the lives lost and those suffering. He stated on social media, “I continue to think about the serious situation in Palestine and in Israel where many, many people have lost their lives. In God’s name, I beg you to stop: cease using weapons!”<sup>4</sup> Gaza is “becoming a graveyard for children,” the United Nation’s Secretary-General António Guterres warned. Violence against Jewish and Palestinian people has risen around the world in response to the conflict. The corresponding rise in antisemitism in times of acute conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is not an uncommon theme. Brian Levin, an extremism researcher and professor emeritus at California State University, San Bernardino, stated that the attack on Israel by Hamas

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Upright, Ed, and Christian Edwards. “November 5, 2023, Israel-Hamas War.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 6 Nov. 2023, [www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-05-23/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-11-05-23/index.html).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

on October 7 was “the worst single-day slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust.”<sup>5</sup> Online and offline, threats have surged, including bomb threats against synagogues and swastikas spray painted on various Jewish venues. According to Community Security Trust, in the first four days of the conflict, the United Kingdom saw a 300% spike in antisemitic incidents. There have been at least a dozen pro-Hamas rallies in the US which government officials have condemned.<sup>6</sup> Social media, confusion, and some measure of historical ignorance on both sides have contributed to the polarization between opinions on the conflict, a conflict with much more gray area than either side would concede.

As violence continues in Gaza, Israel is accused of another war crime after taking responsibility for bombing an ambulance convoy near al-Shifa hospital, attempting to bring critically injured Palestinians to the Rafah border.<sup>7</sup> Thousands of Gazans have clustered around the al-Shifa hospital, hoping it would be a safe haven, despite the IDF declaring that Hamas’ main base is under that hospital.<sup>8</sup> In a statement, the IDF justified that attack claiming, “A Hamas terrorist cell was identified using an ambulance. In response, an IDF aircraft struck and neutralized the Hamas terrorists who were operating within the ambulance. We emphasize that this area in Gaza is a war zone. Civilians are repeatedly called upon to evacuate southward for their safety.”<sup>9</sup> People and governments are responding to Israel’s actions in Gaza, calling these acts, a genocidal war, including Brazil, South Africa, and Colombia. A spokesperson for the Palestinian Health Ministry, Ashraf al-Qudra, informed the Red Cross/Red Crescent that those in the ambulance were civilians, not militants.<sup>10</sup> This bombing is another alleged war crime that Israel is being accused of, including the continuous bombing of the Jabalia refugee camp and the UN school at the camp.

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<sup>5</sup> Farivar, Masood. “Antisemitism Surges around World as Israel, Hamas Clash.” *Voice of America*, Voice of America (VOA News), 12 Oct. 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/antisemitism-surges-around-world-as-israel-hamas-clash/7306956.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/antisemitism-surges-around-world-as-israel-hamas-clash/7306956.html).

<sup>6</sup> Farivar, Masood. “Antisemitism Surges around World as Israel, Hamas Clash.” *Voice of America*, Voice of America (VOA News), 12 Oct. 2023, [www.voanews.com/a/antisemitism-surges-around-world-as-israel-hamas-clash/7306956.html](http://www.voanews.com/a/antisemitism-surges-around-world-as-israel-hamas-clash/7306956.html).

<sup>7</sup> Corbett, Jessica. “Israel Accused of ‘War Crime’ after Bombing Ambulance Convoy Outside Gaza Hospital.” *Common Dreams*, 6 Nov. 2023, [www.commondreams.org/news/israel-bombs-ambulance](http://www.commondreams.org/news/israel-bombs-ambulance).

<sup>8</sup> Najjar, Farah, and Joseph Stepansky. “Israel-Hamas War Updates: Israeli Strike Hits Gaza Medical Convoy.” *Al Jazeera*, Al Jazeera, 4 Nov. 2023, [www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/3/israel-hamas-war-live-israeli-forces-gather-outside-gaza-city](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2023/11/3/israel-hamas-war-live-israeli-forces-gather-outside-gaza-city).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



*Multiple Israeli airstrikes hit Jabalia, Gaza's largest refugee camp, where there are some 116,000 registered refugees living. Photo Credit: Mohammed al-Masri/Reuters*

Leaders from across the globe have come together to push forth a new two-state solution, foremost among them United States President Biden. Biden has emphasized that it is crucial to have a vision for the future of Israel and Palestine. Many scholars and world leaders believe that this solution to be the way to bring peace after the bloodiest Israeli-Palestinian conflict in decades,<sup>11</sup> and the once-dormant two-state solution now appears to be back on the table. According to Yossi Mekelber, an associate fellow at the Chatham House think tank, “There are no other viable alternatives. The two-state solution is the least bad option to enable both Israelis and Palestinians to fulfill their political, civil, and human rights.”<sup>12</sup> With hopes from many Israelis that Netanyahu’s tenure of office will be over after the colossal intelligence failure of October 7, what is lacking on the Palestinian and Israeli fronts is strong leadership and governance. However, the prospect of improved Palestinian governance appears bleak, as Hamas controls Gaza and Abbas’ PA rule of the West Bank has been distinguished mainly by extraordinary corruption and little improvement in the lives of the West Bank Palestinians in almost twenty years of an ostensibly four-year ruling term. One possible replacement for Abbas is Marwan Barghouti, a top leader in the Fatah party and one

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<sup>11</sup> “Israel-Palestine: Is the Two-State Solution the Answer to the Crisis?” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 Nov. 2023, [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/04/israel-palestine-is-the-two-state-solution-the-answer-to-the-crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/04/israel-palestine-is-the-two-state-solution-the-answer-to-the-crisis).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of very few who enjoys a reputation for integrity in the Palestinian street; however, he has been in an Israeli prison for the past 21 years, and the rest of the Palestinian bench is woefully thin on talent or popularity.<sup>13</sup> Another possible successor of Abbas is Mohammed Dahlan, the previous Fatah party security chief whom Abbas exiled to Dubai.



*Protesters at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Washington D.C. Photo Credit: Jose Luis Magana/AP Photo.*

Worldwide pleas for a ceasefire have spiked as the death toll in Gaza increases dramatically by the day. While Netanyahu has stated that he has no intention of a ceasefire until the hostages are released and has striven to project an aura of strength and sovereignty, it appears clear that the Israeli government was caught flat footed by the October 7 terrorist attacks. Even three weeks later, the Israeli government's goals in Gaza appear ill defined beyond rooting out and eliminating Hamas, massive civilian collateral damage notwithstanding. There is no question that Israel will seriously damage Hamas in Gaza with this current military operation. It is equally certain that this war and subsequent likely occupation of Gaza will never be accepted by the Palestinian populace, despite their weariness of Hamas and its incessant terrorism and war-mongering. The purpose and endgame of Hamas' attack and massacres of October 7 are also unclear, as the current massive

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<sup>13</sup> "Israel-Palestine: Is the Two-State Solution the Answer to the Crisis?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 4 Nov. 2023, [www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/04/israel-palestine-is-the-two-state-solution-the-answer-to-the-crisis](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/04/israel-palestine-is-the-two-state-solution-the-answer-to-the-crisis).

Israeli response in Gaza should have been expected, although perhaps the apparent disregard for civilian collateral damage has been a surprise to Hamas. It is also possible that this type of massive indiscriminate Israeli response was actually what Hamas was trying to provoke. The Palestinian populace is now in the cursed position of having as its primary, possibly only, military defender, the very same entity, Hamas, that unleashed the events that brought this war to Gaza in the first place. As this article suggests, how this war will end is impossible to predict. At a minimum, it appears that only the removal of Hamas from the equation will allow for an eventual political restructuring of Gaza, that would allow a two-state solution to have any chance of success. Far-right parties on both sides have not brought the answer to the decades-long conflict. Will this war end in the demolition of what is left of Gaza along with Hamas? Or will there be enough left of Gaza to give these two peoples a chance to find a solution?

