

DSA Statement on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Winning Peace with Justice in the Middle East

Peace in the Middle East and justice for both the Palestinian and Israeli people can only be achieved through mutual recognition by each side of the right of each people to viable and secure states of their own, in which the rights of minorities are also guaranteed. Thus, the rejectionist politics of both the Netanyahu administration and of Hamas are a barrier to peace. United States foreign policy should be mobilized in favor of peace forces in both camps and, in particular, against rejectionist Israeli government policies, which historically were and remain buttressed by unconditional U.S. economic and military aid.

The Perspective of Democratic Socialists of America

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Democratic Socialists of America deplores the continuing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip, its multi-party refusal to uproot settlements in the West Bank that block a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and its wall that brings neither long-term security to Israelis nor solidarity with its neighbors.

Further, DSA believes that the recent Israeli bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza did not advance the peace process. In seven years of intermittent rocket launchings from Gaza, 22 Israelis have been killed and scores wounded. But these numbers, as horrid as they are, pale in comparison to the loss of civilian life among the Gazan population and the squalid conditions in which they must live within borders policed by Israel. But there was a ceasefire in 2008, and if indirect negotiations with Hamas had not been abandoned by Israel it is quite likely the cease-fire would have been maintained without the Israeli military escalation. By killing hundreds of Palestinian civilians, wounding thousands more, leaving upwards of 50,000 homeless and turning whole sections of Gaza City into what even Israeli observers call “an earthquake zone,” Israel’s three-week military operation was an excessive and inhumane response to Hamas’s deplorable rocket launchings into Israeli population centers. It was

also a failure in that it did little to enhance the long-term security of the Israeli people.

As even former Israeli conservative Prime Minister Ehud Olmert now admits, Israel can neither gain physical security nor perpetuate its status as a majority Jewish state unless it ends its unjust occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The international community must of course consistently condemn unjust attacks on civilians by both sides. Democratic Socialists of America urges the U.S. government and the international community to insure that the temporary ceasefire in Gaza leads to a sustained diplomatic effort to negotiate a just, two-state solution to the conflict between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

The Israeli state has a right to defend its people, but after more than 60 years of self-defense and 40 years of an unjust occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, it should be self-evident that peace and security for Israel cannot be achieved by injustice towards another people. The common Israeli/ U.S. effort to isolate, both diplomatically and economically, the Hamas regime in Gaza only served to increase Gazan support for Hamas. There can be no military solution, imposed by either side, to what is a political problem. The withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces from the West Bank and the creation of an economically viable and politically independent Palestinian state would provide the Palestinian people a reason to push aside rejectionist forces within their community.

DSA also recognizes that leaving it at telling combatants to lay down their arms and embrace a two-state solution is like asking the sea to part itself. With hostilities enduring since before the time of Israel’s founding and with its holding and colonizing East Jerusalem and the occupied territories for longer than the 30 years war lasted, a political solution is both necessary and elusive.

In many ways, the worst elements of both Israeli and Palestinian society are now the political leaderships of their respective nations. On the Israeli side, opportunism mixes with chauvinism as Netanyahu’s Likud-coalition

government panders to the settler vote. Yet without removing the settlements, by either repatriating the settlers root and branch, buying out their holdings or acceding them as citizens with equal rights in a Palestinian state—there won't be peace. Even a Palestinian state comprising the West Bank and Gaza, with Israel still in control of the settlements, the water and the most arable land, won't be viable. Neither will a Hamas-led state whose main goal is reversing the Nakba.

On the Palestinian side, there won't be peace until there's a broad pro-peace front that can compete with the Islamists—and they can only do that if they have partners among the Israelis and the U.S. citizenry, not followers cheering on an impossible military solution or endorsing an illusory “single-state” solution.

What it will take is diplomacy by outside forces to give political weight to those factions genuinely desiring peace and willing to compromise. It means freezing out the millenarians on either side—even as we know that both Likud and Hamas must be brought to the peace table, at least in the first instance- while allowing moderate elements on both sides of the Green line to be able not only to negotiate a peace with authority but to keep one by ruling stable states.

In the short-run, a viable cease-fire in Gaza must involve international supervision of the crossing points between Egypt and Gaza and between Israel and Gaza. The basic needs of the people of Gaza cannot be met absent normal commerce between Gaza and Egypt, Israel and the West Bank. Re-opening the border crossings would also eliminate the Hamas rationale for abandoning the previously successful cease-fire. An internationally

guaranteed cease-fire must also preclude the covert importation of arms into Gaza.

As the preponderant military force in the region, Israel can best reinitiate the peace process. Israel could help restore its tarnished international image by taking up the Arab League's 2002 initiative as a starting point for comprehensive peace negotiations. In 2002, the Arab League abandoned its long-standing denial of the right of the state of Israel to exist and offered to recognize the state of Israel in return for the creation of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

DSA recognizes that its primary political responsibility is to change a U.S. foreign policy that continues to give a blank check to Israeli government policy by prolonging its policy of massive unconditional military aid to Israel. The Bush administration's unyielding support for Israeli intransigence harmed the people of Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel itself. Thus, DSA will work, along with other pro-peace forces in the American Jewish, Arab, and broader progressive community to pressure the Obama administration to adopt a balanced Middle-East approach. We support the Obama administration's call for an end to expansion of settlements, and we urge pressure on Israel to freeze any settlement activity as a prelude to abandoning them in an effort to bring peace. Such a policy should use carrots and sticks to encourage both sides in the conflict to make the hard choices and compromises that must be the foundation of an enduring peace. As activists in the Israeli peace movement have said for generations, the U.S. cannot contribute to the security of all the peoples of the Middle East if it continues to embrace Israeli governments that block the peace process.

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