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## A Ceasefire in Gaza

*Whoever bears responsibility for the blast killing hundreds in a hospital, the toll of the Gaza war is far too high. Western leaders should join calls for a pause to save lives, prevent fighting from spreading and give diplomacy a chance.*



In the evening of 17 October, a blast at a hospital in Gaza City killed 471 people, according to local authorities, the vast majority civilians. The health ministry in Gaza blamed an Israeli airstrike; Israel, later backed by the U.S., pointed to errant Palestinian militant rocket fire. Overnight, northern Gaza endured heavy Israeli bombardment, as it has done now for ten days, with areas in the south to which many people had fled also coming under fire. The bombing is part of Israel's Operation Iron Swords, launched in response to Hamas's 7 October attack on Israeli communities surrounding the Gaza Strip, in which militants killed 1,400 Israelis, mostly civilians, and took about 200 hostages. As of 18 October, the Israeli campaign has killed [some 3,500 Palestinians](#), including hundreds of children. The hospital explosion triggered fury across the region, with large street protests in Arab, Iranian and Turkish cities. Arab leaders pulled out of a planned summit in the Jordanian capital Amman with U.S. President Joe Biden, who visited Israel on 18 October.

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Hamas, meanwhile, should release the hostages.*

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Mass casualty events have accelerated efforts to end previous Arab-Israeli wars; the hospital blast should do the same. With Hamas's attacks, Israel suffered a calamity on 7 October, shattering its sense of security. Its right to self-defence and to secure Israeli communities in the south is clear. But if its response continues along the present course, Israel will not only raze Gaza, home to 2.3 million people, but risk igniting a regional conflagration that would pose a far graver danger to Israel itself. On 18 October, reportedly at Biden's urging, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would not block humanitarian aid coming into Gaza from Egypt (though adding it would "thwart" any attempt by Hamas to supply itself by these means). Israel should pause the bombing to allow a real humanitarian corridor to open. In parallel, it could outline to Western partners its terms for a permanent ceasefire that would include a way to deal with Hamas and the question of Gaza's future governance. Hamas, meanwhile, should release the hostages it and other militants hold.

Israel's bombardment of Gaza is its response, or at least the first stage thereof, to Hamas' [Operation al-Aqsa Deluge](#), which in addition to those killed left another 3,500 people wounded, 102 of them seriously. Among the hostages Hamas took were Israelis, including at least 26 children, and several foreigners; Hamas claims that other Palestinian groups dragged back another 50 captives. It is hard to overestimate the trauma and pain the attacks, unprecedented in Israel's history, have caused to Israelis, not just due to their scale, but because they exposed the country's vulnerability and institutional fragility. In Israeli eyes, the consequences could be existential, and as a result, Israel's military campaign has been more intense and destructive than in its previous wars with Hamas. In addition to causing numerous deaths and injuries, it has flattened entire neighbourhoods in Gaza, the deeply impoverished coastal enclave that Israel (along with Egypt) has blockaded since 2007. Israel put its ground offensive on hold while Biden was in the country, but such an operation still appears imminent; Israel has mobilised 360,000 reservists and told residents of Gaza's northern and central areas (some 1.2 million people, more than half of the population) to evacuate. Many complied, but an estimated half a million remain.

Questions remain about how Israel will pursue its campaign and to what end. An Israeli cabinet statement on 15 October – a week after it formally declared war, for the first time since 1973 – identified four objectives for the Gaza operation: “toppling Hamas and destroying its military capabilities”; “eliminating the threat of terrorism emanating from the strip”; “exerting maximal effort to find a solution to the hostage issue”; and “defending the state's borders and citizens”. These are all legitimate aims, but they cannot be divorced from realities in Gaza or the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given Hamas's roots and long history in Gaza, as well as the size of its ranks, its covert facilities and its popularity in some quarters, smashing its military capacities – even if not the movement in its entirety – is likely to be a drawn-out, bloody affair. It will mean confronting Hamas on its home turf, a battle for which the movement has long been preparing. Sustainably ridding Gaza of all manifestations of what Israelis see as terrorism and many Palestinians call resistance will be impossible absent wider political change. Israel faces tradeoffs among its objectives, notably between bringing home hostages and eradicating Hamas's military infrastructure.

Neither the Gaza crisis nor the Israeli-Palestinian conflict writ large has a military solution. It is not evident what conditions Netanyahu would place on a permanent ceasefire or how far diplomacy could go in meeting them. Western leaders may now also be particularly wary of asking Israel to stop bombing when the Pentagon itself has said misfired Palestinian rockets probably caused the hospital blast. On 18 October, the U.S. vetoed a UN Security Council resolution, supported by most other Council members, that, in addition to condemning the Hamas attacks in Israel, would have demanded a humanitarian pause in Israel's bombardment of Gaza. But while the war continues, more incidents like the hospital explosion are all too plausible and, even if Palestinian militants in this instance were responsible, ten days of Israeli bombing has exacted a terrible toll on innocent people in Gaza. While neither Iran and its non-state allies across the region nor Israel and the U.S. appear to want a regional confrontation, the danger of a wider war is growing. Israeli ground troops going in would exacerbate the risks.

The best option now is for the U.S. and its allies to press Israel to pause the bombardment, honour its pledge to allow humanitarian access to Gaza and lay out conditions for a permanent ceasefire, including for Gaza's reconstruction. Hamas and Palestinian militants, in turn, would end rocket fire from Gaza and let the hostages go. Meanwhile, even as Western countries work to stop the war from spreading, they might also plant the seeds of discussions about broader regional de-escalation, which will be necessary for lasting peace and security. They could, for example, after a ceasefire, restart discussions about normalisation of relations, particularly between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which have suffered a setback in the past ten days, and try to forge a bigger accord between Israel and key Arab states as well as Türkiye that addresses Israel's splintered sense of security and reins in Hamas through regional guarantees. The immediate imperative, though, is to buy time for a humanitarian pause in Gaza and for diplomacy.

### **The Hamas Atrocities and the Aftermath**

Hamas's attack caught Israel off guard. As thousands of rockets rained down on Israel, militants broke through the fortifications surrounding Gaza, overrunning 22 towns abutting the border, as well as eight military posts. A reported 336 Israeli soldiers were among the dead, but most of the victims were civilians, including many children. It took Hamas and other militants mere hours to kill more Israelis than during the entirety of the second intifada (2000-2005). Ten days later, with rockets still falling in Israel and schools across much of the country closed, the emergency has yet to pass. In several towns, entire families were wiped out, parents shot in front of their children, people burned alive while trying to flee in their cars and babies found riddled with bullets. Gruesome photographs circulated in the country and beyond, drawing comparisons in Israel and the West to the crimes of the Islamic State, or ISIS. That some Hamas leaders may have been taken aback by the speed and extent of Israeli defences' collapse and even by the butchery that ensued in no way absolves the movement of responsibility.

Since the attack, Israeli leaders have often suggested that civilians in Gaza bear responsibility for Hamas's actions. Israel's UN ambassador, Gilad Erdan, [said](#), “I really feel sorry for the suffering of the people of Gaza, but we should all remember they elected Hamas eighteen years ago”. Even Israeli President Isaac Herzog, considered a moderate, went so far as to imply that no Palestinian in Gaza is innocent: “It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true. They could have risen up [against Hamas]”. Israeli policy reflects the same belief. Israel's defence minister, Yoav Gallant, said on 9 October, “I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel”. [Energy Minister](#)

Israel Katz [subsequently ordered](#) that water supplies be cut off: “No electrical switch will be turned on, no water pump will be opened and no fuel truck will enter until the Israeli abductees are returned home”. These policies – which the U.S. has pressed Israel to relax, so far to no avail – have led human rights organisations and humanitarian agencies such as, respectively, the Israeli group [B’Tselem](#) and the [International Committee of the Red Cross](#) to accuse Israel of failing to protect civilians in accordance with its international obligations.

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The organisations reached similar conclusions about Israel telling the population of Gaza’s northern and central areas to evacuate to the south of the territory. The leaflets bearing this message were dropped in areas home to upward of 1.2 million civilians, who were instructed to flee within 24 hours, a deadline that was subsequently extended. The large-scale evacuation urged by Israel does not relieve it of its legal responsibility to protect both the civilians who remained against its wishes and those who left their homes in accordance with them. The short evacuation window and humanitarian conditions in both the north and south led the UN to call for the order to be rescinded. With Hamas telling residents to remain, many of them incapable of leaving and many others fearful of becoming refugees for a second time in a century – refugees from the 1948 war or their descendants comprise 70 per cent of Gaza’s Palestinians – roughly 500,000 people remain in the north and centre (though many of them have been forced from their homes).

The week of 9 October saw discussion of still further displacement, from Gaza into Egypt, with some governments reportedly pushing Cairo to host Palestinians from Gaza in the Sinai desert in return for financial aid and other inducements. Firm regional opposition, particularly from Egypt, seems to have [ended that discussion](#) for now. On 15 October, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [said](#), “When people leave their homes in conflict, they deserve the right to return to those homes – to those houses. And this situation is no different”.

### **Israeli Goals**

Israeli officials say the Hamas operation showed that Israel’s security paradigm was wrong. They had thought Israel could coexist with Hamas in Gaza because, they believed, it was deterred. Since that is not the case, they believe that Israel must take away Hamas’ ability to threaten Israel and re-establish deterrence, both in Gaza and in the whole Middle East. They want Operation Iron Swords to make as convincing an impression of Israel’s invincibility on Gaza and the region as Operation al-Aqsa Deluge made of vulnerability upon Israelis. This goal almost certainly means killing as many as possible of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’ military wing comprising more than 30,000 fighters (Israeli analysts say Netanyahu’s statements that all Hamas members would die referred only to militants, not to the far larger number of card-carrying party members, most of whom are civilians). According to the old paradigm, Israel reinforced its deterrence, in its leaders’ words, by “mowing the grass” – periodically demonstrating the cost of transgressing red lines and diminishing Hamas’s fighting capacity. With Operation Iron Swords, they appear to be aiming for something more akin to clear-cutting that alters Gaza’s ecosystem to prevent Hamas’ regrowth in the strip and better protect Israel from attack.

If Israel does launch a ground offensive, it appears likely to first seek to capture or establish a presence in northern and central parts of Gaza, including Gaza City. Israel could seek to protect its Gaza perimeter from the eventuality of a reconstituted Hamas by establishing a long-term presence within the enclave – an Israeli-controlled security zone in Gaza’s north and along its western edge, for instance. Whether it will attempt to take more territory or clear it of Hamas infrastructure remains uncertain, maybe [even to Israeli leaders themselves](#) at this point, [and perhaps will depend on](#) the campaign’s costliness to Israel, the tolerance Israelis show for military casualties, global public opinion regarding Palestinian suffering, regional escalation risk and the dilemma posed by the question of who could govern Gaza next. A last factor is whether the situation in Gaza’s south grows so disastrous that Egypt – contrary to its current refusal – is forced to admit people in substantial numbers. It may be some time before Israel’s precise aims are clear.

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*Israel’s stated war objectives ... leave little space for a Hamas return to power.*

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Israel’s stated war objectives – notably “toppling Hamas and destroying its military capabilities” – leave little space for a Hamas return to power. The view held by most Israeli security cabinet ministers appears to be that Israel will purge Gaza of Hamas and withdraw. Thereafter, it will respond to renewed military activity but not intervene in Gazan politics. But unless an Israeli ground operation ends earlier than planned, either because of

Israel's own losses or external pressures, it is hard to imagine Hamas ruling again any time soon. It is not just about Hamas's own atrocities, the ensuing barrage of Israeli and Western rhetoric against the group and Israel's determination to deal the group a decisive blow. Hamas itself may not wish to govern. Plan A for its 7 October assault may have been to use hostages to blunt Israeli retaliation. Plan B, if the first were to fail, may have been to draw in the Israeli army, forget about administering the strip and return to what it sees as its roots as a resistance movement.

Alternatives are not evident. It is hard to see Israel itself assuming the responsibility, financial burden and danger of directly controlling 2.3 million Palestinians. Nor does it seem likely to put its security in the hands of some form of international trusteeship. Certainly, no Arab or Muslim government is offering its forces to police the strip. A more obvious option would be the Palestinian Authority (PA), with which Israel cooperates in running the West Bank. But there is little hope that the already deeply unpopular PA could return to Gaza on the back of an Israeli invasion and not be treated as an enemy. Moreover, it is not clear that Israel would want the West Bank and Gaza under a single authority: it has invested heavily in severing the West Bank from Gaza, for reasons of both security (to curb Palestinian factions' transfer of military expertise) and politics (to prevent their working together for Palestinian statehood). A different Gaza leadership, perhaps akin to the collaborationist Village Leagues in the West Bank in the 1970s, also seems improbable and would face the same challenges in governing effectively.

### **Western Support for Israel**

Backing from Western capitals for Israel has been more forceful than usual in light of the 7 October attacks' nature as well as the number of Westerners among the dead and those held hostage. Several top Western officials have spoken about Israelis' trauma in deeply personal terms. Before Biden's own trip, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had stopped in Tel Aviv twice to express solidarity before continuing to Arab capitals. U.S. officials have reminded Israel of the importance of sparing civilians in its campaign, though many European leaders have avoided such words of caution. **Reactions from the rest of the world have put more stress on safeguarding civilian well-being.**

Until the 17 October disaster, European leaders, usually rhetorically more assertive backers of the rules of war, had mostly been quiet on Israel's obligations to observe international humanitarian law in Gaza. Only Ireland, Denmark and Luxembourg had pushed compliance. Some EU officials had [spoken out](#). On 10 October, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell notably said some of Israel's actions in Gaza are "against international law"; and Charles Michel, president of the EU Council, on 14 October [issued a statement](#) and letter to the EU's 27 member states calling for restraint and respect for international humanitarian law. In parallel, what was described to Crisis Group as an "internal war" within the EU over the invocation of international law [burst into the open](#). Top European officials who over recent months have agonised over why non-Western capitals regard with scepticism Europe's calls for action in Ukraine appear tone-deaf to the double standard their silence on Israel's Gaza campaign signals around the world.

Washington has spoken of civilian protection. In the immediate aftermath of Hamas's attack, the U.S. was keen that no daylight appear between it and Israel, but its rhetoric has shifted since then. On 10 October, President Biden told U.S. Jewish leaders that he informed Netanyahu "that it is really important that Israel, with all the anger and frustration and just – I don't know how to explain it – that exists is that they operate by the rules of war".

In some ways, while the Hamas attacks were a sea change in terms of their scale and horror, the U.S. response thus far fits a pattern of previous Gaza wars: Washington affirms Israel's right to self-defence at the outset, gives Israel time to achieve its military objectives and becomes firmer about restraint only as the civilian death toll mounts. In Israel's three most costly ground offensives of the century – the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war and the 2008-2009 and 2014 Gaza-Israel wars – this sequence took one to three weeks to play out. The Security Council veto on 18 October suggests that the hospital blast has not significantly altered the U.S. position. Speaking in Israel that day, Biden backed Israel in blaming the Palestinian side for the hospital tragedy – "based on what I've seen, it was done by the other team" – he said, indicating that Washington would essentially maintain its support for Israel's response to the 7 October attacks. But he also admonished Israel that the response "requires asking hard questions. It requires clarity of objectives and an honest assessment of whether the path will achieve those objectives".

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Thus far, all major Western capitals have steered clear of pleas for de-escalation. On 12 October, for example, the EU spokesperson [demanded](#) that Hamas cease fire, but did not make a similar request of Israel. Most White House statements have avoided calling for an end to violence. Indeed, Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre went as far as to [describe ceasefire calls](#) from progressive members of Congress as "repugnant" and "disgraceful". Blinken himself first indicated support for a Turkish offer to mediate a ceasefire – and then deleted the tweet. On 13 October, the *Huffington Post* [reported](#) on an internal State Department memorandum instructing U.S. diplomats not to use three sets of terms – "de-escalation/ceasefire", "end to violence/bloodshed" and "restoring

calm” – in public statements about the Gaza conflagration. Republican members of Congress have pushed in vitriolic terms for Israel to take the gloves off in its military campaign.

Non-Western governments have been more critical of the Israeli assault. China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, for example, told his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan that “Israel’s actions have already gone beyond self-defence”, adding that Israel “should conscientiously listen to the calls of the international community and Secretary-General of the United Nations, and halt collective punishment of the people of Gaza”. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa [underscored](#) his country’s historical support for the “just struggle” of Palestinians. Brazil’s Foreign Minister Mauro Luiz Iecker Vieira [said](#) his country had “received with dismay the news that Israeli forces called for all civilians – more than one million – living in northern Gaza to leave within 24 hours”.

For their part, Arab governments at first appeared cautious, projecting a wait-and-see attitude, while insisting that Israel observe international humanitarian law. Saudi Arabia, for example, [urged](#) de-escalation by both sides, protection of civilians and restraint, while also noting its prior warnings that the situation might erupt due to continued occupation, the violation of Palestinians’ legitimate rights and intrusions into Muslim holy places. It also renewed its call for a two-state solution. The hospital blast prompted angrier statements. In Jordan, the foreign ministry [said](#) the incident was a “heinous war crime that cannot be ignored” and called on Israel to “stop its aggression against Gaza”. After announcing that Amman was cancelling the summit with Biden, Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said, “There is no point in doing anything at this time other than stopping this war”.

### Risks of Escalation

The risks of escalation are all the graver after the hospital blast. A first flashpoint is on Israel’s northern border, where clashes between Israeli forces and Hizbollah, the powerful Lebanese Shiite militia-cum-party and key partner of Iran, have been worsening, nudging up against the red lines that have preserved a semblance of quiet over almost two decades. The second is in the West Bank, where settler militias, often backed by the state, have killed Palestinians in increasing numbers over the past week. Overhanging those theatres is the regional competition pitting Iran against Israel and the U.S.

Amid concerns that Iran would take advantage of Israel’s disarray, Washington quickly signalled that it would come to Israel’s defence if need be. It expedited weapons shipments and sent an aircraft carrier group to deter Hizbollah from attacking Israel across its northern border, followed some days later by a second flotilla. Public warnings exchanged by the [U.S.](#) and Iran over the Gaza campaign have tended to be vague, reflecting more a desire to deter conflict than to get entangled in one. Credible Israeli sources say the U.S. has also told Israel that while it would enter the war in the event of a Hizbollah attack, it expects Israel to avoid pre-emptive strikes on the Lebanese group.

The Lebanon-Israel border certainly looks precarious. Since the fighting began, Israel has engaged in sporadic exchanges of fire at the border with Hizbollah. To date, these have remained largely within unspoken [rules of engagement](#) that Hizbollah and Israel have developed since their last major conflict in 2006. But clashes have been increasing in frequency and intensity. *An attack by either side that hits, inadvertently or simply through miscalculation, a target unacceptable to its rival or that causes too many casualties could set off an escalatory cycle of strikes and send the parties toward large-scale confrontation. Nor is it clear that Hizbollah would stand by should the death toll among Palestinians in Gaza or the costs to Hamas prove too high. It might feel compelled to intervene militarily, whether to protect its partner or for fear of the cost to its credibility of failing to stand up for the Palestinian cause.*

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*The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has seen a sharp uptick in violence, in what has already the deadliest year in decades.*

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Meanwhile, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has seen a sharp uptick in violence, in what has already been the deadliest year in decades for Palestinians in the West Bank and Israelis in the area. In the ten days since 7 October, Israeli forces or settlers have killed scores of Palestinians, injured 1,200 and reportedly arrested over 400. Some deaths have occurred during protests, as on 13 October, when sixteen demonstrating Palestinians lost their lives. Other Palestinians have been killed in clashes during army search operations. But

many killings were random shootings of Palestinian drivers by Israeli soldiers or settlers going into towns and gunning down the first Palestinian they saw. Israeli forces have targeted local journalists, fearing that their coverage of the spate of violence could trigger further public anger. Israel also imposed a total closure – meaning that it allows nothing in or out, while also blocking traffic headed from town to town – in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and shut the Allenby Bridge, the main route to Jordan. The PA has taken measures of its own, including quiet negotiations with residents to avoid protests, especially near Israeli checkpoints, that could easily escalate. Authorities in Ramallah likely fear that significant turmoil in the West Bank could bring a massively disproportionate Israeli response that, in light of what is happening in Gaza, could have severe and far-reaching consequences for all the occupied Palestinian territories.

### **A Ceasefire and Time for Diplomacy**

Under the stresses of their own failure and grief, enormous public anger and having to react on the fly, Israel's leaders have had to respond to Hamas's attack, restore their citizens' sense of security and plan for Gaza's future all at once. The task is all the harder given the intermingling of Hamas fighters and civilians. But Israeli leaders, in pursuing these objectives, should not set themselves up to face even more volatile dangers. Whatever caused the hospital blast, the costs of the Gaza operation in terms of lives lost and risks of regional escalation were already too high. Given the last ten days' toll, it is hard to imagine what will be left of the strip if Israel does send ground forces into Gaza or continues bombing for as long as it appears to believe its objectives require.

Western leaders, including President Biden, should push Prime Minister Netanyahu to pause the bombardment, allow in adequate humanitarian aid and lay out his conditions for a continued ceasefire. Whether regional diplomacy can sufficiently, in Israel's view, rein in Hamas or alight on some alternative for Gaza remains unclear, though that risk needs to be weighed against the reality that Israel's military campaign is unlikely to destroy the group or even completely wipe out its armed wing. Past negotiations among Palestinian factions to close the schism between the West Bank and Gaza have produced power-sharing options in which Hamas would take a back seat in governing Gaza. Those have foundered, particularly on the future of Hamas's military, but they might be revived as part of a regional deal, perhaps involving the normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel but supported by a broader array of regional actors, including Türkiye, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The [Saudi-Iranian rapprochement](#), which for now appears to be continuing, could enable at least steps toward some form of regional understanding. Hamas and other Palestinian militants, for their part, should release all hostages and stop rocket fire into Israel.

If Western leaders still shy away from calling for a ceasefire, as appears likely after Biden's visit, Israel's Western friends must impress on its leaders far more forcefully than they have to date the imperative of protecting Palestinian civilians in Gaza. It goes without saying that states are bound to follow the edicts of international humanitarian law, with its requirements in this regard. In today's charged political atmosphere, Western leaders should be considerably more vocal in making the requirements clear. It is not just about legality, however. A lesson of the post-9/11 era is that allowing lawyers to set the outer limits of how a state comports itself in armed conflict is a mistake. Israel's actions should be guided not only by what its lawyers tell it will pass muster but by what good sense tells it about how its behaviour will affect people who are blameless in the Hamas attacks, what grievances it will be creating, what regional dynamics it will be driving and what prospects of escalation exist. Israel should also seek to preserve the chance – however slim – that out of this hellish situation may come, if not an opportunity for an enduring peace, then at least something short of the worst possible outcome. Drawing legal distinctions is unlikely to produce the same sense of caution that weighing these considerations would do.

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### *Whether or not there is a ceasefire, addressing Gaza's humanitarian crisis is essential.*

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Whether or not there is a ceasefire, addressing Gaza's humanitarian crisis is essential. A good start would be a humanitarian corridor from Egypt, as Netanyahu says Israel will permit, that allows more food, water and medical supplies into Gaza. The U.S. is right to reject the evacuation of people in Gaza into Egypt, from which they would have uncertain prospects of returning. As [Blinken told a television interviewer on 15 October](#): "I've heard directly from Palestinian Authority President Abbas and from virtually every other leader that I've talked to in the region, that that idea is a non-starter, and so we do not support it". But getting supplies the other way through the border is vital.

If the bombing continues, it is vital that fighting not spread to other theatres. One challenge in this regard is the way Israel conducts the war and how much Palestinians in Gaza suffer. But Israel can do other things: for example, curbing visits by Jewish worshippers to the Holy Esplanade, the plaza sacred to both Jews as the Temple Mount and Muslims as the al-Aqsa mosque compound, and stopping settlers from attacking Palestinians in the West Bank, ideally without imposing additional lockdowns on Palestinians. Both Israel and Hizbollah need to be more cautious about cross-border exchanges of fire, lest an attack by one overstep the

other's red lines. Iran, which has been sounding ominous warnings about an expansion of the conflict, has the capacity to aggravate the situation; beyond the U.S. naval deployments, the U.S., European and regional governments should underscore the negative consequences of Tehran further fanning the flames directly or indirectly. Israel itself might engage Arab capitals and even Ankara to demonstrate that it understands their concerns and, despite its backing from Washington, is not totally indifferent to regional perceptions.

In the longer term, world leaders need to put Palestinian national aspirations back on their agendas. The Hamas attack likely will lead many, particularly in Israel, to question whether the peace process is not just moribund but the entire notion of one unviable. But Hamas has long been boycotted and Gaza isolated, and the 7 October attacks dispel the idea that Israel can wall itself off without addressing the political question. As the latest horrors in Israel-Palestine make starkly clear, the occupation and conflict cannot be contained in Gaza or anywhere else while the rest of the world turns the page. Attempts to do so will doom prospects for durable peace and security in the Middle East and bring ever greater tragedy and violence.

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