



# Israeli-Palestinian Peace Must Reflect Reality

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"I hate the 'to be sure' sentences," an Israeli opinion leader once told me, referring to critiques of the Jewish state. For instance, "To be sure, Israel is surrounded by enemies." Or, "to be sure, Israel faces a genocidal Hamas to its south and a more powerful genocidal Hezbollah to its north."

He hated the "to be sure" sentences, he explained, because they were throw-away lines, sops to reality that writers felt compelled to acknowledge before they returned to their central task of overwhelmingly blaming Israel for the region's tumult.

Well, "to be sure"-ism has returned as top U.S. and Western officials and opinion leaders resurrect the ever-elusive "two-state solution" for Israeli-Palestinian peace and criticize Israeli military operations in Gaza that, they say, will kill it.

"I will never understate the grave threats Israel faces, and has faced, for the entirety of its existence," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in classic "to be sure"-ist fashion before focusing his fire on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – in a high-profile speech that President Biden praised for raising concerns "shared... by many Americans."

"I want to be very clear about one thing Schumer and Biden have also made clear:" New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman added in similar fashion before firing away at Netanyahu. "The war in Gaza was forced on Israel by a vicious attack by Hamas on Israeli border communities..."

The problem with "to be sure"-ism amid the war is that in pressuring Jerusalem to scale back its military plans and pursue the two-state solution at this moment, its critics ignore an ugly reality on the Palestinian side – that among its leaders and people, there is no constituency for "two states living side by side in peace."

Pressing for the two-state solution now, while Israel is at war and Palestinians largely oppose co-existence, surely will prove fruitless, nurturing more cynicism and setting back prospects of ever achieving peace.

**Reality #1 – Hamas:** "If Israel were to... tighten its control over Gaza and the West Bank... then what reasonable expectation can we have that Hamas and their allies will lay down their arms?" Schumer asked.

Answer: none. But Hamas won't stop fighting no matter what Israel does. The group's very *raison d'être* is Israel's destruction, as Schumer acknowledged elsewhere in his speech. Any hope for Israeli-Palestinian peace rests on Hamas' destruction, which Israel is pursuing, not on a naive "reasonable expectation" that it and such like-minded allies as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad will "lay down their arms."

**Reality #2 – the Palestinian Authority:** "I don't know if the Palestinian Authority can get its act together to be the government that Palestinians and Israelis need it to be," Friedman admitted – after predicating America's "entire Middle East strategy" and "Israel's long-term interests" on Israel partnering with that very organization.

Friedman's right to wonder, however much it eviscerates his argument. The supposedly "moderate" PA pays monthly pensions to the families of Palestinian "martyrs" who kill Jews, with higher payments for those who murder in greater number. Across the West Bank, which the PA runs, Palestinians at schools, in mosques, and on social media are taught to hate Jews and reject Israel's legitimacy. By November, at least eleven Palestinian schools (including eight run by the PA) had celebrated the Hamas slaughter and hostage-taking of October 7.

**Reality #3: the Palestinian people.** True peace must not only emerge from a negotiating table but also reside in the hearts of the population. But just 17 percent of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank supported a two-state solution in a November poll, while 75 percent supported a "Palestinian state from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea" – alas, replacing what's now Israel.

In a December poll, 72 percent of Palestinians supported the Hamas attack, and support for Hamas since October has risen in Gaza and skyrocketed in the West Bank.

Here's a little bit more harsh reality:

Israeli leaders might be a bit too busy to be, in Friedman's words, "fighting Hamas in Gaza with one hand and activity pursuing peace with the other." While pursuing Hamas, they're responding to rocket fire across Israel's northern border from Hezbollah. Meanwhile, Israel just suffered its first cruise missile attack by Houthi rebels on Israeli land.

Also, lest U.S. and other voices think that an Israel election that ousts Netanyahu – which Biden, Schumer, and others are boldly advocating – will alter Israeli policy, Israel's leaders and people across political persuasions seem fairly united on "the broad contours" of Netanyahu's response to October 7.

Rather than part company with reality, U.S. officials and opinion leaders should embrace it. Long-term Israeli-Palestinian peace requires, among other things, a destroyed Hamas, an overhauled Palestinian Authority, and a spirit of co-existence that's nurtured among the Palestinian people.