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Peace in Gaza: If not now, when?

Steve Bakke  *October 12, 2025*



The Middle East has changed a lot since October 7, 2023. Notwithstanding the Abraham Accords, signed near the end of President Trump's first term, Israel was then still a lonely island surrounded by Muslim countries, some dangerous enemies.

Iran, the world's leading promoter of international terrorism, along with its numerous terrorist proxies, have been weakened significantly. In Lebanon, Israel's military has seriously diminished Hezbollah. The Houthi rebels in Yemen have been weakened by the many isolated military strikes conducted by the U.S. and the U.K. And Syria's Assad regime collapsed as a result of its civil war.

In Gaza, Hamas has been reduced to a guerilla force by Israel's retaliation following October 7. And President Trump ordered Operation Midnight Hammer, the dropping of bunker-buster bombs and firing of Tomahawk missiles, thereby destroying most of Iran's nuclear weapons capabilities. That was the ultimate goal of the 12-day Israel-Iran War.

Now, America and Israel have proposed a new agreement for peace in Gaza. And many important Mideast Muslim nations are supporting the proposal. It provides for a cease-fire followed by the release of remaining hostages, living and deceased. Israeli forces would withdraw, and military operations would be suspended. At this writing, the first steps are apparently approved by all parties. Israeli troops are being withdrawn, and release of hostages is expected in a few days.

The proposal allows Hamas members to transport to any country that will receive them. Recovery and reconstruction is part of the plan and the Palestinian people would remain in Gaza. There are provisions for a new government to be established. In short, a two-state solution is in the works. The world wants it, but will Hamas fully cooperate?

It's important to ask whether there's any possibility of successfully achieving a two-state solution, with separate Jewish and Palestinian nations. A review of history suggests that could be a "bridge too far."

There have been five previous attempts: In 1936 the British offered 80% of the disputed territory to the Arab people; In 1947 – the UN planned to divide the land; In 1967, after the "Six Day War, victorious Israel offered much of the conquered territories back to its adversaries; In 2000, after the Camp David Accords, Gaza and most of the West Bank was offered for formation of a Palestinian nation; And in 2008 Israel "sweetened" the 2000 offer.

In each case, the offers were rejected by Arab leadership such as the Arab League, or PLO leaders Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas. Israel's continued existence was unacceptable to them.

Skeptics of the timing of this proposal believe Hamas has not been totally defeated. While Hamas has been reduced to a guerrilla group, would another two years fighting totally eliminate them? Or is it time for Israel to accept the current status as adequate?

In contrast, many citizens of the world can't abide the extent of Israel's actions following October 7. They believe something like a "proportionate response" would have been the appropriate reaction.

Did Israel over-react? Israel's military actions following October 7 weren't merely an angry whim. This war was destined to be an urban war with Hamas causing many casualties by using civilian hospitals, schools, and living quarters as shields for many military operations. And consider the fact that Israel flooded citizens with warnings prior to military strikes.

"Proportionate response" constraints were not part of America's response to "9/11," nor to the Pearl Harbor attack. It didn't come into play when our soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy in 1945. And no limitations affected America's WW2 bombings of Dresden or Japanese cities. The goals were simply to destroy the enemy.

Imagine an enemy on America's border that, for decades, had expressed its intention by firing tens of thousands of missiles and mortars, and making suicide attacks on America.

Imagine also an attack on America similar to the October 7 attack on Israel. Based on relative populations, a proportionate attack on America would mean almost 45,000 Americans killed, and about 10,000 hostages taken. In that situation, I would expect America to fully engage the enemy and remove all possibility of future threats.

Sadly, and inevitably, much reflection and evaluation is given to all tragic and horrific wars. And just as inevitably, the result will show lists of genius and heroism along with excesses and regret.

Israel is located in a tough "neighborhood." I mentioned earlier, the military gains Israel has made relative to Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis. Syria is on its heels after their civil war, and Iran's military capabilities were significantly damaged. Significant monitoring will be required so that those threats don't return to strength.

Combine these factors: the weakened military strength of Iran and its proxies: the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco; the normalization agreements Israel has with Egypt and Jordan; and the general endorsement of the Gaza proposal by many Mideast Muslim nations. In combination, those elements provide important supportive context for the creation of peace in Gaza.

I'm suspending my opinion that a two-state solution would be impossible. I support giving this peace opportunity a chance. As I write this, President Trump is on his way to Israel to welcome the release of hostages which is scheduled to begin tomorrow. We don't know what the next few days and weeks will bring. Hopefully there'll be complete success.

Nevertheless, all things considered, I don't believe there will be a more opportune time to take these actions. If not now, when?