

2-state solution needed to end conflict in Gaza

Historically, war has been defined as an armed conflict that is generally fought between sovereign states. Under this theory, warring states are in a position to make a sovereign decision to end the conflict if they choose to do so as long as they remain independent.

But the Gaza war is more complex. Hamas, which has effectively controlled the Gaza Strip even though it is not a sovereign government, launched a surprise attack on Israel in October 2023, killing about 1,200 people and kidnapping more than 200. The death toll from Israel's retaliatory strikes launched in the wake of the Hamas attack stood at about 30,000 by the end of February.

To what extent was Hamas aware of its responsibility for governing Gaza while it was preparing the offensive? Even Agis II, king of the militaristic city-state of Sparta in ancient Greece, referred to a political philosophy that the most important thing to learn was "knowledge of how to rule and be ruled."

Residents in Gaza have now begun openly criticizing Hamas, with one Palestinian quoted as saying, "[Hamas] mounted the [October] offensive without considering how catastrophic its consequences would be." In December, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research released the findings of a survey that showed 37% of those in Gaza were critical of the October attack. The figure is likely much higher now.

The Confucian scholar Momo Seika, who lived during the Edo period (1603-1867), once wrote that a military expedition is no different than a criminal penalty — on a small scale, punishment takes the form of a penalty, and on a large scale, it takes the form of an expedition.

Hamas and Israel began engaging in "attacks by stratagem," driven by a desire for vengeance and a determination to punish each other. But the Gaza war has now changed both politically and/or morally into a war that threatens to forever deprive the losers of a country of their own.

Israeli forces have pushed Palestinians out of northern Gaza and into the Rafah area bordering Egypt, and left a number of civilians dead and injured that is unprecedented in the 21st century. Such grueling military operations are bound to

face a harsh judgment from history. Regardless, Hamas, which sees itself as a Palestinian nationalist organization, can never be free from political responsibility for triggering so much loss of life among the Gaza populace.

Hamas is also an armed Islamist organization. Some say Hamas has contributed to Iran's positional warfare as part of the anti-U.S. and anti-Israel "Axis of Resistance," a network of non-state actors that is aimed at encircling Israel. It includes Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group, Syrian militias aligned with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Yemen's Houthis rebels.

The United States and Israel, for their part, have gone so far as to stage mobile retaliatory attacks on Iran-sponsored groups, including



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Hamas, while consistently being careful not to come into conflict with Iran itself.

The plight of Gaza residents, who are victims of this wider regional conflict, is heart-wrenching beyond expression. On top of the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are now being used as pawns in the showdown between Iran on one side and the United States and Israel on the other, a unique international confrontation.

Moreover, the Gaza war, alongside the

Ukraine war, has emerged as a core symbol of what New York Times opinion columnist Thomas Friedman has described as a "titanic geopolitical struggle."

Russia can no longer sustain its aggression against Ukraine without military assistance from Iran. Ukraine, for its part, may yield to Russia without aid from the United States and other friendly countries of Israel. In the Middle East, the October assault by Hamas — which has abetted Iran's campaign to end its competitive coexistence with Israel — wrecked a good opportunity for a Saudi-led group of east Arab countries to agree with Israel to shift to friendly cooperation.

Russia and Iran are each other's greatest ally in the Ukraine war and the Syrian civil war. However, as Russia is home to many Jews and a member of the OPEC+ alliance of oil-exporting countries, the nature of its relationships with Israel and Saudi Arabia differs from its relationship with Iran.

And for Iran, there is a drastic difference in the importance of Russia, a great power, and Hamas, a nonstate entity.

Due to such diplomatic twists, the small, resource-poor region of Gaza has not seen any country in either the authoritarian bloc, including Russia and China, or the bloc of liberal democracies, including the United States, European countries and Japan, come to its aid in military terms. So what should be done to force Israel to end its war, which has killed so many in Gaza?

Do the right thing

First, all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should return to the wisdom of those Palestinian and Israeli leaders who sought a two-state solution as part of the 1993 Oslo Accords. At the same time, the Saudi-led framework for competitive coexistence with Israel should be made to incorporate the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, excluding Hamas.

Gaza's rights to self-determination and survival cannot be realized as long as its residents are being victimized, as has happened under Hamas' rule.

The proposed two-state solution was conceived in the 1990s by Palestinian and Israeli leaders who compromised with each other to the extent possible and built trust between them. Mahmoud Abbas, the current president

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of the Palestinian Authority (PA), is one of those who contributed to the creation of the proposal. Today though he is regarded with ill will, and the people seem to believe that "even a fast horse, once it's old, is no match for a pack horse." Of course, he is responsible for the notorious corruption within the PA.

That said, unlike Hamas, Abbas and other PA leaders have never carried out any terrorist attacks. Another saying goes, "An old horse won't forget the way." In reality, no entity other than the PA is qualified to be internationally trusted to govern a post-Hamas Gaza.

On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu remains firmly opposed to a two-state solution and has not given up on his ambition to expand existing Israeli settlements on the West Bank — against the wishes of the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the late Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who both contributed to the two-state proposal.

In addition, Netanyahu, who could be arrested at any time on suspicion of fraud, seems to be using the war with Hamas to cling to his current position. He will likely refuse to accept a full-scale armistice in Gaza until after the U.S. election in November, when Donald Trump could return as president.

Everyone knows in theory how the war might end. First, Israel would go to the polls in a Knes-

set general election and deny Netanyahu reelection by taking away seats from the far-right and religious right parties that form the coalition government. A group of moderates would be given a mandate to form a new cabinet and tasked with persuading the Israeli population to accept the two-state solution.

However, the Knesset voted in February to back Netanyahu's declaration opposing any unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state. The resolution was supported by 80% of Israeli parliamentarians, including those from opposition parties. In a related development, a recent Israeli opinion poll found that 60% or more of respondents were opposed to Israel agreeing to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

If the international public still wants to pursue a two-state solution, there is no other effective choice for now but to rely on U.S. President Joe Biden. To get Israeli voters to accept both a truce and a two-state solution before November's U.S. presidential election, Biden will have to pressure Israel by suggesting a possible review of U.S. assistance to the ally.

It is understandable that Gaza's people feel disgusted with the PA. But would they be happy under the joint rule of Israel and Arab countries or under U.N. control?

The jurist Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Wansharisi, who lived around 600 years ago in what is now Morocco, once wrote: "Rather Muslim tyranny than Christian justice."

Even if Gaza's people are averse to the PA run by their fellow Palestinians, would they prefer to have their territory occupied by foreigners almost indefinitely and to have swaths of West Bank land taken over by Israeli settlers? Such a misfortune would only perpetuate the cycle of violence and terrorism.

An ancient Greek maxim says, "Luck rules life, not wisdom." But this is not true in the least.

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