

# Guest Essay: Establishing 'Gaza-Palestinian Protectorate' would go a long way

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BY U.S. REP. MARCY KAPTUR



Palestinians pray for relatives killed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip at a hospital in Deir al Balah, Monday. Since the beginning of the war on Oct. 7, more than 25,000 Palestinians have died, and more than 60,000 have been injured with two-thirds of the victims being women and children.

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Halfway around the world, the war between Hamas' terrorist units and Israel is a piercing global tragedy. It demands a global response. Yet, "Peace and Justice" have eluded solution in this troubled region for over a century. It will be even harder to achieve after this conflagration ends. The extraordinary death toll will resound for generations forward. How does one create a lasting peace borne of such fierce, enduring hatreds?

The invasion Hamas' fighters launched from Palestinian Gaza into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023 broke the cease-fire that had tensely hung over that very troubled region. More than 1,200 innocent Israeli civilians were slaughtered in a barbaric attack, with more than 100 Israeli and some American hostages still remaining in captivity. More than 250,000 Israelis were evacuated and displaced from their homes. In Gaza, 1.7 million Gazans have subsequently been displaced with Hamas health officials claiming more than 25,000 civilians dead, and more than 60,000 injured with two-thirds of the victims being women and children.

How does any army defeat a hostile enemy positioned amidst a civilian population and underground in a vast "bunker city" with miles of interconnected tunnels, dug for purposes of war, not peace?

Over 140,000 Hezbollah terrorist forces supplied by Iran, are positioned in southern Lebanon, shooting rockets down on Israel now. It is no accident Yemen's terrorist Houthi adherents, also supplied by Iran, have been purposefully shelling private cargo ships as well as targeting U.S. naval vessels in the Red Sea to disrupt global trade in this conflicted region. Russia's role in exacerbating resurgent unrest was made clear when top Gen. Sergei Shoigu recently visited Iran. And a Hamas delegation was in Moscow not long after it attacked Israel.

Across the Middle East, a spiderweb of terrorism is hastening, hell-bent on evil. Iranian drones and missiles are being used against Ukraine, Israel, the United States, and our allies in Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, and Jordan. North Korean missiles are likewise in use against Ukraine. The global distinction between tyranny and liberty could not be clearer. The world community of nations must not allow terrorist forces enabled by Iran and Russia to foment unrest and carnage. The sacred boundaries of nations must be respected, defended, and enforced.

The history of the Middle East instructs that former adversarial nations can make peace among themselves. For nearly five decades, dating back to my days of service in the Carter administration, proposals for a two-State solution have been advanced for Israel and Palestine.

Ironically, the depth and brutality of this present conflict may create an opening for a far-reaching solution. If the world community could spend as much money on peace as it has on war, both the Israelis and Palestinians could have thriving homelands.

To move forward, I propose that the United Nations, or a coalition of willing nations, begin to negotiate a "Gaza-Palestinian Protectorate." The parties involved should aim to negotiate a long-lasting solution to the conflict in Gaza, address challenges in the West Bank, and divide the contested territory securing their existence with an International Multilateral Security Force to separate warring factions.

If the civilized world could achieve this with a divided Korea, why not with Palestine and Israel?

The goals of the Protectorate would be fourfold:

- 1) an international coalition of nations should be assembled and involved in organizing its administration and staffing;
- 2) Gaza would be demilitarized of weapons, war, tunnels, and fortifications;
- 3) Hamas would have no role, politically, administratively, or economically;
- 4) Palestinians from Gaza should be involved in the administration of the Protectorate's on-site operations, including its police forces.

The Protectorate would have three immediate tasks. The first would be to quickly secure resources and provide food, water, shelter, and medical care to the almost 2.3 million people of Gaza.

The second is to provide an international military coalition that can demilitarize Gaza as quickly as possible. Gaza must never again be a threat to its neighbors.

The third is to physically separate Gaza and Israel, by creating a demilitarized zone between the two, that is virtually impenetrable, as is the DMZ between North and South Korea. As part of the separation, the infrastructure to provide water, sewage treatment, and energy needed by Gaza should be located in Gaza and staffed by the people of Gaza.

One of the long-term missions could be to rebuild what is now a destroyed area under a new vision of peace and prosperity. Gaza has many undeveloped resources, the primary of which is its land and location. While small in size, Gaza is located in one of the most attractive parts of the Mediterranean, with miles of undeveloped, beautiful beaches that could become a recreational center of the region.

With peace and stability, Gaza could become a financial and economic hub that attracts capital and businesses from around the world. Gaza and the West Bank have the thousands of workers needed to rebuild what has been destroyed along with necessary staff to renew the economy. A "Gaza Development Authority" as part of the Protectorate could create and administer a long-term development plan to bring prosperity and transparency that would forestall the corruption that so often accompanies unfettered development.

Hope must arise from this cruel war. Old diplomacy, and old solutions should be shelved. They should be replaced with a forward-looking approach that could bring peace, justice, and prosperity to this war-torn region. Succeeding would give hope to a civilized world that hungers for peace in these troubled lands.

*Rep. Kaptur is a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee and its Defense and Energy and Water Subcommittees. She has traveled widely across the Middle East including to Israel, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Iraq, Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Turkey.*