

## Service in Dissent

### Joint Statement of U.S. Government Officials who have Resigned over U.S. policy towards Gaza, Palestine, and Israel

We are former U.S. Government Officials who resigned from our respective positions over the last nine months due to our grave concerns with current U.S. policy towards the crisis in Gaza, and U.S. policies and practices towards Palestine and Israel more broadly. We are subject matter experts representing the interagency, and are a multifaith and multiethnic community of professionals and patriots dedicated to the service of the United States of America, its people, and its values. Whether in the civil service, foreign service, armed forces, or as political appointees, each of us has sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, and as our nation celebrates its Independence Day, each of us are reminded that we resigned from government not to terminate that oath but to continue to abide by it; not to end our commitment to service, but to extend it.

Alone, we each made the somber and difficult decision to resign based on the individual circumstances we encountered at different times during these past nine months as we performed our specific jobs. But today we stand united in a shared belief that it is our collective responsibility to speak up.

The Administration's policy in Gaza is a failure and a threat to U.S. national security. America's diplomatic cover for, and continuous flow of arms to, Israel has ensured our undeniable complicity in the killings and forced starvation of a besieged Palestinian population in Gaza. This is not only morally reprehensible and in clear violation of international humanitarian law and U.S. laws, but it has also put a target on America's back. This intransigent policy risks U.S. national security and the lives of our service members and diplomats as has already been made evident with the killing of three U.S. service members in Jordan in January and the evacuations of diplomatic facilities in the Middle East, and also poses a security risk for American citizens at home and abroad. Despite this, the Administration's choices have continued to threaten U.S. interests throughout the region. Our nation's political and economic interests across the region have also been significantly harmed, while U.S. credibility has been deeply undermined worldwide at a time we need it most, when the world is characterized by a new era of strategic competition.

Critically, this failed policy has not achieved its stated objectives—it has not made Israelis any safer, it has emboldened extremists while it has been devastating for the Palestinian people, ensuring a vicious cycle of poverty and hopelessness, with all the implications of that cycle, for generations to come. As a group of dedicated Americans in service of our country, we insist that there is another way. In this Statement, we describe the current crisis, explain what we have seen, and address the Biden Administration with policy proposals that we, based on our extensive experience in government, believe must be adopted, including to ensure that catastrophic policy failure like this can never happen again. Finally, but with the deepest devotion, we address the thousands of honorable individuals still in government who are struggling on a daily basis with difficult moral and personal choices.

## **The Current Crisis**

U.S. policy choices have begotten a disaster. First and foremost is the catastrophic and rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis that the Israeli government has created for the Palestinian people, for whom the missteps of the ink of American bureaucracy has been paid in the blood of innocent men, women, and children. To date, over 37,000 Palestinians have been killed, the vast majority of civilian and humanitarian infrastructure has been destroyed, thousands of innocent people remain missing under the rubble, and millions continue to face a manufactured famine due to Israel's arbitrary restrictions on food, water, medicine, and other critical humanitarian goods. Yet, rather than hold the Government of Israel responsible for its role in arbitrarily impeding humanitarian assistance, the U.S. has cut off funding to the single largest provider of humanitarian assistance in Gaza: UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinians.

Second, we note with further concern and sadness that U.S. policy for many years, but particularly since October 2023, has not only contributed to immense humanitarian harm, but has failed when measured against its own declared intent: to contribute to the peace and safety of all in the Middle East, and particularly that of Israel. Rather than using our immense leverage to establish guardrails that can guide Israel towards a lasting and just peace, we have facilitated its self-destructive actions that have deepened its political quagmire and contributed to its enduring global isolation; there is no regional settlement, no agreement with autocratic regimes, no diplomatic step short of the resolution of the Palestinian right to self-determination that can provide Israel with real security.

Third, U.S. policies in this regard have been deeply damaging not only for U.S. relations in the region, but for our global credibility, the credibility of U.S. values, and the credibility of the West—a particularly perilous state of affairs in the context of this era of strategic competition. Not only have we inflicted deep and lasting damage to our relations across the region and destabilized the Middle East, but our policies towards Gaza have led us to double-down on our support to brittle regional autocracies as a hedge against public opinion. Meanwhile, on the global stage, who does not see us as hypocrites when the United States condemns Russian war crimes while unconditionally arming and excusing Israel's? Who does not now laugh when Secretary Blinken describes the “rules based international order” while simultaneously undermining it in favor of Israel?—a tragedy after the decades Americans have spent building that order.

## **How did it go wrong?**

Each of us has had our own experience of the cascading failures of process, leadership, and decision-making that have characterized this Administration's intransigent response to this continuing calamity. Taken together, these paint a picture of an overlapping and systemic set of problems in this Administration's policy approach, and a series of warnings that have gone unheeded:

In our collective experience, we have seen for years the silencing of concerns about Israel's human rights record and the failure of the Oslo process and broader U.S. policy. We have seen debate silenced in government; facts distorted; laws sidestepped and wilfully ignored, even

violated; and lawyers working overtime to avoid faithfully implementing the law. We have seen America, in a process turned on its head, rush to arm Israel even as civilians are massacred with U.S. arms, and efforts to share intelligence with Israel that have contributed to this catastrophe. We have seen peaceful protests met with rancid accusations of antisemitism and with violence, while an Administration that previously fought for free speech on college campuses stood by as it was silenced. We have seen unconditional U.S. support for Israeli military operations in Gaza make it impossible to advocate for human rights in the Middle East and lead regional advocates to turn their backs on our diplomats. We have seen a U.S. Government that dehumanizes both Palestinians and Jews, making the former victims of its weapons and the latter scapegoats for its war machine. We have seen an Administration that is willing to lie to Congress, and a Congress that punishes the truth.

Both our individual and common experiences demonstrate an Administration that has prioritized politics over just and fair policymaking; profit over national security; falsehoods over facts; directives over debate; ideology over experience, and special interest over the equal enforcement of the law. The impact of these injustices has resulted in tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian lives taken, reflecting a clear picture to the world of whose lives matter, and whose lives simply do not to United States policy makers. As members of the United States Government, each of us witnessed this abrogation of American values, leading us to resign.

### **What is to be done?**

- A fundamental principle, and the first step in correcting U.S. policy, is for the Government of the United States to faithfully execute the law. It is abundantly clear that the Administration is currently willfully violating multiple U.S. laws and attempting to deny or distort facts, use loopholes, or manipulate processes to ensure a continuous flow of lethal weapons to Israel. As practically every credible and independent international human rights organization has identified, there have been clear gross violations of human rights by units of the Israeli security forces, dating back well before 2023, that should compel ineligibility determinations under the Leahy Laws. As multiple credible humanitarian aid organizations have identified, Israel has also, and continues to, arbitrarily obstruct U.S.-funded humanitarian assistance, which should trigger a suspension of security assistance under Section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act. A government that acts above, or around, the laws set by elected legislatures is not a government that is faithful to the Constitution, or to its commitments to the people of these United States.
- Secondly, we believe the U.S. Government should use all necessary and available leverage to bring the conflict to an immediate close and to achieve the release of all hostages, be they Israelis kidnapped on October 7th, or the thousands of Palestinians, many of them children, sitting uncharged in Israeli administrative detention.
- Third, we believe the United States should commit the funding and the support needed to ensure an immediate expansion of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza, and the reconstruction of that territory—a moral obligation given that the harm and

destruction to-date has largely been dealt by American weapons.

- Fourth, we believe the United States should immediately announce that the policy of the United States will be to support self-determination for the Palestinian people, and an end to military occupation and settlements, including in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.
- Fifth, we believe there is an urgent need for change in the organizational cultures and structures that have enabled the current U.S. approach. This includes the strengthening of oversight and accountability mechanisms within the Executive Branch, greater transparency regarding arms transfers and legal deliberations, an end to the silencing and sidelining of critical voices, and statutory change via the legislative process; we commit to working with the Executive and Legislative branches to detail and pursue such reforms.
- Finally, we believe freedom of speech is under threat in this country, and we abjure political pressure on colleges and universities in particular that have led to a militarized police response to peaceful protests, and we call upon the U.S. Government, including the Departments of Education and Justice, to take any and all necessary steps to protect free speech and nonviolent protest.

#### **Our message to our former colleagues:**

Your voice matters. We write to you with hope that you will use your positions to amplify calls for peace and hold your respective institution accountable to the violence unfolding in Palestine. We thank those of you who are working day in and day out to press for just and equitable policies that protect all lives. We recognize the systemic obstacles you face, both as you perform your work, and as you consider leaving it. We particularly embrace those of you representing America's diversity who feel that your voices have been disempowered, ignored, and tokenized. We are with you, and we know that a better way is possible, but only when we are all brave enough to challenge institutions and outdated forces that attempt to silence us.

We encourage you to keep pushing. In our experience, no decision point is too minor to challenge, so while you are in government service, use your voice, write letters to leaders in your agencies, and bring up your disagreements with your team. Speaking out has a snowball effect, inspiring others to use their voice. There is strength in numbers, and we urge you to not be complicit. We encourage you to consult with your Inspectors General, with your legal advisors, with appropriate Members of Congress, and via other protected channels, to question the veracity and/or legality of specific actions or policies. There are resources, and you have advocates, including all of us, who can support you in speaking your truth.

We close with wisdom from Dr. Martin Luther King in his message about the Vietnam War that resonates today: "the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak ... for we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us." May we all have the moral courage to speak and push for a better world, for a better America.

Signed, this week of July 4, 2024:



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