

I joined the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM) over 11 years ago, and have found it a fascinating job with engaging, and often immensely challenging - intellectually and morally - tasks and objectives. I have been proud in my time of service to have made many differences, both visibly and behind the scenes, from advocating for Afghan refugees, to pushing back (with not insignificant results) on pending Administration decisions to transfer lethal weapons to countries that abuse human rights, to sculpting policies and practices that advance human rights, to working tirelessly to advance those policies and decisions that are good and just; from our global humanitarian demining efforts to our support for Ukraine's defense in the face of murderous Russian aggression.

When I came to this Bureau, the U.S. Government entity most responsible for the transfer and provision of arms to partners and allies, I knew it was not without its moral complexity and moral compromises, and I made myself a promise that I would stay for as long as I felt the harm I might do could be outweighed by the good I could do. In my 11 years I have made more moral compromises than I can recall, each heavily, but each with my promise to myself in mind, and intact. I am leaving today because I believe that in our current course with regards to the continued - indeed, expanded and expedited - provision of lethal arms to Israel - I have reached the end of that bargain..

Yes, PM can still do an immense amount of good in the world: there is still, sadly, a great need for American security assistance - a need for American arms and defense cooperation to defend against the multiple military perils that democracy, democracies, and humanity itself, face on this earth. But we cannot be both against occupation, and for it. We cannot be both for freedom, and against it. And we cannot be for a better world, while contributing to one that is materially worse.

Let me be clear: Hamas' attack on Israel was not just a monstrosity; it was a monstrosity of monstrosities. I also believe that potential escalations by Iran-linked groups such as Hezbollah, or by Iran itself, would be a further cynical exploitation of the existing tragedy. But I believe to the core of my soul that the response Israel is taking, and with it the American support both for that response, and for the status quo of the occupation, will only lead to more and deeper suffering for both the Israeli and the Palestinian people - and is not in the long term American interest. This Administration's response - and much of Congress' as well - is an impulsive reaction built on confirmation bias, political convenience, intellectual bankruptcy, and bureaucratic inertia. That is to say, it is immensely disappointing, and entirely unsurprising. Decades of the same approach have shown that security for peace leads to neither security, nor to peace. The fact is, [blind support for one side](#) is destructive in the long term to the interests of the people on both sides. I fear we are repeating the same mistakes we have made these past decades, and I decline to be a part of it for longer.

I am not ignorant when it comes to the situation in the Middle East. I was raised surrounded by debates about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; my Master's thesis was about Israeli counterterrorism and civil rights (in researching it I met two men who have since been among my lifelong heroes, [Uri Avnery](#), and an Israeli Palestinian advocate I shall not name here); I served for the U.S. Security Coordinator, living in Ramallah while advancing security sector governance within the Palestinian Authority and liaising with the IDF; and, I have deep personal

ties to both sides of the conflict. Those who know me best know that I have opinions, and they are strong ones. But this is what is at the core of them: that there is beauty to be found everywhere in this world, and it deserves both protection, and the right to flourish, and that is what I most desire for Palestinians and for Israelis. The murder of civilians is an enemy to that desire - whether by terrorists as they dance at a rave, or by terrorists as they harvest their olive grove. The kidnapping of children is an enemy to that desire - whether taken at gunpoint from their kibbutz or taken at gunpoint from their village. And, collective punishment is an enemy to that desire, whether it involves demolishing one home, or one thousand; as too is ethnic cleansing; as too is occupation; as too is apartheid.

It is my firm belief that in such conflicts, for those of us who are third parties, the side we must pick is not that of one of the combatants, but that of the people caught in the middle, and that of the generations yet to come. It is our responsibility to help the warring parties build a better world. To center human rights, not to hope to sideline or sidestep them through programs of economic growth or diplomatic maneuvering. And, when they happen, to be able to name gross violations of human rights no matter who carries them out, and to be able to hold the perpetrators accountable - when they are adversaries, which is easy, but most particularly, when they are partners.

I acknowledge and am heartened to see the efforts this Administration has made to temper Israel's response, including advocating for the provision of relief supplies, electricity, and water to Gaza, and for safe passage. In my role in PM, however, my responsibilities lie solidly in the arms transfer space. And that is why I have resigned from the U.S. Government, and from PM: because while I can, and have, worked hard to shape better policy making in the security assistance field, I cannot work in support of a set of major policy decisions, including rushing more arms to one side of the conflict, that I believe to be shortsighted, destructive, unjust, and contradictory to the very values that we publicly espouse, and which I wholeheartedly endorse: a world built around a rules-based order, a world that advances both equality and equity, and a world whose arc of history bends towards the promise of liberty, and of justice, for all.

And I would note with concern in parting, as regards competitions well beyond this current conflict, that if we want a world shaped by what we perceive to be our values, it is only by conditioning strategic imperatives with moral ones, by holding our partners, and above all by holding ourselves, to those values, that we will see it.

I want to close by noting that while bureaucracy is not without its automatons, and that, as I have learnt, physical courage comes easier than moral courage, I have had the privilege of working with a large number of truly thoughtful, empathetic, courageous, and *good* civil servants, and many of them can be found in PM, from its entry level to its most senior level. As they carry on advancing the interests of the nation and the world in a field in which, perhaps more than any other, it is easier to be better than it is to be good, I can say without hesitation that they are the best. I wish them continued success, strength, and courage. And I wish all of us - peace.

Josh Paul, October 18, 2023.