

November 10, 2023

Dear President Obama,

We—your former campaign staffers and political appointees—write this letter in response to your October 23 post, “[Thoughts on Israel and Gaza](#)” and [your remarks](#) at the reunion. We feel deep sorrow and anger over the Israelis and Palestinians killed in the past weeks, and condemn vile acts against innocent civilians by Hamas and the Israeli government. We continue to call for the safe return of Israeli civilian hostages and imprisoned Palestinian civilians, and an immediate end to the collective punishment of all Palestinians.

In this critical and defining moment, we remember Dr. King’s words you often echo: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” You always called on us to be courageous in reaching our hands high to help bend the arc toward justice. Today, we call on you to stand with us, to do the same.

As we witness the scale and speed of a worsening siege in Gaza, we implore you to muster the moral and political courage you ingrained in us, and **leverage your influence to encourage President Biden and elected officials toward de-escalation, an immediate ceasefire, and brokering the return of hostages using the international stage.** We must demand our government’s largest ally—Israel—to end ongoing violations of international humanitarian law and the widespread massacre of Palestinians, half of whom are children. **War crimes cannot be allowed to become an acceptable global response to war crimes.**

Since Hamas’ deplorable attacks on October 7, killing about 1,400 Israelis, it is unintelligible how the U.S. and Israel can justify a response of collective punishment on Palestinians. **A human catastrophe is unfolding.** As of November 7, Israel has killed more than [10,300 Palestinians](#), at least 4,200 of them children. Thousands more—including 1,300 children—are still unaccounted for and believed to be buried

under rubble. At least [1.5 million Gazans have been displaced](#), left with dwindling access to food, water, electricity, and fuel. Israel has targeted and destroyed [at least 221 schools](#), more than 34 health care facilities, over 177,000 homes, many churches and mosques, [at least six refugee camps](#), and critical infrastructure. **Palestinians are caged in with nowhere to escape.** Israeli officials have dehumanized Palestinians as “human animals,” “children of the dark,” and “the Amalek” to justify their actions.

These escalating crimes against humanity as a means for security are shortsighted and a detrimental miscalculation. They will elicit counter-responses. The historic levels of bombardment and disregard for human life has not achieved the strategic outcome of defeating Hamas. As former State Department Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Director Josh Paul [lamented](#), the Biden Administration’s “impulsive reaction built on confirmation bias, political convenience” is “decades of the same approach that have shown security for peace leads to neither security, nor to peace.” The alarming normative consequences of this current strategy must change.

The siege the Israeli government unleashed on Gaza jeopardizes any path for peace and undermines our promise of a human-centered and rules-based world order. **Carpet bombings and killings are having detrimental and long-term implications for Gaza’s recovery, Islamophobia and antisemitism, and escalating international conflict.** And all within the context of rising authoritarianism and nationalism, including in Israel. We are failing to establish a rules-based world order. In fact, we are contributing to its demise, with irreparable damage to our global position.

President Obama, we joined your campaign and administration because we believed in your vision of the world: one of inclusivity, respect, humanity, justice, and hope. We believe in the inherent value of every human life. We were inspired by the courage you exhibited in your demands to our allies as we worked toward a more just and equitable world. **It is these values that compel us to come together and implore you to call for an immediate end to this humanitarian catastrophe.**

Over a decade ago, in Jerusalem, [you spoke to the Israeli people](#) with audacious candidness: “I believe it’s important to be open and honest, especially with your friends... Neither occupation nor expulsion is the answer. Just as Israelis built a state in their homeland, Palestinians have a right to be a free people in their own land.”

In a time when views are as polarized as ever, and you have already chosen to weigh in, we ask you to encourage our leaders to:

1. **Recenter the strategic objective** by demanding a **ceasefire**, brokering the release of Israeli hostages and imprisoned Palestinian civilians, and establishing a path toward collective peace and Palestinian self-determination;
2. **Uphold international law** by denouncing the latest terror campaign, killings, and incarceration of Palestinians by illegal settlers and police in the West Bank, where Hamas does not even operate; and
3. **Minimize the humanitarian toll** by establishing a more expansive and consistent humanitarian aid corridor that meets the dire needs in Gaza. Halt the expanded and expedited provision of lethal weapons to Israel. Evacuate Americans in Gaza and the West Bank, as is being done in Israel.

President Obama, in just over a year, Americans will head to the polls. Many of us are well-versed in the razor-thin margins of today’s polarized elections. The American and global public outcry against the Israeli government’s actions cannot be ignored or underestimated. **To stand against a ceasefire is to stand against the will of the majority of the people in the United States.** We will not forget the public and active role this administration and Democrats in Congress are playing in this defining moment.

In your remarks in Jerusalem, you stated: “Let me say this as a politician—I can promise you this, political leaders will never take risks if the people do not push them to take some risks. You must create the change that you want to see.”

You inspired and prepared us for this moment, where having the courage to speak out can result in persecution, [job loss](#), and alienation. We are taking personal risks at a time

reminiscent of authoritarianism and McCarthyism that punishes free speech. **We need your allyship, no longer as the politician but as a moral compass we look to, to advocate for a ceasefire and for humanity to prevail. We cannot be bystanders to a historic collapse of empathy.**

We only live once on this earth. And what we do with that time and space is what we are accountable for. It is our legacy and our duty to generations that follow. And while history does not move in a straight line, we have the choice on where we stand. **No matter the risks, we choose to be on the right side of history—for justice and humanity.** This is a key moment in history. **Please, stand by us.**

With hope for a better and more peaceful tomorrow,

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