

Opinion **Israel-Hamas war**

## Why a Palestinian state is the best security guarantee for Israel

A power vacuum in Gaza after the current war could set off another cycle of violence and terrorism

**JOSEP BORRELL**



Palestinians face a humanitarian crisis in Gaza © Said Khatib/AFP/Getty Images

**Josep Borrell** YESTERDAY

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*The writer is the EU's High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy*

I have just spent five days in the Middle East. Along with Ukraine, it has become one of the world's most volatile regions. There will be periods of calm that may give the impression that tensions are easing, but the [Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#) remains more pervasive than ever and it is here to stay. Our political myopia, to think this conflict was manageable by paying lip service to the two-state solution and then leaving it to fester, must end. Not only for reasons of humanity, justice or morality, but because if we do not fix it now, it may trigger displacement of people, including towards Europe, and exacerbate the risk of terrorism and intercommunity tensions.

The region is again haunted by trauma and rage. Israelis are deeply affected by the carnage of October 7, resulting in over 1,200 people killed and more than 200 hostages. Palestinians face a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, another carnage with more than 13,000 victims, primarily women and children, along with attacks by Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. A [temporary ceasefire and partial hostage](#) release took effect on Friday. I hope this will create a positive dynamic leading to the release of all hostages and an end to hostilities.

The horrors committed by Hamas and other extremists are detrimental to Palestinian interests. The leaders I met in Ramallah acknowledge this. However, for them the

interests. The leaders I met in Ramallah acknowledge this. However, for them the fundamental issue lies in the Israeli occupation. They struggle to explain to constituents why their freedom of movement is restricted, while illegal settlements flourish and settlers are free to attack them. They also cannot ensure security in the occupied West Bank while Israel is withholding Palestinian tax revenues it collects on the Palestinian Authority's behalf.

One horror does not justify another. Yet each side looks only at its own side of the tragedy, at what happened yesterday or what is happening today. But there will be a tomorrow that neither side is yet able to envisage. Israelis believe they need to eliminate Hamas to guarantee their security. Palestinians prioritise ending Gaza's humanitarian catastrophe and settler provocations.

Despite these challenges, we must keep the possibility for peace open. My recent trip to the region has strengthened my conviction that the best guarantee for Israel's security is the establishment of a Palestinian state. And, in the short term, we should avoid weakening the Palestinian Authority.

Vacuums cannot persist in nature or in politics. If neither Hamas nor Israel governs Gaza, and neither should, the power vacuum will quickly be filled by uncontrolled forces that could turn Gaza into a failed territory and set off another cycle of violence and terrorism. We have known since Hobbes that a society without a Leviathan, a state, is doomed to violence and chaos.

We have witnessed similar situations unfold too many times before. We have seen the flows of refugees escaping Syria's conflict into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. These countries cannot shoulder another major influx of Palestinian refugees. In the words of one of my interlocutors last week, we will not survive another Nakba. And Europe and the international community will not and cannot accept another forced mass displacement of Palestinians.

To prevent Gaza from falling into the hands of uncontrolled armed groups that may destabilise the entire neighbourhood, starting with Israel, the territory must be governed by a state representing its people. Israel's own security requires the creation of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

How and when we achieve this will depend on all of us. One thing is clear: all my interlocutors in the Arab world have accepted Israel's existence and want to engage with it. They recognise the immense opportunity that lies in a peaceful neighbourhood, cross-border co-operation and Israel's potential role as a regional economic driver. But all agree that Arab-Israeli co-operation hinges upon resolving

the Palestinian question. There is no way around it.

To move forward, we must aim for a solution based on justice and equal rights for both peoples. This means, first and foremost, the need for security in the whole region and in Europe, which faces the immediate repercussions of instability. As neighbours, we must join forces with partners regionally and across the world to reach a viable, lasting political settlement for the benefit of Israelis, Palestinians and the region. This is also in our own best interests. The EU, alongside some Arab countries, initiated efforts towards this goal with the Peace Day Effort, launched at the UN in September, just before the storm started. We are determined to keep working towards this objective.

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