

NAVIGATING THE WAR ON GAZA

Last updated: November 27, 2023

Authored by: War Prevention Initiative



NAVIGATING THE WAR ON GAZA

War Prevention Initiative, November 2023

Executive Summary

The current surge of violence in Israel and Palestine demands urgent attention and a departure from militarized responses. The War Prevention Initiative recognizes the gravity of the situation, acknowledging the complexity of historical traumas and contemporary war crimes committed by both Hamas and the Israeli government. We fear that the current conflict trajectory in Palestine and Israel has set back efforts for long-lasting peace by generations.

As we are writing this briefing, there needs to be an extension to the pause recently negotiated to permit the release of hostages and prisoners and begin negotiations leading to a permanent ceasefire. The latter, the return of all hostages, and rapid delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza are the only conditions by which negotiations for immediate de-escalation and long-term peace can be pursued. The resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict necessitates a fundamental transformation in the relationship between the two parties, driven by grassroots movements amplifying the voices of peacebuilders dedicated to coexistence, justice, and freedom.

This briefing emphasizes the role of the U.S.-based peace and security sector in advocating for a demilitarized approach, challenging the unquestioned flow of weapons to Israel, and promoting structural changes that address the root causes of the conflict. The briefing will delve into core problems in the discourse on Israel and Palestine, offering recommendations for remediation.

Recommendations for U.S.-Based Peace Organizations:

- 1) **Information Sharing and Advocacy**
- 2) **Guidance for Decision-Making**
- 3) **Networking and Collaboration**
- 4) **Advocacy**
- 5) **Promote Contextual Understanding**

This briefing serves as a call to action for the broader peace and security community in the U.S. to contribute to a peaceful, non-militarized resolution to the war on Gaza. The recommendations can also benefit other conflict contexts and organizations beyond the peace and security sector.

Navigating the War on Gaza

War Prevention Initiative, November 2023

Long Summary

The surge in violence in Israel and Palestine has deeply unsettled and horrified us. In moments of acute crisis, it is difficult to meaningfully respond in a way that rejects a militarized approach and affirms the dignity and humanity of those most affected by violence.

The context of this briefing is war. Hamas' killing of about 1,200¹ mainly Israeli citizens and abduction of about 200 Israeli and foreign civilians re-affirms deep-seated existential fears and ancestral trauma of centuries of oppression, genocide, and violence against Jewish people. The continued firing of rockets by militants into Israel and the holding of hostages are war crimes committed by Hamas². At the same time, Israel's government has responded with indiscriminate bombing and a ground invasion, which have killed a reported 14,800³ Palestinian civilians so far, as well as a deliberate blockade of essential resources such as food, water, electricity, medicine, fuel, and communication services to civilians in Gaza. These actions, constituting war crimes, along with dehumanizing statements by Israeli government officials, compel us to take seriously the warnings issued by UN officials, legal advocacy groups, and scholars in international law, genocide studies, and conflict studies of the imminent threat of genocide and ethnic cleansing of the

¹ Boxerman, A. (2023, November 12). What We Know About the Death Toll in Israel From the Hamas-Led Attacks. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/12/world/middleeast/israel-death-toll-hamas-attack.html>

² See: International Committee of the Red Cross. (2010, October 29). *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm>

³ This number is an unverified account by Gaza's Government Media Office government and used by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-51>). The Health Ministry in Gaza tracked casualties until November 10, 2023. Because of the breakdown in communication and disruption to the internet, the Health Ministry can no longer track the casualties. Last official data at: *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Occupied Palestinian territory | Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel—Reported impact | Day 35*. (2023, November 10). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-35>

Palestinian people⁴⁵. We fear that the current conflict trajectory in Palestine and Israel has set back efforts for long-lasting peace by generations.

As we are writing this briefing, there needs to be an extension to the pause recently negotiated to permit the release of hostages and prisoners and begin negotiations leading to a permanent ceasefire. The latter, the return of all hostages, and rapid delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza are the only conditions by which negotiations for immediate de-escalation and long-term peace can be pursued. Achieving a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict requires a structural transformation in the relationship between Israel and Palestine. This transformation demands political leadership that is responsive to the genuine needs of all people. It should organically develop from the grassroots, amplifying the voices of Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders dedicated to coexistence, justice, dignity, and freedom for all.

U.S.-based peace organizations are well-positioned to advocate for a peaceful and demilitarized approach. The U.S. contributes billions in weapons shipments⁶—direct weapons sales and missile defense—to Israel every year. The unquestioned sending of weapons of war is a failed strategy that does not make Israel more secure and that upholds conditions of occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. We believe that sharing information and recommendations to our community of practice will contribute to meaningful knowledge and action by our U.S.-based partners toward a more peaceful Israel and Palestine.

In a forthcoming briefing, we identify six core problems with the ongoing discourse on Israel and Palestine—*decontextualization, dehumanization, absolutist language, militarized security, binary thinking, and Orientalism*—and recommendations on how U.S.-based peace organizations can remediate these problems. The recommendations from this briefing are intended for the broader peace and security community in the U.S. to advocate for a peaceful and demilitarized solution to the war on Gaza. These recommendations may

⁴ See: *Israel's Unfolding Crime of Genocide of the Palestinian People & U.S. Failure to Prevent and Complicity in Genocide*. (n.d.). Center for Constitutional Rights. Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://ccrjustice.org/node/10061>; *Public Statement: Scholars Warn of Potential Genocide in Gaza*. (2023, October 15). Third World Approaches to International Law Review. <https://twailr.com/public-statement-scholars-warn-of-potential-genocide-in-gaza/>; Tétrault-Farber, G., & Farge, E. (2023, November 3). UN experts say ceasefire needed as Palestinians at "grave risk of genocide." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-experts-say-ceasefire-needed-palestinians-grave-risk-genocide-2023-11-02/>; *UN expert warns of new instance of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, calls for immediate ceasefire*. (n.d.). United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-expert-warns-new-instance-mass-ethnic-cleansing-palestinians-calls>

⁵ It is important to note that ethnic cleansing and genocide often takes place in times of war or violent conflict where "both sides" engage in violence against the other (for example, the Rwandan genocide took place during the Rwandan civil war). Hamas' indiscriminate violence does not justify Israel's indiscriminate violence against all Palestinians in Gaza.

⁶ AJLabs. (2023, October 11). *How big is Israel's military and how much funding does it get from the US?* Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/how-big-is-israels-military-and-how-much-funding-does-it-get-from-the-us>

also be helpful for other conflict contexts or networks and organizations not identifying as peace and security stakeholders.

This briefing is intended for the broader peace and security community in the U.S. to advocate for a peaceful and non-militarized solution to the war on Gaza. These recommendations may also be helpful for other conflict contexts or networks and organizations not identifying as peace and security stakeholders.

1. **Information sharing and advocacy:** Use the information and framing to inform your community, stakeholders, and audiences about the nuances of the war on Gaza. Use these insights to drive informed discussions regarding peace and security in Israel-Palestine.
 - a. **Incorporate nuanced language:** Encourage precise wording and avoid absolutist and biased statements in discussions and publications to allow nuanced perspectives and informed analysis⁷.
 - b. **Reject oversimplified narratives:** Advocate against the oversimplification of the conflict and promote balanced understanding that acknowledges the complex historical and social elements involved.
 - c. **Support peace journalism:** Promote media sources focusing on structural causes and inclusive voices, encouraging a deeper understanding of the conflict beyond mainstream narratives.
2. **Guidance for decision-making:** Use the recommendations to evaluate and support initiatives, policies, and strategies related to peacebuilding efforts in the Israel-Palestine conflict.
 - a. **Call for an immediate ceasefire:** Call for the cessation of violence to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved parties.
 - b. **Challenge militarized approaches:** Advocate for an alternative concept of security, focusing on non-militarized approaches to peace and security in the region.
 - c. **Program Development:** Tailor peace and security programs that address dehumanization, contextual understanding, and promotion of peacebuilding⁸.
3. **Networking and collaboration:** Engage with other organizations to develop collaborative approaches and initiatives that align with the recommendations mentioned in this briefing.

⁷ Avoiding biased statements should not prevent us from supporting the humanity on both sides and demand justice in a context of oppression and occupation.

⁸ See this excellent piece calling for the support of civil society peacebuilding efforts: Cammack, P. (2023, October 30). *The Best Hope for Ending the Israel-Hamas War? Civil Society Peace Builders*. The Chronicle of Philanthropy. <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/the-best-hope-for-ending-the-israel-hamas-war-civil-society-peace-builders>

Engage with diverse perspectives: Encourage engagement with historically excluded voices and narratives, which can provide nuanced and lived experiences that enrich the understanding of the conflict.

4. **Advocacy:** Support peacebuilding approaches that address immediate and structural violence. Encourage your network to take action in this regard.
 - a. **Advocacy efforts:** Advocate for policy changes that reject the failed status quo, humanitarian aid, and an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, considering the complex context and multifaceted narratives in the conflict.
 - b. **Advocacy against dehumanization:** Take a stance against dehumanizing language and narratives, particularly those that perpetuate violence and oppression against any party in the conflict.
 - c. **Domestic advocacy:** Advocate for policies and programs that combat antisemitism and Islamophobia carried into the U.S. context by the Israel-Palestine conflict.
5. **Promote contextual understanding:** Emphasize the importance of understanding the historical, social, and political context that shapes the conflict to your community, stakeholders, and audiences. Use this understanding to create more informed and nuanced narratives, programs, and policies.

Navigating the War on Gaza

War Prevention Initiative, November 2023

Full Briefing

The context of this briefing is war. Hamas' killing of about 1,200⁹ mainly Israeli citizens and abduction of about 200 Israeli and foreign civilians re-affirms deep-seated existential fears and ancestral trauma of centuries of oppression, genocide, and violence against Jewish people. The continued firing of rockets by militants into Israel and the holding of hostages are war crimes committed by Hamas¹⁰. At the same time, Israel's government has responded with indiscriminate bombing and a ground invasion, which have killed a reported 14,800¹¹ Palestinian civilians so far, as well as a deliberate blockade of essential resources such as food, water, electricity, medicine, fuel, and communication services to civilians in Gaza. These actions, constituting war crimes, along with dehumanizing statements by Israeli government officials, compel us to take seriously the warnings issued by UN officials, legal advocacy groups, and scholars in international law, genocide studies, and conflict studies of the imminent threat of genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people^{12,13}. We fear that the current conflict trajectory in Palestine and Israel has set back efforts for long-lasting peace by generations.

⁹ Boxerman, A. (2023, November 12). What We Know About the Death Toll in Israel From the Hamas-Led Attacks. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/12/world/middleeast/israel-death-toll-hamas-attack.html>

¹⁰ See: International Committee of the Red Cross. (2010, October 29). *The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols*. <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/war-and-law/treaties-customary-law/geneva-conventions/overview-geneva-conventions.htm>

¹¹ This number is an unverified account by Gaza's Government Media Office government and used by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-51>). The Health Ministry in Gaza tracked casualties until November 10, 2023. Because of the breakdown in communication and disruption to the internet, the Health Ministry can no longer track the casualties. Last official data at: *United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Occupied Palestinian territory | Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel—Reported impact | Day 35*. (2023, November 10). United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory. <http://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-reported-impact-day-35>

¹² See: *Israel's Unfolding Crime of Genocide of the Palestinian People & U.S. Failure to Prevent and Complicity in Genocide*. (n.d.). Center for Constitutional Rights. Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://ccrjustice.org/node/10061>; *Public Statement: Scholars Warn of Potential Genocide in Gaza*. (2023, October 15). Third World Approaches to International Law Review. <https://twailr.com/public-statement-scholars-warn-of-potential-genocide-in-gaza/>; Tétrault-Farber, G., & Farge, E. (2023, November 3). UN experts say ceasefire needed as Palestinians at "grave risk of genocide." *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/un-experts-say-ceasefire-needed-palestinians-grave-risk-genocide-2023-11-02/>; *UN expert warns of new instance of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, calls for immediate ceasefire*. (n.d.). United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Retrieved November 15, 2023, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/un-expert-warns-new-instance-mass-ethnic-cleansing-palestinians-calls>

¹³ It is important to note that ethnic cleansing and genocide often takes place in times of war or violent conflict where "both sides" engage in violence against the other (for example, the Rwandan genocide took place during the Rwandan civil war). Hamas' indiscriminate violence does not justify Israel's indiscriminate violence against all Palestinians in Gaza.

As we are writing this briefing, there needs to be an extension to the pause recently negotiated to permit the release of hostages and prisoners and begin negotiations leading to a permanent ceasefire. The latter, the return of all hostages, and rapid delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza are the only conditions by which negotiations for immediate de-escalation and long-term peace can be pursued. Achieving a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict requires a structural transformation in the relationship between Israel and Palestine. This transformation demands political leadership that is responsive to the genuine needs of all people. It should organically develop from the grassroots, amplifying the voices of Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders dedicated to coexistence, justice, dignity, and freedom for all.

U.S.-based peace organizations are well-positioned to advocate for a peaceful and demilitarized approach. The U.S. contributes billions in weapons shipments¹⁴—direct weapons sales and missile defense—to Israel every year. The unquestioned sending of weapons of war is a failed strategy that does not make Israel more secure and that upholds conditions of occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people. We believe that sharing information and recommendations to our community of practice will contribute to meaningful knowledge and action by our U.S.-based partners toward a more peaceful Israel and Palestine.

There are countless concerned citizens, peace organizations, peace and security funders, and civil society organizations and their members deeply committed to advancing a more peaceful world. Their access to and ability to navigate complex and often distressing information is a powerful tool in this pursuit. However, the asymmetric war waged by Israel on Gaza in response to Hamas's violence, the overflow of news, images, narratives, and expert opinions, particularly heightened through social media, can be overwhelming. Moreover, in times of war, complex issues are often simplified into dangerous dichotomies such as good and evil, us vs. them, and attack and counterattack.

We created this briefing to demonstrate how to process and share information regarding the war on Gaza while rejecting a military solution and calling for peace with justice. Moreover, we hope the briefing will guide you in making informed decisions about programming and advocacy. This briefing identifies six problems with the current discourse on the war on Gaza and offers concrete recommendations on how the broader peace and security community can remediate these problems: decontextualization, dehumanization, absolutist language, militarized security, binary thinking, and Orientalism.

¹⁴ AJLabs. (2023, October 11). *How big is Israel's military and how much funding does it get from the US?* Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/how-big-is-israels-military-and-how-much-funding-does-it-get-from-the-us>

As you engage with this briefing, we encourage you to approach this subject with an open mind, a critical eye, and a firm dedication to peace, justice, and human dignity. We incorporate feminist and antiracist viewpoints to comprehend the power dynamics, structural inequalities, and historical injustices shaping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the war on Gaza. We unambiguously reject violence and the killing and hostage-taking of civilians by Hamas militants as well as by the Israeli military, whose collective punishment of Palestinians both clear violations of international humanitarian law¹⁵. Moreover, we recognize that only by ending the occupation and oppression of Palestinians can pathways to a peaceful future between Israel and Palestine be established.

How to use this briefing

This briefing is intended for the broader peace and security community in the U.S. to advocate for a peaceful and non-militarized solution to the war on Gaza. These recommendations may also be helpful for other conflict contexts or networks and organizations not identifying as peace and security stakeholders.

1. **Information sharing and advocacy:** Use the information and framing to inform your community, stakeholders, and audiences about the nuances of the war on Gaza. Use these insights to drive informed discussions regarding peace and security in Israel-Palestine.
 - a. **Incorporate nuanced language:** Encourage precise language and avoid absolutist and biased statements in discussions and publications to allow nuanced perspectives and informed analysis¹⁶.
 - b. **Reject oversimplified narratives:** Advocate against the oversimplification of the conflict and promote balanced understanding that acknowledges the complex historical and social elements involved.
 - c. **Support peace journalism:** Promote media sources focusing on structural causes and inclusive voices, encouraging a deeper understanding of the conflict beyond mainstream narratives.
2. **Guidance for decision-making:** Use the recommendations to evaluate and support initiatives, policies, and strategies related to peacebuilding efforts in the Israel-Palestine conflict.
 - a. **Call for an immediate ceasefire:** Call for the cessation of violence to ensure the safety and well-being of all involved parties.
 - b. **Challenge militarized approaches:** Advocate for an alternative security concept, focusing on non-militarized approaches to peace and security in the region.

¹⁵ Baldwin, C. (2023, October 27). *How Does International Humanitarian Law Apply in Israel and Gaza?* | *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/10/27/how-does-international-humanitarian-law-apply-israel-and-gaza>

¹⁶ Avoiding biased statements should not prevent us from supporting humanity on both sides and demand justice in a context of oppression and occupation.

- c. **Program Development:** Tailor peace and security programs that address dehumanization, contextual understanding, and promotion of peacebuilding¹⁷.
3. **Networking and collaboration:** Engage with other organizations to develop collaborative approaches and initiatives that align with the recommendations mentioned in this briefing.
 - a. **Engage with diverse perspectives:** Encourage engagement with historically excluded voices and narratives, which can provide nuanced and lived experiences that enrich the understanding of the conflict.
4. **Advocacy:** Support peacebuilding approaches that address immediate and structural violence. Encourage your network to take action in this regard.
 - a. **Advocacy efforts:** Advocate for policy changes that reject the failed status quo, humanitarian aid, and an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, considering the complex context and multifaceted narratives in the conflict.
 - b. **Advocacy against dehumanization:** Take a stance against dehumanizing language and narratives, particularly those that perpetuate violence and oppression against any party in the conflict.
 - c. **Domestic advocacy:** Advocate for policies and programs that combat antisemitism and Islamophobia carried into the U.S. context by the Israel-Palestine conflict.
5. **Promote contextual understanding:** Emphasize the importance of understanding the historical, social, and political context that shapes the conflict to your community, stakeholders, and audiences. Use this understanding to create more informed and nuanced narratives, programs, and policies.

Problem: Decontextualization of an intractable conflict

The Israel-Palestinian conflict is a so-called intractable conflict¹⁸, representing a longstanding and immensely challenging issue with no easy resolution in sight. It is crucial to note that attributing the cause of the war on Gaza to the October 7, 2023, violent attacks by Hamas militants is ahistorical and may lead to misleading conclusions. Instead, the violence that we are witnessing today is part of a decades-long conflict trajectory where social identities, binary truths, power dynamics, social structures, and militarization have prolonged and entrenched the conflict. This briefing does not seek to provide the

¹⁷ See this excellent piece calling for the support of civil society peacebuilding efforts: Cammack, P. (2023, October 30). *The Best Hope for Ending the Israel-Hamas War? Civil Society Peace Builders*. The Chronicle of Philanthropy. <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/the-best-hope-for-ending-the-israel-hamas-war-civil-society-peace-builders>

¹⁸ Intractable conflict is “an enduring conflict that resists all forms of resolution attempts because of the nature of the issues, goals, identities, relationships, dynamics, social structures, and other drivers of conflict perpetuation.” Arai, T. (2022). Functional coexistence in intractable conflict: A decades-long view of conflict intervention. *Peace & Change*, 47(2), 118–151.

historical context of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Instead, it aims to highlight critical factors for consideration.

An accurate contextual interpretation should acknowledge objective issues within the conflict and embrace conflicting historical narratives without attempting to oversimplify by developing a single narrative. The deep-seated social-psychological aspects that sustain the conflict offer insights into why individuals and groups are entangled in intractable conflict. Drawing from the invaluable insights of Julia Chaitin, an Israeli social psychologist and peace activist collaborating with Palestinian counterparts, social-psychological frameworks can aid in comprehending the conflict's endurance¹⁹:

- **Long-term trauma:** Considering the intergenerational impact of significant social traumas (e.g., the Holocaust for Jewish Israelis and events like al-Nakba and the ongoing occupation for Palestinians).
- **Collective identity:** Understanding the deep-rooted sense of victimhood experienced by both Jewish and Palestinian communities.
- **Differing worldviews:** Recognizing the contrasting perspectives, ideologies, and claims to land that contribute to the conflict.
- **"Us vs. them" mentality:** Addressing the tendency towards stereotyping, scapegoating, delegitimizing, and dehumanizing the opposing group.
- **Empathy challenges:** Acknowledging the difficulties in empathizing with the suffering of the other group.
- **Barriers to problem-solving:** Identifying the challenge in overcoming certain mindsets and entrenched beliefs.
- **Lack of meaningful dialogue:** Highlighting the geographical and social segregation and the lack of comprehensive understanding of the "other."

Moreover, a contextualization of the conflict must prominently address power dynamics. A historical and psychosocial analysis reveals that both Israelis and Palestinians endure the repercussions of the conflict. However, a heavily militarized Israeli government, recognized as an occupying force in Palestine by international law²⁰, disproportionality subjects Palestinians to state-sanctioned violence. Within this framework, the current war on Gaza is not merely a confrontation with Hamas but part of a broader conflict where the Israeli government maintains a system of oppression and occupation of the Palestinian people.

Recommendations:

¹⁹ See: Chaitin, J. (2011). *Peace-Building in Israel and Palestine*. Palgrave Macmillan US.

²⁰ *Commission of Inquiry finds that the Israeli occupation is unlawful under international law*. (2022, October 20). OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/10/commission-inquiry-finds-israeli-occupation-unlawful-under-international-law>

- **Avoid biased historical descriptions:** Acknowledge the legitimate claims of Israelis and Palestinians to disputed lands and understand the complexity of competing historical narratives.
- **Recognize trauma impact:** Acknowledge the collective traumas triggered by deadly attacks and collective punishment, affecting both Israelis and Palestinians.
- **Address power asymmetries:** Recognize power imbalances between Israel and Palestine and tackle oppression, occupation, and encroaching West Bank settlements while also acknowledging Israel's right to exist.
- **Embrace comprehensive context:** Understand the complexities rather than opt for simple solutions when confronted with outrage.
- **Understand motivations for violence:** Recognize the context in which violent acts occur and engage constructively to address the root causes.
- **Contextualize the emergence of Hamas:** Understand and work to dismantle the violent systems that facilitate the group's existence.
- **Use context for progress:** Use context to move beyond paralysis and silence, promoting informed action.

Problem: Dehumanization

Dehumanization is a psychological process wherein adversaries are perceived as less than human, denying them moral consideration. All individuals inherently possess inviolable human rights. Yet, when certain groups are seen as beyond morality, basic needs and fair treatment seem irrelevant. Dehumanization is often directed towards those perceived as threats, making increased violence or the violation of fundamental human rights more acceptable.

Dehumanization creates an enemy image that involves negative stereotypes of the opposing group as inherently evil while portraying one's side as virtuous. This dynamic makes it difficult to empathize or understand the adversary's perspective, to communicate effectively, or to find common ground. When viewing adversaries as "diabolical enemies," conflicts are framed as battles between good and evil, entrenching inflexible positions.

Dehumanization predictably increases the likelihood of violence and mass atrocity crimes. Addressing dehumanization is a long-term process requiring a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders to tackle root causes.

Recommendations:

- **Actively challenge instances of dehumanization:** Identify, call out, and refrain from dehumanization.
- **Offer alternatives to dehumanization:** Promote empathy and our common humanity by sharing stories and visuals that highlight lived experiences or model peaceful relationships.
- **Support programs that counter dehumanization:**
 - Cultivating empathy

- Fostering personal relationships between conflicting parties
- Pursuing common goals to break down barriers and foster a sense of shared humanity.

Dehumanizing language supporting the Israeli government's war on Gaza:

- 1) "There will be no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel, everything is be closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly." Yoav Gallant (Israeli Defense Minister)
- 2) "The right of me, my wife, and kids to travel around the West Bank is more important than that of the Arabs. (Sorry Muhammed), but that is the reality." Itamar Ben Gvir, Israeli National Security Minister
- 3) "I don't think there's any way Israel can be expected to co-exist with or find some diplomatic off-ramp with these savages... they have to be eradicated." Marco Rubio, United States Senator
- 4) "This is a struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle." – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (posted on social media)
- 5) "Gaza Nakba 2023. That's how it'll end." – Avi Dichter, Israeli Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

- 1) Yoav Gallant, Televised address (9th October), [AL-Jazeera](#) [video]
- 2) Itamar Ben Gvir, Televised interview (23rd August), [Middle East Eye](#) [video]
- 3) Marco Rubio, (9th October) [CNN](#) interview posted by Daily Kos, along with this [article](#).
- 4) Benjamin Netanyahu, on X [formerly Twitter] (16th October), [Snopes](#), fact-checker [tweet]
- 5) [Haaretz news](#) article (12th Nov)

Note: In the context of warfare, dehumanization manifests as a reciprocal phenomenon. Some proponents of Hamas employ dehumanizing rhetoric when referring to Israelis. It is crucial to emphasize our unequivocal rejection of such perspectives. The examples presented herein are intended to offer insight into the ongoing war initiated by the Israeli government against Gaza, focusing on the current situation rather than delving into the broader historical context.

Problem: Absolutist language and propaganda

Absolutist language presents viewpoints in an extreme manner, leaving no room for nuance or alternative perspectives. The clamor of wartime propaganda tends to drown out subtleties and directly or indirectly suppress viewpoints contrary to the beating of war

drums. For instance, Israeli officials consistently criticized UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' calls for a humanitarian ceasefire²¹, while numerous U.S. nonprofits find themselves operating under either imposed or self-imposed silence²². It is important to note that propaganda is not confined to any specific group; rather, it constitutes a systematic and often manipulative method of disseminating information, ideas, or narratives to influence people's beliefs, opinions, and behaviors. When these elements converge, it becomes evident how extreme and unqualified language is employed within propaganda to manipulate public opinion.

The attacks by Hamas militants in Israel and the Israeli government's war on Gaza are violent actions that do not represent the entirety of the viewpoints or policy preferences of Palestinian or Israeli people. There is no conflict where the most violent actors attain the full and unconditional support of the wider population. While pernicious and often appealing to the larger public, absolutist views and propaganda can be countered effectively by peace groups. Instead of listening to leaders who advocate for fear, hatred, and violence, we should focus on and support the voices in the region working for peaceful coexistence and justice.

Recommendations:

- **Avoid language that sanitizes or obfuscates the reality of war:** Read and adhere to the recommendations in "[Language Use about Gaza: Ten Urgent Suggestions.](#)"²³
- **Seek and support information demonstrating key characteristics of peace journalism:** Focus on structural causes, inclusive voices, contextualization, solutions-oriented reporting, and conflict analysis.
- **Challenge attempts to stifle contextual perspectives:** Organized stifling of pro-peace voices can be intimidating. Seek support within organizations and the strength of organizational networks to defend the space for pro-peace language.
- **Question dominant binary narratives, anticipating resistance:** For instance, questioning support for the Israeli government and military can be misconstrued as supporting Hamas militants and their attacks.
- **Use precise language:** Condemning antisemitism with moral clarity does not prevent informed criticism of the Israeli state. Supporting Palestinian calls for justice does not necessarily imply a denial of Israel's right to exist.

²¹ See: Mauldin, W. (2022, October 25). Israeli Foreign Minister to U.N.'s Guterres: 'In What World Do You Live?' *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/israel-hamas-war-news-gaza-palestinians/card/israeli-foreign-minister-to-u-n-s-guterres-in-what-world-do-you-live--6XWYYjb2MqB95xFDsYVW8>;

<https://twitter.com/elicoh1/status/1721598042858533337>; TOI Staff. (2023, November 15). *Former envoy to UN suggests Secretary-General Guterres is a 'spokesman for Hamas.'* <https://www.timesofisrael.com/former-envoy-to-un-suggests-secretary-general-guterres-is-a-spokesman-for-hamas/>

²² See: Ware, J., Rabbi Silverstein, B., & Anonymous. (2023, October 13). A Plea for Humanity and Justice in Israel/Palestine. *The Center for Effective Philanthropy*. <https://cep.org/a-lonely-place-a-plea-for-humanity-and-justice-in-israel-palestine/>

²³ See: <https://www.wordsaboutwar.org/gaza.html>

- **Scrutinize media expertise:** Do the perspectives of those most affected by violence take precedence, or do elite interests dominate? Seek credible citizen journalists.

Problem: Militarized security

The use of war to achieve peace is mainly unquestioned by state leaders, generals, experts, and intellectuals. While they articulate phrases such as "there is no military solution," "this cannot be solved militarily," or "the solution has to be political" in speeches and interviews, these statements paradoxically precede justifications for engaging in wars. It is imperative to embark on a different trajectory—one not guided by wishful thinking but instead informed by a meticulous analysis of nonviolent alternatives, excluding any consideration of a so-called military option in the equation. There is abundant evidence that there is no military solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. This unchecked embrace of "peace through strength" aligns with a militarist paradigm that sees military violence as the most effective method to maintain societal and global order. The promotion of "peace through strength" and the supply of extensive weapon shipments, often termed "military aid," is an ineffective and incendiary response to the complex and ongoing conflict. While the Israel-Palestine conflict is multifaceted, the prevailing militarist paradigm consistently obstructs constructive pathways toward peace. A starting point for peace is acknowledging that militarization cannot solve conflicts related to demands for freedom, dignity, and security for all people involved²⁴.

Israel stands as a highly militarized nation, where the discourse on security heavily emphasizes the use of military force as the primary means to ensure safety. Meanwhile, Hamas is a militant organization that resorts to attacking military and civilian targets in Israel and autocratically governs the Gaza Strip.

It is crucial to collectively reassess what fosters safety and security and identify opportunities to challenge the role of militarism in the conflict. Pathways to peace between Israel and Palestine must rest on a redefined concept of security, emphasizing a shared paradigm that acknowledges the experiences of individuals and communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by security threats or marginalized by traditional security narratives. It is imperative to ask critical and probing questions:

- Do weapon shipments to Israel enhance the safety of both Israeli and Palestinian citizens?
- Will more weapons lead to deterrence—or an escalation of conflict, drawing in more warring parties?
- How will increased militarization further harm civilians?
- Will massive bombings in Gaza secure the release of hostages?

²⁴ Minges, M. (2023, October 24). *A Conflict Resolution Expert on Peace and the Israel-Hamas War*. American University. <https://www.american.edu/sis/news/20231024-a-conflict-resolution-expert-on-peace-and-the-israel-hamas-war.cfm>

- Will intensified conflict lead to the dismantling of Hamas or provoke Palestinians to turn against Hamas, or will it lead to more significant consolidation of support for Hamas?
- Will further militarization pave the way for peace between Israel and Palestine?
- Are there alternative methods to ensure security for all?
- Can even so-called "proportional" or "limited" military responses break the cycles of violence?
- Are civilian voices from both sides being considered?
- Is the extensive use of force and disregard for international humanitarian law an appropriate response to Hamas' brutal attacks, ultimately punishing two million people?

Security Without War: 2 examples applicable to Israel and Palestine

Example 1:

In his article titled "There are nonmilitary alternatives to Israel's war in Gaza²⁵", nonviolence expert George Lakey delineates eight techniques from the nonviolent toolbox as practical applications for non-military defense against terrorism. He provides a concrete exploration of these techniques to challenge the prevailing notion that war is the sole means to ensure safety and respond to the October 7 massacre by Hamas. The outlined techniques are as follows:

1. Ally-building and the infrastructure of economic development
2. Reducing cultural marginalization
3. Nonviolent protest/campaigns among the defenders, plus unarmed civilian peacekeeping
4. Pro-conflict education and training
5. Post-terror recovery programs
6. Police as peace officers: the infrastructure of norms and laws
7. Policy changes and the concept of reckless behavior
8. Negotiation

Example 2:

The Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP)²⁶ is "a coalition of over 170 organizations—and tens of thousands of Palestinians and Israelis—building people-to-people cooperation, coexistence, equality, shared society, mutual understanding, and peace among their communities". Currently, ALLMEP lists 40 different member critical engagements helping those most in need of assistance during the war. These engagements go beyond responding to the war in that they include peacebuilding measures such as providing food and shelter to Bedouin communities, offering trauma counseling, and organizing educational workshops. Other programs focus on

²⁵ Lakey, G. (2023, November 7). *There are nonmilitary alternatives to Israel's war in Gaza*. Waging Nonviolence. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2023/11/there-are-nonmilitary-alternatives-to-israel-war-gaza/>

²⁶ <https://www.allmep.org/about-us-allmep/>

promoting peace and coexistence, such as bringing together Jewish and Arab students for dialogue.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage critical inquiry into what defines security:** Ask questions like those listed above that consider what security means and how all groups can attain it.
- **Advocate for an end to weapons shipments:** Provide a platform to challenge the unquestioned support for military weapon shipments to the Israeli government.
- **Highlight that further militarization and violence are counterproductive²⁷:** Increased violence will only exacerbate suffering and grievances, leading to renewed support for continued violent resistance against Israel in the future, and escalated militarization is likely to widen the conflict and involve more fighting parties, such as Hezbollah and Iran.
- **Advocate for alternative approaches to achieve security²⁸:** Israel's war on Gaza and the noted concern for genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people is a chosen path by the Israeli government in its attempt to achieve security. There are always alternatives to violence as a means to resolve conflict. Consider what nonviolent responses fulfill security goals (see box "Security Without War").

Problem: Binary thinking

In enduring conflict, particularly during wartime, embracing varying truths becomes challenging for those most impacted. Amidst conflict, people tend to interpret events in ways that align with their pre-existing narratives. Collective memories and traumas play a significant role in shaping social identities, where personal stories are often perceived as the absolute truth of the conflict. Propaganda further solidifies each side's unwavering truth, even though our social realities and interpretations are continually negotiated and reinterpreted. The world around us and our understanding of events and issues constantly evolve.

Specific facts like the ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, the attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians, and the massive bombings of Gaza due to Hamas' actions are evident yet contested primarily among individuals and groups who are "taking a side" in the conflict. However, there are more complicated contested truths regarding the nature of the entrenched conflict between Israel and Palestine. It is crucial to create space for these differing truths. In essence, we must unequivocally condemn violence by Hamas militants while simultaneously expressing solidarity with the oppressed and occupied Palestinian people—and unequivocally condemning the violence Israel has unleashed on

²⁷ See: Abu-Nimer, M. (2023, October 13). *When will we learn that violence doesn't lead to security?* Waging Nonviolence. <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2023/10/israel-gaza-violence-doesnt-lead-to-security/>

²⁸ See: Stephan, M. J. (2009). *Civilian jihad: Nonviolent struggle, democratization, and governance in the Middle East* (1st ed). Palgrave Macmillan.

all of Gaza. Our stance should demonstrate solidarity with Palestinians striving for freedom, dignity, justice, and security while acknowledging the existential fear triggered by Hamas' attacks and the need Jewish Israelis have for security as well.

Acknowledging diverse truths also necessitates questioning our positions of power and privilege. It is far too easy to exploit the October 7 attacks by Hamas as a justification for silence or unconditional support for the actions taken by the state of Israel. This kind of "neutrality" fails to consider power imbalances and situations of injustice and oppression. Our silence in the face of the collective punishment of Palestinians for brutality they had no part in points to a double standard for whose lives are worth more and whose lives are worth less. Embracing diverse truths does not preclude us from taking a stance against violence for common security and justice.

Recommendations:

- **Simultaneously oppose antisemitism and Islamophobia:** Remain mindful and outspoken against subtle and overt antisemitism and Islamophobia beyond the immediate context of the Gaza conflict—peace and justice advocacy encompasses all groups and their respective needs.
- **Divert strawman arguments:** Refuse to allow accusations of antisemitism or Islamophobia to silence your contextualized interpretation (e.g., challenges to government officials/leaders and their policies) of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- **Identify root causes of conflict:** A thorough analysis of the root causes of violence should encompass both the decades of oppression and occupation of the Palestinian people by the Israeli government and the historical oppression of Jewish people in Europe, North Africa, and elsewhere.
- **Challenge the U.S. government's involvement:** Annually, the U.S. supports Israel with billions in weapons shipments ("military aid")²⁹, the very weapons used to bomb civilians in Palestine. Advocate for an end to weapons shipments and a revision of what support for Israel without adding weapons of war could look like.
- **Emphasize common humanity:** An essential stance for everyone should be an unequivocal and genuine belief in the equal value of all lives.
- **Amplify hybrid voices that challenge simplistic narratives and binary thinking:** It is particularly powerful to listen to those who hold perspectives that run counter to the dominant perspectives associated with their identity or position, as these voices make it harder to sustain a view of the "other side" as monolithic. For instance, highlight the voices of Israeli "refuseniks" or of Palestinians who have been at the vanguard of nonviolent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

²⁹ The commonly used term is "military aid", which should be an oxymoron, given that "aid" usually appears in humanitarian and medical contexts. See more on the use of language at: <https://www.wordsaboutwar.org>

Problem: Orientalism

Examining the conflict between Israel and Palestine without acknowledging the late Palestinian-American academic and political activist Edward Said's thesis of orientalism is an oversight. Orientalism refers to the Western academic and cultural framework that has historically portrayed the East as exotic, irrational, and inferior, serving as a tool of imperial control and cultural dominance.

The influence of orientalism is evident in several aspects discussed in this briefing. It shapes how the conflict is framed, giving precedence to a Western "truth" over Arab perspectives and using dehumanizing language to contrast the perceived advancement of the Western world with an alleged backwardness of the Arab world. An example of this was evident in a social media post by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu: "I tell our friends in the enlightened world: Our war is also your war. If we do not stand together in a united front, it will reach you as well."³⁰

Mainstream media coverage and the language used by U.S. and other Western officials when discussing the topic of Palestine and Israel demonstrate a greater disregard for Palestinian lives, revealing an underlying bias that suggests brown and Muslim lives matter less than those of Jewish Israeli individuals. This bias is frequently hidden behind the sanitized language used by war and peace experts who shape our collective understanding of conflicts.

In media narratives, Palestinians are predominantly approached only in the aftermath of attacks on Israeli civilians by militants. There is an implied expectation that any Palestinian speaking in the media should condemn and distance themselves from Hamas. However, a double standard exists, as a similar requirement is not placed on Israeli voices regarding the Israeli army or on U.S. voices regarding weapon shipments fueling the violence.

Recommendations:

- **Humanize equally:** Many media narratives cast Palestinian casualties as merely "collateral damage" while attributing a more personal characterization to Israeli casualties as "humans, friends, neighbors."
- **Seek expertise beyond the usual voices:** This includes individuals whose legitimacy is not solely based on academic credentials, military authority, or recognition as political commentators.
- **Engage with historically marginalized voices:** Such individuals can offer insights based on their lived experiences with the conflict.

Conclusion

³⁰ <https://twitter.com/IsraeliPM/status/1713949763303776614>

This briefing offers recommendations to address the problems that we have identified with the current discourse on the war on Gaza, directed to an international peace and security practitioner audience. We intend that these recommendations can directly shape how our community approaches the war on Gaza in the immediate future and be put into action in future thinking, writing, and programming in the peace and security sector more broadly and where appropriate. Our dual role as a peace research and advocacy program within the context of a family foundation provides us with the unique opportunity to be honest and forthright in our analysis. We encourage readers of this briefing to apply what makes sense to you in your institutional context and leave the rest.

We offer these recommendations with a deep concern for the human costs of violence. We must be humble in speaking about what comes next in Israel and Palestine. We do not claim to have the answers or argue for a particular solution to the conflict. The pathways forward must reject the notion of “peace through strength” and embrace a demilitarized security that rejects violence as the means to solve conflict. Achieving a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict requires a structural transformation in the relationship between Israel and Palestine. This transformation demands political leadership that is responsive to the genuine needs of all people. However, there is one recommendation that we can advocate with complete confidence. **The peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict must develop organically from the ground up, elevating the voices of Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders who work for coexistence, justice, dignity, and freedom for all.** We must listen to the voices of peacebuilders and follow their lead in discovering the solution that affirms every Israeli’s and Palestinian’s humanity, ensuring sustainable peace with justice.

For further related statements by partner organizations and networks, please refer to the following:

- **The Alliance For Peacebuilding:** Statement on the Violent Conflict in Israel and the Palestinian Territories – <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/afp-publications/afp-statement-israel-palestinian-territories101223>; Call To Action: Israel-Palestine - <https://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/afp-publications/afp-call-to-action-israel-palestine>
 - **Peace Action:** GAZA CEASEFIRE NOW!
– <https://www.peaceaction.org/2023/10/31/gaza-ceasefire-now/>
 - **Madre:** Israel Launches Ground Operation: We Need a Ceasefire Now
– <https://www.madre.org/palestine/>
 - **Madre:** Peace Depends on Justice (Statement) - <https://www.madre.org/media-item/peace-depends-on-justice-in-palestine/>
- Win Without War:** Increasing Escalation in Gaza Reaching Tipping Point
– <https://winwithoutwar.org/increasing-escalation-in-gaza-reaching-tipping-point/>

- **Peace Direct:** Statement on the Rising Toll of Violence in Israel and Palestine – <https://www.peacedirect.org/statement-on-the-rising-toll-of-violence-in-israel-and-palestine/>
- **Center for International Policy:** Ending the War and Ensuring Human Security in Israel-Palestine: Five Recommendations — https://cfde140b-3710-4a65-aa9a-48b5868a02dd.usfiles.com/ugd/3ba8a1_1ac83b20f6c8431a94301ccafe3cb88d.pdf
- **Friends Committee on National Legislation:** The U.S. Must Act to De-Escalate the Violence in Israel and Palestine — <https://fcnل.querum.us/campaign/51886/>
- **American Friends Service Committee:** [A lot of work on the topic of Gaza/Palestine] Creating an apartheid-free world (published Oct 3rd) <https://afsc.org/news/creating-apartheid-free-world>
- **Foundation For Middle East Peace:** Israel’s War on Gaza & Escalations Everywhere (Resource List) <https://fmep.org/resource/gaza/>
- **New Israel Fund:** Calling out Settler Violence in the West Bank <https://www.nif.org/stories/human-rights-democracy/calling-out-settler-violence-in-the-west-bank/>