



**Statement of  
Senator Peter Welch  
Remarks as Delivered  
Ending the War in Gaza  
June 5, 2024**

Madam President, last Friday President Biden announced the elements of a proposed plan for a permanent ceasefire in Gaza. If accepted by both Israel and Hamas, the plan would prevent many more months of death and destruction. It would save countless lives, free the hostages, and offer a way forward to a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In order for the plan to succeed, the President will need to use the leverage that only he has as President, with Israel, Egypt, Qatar, Jordan, and others.

I believe it will also require a decisive change in our own policy. After eight months of relentless bombing and shelling, the United States should stop – should stop – supporting a war strategy that has not only caused massive death and destruction but has failed to achieve either of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s key objectives: total victory over Hamas and the release of the remaining hostages.

Instead, eight months into this war, Gaza is in ruins, tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed and many more have been injured, including thousands of women and children. Some 100 hostages remain trapped underground. They are subjected to daily abuse by their captors while bombs explode above them, with no idea if they will live to see the light of day.

On May 26<sup>th</sup>, the Israeli Defense Forces—using munitions provided by the United States—attacked a camp of displaced Palestinians in Rafah, where the Israeli military had ordered them to relocate to avoid the bombing in the north. The attack incinerated 45 people and injured many more. Mr. Netanyahu called it a tragic mistake.

In reality, it was the gruesome result of an ill-conceived, scorched-Earth campaign that has gone on for far too long.

For years, Mr. Netanyahu used Hamas as an asset in his very cynical strategy to ensure the Palestinian Authority could not become an effective partner for peace. He steadily expanded Israeli settlements, roads, and other infrastructure in the West Bank to create conditions on the ground to undermine the viability of a Palestinian state. His policies fueled hatred and violence among Israelis and Palestinians. Yet throughout those years, the United States has supported his government unconditionally.

The Israeli and Palestinian people are now paying the price for these failed policies.

Today, over a million Palestinians in Gaza are suffering from acute hunger. Children are starving. The wounded are dying from lack of medical care. Children with life threatening injuries cannot leave Gaza to obtain the surgery that they need in other countries. Hundreds of trucks carrying food, medicines, and other aid have been stalled in Egypt. And the sea pier constructed by our Department of Defense, using hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, is in pieces.

Despite intensifying criticism around the world, Mr. Netanyahu has responded to his many critics—including Israeli citizens—with reckless defiance.

Madam President, the time will come when this war ends. President Biden announced a plan to achieve, through diplomacy, what military force has failed to achieve. But whenever that time comes, Gaza will be uninhabitable. Two million Palestinians will be dependent on international aid for years to come.

Rather than bringing security and peace to the Middle East, I fear that the legacies of this war could be the opposite: more hatred, and regardless of what is left of Hamas, more acts of violence against Israelis and Americans.

Last week, Secretary Blinken said Israel must decide if its military actions are worth the cost in civilian lives. I agree.

But the United States—not just Israel—must answer this question, too.

Is Israel's use of our planes, our tanks, our bombs, our ammunition worth the cost in civilian lives?

Is it worth the risk of creating a new generation of terrorists – victims of bombing and shelling who saw their parents, siblings, and friends die, their homes destroyed?

Is it worth the lives of the hostages?

Madam President, I believe the answer is no.

The United States should stop providing offensive weapons and munitions to a polarizing foreign leader who treats billions of dollars in military aid from American taxpayers as an entitlement, while he ignores the appeals of American officials to stop bombing, shooting, and denying aid to Palestinian civilians.

The United States should stop providing offensive weapons and munitions to a foreign leader who promotes policies that are diametrically against U.S. national interests, and by doing so sets back progress for Middle East peace and puts American lives at risk.

The United States should stop supporting a war strategy that has repeated some of our own worst mistakes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The United States also should defend the Geneva Conventions and the international tribunals, including the International Criminal Court. Some here have denounced the chief prosecutor for bringing charges against Prime Minister Netanyahu. There is no equivalence between Israel and Hamas, to be sure. But there are credible allegations of violations of the laws of war in Gaza. Attacking the Court plays into the hands of war criminals like Vladimir Putin. It weakens our own credibility and the Court's legitimacy.

It undermines the universal principle that no one, no government, is above the law—a cardinal principle the United States should strongly defend.

Madam President, the perpetrators of the October 7<sup>th</sup> massacre must be brought to justice. Such horrendous crimes must not go unpunished. But destroying Rafah is not going to “finish off” Hamas. It is not going to save the hostages. It may doom them.

President Biden has outlined a credible plan for peace. While Israel and Hamas will ultimately decide when this war ends, we, the United States, can decide when it ends for us. Secretary Blinken asked the right question, which should have been asked months ago.

The right answer is no. Israel's bombardment of Gaza is not worth the cost in civilian lives, and we should stop supporting it.