



**Senator Peter Welch  
Remarks as Delivered  
On the Importance of a Two-State Solution  
January 29, 2025**

Like all of us I was enormously relieved by the announcement of a ceasefire in Gaza, the gradual release of hostages, and a surge in humanitarian aid for the two million desperate Palestinians who are trapped inside Gaza.

Despite the daunting challenges ahead and the many factors that could derail negotiations to implement *Stage Two* of the agreement, I'm cautiously hopeful that this could be the beginning of the end of a war that has traumatized millions of Palestinians and Israelis for more than 16 months.

There will come a time for the accounting of the conduct of the war, which has caused such appalling loss of Palestinian and Israeli lives, including tens of thousands of children, of health workers, aid workers, and journalists, and massive destruction of property, including practically every hospital, every school, and university in Gaza. These things must not be forgotten, and that means investigating and holding people accountable under the laws of war.

But today, I want to speak briefly on an issue that is key to the lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis that we seek. And that is the creation of a viable, secure, independent, and demilitarized Palestinian state.

The war in Gaza was triggered, of course, by the merciless slaughter on October 7, 2023, of 1,200 innocent Israelis, Americans and others, and the abduction of some 250 hostages, many of whom have died. But as we all know, the Middle East conflict began many decades earlier. And some would say centuries ago. Ethnic hatred and religious intolerance passed down from one generation to the next have fueled seemingly endless violence perpetrated by extremists on both sides. And it's created a

chronic state of insecurity for Israelis, and insecurity and humiliation, poverty, and hopelessness for Palestinians.

In the West Bank, Israel's ever-expanding settlement construction—in violation of UN resolutions and contrary to U.S. policy—has created a patchwork of separate and unequal enclaves and illegal outposts, provoking frequent acts of deadly violence by Israeli settlers and also by Palestinian extremists.

Gaza, with the overt support of the Netanyahu government, became an open-air prison for two million impoverished Palestinians dependent on international aid and under the ruthless control of Hamas.

And throughout this period, the wealthy Arab states have called for a Palestinian state. But they have expended minimal political capital or resources in furtherance of that goal. A lot of talk, very little action.

Successive Palestinian leaders have squandered opportunities to make necessary political and economic reforms, while Mr. Netanyahu has worked to create conditions on the ground that would actually make a Palestinian state impossible.

Despite this grim reality—and it is a grim reality—the attention focused on the remarkable life of President Jimmy Carter after his death on December 29<sup>th</sup>, reminded us that even in the most difficult circumstances peace is possible between long-standing enemies. It happened. But that possibility depends on the quality of leadership.

If there ever were a time when the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, their Arab neighbors, and the United States should put the interests of regional peace and economic cooperation and development, including an independent Palestinian state, over personal and political ambition—it is now. It is *now*.

Gaza is in ruins. Hamas and Hezbollah—still a threat—pose less of a threat than at any time in recent history. The horrific Assad regime is gone. Iran is also weaker. Most Israelis, Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians want peace. But given the absence of visionary and courageous leaders in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the possibility that a path to a Palestinian state will emerge really does depend on the Trump

Administration using its diplomatic influence far more forcefully and effectively than previous U.S. administrations—including the first Trump Administration—were willing to do.

We've got to act. And it will require the same of Congress, which in the past has restricted itself to enacting tighter and tighter sanctions on the Palestinians causing increasing desperation and resentment for innocent Palestinians, while at the same time, opposing any incentives on Israel to stop settlement construction and settler violence.

There are those who believe that because of Israel's construction of settlements, walls, fences, separate highways, factories, and farms in the West Bank, that the West Bank and Gaza can never be reconfigured into a viable Palestinian state. Having seen a current map of the West Bank, I can certainly understand that.

But others reject the very idea of a Palestinian state as incompatible with Israel's security, without proposing any alternative that would preserve Israel as a democracy in which all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity; religion, have equal rights. Given Hamas' horrific attack on October 7<sup>th</sup>, I can also easily understand that.

Then, on January 25<sup>th</sup>, President Trump called for "cleaning out" of Gaza, suggesting that a million and half Palestinians should be resettled in Jordan and Egypt. And you know, seriously, there's just so many things wrong and unrealistic with that reprehensible and unworkable idea that it barely deserves a response, beyond the predictable and immediate repudiation by all those who would be impacted. It's not serious.

But to me, as elusive as it may seem, there really is no solution that offers lasting peace, and continued U.S. support, other than two independent states—Israel and Palestine, side-by-side. A Palestinian state will only be possible if both sides are pressured to make the difficult compromises both sides they so far refused to make. And only the United States and our heretofore reluctant Arab allies can exert the kind of pressure that's necessary to bring people to an agreement.

Mr. President, there have been far too many missed opportunities and disappointments since the Oslo and Camp David Accords, and far too much needless death and destruction resulting from the unchecked ambitions of leaders motivated by their worst instincts. History will judge us whether we seize this moment to finally chart a different course. A course that does enable Israelis and Palestinians to finally accept that there is no turning back the clock, that both are there to stay, and that as many Palestinian and Israeli neighbors have shown throughout years of conflict and loss, they have far more in common than their differences.

Mr. President, I yield back.

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