

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 30, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express our concern regarding the current status and viability of the two-state solution with regard to the current actions, statements, and policies of the Israeli government led by Prime Minister Netanyahu.

For decades U.S. policy has been clear:<sup>1</sup> the only path for sustainable peace and solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a two-state solution. Hamas's horrific terrorist attack on October 7, which killed over 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals and involved taking approximately 240 people hostage,<sup>2</sup> has only increased the urgency for the United States to put all parties on a path to peace. Only through a viable two-state peace process can we ensure that the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state are met, along with the necessary requirements for a secure, democratic, and Jewish state of Israel. It is critical that both Israelis and Palestinians have leaders who are actively working to build a viable path to a two-state solution.

We appreciate that this administration has consistently and repeatedly made clear that "genuine security" for Israel is possible only with a "pathway to a Palestinian state."<sup>3</sup> We also agree with President Biden that "there's no going back to the status quo."<sup>4</sup> But we have serious concerns that the Netanyahu government's public and repeated rejection of a two-state solution<sup>5</sup> fundamentally threatens regional security and undermines any path to a durable peace. For

<sup>1</sup> Congressional Research Service, "Israel and the Palestinians: Chronology of a Two-State Solution," Jim Zanotti, June 30, 2020, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/IF11237.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> New York Times, "What We Know About the Death Toll in Israel From the Hamas-Led Attacks," Aaron Boxerman, November 12, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/12/world/middleeast/israel-death-toll-hamas-attack.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Associated Press, "At Davos, Blinken calls a pathway to a Palestinian state a necessity for Israeli security," Jamey Keaten, January 17, 2024, <https://apne.ws.com/article/zelenskyy-davos-blinken-guterres-amirabdollahian-world-economic-forum-373494e853e64422674b9c3130fb3806>.

<sup>4</sup> Associated Press, "Biden pushes Mideast leaders to consider two-state solution after Israel-Hamas war ends," Aamer Madhani, Chris Megerian, Will Weissert, and Seung Min Kim, October 29, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/biden-pushes-mideast-leaders-to-consider-two-state-solution-after-israel-hamas-war-ends>.

<sup>5</sup> CNN, "Netanyahu again rejects Palestinian sovereignty amid fresh US push for two-state solution," Abeer Salman, Mitchell McCluskey, Ibrahim Dahman, Sophie Tanno, Kevin Liptak, and MJ Lee, January 21, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/21/middleeast/netanyahu-palestinian-sovereignty-two-state-solution-intl/index.html>.

decades, numerous Israeli governments guarded and upheld the promise of a two-state solution as the foundation for a lasting peace in the region. Prime Minister Netanyahu's explicit departure from that position, both in his statements and in government policies aimed at undermining this internationally agreed upon pathway, is dangerous to both U.S. and Israeli national security.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has never championed<sup>6</sup> a two-state solution.<sup>7</sup> But in recent days his public comments have repeatedly and directly contradicted U.S. policy goals.<sup>8</sup> The Prime Minister recently said that he will “not compromise on full Israeli security control of the entire area west of Jordan River,” which he claims “is irreconcilable with a Palestinian state.”<sup>9</sup> He has backed his comments up with action: the Netanyahu government has put pressure on Egypt and other countries in the region to accept Gazan war refugees and floated suggestions of “voluntary emigration” after the war,<sup>10</sup> raising concerns that this government is working toward the “permanent expulsion” of Palestinians from their homes.<sup>11</sup> Even before October 7, the Prime Minister agreed to freeze new settlements in the West Bank,<sup>12</sup> only to expand them anyway<sup>13</sup> and make a path toward a coherent Palestinian state even more challenging.

We are also concerned about the ongoing risk to Israeli hostages as a result of offensive operations in Gaza. The safe return of the remaining hostages must continue to be a paramount priority.<sup>14</sup> The continued captivity of these hostages and the suffering of their families is the responsibility of the terrorist organization that seized them. Israel has a legitimate right to self-defense. While Israel seeks to bring justice to its people, we are concerned by the actions of the Netanyahu government that have unnecessarily prolonged and expanded suffering in both Israel and Gaza.

---

<sup>6</sup> CNN, “Netanyahu outlines vision for two-state solution – without Palestinian sovereignty,” Hadas Gold, February 1, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/02/01/middleeast/netanyahu-palestinian-sovereignty-mime-intl/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Palestinian Territories,” policy objective, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/palestinian-territories/>.

<sup>8</sup> Associated Press, “Israel's Netanyahu rejects any Palestinian sovereignty post-war, rebuffing Biden,” January 21, 2024, <https://www.npr.org/2024/01/21/1225883757/israels-netanyahu-rejects-any-palestinian-sovereignty-post-war-rebuffing-biden>.

<sup>9</sup> New York Times, “Biden Presses Netanyahu on Working Toward a Palestinian State,” Peter Baker, January 19, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/19/us/politics/biden-calls-netanyahu-as-their-views-on-the-conduct-of-the-gaza-war-diverge.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Politico, “EU and UK slam Israeli ministers' call for ‘voluntary emigration’ from Gaza Strip,” Bethany Dawson, January 4, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-uk-slam-inflammatory-call-by-israeli-minister-smotrich-voluntary-emigration-of-gaza/>.

<sup>11</sup> New York Times, “Israel Quietly Pushed for Egypt to Admit Large Numbers of Gazans,” Patrick Kingsley, November 5, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/05/world/middleeast/israel-egypt-gaza.html>.

<sup>12</sup> The Times of Israel, “Netanyahu rushes to deny settlement freeze announced after Aqaba summit,” Lazar Berman and Jacob Magid, February 26, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-rushes-to-deny-settlement-freeze-announced-after-aqaba-summit/>.

<sup>13</sup> The Times of Israel, “Netanyahu hands Smotrich full authority to expand existing settlements,” Jeremy Sharon, June 18, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-hands-smotrich-full-authority-to-expand-existing-settlements/>.

<sup>14</sup> Associated Press, “Hostage Families Protest Outside Netanyahu's Home, Ramping up Pressure for a Truce-for-Hostages Deal,” Julia Frankel, Samy Magdy, and Elena Becatoros, January 20, 2024, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2024/01/20/hostage-families-protest-outside-netanyahus-home-ramping-pressure-truce-hostages-deal.html>.

The current military strategy of the Netanyahu government has exacerbated the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, taking more than 25,000 Palestinian lives,<sup>15</sup> increasing regional instability,<sup>16</sup> jeopardizing U.S. troops in the region,<sup>17</sup> and failing to achieve the release of the remaining hostages. These decisions by the Netanyahu government have even raised alarm with a member of Prime Minister Netanyahu's own War Cabinet, who has expressed deep concern about the government's failure to bring home the over 100 Israeli hostages who remain in Gaza.<sup>18</sup> These miscalculations by the Netanyahu government are extremely harmful to a viable two-state solution needed for a lasting peace that Israelis and Palestinians deserve.

We also recognize that the future success of a two-state solution is inextricably linked to a viable and effective leader for a Palestinian government. For years the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been riddled with mismanagement, corruption, and nepotism.<sup>19</sup> The PA's popularity has plunged among Palestinians in the West Bank,<sup>20</sup> deeply undercutting their confidence in the viability of any two-state solution. The United States and the international community must redouble their commitment to supporting a governance structure that prioritizes the welfare and needs of its people. The current PA has fallen deeply short of these commitments and has also hindered the viability of a two-state solution in the process.

The Palestinians need an effective leader for the future reconstruction and governance of Gaza. We must make every urgent effort to ensure that the leaders of the Palestinian people have the capacity, capabilities, and institutional strength to deliver effective governance. This governance must be conducted in a way that not only represents the interests and needs of the Palestinian people, but also ensures the security of both Israel and the Palestinian people. The United States should help foster an environment that supports Palestinian leaders who are committed to the cause of a two-state solution.

In light of these issues concerning the two-state solution with the current Israeli government and future representation of the Palestinian people, we seek more clarification on the administration's positions on the following questions:

---

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press, "Palestinian death toll in Gaza surpasses 25,000 while Israel announces the death of another hostage," Najib Jobain and Samy Magdy, January 21, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-war-news-01-21-2024-02caafa092668ecc7ff122229c166807>.

<sup>16</sup> Wall Street Journal, "After 100 Days, Israel-Hamas War Threatens to Spill Beyond Gaza, Disrupt Global Trade," Rory Jones, January 14, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/after-100-days-israel-hamas-war-threatens-to-spill-beyond-gaza-disrupt-global-trade-2d36ab09>.

<sup>17</sup> CNN, "Fears are rising of a widened Middle East war and US troops are in the firing line," Stephen Collinson, December 27, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/27/politics/fears-middle-east-war-biden/index.html>.

<sup>18</sup> CNN, "Israeli government divisions deepen as cabinet minister says defeating Hamas is unrealistic," Nadeen Ebrahim and Vasco Cotovio, January 20, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/middleeast/eisenkot-netanyahu-israel-war-politics-gaza-intl/index.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Guardian, "Corrupt, discredited: could a reformed Palestinian Authority run Gaza?," Patrick Wintour, November 27, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/27/corrupt-discredited-could-a-reformed-palestinian-authority-run-gaza>.

<sup>20</sup> Associated Press, "Palestinian poll shows a rise in Hamas support and close to 90% wanting US-backed Abbas to resign," Karin Laub, December 13, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-palestinians-opinion-poll-wartime-views-a0baade915619cd070b5393844bc4514>.

1. Does the administration believe that the Prime Minister's current military strategy and his stated views on the post-war status of the Palestinian people advance the objectives of returning Israeli hostages and creating a viable path to a two-state solution?
2. What actions will the President take to ensure that the current Israeli government alters course and takes meaningful steps to create the conditions for a viable two-state solutions?
3. What actions will the President take to advance an independent, self-governed Palestinian state, as well as encourage meaningful steps to alter course and create the conditions for a viable two-state solution?

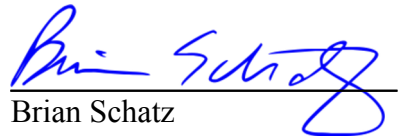
We request a meeting to discuss these concerns and to learn more about the administration's diplomatic strategy to advance a two-state solution, as well as a written response by February 13.

Sincerely,



---

Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



---

Brian Schatz  
United States Senator