

How to be pro-ceasefire without being antisemitic

Too many worldwide are calling for a unilateral Israeli surrender to Hamas rather than for both sides to lay down arms

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Thousands of people march down Washington Boulevard in downtown Detroit, Michigan, to call for a ceasefire in the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, October 28, 2023. Jeff Kowalsky/AFP)

Like a growing number of Israelis, I am increasingly in favor of a ceasefire. I think it is important that there is a strong domestic movement within Israel to pressure the government into agreeing to it. However, like many Jews, I am extremely uncomfortable with the international pro-ceasefire movement.

First of all, the movement often focuses exclusively on pressuring Israel into a ceasefire, ignoring Hamas's role in the current round of conflict. Not only did Hamas start the current war with a brutal attack on Israeli civilians, with some 1,200 murdered and over 250 kidnapped, but also, Hamas is still proving itself unwilling to engage in a ceasefire.

Throughout this war, Hamas has continually demanded that Israel pull back its forces and leave Hamas in control of Gaza, reverting to the pre-October 7 status quo that allowed Hamas to perpetrate the worst act of genocide against Jews since the Holocaust. Obviously, Israel could not agree to this demand while maintaining its moral obligations to protect its own citizens.

However, the content of Hamas's demands are less important than the existence of the demands in the first place. Generally speaking, a ceasefire is one of two things:

Two sides agree to stop fighting temporarily, allowing time for final-status negotiations to take place. In such a definition, each side, both Israel and Hamas, would save its day-after demands for after the ceasefire is in place, rather than using it as a prerequisite for the ceasefire, as Hamas is doing.

A long-term truce to stop fighting, without addressing root causes of the conflict and final-status negotiations. In such a situation, the conflict does not get resolved, but may simmer, allowing for a status quo that turns into either begrudging peace, low-level conflict, or war a few years or decades down the line. Think of the armistice agreements Israel had with neighboring Arab countries after the 1948 war. They didn't "solve" anything, but they led to an immediate stop in fighting, though there was still low-level conflict and multiple outbreaks of war in the decades following. In such a situation, there may be small-scale negotiations about where each

country's troops withdraw to, which lines they are/aren't allowed to cross, etc. But, a demand for one side to unilaterally surrender, and withdraw its forces to where they were before the war, and give up any defensive measures it may have gained during the fighting, does not fall under such a definition. Again, the idea here is you prioritize each laying down your arms now, agreeing to more or less stop the conflict in its current state, rather than negotiate a long-term settlement. Yet, a demand for unilateral surrender and agreeing to a specific permanent solution is precisely what Hamas is demanding of Israel.

Furthermore, international pro-ceasefire rallies sometimes feature speakers who actively support Hamas. It is hard to describe a rally that features a speaker who supports an organization that perpetrated an act of genocide against Jews as not being antisemitic. Similarly, sometimes they feature speakers who deny the October 7 atrocities. Since such a claim accuses thousands of Jews in Israel and around the world of engaging in a massive hoax, it is also hard to describe a rally that features such a speaker as not being antisemitic.

The international pro-ceasefire movement, by inviting such speakers, makes Jews around the world and in Israel afraid of it and suspicious of its motivations. In doing so, it alienates pro-ceasefire advocates in Israel, yet without the support of Israeli advocates and their pressure on the Israeli government, a ceasefire remains even further out of reach.

As a Jew living in Israel, I believe two things:

Hamas chose the southern kibbutzim and towns out of convenience. If they could have penetrated further into Israel, they would not have hesitated to kill or kidnap me or my family.

Every life is precious. I cannot support the growing humanitarian disaster in Gaza. The number of people who have died, and the number currently facing homelessness and lack of food and medical supplies, is beyond comprehension.

That is why I support a ceasefire, accompanied by an exchange of Israeli hostages. However, I cannot support a ceasefire that is not a ceasefire, but in fact, a unilateral surrender to Hamas masquerading by another name.

I urge all those around the world who care about the well-being of Gazans and truly want a ceasefire to stop inviting antisemitic speakers to your events, so you can forge collaborations with Israelis who want the same thing. Even if you believe that Israel should not exist, at the end of the day, without public pressure by Israelis on their government, a ceasefire is less likely to happen. And the more antisemitic the international pro-ceasefire movement appears to be, the politically harder it is for the domestic ceasefire movement within Israel to gain support.

So let's work together to pressure both sides into ending this war, instead of pretending that the ongoing fighting is solely Israel's responsibility.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shayna Abramson, a part-Brazilian native Manhattanite, studied History and Jewish Studies at Johns Hopkins University before moving to Jerusalem. She has also spent some time studying Torah at the Drisha Institute in Manhattan, and has a passion for soccer and poetry. She is currently pursuing an M.A. in Political Science from Hebrew University, and is a rabbinic fellow at Beit Midrash Har'el.