

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Steven Erlanger, Chief Diplomatic Correspondent, Europe, for *The New York Times*

Nabil, on the Israeli-Palestinian thing, do you see much hope coming out of this?

Nabil Fahmy, Dean Emeritus of the American University in Cairo, former Foreign Minister of Egypt

I think the shock has made us all realize again that we need to devote attention to the issue. There are really two issues, but they are connected, the crisis Gaza and the day after Gaza, in other words, October 7 onwards, and we have the conflict, which is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that has been going on for decades. To solve the Gaza issue, the Hamas, in particular, is not going to agree to a complete hostage exchange, they may do something partial, and lose all control for them to be, as has been announced, to be targeted by Israelis wherever they go, wherever they do not go. They are going to ask for interim measures that will ultimately break down, out of differences or look for closure. Understandably, the Israelis are not going to agree to a complete ceasefire or withdrawal except if they got a complete hostage exchange and some sort of security arrangement that makes them more comfortable. Frankly, I am being quite generous here that there is not more behind this. My point really is, and let me add to that, to provide both sides with what is necessary you have to have the regional and the international communities supporting this. As Itamar mentioned, we have been pressured to take in more Palestinians, which we rejected for political reasons, but we have also frankly been asked to go in and manage Gaza, which is a hilariously silly idea.

Steven Erlanger

Even Sadat did not want to do it.

Nabil Fahmy

No. The idea of us having to shoot at Palestinians and Israelis makes absolutely no sense. Let me just very quickly summarize my approach here. I believe we need to have the crisis and the conflict as bookends of the same project and that the best way to do that is whatever ceasefire agreement is being negotiated, complete or interim, put that in a Security Council resolution, almost identical to what the US proposed, 2735, I think. The reason I chose this resolution is that it talks about ceasefire and complete hostage exchange, but then it talks about a two-state solution. I would add to that all the content of the hostage exchange but also recognition of a Palestinian state under occupation. Therefore, both sides know where they are beginning and where the ultimate objective is. The problem is neither side, and again I am being

very generous here, trusts the other so we need to take action on the ground with a vision towards the future but create some teeth for that vision. I do not think that can be done quickly with the present situation, firstly because the present Israeli government does not believe in a two-state solution, and they have done everything under the sun to push Palestinians further out. Second, the Palestinians are so divided that they are weakening their own negotiation positions. Let me close that it is because of that, that by codifying the goal, that we are looking for two states, and the measures taken on the Gaza issue, and linking that to the ultimate result, we are buying time as confidence tries to develop. Is that easy and I am I optimistic? For religious purposes I am not a betting man, but that is a good reason not to bet.

Steven Erlanger

Precisely. It is also hard for me to imagine after October 7 Israel giving up security control over Gaza under any circumstances, certainly along the borders. We will see. I wanted to bring up the West Bank and I have spent a lot of time there since October 7, around Jenin and Tulkarm.

Nabil Fahmy

That is what I meant by two states because to me it is not Gaza, it is Gaza and the West Bank.

Steven Erlanger

In a way, you almost need a three-state solution.