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USA

Protestors' Demands for a Ceasefire, End to Support for Israel, Shake American Institutions

- IV Online magazine - 2023 - IV586 - November 2023 -
Publication date: Monday 20 November 2023

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After Hamas' heinous attack Israel on October 7, killing 1,200 people, many civilians, including children, Israel began a siege of Gaza, cutting off food, water, and fuel, unleashing an unrelenting bombardment, and carrying out an invasion of Gaza that has killed over 10,000 people, almost half of them children, no doubt hundreds more by the time you read this. The sight of an entire city virtually completely destroyed, hospitals ruined, and men and women walking through the rubble carrying their dead children and babies has horrified millions around the world, including in America.

President Joe Biden, who has strongly supported Israel, as has the U.S. Congress, has opposed a cease fire, calling only for brief humanitarian pauses. That is the position of progressive Senator Bernie Sanders as well.

In the United States for the last seven weeks, however, there have been dozens of protest demonstrations involving tens of thousands of people demanding a ceasefire and an end to US. Support for Israel. Mostly organized by Jewish and Palestinian groups, these protests for a ceasefire often involve civil disobedience, blocking major city streets, highways, and bridges, occupying government offices, train stations, or university facilities. I myself, like more than 1,000 people across the country, was arrested in one of these huge, multi-racial, religiously diverse protests.

Politicians and the press have accused the protests of being antisemitic and pro-Hamas supporters of terrorism—a patently false claim since many are organized, led by, and sometimes largely made up of progressive Jews. Nonetheless, the combination of Israel's continued crimes against humanity and our protests have gradually changed the political climate. A recent Reuters/Ipsos poll found that 68% of respondents felt that, "Israel should call a ceasefire and try to negotiate." Over 80 percent of Democrats are for a ceasefire. The pro-ceasefire movement's activities have ramified through American society, affecting government and politics, universities, churches, and the publishing industry, among others.

Let's start at the top with a rift in President Joe Biden's administration. In mid-November more than 500 officials from 40 government agencies sent a letter to President Biden protesting his support of Israel in its war in Gaza. [\[1\]](#) After denouncing Hamas for its attack, the letter read:

We call on President Biden to urgently demand a cease-fire; and to call for de-escalation of the current conflict by securing the immediate release of the Israeli hostages and arbitrarily detained Palestinians; the restoration of water, fuel, electricity and other basic services; and the passage of adequate humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip.

Most of those signing the letter came from the National Security Council to the F.B.I. and the Justice Department.

Bernie Sanders issued a statement on Nov. 18, stating, "While Israel has the right to go after Hamas, Netanyahu's right-wing extremist government does not have the right to wage almost total warfare against the Palestinian people. That is morally unacceptable and in violation of international law." As a condition for U.S. aid to Israel, he called for "an end to the indiscriminate bombing; the right of displaced Gazans to return to their homes; no long-term Israeli re-occupation or blockade of Gaza; an end to settler violence in the West Bank and a freeze on settlement expansion; [and] a commitment to broad peace talks for a two-state solution in the wake of the war." But he did not join the movement's call for a ceasefire

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Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other 20 other members of Congress sent a [letter](#) to President Biden, asking him to support a bilateral ceasefire in Gaza, in order to protect the one million children living there. It stated, "We write to you to express deep concern about the intensifying war in Gaza, particularly grave violations against children..."

About a week before, a group of 14 senators [\[2\]](#) did not go so far, but did call for a short-term stop of hostilities in Gaza because of concerns over the failure to protect noncombatant civilians and the potential escalation of the conflict. Thirty-one members of Congress, senators and representatives, now support a ceasefire.

Some 300 delegates to the Democratic Party national convention who voted for Bernie Sanders sent a letter [\[3\]](#) to him urging him to support a ceasefire. And some 250 members of Elizabeth Warren's campaign staff have done the same.

Marcy Winograd, a 2020 Sanders delegate and a co-founding member of the Los Angeles chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace, stated, "As a Jewish member of Congress, Senator Sanders' voice would be particularly persuasive in demanding an end to Israel's violations of international law that shock the world..."

Universities throughout the country have been particularly challenged by ceasefire protests. Several have suspended or banned Students for Justice in Palestine and other organizations have had their events canceled. [\[4\]](#) Students at Columbia University in New York, to give one example, have in response called for an end to censorship of Palestinian groups, and some 250 professor joined the students in the demand for free debate and discussion on campus. [\[5\]](#)

The churches too have become involved. Various Black church organizations have issued statements calling for a cease fire. One Black religious leader, Michael McBride, a California pastor and anti-gun violence activist, said "We are faith leaders in the African American faith tradition, in the Black church prophetic tradition, and we are people familiar with pain and suffering enacted by state actors." [\[6\]](#) A group of Quaker, Unitarian, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Methodist and Baptist churches, and other denominations [\[7\]](#), wrote,

We call on you, President Biden, and your Administration to support an immediate ceasefire, de-escalation, and restraint by all involved. We have made the same requests to Congress. All efforts, including bilateral and multilateral ones, must be made for this war to be brought to a swift end.

Finally, at the National Book Awards [\[8\]](#), this years finalists issued a statement reading:

"On behalf of the finalists, we oppose the ongoing bombardment of Gaza and call for a humanitarian cease-fire to address the urgent humanitarian needs of Palestinian civilians, particularly children. We oppose antisemitism and anti-Palestinian sentiment and Islamophobia equally, accepting the human dignity of all parties, knowing that further bloodshed does nothing to secure lasting peace in the region."

While Biden and Congress ignore, this is the dominant sentiment in America today. [\[9\]](#) We want a ceasefire and we will continue to protest until we achieve it.

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[1] New York Times, 14 November 2023 "[More Than 500 U.S. Officials Sign Letter Protesting Biden's Israel Policy](#)".

[2] AURN, 3 November 2023 "[Democratic Senators Call For Ceasefire](#)".

[3] *The Intercept*, 3 November 2023 "[More Than 300 DNC Delegates for Bernie Sanders Push Senator to Call for Ceasefire in Gaza](#)".

[4] *The Nation*, 19 October 2023 "[Columbia University's Double Standard for Palestinian Protests](#)".

[5] *Eyewitness News*, 16 November 2023 "[Hundreds protest at Columbia over school's decision to suspend student groups calling for cease-fire](#)".

[6] *Washington Post*, 10 November 2023 "[Black Christian leaders call for ceasefire in Gaza](#)".

[7] *Episcopal News*, 13 November 2023 "[Presiding bishop joins Christian leaders in letter to Biden, calling for ceasefire in Gaza](#)".

[8] *The Hub*, 16 November 2023 "[Here is the moment the National Book Award finalists called for a ceasefire.](#)" and the *New York Times*, 14 November 2023 "[Israel-Hamas War Sows Disruption at the National Book Awards](#)".

[9] Some 68% of respondents in the Reuters/Ipsos poll said they agreed with a statement that "Israel should call a ceasefire and try to negotiate".