

Jacques Cheminade: Declaration on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

by Jacques Cheminade, President of the French political party *Solidarité et Progrès*

—“Out of the strong came forth sweetness.”
(*Judges* 14:14)

—“Pray at night so that people can sleep.”
(*Hadith*)

PARIS, Oct. 10, 2023—The situation in the Middle East is a shame for all. A shame, because nobody really fought to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have allowed a people who live surrounded by enemies and feel like they are, to surround another people living in an open-air prison. From this evil which has lasted for so long, we must ensure today, against all odds, that a greater good comes out of it.

Every human being can only be shocked by the images of the Israeli victims of operation “Al-Aqsa Flood” and the treatment inflicted on the Palestinians by successive Israeli governments. Beyond the terrible suffering of the victims, our challenge is to reach a solution where this will cease. It is a challenge that concerns us all because this tiny part of the world is an essential center of civilization that cannot be left abandoned to barbarism.

The worst is the taking of hostages by everyone, by Hamas but also by the real racist attacks in the West Bank, and the death inflicted on civilians in particularly atrocious conditions.

The first thing we can do is inspire these enemies to think and put themselves in the other’s shoes, no matter how painful it may be. Martin Luther King guides us in this effort by explaining to us why we must love our enemies in order to transform them into friends and to transform ourselves.



Noord-Hollands Archief/Foto de Boer

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

These considerations will undoubtedly seem utopian and far from reality to those who look for contradictions without seeking peace. This examination, on the contrary, requires two things: to examine one’s conscience and to imagine a greater good beyond the terms of the tragedy underway.

That examination of conscience calls to the Palestinians. We cannot achieve peace by proclaiming the extermination of Jews and the destruction of Israel. The aim never justifies the means, and the means of terrorism destroys not only the other but also oneself. Fanaticism leads to unchecked terrorism. Thus, the areas hit by Hamas are those where many activists of the secular Israeli left are living who favor peace without occupation. Destroying those with whom one must one day necessarily speak is worse than a crime.

The examination of conscience equally calls to the Israelis. Allowing a part of one’s population, in particular the settlers, to treat Palestinians like dogs, in defiance of the very laws of Israel, is an almost daily crime. Hav-



U.S. Navy/Alexander Kubitz

U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (right) met with Israeli Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant in Tel Aviv, March 9, to discuss expanding military cooperation.

ing reduced Gaza to an open-air detention camp inevitably provokes violence and despair among its inhabitants. Worse still, wanting to totally besiege it is an abomination. By asserting: “No electricity, no food, no gas, we fight animals, and we act accordingly,” Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant violates, unfortunately in the wake of many others, the essential principles of Judaism and human rights. The total siege of the Gaza Strip—and we must now add: no water!—is prohibited by international humanitarian law. By repeatedly declaring that “the Palestinian Authority is our burden, Hamas our opportunity,” Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich cynically played with fire, like all Israeli officials did before him who promoted Hamas to discredit the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian cause. We suspect that it were these dubious games which, at least in part, have led to the failure of Israeli services to protect a border nevertheless riddled with sensors, cameras and guards.

An offensive of this type is comparable, not to September 11, as many repeat without thinking, but to the “Tet Offensive” during the Vietnam War, and one must weigh the terrible consequences this will have in absence of fair compromises to escape the dilemma.

In reality, we know the formal solution: Stop the bloodshed with a just and lasting peace, with the creation of a Palestinian state. The two peoples could thus, if not become closer, at least respect each other, not institutionally but through economic cooperation across the whole of Southwest Asia. However, this solution cannot be applied in a context limited to the territory of the conflict itself, because everyone perceives the other as an existential threat. External influences exacerbate the conflict between two peoples considered to be exemplary, but reduced to being “cards” to be played in a proxy war. First Great Britain, then the United States, and too often France, played a double game to control the region’s oil resources and, more recently, the technical qualifications of cutting-edge industries in Israel. It is therefore first of all a destructive foreign interference which must cease and be transformed into a catalyst for development and mutual security creating the conditions for the solution, guaranteeing both parties its achievement.

France alone cannot play this role. However, China has just presented a declaration for a “global community with a view to a shared future” and President Putin, during the Valdai Discussion on Oct. 5, in turn promoted

the conditions for a “just multipolarity: How to ensure security and development for all in a new global system.”

Global Times, the semi-official Chinese government newspaper, pointed out that “any plan with geopolitical motivations is by nature doomed to fail to promote mutual and peaceful development in the Middle East.” These are opportunities to be seized, especially since Russian and Chinese interventions have so far demonstrated real moderation.

We must, however, go further. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict being only one element in an environment of global economic crisis, we will only be able to resolve this bloody dilemma by including it in a solution on an international scale, in the same way as for ending the war in Ukraine.

The countries of the Global South do not want to be dragged into wars in which they would have everything to lose, and, for this reason, they intend to escape the colonial and neocolonial trap.

It is by taking a step in their direction that France can play an unprecedented role, in the spirit of the Non-Aligned Movement of Bandung, which is re-emerging today, and of the spirit of détente, of understanding and cooperation of General de Gaulle. A vast undertaking? Of course, but without a new international security and development architecture in the interest of each nation, the collapse of the current Western financial system can only lead to a clash of bloc against bloc and, ultimately, to a world war—first economic and then military. Operation “Al-Aqsa Flood” would then be only the first storm.

France must demonstrate a political will to live up to its historic role, and with our backs against the wall, paradoxically, what is happening in Israel and Palestine offers us such an opportunity.

It is up to us to rediscover a “citizen’s spirit” to change the direction of power at home in synchronization with what needs to be changed in the world. And to do this by tracing, with others, the path to a collective solution. To do this, each of us must elevate the debate, beyond the framework of the Middle East, which is its touchstone.

Today my thoughts go to my friend Maxim Ghilan (1931-2005), director of the International Jewish Peace Union, poet, and Editor-in-Chief of *Israel & Palestine*, friend of Nahum Goldmann, Pierre Mendès-France, and Abou Nizen.