



Responding to the Gaza War

Andrew J. Bacevich, Santiago Ramos, Jordan Denari Duffner

DECEMBER 2023

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Bacevich reminds us that “President Biden has offered Israel virtually unlimited U.S. moral, material, and diplomatic support.” Where does this leave the United States politically and morally? Bacevich argues that U.S. foreign policy cannot improve the situation in the Middle East with more combat. What reasons does he give as to why current approaches are failing? Do you agree with his argument?

2. U.S. foreign policy today, according to Bacevich, consists of “tired slogans that possess little practical utility.” He provides examples such as the role of “American global leadership” to maintain “a rules-based international order.” What effect, if any, do political slogans like this have? Do they possess meaning or power? What do you make of Bacevich’s revised U.S. Middle Eastern foreign policy of “do no further harm”?

3. Denari Duffner writes, “To honor the memories of Wadea and the thousands of people killed in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel in recent weeks, the least we can do is keep bigotry from festering and spreading in our communities.” She calls for consistency and nuance when identifying forms of bigotry, which we shouldn’t confuse with criticism. What distinguishes bigotry from criticism? Have you seen the two conflated in debates about Israel and Palestine?

4. Denari Duffner shows how Christians have played a role in the perpetration of hateful acts against Jews and Muslims. If you grew up in a Christian tradition, have you witnessed hateful rhetoric targeted towards Jewish or Muslim populations? What drives this rhetoric, and what can Christians do to move beyond it?

5. Ramos highlights the work of religious and cultural institutions in developing relationships between Israeli and Palestinian workers, and of NGOs in building a Palestinian civil society. Is there a path forward for these organizations, given the Israeli government’s military actions and the culture of fear between the two groups? Can organizations like this contribute to the diplomatic solutions and coexistence Bacevich calls the only way forward?

6. “Small acts of decency during wartime are important,” explains Ramos, citing journalist Chris Hedges. Ramos emphasizes the need to uphold networks of cooperation and friendship. How have you felt the effects of the conflict in your own community, and what small acts can you do in your everyday life to contribute to a more peaceful world? How can we foster our common humanity to heal the divides in our communities?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

The Editors, “Bad Tidings,” December 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/advent-editorial-gaza-israel-peace-marx-netanyahu>

Jordan Denari Duffner, “Why Stay Silent?” June 2021: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/why-stay-silent>

John Connelly, “Nazi Racism & the Church,” February 2012: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/nazi-racism-church>

Susan Bigelow Reynolds, “Never Again, Again,” April 2022: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/never-again-again>