

'America and Israel have a marriage of power — but the US deep state can change policy'

Economist **Jeffrey Sachs** is University Professor and Director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University. Speaking to **Srijana Mitra Das** at *Times Evoke*, he discusses the Middle East crisis — and its echoes in America:

Iran attacked Israel directly this week — how do you analyse this round of violence?

There is indeed a very dangerous cycle of escalation underway. This latest attack was another step, with the large barrage of Iran's ballistic missiles. Israel had escalated previously with political assassinations, an attack on Iran's diplomatic mission in Damascus, the recent bombings of Beirut and the ground incursion into Lebanon. Israel's violence in Gaza during the past year has been of a shocking dimension — the International Court of Justice (ICJ) is indeed considering whether Israel's actions have reached the level of genocide outlined under the 1948 Genocide Convention.



What role does history play here?

Historical issues are ever-present, deep and complex. The main issue here is the status of the Palestinian people — they have no political rights. The ICJ recently ruled that Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands in the West Bank and East Jerusalem since June, 1967 is a violation of international law.



A NEW WAVE? Kamala Harris has spoken emphatically on human suffering in Palestine

The roots of this conflict go back further, at least to the 1917 Balfour Declaration by which Britain pledged a Jewish homeland in the Ottoman region of Palestine — it was a typical British imperial manoeuvre, to promise something that was not under Britain's control or its right to pledge. Of course, the cultural meaning of that Balfour Declaration had a far longer historical shadow, stretching back two millennia. Jewish Zionists in 1917 were claiming their right to an ancient homeland. Palestinian Arabs replied they were the owners and residents of that land and had been for centuries. It's very complex — and heatedly debated for current political advantage.

Colonial Britain created Israel — but why has the United States consistently supported it?

US politics has been driven by several considerations. First, following the Holocaust



ONCE, I HAD A SCHOOL... Palestinian children have been the most grinding victims of Israel's war on Hamas. As Benjamin Netanyahu (L) vows victory, thousands have been bombed or made refugees



in World War II at the hands of Hitler's Nazi regime, the US political solution was to support a homeland for surviving Jews. Second, over time, the Israel lobby became very powerful in the US, winning political support in Congress and the White House through massive campaign contributions. General public sympathy for Israel also combined with anti-Muslim sentiments in parts of US Christian society. Third, the US uses Israel to project American military power across the Middle East.

Thus, the US-Israel relationship is a marriage of sympathy, interest and power — yet, it is failing to serve the cause of peace and justice. It's working against the US and global security as America finds itself backing Israeli extremism and its opposition to an independent state of Palestine.

With Iran in the fray, do we risk a wider war now?

These risks are very real. There is every indication Israel wants to draw the US into a direct war with Iran. There are two reasons — first, Israel rejects the two-state solution while Iran promotes Palestinian rights and backs Hamas and Hezbollah for this. Israel also argues Iran seeks the elimination of Israel — this is an arbitrary claim. There are good reasons to expect that Iran will join the Arab states in supporting a two-state solution. Second, Iran is close to developing a nuclear weapon — Israel is trying to

SUMMER OF DISCONTENT: US youth held protests for Gaza



stop that through military means rather than diplomacy.

The correct approach would be for the United Nations to say categorically there will be two states living side by side, on the borders of 4 June, 1967, before the 1967 war: This should be done by the UN Security Council. To this date, the US has protected Israel against this obvious peaceful solution, even though the US government's political position, in theory, is in favour of this — in practice, America backs Israel's rejection of it.

There have been many recent protests in the US supporting Palestine — what explains this shift?

Israel's brutality and its steadfast opposition to Palestine's political rights — an independent, sovereign and secure state of Palestine — is the reason. Students on US campuses are understandably, even bravely, calling for Palestinian rights and an end to Israel's murderous incursions into Gaza.

Could this change US foreign policy hereon?

US foreign policy is traditionally run by the security state — the White House, Pentagon and CIA — without asking much about public opinion. It is also run secretly and unfortunately, with lying or, at best, half-truths. Yet, public opinion does count a bit — and it is definitely turning against Israel's extremism. The US is also sensitive to global opinion from other governments. Here too, America is increasingly isolated as the majority

of humanity favours the two-state solution. Both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris are in the hands of the Israel lobby, with funding by pro-Israel sources — yet, the deep state can change policy, no matter who is elected.

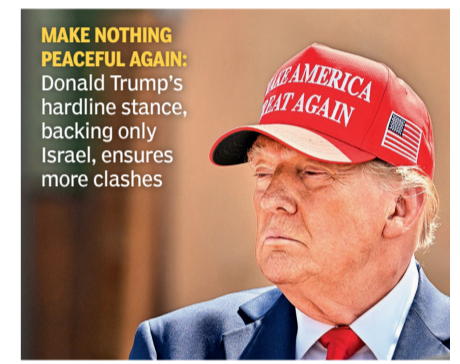
Many sympathise with Palestine — and oppose Hamas for harming unarmed Israelis. How should we view both kinds of violence?

The only peaceful solution is diplomatic and political. The UN should impose the two-state solution — and Hamas and Hezbollah should be disarmed vis-à-vis Israel. This is possible — a political solution through the UN Security Council which includes the disarmament of military forces fighting Israel.

What would be an enduring solution to the Israel-Palestine crisis?

The UN Security Council should immediately vote membership for the State of Palestine as the 194th UN member state. The borders should be those of 4 June, 1967, in accordance with international law. The capital of the new state should be in East Jerusalem.

The UN should introduce peacekeepers to separate and protect the two populations. Financial and military backers of Hamas and



MAKE NOTHING PEACEFUL AGAIN: Donald Trump's hardline stance, backing only Israel, ensures more clashes

Hezbollah — notably Iran — should end support for these. A fund should be established, drawing on global donors, to help the new state and rebuild Gaza and other destroyed areas. We need peace above all. This can only be achieved through diplomacy at the UN. Israel rejects this kind of compromise and, so far, the US has backed Israel — it's time America acts with the rest of the world.

Views expressed are personal

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