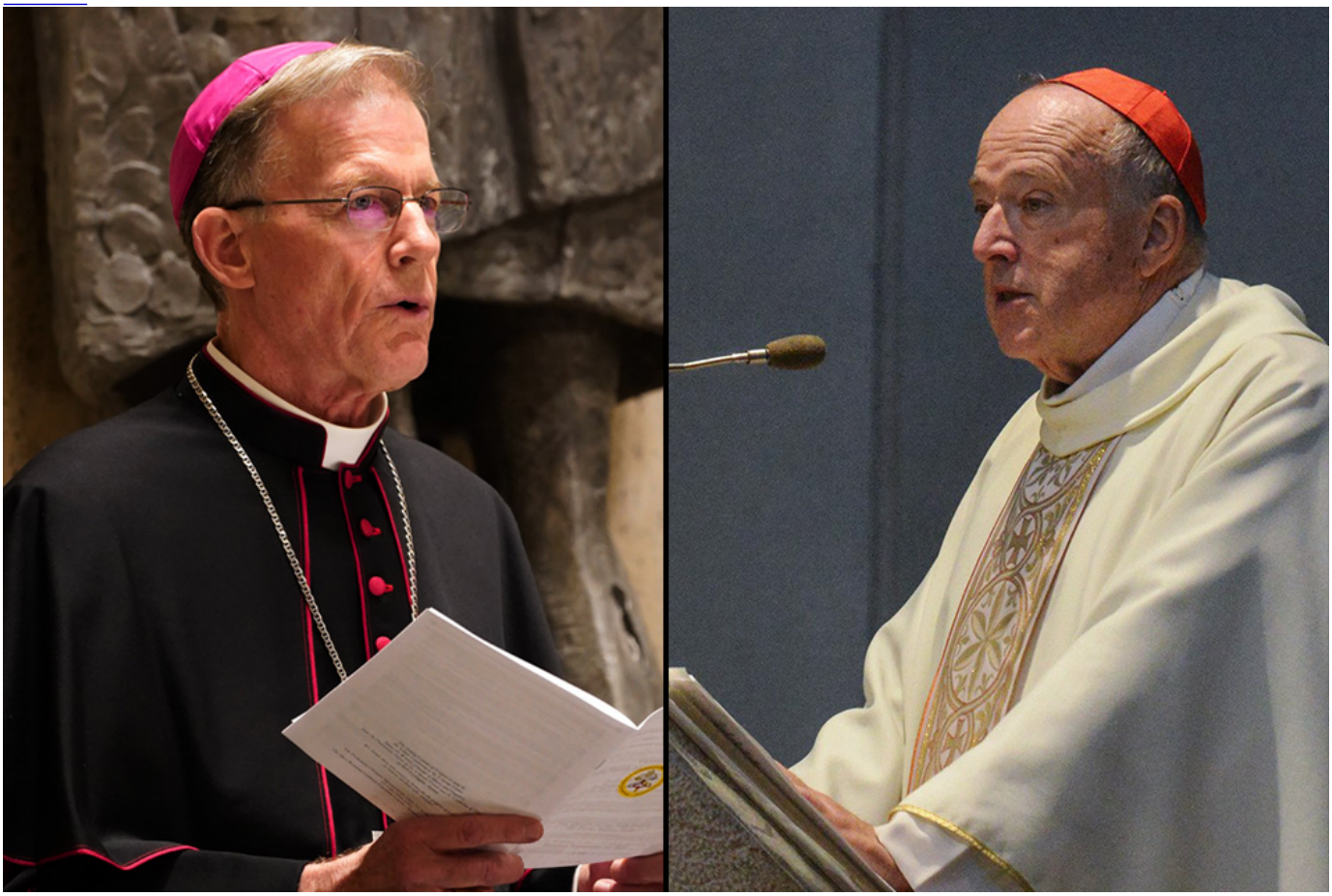
News



Left: Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz); right: Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego (CNS/Chris Warde-Jones)



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Two U.S. Catholic bishops on Jan. 17 added their voices to growing calls for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego and Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico, released a statement both condemning Hamas' surprise Oct. 7 attack against Israel and calling for an "immediate and total" halt to continuing Israeli military action in Gaza.

"The siege of Gaza has lasted more than 100 days and has already resulted in the deaths of more than 23,000 people, most of them innocent civilians. This is more than one percent of the entire population of Gaza. Proportionately for the United States, this would represent more than 3.5 million lives," the bishops wrote, also citing the damage to Gazan housing and infrastructure.

The bishops continued, "A humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in Gaza before the eyes of the world. In such a conflict, continuing such warfare is neither just nor tolerable."

The United Nations' emergency relief chief said Jan. 15 that hundreds of thousands of Gazans are starving and "actually in famine."

The bishops also raised concerns that the war in Gaza would lead to further violence in Lebanon, the West Bank and other parts of the Middle East.

In recent weeks, Israel's military and the Lebanese militant group and political party Hezbollah have been exchanging fire over the Lebanon border. The U.S. military has also been striking what they say are Iran-backed Houthi sites in Yemen, in retaliation for that militant group's alleged attacks on international shipping routes. Houthi leadership says they are undertaking the attacks in support of the Palestinian cause.

In condemning Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks, the bishops wrote, "The massacre of more than 1,200 innocent Israelis, including children, and the abhorrent victimization of women on Oct. 7 stand as a shocking attack by Hamas upon the most basic principles of human dignity."

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McElroy and Wester said those attacks delegitimized Hamas' future role in the Middle East. The bishops voiced their support for Israel's right to bring to justice those who carried out the attack, and to pursue recovery efforts for the more than 100 remaining Israeli hostages.

McElroy and Wester's statement echoes comments from Pope Francis, who has been calling for a cease-fire in Gaza since Oct. 29, frequently mentioning the victims of the war in his public speeches.

In his annual Christmas day address, the pope lamented the "appalling harvest of innocent civilian victims" and said, "To say 'yes' to the Prince of Peace, then, means saying courageously 'no' to war, to every war, to the very mindset of war, an aimless voyage, a defeat without victors, an inexcusable folly."

The president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, has previously called for a "cessation of all hostilities, the release of hostages, and for earnest negotiations towards a peaceful resolution of this conflict."

Unlike Broglio, however, McElroy and Wester's statement highlights the U.S. role in the conflict, saying the continuing war "calls us as Americans to press for a national policy which is focused unswervingly on an immediate and total ceasefire."

In December, the Biden administration bypassed Congress twice to sell Israel hundreds of millions of dollars of weapons, including tank ammunition and artillery shells.

While polling on U.S. support for Israel varies, 61% of likely U.S. voters supported the U.S. calling for a cease-fire in Gaza, according to a Dec. 5 Data for Progress poll. A Dec. 14-16 poll from Morning Consult found 59% of U.S. voters backing a cease-fire.

McElroy and Wester framed a cease-fire as the best way forward. "Only such a cease fire can end the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, stop the growing risk of expanded warfare in the Middle East and maximize the chance of returning the hostages to their families alive," the bishops wrote.

They continued, "Our country has a powerful voice on these issues. Let it echo Pope Francis's call amidst suffering on all sides 'No to weapons, yes to peace.' For this will be the only true pathway for justice in the land that so deeply reflects the presence

of God."

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