Opinion
NCR Voices



Young women embrace as people gather at Hostage Square in Tel Aviv, Israel, to celebrate after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Hamas agreed on the first phase of a Gaza ceasefire Oct. 9, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Shir Torem)



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The news that Israel and Hamas have agreed to a ceasefire and the release of the hostages abducted on Oct. 7, 2023, should be greeted with hope and joy. The prospect of peace still seems distant, but the ceasefire is a necessary first step. Even those of us who deplore President Donald Trump for many things need to tip our hat to him if he pulls this off.

Releasing the hostages was always the fastest way to end the war but Hamas resisted it, knowing that the hostages were really the only thing it had to offer in negotiations. The war in Gaza has greatly diminished the terrorist organization's hold on the people of Gaza: The first job of any government is to protect its own people and Hamas has used its people as human shields for years, the very opposite of protection. The Israeli hostages are not the only people being freed from the grip of Hamas. The people of Gaza are, too.

One key to moving from a ceasefire to a permanent peace is the involvement of other Arab states in the rebuilding of a new political regime in Gaza. As Nahal Toosi noted in Politico, " 'Regional partners' — mainly Arab countries — are expected to ensure that Hamas lives up to its obligations under the proposal." One Arab diplomat told her, "It means more people have skin in the game, and we'll see new people, rather than just the traditional players."

Hamas militants can go into exile, but they will have no role in governing Gaza. Amnesty will be extended to those members of Hamas who disarm and pledge themselves to peaceful coexistence. Gazans must only look across the border to Egypt to recognize that peaceful coexistence with Israel is not only possible but is the only sane path forward. Egypt made its peace deal with Israel in 1978 and it has held. The two countries are not exactly friendly, but the peace has held.



Palestinian children celebrate in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip after U.S. President Donald Trump announced that Israel and Hamas agreed on the first phase of a Gaza ceasefire Oct. 9, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Dawoud Abu Alkas)

Hopefully, the release of the hostages will also weaken the extremists in the Israeli government, although Israel's "core security interests are not partisan property," as opposition leader Benny Gantz explained in a New York Times op-ed last month. Political coalitions are always difficult and many have criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for appeasing the extremists in his Cabinet. "Netanyahu's maneuvering cannot be disentangled from his need to appease far-right factions at home, even as military leaders caution that tightening Israel's grip on Gaza achieves nothing but more bloodshed," opined NCR's editors in August.

This criticism puts me in mind of those who criticize Franklin Delano Roosevelt for his failure to embrace civil rights for Black Americans. FDR would not even support an anti-lynching bill for fear he would lose the support of Southern senators whose votes he needed to pass the New Deal programs. It is easy to criticize FDR. Obviously, lynching was a horrible thing. But who can say FDR was wrong in his

assessment of what was possible politically in that moment of history? A country beset by widespread unemployment with millions of indigent elderly would hardly be in a position to enact civil rights. On the other hand, as both the New Deal and the Second World War played out, FDR's successor, Harry Truman, was able to tackle civil rights, desegregating the military and enacting a desegregation plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform. The Southern delegations walked out of the 1948 national convention, but Truman still won reelection. Would such an outcome have been possible in 1936? Or in 1940?

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In an op-ed at Religion News Service, Mark Silk, former director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, invokes the biblical story of the prophet Jonah to warn against undue optimism. On the Israeli side, Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich called for "total annihilation" in Gaza while, on the Palestinian side, Hamas has never revoked or amended its charter's call for the extermination of Israel and all Jews. "I'd like to believe that, unlike the magical tale of Ninevite repentance, the ceasefire plan for Gaza will lead to a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians," Silk writes. "But with angry messianists on both sides, I have my doubts."

Politics is the art of the possible but it is also more than that. Calculation pertains to devising methods to achieve certain goals, not in identifying those goals. There is plenty of kindling to keep the fires of animus and hatred burning in the Mideast. With so much suffering on both sides of the divide these past two years, we can hope that people are more tired of war and hatred than they are consumed with a desire for vengeance.

In Ireland, there are still divisions along sectarian lines, but there is no more open warfare. In Bosnia, the country's population remains divided in separate enclaves but the killing has stopped. We can all hope that leaders on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will seek peace now and have the courage to pursue it. As the great Israeli leader and peacemaker Yitzhak Rabin said, "You don't make peace with friends; you can only make peace with your enemies." It is time for these enemies to make peace.