

Mallat Issues statement for a USG ceasefire ultimatum in Gaza and South Lebanon



The office of Professor Chibli Mallat has released an opinion piece in which he outlines a workable plan to end the war in Gaza and South Lebanon. In Lebanon in particular, as the war drums increase in intensity, the plan builds on his recent initiative for the domestic and international recognition of the current Lebanese consensus to prevent full war in South Lebanon. The plan would also put an end to speculation and uncertainty in relation the health and fitness of the American president that ensures continuity for the Ceasefire. Mallat builds in this proposition on lifetime academic and engaged efforts for Middle Eastern peace, and on his recent initiative to prevent Lebanon being involved in a full and devastating war because of Gaza.

The plan advocates setting a time ultimatum by the US government for both Israel and Hamas to start implementing UNSCR 2735, and heightened transparency on the president's health in relation to his daily activities, together with a readiness to pass on the mantle of leadership to the vice-president if and when needed.

A plan for Joe Biden: forcing the Ceasefire on the Israeli government and Hamas, winning the presidency

Chibli Mallat

The rise of autocrats in America and the rest of the world in the past two decades has basic and well understood roots: a structural wave of massive, increasing migration from the South; and economic insecurity for the middle class and its lumpenization as a large set of voters living in quotidian precarity.

Migration has become massive and structural. It results from failed decolonization and grave weather deterioration. Brexit and the retreat of Europe are the result of the massive flight of Syrians to Europe in 2012 as repression reached new heights in their homeland. Italian and French fascist movements result in large part from migration across the Mediterranean by the wretched of the earth seeking kinder skies from Africa and Asia. Italy first, France next.

Precarity and lumpenization: In the US, it is precarity, not GDP or per capita income, which characterizes the economic system. It is illustrated by the cashier's daily life as template for the workforce. Her compensation is a pittance, her hopes of advancement are nil, and her already dreary job is increasingly replaced by automation. The European cashier follows her across-the-Atlantic counterpart. Mom and pop's petit commerce dies at every street corner and is replaced by no less precarious trades than hairdressing and nail polishing, also doomed soon enough by the robot fixer. Precarity means uncertainty means frustration means lumpenization of the whole workforce, with lumpen defined as "dispossessed and uprooted individuals cut off from the economic and social class with which they might normally be identified" (Webster). This was true in the 1920s and 1930s for the rise of fascism. It is a worldwide characteristic of present economies, despite the extraordinary rise of GDPs and the variety of consumer items unlike during the Great Depression. The world is getting richer, while the people feel increasing precarity.

These two socio-economic characteristics are structural in the US. Precarity augments inside the borders as migration waves roll on with a cheaper workforce pushing North from ravaged central and south America.

There is little that can be done in the short term. But political time moves differently. To avoid autocracy in power in the US, and its continued rise in the world, I propose to keep these two long-termish traits in mind, while I address the tighter political framework upon us in America.

Joe Biden is a decent and competent president, but America worries about his age and performance. His every word and move is recorded, his every gesture scrutinized, whether genuinely expressive of physical and mental regression or the figment of adverse media -- official and social. For now, Trump holds better on that register than Biden.

This is likely to remain true until the elections. If Mr. Biden can assure the larger public that he can continuously put on a performance like the one before Congress on March 8, he must plan and schedule heavyweight addresses now, and avoid wandering off on an exhausting campaign trail of sideshows. If he cannot, or if he fails in exuding confidence at any of those public appearances, he must be ready to pass the torch to the vice-president. He and Kamala Harris could then then continue the campaign with her energy upfront, together with a new vice-president whom she appoints. She has already stepped up her presence and developed an increasingly assertive and convincing discourse.

If by the Democratic Convention on August 19 the president has faltered, the American people

will know what to expect and will appreciate him the more for his readiness to step down.

But another cloud has darkened the chances of a Democratic presidency. Like Syria for Brexit and the unraveling of Europe, it is Israel-Palestine for a diminished US leadership incapable of forcing its closest and most dependent ally to stop the war. The US government let the bombing drag on, eventually unleashing waves of protests on the finest campuses. This has not only undermined the Democrats' authority with their traditional reservoir of young, educated Americans. Critically, it has created more precarity in the public space.

The USG secured a near-unanimous Ceasefire Resolution on June 10. UNSCR 2735 (2024) is an excellent Resolution. The US president needs a diplomatic win to materialize.

Contrary to what the Israeli government and Hamas say or are said to say, the Resolution, if implemented, ends the war in Gaza, and Hizbullah has committed to end hostilities on the Lebanon-Israeli border as soon as the guns fall silent in Gaza.

Let us consider the schedule under the Resolution. First phase: six weeks, starting with a full ceasefire, Hamas releases ten, thirty, forty hostages, alive and dead. Gazans displaced internally begin returning to where their first refuge took them when they were prevented from returning to their homes in 1948. If Mr. Netanyahu starts the war again by saying negotiations have failed, we will be back to where we are today. This is hard to envisage, for it would repeat tragic 'Sophie's choices' for the families of the remaining hostages, and unleash new mass flights of already multi-displaced Gazans. As both the US president and vice-president have repeated, "it's time for war to end". The Israeli government is frail, and the US has the means to weakening it into resignation.

No one in the world but the current Israeli Prime Minister can afford this. Least of all the US president.

To cut short on the trade of accusations on who is responsible for not accepting a stop to the hostilities, the US administration need only ask one thing from the warring parties: date and time for the Ceasefire. Hamas says it 'welcomes' the ceasefire. It will no doubt say in answer to an American ultimatum: tonight midnight, or the earliest possible, or as soon as the Israelis name a time. If Hamas does not, the USG or the UNSCR can declare it in breach of the Resolution, and the Israeli government allowed to pursue the war. As for Mr. Netanyahu, he will continue to play for time and on words, but for how long? If Hamas gives a date as above, can he afford not to give one? The American government can easily remind him that US interests come first, for instance in withholding a visa for his July visit to Congress, to declaring a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders which it would pledge to protect. The two states, with a territorial link between the West Bank and Gaza, are squarely announced in the last Ceasefire resolution.

As the first phase of the Ceasefire unfolds from late June roundabout, six weeks take us past 24 July, where Mr. Netanyahu can bask in Congressional glory without risk of being undercut by President Biden. More importantly, it takes us close to the Democratic Convention on 19 August.

With a plan for solving the full Middle East crisis and a lasting Ceasefire in place, the American president will once again appear as world leader.

Never minimize the allure of appearance for voting day. Precariousness matters, yes. Migration matters, yes. But leadership also matters, however intangible it be. After the Camp David peace between Israel and Egypt, Jimmy Carter would have won but for the bad luck in the operation to release the US hostages held in Tehran. Ronald Reagan was revered for winning the Cold war, and Bush Junior originally supported for liberating Iraq from Saddam Hussein in 2003, in time for his reelection the following year. Only later did liberation turn into occupation.

Bringing the two strands together for a Democratic win on November 5th is less complicated an electoral strategy than many think. Mr. Biden could declare it immediately in close to the following terms:

“The USG expects the application of UNSCR 2735 (2024) next week. It wants the Ceasefire to start as early as midnight Sunday for Monday. It expects the Israeli government and Hamas to accept it with no condition. If the Israeli government rejects it or remains silent, the USG will declare it to be in breach of the Resolution and will consider its options [as above, visa rejection and Palestinian state recognition, and several other possibilities]. If Hamas rejects it or remains silent, the USG will declare Hamas to be in breach of the Resolution and the Israeli government can resume its operations.”

Once the Ceasefire is in place, the first phase starts under the American plan as integrated in the Security Council resolution. In the timeline suggested, this is six weeks from roughly the second half of July, so in early to mid-August. By then, Mr. Netanyahu would have visited Washington, where he will be warned again that there is no breaching the Ceasefire or else. Aid to Gaza will be in full swing, and the first group of hostages will have been released to euphoria worldwide. Biden’s international success will then be celebrated at the Convention for his presidential leadership. This should last until the elections, especially with the expected disarray in Mr. Trump’s camp.

In parallel, and once the Gaza Ceasefire is in place, the deciding figures in the Democratic Party can address widely shared concern with the mental and physical weakness of President Biden. Constitutionally, passing on the leadership to Kamela Harris will be effected, if need be, up until the week before election day, and a new vice-president announced simultaneously. A simple declaration from the White House is needed:

“The President is in good health and full control, but he is considering the danger to American democracy under an autocrat in the White House, and he is prepared to resign in favor of the vice-president should his physical state falter in a way that impairs his program. Decision on passing on the leadership through the campaign depends on his being fully fit and seeing to be fit by the American people. To ensure that the American public is fully informed, the White House will provide a weekly account of the extraordinary work which the President continues to

accomplish every single day.

It will be President Biden's decision to resign if he believes passing on the leadership mantle is in the interest of the country.

The president wishes to consolidate Middle Eastern peace by then and lay the ground for the full implementation of UNSCR.”

Chibli Mallat is a lawyer, human rights activist, and law professor. His books include *The Middle East into the 21st Century* and *Democracy in Fin-de-Siècle America*.