

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

February 1, 2024

Dear President Biden,

The undersigned 80 groups - 49 national, and 31 state and local - work across the ideological spectrum and represent multiple sectors including veterans, diaspora communities, working class voters, national security experts, faith leaders, peace advocates, human rights defenders, public health professionals, and more. In light of the recent tragic deaths of U.S. service members in Jordan and calls for all-out war with Iran in response, we write to express our mounting alarm about the recent ramping up of conflict in the Middle East. Israel's air and ground offensive against Gaza - following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7 - has killed a staggering [26,000 people](#) and counting in just under four months, and led to other reverberating violence. Militias backed by Iran are targeting U.S. service members in the region, international shipping lanes are being attacked by the Houthis, and Israel and Hezbollah continue a dangerous retaliatory cycle of mortar and rocket attacks. We fear that, as tensions continue in this escalatory spiral, the U.S. could become engaged in a protracted new war that spans across the entire region. To avoid such an unacceptable outcome, we urge you to prioritize diplomatic pathways to de-escalation, which must include urgently pressing for and securing a permanent ceasefire in Gaza.

While the Houthi attacks on shipping vessels in the Red Sea have been concerning and dangerous, the decision to initiate airstrikes in Yemen has done little to stop these attacks and may trigger a significant expansion of the war. We are deeply alarmed by recent reporting that your administration is considering following up on recent U.S. strikes in Yemen against the Houthis with a "[sustained campaign](#)," despite [acknowledging](#) these strikes are, in fact, not working. These strikes, in addition to other reactive measures such as designating the Houthis a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT), have only emboldened the group, as their attacks have expanded to include UK and U.S. ships, and threaten the UN-announced peace process in Yemen.

Even before the militia attacks that [recently killed](#) three U.S. service members and wounded many more in Jordan near the Syrian border, the war between Israel and Hamas had led to a dramatic increase in attacks on U.S. forces in the region, wounding nearly [70 U.S. personnel](#) (that number has [now risen to 100](#)). Initially, the U.S. military response was largely limited to striking back on militias in Iraq and Syria, and now some are calling for direct confrontation with Iran. But instead of keeping our troops safe or improving our security, these tit-for-tat attacks

have not deterred militias from seeking to strike U.S. forces. The only pause in attacks came when the Biden administration secured a week-long pause in the fighting, as hostages held in Gaza were released.

Mr. President, retaliatory bombing will not calm the region or resolve these conflicts, and instead may entangle the U.S. in a disastrous open-ended conflict with a range of actors. This is particularly true of the irresponsible calls for a new unauthorized bombing campaign inside Iran, which would bring Iran directly into the fighting against U.S. forces. Such a result would be disastrous, undermine U.S. interests, put our service members at even greater risk, and come with a devastating cost in both dollars and lives. As dozens of Members of the House and Senate have [recently made clear](#), you do not have the unilateral authority to escalate militarily in the region, and we will press Congress to exercise its constitutional right to prevent you from doing so.

While there is no panacea before us, it is undeniable that the rise in attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and by militias in Iraq and Syria are directly connected to the conflict in Gaza. This is clear both by the Houthis' own statements, and the [decrease](#) in militia attacks during November's weeklong ceasefire in Gaza. We strongly condemn the violence from Hamas, the Houthis, and other Iran-backed militias, and the support provided by Iran's government. Writing as U.S.-based organizations, however, we affirm that our government's foremost responsibility is to keep people safe, even when it's difficult – and this escalatory pathway will only lead to further instability and violence. And as a president that [campaigns on](#) a promise to “elevate diplomacy as a principal tool of our foreign policy” and lean on military force only as a “last resort,” it is imperative that you exercise leadership in this moment and utilize all leverage at your disposal to de-escalate and explore all diplomatic pathways to address the root causes of the violence.

We urge you to lead with diplomacy, by pressing for a ceasefire in Gaza, to address the source of the violence and prevent further escalation.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

ActionAid USA

Action Corps

Afghans For A Better Tomorrow

Alliance of Baptists

American Friends Service Committee

Antiwar.com

Center for International Policy

Center for Victims of Torture

Center on Conscience and War
Charity & Security Network
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding and Policy
CommonDefense.us
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Defending Rights & Dissent
Demand Progress Education Fund
End the Wars Committee of Progressive Democrats of America
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA)
Health Alliance International
Historians for Peace and Democracy
If Not Now
Institute for Policy Studies New Internationalism Project
International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN)
Just Foreign Policy
The Libertarian Institute
MADRE
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
MPower Change
Muslims for Just Futures
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Council of Churches
National Iranian American Council
Peace Action
Presbyterian Church, (USA), Office of Public Witness
ReThinking Foreign Policy
RootsAction.org
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
The United Methodist Church — General Board of Church and Society
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Veterans For Peace
Women for Weapons Trade Transparency
Working Families Party
World BEYOND War
Win Without War
Yemen Relief and Reconstruction Foundation

Yemeni Alliance Committee

State and Local Organizations:

American Friends Service Committee, Colorado

The Azarias Project

Brooklyn For Peace

Carolina Peace Center

Chicago Area Peace Action

Cleveland Peace Action

Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, Washington, DC

Friends Committee on National Legislation Colorado Advocacy Team

LEPOCO Peace Center (Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern)

Massachusetts Peace Action

Minnesota Peace Project

National Iranian American Council - Colorado Chapter

New Hampshire Peace Action

New Jersey Peace Action

Newton Dialogues on War and Peace

North Carolina Peace Action

Oregon FCNL Advocacy Team

PA Progressive Dems of America

Partners for Peace Fort Collins

Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore

Peace Action Montgomery

Peace Action New York State

Peace Action of San Mateo County

Peace Action WI

Peace and Social Justice Committee, Fifteenth Street Friends Meeting, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

Peace Corps Iran Association (PCIA)

Peace, Justice, Sustainability NOW!

Sacramento Area Peace Action

South Dakota Voices for Peace

Western New York Peace Center

Western Mass CODEPINK