

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 - 52 national, and 28 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

Brooklyn For Peace

Carolina Peace Center

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  
Pax Christi Metro DC-Baltimore  
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  
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  
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