

May 5, 2024

To the Members of Arlington Town Meeting,

I will be voting in opposition to the resolution with regard to the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. I do not endorse nor condone acts of terror, genocide, or violations of international law. I am equally horrified by the terrorist actions of October 7 and by the devastating situation within Gaza today. I would love to see an end to war. I do not think the structure and nature of our Town Meeting affords us the space to delve into how to achieve it. We cannot, in a handful of seven minute presentations, hope to so easily remedy this conflict where so many better educated and better equipped diplomats have tried and failed.

I object to the resolution, in part, because the language of the resolution is flawed. It is passive in voice, ambiguous in nature, and uses terms and phrases in ways that seem inconsistent with established definitions. Addressing these linguistic concerns risks moving the conversation from policy to pedantry. Failing to address them leaves the resolution unclear and flawed.

Why should it matter if the language is passive? The AHRC stated, in their endorsement of a draft ceasefire proclamation, that they “*wanted to make sure the proclamation centered on common humanity, civilian welfare, and the impacts in Arlington, rather than trying to place blame and take sides.*” (<https://www.arlingtonhumanrights.org/post/ahrc-endorses-2024-special-town-meeting-warrant-article-5>). However, by failing to assign culpability, it leaves it to each reader to assume who was intended to be the culpable party. Some may read it as assigning culpability to a single-side (either defensively as a side with which one agrees or, perhaps, triumphantly as calling out a side with which one does not agree) while others may read it as “all sides.” This ambiguity gives the appearance of uniformity and agreement where there is none.

The ambiguity further exists in the use of words like “hostage,” “displaced,” and even “immediate and permanent ceasefire.” I am confident that some Town Meeting Members read the word “hostage” to mean the people who, while engaged in peaceful activities, were taken hostage on October 7, 2023, by terrorists under the banner of Hamas. I am equally confident that some Town Meeting Members read the word “hostage” to mean people held in the Israeli prison system (lawfully or not). There may even be Members who read it entirely differently. Likewise, the word “displaced,” implies there was a place they were previously entitled to... this is no small nuance, as so many conflicts revolve around who is entitled to live where. Once we go down this path of history, how do we decide we’ve gone far enough? And finally, who is supposed to

cease fire as a result of this resolution? Will Israel no longer be on the receiving end of thousands of rockets fired annually from its neighbors? Is Israel to simply repeat the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza as it did in 2005? What happens after the immediate ceasefire? How does it become permanent?

The AHRC provided Town Meeting with a letter endorsing (8-1) adoption of a resolution. (<https://arlington.novusagenda.com/Agendapublic/AttachmentViewer.ashx?AttachmentID=21236&ItemID=17942>) Their letter concluded with the statement that they “believe the statement’s bilateral call for peace, universal recognition of rights, and calls for mutual understanding and co-existence are consistent with both the AHRC’s principles and the town’s greater aspirations for equity, diversity, and inclusion.” However, the resolution before Town Meeting does not use the words “bilateral,” or “universal recognition,” or “mutual.” The resolution, as written, does not actually make the calls endorsed by the AHRC.

In addition to my concerns about the wording of the resolution, I am also troubled by the demonization of Town Meeting Members who have declined to support it. Refusing to sign on to an ambiguous and potentially misleading resolution does not make one anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic, anti-Palestinian, anti-Islamic, or anti-Humanitarian. While I wish to see a permanent peace, I don’t think this resolution does anything to advance it. That is reason enough to vote against.

I hope that we can all engage in this process with mutual respect and empathy. Many of the people who will be at Town Meeting for this vote have or had friends and family directly impacted; I myself have friends and family who are directly impacted. We must respect our mutual humanity and strive to make Arlington the best place that we can. We should condemn all forms of racism, bigotry, and discrimination, and support members of our Arlington community who are affected by this crisis. This resolution, as drafted, does not.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/A. Badik/
Adam Badik, Precinct 5