

COMMENTARY

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The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Breaking the Deadlock

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has rarely been so far from finding a resolution. Since the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas during the summer of 2014, the desire to seek peace has been diminishing, and instead growing tensions have prevailed, punctuated by stabbings and car-ramming attacks by the Palestinians, and violent acts including arson by the settlers.

The despair of both peoples has rarely taken such a dispiriting face than with this daily violence. Moreover, the attention of the international community has been diverted from the Palestinian question due to the Syrian conflict and the murderous activities of Daesh (ISIS), which are the main focuses of diplomatic efforts and public opinion.

A state of tension favourable to peace between Israel & Palestine

Yet, the climate has rarely been so favourable to a resolution of the conflict. The chaos that is sweeping the Middle East has been a game-changer in relation to Israel and the Arab countries.

Many Palestinians and Israelis are worried about the possible breakout of ISIS in Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas' policy failures and the insistence of the Israeli government to return to dialogue under its own terms provide a breeding ground for more hostile activities that will prevent pacific coexistence. Terrorist sparks are everywhere in Palestine; no country in the Middle East has an interest in letting a new conflict emerge.

However, a majority of Israelis and Palestinians seek peace, and the desire of Arab countries to normalize their relations with Israel offers fertile ground for the resumption of peace negotiations.

In 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative was proposed by the Arab League to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the proposed framework, all Arab and Muslim countries would establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel after the successful conclusion of the peace process with the Palestinians.

For the Arab countries, truce with Israel would enable the emergence of an arc of stability from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Peninsula. This could prove useful for these countries who want to rally against the regional influence of Iran.

Leadership must come from Europe

In this complex situation of intertwined interests, Europe has a prominent role to play as the US is currently unable to commit to the peace process. Distracted by the upcoming presidential elections, concerned about the absence of a real prospect to reach an agreement, and its preference to assume a wait-and-see attitude, the US may well be ready to back an EU initiative for peace.

Such an opportunity exists. France has been trying for months to rekindle the peace process and is considering an international conference involving all the stakeholders in this conflict. The European Union as well as its Member States has to give their unmitigated support to this initiative.

However, some diplomatic conditions have to be met, drawing on the lessons of past failures. Otherwise, we would at best get temporary truces, a mere respite before the next outbreak of violence. The Arab Peace Initiative has to be the basis of all negotiations.

On the one hand, it stresses the principle of coexistence between the Arab and Israeli peoples. On the other hand, it shows a spirit of compromise to end the conflict with mutually agreed upon land swaps.

The role of the European Union is to support the peace process. In this context, we have to affirm that the Middle East Quartet is now more a burden than a help in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their demands towards Hamas are outdated and don't take into account the new realities.

All those who have an interest in the status quo are supporting the Quartet. We need to get rid of the Quartet, revitalize the Arab Peace Initiative and promote the latest French initiative.

As for now, preparing peace

However, seventy years of failures in the attempts to bring peace between Israel and Palestine have taught us that diplomacy alone is not enough. Seven decades of suffering, the loss of Palestinian dignity as well as the political opportunism from the leaders of the two sides has built psychological barriers which are almost impossible to overcome in the current situation unless a process of people-to-people interactions for a period of time precedes the peace negotiations.

There is a need for mutual understanding to accept the obvious: the destruction of Israel or the vanishing of the Palestinians is impossible scenarios. Coexistence between the two peoples is the inevitable historical horizon.

This entails ending the poisonous narratives delivered by leaders from both sides, ending rampant settlement construction, changing school textbooks that demonise the Other, supporting common initiatives like Ecopeace to protect shared environmental heritage... all conditions that will pave the way for peace.

In Human, All Too Human, Nietzsche stated “Whoever lives for the sake of combating an enemy has an interest in the enemy’s staying alive”. His words resonate with this conflict where the Other is reduced to their role as a hereditary enemy. Breaking this cycle is our ambition.

With this favourable climate, the current diplomatic efforts and some mutual confidence-building, we have the will to solve once and for all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the EU has the capacity to assume the leadership role. This is our roadmap to reach peace.

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