



# THE UN'S ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

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## THE LESSON OF LEBANON

The recent conflict in Lebanon has shown the danger of allowing efforts towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East to derail. If the underlying causes of this long-standing conflict are not addressed urgently, any provocation could escalate and engulf the entire region. Allowing the status quo to prevail threatens both regional and global security by fuelling resentment of the West, stoking extremism in the region, radicalising Muslim populations in western Europe, and undermining democracy in the Middle East. Until the international community commits itself to taking the necessary steps towards achieving a peace in the Middle East which is both just and lasting, then some states in the region will continue to feel justified in funding resistance movements and even pursuing a nuclear-weapons capability, thereby deepening mistrust and making further clashes more likely.

## OBSTACLES ON THE ROAD MAP

In April 2003 the Quartet – comprised of the UN, the US, Russia and the European Union (EU) – presented the parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the 'road map', a peace plan drawn up to help implement the two-state solution, as outlined in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). Despite an auspicious start, with both parties taking genuine steps forward, the negotiations collapsed, the ceasefire broke down and the international community failed to induce the two parties to move forward.

The longer the international community takes to re-initiate the peace process the more entrenched the current impasse will become and the more problematic it will be to achieve any progress. The UN and its partners in the Quartet, along with key Arab states, must act now to get the peace process back on track. There are many obstacles, among them a deep mistrust between the parties to the conflict, exacerbated by the election of Hamas to the Palestinian Authority; the absence of a coherent Palestinian negotiating voice given the in-fighting within the administration; and the preoccupation of the US with Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran and questions over its legitimacy as an arbiter in the region.

However, there are encouraging signs that the crisis in Lebanon will galvanise the international community into action. The UN Security Council seems to be expanding its engagement in the region and for now appears united in its approach.

## SOME STEPS WHICH COULD BE TAKEN

- The UK government should press for the convening of an international peace conference attended by all relevant stakeholders to re-initiate the peace process and create an environment conducive to opening negotiations.
- The UN Security Council should take the lead in initiating talks and guiding the region towards a comprehensive settlement based on the 2003 Roadmap.
- The members of the Quartet need to work closely with regional partners to devise and implement a comprehensive settlement.
- The UK government should use its influence with the US and Israeli governments to urge them to accept the resumption of a Middle East peace process.
- The UK Prime Minister should deliver a major speech on the Middle East outlining the immediate need to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process and to establish a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement.
- In its discussions with governments in the region, the UK government should emphasise the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognised borders, as affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397. This must be accompanied by a just resolution of the refugee issue; recovery of lost land by Syria; and a fully sovereign and secure Lebanese state.

## **ASK YOUR MP**

- **What is the government doing to create the conditions necessary to achieve peace, stability and prosperity in the region?**
- **How is the government using its influence with the US and Israeli governments to urge them to accept the resumption of a Middle East peace process?**
- **Given that the achievement of lasting peace in the Middle East is a central foreign policy aim of the EU, what action is the government taking to ensure that the EU is active in attempts to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process?**
- **What action, if any, is the government taking via the EU Partnership for Peace programme to bring together civil society actors from Israel, the occupied territories and neighbouring countries?**
- **What action is the government taking to ensure that media reports of issues involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict are fair and do not fuel anti-Semitism?**
- **Does the government acknowledge that Israel's undeclared possession of nuclear weapons is fuelling an arms race in the region which is impeding efforts to achieve a lasting resolution of the conflict?**

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