

GLOBAL
DIPLOMATIC
FORUM



MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

ROUND TABLE REPORT

Global Diplomatic Forum

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Middle East Peace Process Round Table Report 2013
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High profile speakers and distinguished audiences convened in the House of Commons in London on the 22nd of October 2013, to discuss the current developments on the Middle East Peace Process. The round table forms part of the Middle East and North African Programme that was launched by the Global Diplomatic Forum in December 2012.

The round table organised by the Global Diplomatic Forum, aimed at gathering together leading experts and people with a special interest in the field to debate its most contemporary issues, as well as to discuss measures that could contribute to the efforts by key actors to reach sustainable resolution to the conflicts.



Global Diplomatic Forum - Middle East and North Africa Programme

The Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) programme run by the Global Diplomatic Forum is a comprehensive initiative, aimed at bringing together leading experts to debate current and future challenges to diplomacy in the region.

The programme is a combination of conferences, round tables, discussion groups, presentations, research publications, consultation reports and policy briefings. We engage with different stakeholders involved in the diplomatic dynamism in the region and offer positive platforms both in the MENA and in other regions.

The programme covers different angles and aspects related to the diplomatic vitality in the region. Topics are comprehensive and are discussed from different perspectives.

The main areas the programme deals with are:

- The Middle East Peace Process
- Arab- Iran relations
- The evolution of regional organisations as diplomatic entities: League of Arab States, Gulf Cooperation Council & Arab Maghreb Union
- The future of Arab-EU relations
- Arab – American relations
- French relations with Maghreb countries
- The BRIC countries relations with the Arab countries
- The diplomatic discourse of security issues in the region
- Maghreb- African relations.



Programme Objectives

The various activities conducted by the Global Diplomatic Forum present an essential platform to set the ground for our programme on the future of diplomacy in the MENA region.

The main objectives of the programme are summarised below:

- Promoting more diplomatic course of action to resolve conflicts in the regions
- Encouraging cooperation between countries in the region and the neighbouring regions
- Identifying opportunities for relations between countries of the region with the rest of the world
- Analysis of perspectives and positions of different actors and stakeholders vis-à-vis the diplomatic challenges in the region
- Engaging diplomats in discussing questions related to the diplomatic dynamism in the MENA territory
- Boosting the sharing of research outputs and exchange of insights and analysis on different aspects of MENA foreign affairs and security issues
- Facilitating high level meetings of experts to debate ideas, exchange knowledge and networking
- Providing an in depth understanding of the different scenarios of future of MENA.

The Middle East Peace Process - Round Table

Synopsis

Both bilateral and international diplomatic efforts have so far yielded limited results in bringing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the longest standing conflicts in the world, to an end. Over 60 years have passed and still there is no agreement between the two parties.

The Palestinian Authority opted for a unilateral declaration of an independent state at the United Nations last year. This has been seen as a sign of deep frustration at the slow pace of a negotiated resolution of the conflict.

As efforts are being multiplied to bring the parties around the table for meaningful negotiations, a number of questions need to be urgently addressed:

- What impact has the Arab Spring and the ongoing problems in the Middle East had on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?
- What steps can the parties take to improve the chances of success?
- What actions the USA should take as a peace broker in this conflict?
- What role can the quartet play? Can Russia and EU play a more active role?
- How have developments in Egypt and the fragmentation in the Arab League changed the picture for negotiators?
- What about Gaza?
- What lessons can be learnt from the Oslo agreement?

Round Table Panellists

Andrew Wilson

Sky News Presenter (Chair)

Rt Hon Jack Straw MP

Former Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs,
UK

Lord Hylton

Member of House of Lords,
UK Parliament

Ian Lucas MP

Shadow Minister for
Middle East and Africa,
UK Labour Party

Dr Einat Wilf

Former Member of the Knesset,
Israel

Professor Manuel Hassassian

Ambassador of Palestine to the UK



This is the fourth platform organised by the Global Diplomatic Forum related to the Middle East Peace Process - the first took place as a round table at the House of Commons in December 2012, we then facilitated two sessions during the Young Diplomats Forum in Ankara, Turkey - Middle East Peace Process and Track II diplomacy.

The main aspect of the programme is extracting ideas from platforms and putting them into tangible consultations that can be facilitated through track II and track III platforms, which are essential for the positive outcome of the process.

The desired outcome of all efforts towards the Middle East Peace process can be summarised in the following:

- Peace agreement leading to a two-state solution
- Sustaining peace and security for Israeli and Palestinian people
- Normalisation of relations between Israelis and Arabs in the region.

Key ideas discussed:

The Arab League Proposal

Highlighted by Professor Hassassian, the Ambassador of Palestine to the UK, the Arab League Proposal is still very much on the table.

The proposal was a tremendous breakthrough with regards to the position of the Arab States towards Israel given that the Arab League summit in 1967 in Khartoum rejected the right of existence to Israel and rejected any negotiation with Israel. Regardless of the details of the Arab League proposal (as any agreement should be negotiated between the Israelis and the Palestinians), the proposal presents a strong statement of intent that can be built on. 56 countries, members of the Islamic conference including Iran have supported the proposal since 2005.

The Arab League and the Arab states should have engaged more with Israeli stakeholders in promoting their proposal and building a shared vision on the post conflict environment in the region.

Although there are questions of the homogeneity of the perspectives of the

different Arab States Vis-à-Vis the settlement of the conflict, engagement with Israel is crucial.

We re-affirm our previous recommendation from the last round table in which we called for the engagement of the Arab League and Gulf States Council in Peace Process Negotiations.

Recognition of Israel as a Jewish state:

Dr Wilf referred to British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin speech in 1947:

“For the Jews, the essential point of principle is the creation of a sovereign Jewish state. For the Arabs, the essential point of principle is to resist to the last the establishment of Jewish sovereignty in any part of Palestine”.

Assuming that his statement was accurate in 1947, it is certain that there have been changes in the views and opinions of Arabs towards the existence of Israel as Jewish state over the past 65 years.

Whilst there is a concern amongst a significant number of Israelis regarding this issue, the Palestinian Ambassador stated that the Palestinian Authority has recognised the state of Israel for more than 2 decades and is willing

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to recognise Israel as a Jewish state.

Therefore this issue can be overcome as an obstacle in the route towards a peace agreement if solved as part of the wider context of the agreement in conjunction with other related issues - especially the one of refugees.

However, this issue may remain an obstacle in the sustainability of peace and normalisation of relations in the wider region. For that, wider engagement and involvement of Arab states and aggressive track II and track III diplomacy approaches would certainly minimise the impact of the problem and transform perceptions from both sides.

Israeli Settlements in the occupied territories

The settlements present a serious obstacle to negotiations as they complicate the agreement and they make it politically harder for the Palestinian authority to engage in negotiations.

The settlements increase the risk of violent frictions between the settlers and the Palestinians, which complicates the territorial and diplomatic compromise during negotiations.

Although the issue of settlements could be overcome via land swaps during negotiations, the building of any further settlements must be frozen. Bilateral arrangement can be put in place for any security concerns of Israel.

The Issue of Refugees

The length of the conflict has deepened the issue of refugees as stated by Dr Wilf, who claimed that the fourth generation of Palestinians in Gaza are still claiming the right of return to Israel.

Professor Hassassian responded that the

Palestinian Authority has a comprehensive practical resolution to the issue of refugees

There are reasons to believe that fewer refugees would ultimately choose to return to their original homes inside Israel than the numbers cited by both Israeli and Palestinian sides. A resolution of this issue requires a broader agreement that can bring all host Arab states, including Lebanon and Syria, on board in a comprehensive peace settlement. Securing the residency and citizenship rights of Palestinian refugees will require regional agreements.

This is another issue that we see that Arab states should take part in implementing a practical resolution to.



Peace Mediators

The United States' close relationship with Israel is an asset that has played a key role to initiate the negotiations aiming at a two-state solution. Their stance has been geared towards promoting a resolution through negotiations between the two parties themselves. The United States is the only international actor that has been taking this responsibility upon themselves to work towards bringing the parties together around the negotiation table.

As the only actor with enough leverage to push the parties towards a negotiation, the United

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States is often held responsible for any slow down or failure of the process. In contrast the other members of the Quartet have been idle in their efforts to make any significant contribution to the process.

Further involvement of other members of the Quartet is required in proposing and implementing measures that guarantee the sustainability of the post conflict era.



Oslo Agreement

According to the Palestinian Ambassador, the Oslo agreement's incremental approach has not worked. The Oslo Agreement has initiated the route that is still on-going and there are definitely lessons to learn from the implementation itself, especially with regards to the failure of the process and the agreement to sustain.

The Oslo Agreement has undoubtedly transformed the dynamism of the conflict with more initiatives being proposed following it and paved the way for the real starting point of different track II diplomacy actions that have taken place over the last two decades.

Local politics

The main barrier to the any resolution remains the local politics from both sides. Tough compromises need to be made by both if any kind of resolution is to be sought. Any agreements will see stern opposition from opponents from both sides.

We have had two leaders in the past (Anwar Sadat and Yitzhak Rabin) from the region, who paid with their lives for the pursuit of peace. Scepticism and opposition to viability of the peace process will remain part of the formula that decision makers from both sides need to deal with.

Strong international support for the efforts of the Israelis and Palestinians is required. The commitment of both sides to put any agreement for referendum presents a guarantee for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Global Diplomatic Forum

- Laying the Ground for the Post-Conflict Middle East

Achieving peace in the Middle East may seem at times a ‘mission impossible’, however, one should remember that peace in the region has been achieved between Israel and Egypt; and Israel and Jordan.

In both cases, the peace agreements have withstood the test of time. These two peace agreements were reached through negotiations. The question of normalisation between these two countries and Israel is debatable depending on how one sees normalisation. For example, in the current political situation in Egypt, the biggest sin any party can accuse the other party of is collaboration with Israel. This is a country that has had a peace agreement with Israel for more than 30 years.

Taking into consideration the context of the peace agreement and the fragile environment in which it was achieved one could be forgiven for saying that achieving peace was enough in itself. More efforts and some courageous decisions should be made on all sides if normalisation is ever to be achieved. Normalisation will involve 23 countries and millions of people living in and outside the region. It will require education about the other and transformation of perceptions, thinking and actions towards the other. It is a process which should culminate in replacing fear and hatred with mutual trust and tolerance. It should also facilitate reconciliation and promote co-existence and partnership.

However, there are vital steps that need to be taken even before we get to that stage. For example, we cannot wait until the agreement is reached to start the process of transforming the mind-set of people to accept the new situation.

Real interaction between people from Israel and the Arab world to discuss the shape of the post conflict Middle East should be encouraged – and it’s part of our mission at Global Diplomatic Forum to facilitate the engagement.



Global Diplomatic Forum

- Laying the Ground for the Post-Conflict Middle East

With respect to catalysing change, the Global Diplomatic Forum organised the Young Diplomat's Forum in Turkey in September 2013. The event was attended by 100 young leaders from 70 countries.

One of the participants from Israel (David) stated after the forum:

"As an Israeli, it was inspiring to meet young leaders from countries like Pakistan, Morocco, Libya and Iraq, and discover that everyone had a common dream of peace and of a better future for our region".

Another participant from Pakistan referred to David in his [Article](#) in a Pakistani Newspaper:

"Being an international conference, there were ample opportunities to witness cross-cultural bonding. Thus, we had an Israeli delegate taking good care of his Pakistani roommate when he fell ill".

One of our Moroccan attendees wrote an [Article](#) on promoting interaction between Israelis and Arabs as part of education.

New generations in the region will be looking beyond deterring and boycotting each other. The Global Diplomatic Forum is committed to playing an active role as a facilitator of track two and track three diplomacy platforms.



Support the Middle East and North Africa Programme

The Middle East and North Africa Programme present opportunities to examine different angles in approaching the diplomatic dynamism in the region.

As an independent NGO without core funding from national governments or private sector companies, the Global Diplomatic Forum is financed through participation costs, individual grants for specific events, contributions and donations, sponsorship and in-kind support in the form of reduced rates for services.

The Global Diplomatic Forum is also reliant on the support of individuals, organisations, and companies in the form of donations. This support is vital to ensure the continued independence of the Global Diplomatic Forum.



If you would like to support this specific project and would like to know more about this programme please contact us at:

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We will be happy to provide you with any further information.