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Two-State Solution Slipping Away! Do Not Miss the Opportunity to Reverse the Negative Trends

The report published last week by the Quartet – the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations – presents an analysis that should come as no surprise to anyone. The negative trends on the ground continue to jeopardise prospects for peace and diminish the prospects for a two-state solution.

Palestinian frustration after half a century of occupation, dozens of failed peace efforts cannot be wished away; it cannot be vanquished by aggressive security measures, continued illegal settlement activities in the occupied West Bank, arrests or punitive home demolitions. Neither is it helped when Israeli ministers openly reject the very notion of a Palestinian state, call for the complete annexation of the West Bank or rush to approve more settlement construction.

But neither will the violence and terror we are witnessing again help bring about a Palestinian state. A peaceful future for both peoples cannot emerge on the back of statements that glorify terror and justify killing; mutual respect cannot come as a result of stabbings, shootings and car-rammings.

Most Palestinians have lived with the humiliation of occupation all their lives. They do not need the Quartet to tell them about the devastating impact of the illegal settlement enterprise on their lives, their economy, and their legitimate aspirations for an independent, sovereign, viable state. For them, a nine-page report could never fully capture what it is like to live under a military rule which governs every aspect of their daily existence and which has the power of life and death over them and their children. The shooting of 15 year old Mahmoud Raafat Badran, on his way home from a swimming pool is the latest testament to this sad predicament. No army should kill children by mistake.

Equally so, Israelis know that continuing terrorist attacks, the incitement which encourages such acts, and the ongoing militant activity in Gaza are major obstacles not just to peace, but to rebuilding trust. The recent murder of Hallel Yaffa Ariel provided further testimony to that. Heroes do not kill sleeping children. Most Israelis have lived with such fears all their lives. It is also clear that the takeover of Gaza undermines the ability to achieve and implement a negotiated solution.

Given this stark reality, Palestinians and Israelis have, understandably, reached a point where many on both sides have lost faith in the other's commitment to a future of two states living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition. Many of them have also grown critical of the international community – some thinking it is not doing enough to resolve this conflict while others see it as overly involved with it.

At the end of the day, the sad reality for peoples on both sides of the conflict is that the things which they hold most dear - statehood and security - are slipping further away.

The report published by the Quartet sends two very clear messages. First, to those who hope that the international community would somehow abandon this conflict and let it descend in a deteriorating status quo to perpetual chaos, we say: no, you are wrong. The report reflects the determination of the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations not to look away, but to expose and

draw attention to the problems in a more detailed and uncompromising manner than ever before and to hold the leaderships to account on their actions and inactions.

Second, to those who hope that the international community will enforce a solution on this conflict, we say: you, too, are wrong. No third party can decide for Israelis or Palestinians what compromises to make and what risks to take for peace. None of us can convince them to begin trusting each other. What the international community can and must do is to provide the parties with support and incentives to take the right path, the one towards peace, in line with commitments they have already made to each other and before the world. We must pledge to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) through negotiations in a manner that resolves all permanent status issues, meets Palestinian aspirations for statehood and Israeli security needs.

The report describes the Quartet's view on the main obstacles blocking the path forward, and what needs to be done to overcome them. Both have been critical of the report.

But can anyone deny that violence is a problem for rebuilding trust? Who will make the argument that more cannot be done to end incitement?

Can anyone question the fact that illegal settlements, the taking of land for exclusive Israeli use and the prevention of Palestinian development in Area C of the occupied West Bank are not undermining the prospect for a two-state solution? Who will say that the Russian Federation, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations are wrong when they call for these policies to stop?

Who can question the need to fully lift the closures on Gaza, end militant activity and reunite it under one single legitimate leadership?

This conflict is so complex and so long-standing, that any expectation of a quick fix that resolves all final status issues is at best naïve, and at worst a cynical strategy to avoid the painstaking work needed to rebuild trust and create conditions for a realistic, serious and ultimately successful negotiations that will end the occupation that began in 1967 and realize a two state solution. No one is talking about yet another new transitional agreement but rather about implementing what both sides have already agreed upon and changing reality on the ground to pave the road for the final deal.

The Quartet report sounds an alarm bell that we are on a dangerous slope towards a one state reality that is incompatible with the national aspirations of both peoples.

The international community stands ready to engage both with Israeli and Palestinian leaders on the implementation of the report's recommendations. We believe that if they take up this challenge, in cooperation with regional actors, Palestinians and Israelis will experience a positive change in their lives and sense renewed hope – a first and necessary step towards a future in which they can each live in freedom and dignity on their ancestral homeland, as good neighbours and masters of their own fate. I urge leaders on both sides not to miss this opportunity.