

Creating a Comprehensive Peace Plan

This non-paper outlines practical steps to re-initiate the Middle East Peace Process, building on the preparatory work of the Peace Day Effort and the European Council's support for holding a peace conference "soon". It elaborates, with practical proposals, on the agreed principle that only a political, sustainable, long-term solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will bring peace to the two peoples and stability to the region.

The present document does not presume to address how to deal with the terror attacks by Hamas on and since 7 October 2023, nor with the dire humanitarian situation or the conduct or conclusion of the Gaza war. These vital and urgent matters are discussed elsewhere, including in the Orientation Note shared by the HRVP to the Foreign Affairs Council for its meeting of 11 December 2023.

This non-paper aims to address the conflict and occupation that preceded the Gaza war and that, if left unaddressed, must be expected to lead to further wars. It argues that in view of the current situation and despite the evident difficulties and uncertainties, the time to prepare for comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace is now.

Ending the Gaza War Entails Starting a Comprehensive Peace Process

1. It is in the vital interest of the European Union to address the situation in Gaza, the war, and the terrorist threat. To do this we must deal now with the future security of Israelis and Palestinians, the stabilization of the occupied territories, and the early recovery and governance of Gaza. Preparing for the post-war period necessarily includes starting an initiative to conclude the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts.
2. In the absence of a peace process to achieve the two State solution, any governance and security mechanism established in Gaza or elsewhere will be perceived as an extension of the occupation and a denial of Palestinian rights, and will therefore create further security risks. In addition, Arab and other States explicitly condition their possible contributions to a post-war Gaza to the start of a comprehensive peace process leading to Israeli-Palestinian peace. Moreover, the absence of a peace process will prolong the current violence and provide a feeding ground for more radicalization and conflict to come. This will endanger Israelis and Palestinians, but is also a major security, political and migratory risk for the region and Europe. Therefore, it is necessary now to advance comprehensive peace as soon as possible.

Comprehensive Peace and the Need for Peace Partners

3. There is no credible comprehensive solution other than an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, in peace and security, with full normalization and substantive development of security and economic cooperation between Israel, Palestine

and the region. An effort to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace could have positive consequences when addressing the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian conflicts.

4. It is unrealistic to assume that Israelis and Palestinians (the latter represented by the PLO and the PA), will in the near future directly engage in bilateral peace negotiations to achieve comprehensive peace, let alone conclude such negotiations, without strong international involvement. Palestinians will need a revitalized political alternative to Hamas, while Israelis will need to find the political will to engage in meaningful negotiations towards the two State solution. Therefore, it is the responsibility of outside actors, i.e. their partners and neighbours such as the EU, to help the conflict parties by preparing the ground for comprehensive peace.

A Preparatory Peace Conference

5. Building on the cooperation established in the Peace Day Effort, the EU, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the League of Arab States, should at the earliest opportunity organize a Preparatory Peace Conference for potential contributors to comprehensive peace. They should extend an invitation to the United States and other key actors such as the United Nations to be part of the Conveners. This Conference may address the situation of the Gaza war if at that time it is still ongoing, but its fundamental objective should be to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
6. Following the format of the Peace Day Effort, the Preparatory Peace Conference should convene Foreign Ministers and Heads of relevant International Organizations willing and able to contribute to comprehensive peace. The Conveners should, near-simultaneously, organize separate meetings with each of the conflict parties. The conflict parties are an integral part of the peace effort, but cannot be compelled to sit with each other. Neither can contributing States be compelled to sit with any conflict party they refuse to meet. This format, therefore, allows work to start even if one or more of the parties is not yet ready to participate or to sit with any other party.
7. At the Preparatory Peace Conference, the Conveners should present an initial draft framework for a Peace Plan, and invite all interested States and International Organizations to add to its further development. The Conveners should provide an agenda to complete the initial framework Peace Plan within one year, through working groups to which interested States and International Organizations can make contributions.

Developing a Peace Plan

8. The Peace Plan should combine and set out as practically as possible the central elements of comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace, respecting relevant UNSC Resolutions. It should be inspired by and build on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, European Union Council Conclusions, the 2020 Arab-Israeli normalization agreements and the interim results of previous US-led peace negotiations.

9. An essential element of the Peace Plan should be the development of robust security assurances for Israel and the future independent State of Palestine, conditional upon full mutual diplomatic recognition and integration of both Israel and Palestine in the region. The Peace Plan should also include the Peace Supporting Package envisioned in the Peace Day Effort. This means that it should state, as clearly and to the extent possible, which regional and global political and security mechanisms and other agreements and projects will be made available the day the parties conclude their peace agreement.

Engagement with the Conflict Parties

10. Permanently, at every step and at any time in the development of the Peace Plan, the Conveners should consult the conflict parties. Nevertheless, work on the development of the Peace Plan should start, and continue, also at times that one or other of the conflict parties is not ready to engage.
11. Once completed, the Peace Plan should be presented to the conflict parties. It will be for them to negotiate the final text. In order to favour those negotiations, the contributing States and International Organizations should at that point set out the consequences they envisage to attach to engagement or non-engagement with the Peace Plan.

Parallel Efforts

12. While the Peace Plan is developed, parallel efforts are needed to: offer humanitarian relief, obtain the release of the hostages, prevent regional escalation; end the current war; provide for recovery and reconstruction of Gaza and the affected communities in Southern Israel; stabilize the occupied territories; strengthen the Palestinian Authority's democratic legitimacy and its ability to assume its governing functions in Gaza; preserve the two State solution on the ground; achieve a more inclusive PLO and PA on the basis of a commitment to the two State solution and non-violence; strengthen security for Israelis, Palestinians and their neighbours; and communicate the need for comprehensive peace. These matters may be included on the agenda of the Preparatory Peace Conference and in meetings with the conflict parties.