**Chairmen's Report on
the High-level Expert Group Meeting**

"The Islamic World and the West"

Chaired by

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ISRAEL VS. PALESTINE

Rooted in a conflict centuries old, a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine is critical to the region and to the world as a whole. The goals of both Israel and Palestine, in the resolution of their conflict, represent the goals of the world at large; lasting peace and international security. In an effort to better understand the problems facing the international community in relation to this conflict, the InterAction Council High-level Expert Group Meeting, held on the 27th and 28th April 2006 in Amman, Jordan, was convened to tackle the walls that surround the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. After concentrated discussion, participants of the High-level Expert Group Meeting developed a series of recommendations for the development of an enduring peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine.

Mutual Recognition

Mutual recognition, non-violence, and adherence to previous agreements from both sides are essential to the peace process moving forward.

Israel and the international community must recognise the role that Palestine's democratically elected government plays in contributing to the efficacy of the process for peace. It was recognised that Hamas won the 2006 election, and for this reason, it is crucial that the international community take immediate action to engage the Palestinian Authority in a political process based on dialogue, in order to revive the peace process and allow for renewed economic support.

Respect for International Law

International law embodies a wisdom and sense of reasonableness in human behaviour and provides an alternative to violence. The peace process can only be sustained by respect and adherence, on both sides of the conflict, for the rule of law.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is perpetuated by physical and psychological barriers that prevent a peaceful and secure co-existence between the two parties. The ongoing construction of the Israeli wall on occupied territory, which has been pronounced illegal by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), instigates conflict. The continued construction of the wall on occupied territory, in defiance of the ICJ ruling, demonstrates unwillingness on the part of Israel to adhere to its obligations under international law and has symbolic and substantive relevance for the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The Role of the International Community

It is time for the United States (U.S.), Russia, the European Union and the United Nations to produce a clear plan of action for the further implementation of the Roadmap for Peace. Other parties should also play a role in facilitating the peace agreement.

One of the key dilemmas to the resolution of the conflict arises from contradictory views about what constitutes a fair and just solution. It is the inability of both parties to recognise this material gap that contributes to the dispute. The international community should play an important role in assisting the parties to negotiate this gap. One of the most important tasks of the international community is to exert equal and balanced pressure on both Israel and Palestine to move forward in the peace process.

Neither party to the conflict will abandon its current position without incentives to move toward a peaceful settlement. Identifying the interests of Israel, Palestine, and the international community is key to resolving the conflict. All parties must be engaged in this process, reaching a mutual peace through the implementation of mutual conditions agreeable to all.

The international community must continue to provide humanitarian aid to the Palestinians to prevent any further deterioration of living conditions. In this respect, Japan and others that provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians serve as a model to other nations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The High-level Expert Group recommends taking collective action to ensure peace and stability between Israel and Palestine by:

1. Reinforcing the notion that mutual recognition, non-violence and adherence to previous agreements by both sides are essential to the peace process moving forward;

2. Calling upon both Israelis and Palestinians to respect international human rights and humanitarian law;

3. Calling for the cessation of all acts of violence carried out by both Israelis and Palestinians;

4. Engaging the democratically elected Palestinian government in a political process based on dialogue in order to revive the peace process and allow for renewed economic support to the Palestinian Authority;

5. Recognising that isolation of Hamas will only lead to further radicalisation and risks increased internal fighting and fragmentation of the Palestinian society;

6. Underlining that a unilateral decision by Israel on its borders will not produce a durable solution, nor will it give Israel security and legitimacy;

7. Stressing that only a political settlement based on negotiations, acceptable to both parties, will produce a durable peace and the integration of Israel into the Middle East;

8. Acknowledging that the political formula for this solution is well known, and that a delay in implementation will only result in further loss of life and human suffering;

9. Calling upon Israel to comply with the ruling of the International Court of Justice with respect to the construction of the Israeli wall on occupied territory, and recognising that the construction of the separation wall has a negative impact on the overall peace process and aggravates the humanitarian and social situation for many Palestinians;

10. Calling upon the Quartet to produce a clear statement and direction on the implementation of the Roadmap for Peace;

11. Encouraging all states to support Palestinians by providing humanitarian aid and economic support.

ACHIEVING PEACE IN IRAQ

The stakes in Iraq are extremely high. The Coalition still does not know how to resolve the problem it has created, how to persuade Iraqis to join together, and how to achieve lasting peace and security in Iraq. Continued instability in Iraq threatens the balance of the region and the security of the globe. Myriad issues plague Iraq: for the first time in history Baghdad is governed by a non-Sunni-centred regime; the territorial boundaries of Iraq, a product of colonial line drawing, brings together three distinct groups who are required to cooperate to form a democratic government; the decision to go to war in Iraq is mired by controversies and debate; and lacking a clear exit strategy for the occupying coalition forces, the U.S. faces the prospect of humiliating defeat and irreversible sectarian strife.

The best way to address the Iraqi conflict is for the U.S. to have the political wisdom and courage to acknowledge that its policies regarding Iraq have been unsuccessful. Given the results of the American intervention, the most difficult issue facing the international community now is how to reverse the situation and help create a stable, secure, and democratic Iraq. In the face of increasing sectarianism and with Iraq on a path to civil war, the international community has an obligation to discuss alternatives to the U.S.-led military presence and to address the current instability within Iraq. While complete consensus on this issue may be currently unachievable, the international community should exert its influence by proposing several alternatives to the status quo.

The first alternative is for the U.S. to firmly indicate its intention to commit to a complete, unconditional military withdrawal within a set timeline. This alternative rests on the notion that the best way to overcome political violence in Iraq is for a withdrawal to occur in a way that creates the strongest possible incentive for an internal political solution. Continued U.S. control through occupying coalition forces in Iraq shifts the distribution of influence and power in Iraq, and prevents Shiite and Kurdish Iraqis from having an incentive to reconcile with Sunni Iraqis. If the U.S. does not set a timetable for withdrawal it risks losing the support of the American people, adding fuel to the insurgency, and increasing the prospect of civil war and a humiliating defeat for the U.S.

A second alternative recognised that withdrawal by the U.S. may not be possible within a set timetable and that it should continue to provide security in Iraq, while training and preparing indigenous Iraqi security forces for a future handover. A withdrawal of the American presence too soon would leave a great vacuum of power that may plunge Iraq deep into civil war. This plan envisions training and educating Iraqi security forces along non-sectarian lines. This alternative also recognises the role of Americans in protecting civilians from insurgencies and sectarian violence. However, a continued U.S. presence should envision that the U.S. comes to the table with a plan for its commitment to relinquish power and control to Iraq once it has achieved security and stability.

The final alternative calls for a multi-national "replacement" security force to take the place of the U.S.-led coalition force in Iraq. The replacement security force should be comprised of forces from impartial third party and non-neighbouring Arab countries. A replacement force should not be imposed upon Iraq, but instead should reflect a representative expression of Iraqi consent through its democratically elected political structures. Neighbouring countries of Iraq have a crucial role to play in economic and social reconstruction. States in the region should invest in the process of national reconciliation by providing a platform for the Iraqis to come together to discuss and resolve the issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The High-level Expert Group recommends taking collective action to ensure the security and stability in Iraq by:

1. Recognising that the continued conflict in Iraq could soon transform into a full fledged civil war that seriously destabilises the whole region;

2. Urging the replacement of the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq with a multi-national security force comprised of impartial third parties and non-neighbouring Arab countries, in full coordination with the democratically elected government of Iraq;

3. Recognising that the U.S. must continue to maintain the security situation in Iraq until the multi-national replacement security force is operational;

4. Prioritising efforts to rebuild the Iraqi security forces along non-sectarian lines in order for it to ultimately take full responsibility for the security situation;

5. Increasing global and regional support for economic and social reconstruction, institution building, and the process of national reconciliation;

6. Recognising that religious leaders have a role to play in shaping a harmonious solution for the prevention of sectarianism amongst Iraq's disparate factions.

THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND THE WEST

The terrorist attacks perpetrated on September 11 by the Islamist al-Qaeda group drew world attention to the relationship between the West and the Muslim world. But there has been a failure to distinguish between the religion of Islam, and terrorism, which emanates from small groups who have deviated from the fundamental teachings of Prophet Mohamed. The resolve to fight terrorism has rarely been accompanied by an attempt to acquire a better understanding of Islam, its foundations and its history. The process of escalating hostility could cause severe damage to the West and to the peoples of 60 Muslim countries in the world.

In framing the discussion, it is first necessary to examine the prevailing myths that accompany the "Islam vs. the West" debate. It is important to recognise the extent to which the Huntington theses, which described a "clash of civilisations" between the Muslim and Western worlds, has narrowed the parameters of the debate.

It must be noted that in the dialogue of a "clash of civilisations" it is easy to become entrenched in the dichotomy of Islam vs. the West, rich countries vs. poor countries, and religious extremism vs. secularism. However, each of these disparate positions represents a spectrum of human thought. It is important to recognise that there are many globalisations, many interpretations of Islam, and many ways of thinking about what constitutes the West.

Although characterised as a clash of religious extremisms, the issues between Muslim and Western nations comprise a number of geopolitical, economic, and cultural factors. Globalisation, cultural identity, politics, power, and poverty each play a distinct role in the relationship between the Muslim world and the West.

There is no consensus on globalisation and its effect on the Muslim world. To the latter, globalisation is generally associated with Americanisation and, relatedly, to secularism. Some Muslim states thrive under globalisation, eagerly adapting to the principle of a free market economy. However, many states are not yet benefiting and

many Muslim populations remain suspicious of globalisation, viewing it as a threat to their cultural and religious identity. The desire to reject globalisation is not a phenomenon confined only to the Muslim world. In the West, diverse groups are also concerned with the negative effects of globalisation.

Identity is integrally connected to how a people perceive its cultural history. Western civilisations tend to be selective in recalling their history. For the post-World War II generation in Europe, the days of colonisation and imperial rule are a part of the distant past. Globalisation, democracy, and liberal economies are the future. To the Arab world, however, history plays an important role in cultural identity. Arab nations view the present as one that has been shaped by a past of humiliating defeat and Western colonisation. Western concepts are often perceived by the Arab world as interference by the West and an attempt to export a particular culture and tradition.

If the Muslim world is perceived as weak, and the Western world as powerful, then the imbalance of world power leads to the classical conflict of power sharing amongst nations. Differences between the Muslim world and the West cannot be viewed as only differences of culture and religion or be blamed on a lack of understanding between the two. The struggle is largely rooted in territorial conflict and the sharing of power. The Muslim and Western worlds must focus on conflict resolution and the creation of a system for security of the region if they wish to enhance peaceful co-existence.

It is critical that we seek to understand how Western actions are viewed by many followers of Islam, even moderate followers. The perception in the Muslim world is that it is being cornered by U.S. intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, and continued military presence in the region. The territorial conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis remains a primary catalyst of conflict between the Muslim world and the West. It provides Islamists with a motive to oppose Western governments and to launch terrorist activities against the West and Israel, which is responded to by the U.S.-led "war on terror."

Poverty, the need for development, a lack of respect for human rights and an unequal distribution of wealth in many Arab countries all contribute to the rivalry between Arab and Western nations. These issues can be characterised as a perceived difference between the "haves" and the "have nots." The demand for oil will continue to exacerbate this conflict, as the struggle to control a dwindling oil supply relative to world demand increases geopolitical pressure.

Finally, religious extremism also plays an important role on both sides. Extremism emerges in the interplay between civilisations, but greatly influences the world's powers. In the U.S., elements of neo-conservatism influence decisions in Washington D.C., while in the Muslim world, elements of radical Islamism capitalise on dissatisfaction with globalisation.

Ultimately the goal for both civilisations is justice and dignity, such that we can all enjoy the fruits of a civilisation based on the common bond of humanity. From the complex situation of diverse cultures, religions and expectations, some common ground must be identified.

Achieving justice and dignity requires an understanding of both ourselves and of others. Those who do not understand themselves cannot know others. Those who are blind to the past are blind to the present, as well as to their future. Respect and understanding are the prerequisites for the protection of universal values of human dignity, liberty, equality, the right to participation and respect for fundamental human rights. These basic values apply to all.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The High-level Expert Group recommends taking collective action to resolve conflict between the Muslim world and the West by:

1. Dispelling the perception of a simple "clash of civilisations" and "war of religions" in order to focus efforts on a dialogue of justice, development and freedom for all;

2. Developing multi-faceted dialogue between the West and the Muslim world on issues of faith, culture and the sharing of resources;

3. Engaging in reciprocal communication: for the West to acknowledge that the globalisation process requires respect for Islamic faith and Muslim culture and for the Muslim world to communicate that it respects Western values;

4. Promoting dialogue that allows moderate voices on both sides to meaningfully contribute to global solutions;

5. Educating the next generation and teaching them to respect and learn from cultural diversity;

6. Reinforcing that the ultimate goal for both civilisations is justice and dignity, such that we can all enjoy the fruits of a unified human civilisation.

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