

European Statesmen Support a US Peace Initiative in the Middle East

In this statement, European statesmen endorse the initiative of a group of American senior former officials, and call for parallel efforts in Europe to support President Obama in his new policy towards the Middle East and his approach to reach a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians

President Obama is setting forth on an entirely new path in the Middle East with great courage. He has broken with the previous policies and is engaging in an effort to build for the future. His address in Cairo testifies to this.

Within days of becoming President of the United States, Obama was urged to throw his energies into resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The call came from ten former US government officials representing both major political parties; their eminence lends their appeal great importance as the new American foreign policy unfolds.

The group issued a report* which we believe offers a clear-sighted view of the situation and proposes a balanced, effective and fair approach for resolving the conflict. It will remain involved and continue to offer ideas and support to the White House as the President pursues his efforts to broker a peace settlement.

We think, as does the American group, that the Israelis and Palestinians are not in a position to restart the peace process by themselves. In the current context, the United States, and the President himself, have a unique responsibility to initiate a process for a settlement based on principles already agreed by Israelis and Palestinians.

The US group is correct in stressing the *need for a two state solution* based on the lines of June 4, 1967, with minor, reciprocal, and agreed-upon modifications as expressed in a one to one land swap, to take into account areas heavily populated by Israelis in the West Bank. In this regard, we believe that the course of the *Wall*, and even its very existence, will need to be revised within the framework of a comprehensive settlement.

The *refugee* problem would be settled in a way consistent with the two-state solution, which does not entail a general right of return, but addresses the Palestinian refugees' sense of injustice, and provides them with meaningful financial compensation as well as resettlement assistance.

As for *Jerusalem*, the city would be home to both capitals, with Jewish neighbourhoods falling under Israeli sovereignty and Arab neighbourhoods under Palestinian sovereignty, with special arrangements for the Old City providing each side control of its respective holy places and unimpeded access by each community to them.

The Palestinian state would be *demilitarized* and provided with security mechanisms that address Israeli concerns while respecting Palestinian sovereignty.

Finally, a *multinational force* would be deployed to ensure a peaceful transitional security period. This coalition peacekeeping structure, under United Nations mandate, would include American leadership of a NATO force supplemented by Jordanians, Egyptians and others.

For Palestinians to be empowered again as a reliable partner, capable of reaching and implementing an agreement, they need to form a *national unity government* that includes Hamas. Israel itself, through its indirect negotiation with Hamas, has acknowledged that the movement is simply too important and powerful to be ignored.

Washington should therefore shift its objective from ousting Hamas to modifying its behaviour, offer it inducements that will help promote a moderate vision within its ranks, and cease discouraging third parties from engaging with Hamas in ways that might help clarify the movement's views and test its behaviour.

The US should actively encourage Palestinian national reconciliation and make clear that a government that agrees to a ceasefire with Israel accepts President Mahmoud Abbas as the chief negotiator, and commits to abiding by the results of a national referendum on a future peace agreement would not be boycotted or sanctioned.

We firmly endorse the parameters proposed by the American Eminent Persons Group and look forward to advancing European initiatives consonant with the spirit and vision of our American counterparts.

President Obama's address in Cairo was a defining speech, inspired and sincere, likely to convince all those who had lost hope of seeing the Middle East live in peace one day. It is clear to us that Europe should help him in every way it can to pursue his efforts in spite of the inevitable obstacles that will emerge.

Signatories:

Alain Juppé, Chris Patten, Clare Short, Erkki Tuomioja, Helmut Schmidt, Hubert Védrine, Jorge Sampaio, Lena Hjelm-Wallén, Lionel Jospin, Louis Michel, Mary Robinson, Massimo d'Alema, Michel Rocard, Richard von Weizsäcker, Romano Prodi, Simone Veil, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Teresa Patrício Gouveia, Jean François-Poncet, Felipe Gonzalez, Giuliano Amato and Peter Sutherland

** The ten authors of the US report "A Last Chance for a Two-State Israel-Palestine Agreement" are Brent Scowcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Chuck Hagel, Lee H. Hamilton, Carla Hills, Nancy Kassebaum-Baker, Thomas R. Pickering, Theodore C. Sorensen, Paul A. Volcker, and James D. Wolfensohn.*

The full text can be accessed on the US-Middle East Project website www.usmep.us

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