

Peace in the Mideast will come only with international help



Palestinians erect a makeshift tent among the rubbles of destroyed buildings in Beit Lahiya town in the northern Gaza Strip, 07 August 2014. At least 1,886 people have been killed and more than 9,800 injured in the month since the start of the Israeli operation in Gaza, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. (Mohammed Saber/EPA)

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Negotiations to end the fighting in Gaza are at an impasse. In the talks under way in Cairo, Israel made a reasonable demand for the demilitarization of Gaza, but no country has raised its hand to aid in the process. Israel has developed technological fixes for the offensive weaponry Hamas has developed, but this is simply a reaction, not a permanent fix, to potential violence.

Hamas's demand for the release of prisoners and the reopening of Gaza's passages also will not win unconditional acceptance; Israel will not hand over prisoners to Hamas. Even if the passages are opened, Hamas will not be involved in their operation. Despite trying to build a political coalition against Israel, Hamas will emerge from this war with only Qatar and Turkey in its corner, and an array of Arab and international actors opposed to what it stands for.

Unless Israel and the Palestinians develop a pathway forward, these violent encounters will recur every few years, with military capability simply buying time between wars.

If nothing else, this war has made abundantly clear that the status quo in the Israeli-Palestinian arena is not

sustainable. Amazingly, however, rather than see this and realize the need for continued diplomacy, the leaders have hardened their positions even further: [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said](#) that Israel would never relinquish security control of the West Bank, and Palestinian President [Mahmoud Abbas said](#) Palestine will seek to join the International Criminal Court.

The current Israeli and Palestinian leadership may not see a way out, but I refuse to see endless conflict as a fait accompli. There is a pathway forward that could translate the fighting in Gaza into something meaningful and positive. Lasting peace demands a creative, multipronged approach.

First, the international community must play a far more prominent role in peacemaking. Since 2002, [an Arab Peace Initiative](#) has been on the table, and there is increasing interest in developing a regional approach to peace. At the same time, the immediate issue at hand is how to govern Gaza and create conditions conducive to peace. One way would be to temporarily internationalize the governance of Gaza. The international Quartet (the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia) and key Arab states (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others) could structure a transitional governance arrangement over Gaza as a means of addressing the immediate needs of the population while paving the way for the ultimate assumption of responsibility by the Palestinian Authority. Such an arrangement would also facilitate the protection of Palestinian civilians, an issue surely to occupy the attention of diplomats in the period ahead.

To give this idea legal and political weight, the U.N. Security Council could ask key Arab states to form a temporary governing body that would coordinate closely with the [May 2014-created Palestinian Authority cabinet](#). This temporary body would start disarming all militias and facilitating the deployment of [Palestinian Authority security forces to maintain order](#). At the same time, an internationally supported security mechanism would be set up to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza. This would be an impetus for the reopening of Gaza's passages to Israel and Egypt and provide a secure context for an international effort for the reconstruction of Gaza infrastructure and the development of the Palestinian economy. The E.U. is well-positioned to take the lead on this and has already developed serious proposals for reconstructing Gaza.

Second, as this transitional government comes into being, the Quartet would convene a regional conference designed to launch serious and practical [peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority](#) to devise a vision and process for resolving the underlying Palestinian-Israeli conflict. To ensure the success of the conference and succeeding negotiations, the Quartet would lay out ambitious terms of reference, and there would be active participation by regional Arab states.

Furthermore, when the conference is convened, the Palestinian Authority would agree to freeze its activities in the U.N. system, and Israel would release the remaining prisoners to the authority under the [agreement reached in July 2013](#). During negotiations, Israel would freeze settlement activity in all the areas occupied in [June 1967](#), and the authority would intensify steps to curb incitement in media and education.

Some will question the viability of a plan that requires such a level of activity, commitment and direct involvement of outside parties. Others will question why it is assumed that Hamas would accept being sidelined. And there is the large question of whether the current leadership in Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization are ready to take the hard decisions even to get to a conference, let alone sustain negotiations and reach a positive outcome.

Surely, if there were easier options, they would be advisable and more manageable. But there are no easy options for what ails Israelis and Palestinians. Another de facto cease-fire will solve nothing, and another lull in hostilities will yield nothing more than a brief respite between wars. Further delay is not an option. If we are to emerge from the current hostilities with even a small prospect of a durable solution — and not a temporary fix that will unravel again in a few years — then a package of this sort, and the leadership to make it happen, is required.