



The Arab Press position paper

Preparing for a new peace process MES delegations present their positions

The delegation's position papers have been received with great excitement, as they form the basis of discussions and debates of the upcoming MES conference, a unique opportunity of renewing and enforcing the Middle East peace process.

Representing the Palestinian people, who have expressed hope and optimism towards the conference, the PLO first and foremost called upon Israel to take a position on the Arab Peace Initiative and respond with concrete offers. Citing the requirements of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the PLO argued that Israel's colonies in the occupied territories are illegal, and demanded an immediate freeze of Israelis settlement activities in this context. The Palestinian delegation also proposed to remove all incentives that cause Israelis to move into the occupied territories, while at the same time increasing incentives for current Israeli settlers to move back to Israeli territory. Stressing the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, the PLO furthermore emphasized the status of the city of Jerusalem as a subject to permanent negotiations, since Jerusalem cannot be a divided city, and explicitly stated that said negotiations need to concern the entire city and not merely East Jerusalem.

The Russian position paper gave firstly a brief description about the fundamental elements of the political Russian point of view of the conflict and the related topics like the Jewish immigration waves from the Soviet Union to Israel, Muslim minority in Russia and the relation between the conflict and the international stability.

Then it shows the previous attitude of the Russian government that accepted the two state solution. Afterwards a current Russian policy regarding the conflict parts has been discussed. According to this position paper, Russia has economically very strong relationships with Israel. On the other hand it supports Syria and Iran by arm sales and it allowed Hamas leader to meet the Russian president. The proposed solution from the Russian part of the conflict should be simply in the 2 states solution.

The Saudi position paper focused mainly on the Arab Peace Initiative that has been suggested by the Saudi government in Beirut in March 2002. This delegation assured the importance of the united nation, the United States of America, Russia, the Islamic countries, and the European Union roles in this conflict. It also emphasizes that establishing of a nuclear-free Middle East as weapons of mass destruction will lead to stability and security in this region.

The Turkish position paper began as in the Russian position paper with demonstrating the background of the Turkish role in this conflict from the year 2003, when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the election and then became most dominant political figure in Turkey since Ataturk. The paper claimed that Turkey as a major player in this conflict because it is the only country in the Middle East region that has good relations with all of the Arab countries, Iran, Israel, the EU and the US.

Thereafter, it throws light between the different parts in the conflict and Turkey. Due to the paper, the Israeli-Turkish relationships have been up and down according to the government on both sides. Obama's first visit after he won the election to Turkey points out the importance of Turkey in the region. The relationship between the EU and Turkey is governed by the Turkish attempts to be accepted in the EU. There are common interests between Turkey and Iran in the nuclear issues. Finally, this paper showed that generally Turkey has good relationships to the Arabic countries in the region.

Calling for "more imaginative ways of reengaging the Israelis in the search for peace", the European Union thoroughly advocates the two states solution and the Road Map initiated in 2003. It has become apparent that the EU sees itself as a second influential party (next to the US) that could take over mediation of negotiations on the international level if the US should not demonstrate higher commitment to an effective peace process. Stating that the credibility of the peace process has been damaged and needs to be restored, the delegation representing the EU argued for a more inclusive process and stressed the importance of dialogue. The EU once again called upon Israel to freeze settlement activities in the occupied territories and stated that it would conditionally support a Palestinian coalition government.

The Islamic Republic of Iran reminded the conference participants of the importance of compliance with the norms set forth by the Geneva Convention and stated that the Palestinian people need to be "integrated into the international community". However, no clear solution or conference goal was proposed and the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran did not explicitly mention how this integration should be designed. Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran stressed the right of return of Palestinian refugees and advocated for its implementation.

The Egyptian delegation made clear from the very beginning that Egypt sees itself as a leader in the peace process. The delegation proposed Egypt's leadership on a national level, while the US should take on the role of a leader within the peace process' international dimension. In this context, Egypt called upon the international community to accept its role as a leader and mediator and to commit to staying involved in the process. While Egypt did not present an explicit solution to the question of the status of Jerusalem, the delegation stated some clear positions on the process: advocating the two state solution, Egypt called for an immediate ceasefire, a freeze of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories, the implementation of UN resolutions 242 and 338, as well as the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. In this context, Egypt even mentioned a possible Palestinian coalition government. According to the honorable Egyptian delegation, the implementation of above-listed UN resolutions would finally lead to the deployment of international forces on the Egyptian border, preventing the increase of smuggling activity and enabling "normal commerce" in goods.

Finally, citing His Majesty King Abdullah II, the Jordanian delegation urged the international community to demonstrate more support for the peace process and emphasized the significant role of the "devastating economic situation" of the occupied territories. Surprisingly, this crucial point of the current conflict had not been stressed by other delegations so far. For a successful peace process, the economic implications of the current situation should constitute a primary concern. Calling for an "effective Arab unity" on the peace process, Jordan also urged Israel to demonstrate willingness and commitment. Furthermore, the delegation demanded the 1994 Israeli-Jordanian water resource agreement to stay intact throughout the peace process and beyond. Contrary to the PLO's position, however, Jordan sees Jerusalem as a divided city, serving as both a Palestinian and Israeli capital.

Unfortunately, the honorable delegations of the United States of America, Israel, and Lebanon have not yet published their position papers. As conference preparations have reached their peak, this is a big gap and participants are eagerly awaiting the respective countries' positions.