

Middle East on razor edge

Two-state solution under threat from continued violence and ever-expanding settlements on Palestinian land

Analysis

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SOUTH Africa participated in the recent conference in Paris aimed at reviving the Middle East peace process, which collapsed in 2014 with the outbreak of what has become known as the Fifty-Day Gaza War.

The Middle East peace process remains one of our foreign policy priorities.

Over the past two years envoys appointed by President Jacob Zuma, namely, former minister Zola Skweyiya and former deputy minister Aziz Pahad, have visited a number of countries in the Middle East region and interacted with leaders and opinion makers, soliciting views on how to revive and take forward the two-state solution.

South Africa fully supports the French initiative following the worrying silence and lack of dialogue since 2014.

This initiative is like a first raindrop after a long drought and we hope it will nourish the peace process.

In the past South Africa initiated dialogue between different groups of Palestinians and Israelis during which we shared South Africa's experience in negotiations, peace-building, constitution-building processes and the transition to democratic transformation.

Since 2014 we have watched with horror the destructive and deadly Gaza War, the sporadic acts of violence and counter violence and the heavy-handedness of the security establishment. We have listened to threats and counter threats.

South Africa holds the view that negotiations between Israel and Palestine should have a clear, mutually agreed framework with a reasonable timetable for implementation of agreed processes which will translate into a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The central responsibility for peace is in the hands of Palestinians and Israelis. The rest of the international community is ready to support and encourage the peace process.

We believe that dialogue is still possible. In fact, dialogue is the only way. The two-state solution, with all its shortcomings, is still the only way.

The conference in Paris was part of the French initiative on the Middle East peace process. It is expected that another, broader international conference will be held later this year that will bring in more countries, including Israel and Palestine.

That conference is expected to reignite a negotiations process between Israel and Palestine.

The recent Paris conference was before



PEACE: The writer reflects on the peace conference in Paris to revive prospects of peace and cooperation in the Middle East, and in the process to bring hope to this little girl with the ushering of something akin to the Pax Romana in the troubled Holy Land. PICTURE: GETTYIMAGE

a preparatory platform for the broader conference scheduled for later this year.

At the conference South Africa, together with the foreign ministers of more than 29 countries, including the permanent members of the UN Security Council, members of the Quartet, and the Arab Quartet led by the Arab League, reaffirmed their support for a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the outstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

They reaffirmed that a negotiated two-state solution is the only viable solution to achieving an enduring peace, with two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

We participated in the conference cognisant of the challenges engulfing the Middle East region, especially Israel and Palestine.

The two-state solution is under direct threat because of continued acts of violence and the ever-expanding settlements on Palestinian land that the international community has described as illegitimate and contrary to international law.

The participants at the conference called on both Israel and Palestine to demonstrate a genuine commitment to the two-state solution

KEY POINTS

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negotiations aimed at ending the occupation that began in 1967 and resolving all permanent status issues.

There is a body of reference that has been recognised by the international community as constituting the framework for such negotiations.

These include several UN Security Council resolutions spanning the years 1967 to 2008. In addition, the Madrid Principles of 1991, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 and the Quartet Roadmap of 2003 provide sufficient guidelines to move the process forward.

An open-ended approach becomes an unaffordable luxury as it would be oblivious to the reality on the ground and the constant risks of escalation.

South Africa appeals to all sections of the two nations to come back from the precipice and to seek a peaceful outcome. If this initiative fails we may live to regret the consequences.

Our country is committed to making whatever contribution we can to ensure that this initiative becomes a success.

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in order to rebuild trust and create the conditions for the resumption of meaningful direct