
Statement of the Middle East Quartet, Washington DC, 20 December 2002

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller, High Representative for European Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana, and European Commissioner for External Affairs Chris Patten met today in Washington with President Bush and Secretary of State Powell. In his meeting, President Bush expressed strong support for the efforts of the Quartet and his firm commitment to the Quartet's [Road Map](#), which would realize his vision of two states - Israel and Palestine - living side-by-side in peace and security.

Reaffirming their previous statements, the Quartet members reviewed developments since their last meeting, on September 17, 2002. They condemned the brutal terror attacks carried out by Palestinian extremist organizations since the last meeting, which aim to diminish the prospects for peace, and only harm legitimate Palestinian aspirations for statehood. The Quartet deplores the killing of innocent Palestinian civilians and UN employees in IDF security operations, and calls on the Government of Israel to review its rules of engagement and disciplinary procedures to avoid such civilian casualties.

The Quartet took stock of the results of the ongoing consultations with the parties on the elements of a three-phase performance-based and goal-driven Road Map to realize the vision expressed in President Bush's June 24 speech of two States - Israel and an independent, viable, sovereign, and democratic Palestine - living side-by-side in peace and security. The Quartet commended the constructive spirit that characterized its discussions with all parties. The Quartet, based upon a common understanding on the content and goals of this process, made substantial progress toward finalizing a Road Map for presentation to the parties in the near future. The Quartet agreed to further intensive work to develop a credible and effective monitoring mechanism. In the meantime, the Quartet calls on the parties to carry out as rapidly as possible their responsibilities to restore calm, pursue reforms, and improve the humanitarian situation - steps that will lead to a political process culminating in Palestinian statehood.

Specifically, the Quartet calls for an immediate, comprehensive cease-fire. All Palestinian individuals and groups must end all acts of terror against Israelis, in any location. In this regard, the Quartet welcomes the initiative of Egypt to work with Palestinians to achieve this end. Such a cease-fire should be accompanied by supportive measures undertaken by the government of Israel. As calm is established, Israeli forces should withdraw from Palestinian areas and the pre-Intifada status quo on the ground should be restored. The Quartet calls on the Palestinian leadership to work with the US and others to restructure and reform the Palestinian security services.

Recognizing the importance of well-prepared Palestinian elections to the process of building strong, democratic, institutions in preparation for statehood, the Quartet supports the accelerated work of the Constitutional Committee to draft a Palestinian constitution. The Quartet notes the progress made in the reform process under difficult circumstances and calls for increased efforts by the Palestinian Authority to move forward in a comprehensive and sustained manner, in cooperation with the Task Force on Palestinian Reform, on institutional reforms. In this context, the Quartet welcomes the initiative of the United Kingdom and Prime Minister Blair to convene a meeting early next year to encourage and accelerate the reform process.

The Quartet expresses concern at the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the West Bank. It calls for increased efforts by the Government of Israel to ease the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza. It also calls on Israel and the Palestinians to implement fully the recommendations of the Bertini report. The Quartet welcomes the recent transfer by Israel of VAT and other revenues due to the Palestinian Authority and calls on Israel to continue these monthly transfers including arrears. The Quartet reiterates the importance of immediate Israeli measures, consistent with legitimate security concerns, to improve the lives of Palestinians, including allowing the resumption of normal economic activity facilitating the movement of goods, people, and essential services and lifting curfew and closures. The Quartet calls on Israel to avoid actions that undermine trust and create further hardship for innocent Palestinian civilians, including demolition of houses and civil infrastructure.

The Quartet welcomes efforts to re-organize and update donor coordination mechanisms in order to simplify and strengthen an already unified international effort so as to revive and support peace efforts.

The Quartet reiterates the critical importance of sustaining hope on the part of Israelis and Palestinians for the vision articulated by President Bush, and supported by the Quartet in its previous statements and ongoing engagement with the parties and in the region, of a future in which both peoples can live - in their own states - in genuine peace and security. Consistent with this goal the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 will be ended through a settlement negotiated between the parties and based on resolutions 242 and 338, with Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized borders. For this goal to be achieved, violence and terror must come to an end. Israeli settlement activity must stop, consistent with the recommendations of the Mitchell report.

The Quartet will continue to encourage all parties in the region to seek a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the foundations of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, UNSCRs 242, 338 and 1397, agreements previously reached by the parties, and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah - endorsed by the Beirut Arab League Summit - for acceptance of Israel as a neighbor living in peace and security, in the context of a comprehensive settlement. This initiative is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

The Quartet looks forward to continuing consultations on achieving the above goals, and a further meeting of the Quartet principals in the near future to adopt the Road Map and present it to the parties.

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Meeting in the Middle East Quartet in Washington DC, December 20, 2002

At the meeting the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Per Stig Moeller, deliberated on the below main points of view:

General

Thank you for convening this meeting. EU is fully committed to the work of the Quartet. Only if we pool our efforts can we hope to influence the situation.

Also key to ensure continued close coordination with moderate Arab States. Equally important that we maintain close cooperation with the two

parties. We therefore have to consider how best to communicate the results of our discussions today.

Road Map

As the EU heads of state and government underscored at last week's European Council [in declaration on Middle East] we firmly remain of the view that the Quartet should have adopted and published the Road Map today.

I accept of course that there is no agreement to do this. But it is a pity. It is key to maintain momentum, keep a political perspective in the process and safeguard the credibility of the Quartet.

Much good-will has been invested in 'selling' the Road Map concept to the parties and regional stakeholder. They now expect the Quartet to deliver. True - the Road Map could become hostage in the Israeli election campaign and this could complicate the subsequent implementation.

On the other hand, I do think the Israeli electorate has a right to know what the international community expects from Israel. Further, even Sharon himself has publicly stated that President Bush's vision is a realistic and attainable plan.

Given the circumstances, I find it important that we do three things:

Firstly, we have to send a clear and unambiguous message that the Road Map will be adopted and made public before the end of February.

Secondly, we need - if at all possible today - to finalize the text of the Road Map so it is ready for adoption.

Thirdly, we need to speed up the work of devising a credible monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the Road Map.

Turning to the content a major outstanding issue in the text is the linkage of the settlement freeze to a cessation of hostilities. This linkage poses quite frankly a problem for us. We are very concerned about the continuing expansion of settlements, which is a real threat to the realisation of the Two-State solution and to the implementation of the Road Map. What we should be calling for is therefore rather an unconditional settlement freeze. The settlements are illegal according to international law and a freeze should not be made contingent on a ceasefire. Quite to the contrary the settlements have themselves developed into major flashpoints for violent confrontation. A settlement freeze would provide decisive incentive to cessation of terror and violence.

Perspectives in the coming months

Time is of essence. We are working within a narrow window of opportunity. If it comes to a military confrontation in Iraq we are likely to see a further polarization, particularly among the radical forces on both sides that are trying to undermine the peace process.

Very important that we provide encouragement to the moderate forces and regimes in the region. The Road Map can become a central rallying point for gaining such support.

A new Sharon government will - irrespective of whether Labour joins in the coalition or not - be dependent on the growing part of the Israeli public who is ready for a settlement that allows for both peace and security. It is therefore key to keep up the pressure on Sharon to go ahead with the Road Map.

In a similar way the EU is making a major effort through our policies to engage Turkey and Iran constructively on the side of the West.

Monitoring

A credible monitoring mechanism will be essential to the implementation of the Road Map.

The mechanism must be presented together with the Road Map to the parties and they must agree to it.

We should draw on existing structures and personnel in providing information on implementation. The information should via working group structure be fed to the Quartet Envoys Group who should assess it and transform it into politically meaningful input to the Quartet Principals.

Key that the Quartet Envoy Group clearly pinpoints who is responsible in case of non-compliance and that the Quartet is ready to act on the information.

Palestinian reform process

The EU is pleased with the work in the Quartet Task Force on Palestinian Reform and will continue to be actively engaged in its efforts to assist the reform process.

With the postponement of Palestinian elections there will be sufficient time for more thorough preparations for free and fair elections and for the Palestinians themselves to engage in an open debate on their future political leadership. The Road Map process can help to strengthen the internal debate on the need for a further devolution of executive power.

A significant number of important reform measures are directly or indirectly affected by Israeli actions such as closures and curfews. To facilitate the reform progress Israel should grant long-duration travel permits to all key Palestinian officials involved in the reform process. The Israelis made a commitment to do that at the last meeting of the Working Group on Palestinian Reform in Jordan. A list of such key Palestinian officials has been worked out and provided to Israel.

With the aim of consolidating the work on reform we should consider having an AHLC-meeting shortly after the Israeli elections.

Security

We are encouraged by the Cairo-talks between Fatah and Hamas, which will be resumed in the near future with the aim of reaching an agreement on a stop to attacks on Israeli civilians as well as to attacks inside Israel. The Security Advisor of the EU's Special Middle East Envoy, Mr. Alistair Crooke, has been closely involved in facilitating these talks, which have the potential to change the developments on the ground in a positive direction. The aim should of course be to have Islamic Jihad included in an agreement.

In this connection, the EU will continue to impress on Syria and Iran the need to stop their financial and logistical support to terrorist organisations.

Very important that security trainers and observers are deployed on the ground quickly to follow up if an agreement falls into place.

British Middle East Conference

Welcome the British initiative on Palestinian Reform. Could help keep up the momentum while we are awaiting a new Israeli Government and provide much needed encouragement to the reform forces on the Palestinian side.

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Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller's press statement after the meeting in the Middle East Quartet in Washington DC, 20 December, 2002

We have finalized the Road Map at our meeting.

Very important that President Bush has given his unreserved support to the Quartet and the Road Map principles.

Nobody should be in any doubt that the international community is fully committed to see the Road Map and the vision of two states living side by side in peace and security implemented.

We have a clear agreement. The final adoption and presentation to the parties should take place early in the new year.

Have impressed on the parties the need for them to start implementation of their commitments immediately so we do not lose more time.

The coming weeks will be used for working out an effective and credible monitoring mechanism of the Quartet for the implementation of the Road Map.

No doubt in my mind that the Road Map which builds on the initial Danish EU Presidency draft - in spite of the delays incurred - is the only way forward and will remain the central frame of reference for solving the conflict in the years to come.

from OCHA/RELIEF WEB