<u>**WORKING GROUP: What chance for peace in the Middle East?**</u>

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REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE CHAIR OR THE PARTICPANTS

I: Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The majority of working group participants agreed that the situation is not optimal
for peacemaking now; however, this did not dispel the urgency for it. The situation
is not something that can be left to stagnate without consequences. The lack of a
peace process increases the prospects for conflict and a sclerosis of ill feelings in
the region. Six factors were discussed in terms of negatively affecting the resolution
of the core issues in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: demographic challenges
impacting Israel in terms of her identity as a Jewish, democratic state; occupation
and settlement expansion in the West Bank and blockade of the Gaza strip with
attendant impact on both the occupier and occupied (as well as relationships
between Israel and Palestine with the rest of the Arab world and other regional
players such as Iran); refugees; radicalisation; the Iranian nuclear program; and the
lack of political reform in the region.

Numerous peace plans have been proposed to settle the conflict, each seeking to
resolve the core issues of security, sovereignty, immigration, and borders, but all
centring on a two-state solution.   The group regretted the lack of progress during
the last decade towards this solution, and was mostly pessimistic about the so-
called called "proximity talks" between Israeli and Palestinian Authority
governments, launched in May 2010 by the United States. After 15 months of false-
starts under U.S. mediation, the talks opened with two serious obstacles still in
play: first, the wide gap in the core beliefs of the interlocutors about the meaning
and scope of negotiations; and second, continued opposition from those who do
not support a two-state solution and are looking find opportunities to sabotage the
talks. Sceptics argue that that the conditions are not ripe for peace-making, that
proximity talks are a step backwards from two-decades of direct negotiations, and
that this effort will ultimately fail. Still, there was still some hope that the recent
U.S. initiative will somehow advance to direct negotiations on the core issues.

Most in the group agree that for the peace process to succeed several things must
change.   First, direct talks should not deal with half-measures of conflict
management, but rather focus squarely on conflict resolution. Second, there was a
suggestion that leaders in Israel and Palestine need to be more flexible, and willing
to meet and discuss with their interlocutors. Hamas must be dealt with at some

point and in some form, and could not be ignored. But before Hamas can be involved in the talks it must show willingness to move further on a number of issues, including disarmament, recognition of Israel's right to exist and adoption of a new charter.

The group recommends a multi-party "trust-building" plan in all dimensions. After a ten year hiatus in concerted negotiations, there is a strong need to rebuild the constituencies for peace, especially in the moderate centre. As such, the trust-building process should be based on a step-by-step approach, rather than a big package.   To be successful, all parties will need to reach out to understand and appreciate the historical narrative of the other as well as the internal politics that shape the negotiation process. For Israel, there is a need for greater appreciation by the Arabs for Israeli security concerns and fears of annihilation. Some suggested that the international community should find ways to guarantee Israel's security in advance of negotiations, and that this would assist any process. There was no consensus about the need to recognise Israel as a Jewish state in the trust-building process. Palestinians, under Fatah governance in the West Bank, should be applauded for their efforts at state building under the Fayyad plan.   But this leaves a gap as the 1.5 million Gazans continue to live under a blockade while arms are being smuggled into the area and rockets are shot into Israel proper.   The group suggested that the best way forward is support efforts to resolve the Fatah-Hamas divide while seeking to change Hamas' charter towards Israel. Finally, and most importantly, the region needs leaders who believe in and are committed to a negotiated peace.

II. Israel-Syria

While the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is regarded as key to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli dispute, resolving the Israeli-Syrian conflict is also important for achieving a comprehensive peace.   Both parties see mutual peace as in their national interests, but they appear willing to live with the extant situation. Two-thirds of Israelis do not support giving back the Golan to Syria, as they see too many benefits from the status quo.   On the other hand, there has been neither a direct war nor violations of the 1974 armistice agreement, which leads to optimism that a peace treaty, once struck, would be enduring. Israel can be assured that its security will be guaranteed by a treaty with Syria. Returning the Golan to Syria and ending this dispute is seen as the best means for weaning Syria away from Iran, particularly as this relationship is viewed as one of convenience rather than a lasting partnership. If Syria could be drawn into the Turkish orbit, then it was also felt that the Iranian influence would diminish; that said, it was not clear that this approach will succeed given past failures and the dispute with Israel over the Gaza blockade. It was also noted that, in light of recent events, Turkey must regain the confidence of Israel if it wants to be effective as a mediator.

III. The International Community

Supporting regional leaders in their bid for peace by the international community is vital. The U.S. may be critical to the process but it is not sufficient as a lone actor, as witnessed by recent events. As peace and the peace process will positively affect outside players, the international community has strong interest is seeing an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Turkey could play a significant role, especially as Ankara's

power and prestige expand concurrent with Turkey's economic prowess in the region. One participant suggests adding Turkey to the Road Map Quartet as a fifth player.

Working group members suggested several ways the international community can help:

1) encourage regional leaders to develop a five-year vision for a peaceful region, lifting their horizons from the daily conflicts on the ground;

2) get the regional parties in the mind frame to accept political compromises over standoffs and a zero sum approach;

3) publicise the positive developments in the relationship between Israel and Palestine that the media tend to ignore;

4) coax Hamas to accommodate itself to the world and give up on trying to get the world to accommodate to it. It was argued that the recent Gaza flotilla crisis might provide an opening to Hamas for the sake of humanitarian relief efforts;

5) invite all countries without exception to a peace summit. No country with a vested interest in the peace should be left out. This is a lesson from the Madrid process;

6) create an international real estate investment trust to fund or resettle individuals who wish to move after an agreement; and

7) seek an international institution to guarantee Israel's security, such as the MFO or NATO, as part of the peace plan.

This is obviously an incomplete list of suggestions. The working group could have continued for days before exhausting itself. Though there was not a full consensus on any one measure, the enthusiasm by all parties to reach across the table to find new ways for advancing peace is noteworthy.