

France Proposes Peace in the Middle East

In recent years the government of France has tried to play a role in Middle Eastern affairs, and in the struggle against Islamist terrorism. It has been particularly eager to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. In December 2014 France proposed an international conference to discuss the issue within a two year framework.

On Friday January 29, 2016 French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, qualifying the 2014 proposal, outlined the French position in two parts. One part was that France would organize an international conference, including the European countries, the U.S., and Arab countries, to agree on a two state solution, Israel and Palestine. The other part, considerably more controversial, was that France would “live up to our responsibilities” by recognizing Palestine as an independent state if the conference was unsuccessful.

No one can doubt the good intentions of Fabius or the French hopes for a peaceful conclusion of the century old conflict. However, both parts of his proposal are arguable in view of the reality in the area. Palestinian authorities are divided into factions, some of which are determined not to allow the State of Israel to exist. Although the Palestinian Authority exists its ability to make decision is challenged, and therefore it is unclear who is supposed to be the representative body at any peace conference.

Two issues are involved. One is that Hamas, the terrorist ruling group in the Gaza Strip, may insist on its own state, separate from that in the West Bank. The other is that the various Palestinian leaders will not or cannot control Palestinian violence, or even their incitement to violence.

That violence never stops. On Wednesday February 3, 2016 two female Israeli Border Police officers were attacked by three Palestinians in Jerusalem near the Old City, outside the Damascus Gate. One of them, a 19 year-old woman, who had recently joined the Border Police, died. The attackers, who came from the Jenin area and who were armed with a rifle, knives, and an explosive device, were shot and killed by Israeli police.

Immediately, the mainstream media provided a misleading and anti-Israeli account of the attacks. In this CBS News was prominent. Its disgraceful headline was "Three Palestinians killed as daily violence grinds on." After protests were made about this prejudiced presentation, CBS changed it to "Israeli police kill three alleged (sic) Palestinian attackers." It then changed the headline again, this time to a more correct one, to "Palestinians attack 2 Israeli officers before being killed."

This was an unhappy coincidence between the French proposal and initiative and the brutal Palestinian attack on two young women. Unfortunately, the Palestinian response to the proposal is not likely to limit the terrorist attacks or plans. A few day after the Fabius proposal, another two members of the military wing of Hamas were killed on February 2, 2016 while rebuilding one of the tunnels in the Gaza Strip, used as a launching pad for attacks against Israeli civilians. The Hamas leader in Gaza, Ismael Haniyeh, said the reconstruction of the tunnels, and the digging of rocks must continue. The Hamas spokesperson, Hussam Badrun, called the February 3 attack a "severe blow to the security apparatus of Israel and as a turning point in Al-Quds Intifada."

In their turn, the Fatah leaders have praised the acts of terrorists as "heroic," and honored them.

European countries have already started on the path of recognition of "Palestine." The European Parliament in

December 2014 adopted a resolution recognizing a Palestinian state. So far, Sweden in October 2014 is the only EU country to grant official recognition of the phantom state. However, the UN General Assembly on November 29, 2012 decided by a vote of 138-9-41 that Palestine was a non-member Observer State. All these actions in upgrading the UN status have bypassed the supposed negotiations on the issue. Nevertheless, neither the European decisions nor those of the UN have issued the birth certificate of Palestine.

The EU also in November 2015 issued guidelines that produce made in Israeli settlements must not be labeled "Made in Israel." This is tantamount to participating in the BDS movement.

There are therefore serious problems with the French initiative, helpful though it intended to be. There are at least two factors. M. Fabius must first ensure that Palestinians are truly interested in negotiations and not dedicated to the elimination of Israel. The second is agreement on the basis of negotiations. President Mahmoud Abbas and his colleagues have insisted on conditions, such as Israeli full construction freeze in settlements, and the release of Palestinian prisoners. In contrast, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is prepared to enter into negotiations without preconditions and without dictated conditions.

It cannot be encouraging for Fabius, who has proposed the recognition of Palestine even if the negotiations fail, to listen to the ongoing utterances of Palestinian leaders. The adviser to PA Chairman Abbas and member of the Fatah Central Committee, Sultan Abu Al-Einein in January 2016 praised the Palestinian terror wave in which Palestinians have murdered 28 Israelis and wounded 287. He bowed "before every drop of blood that has dripped from our children and women...those seeking knives today will seek rifles and weapons tomorrow."

Once again this Palestinian leader uses the Palestinian

Narrative of Victimhood. He falsely claimed that the terror wave began because of what was happening in the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the deliberate falsehood that Israel was seeking to destroy the Al-Aqsa mosque.

A more general problem, especially for France in spite of the efforts of French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, is the disturbing fact of the increasing number of anti-Israel and antisemitic views of citizens in European countries. A number of recent studies show that more than 40 per cent of the population in the European Union held that Israelis were behaving like Nazis, a view that is akin to anti-Semitic attitudes. As we know the line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism has often been blurred.

If an international conference is well and impartially organized by France the issues are well known. A two state solution with various swaps of land, to which some political leaders of Israel have agreed, is acceptable to most mainstream, if not all, Israelis. The Palestinians, which ever group is in power, must end all violence, accept the legitimacy of the State of Israel, stop denouncing Israel in international forums and end the BDS campaign, must give up the concept of the "Right of Return" in so far as it applies to Israeli territory, and accept the provisions that Israel has made for its security in border controls and fences.

Fabius might also insist that Palestinian gross violations of human rights cease. Even the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights exposed that torture, whippings, hanging a person from his hands, verbal abuse, and sleep deprivation is being carried out in detention centers.

One encouraging event is that a large vulture that had flown from an Israeli game reserve and landed in a Lebanese village and had been detained in Lebanon on suspicion of spying for Israel was released after UN intervention. The vulture, part of an Israeli conservation project had tags on its wings, "Tel

Aviv University, Israel.”

Laurent Fabius must tread carefully in the hunt not for the vulture but for the dove of peace.