

# An International Peace Conference in the Aftermath of the Israel-Hamas War

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## **Executive Summary**

- International Peace Conferences (IPCs) are useful diplomatic tools for peacemaking and peacebuilding. They bring together all the relevant actors in a multilateral diplomatic setting sponsored by trusted conveners, foster momentum, formally end wars and establish peace treaties, and set road maps and timetables for substantial and sustainable peace processes.
- IPCs are political-diplomatic tools that are instrumental in enabling peace processes and facilitating meaningful peace negotiations, and not a political goal in itself. They might also help in bringing about international legitimacy to the political actors involved, as well as resolving issues of domestic legitimacy.
- Based on the relevant and successful example of the Madrid Conference of October 1991, an IPC in the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas War is a necessary but not sufficient political diplomatic ingredient in the road map leading to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, as well as to peace negotiations towards the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict within a time framework of 3-5 years.
- The ‘package deal’ logic of an IPC that launches simultaneous peace negotiations at the bilateral and multilateral levels (like Madrid 1991), setting a priori the ‘end political game’ through the conditional recognition of a demilitarized Palestinian State, might facilitate the active and positive involvement of significant members of the international community in addressing the urgent humanitarian and logistical needs for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the war.
- The logic of the IPC provides a clear political horizon of hope for Israelis, Palestinians, and the rest of the nations of the region (and the international

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community as a whole), in the form of a gradual and pragmatic political arrangement and 'road map' that is considered anathema to Hamas and to other extreme and recalcitrant elements in both Israeli and Palestinian societies.

- The IPC designed here suggests a combined (hybrid) model that integrates into its agenda the related issues of immediate humanitarian and logistical assistance to the Gaza Strip, the creation and empowerment of an international transitional authority, the empowerment and strengthening of the Palestinian Authority, and meaningful, substantial negotiations leading to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian State alongside Israel, as well as to the conclusion of peace treaties between Israel and the rest of the Arab countries, first and foremost Saudi Arabia.

## **A. Introduction**

The ongoing war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip might evolve in the next few weeks into its 'third stage', following the aerial bombardment and the massive ground operation undertaken by the IDF into a low-intensity warfare and the establishment of buffer zones with or without a limited Israeli military presence in the enclave. The way the war is being prosecuted will determine the range of political options in its aftermath. Despite the reluctance of the current Israeli government to engage in any substantial long-term political discussion about the "day after" in terms of any significant blueprints or scenarios, it is imperative to draw a coherent road map regarding the feasible diplomatic options for the immediate and long-term perspectives regarding Israel's exit from Gaza in the aftermath of the war, including the political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Taking into consideration the lack of political willingness and/or ability of both Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to advance peace after the war, the dire situation in the Gaza Strip, and the international and domestic political repercussions for several key actors (including the United States, Egypt, and Jordan), this paper examines the possible role and functions that an International Peace Conference (IPC) might fulfil in granting domestic and international legitimacy and the drawing of a coherent road map leading to de-escalation, stabilization, demilitarization, reconstruction, and governance of the Gaza Strip in the immediate term. Moreover, any IPC should also address the larger political issue regarding the ultimate diplomatic resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the form of the fulfillment of UNGA Resolution 181 (1947) and the creation of a demilitarized Palestinian State in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, following UNSC Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), and 2334 (2016).

The policy paper draws on historical precedents from other conflicts, as well as reflecting on examples and experiences from the Arab-Israeli conflict, first and foremost the relevant and successful example of the Madrid Conference of October

1991. The major insight to be drawn is that an IPC is a necessary but not sufficient political diplomatic ingredient in the road map leading to the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the war in the immediate term, as well as to peace negotiations towards the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian State alongside Israel.

## **B. Examples, Types, and Functions of International Peace Conferences**

International peace conferences are usually convened in the aftermath of wars, though sometimes they take place as a deliberated diplomatic effort to end the wars in long and protracted conflicts. They are useful diplomatic tool for *peacemaking*, in the form of conflict prevention, management and resolution. Moreover, they can be instruments of *peacebuilding*, designed to promote and reinforce peace in post-war situations, regarding issue-areas such as reconstruction, governance, and transitional security and civilian regimes. They also allow focused attention to the issues at hand, bringing together all relevant actors in a multilateral diplomatic setting sponsored by trusted conveners, foster momentum, formally end wars and establish peace treaties, set road maps and timetables, and even deadlines for action, and establish an agenda to kick-start substantial and sustainable peace processes.<sup>1</sup>

The practice of convening IPCs goes back to the Renaissance period among the Italian city-states, and it continued during the Westphalian, Vienna, post-Vienna, League of Nations, and United Nations international orders. Historical examples include: the Vienna Congress in 1814-1815 (after the Napoleonic Wars); the Congress of Berlin in 1878 (regarding the allocation of territories of the Ottoman Empire); the Paris (Versailles) Conference of 1919 after World War I; the Chaco Peace Conference of 1935-1938 (after the Chaco War of 1932-1935); the Roundtable Conference on Indonesia in 1949; the Japanese Peace Conference in San Francisco in 1951; the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954; the London Conference on Cyprus in 1959; the Geneva Conference on Laos, 1962; the International Conferences on Kampuchea in 1981 and in 1989; the Contadora and Esquipulas peace processes in the 1980s (regarding the end of the Central American civil wars); the European Conference on Yugoslavia in 1992; the Dayton Conference of 1995 that ended the Yugoslavian Wars (regarding Bosnia, Serbia, and Croatia); and the Geneva I and Geneva II Conferences to end the Syrian civil war in 2012 and in 2014.<sup>2</sup> IPCs focus on armed conflicts and their peaceful resolution, so they are different from other regional, international, and global conferences that might address other global and normative issues related to peace in a positive and broader sense, such as climate change, economic development, and the promotion of human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> See Abiodun Williams, "The Use of Conference Diplomacy in Conflict Prevention," *UN Chronicle*, December 2014, No. 3, Vol. 51, "Conference Diplomacy."

<sup>2</sup> See Bertrand G. Ramcharan, *International Peace Conferences* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill).

We can differentiate among three major types of international peace conferences. *Type I* refers to conferences focused on promoting general peace throughout the world, or at least efforts to mitigate and regulate international and domestic conflicts, such as the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 regarding the rules of war; the San Francisco Conference in 1945 that established the United Nations; and the Rome Conference of 1988 that established the International Criminal Court (ICC).

*Type II* follows major or significant international and civil wars or alternatively, they are held to negotiate an end to one, as in the cases of Westphalia, 1648; The Congress of Vienna, 1814; Paris, 1919; San Francisco, 1951; Dayton, 1995; and the truncated Geneva Conferences regarding Syria in 2012 and 2014.

*Type III* refers to peace conferences that establish an agenda for peace (a 'road map') and are mostly symbolic and ceremonial, without engaging in substantive negotiations per se. They have been used to express the sense of the international community (or of the relevant region) in providing a useful framework of principles and goals to be taken and implemented in further specific multilateral and bilateral negotiations. Hence, they serve as an umbrella or diplomatic framework that facilitate the conflictual parties to engage in subsequent substantial peace negotiations. Examples include the Contadora and Esquipulas Conferences of 1983 and 1986; the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991; the London Conference on Former Yugoslavia in 1992; and the Annapolis Conference in 2007. Sometimes an IPC might fit more than one particular type.

Ultimately, we have to keep in mind that IPCs are political-diplomatic tools that are instrumental in enabling peace processes and facilitating meaningful peace negotiations, and not a political goal in itself. They might also help in bringing about international legitimacy to the political actors involved, as well as resolving issues of domestic legitimacy.

### **C. Previous International Peace Conferences in the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

In the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there have been several IPCs that met in the aftermath of crises and wars to find a peaceful way out of the state of permanent conflict involving Israel, the Palestinians, and neighboring Arab States, with mixed results. They include: the Lausanne Conference, 1949; the Geneva Conference, 1973; the Madrid Conference, 1991; the Annapolis Conference, 2007; and the Paris Conference, 2017. For the purpose of this policy paper, I am not referring to other negotiating fora, whether bilateral or multilateral, such as the Rhodes negotiations leading to the Armistices of 1949 between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria; the Camp David Summit of September 5-17, 1978 (which led to the Camp David Agreements and ultimately to the Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt on March 26, 1979); the Wye Conference of October 15-23, 1998; and the failed Camp David Summit of July 11-25, 2000.



- (1) *The Lausanne Conciliation Conference* (April 27 to June 23, 1949; July 18 to September 12, 1949) [Types II and III]: The Conference met in the aftermath of the First Arab-Israeli War (1948-1949), with the ambitious goal of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The participants included Israel, Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Muhammad Nimr Al Hawari, who represented the Palestinian refugees. The members of the UN Conciliation Commission included France, Turkey, and the United States. The Lausanne Protocol that started the negotiations referred to UNGA Resolutions 181 and 194. The main issues discussed were Jerusalem, refugees, and a territorial settlement. The negotiations ended without an agreement.
- (2) *The Geneva Peace Conference on the Middle East* (December 21-29, 1973) [Type II and III]: It was sponsored by the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim under UNSC Resolution 338 (1973) in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. It was co-chaired by the United States and the former Soviet Union. It included representatives from Israel, Egypt, and Jordan, but neither the PLO nor Syria took part. No agreement was reached during the Conference. In 1974, interim agreements were negotiated between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria, under the mediation of the United States.
- (3) *The Madrid Peace Conference* (October 30-November 1, 1991) [Type III]: The Conference was held in the wake of the First Gulf War (1991) and it was co-sponsored by the United States and the former Soviet Union. Israel opposed the presence of PLO representatives, but the Jordanian delegation included Palestinian representatives indirectly related to the PLO leadership in Tunis, which actually behaved as an independent delegation. This was the first time that Israeli politicians negotiated face to face with delegations from Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians. It marked a formal attempt to launch a peace process involving Israel and its neighbors. The Conference and the ensuing rounds of bilateral negotiations (in Washington), and multilateral negotiations did not produce any agreement, but they facilitated and enabled a diplomatic breakthrough between Israel and the Palestinians in 1993 (the 'Oslo' Declaration of Principles) and subsequently with Jordan, leading to the Peace Treaty of October 26, 1994.
- (4) *The Annapolis Peace Conference* (November 27, 2007) [Type III]: Representatives from forty-nine countries and international organizations gathered at Annapolis, Maryland, in a major show of support for the relaunching of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations geared towards a two-state solution. The Conference included the participation of Israeli PM Olmert, PLO Chairman (and President of the PA) Abbas, and the U.S. official host, President Bush. The conference included representatives from the European Union, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and Brazil. Its goal was to resume Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, stalled since the collapse of the Oslo process and the onset of the Second Intifada (2000), and to implement the

Road Map for Peace (2003). The conference concluded with a joint resolution that resumed a process of bilateral negotiations between Israel and the PLO between December 2007 and December 2008.

- (5) *The Paris Peace Conference* (January 15, 2017) [Type III]: Over seventy countries and international organizations attended the Conference hosted by France, but without the PLO/PA and Israel. The major international players included the Quartet members (i.e., the USA, the UN, the EU, and Russia), the P5 of the UNSC (Russia, China, USA, France, and the United Kingdom), Arab and European countries, the G-20 countries and many other state and non-state actors committed to a two-state solution and capacity building for a future Palestinian State. There was no significant follow-through to this multilateral gathering, and its irrelevance can be related to the fact that the major protagonists in the conflict – Israel and the PLO – did not take part in the Conference.

The record of previous IPCs is ambiguous – neither resounding successes nor complete failures. The Lausanne Conference (1949) was a multilateral forum of negotiations that failed in transcending the limits of the Rhodes Armistices and reaching a permanent peace between Israel and its neighbors. Similarly, the Geneva Conference of December 1973 did not lead to any breakthrough after the Yom Kippur War (whereas Syria did not take part of it). The Paris Conference (2017) failed eventually due to the fact that neither Israel nor the Palestinians were present in the gathering. In a more positive vein, Madrid (1991) and Annapolis (2007), established useful diplomatic frameworks to conduct multilateral and bilateral negotiations further on rather than being negotiating fora in themselves. The logic of an IPC as a formal ‘road map’ and agenda setting for peace seems to be even more relevant these days, when we have an urgency to plan “the day after,” even before the formal end of the current war.<sup>3</sup>

#### **D. The Rationale and Pre-Conditions for an International Peace Conference in the Aftermath of the Israel-Hamas War**

Against the distorted view of the current Israeli government, which is reluctant to engage so far in any coherent discussion about the “day after” beyond slogans regarding the “demilitarization” and the “de-radicalization” of Gaza after the (possible?) military defeat of Hamas, there is a strong rationale for the convening of an IPC to discuss the immediate future of the Gaza Strip and the political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The IPC should be an initial necessary but not sufficient building-block of a complex and staged transition from war to peace, while agreeing on a political ‘road map’ that will have to address both the immediate concerns regarding

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<sup>3</sup> See Nathan J. Brown and Amr Hamzaway, “Arab Peace Initiative II: How Arab Leadership Could Design a Peace Plan in Israel and Palestine”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Working Paper*, 2023. [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202311-Arab\\_Peace\\_Initiative\\_II.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202311-Arab_Peace_Initiative_II.pdf)

the dire situation in the Gaza Strip and its transitional stabilization and governance after the war (2-3 years), as well as the bilateral and multilateral peace negotiations that should ensue (for 1-2 more additional years), leading to peace treaties between the State of Israel, the Palestinian State, Saudi Arabia, and the rest of the Arab League countries who do not sustain diplomatic relations with Israel, following the spirit and content of the Arab Peace Initiative.

There is an intrinsic link between the immediate concerns regarding the security, governance, reconstruction, and demilitarization of the Gaza Strip and the eventual resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the form of a two-state solution, since the later political vision (and future reality) is actually a pre-condition for the feasibility of bringing other international actors to assist in the immediate term in the reconstruction and governance of the Gaza Strip, whose political future should be organically linked to the West Bank. This perfectly fits the political and diplomatic logic, as clearly articulated by US President Joe Biden and by US Vice President Kamala Harris, even they did not refer explicitly to an International Peace Conference as a useful diplomatic tool.<sup>4</sup> Thus, an IPC might provide domestic and international legitimacy for the United States and many of the actors involved, first and foremost the Palestinians, setting a coherent timetable for the ensuing peace processes leading to a two-state solution and to the peace and normalization between Israel and its Arab immediate and distant neighbors.

An IPC might also bridge the gap between the immediate concerns in the aftermath of the war and the more distant political horizon, as a kind of “threshold event” to set a diplomatic clock to transition from the immediate term to the medium term, to be completed in a period of 3-5 years since the convening of the Peace Conference until the signing of peace agreements between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine.

The immediate pre-conditions for the convening of the IPC are: (a) the end of the current phase of the war and transition towards a low-intensity type of warfare in the Gaza Strip; (b) a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces and the establishment of temporary security buffer zones by the IDF, to be gradually replaced by a multinational peacekeeping force with a clear mandate and robust rules of engagement, hopefully under Chapter 7 of the United Nations Security Council, following a possible cease-fire.<sup>5</sup> Israel and the PLO must participate in the IPC in the immediate aftermath of the war, so there is no precondition to hold previous elections in Israel and the Palestinian Authority to bring about new leaderships *before* the convening of the IPC, since the

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<sup>4</sup> See Joe Biden, “The U.S. Won’t Back Down from the Challenge of Putin and Hamas,” *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/11/18/joe-biden-gaza-hamas-putin/> and “Remarks by Vice President Harris on the Conflict Between Israel and Hamas,” The White House, December 2, 2023; <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room-speeches-remarks/2023/12/02/remarks-by-vice-president-harris-on-the-conflict-between-israel-and-hamas/>

<sup>5</sup> See Nir Arieli, Jacob Stoll, and Mary Elizabeth Walters, “The Case for Sending a Multinational Force to Gaza,” November 2023, *Mitvim Policy Paper*. See also Michael W. Doyle, Arie M. Kacowicz, Benjamin Miller, and John M. Owen IV, “Deradicalizing Post-war Gaza: Why Biden Must Push for a Middle East Marshall Plan,” *Haaretz*, December 18, 2023.

required domestic political changes through democratic elections in both Israel and the PA might take at least several months, if not years.

## **E. Policy Recommendations I: Structure- When? Where? Who? How?**

### *When?*

The IPC should convene no later than three months since the formal cease fire that will end the war. In case that a formal cease-fire will not be implemented by April 2024, the latest date for the convening of the Conference should be by the end of May 2024, due to the urgency in planning and implementing a massive plan of reconstruction for the Gaza Strip, even if the war will not be formally over.<sup>6</sup>

### *Where?*

The IPC should meet in the Eastern Mediterranean Basin/Middle East, possibly in a location that can be considered as 'neutral', legitimate, or acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians. There are several possible venues to recommend to hold the IPC: 1) *Rhodes, Greece*: As the site of the Armistice Agreements of 1949, signed between Israel and its Arab neighbors with the indispensable mediation of Ralph Bunche from the United Nations; 2) *Riyad, Saudi Arabia*: As the site of an Arab-Islamic summit last November that included twenty-two members of the Arab League and fifty-seven members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, there is an equally important symbolism in holding an IPC there; this might be particularly attractive to lure a recalcitrant Israeli delegation; 3) *Amman, Jordan, or Cairo, Egypt*: Both Arab countries who have diplomatic relations with Israel have a strong stake and urgency in facilitating the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### *Who?*

Following the relatively successful examples of Madrid (1991) and of Annapolis (2007), and due to the dire consequences of the war for both Palestinians and Israelis, the relevant members of the international community should be significantly present in this IPC, for political, diplomatic, and financial/logistical reasons.

First, the IPC should be formally sponsored by the five permanent members of the UNSC (P5) in unison with the original Middle East Quartet (i.e., the UN, the EU, the United States, and Russia), that should become a 'quintet', by incorporating China. If possible, the IPC should be endorsed by a UNSC Resolution, even under Chapter 7. It is preferable to include Russia as a formal co-sponsor rather than having it as a potential spoiler of the peace process. The 'Quintet' should extend the invitations for the participation in the IPC.

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<sup>6</sup> For a similar timetable, see Daniel Krutzer, "What Needs to Happen When the Fighting Stops in Gaza," *The Atlantic*, December 18, 2023.



Second, at the regional level, the ‘regional Quartet’ (i.e. Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia) should co-sponsor the IPC, in coordination with the Arab League. In addition, other Moslem members of the Contact Group for Gaza (including Turkey, Indonesia, Qatar, and Nigeria) should be actively present, especially regarding the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the war. Norway, as the historical leader of the AHLC geared to aid Palestinians, should be part of this effort.

Third, the directed concerned parties, the Israeli government and the PLO are required to participate in the Conference, even if they do not agree in principle to all the suggested items of the mandate and agenda (see below).

Fourth, all other member states of the Arab League and of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) should be encouraged to participate, as well as all the members of BRICS (including Brazil, India, and South Africa), and other relevant countries from the Global South. Due to the massive financial needs to design a ‘Marshall Plan’ for the Gaza Strip and for the West Bank the massive presence of European countries, Canada, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and ASEAN countries should be strongly encouraged.

#### *How?*

The IPC, despite its large participation and scope, is designed mostly as a Type III Conference, along the lines of the Madrid and Annapolis Conferences. Hence, it will last no more than four or five days, setting the stage for subsequent bilateral and multilateral negotiations regarding peace negotiations for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on its agenda and mandate. The most immediate and urgent efforts in the conference will be focused upon empowering a UN-led Transitional Authority in the Gaza Strip (or alternatively, another international/multinational framework), with the immediate plans needed in terms of security, governance, and reconstruction, including specific reference to enhancing the governance capabilities of the Palestinian Authority to become part of the reconstruction and governance effort.

## **F. Policy Recommendations II: Mandate, Agenda, and Expected Results**

### *Mandate and Legal Framework*

The mandate of the IPC refers to two inter-related issues: (1) addressing the immediate future of the Gaza Strip, in the aftermath of the Israel-Hamas War, with a focus upon demilitarization governance, physical and economic reconstruction, and providing security for both Israelis and Palestinians, especially in a transitional period of -2-3 years; (2) re-launching a political-diplomatic ‘road map’ leading to the fulfillment of the logic of UNGA Resolution 181 (1947) regarding “two states for two peoples,” creating a demilitarized Palestinian State living in peace alongside the State of Israel,

and the establishment of peace and diplomatic relations between Israel and the remaining members of the Arab League (first and foremost Saudi Arabia), as well as Moslem countries of the OIC at the end of the negotiating process, and no later than five years since the convening of the IPC.

The legal framework for the IPC will be established, in the best possible scenario, by a UNSC Resolution, possible under Chapter 7, which corroborates the following UN resolutions: 181 (1947); 242 (1967); 338 (1973); 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008), and 2334 (2016). Alternatively, the IPC should follow a UN General Assembly Resolution sponsored by the United States, and hopefully endorsed by both Israel and the PLO. Moreover, as part of the Mandate the IPC will explicitly address and corroborate the principles of the Madrid Conference (1991) and of the Arab Peace Initiative (2002).

### *Agenda*

As part of the agenda to be discussed (if not completely agreed) during the IPC, it should include the following items:

1. *A conditional international recognition of a demilitarized State of Palestine, with borders to be agreed as a result of subsequent peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.*
2. *The establishment of an UN-led Transitional Authority in Gaza for a period of - 2-3 years. That Authority, including multinational peacekeeping forces with a clear security and governance mandate, should replace the IDF presence in the Gaza Strip, in coordination with both Israel and the existing Palestinian Authority.<sup>7</sup>*
3. *Inaugurating a Middle East “Marshall Plan” for the two parts of the Palestinian Authority – Gaza and the West Bank. That Plan should also help to enhance the governance and physical capabilities and infrastructure of the PA, leading the way to the building of the future Palestinian State in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, based on a new legitimate and democratically elected Palestinian leadership.*
4. *A resumption of peace negotiations with increased and active involvement by the international community, as represented in the IPC, leading to a two-state solution and the conclusion of peace treaties between Israel and all the member-states of the Arab League, including Saudi Arabia.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> For the possibility of an international trusteeship in the Gaza Strip, see Limor Yehuda, Omar M. Dajani, and John McGarry, “Establish an International Trusteeship,” in “What is The Path to Peace in Gaza?”, *The New York Times*, December 10, 2023; <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/12/opinion/gaza-israel-palestinians-plans.html>

<sup>8</sup> See Nimrod Goren, “From Fighting to Engagement: A Pro-peace Israeli Sequence for Advancing the Two-State Solution,” in “Expert Views: How Do We Restart the Middle East Peace Process?”, *Middle East Institute*, December 1, 2023.

### *Expected Results*

Modelled after the Madrid Conference (1991), and based upon its agenda, the IPC will formally launch a clear 'road map' and two tracks of subsequent negotiations: bilateral and multilateral. At the *bilateral* level, Israel and the PLO, under the auspices and monitoring of the 'Quintet' and the Regional Quartet will embark in substantial and sustainable peace negotiations, leading to the establishment of a viable demilitarized Palestinian State in Gaza and the West Bank within the stated time framework of 3-5 years from the convening of the IPC. Moreover, a second path of bilateral negotiations will involve Israel and Saudi Arabia, leading to normalization, peace, and diplomatic relations between the two countries.

At the *multilateral* level, the IPC will launch four sets of negotiations. First and in the immediate term, a concerted effort regarding the reconstruction of Gaza, involving all the possible donors from the international community, including Israel itself. A second path of multilateral negotiations will involve Israel, the PLO, and the Arab countries, and other member-states of the international community, regarding multilateral venues for regional cooperation (i.e., water, environment, arms control, and economic development). Third, there will be a negotiating path involving Israel and the member-states of the Arab League in implementing the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative leading to peace, diplomatic relations, and normalization. Fourth, there will be a multilateral negotiating path that will assist and complement the bilateral negotiations between Israel and the PLO regarding practical solutions to the most difficult issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, and security arrangements.

### **Concluding Remarks: Advantages and Obstacles**

- The current Israeli government might have no choice but to participate in the IPC, but without endorsing its explicit agenda (though PM Netanyahu himself accepted in 2009 the possibility of a demilitarized Palestinian State alongside Israel). Like PM Yitzhak Shamir at Madrid, a recalcitrant Israeli government will further erode its international and domestic legitimacy if it openly antagonizes the IPC. As it happened in 1991, this might lead the way to an alternative and more pragmatic government in Israel, through democratic elections.
- Conversely, the 'package deal' logic of an IPC that launches simultaneous peace negotiations at the bilateral and multilateral levels (like Madrid 1991) setting a priori the 'end game' of an explicit political horizon through the conditional recognition of a Palestinian State might facilitate the active and positive involvement of significant members of the international community (starting with the USA and European countries, but not only them but most of the Arab countries and Turkey) in addressing the urgent humanitarian and logistical needs of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the war. Hence, the early commitment to recognize a Palestinian State has become a necessary but not

sufficient condition to mobilize the international community to literally come to the rescue of the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the war.

- Moreover, the phased and structured ‘road map’ (indeed based on the original “Road Map” of 2003), might smooth the transition from cease fire to de-escalation and stabilization; from stabilization and Confidence Building Measures to the establishment of a temporary UN (or other international) Authority; and finally to the fulfillment of the vision of “two states for two peoples” alongside the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative.
- In terms of domestic and international legitimacy, most of the relevant actors can benefit from actively participating in an IPC that formalizes the diplomatic ‘rules of the game’, including the commitment to a peaceful political solution between Israel and the Palestinians. In domestic terms, this can benefit enormously the PA in its way to reform or reinvent itself, as well as the domestic political travails of President Biden in the United States, King Abdullah II in Jordan, and President al-Sisi in Egypt.
- For obvious reasons, Israel has always been reluctant to participate in multilateral fora, preferring always bilateral negotiations to multilateral IPCs. This partly explains the relative failures of Lausanne (1949) and Geneva (1973). Yet, IPCs can be particularly relevant in providing frameworks of international legitimacy for peace processes, like Madrid (1991) and Annapolis (2007). By the end of the day, IPCs can be useful diplomatic tools, considering that the relevant political leaders have the capacity, and the willingness, to engage seriously in peace negotiations.
- It is absolutely necessary for any IPC to succeed to include the presence of all the concerning parties, first and foremost Israel and the PLO. That explains the irrelevance and eventual failure of IPCs like Geneva (1973) and Paris (2017).
- The IPC designed here suggests an integrated (‘hybrid’) model that incorporates the related issues of immediate humanitarian and logistical assistance to the Gaza Strip, the creation and empowerment of an international transitional authority, and meaningful, substantial negotiations leading to the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian State alongside Israel, as well as the conclusion of peace treaties between Israel and the rest of the Arab countries, first and foremost Saudi Arabia.