

## Arab peace plan is key to ending Gaza violence

Arabs, Israel, should adopt Arab peace initiative to prevent civil war in Gaza, writes Hanna Siniora.

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The catastrophic infighting that has so far left scores of dead and hundreds of wounded by Palestinian hands in the Gaza Strip, is a deadly signal that the Mecca agreement and national unity government are in the last throes of falling apart.

Neither Fatah nor Hamas are able to prevent the daily clashes that their movements are part of. The Palestinian public in Gaza is being terrorized by the lawlessness, the shootings and killings that are turning Gaza into another Baghdad. Here it is not Shia against Sunni, but Hamas against Fatah and the slide toward total chaos is perhaps unstoppable.

The abundance of weapons, militias, clans and warring movements have made it impossible to bring order and the rule of law; too many parties, internally and externally, including the occupation, are involved in stirring the rivalries and drastic action must be applied urgently or the Palestinian people will become involved in a civil war in Gaza which will eventually spread into the West Bank.

As has been said all the time, if Israel does not agree to extend its original ceasefire in the Gaza Strip to the West Bank, Palestinians fatalities in the West Bank caused by the Israeli army leads to retaliation by Palestinians in Gaza, and the cycle of violence expands.

To stop the bloodshed, to stop the further undermining of the region, the international community -- and specifically the Quartet, with the participation and acquiescence of Israel, and the Arab League on behalf of the Arab countries, must undertake the following process:

The UN Security Council should convene in order to denounce the deterioration of security in the Occupied Territories, call on Israel and the Arab League to accept and to implement a Security Council resolution calling for an Israeli troop withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and the placement of Arab League troops in the PA (for Israel to comply these troops must come from the two Arab countries that have peace treaties or diplomatic relations with Israel mainly Egypt and Jordan).

In order to also respect Palestinian sensitivities that have struggled for self determination and independence, the Arab League heads of states or foreign ministers, as the next step to the Security Council resolution, must meet to accept a temporary mandate, where Arab troops will replace Israeli troops to stop all sort of violence, internally as well as that which involves Israel.

All the armed elements in the PA, clans, families, militias, Fatah and Hamas, even the PA security forces should be disarmed, and only the Arab troops will be allowed to carry arms to stop lawlessness and implement law and order, and bring total security. Later, a non-factional Palestinian force, professionally trained, will be reconstituted to eventually takeover the security role.

The interim Arab mandate could be five years or even 10 years—its first mission is to stop all kinds of violence. Then a process of rebuilding the local and national political infrastructure begins, parallel to the process of negotiating a regional settlement that ends the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the return of the Golan Heights and any disputed Lebanese areas to their rightful countries.

At this sad juncture, it has become apparent that neither Hamas nor Fatah, alone or combined, have learned the political culture of working together in a coalition to serve their public, the Palestinian people, and that party politics and the struggle over power have led to killings that have led to almost civil war. The only way to prevent total disaster is for the Arab nations, with the backing of the UN and acquiescence of Israel, to work together in order to prevent the growing snowballing of violence from spreading all across the region.

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