

Peace, differently.

**Summary of the report submitted to the President of
the French Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron**

Ofer Bronchtein

President of the International Peace Forum

Special Envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian Relations



"The very idea of bringing Europeans closer together was based on the conviction that we would only rise together, supporting one another. There was neither naïve leniency nor an intention to absolve states of their responsibility. It was not about forgiveness or forgetfulness, but about a clear-sighted and courageous reconciliation, as utopian as it was realistic, all the more necessary because it knew it would emerge from the deepest despair. We needed to break the cycle: reconciliation among European peoples would be the cornerstone of building a pacified Europe. We had to take a gamble and stick to it despite the obstacles. Build bridges, weave connections, create a framework in which passions of hate would be neutralized. Take our sufferings, our trials, our wounds as the foundation for a new common endeavor. Friendship would come later."

Simone Veil

Introduction

This document presents an executive summary of the report “Peace, Differently,” which follows up on a first report written in January 2023. This new report has been submitted to the President of the French Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron.

Multiple events have shaken the region since then, and October 7 marked a major turning point in the history of the Middle East. In Israel, the formation of a right-wing and far-right government, composed of racist and messianic extremists, has thrown out any remaining hopes for a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians. The government's desire to reform the judicial system, which weakens democracy, has sparked unprecedented popular outrage.

On October 7, the worst terrorist attack Israel has experienced since its creation led to a response that was as bloody as it was disproportionate against the Palestinians. The solidarity and unequivocal support in the aftermath of the massacres by Hamas militants have given way to growing isolation and increasingly pressing criticisms of Israel (with some even labeling the country as genocidal), and not always legitimate (with some even questioning the very existence of the state). These criticisms have been accompanied by a troubling rise in anti-Semitism worldwide.

The war in Gaza and the pogrom of October 7 have placed both societies in a state of extreme trauma. Israelis are convinced that their very existence is at stake, and their leaders want to prove to the population that, despite the army's security failures, they are capable of protecting them. Palestinians are enduring the most severe humanitarian crisis in their history. Both sides claim to be victims, and both call for vengeance.

Never have we witnessed such a lack of empathy on both sides. This will make the reconciliation process harder than ever. Paradoxically, because both parties are weakened, there are opportunities for political agreements, and we must redouble our efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians to the negotiating table. These human sufferings and the urgency of the situation compel us to fundamentally change our approach. It is time for France to recognize the Palestinian state, while providing the security guarantees Israel needs.

Even though Europe remains divided and the United States is not determined to lead this initiative due to the November elections, in the current cacophony, let us be bold: France can and must pave the way for rapprochement and historic agreements, provided that Europe ensures coordination.

We have strategic means to contribute to the revitalization of the Palestinian Authority and support the Palestinians in establishing an independent, viable, and democratic state, while freeing Israel from its devastating and self-destructive grip on Palestinian territories, and ensuring its security and legitimacy.

By collaborating with civil society, political leaders, and economic actors, we can relaunch negotiations and foster cooperation between the parties involved. Israeli-Palestinian peace will open new economic opportunities for France and Europe, while strengthening diplomatic recognition of the parties. Humility, clarity, generosity, and forgiveness will be the foundations of peace and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis, between Jews and Arabs.

This summary includes the twenty practical recommendations outlined in the report, aimed particularly at encouraging rapprochement between Israeli and Palestinian societies, and promoting better regional cooperation.

"We owe it to the Palestinians whose aspirations have been trampled for too long. We owe it to the Israelis who have endured the greatest anti-Semitic massacre of our century. We owe it to a region that aspires to escape the promoters of chaos and the sowers of revenge."

Emmanuel Macron

1. Gaza first

The management of Gaza in the aftermath of the war will be an enormous challenge, given the scale of the damage and the distress of the population. A national unity government under the control of the Palestinian Authority will need to be established, with the support of a multinational force, including soldiers from Arab countries. This process will also require international supervision (UN, NATO, or an ad hoc coalition of states willing to contribute). After the distribution of emergency humanitarian aid, reconstruction efforts will need to begin, with massive investments. First, in infrastructure: a port, an airport, a 40 km railway to connect the south and north of Gaza, another 70 km line between northern Gaza and southern West Bank, desalination plants, power plants, hospitals, schools. A universal basic income could be granted to the Gazans for a defined period to ensure their economic independence.

2. Recognize Palestine now!

Immediate recognition of Palestine is imperative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. France, a country whose voice is respected by both parties and a permanent member of the Security Council, must act courageously in this regard. In 2014, the National Assembly and the Senate adopted a resolution calling for the recognition of the Palestinian state, but the executive branch did not follow through. This recognition would send a strong signal to the international community. It should be accompanied by security guarantees for Israel. If the Israeli government refuses to engage in a peace process aimed at the creation of a Palestinian state, we must consider halting funding for the Israeli occupation. The international community has injected 50 billion dollars in public aid to the Palestinians over the past twenty years. Had this aid been conditioned, Israeli authorities would have been forced to reconsider their policy of suffocating the Palestinian economy, particularly in Gaza.

3. Encourage Arab and Muslim States to Recognize Israel

Israel's isolation has had detrimental consequences for decades, depriving certain Arab countries of a positive influence on the conflict and increasing distrust within Israeli society. This logic of exclusion has also contributed to the fragmentation of Arab societies, between countries in favor of rapprochement with Israel and others staunchly opposed to the Jewish state. Countries that have not yet done so should be encouraged without delay to recognize Israel. This recognition could also accelerate the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes and regional economic development. The Abraham Accords are a significant step forward but must be framed within the context of the Arab Peace Initiative. Lasting peace will only come when Palestine is recognized as a state, and Israel is recognized by all Arab and Muslim countries. The new Arab Peace Initiative must be restructured with clearer language, emphasizing the key role of Saudi Arabia.

4. Call as Soon as Possible for Presidential and Legislative Elections in Palestine

While Israelis have ended up with a unity government between the right and far-right, the Palestinians are currently experiencing an authoritarian and marginalized government, which contributes to the frustration and radicalization of Palestinians, some of whom turn to armed Islamist factions. The renewed Palestinian Authority must establish itself as the only entity capable of bringing unity to Gaza and the West Bank, but this solution will not be accepted by the Palestinians without fundamental changes and the holding of democratic elections. Imprisoned leader Marwan Barghouti has been firm with Israel while remaining open to negotiations. He represents a true hope for unity among the Palestinian population and could become the main partner in serious negotiations.

5. Encourage National Unity in Palestine

One only makes peace with their enemies. Hamas will not disappear; its military wing will be significantly weakened in Gaza, but its political branch and ideas will persist and continue to represent a part of public opinion in Palestine in the medium term. Therefore, two options are available to Europe: reject dialogue with the Islamists or attempt to achieve lasting peace by agreeing to bring all factions together. This dialogue must be established under clear and firm conditions: the cessation of violence, the dismantling of the military wing, and the recognition of the agreements signed with Israel. As we saw during the release of Israeli hostages, communication channels do exist. Qatar, Egypt, and even Turkey could be strong mediators to begin discussions with the political leaders of Hamas. Today, Fatah and the PLO have made efforts to integrate Hamas' political wing. Hamas will not be able to continue as it is; it will need to change its current practices, but also change its name, its charter, and its leaders.

6. Transform UNRWA

Originally conceived as a temporary solution with only a three-year mandate, UNRWA is still operating today more than 70 years after its creation. Numerous incidents have tarnished its credibility and weakened its position of neutrality on the international stage. A lasting peace agreement requires the return of refugees to Palestinian territories or their integration into Arab states willing to accept them, whether the state they currently reside in or a third country, in exchange for compensation. A transfer of responsibilities must be carried out from UNRWA to the Palestinian state and to the Arab states hosting the refugees. This transfer should be gradual to avoid harming the refugees or destabilizing the region. It should also be territorially phased to account for the differing treatment of refugees by the host countries. To achieve this, a portion of international aid should be progressively redirected from UNRWA to an international fund for the reintegration of refugees, as well as to the Palestinian Authority.

7. France as the Engine of Europe

Although it holds historical influence in the region and in the conflicts within it, and despite its multiple declarations of support for the two-state solution, the European Union has failed to exert effective pressure on the stakeholders to bring them to the negotiating table. It must now intensify its diplomatic efforts and use its economic levers to encourage Israel and Palestine to seriously engage in peace talks. Beyond the recognition of Palestine, with France at the forefront, a European Development Agency (EDA) modeled after the AFD (French Development Agency) could be considered to replace the dozens of national and international agencies that are sometimes dissonant. A resolution at the United Nations Security Council on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, presented by the European Union, would also clarify the support of European countries for the Palestinians, which is currently diluted in billions of euros in aid.

8. Review the Paris Protocol

The Paris Protocol, signed in 1994, established a mechanism for allocating budgetary resources to the Palestinian Authority, which was intended to be temporary and to promote the emergence of a viable and independent Palestinian economy. It created a customs union between Israel and the Palestinian territories, whereas a common tariff structure is unsuitable for two incomparable economies, with the Palestinian GDP representing only 3.6% of Israel's GDP in 2023. Implementing the parameters for the development of the Palestinian economy requires both an immediate revision of the Paris Protocol, which is ill-suited for building a viable economy, and strict enforcement of it by Israel, which has been using, among other things, tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority as a tool of pressure.

9. Protecting workers: a Priority

Work in Israel is vital to the Palestinian economy. Palestinian workers in Israel endure deplorable working conditions. Too many Israeli employers do not comply with Israeli law, which is supposed to protect them. Before the war, the main Israeli trade union, Histadrut, had expressed its willingness to make legal interventions with the military and political authorities to change the status of workers in Gaza and grant them a work permit identical to that of workers in the West Bank. The union had submitted several proposals to improve the working conditions of these workers. Social organizations, including French trade unions, particularly the CFDT, can play a role as facilitators.

10. Multiply Strategic Investments in Palestine and Israel

There is a multitude of untapped resources in the Palestinian economy. We should multiply strategic investments in green energy, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, water management, healthcare, quantum physics, and data storage with Israel; and in renewable energy, agriculture, innovation, road, port, and railway infrastructure in Palestine. In the current context, we could create a sustainable development investment fund by establishing a 0.25% tax on fossil fuels and arms sales. Such a tax would generate several billion dollars annually, not to mention its multiplier effects. The funds would be invested in projects and companies that support sustainable development.

11. Invest in Federative Projects in France

The importation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into France is not a fantasy and contributes to an increase in racist and anti-Semitic acts. The creation of a cultural incubator aimed at supporting projects that bring together Jewish and Muslim communities will help strengthen dialogue and highlight the similarities between the two communities. At the same time, an economic incubator could be created to support entrepreneurs from both Jewish and Muslim communities and encourage their cooperation. With an approach focused on social innovation, sustainable development, and technology, it would offer a support program including mentoring, funding, and networking, with a particular focus on young people and women.

12. Consider Cantonization or Confederation as an alternative solution

In the Israel-Palestine context, assuming the adoption of such a system, some cantons would be predominantly Orthodox Jewish, others Muslim, some secular, and others would also include Bedouin, Druze, or Christian minorities. These ethnoreligious groups could express themselves within regional governments where each would hold a clear majority. Legally, the cantons would each have their own parliament responsible for voting on laws and adopting a cantonal budget. The federal government would operate based on a written constitution. To ensure stability, the parliament would be bicameral, composed of the existing Knesset and a new body representing the cantons. The federal government would oversee defense, foreign relations, and macroeconomic policy, based in Jerusalem. The capital would be Palestinian in the east and Israeli in the west. The Old City, covering 0.9 km², would be co-managed by a consortium of countries and could host the headquarters of an international organization, with shared sovereignties according to the different neighborhoods. Jerusalem could then become a city of peace and exchange, around a common narrative.

13. Put Peace on Track

The construction of the first French train in the Palestinian territories is a consensual project with symbolic significance: France would thus demonstrate its confidence in the construction of a viable Palestinian state. This project will mobilize thousands of Palestinian workers, create long-term jobs, and position France at the forefront of economic opportunities and infrastructure development in Palestine. A train line of approximately 12 km could be built between the center of Ramallah and the Qalandia checkpoint. French companies anticipated for the project include Meridiam, Alstom, and RATP. In the long term, the construction of a 40 km railway connecting the south and north of Gaza could be part of the initial investments in the reconstruction of the enclave. Later, a 70 km line between northern Gaza and southern West Bank would contribute to reunifying Palestinian territory.

14. Renewable Energy: A Priority

Europe must support the renewable energy market by financing projects through loans. The European Commission's recent energy strategy has emphasized the potential of future clean energy imports from the Middle East. The water-energy agreement concluded between Israel and Jordan in 2021 is expected to create a market of 5 to 7 GW. On the other hand, such an agreement helps promote lasting peace based on energy interdependence and trust between states. Thus, NGOs propose a cooperation framework based on the exchange of Israeli desalinated water and Jordanian solar energy, and promote the production of solar energy in Area C.

15. Water: A Source of Peace

A scarce resource in the Middle East, water is one of the issues left to negotiation in the final status of the Oslo Accords. The availability of large quantities of treated water makes it possible to equitably share natural water between Israelis and Palestinians, which would significantly improve the lives of every Palestinian and benefit the economy in a meaningful way. Palestine could fully exercise its water rights by pumping water from the three basins of the Mountain Aquifer, while Israel would reduce its dependence on groundwater by increasing its production of desalinated water. To compensate for Palestinian and Jordanian losses of water from the Jordan River due to diversion and pollution, an increase in pumping from the Sea of Galilee, following the model of the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, could be considered. Inviting Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate the water issue in order to replace Article 40 of the 1994 Oslo Accords and create a joint water management committee would be a key and accessible step towards ecological, economic, health, and security progress.

16. Intensify Trilateral Cooperation

Decentralized cooperation is one of the strengths of the French Consulate General in Jerusalem, with more than 80 active Franco-Palestinian cooperation agreements, which demonstrate France's support to the Palestinian population. Events related to the intifadas have made it difficult to carry out these agreements: let's relaunch them and multiply trilateral cooperations between universities, cities, and schools in France, Israel, and Palestine. Not only do such partnerships present important economic and diplomatic opportunities for France, but they also contribute to dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians on neutral ground, which is absolutely necessary to combat rejection of the other. In continuity with the Erasmus+ program, to which Israel belongs, the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Erasmus program would encourage students from the region to learn more about their neighbors and thus promote the sharing of common challenges.

17. Make Francophonie a Vector for Peace in the Middle East

Let us further leverage the influential Francophonie network in Israel and Palestine, particularly by integrating Israel and the future Palestinian state into the International Organisation of La Francophonie to encourage a culture of peace and dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Let us encourage stronger collaboration between the French Institutes in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Haifa, Nazareth, and Gaza. Let us develop Francophonie Projects by mobilizing French-speaking volunteers from around the world to help the Palestinian population rebuild Gaza through volunteer programs and skill exchange initiatives.

18. Encourage Regional Cooperation

The project revealed at the G20 summit in New Delhi regarding the creation of a new trade corridor between India and Europe represents a unique opportunity for rapprochement and will radically change the face of the region and the relationship between Asia and Europe. It could also become one of the flagship projects for the reconstruction of Gaza, turning the enclave into a strategic transit point. The Emirati-Saudi railway network, powered by renewable energy, passing through Jordan and heading towards the Ports of Haifa and Gaza, could significantly enhance the security and stability of the countries in the region. This project, in addition to facilitating international trade by creating a consolidated trade route that will reduce transport costs, will also promote market access and encourage investment opportunities between the participating countries. In this context, the European Union must advocate for the participation of the Palestinians in this major project, so that the economic opportunities can also benefit them.

19. Organize a Conference to Encourage Euro-Mediterranean Partnerships

Let us organize a meeting in Paris between representatives of Israeli, Palestinian, Arab, and European civil societies. Entrepreneurs, leaders, artists, intellectuals, opinion makers, and influencers will come together on neutral ground to build partnerships based on common interests. Four key areas have been identified: sustainable economy, new technologies, future networks (women, youth, media), and culture and peace education. Mixing private and public actors is essential because of the importance of the private sector in the region and its involvement in peacebuilding efforts, which will create the necessary incentives to broaden support circles. The combination of civil society actors, political leaders, and international organizations will demonstrate a new approach to peacebuilding, outside of the traditional cycles of negotiations between leaders that are currently paralyzed.

To ensure transparency and accessibility of information, a digital platform, the Peace Book, will list calls for proposals and peace initiatives, encouraging citizens, small and medium-sized NGOs, and SMEs to cooperate and propose joint projects.

20. Cultural Meetings with Jews from the East

At the initiative of President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, organizing cultural meetings with Jews from the Arab and Muslim worlds would provide an opportunity to overcome political divisions and establish relationships based on mutual respect and appreciation. These encounters could highlight the cultural, historical, and linguistic commonalities between Palestinians and Jews from the Middle East, focusing on shared traditions, culinary specialties, music, dance, and other elements of their common heritage. Encouraging dialogue between Palestinians and Jews from the Middle East would help ease existing tensions and lay the foundations for long-term regional integration.

"In the terrifying prospects that open up for humanity, we see more clearly than ever that peace is the only fight worth pursuing. It is no longer a prayer, but a command that must rise from the peoples to their governments, the command to choose definitively between hell and reason."

Albert Camus

