

It's Time for the World to Turn to the United Nations to Broker an Israeli-Palestinian Peace

LONDON - Ceasefires come and go between the Israelis and Palestinians while the death toll mounts. Only the United Nations General Assembly can mobilize world opinion. Nothing else seems likely to break the deadlock. The Security Council is unable to move because of an implicit American veto hanging over its proceedings.

The important development over Gaza is that the Americans are no longer relying on the Egyptians or Saudi Arabia to help broker a settlement, but have turned to Turkey and Qatar in despair to mediate with Hamas, the Palestinian leaders within Gaza. What can Turkey and Qatar do? They can and should urgently liaise between Fatah and Hamas on a brief outline settlement with the objective of putting its terms to the UN General Assembly where it cannot be vetoed as in the Security Council.

The Americans will hate the idea of using the General Assembly but this forum could provide the spur to obtaining an agreement. Against American wishes, Palestine was admitted not long ago to the Assembly and it is now time the rest of the world insisted this UN forum be used. Any worthwhile outline agreement will have to address urgently two main issues: lifting the blockade of Gaza for a fixed period, perhaps six months renewable if detailed negotiations continue; and committing Hamas to the same formulation as Fatah about recognizing Israel.

Hamas has to put beyond doubt for world opinion that Israel's claim is wrong that the underlying Hamas objective is to drive Israel into the sea. Hamas also must make it clear they are ready to live alongside Israel in a two state solution, Palestine and Israel. Such a Declaration put before the General Assembly and endorsed by a great majority of nations would have permanence and standing. Hamas has hitherto equivocated in lesser forums fearing the commitment will just be pocketed by Israeli negotiators.

There was, in the past, a measure of respect from Egypt for Hamas who won the last election in not just Gaza, but also the West Bank. At that time, the Western democracies tragically refused to deal with Hamas -- in part because they had links with Hezbollah, the Shia militants in Lebanon. Hamas, with President Morsi elected in Egypt and having broken with Hezbollah, hoped for progress; finding none and with Morsi now in prison, they sensibly, a few months ago, linked themselves once again with Fatah and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. What was Israel's reaction to this attempt at Palestinian unity? They did every-

thing in their power to disown it, showing they preferred to foster dissent amongst the Palestinians.

Egypt did manage in the past to bring about a number of significant ceasefires when Gaza was ablaze but the fact that Hamas stems from the Brotherhood means the new Egyptian military leader General Sisi thinks he can stand by while Israel obliterates them with no consequences for Egypt even within the Arab League. He also thinks he can eradicate the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt. President Nasser, at the height of his power in Egypt, after defeating Britain and France over the Suez Canal in 1956, failed to defeat the Brotherhood. It is hard to see Sisi, the leader of the military coup, succeeding, particularly with his deplorable record over human rights within Egypt over the last few months.

I had hoped as Foreign Secretary in 1977, when the Egyptian President Sadat flew into Israel followed by the Camp David agreement, that peace between Israel and Palestine by now would have been a done deal. A solution is still possible but time is fast running out. With the Sunni extremists ISIS destroying Mosul and threatening Jordan, today only the General Assembly can point the way to an Israeli Palestinian settlement.