



# SECURITY COUNCIL REPORT UPDATE REPORT



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## DEBATE ON SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

### Background

The Council on 12 December will hold a debate on “Sustainable Peace in the Middle East”, at the initiative of Qatar, which holds the presidency of the Council in December. The main issues likely to arise during the debate are the resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and efforts toward the implementation of the roadmap. Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be invited to participate, as well as the presidency of the European Union (Finland) and the chairman of the League of Arab States.

The Secretary-General will also participate, giving the Council his reflections on the current situation in the Middle East and an assessment of the situation during the last ten years which coincide with his term of office.

### Expected Council Action

Qatar is expected to circulate a draft presidential statement which would respond to the debate and set out the Council's views on the steps that now should be taken. It is likely to emphasise the need to revive the peace process and implement the roadmap. At the time of writing it is far from clear whether consensus can be reached on a presidential statement. Numerous attempts have been made to reach agreement during 2006 on similar language. All have failed due to the US view that the Council should remain silent. It remains to be seen whether the recent truce in Gaza may have influenced the overall dynamic.

### Recent Developments

On 11 November, the US blocked the adoption of a Qatar-sponsored Security Council resolution (with abstentions from Denmark, Japan, Slovakia and the UK), calling for a UN fact-finding mission in response to the Israeli operation in Gaza which killed at least 18 civilians earlier in the month. (Please refer to our Update Report on the Proposed Resolution on Israeli Military Action in Gaza.)

On 15 November, a special session of the Human Rights Council was convened at the initiative of the Group of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference to address the situation in Gaza. The Human Rights Council adopted a resolution expressing shock and also its alarm at violations of human rights by Israel in the Palestinian Occupied Territory. It decided to dispatch a high-level fact-finding mission to travel to Beit Hanoun in order to assess the situation of victims and make recommendations on ways to protect Palestinian civilians against further Israeli assaults.

On 17 November, the General Assembly convened in an emergency special session and adopted a resolution which deplored Israel's shelling of Gaza, called on Israel to withdraw its troops from the

territory, and asked the Secretary-General to send a fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun and report back to the Assembly within thirty days on the circumstances surrounding the Israeli shelling. The text submitted by Qatar was very similar to the vetoed Council draft resolution. It included, however, a call on the Palestinian Authority to “take immediate and sustained action to bring an end to violence, including the firing of rockets on Israeli territory”.

The Quartet met in Cairo on 15 November and reiterated its statement made in September, welcoming Palestinian efforts to form a unity government “in the hope that the platform of such a government would reflect Quartet principles and allow for early engagement,” renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept agreements already signed between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel stated that it was ready to resume contacts with a Fatah-Hamas unity government.

During November, talks on a national unity government made good progress. However, they now seem to be stalled.

France, Italy and Spain have also proposed to organise an international conference to revive the peace process.

An agreement was reached on 25 November between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to establish a mutual ceasefire in Gaza. After protracted negotiation on the text, the Council welcomed the ceasefire agreement in a press statement issued on 6 December.

### **Key Issues**

Qatar had signaled its intention to convene an open thematic debate at the ministerial level in order to “engage the Council in discussion on the most effective ways to guarantee the establishment of a lasting peace in that important region of the world, and the sustainability of that peace”. At press time, no foreign minister has confirmed attendance, due to the short notice and also because many think that in the absence of the formation of a national unity government in Palestine, the prospects for a renewed peace process remain uncertain. A ministerial-level Council meeting may therefore be premature.

However, the Qatari initiative gained new momentum with the decision by the Secretary-General to present to the Council a statement—along with a report—on the Middle East assessing the situation over the last ten years and providing some recommendations for long-term peace. Although details of his statement are still being developed, it seems that it will focus primarily on the Israeli-Palestinian issue but will also explore the Lebanese and Syrian peace tracks, with a strong emphasis on the regional dimension and interlinkage of Middle East issues. The Secretary-General has always considered that a comprehensive settlement of all issues in the Middle East is necessary for the achievement of sustainable peace.

Although the report may contain elements related to the implementation of resolution 1701 on Lebanon, it is not designed to be linked to any resolution or specific mandate. The initiative may serve to reinforce the idea of convening a ministerial meeting on the Middle East at a later stage.

It remains to be seen whether Council members will respond to the Secretary-General’s recommendations during the debate, or even whether some will be incorporated in a presidential statement. (It is likely that Council members will be briefed about the recommendations before the debate.)

## Council Dynamics

The US considers that the Quartet should remain the forum for discussion on the Middle East peace process, and in the past the US has been cautious about trying to address more comprehensively all issues in the Middle East in order to achieve sustainable peace. Finally, the US tends to argue that the Council should only become substantially involved after agreement has been reached between the parties to resume peace talks.

At press time, a draft had yet to be circulated. Given the amount of time necessary to negotiate any text on the Middle East (even press statements), some think that it may already be too late, especially since except for supporting a ceasefire in Gaza, Council members disagree on many other issues that seem likely to be inserted in a presidential statement, such as the role of the Quartet, engagement at the regional level and the protection of civilians.

## UN Documents

<b>Vetoed Draft Council Resolution</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>S/2006/878 (10 November 2006) called upon Israel to cease its military activities in Gaza and upon the Palestinian Authority to take steps to stop the firing of rockets into Israel and requested the Secretary-general to establish a fact-finding mission in Beit Hanoun.</li></ul>
<b>Security Council Press Statement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>SC/8889 (6 December 2006) welcomed the mutual ceasefire in Gaza.</li></ul>
<b>Selected Letter</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>S/2006/886 (15 November 2006) was the letter from the League of Arab States including its resolution adopted in Cairo on “ongoing Israeli acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and ways of dealing with them”.</li></ul>
<b>General Assembly Resolution</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>A/RES/ES-10/16 (20 November 2006)</li></ul>
<b>Human Rights Council Resolution</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>S-3/1 (15 November 2006)</li></ul>

## Useful Additional Sources

- OPT: Civilians Must Not Be Used to Shield Homes against Military Attacks*, Human Rights Watch, 22 November 2006
- Quartet’s latest statement of 20 September 2006  
[http://www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/middle\\_east/quartet-20sept2006.htm](http://www.un.org/news/dh/infocus/middle_east/quartet-20sept2006.htm)