

U.S.-Backed 'Quartet' Makes Demands of Israel

Friday, a "quartet" that includes Russia, the United Nations and the European Union made a list of "requests" to both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in what was billed as a first-of-its-kind "way forward" to a "lasting resolution."

The "Middle East Quartet" had worked on the eight-page report for more than four months. It calls on both sides to "independently demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to the two-state solution" and to "refrain from unilateral steps that prejudice the outcome of the final negotiations."

Neither side is going to like the Quartet's "recommendations," either. They are:

- Both sides should work to de-escalate tensions by exercising restraint and refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric.
- The Palestinian Authority should act decisively and take all steps within its capacity to cease incitement to violence and strengthen ongoing efforts to combat terrorism, including by clearly condemning all acts of terrorism.
- Israel should cease the policy of settlement construction and expansion, designating land for exclusive Israeli use and denying Palestinian development.
- Israel should implement positive and significant policy shifts, including transferring powers and responsibilities in Area C, consistent with the transition to greater Palestinian civil authority contemplated by prior agreements. Progress in the areas of housing, water, energy, communications, agriculture

and natural resources, along with significantly easing Palestinian movement restrictions, can be made while respecting Israel's legitimate security needs.

- The Palestinian leadership should continue their efforts to strengthen institutions, improve governance and develop a sustainable economy. Israel should take all necessary steps to enable this process, in line with the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee recommendations.
- All sides must continue to respect the ceasefire in Gaza, and the illicit arms buildup and militant activities must be terminated.

The U.N. Security Council got a sneak-peek at the report Thursday.

"The main objective of this report is not about assigning blame," Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told the 15-member council. "It focuses on the major threats to achieving a negotiated peace and offers recommendations on the way forward."

The Quartet "principals"—Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, United States Secretary of State John Kerry, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and E.U. High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Federica Mogherini—issued a joint statement following the release of the report:

"The Quartet invites both parties to engage with it on implementing its recommendations and creating the conditions for the resumption of meaningful negotiations that resolve all final status issues."

Separately, Ban issued his own statement underscoring the report's finding "that there is a strong need for affirmative steps to reverse negative trends on the ground."

"These trends risk entrenching a one-state reality of perpetual occupation and conflict which is incompatible with realizing the national aspirations of both peoples," he said.

"A negotiated two-state outcome that meets Israeli security needs and creates a sovereign Palestinian state, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues is the only way to achieve an enduring peace."

Ban "strongly encouraged" both sides to engage with the Quartet on "implementing the report recommendations" in order to "rebuild hope" for their people. He also expressed concern about the recent spike in Islamic terrorism in the Middle East and said he "condemns all acts of terror and violence."