

THE QUARTET FOR THE MIDDLE EAST - A DECADE OF ACTIVITY

Ana-Maria BOLBORICI¹

Abstract: *The theme of the paper is focused upon the problem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the implication of the Quartet for the Middle East, this year the organisation is celebrating a decade of activity. The Quartet plays a significant role in the context of the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) as a political group with four important members (the UN, the Russian Federation, the USA and the European Union). This paper presents a few strategies of the Quartet for the Middle East concerning the states directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also of importance for the countries with interest in the evolution of the Middle East peace process.*

Key words: *the Quartet for the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Middle East Peace Process.*

1. Introduction

During the Cold War period many countries expressed their interest by acting consequently in supporting the peace process in the Middle East.

The end of this war produced a clear distinction in the competition concerning the spheres of influence between the two important powers (Russia and the USA), causing a major change in the balance of the global geostrategic moment that also reflects the changing balance of power in the Middle East.

The historical evolution of the European continent and, in particular, the Middle and Near East, also reveals and confirms that the involvement of the European

diplomacy in supporting the Israeli-Palestinian peace is not only an effect of the Cold War, but it is deeply rooted in the history of the foundation of the European peoples (see the consequences of World War I and the implications that have affected the eastern area, especially after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire).

However, it should be stressed that the European states (as unique entities) although they didn't have an important political role, maintained their interests (commercial and otherwise) in the region, but only after the ending of the Cold War, Europe has attained real opportunities in approaching some thorny issues, such as: the particular issues in the Middle East and specifically the Palestinian problem [3].

¹ Faculty of Sociology and Communication, *Transilvania* University of Braşov.

For the entire international community the 21st century debuted with effervescence more or less predictable, the Islamic terrorism being the main cause.

Analysing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the context of the new century, we could identify the same effervescence which was manifested at the starting of the second Palestinian Intifada, which will lead to a century of convulsion between Palestinians and also between Israelis and Palestinians.

This brief radiography of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict circumscribes the context in which the Quartet for the Middle East appeared; this international organization convened under the same institutional umbrella the representatives of the UNO, the Russian Federation, the USA and the European Union, which have as common motivation the desire to end this endemic Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a durable and comprehensive peace.

Since 2002, the UN has decided to associate with the United States, the European Union and the Russian Federation for conjugating and also capacitating the diplomatic effort so needed for the establishment of a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the Middle East.

The Resolution 1397, adopted by the Security Council during the 4489th meeting (on 12th of March 2002), invoked the compulsory compliance with the rules of humanitarian law, the resolutions already adopted and promoting as the unique solution to the conflict Israeli-Palestinian, the perspective of regions with two states living side by side, within mutually recognized borders (one Israeli and one Palestinian); all of these issues can be

found in the resolutions 1402 (March 30, 2002), 1403 (April 4, 2002), 1405 (April 19, 2002) etc.[4]

2. Discussions

A brief review of the chronology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict obviously reveals the sustained involvement of some international actors (with more or less global vocation) in an attempt to solve the crisis and achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian crisis specific global and regional security structures have launched a series of initiatives aimed to stabilize the Middle East by facilitating efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the engaging in multilateral regional platforms.

In the Middle East the beginning of the 21st century has been marked by the intensification of the rebel movements, considering that the terrorism exacerbation became more evident.

The outbreak of the second Palestinian Intifada will open a decade of intra-Palestinian and inter-Israeli-Palestinian convulsions which will attract the international community attention.

Thus, the first session of the Quartet for the Middle East was held in Madrid and brought together (in a diplomatic formula) to the negotiating table: the U.S. representatives, the European Union, the United Nations and the Russian Federation in order to find an appropriate solution to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Regarding the attributions, respectively the role of the four members of the Quartet for the Middle East, the perspectives are multiple and also different; on the one

hand, some consider that this organism is an American instrument used to legitimate the decisions related to the Middle East [2].

Others believe that, in theory at least, all these four members are equal within the group, each having a complementary role, because in practice it is quite difficult to determine exactly which of them has a key role in this structure.

There are also other points of view according to which the Quartet was designed to represent an international consensus, so that the parties which are involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot influence the Russian Federation and the European Union in adopting different views compared to those promoted by the USA [1].

However, without excluding the individual efforts of its members, the political force of the Quartet results from the integrated synergic action of a joint action plan; its members are meeting regularly, on the basis of a common agenda which is rigorously predetermined, to coordinate all the efforts for the amelioration of the diplomatic conflict generalized in the Middle East.

Coincidence or not, the first session of the Middle East Quartet meeting in this new diplomatic formula was held in Madrid (10th of April 2002), location which after 11 years (in 1991) succeeded to bring at the negotiating table the representatives of Israel, the Palestinian entity and the Arab states.

At the press conference organized on that occasion, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan wanted to mention before reading out the joint statement that the new institutional formula was created on the background of an escalated crisis in the

whole region of the Middle East and, primarily, of the intensification of the struggle between Israelis and Palestinians [6].

Since its first official meeting, the Middle East Quartet aimed to draw the attention of both parties involved, and also of the entire international community to the serious situation in territories, calling for urgent cease of any kind of violence and terrorism, both of these threatening the security and the stability of the entire region.

The message sent by the first joint statement of the Quartet for the Middle East, relates to a number of important issues which in some measure could condition even the pacification of the area and implicitly the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Secondly, the Quartet categorically has condemned the violence and the terrorism arguing that for the solving of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can't be taken into consideration a solution of a military nature; therefore, the Quartet recommended to both parties of the conflict to find a political solution which reflects the Resolutions 242 and 338, the principle of land for peace and also other principles launched at the International Conference in Madrid (1991).

Thirdly, the Quartet has urged the Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to cease the confrontations and, in parallel, sent a message to the international community, in particular to the Arab states suggesting them to support and reinforce the PA by continuing the efforts for reconstruction of the infrastructure, the security and the governing capacity of the Palestinians.

Fourthly, the Quartet urged the PA to end the terrorist attacks against Israel,

advising them to make everything possible to remove/ decompose the terrorist infrastructure (including the cessation of terrorism financing) and stop any incitement to violence.

Fifthly, the Quartet demanded Israel to withdraw from all Palestinian cities, including Ramallah and, also, the cessation of the attacks against Palestinian civilians.

Sixthly, the Quartet has expressed its support for the plan advanced by President Bush, which presented as the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the coexistence of the two states (Israel and Palestine) [13].

The Quartet welcomed the peace initiative of the Saudi King Abdullah appreciated as representing a significant contribution to the establishment of a comprehensive peace, which also involved the inclusion of the subsequent agreements with Syria and Lebanon.

The Quartet approached several issues whose solutions largely depend on extinguishing the conflict from the Middle East; for example, on the issue of the Jerusalem city, the Quartet has stated invariably that the annexation of the eastern part of the city is not recognized by the international community and this should be clarified through direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations concerning its permanent status.

Regarding the same problem, the Quartet has specifically condemned the Israeli government's decision to plan the construction of new homes in East Jerusalem, majority Arab, annexed in 1967 [8].

Another issue frequently debated by the Quartet for the Middle East is about the Palestinian unity, the organization suggesting that a reunification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the PA

legitimacy would be a benefit for the positive development of the peace process [10].

All the problems analyzed by the Quartet for the Middle East, even from the first official statement, have not been solved and even these are very current, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is far from the implementation of an appropriate solution.

The press statements of the Quartet, offered during the ten years from the institutional onset, summarize in general the official views regarding the major events that affect the Middle East and considering their impact these statements always reiterate the same recommendations that have been advanced since 2002.

From the hermeneutic point of view, the Quartet for the Middle East is promoting a rectilinearly discourse, if we consider that the basic principles and rationale underlying the proposed solutions at specific problems to the Israeli-Palestinian crisis do not support changes according to social, political and economic contexts.

Therefore, the Quartet is a supporter of the three guiding principles: the renunciation to violence/ terrorism, the recognition of Israel and the respect of the agreements adopted throughout the Middle East peace process.

All these three principles have been designed to represent the framework for a positive development of the peace process, these also constituting compulsory conditions that must be fulfilled by the parties involved in negotiations on the peace process in the Middle East.

Whenever it had the opportunity, the Quartet noted that these principles are inseparable and the infringement of these cancels any attempt to negotiating a peace settlement.

However, the reality demonstrated that these three principles have acted as an impediment for the progress of peace; an example in this regard is the constant defiance of these by the Hamas [2].

Summarizing the frequency with which the Quartet for the Middle East Quartet organizes the institutional reunions, there is a certain regularity mainly determined by the evolution of events and the current situation in the region; every time when the group meets, it analyses the context of the actions taken by the parties involved in the conflict and, at the same time, they make the necessary recommendations appropriate to the situation.

The Quartet organizes meetings in different locations and after the proper discussions (that take place with closed doors), the overall conclusions concerning the concrete situation regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Middle East, in general, are presented to the press.

In the joint statement, of 21st of September 2010, the Quartet for Middle East, accentuated the importance of resuming the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in order to identify a mutually acceptable solution to the issues which influence the final agreement within a period of one year and to create the necessary prerequisites for creating an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state [9].

The Quartet also reiterated, its subsequent commitment concerning the implementation of the final agreement and the commitment (since 2002) to establish a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanon peace agreements.

The Quartet requested that both parties needed to fulfill their obligations arising

from the Roadmap, also, the international community will support the peace process and according with the Arab Peace Initiative (approved by the Arab League, on 27 - 28 March 2002), all the Arab states must support Israeli-Palestinian negotiations by promoting positive relationships in the whole region, including combating the violence and terrorism.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, we need to retain that starting with the institutional emergence of the Quartet for the Middle East and the detailing of the Road Map, for the first time on 24th of June 2002, by the U.S. President George W. Bush and, later, by the Quartet, on 17th of September 2002, the European Union has categorically and with consistency supported the two-state solution; so, all the principles adopted which are considered essential for the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are periodically reiterated [4].

An element of novelty can be seen in the contents of Resolution 1515, adopted by the Security Council on 19th of November 2003, which refer to the principles of the Madrid conference (promoted during the first meeting of the Quartet for the Middle East), along with other resolutions already adopted, the basic aim being the implementation of the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese peace negotiations [12].

In the same resolution, the Security Council expressed its support for the plan concerning the implementation of the solution proposed by the Quartet regarding the coexistence of the two states (it is about the Road Map document prepared by the joint action of the members of the Quartet and presented on 30th of April

2003, both to the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority and which is not applied yet).

The analysts consider that the President Mahmoud Abbas made (on 23th of September 2011) a historical step by asking to the United Nations the recognition of the Palestinian state, a request which he described as a "Palestinian Spring", but which Israel considers to be premature without direct negotiations that would lead to a durable, just and comprehensive peace. It would be a right time for the a "Palestinian Spring" to join the Arab Spring in reshaping the Middle East, said Abbas, "my people want to exercise their right to enjoy a normal life like everyone else", said the Palestinian leader in that context [7].

In its turn, the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu replied that the Palestinians seek to make "a state without peace" by ignoring important security concerns of Israel. The Israeli Prime Minister said that the Palestinians are armed not only with the "hopes and dreams" as Abbas said in his speech, but also with "10,000 missiles and Grad rockets supplied by Iran, not to mention lethal weapons continually coming to Gaza" [7].

Netanyahu also stated that the Palestinians should make peace with Israel and then try to achieve the statehood; peace has to come within a two-state solution, which recognizes the state of Israel. If this happens, the Israel will be the first which will recognize the Palestinian state, Netanyahu has assured [7].

The most recent meeting of the Quartet for the Middle East (on 31st of January 2014, held at Munich) tried to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian peace process at least in a discursive way.

However, the recent statements of the Secretary of State, John Kerry, according to which Israel risks becoming a state "of apartheid" if it does not make a quick peace with the Palestinians, do not help in any form the positive evolution of the peace process in the Middle East [5].

It should be noted that the Secretary of State, John Kerry, made this statement (on April 25th, 2014) in a behind closed doors meeting of the Trilateral Commission (a nonpartisan and nongovernmental discussion group founded by David Rockefeller), and because of this reason these assertions can't be analyzed (since there were not assumed in public) [5].

All these statements are only delaying the progress of the negotiations and implicitly the Middle East peace process.

For a quick end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a full cooperation between the four institutional partners of the Quartet for the Middle East is required, which should be reflected in more concrete and realistic steps, and less in practicing a discursive rhetoric [11].

In the last period, the efficacy of the Quartet for the Middle East is frequently called into question.

Definitely, in the coming decades the historians will be able to bring to light those evidences which will evaluate objectively the importance of the institutional appearance of the Quartet for the Middle East, on the international stage.

Some analysts already try to find more or less pertinent answers, concerning the initial act of the President Bush of involving the EU, the UN and the Russian Federation at his initiative for the Israeli-Palestinian peace.

On the other hand, there are points of view that share the belief that this supranational political mechanism (the

Quartet) has a highly relevant mission in the current stage of negotiations, which seems to hold the key to success for installing the peace in the region.

We consider that the history is the only one which will decide if the Quartet for the Middle East will find the necessary resources for the implementation of what the analysts call the *raison d'être*, more exactly an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty which should finally lead to the peaceful coexistence of Israel with Palestine and also with all the Arab states in the region.

References

1. Dunne, M.: *Rethinking US Strategy on the Middle East Peace Process*, March 18, 2010. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=40380>. Accessed: 17 December 2010.
2. Goerzig, C.: *Transforming the Quartet principles: Hamas and the Peace Process*. In: European Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Paper, Condé-sur-Noireau (France), September 2010, pp. 5-7.
3. Idan, L.: *The EU Policy in the Middle East. Problematic Nature and Potential Role*". Dissertation zur Erlangung des Grades des Doktors der Philosophie im Fachbereich Sozialwissenschaften der Universität Hamburg, 2005, p. 41.
4. *** *2003 Road Map for Peace*, ProCon.org. Available at: <http://israelipalestinian.procon.org/view.background-resource.php?resourceID=1011>. Accessed: 28 July 2010.
5. *** *Mediafax.ro*. Available at: http://www.mediafax.ro/externe/lideri-israelieni-au-condamnat-declaratiile-lui-john-kerry-despre-riscul-de-apartheid-in-israel-12545490?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+MediafaxExterne+%28Mediafax+-+Externe%29. Accessed: 28 April 2014.
6. *** *Quartet Joint Statement, Press Conference (Madrid) - Press Release*. Available at: <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/4808d2e68a33b35385256b970062deaf?OpenDocument>. Accessed: 28 July 2010.
7. *** *România Liberă*. Available at: <http://www.romanialibera.ro/actualitate/mapamond/cvartetul-pentru-o-mijlociu-propune-o-solutie-de-compromis-dupa-ce-abbas-a-cerut-recunoastere-la-onu-238721>. Accessed: 28 April 2014.
8. *** *Statement by Middle East Quartet*, 12 March 2010. Available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sg2157.doc.htm>. Accessed: 17 December 2010.
9. *** *Statement by Middle East Quartet*, 21 September 2010. Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/docs.asp?Topic=Middle%20East&Type=Quartet%20statement>. Accessed: 17 December 2010.
10. *** *Statement by Middle East Quartet*, 21 September 2010. Available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sg2162.doc.htm>. Accessed: 17 December 2010.
11. *** *The Middle East Quartet: A Progress Report*, 2008, p. 5. Available at: http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/middle_east_quartet.pdf. Accessed: 17 December 2010.

12. *** *UN Resolution*. Available at: <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/vDateDoc?OpenView&Start=1&Count=150&Expand=9.10#9.10>. Accessed: 10 August 2010.
13. *** *UN Resolution 1397* (12 March 2002). Available at: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/UN%20Security%20Council%20Resolution%201397>. Accessed: 20 December 2010.