

THE INTERNATIONAL
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY
OF RADICALISATION AND
POLITICAL VIOLENCE



15 Ideas to Fix the Middle East

The First Annual Atkin Conference
on Prospects for Peace in the Middle East
8 July 2009



About the Atkin Conference

The First Annual Atkin Conference on Prospects for Peace in the Middle East was convened by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) and held at King's College London on 8 July 2009. Its aim was to bring together scholars and experts to take stock of the current political situation in the Middle East, and debate ways in which a peaceful settlement of the conflict could be advanced.

Discussions took place in three panels: 'International Dimensions'; 'Israeli Perspectives'; and 'Arab and Palestinian Perspectives'. Ambassador Marc Otte, the European Union's Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, delivered a keynote speech on Europe's role in promoting a peaceful settlement.

For more information about this year's conference, including Podcasts of the various sessions, please visit www.icsr.info.

The next Annual Atkin Conference will be held in July 2010.

About the Atkin Fellowship

Thanks to the generosity of the Atkin Foundation, ICSR is offering young leaders from Israel and the Arab world the opportunity to come to London for periods of four months.

The purpose of the Fellowship is to provide young leaders from Israel and the Arab world with an opportunity to develop their ideas on how to further peace and understanding in the Middle East through research, debate and constructive dialogue in a neutral political environment.

The Atkin Fellowship is aimed at promoting new thinking among young leaders – typically from government, business, academia, and the media – who will occupy positions from which they can shape politics and public opinion in Israel and the Arab world.

For more information about the Atkin Fellowship, please visit www.icsr.info

ICSR 2009

This booklet was edited by Alexandra Matine, Peter Neumann and Katie Rothman.

All pictures were taken by Greg Funnell.

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The booklet can be downloaded free of charge at www.icsr.info

Dear Friend,

Nearly 150 people came together at King's College London on 8 July to discuss prospects for peace in the Middle East. The First Annual Atkin Conference brought to London prominent scholars, policymakers and activists from Israel, Palestine, as well as many Arab and European countries.

The most important participants, however, were this year's Atkin Fellows – young leaders from Israel and Palestine, who – thanks to the generosity of the Atkin Foundation – had the chance to come to London to study and work together.

The purpose of the conference was not to resolve the conflict. Conferences rarely resolve conflicts. But they bring people together, stimulate fresh ideas, and – most importantly – clear up muddled thinking.

Good conferences enable participants to recognise new trends and subtle shifts, and they make it easier to distinguish what's important from what's not.

The 15 ideas presented in this booklet are a snapshot of the discussions and debates which took place at our conference. In fact, they are taken directly from the participants' presentations or contributions during the day.

They don't amount to a comprehensive peace plan. Nor are they all complementary. In some cases, in fact, they are diametrically opposed. Yet still – when taken together – they provide an excellent overview of the issues that need to be addressed:

- Do we need a new peace process, or should we find a different framework?
- Who should be engaged? Who should be kept out of the door?
- How can we galvanise the leadership that's needed to make things happen?
- What more can be done to build peace from the bottom up?

Readers of this booklet may come to different conclusions about how these questions should be answered. That they need to be tackled with vigour and urgency, however, is beyond doubt.

Muddled thinking is no longer an excuse.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Peter Neumann'.

Dr. Peter R. Neumann,
Executive Director

15 Ideas to Fix the Middle East

Process or Principles

Idea 01

Set Out the Principles



The parties are incapable – on their own – to reach a peace agreement. Both sides have demonstrated their ability to endure and live with conflict, which means that – at the moment – none of them is desperate for a peace agreement...

The Obama administration is bent on a form of negotiations which follow the model that was adopted with the Madrid process in 1991-92. I don't think this is going to work. It may improve the atmosphere and generate a little trust, but it's not going to achieve a breakthrough.

The U.S. Special Envoy for the Middle East, George Mitchell, will end up using all his political capital in order to get a settlement freeze, but – in reality – there will never be a complete freeze. The Likud [Party in Israel] will drown Mitchell in details and negotiate forever.

To move this forward, then, the international community led by the United States – and

supported by the Europeans, the United Nations and Russia – must come up with a declaration of principles that would guide a possible settlement.

Not a map, not a peace agreement, but principles which will bring the parties to sit together and negotiate around them. They should be created in consultations with the parties, but the international community should not become their hostage. Without those principles, nothing will happen. This will be the moment of truth for both Israelis and Palestinians.

[Dr. Ezzedine Choukri](#) is a visiting lecturer at the American University of Cairo. He previously served as a senior Egyptian diplomat.

Idea 02

Think Long Term



History books and holy books tell us a lot about the past, but they rarely offer a recipe for the future. What's needed today is a new script for the future. We need to pursue [conflict] resolution as opposed to continuing a process which just maintains the status quo. We also need to inject a sense of urgency: there

are ticking clocks in the region – whether they are certain leaders' biological clocks or entire countries', such as Iran...

President Obama called for a strong collaboration between Arab countries and the United States. And he is right. Only a parallel, inclusive and comprehensive approach... can lead to normalisation with Israel...

However, there is [another important] axiom for a successful [approach], and that is to look ahead. The future of this region is not only about agreeing on borders or agreeing on sharing water. We need to think now about designing the long term future for this region. And that's

where the European Union has a [unique and relevant] historical experience, because that's where it succeeded after World War II. It created a culture of talking before shooting.

[H.E. Marc Otte is the European Union's Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.](#)

Idea 03

Take Small Steps



The Middle East is often seen as the graveyard of foreign policy. Regional politics is very powerful in the region: it draws the countries, which get involved, into its own practices, into its own ways of operating.

But... there are always possibilities of working with the political grain... The challenge for President Obama will be to try to find a new entry point... recognising that the United States cannot by itself, or even with its allies, reshape the politics of the region completely. But it can exercise a positive influence. And that's why a lot depends on what can be achieved in prior negotiations with the Iranians and the Syrians.

There is a lot of fluidity at the moment. There is no instant initiative available either to President Obama or Prime Minister Netanyahu. The problems are far too deep-rooted and far-reaching to be resolved by any single move. All that's

realistically possible is a long series of small incremental steps.

Lots of steps need to be taken, not one single one. The situation must be managed and ameliorated – it cannot be resolved in one go.

[Professor Sir Lawrence Freedman is Vice-Principal of King's College London and author of *A Choice of Enemies: America Confronts the Middle East* \(Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008\)](#)

Engagement or Isolation?

Idea 04

Mobilise the Moderate Arab Regimes



We need the Arab World – the moderate Arab World – to roll up their sleeves, show its support to the Palestinians, and do something substantial. [They have to] help the Palestinians do some of the heavy lifting

which they cannot do by themselves. [In other words,] we need the Saudis, we need the Egyptians, the Jordanians, and the governments from the Gulf to come in with Morocco and Tunisia and have a unified Arab stand in order to help solve the conflict...

The problem is that the regimes we have to deal with in the region are themselves dealing with political elites who are radical to the core. Elites who do not have the legitimacy that is brought by the democratic vote. Our responsibility is to help these countries move their elites in the right direction.

The Arab world can do much more than it has done until

now... [W]ith the threat of Iran becoming a nuclear power, the moderate states of the Arab World need to understand that if they do not help... to resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict their own [survival] might be on the line.

H.E. Ron Prosor is Israeli Ambassador to the United Kingdom and a former Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Idea 05

Include the Radicals



There are non-state actors in the Middle East... who play a crucial role and cannot be excluded from any peace process... We cannot live in a Middle East where these non-state actors are silenced. No future settlement will be viable if we try to push [them] aside... The only way a peace process could work is if these actors are included in a

unified government, which then becomes a viable partner for a settlement.

Some people say Hamas is a terrorist organisation, but that's a misconception. Hamas and Hezbollah are not just terrorist organisations: they are political actors who want to maximise their interests and have a place at the political table. They are not Al-Qaeda. We should change our approach towards these organisations – especially for the sake of the Palestinians...

[At the same time,] it's crucial that Hamas recognises that Israel is here to stay, and that in response Israel recognises that the Palestinians are here to stay. Unless we agree on this logic, we

won't see peace in the Middle East in the near future.

Dr. Yasar Qatarnah is President of the Third Way Institute in Amman, Jordan. He previously served as Director of the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention (Amman).

Idea 06**Reduce Iranian Influence**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not an issue that can be divided from the larger regional issues. What first needs to be solved is the Iranian issue. Iran has contributed to radicalisation throughout the region. Radical groups have been sabotaging every single peace process since

1991... and they have achieved huge successes: they conquered Gaza; they almost conquered Lebanon; they have gained a lot of influence in Iraq; ... and Iran itself is on the verge of becoming nuclear...

Israel will not negotiate and/or work on a peace agreement with the potential of Iran going nuclear within the next year. This issue cannot be resolved by Israel alone: it is a matter for the United States, the European Union and the Arab states, especially the moderate ones.

Barack Obama has taken a very important step towards challenging the radical elements in the region. By building a framework agreement with

Russia both countries are on course to having a new arms limitation treaty in place by December. That's a good thing, because the Russians are the only power who can pressure the Iranians to stop the nuclear problem.

Dr. Ely Karmon is Senior Research Scholar at the International Institute for Counterterrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel).

Idea 07**Help Arab Countries Play a Positive Role**

The first step could be to get a separate peace treaty with Syria. This should not be isolated from the overall peace process, but be an integral part of renewed, direct negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli side. A couple of years ago, we were close to having an agreement between Syria and Israel on

the Golan Heights, so why not continue where we stopped?

The new style and tone of the Obama administration has been helpful in creating a better atmosphere. In his Cairo speech, Obama paid respect to the Arab World. Before that, he visited Saudi-Arabia, calling it 'the cradle of the Islamic world'. All this is very important, but it's important too that the Arab countries are responding to the American overtures with a different tone towards Israel – confidence-building measures, diplomatic contacts, and so on...

We need to build on the Arab Peace Initiative and encourage the Arab countries to play a constructive role, for example by helping the Palestinian Authority

with their enormous financial and organisational problems. Those are the preconditions for final status talks, which should be resumed in the foreseeable future.

Dr. Friedbert Pflüger is a former German State Secretary for Defence, and served as the foreign policy spokesman of the Christian Democratic Union.

Leadership

Idea 08

Follow Obama's Lead



Barack Obama is the person who holds the key. His determination to take a new approach towards the region is absolutely crucial. And his change of tone makes Britain's foreign policy and Britain's attitude towards the White House easier to coordinate

and accommodate than it was under George W. Bush.

The truth is: the US is the lead player, and we have to find a way of accommodating our foreign policy within the framework that they have defined. We are subordinate in this matter – in spite of our colonial past.

The change of attitude of the current American administration towards the Middle East conflict is an opportunity for transatlantic co-operation and a concerted effort at breaking the log-jam.

Achieving peace between Israel and the Palestinians serves the national interests of both Europeans and Americans. But the context in which these

interests are best pursued is necessarily dictated by a vibrant political relationship. It is time to redraw, renew and reinvigorate that relationship.

[Sir Menzies Campbell is a Member of Parliament and former leader of the British Liberal Democrats.](#)

Idea 09

Begin with Syria



Here is the solution: Israel will withdraw from 92% of the West Bank and keep around 650 km², where 80% of the settlements are. There will be a bridge or a tunnel connecting the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Jerusalem will be divided. There will be a satisfactory [financial] solution for the Palestinian refugees... Israel will withdraw from the

Golan Heights... This is what the negotiations will lead to.

What we need now are strong, powerful Arab and Israeli leaders who are not afraid to take difficult decisions and are capable of implementing them... But time is of the essence: if Iran becomes nuclear, it will be the end of any peace process, because no Israeli Prime Minister (Left or Right) will be able to convince the Israeli people to give up land in the Middle East.

That's why President Obama should not be wasting his time with the settlement question. The only chance for a breakthrough is on the Israeli-Syrian front. The current Israeli Prime Minister and all his predecessors since 1993 have been willing to give back

the Golan Heights. A push from the Obama administration in this direction could really move the peace process forward.

[Dr. Ahron Bregman is lecturer at the Department of War Studies at King's College London and author of *Elusive Peace* \(Penguin, 2005\).](#)

Idea 10**Be Bold and Courageous**

The contours of an agreement exist. We know what the parameters are. Now it's a matter of leadership, ideology and decisions. [Former Israeli Prime Minister] Ehud Olmert would have been able to... convince the Israeli people to accept [a peace agreement with Syria and the

Palestinians]. But it's hard to see how the Likud party could secure peace.

They might surprise us with an agreement with the Syrians. The precondition would be for things to calm down on the ground with the Palestinians – through 'economic peace', for example – and then for Netanyahu to prepare an agreement with the Syrians that would change the dynamics in the region. Like Menachem Begin did, when he secured peace by giving the Sinai back to Egypt. That was a difficult decision, but a crucial one because it created a new dynamic of changing reality on the ground.

What we need, therefore, is a courageous and bold Israeli government which will accept the basic parameters of the end game and enter into serious negotiations with the Palestinians and the Syrians. If, on the other hand, the Israeli government remains stuck in its traditional right-wing ideas, we won't be moving forward but backwards.

Dr. Ron Pundak is Director General of the Peres Center for Peace. He was a member of the Israeli negotiating team during the Oslo peace process.

Idea 11**Revive the United Nations**

Despite all its flaws and weaknesses, the United Nations still offers the best chance to lead the conflicting parties in the direction of a negotiated settlement. Politically, only the UN includes Arab states and is therefore the only organisation which can deliver the widest possible support from this important constituency.

If Israel's aspirations are those of legitimacy, recognition and normalisation, the United Nations offers the best possible channel through which to achieve these aims. Indeed, by bringing along key players which have thus far been on the sidelines, such as the Arab states and Turkey, the UN can offer incentives which no other mediator can deliver by themselves.

Let's not forget, the United Nations – perhaps more than any other external actor – has deep knowledge of the region and maintains close connections with all regional and state actors in the Middle East. It has a wide presence through its envoys and agencies, which serve as listening posts but

can also be used to facilitate a peace process. Taken together, the UN offers a highly attractive 'package' without which peacemaking efforts in the Middle East are unlikely to succeed.

Odelia Englander is an Israeli Atkin Fellow. Her paper – 'Converging for Peace – The United Nations and the Israeli-Palestine Peace Process' – can be downloaded at www.icsr.info.

Building Peace from the Bottom Up

Idea 12

Make Peace Meaningful



I sometimes think of Palestine as the land of processes. It has witnessed many peace processes, but none of them have led to peace... America's new vision must certainly be supported, but most of all, we now need to empower the peace camps on both sides.

There has to be an acceptance of the need for peace to exist... People need to see change on the ground so they buy into the concept of peace – so that it is meaningful to them, so that they want to go for it.

But what have they seen so far? More settlements, more checkpoints, higher walls... To them, there is no peace: there are talks, empty promises and no delivery.

We must also look ahead and tackle the questions that might arise in the future. For example, if a peace agreement is to be signed, will Israel and Palestine live under a policy of cohabitation, or will they exist in total separation? The wall in Palestine is in the

process of creating a moral wall between the two countries. Is this the future of the Middle East?

Dr. Sabri Saidam is a senior advisor to the Palestinian President and a former minister in the Palestinian Authority.

Idea 13

Empower Palestinian Civil Society



In media reports, Palestinian society is often seen exclusively through the prism of militant groups and their political leaderships. The resulting perception is that of a dysfunctional, over-militarised society in which there is no space for tolerance and dialogue.

In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Palestine has potentially one of the most sophisticated and vibrant civil societies in the Arab world, and the failure to recognise and cultivate it as a force for positive change has been one of the great missed opportunities in advancing democracy, peace and pluralism.

Palestinian civil society can be influential in shaping the organisation of the Palestinian government, and it can play a vital role in defining the nature of a future Palestinian state. But this will only happen if members of civil society are empowered and mobilised. Palestinians have lost confidence in the effectiveness of the existing political parties, creating an atmosphere of

pessimism and diminishing people's hopes that they can build a functioning and peaceful state for their people.

The aim must be to break the silence and mobilise the forty or so percent of the Palestinian population who are either apolitical or do not believe that change is possible within Palestine's current state of instability and fragmentation.

Amal Abusrour is a Palestinian Atkin Fellow. Her paper – 'Palestinian Civil Society: A Time for Action' – can be downloaded at www.icsr.info.

Idea 14

Improve the Work of Peace NGOs



Grassroots support is needed for any future agreement to be accepted by all the peoples of the region. In helping to create such an atmosphere and generate real change, peace and conflict resolution organisations (Peace NGOs)

can play an important role. But the 'peace industry' faces major problems: many of the peace NGOs are oversized and torn by misunderstandings and cultural differences. Also, it is widely known that peace NGOs have a tendency to 'preach to the choir', that is to say, they are failing to reach those communities who need to be engaged, mobilised and 'won over' for the cause of peace most urgently.

Peace NGOs need to become more efficient and professional. They owe it to their funders to have unified monitoring standards, which allow donors and the public to understand what they do and how their money is being spent. More effort also needs to be put

into engaging those (currently neglected) segments of society – in the Israeli case, the immigrant, religious, and settler communities – which could be decisive in determining the future prospects of peace in the region.

Sefi Kedmi is an Israeli Atkin Fellow. His paper – 'Under the Microscope: Israeli and Bi-national Peace NGOs' – can be downloaded at www.icsr.info.

Idea 15

Help Palestinians and Israelis Work Together



Despite decades of conflict and violence, there have always been civil society organisations in Palestine and Israel that have crossed the cultural, national, religious and ethnic divides. They are organisations in which Palestinians and Israelis work and socialise, carry out joint

projects, and get to know each other. They can play a critical role in helping Track II and other diplomatic initiatives to succeed, creating supportive public opinion and putting pressure on policymakers on both sides.

Unfortunately, despite their promise and expansion in the 1990s, there is little evidence that these organisations have had much practical impact in advancing peace and reconciliation.

Part of the reason for the organisations' lack of success is their lack of coordination, but also legal and regulatory obstacles which could easily be removed if the political will to do so existed. Joint organisations, however, also need to take a hard

look at themselves. They have to broaden their reach and develop projects and activities for groups which have been neglected in existing schemes. On the Palestinian side, this includes especially religious people and women from less fortunate and marginalised areas.

Oday Abukareh is a Palestinian Atkin Fellow. His paper – 'Collaborating for Peace? Assessing the Work of Palestinian-Israeli Joint Organisations since the Oslo Accords' – can be downloaded at www.icsr.info.



15 Ideas to Fix the Middle East

This booklet contains 15 ideas on how to advance a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. They are excerpts from the presentations and papers presented at the First Annual Atkin Conference on Prospects in the Middle East, which was held at King's College London on 8 July 2009.

The 15 ideas in this booklet don't amount to a comprehensive peace plan. Nor are they all complementary. But they set out an agenda. And they present policymakers with a challenge.

No matter how fraught the situation appears to be, this booklet shows that there are plenty of ideas for moving forward. Readers may come to their own conclusions as to what approach works best. That positive action is possible, however, is beyond doubt.

About ICSR

ICSR is a unique partnership of four great academic institutions: King's College London; the University of Pennsylvania; the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya (Israel); and the Regional Centre on Conflict Prevention Amman (Jordan).

Affiliate institutions are the Centre for Policy Research in New Delhi, and the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies in Islamabad.

ICSR's aim and mission is to address the challenge of radicalisation and political violence by bringing together knowledge and leadership. The Centre is dedicated to producing first class research; facilitating outcome-driven dialogue; and fostering leadership.

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