



KERRY'S MIDDLE EAST PEACE FRAMEWORK

There was little new in US Secretary of State John Kerry's outline for measures to revive peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians presented Wednesday. But Washington's top diplomat hopes that by laying out the ideas that he says are shared by the broader international community, he can leave a framework. Here are the "six principles" Kerry says must underlie a renewed search for peace based on an Israel-Palestine two-state solution.

'RECOGNISED INTERNATIONAL BORDERS'

On November 22, 1967, after Israel's victory in the Six-Day War over its Arab neighbors, the UN Security Council passed its Resolution 242. Israel's win left it in possession of the Golan Heights, Gaza, Sinai, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in addition to its original territory. Under UNSC 242, Israel should hand back its new land and in 1993 the Palestinian Liberation Organization agreed that 242 could serve as a basis for talks. Israel has pulled out for Sinai and Gaza, annexed Golan and east Jerusalem and is occupying and settling the West Bank.

Kerry's speech insisted that UNSC 242 has long been "accepted by both sides" and must be followed, albeit with "mutually agreed equivalent swaps." And he warned: "No changes by Israel to the 1967 lines will be recognized by the international community unless agreed to by both sides."

'TWO STATES FOR TWO PEOPLES'

Israel did not welcome Kerry's speech, but many Israelis will welcome his second "core principle" for any deal. While the final settlement will see the Palestinians installed in their own state, they must in turn recognize Israel "as a Jewish state." Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists that the Palestinian hostility to the idea of Israel as a Jewish homeland is a key barrier to peace. But Kerry noted that this has been enshrined in the plan since 1947, when the disputed area was partitioned under UN General Assembly resolution 181.

'REALISTIC SOLUTION FOR REFUGEES'

There are an estimated five million Palestinians claiming descent from those displaced from their homes during the creation of Israel. Their long-standing demand for a "right of return" to homes in some cases now within pre-1967 Israel has long been a stumbling block. Kerry's principles acknowledged that international assistance and some kind of compensation will be necessary and fair for these people. But a "realistic solution" would not involve a mass return. "The solution must be consistent with two states for two peoples, and cannot affect the fundamental character of Israel," he said.

'JERUSALEM CAPITAL OF TWO STATES'

Israel claims the city of Jerusalem as its "undivided" capital, and Trump plans to move the US embassy there in support of this idea. But the city holds sites holy to Muslims, Jews and Christians alike and the Arab world would erupt in anger if a sole Israeli claim prevailed. Kerry admitted that the city's fate "is the most sensitive issue for both sides" and suggested it be the "internationally recognized capital of the two



Members of Hashid Shaabi or Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) fire towards Islamic State militant positions in west of Mosul, Iraq, yesterday. Iraqi forces have advanced into eastern Mosul -- which is divided by the Tigris River -- and have retaken some neighbourhoods on that side of the city, which has been held by the Islamic State group for more than two and a half years.

OFFENSIVE TO LIBERATE MOSUL FROM IS Second phase begins

REUTERS, Mosul

Irqi security forces yesterday began the second phase of their offensive against Islamic State militants in Mosul, pushing into some eastern districts where the battle has been in deadlock for nearly a month.

Thousands of federal police troops who redeployed from Mosul's southern outskirts two weeks ago also pushed into a handful of southeastern districts, state television reported.

"This is the second phase of the operation to liberate Mosul conducted by the special forces, the federal police and us on this front," General Nejm Jabouri, a senior army commander, told Reuters in a village just north of Mosul.

Since the offensive to capture Mosul began nine weeks ago, counter-terrorism forces have retaken a quarter of the city, the militants' last major stronghold in Iraq, but their advance has been slow and punishing. They

entered a planned "operational refit" earlier this month, the first significant pause of the campaign.

The battle for Mosul involving 100,000 Iraqi troops, members of the Kurdish security forces and Shia militiamen, is the biggest ground operation in Iraq since the US-led invasion of 2003 that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The coalition bombed the last remaining bridge connecting the eastern and western parts of Mosul late on Monday in a bid to make it more difficult for Islamic State to redeploy and resupply its fighters across the Tigris River.

"The enemy is currently isolated inside the left (eastern) bank of Mosul," Yahia Rassol, a military spokesman, said on state TV. "In the coming days, Iraqi forces will liberate the entire left bank of Mosul and after that we will tackle the right."

The United Nations has previously expressed concern that the destruction of Mosul's bridges could obstruct the

evacuation of civilians. Up to 1.5 million are thought to remain inside.

Mosul, the largest city held by Islamic State anywhere across its once vast territorial holdings in Iraq and neighbouring Syria, has been held by the group since its fighters drove the US-trained Iraqi army out in June 2014.

Its fall would probably spell the end for the group's ambition to rule over millions of people in a self-styled caliphate, but the fighters could still mount a traditional insurgency in Iraq, and plot or inspire attacks on the West.

Irqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who previously pledged to retake Mosul by the end of the year, said this week it would take another three months to rout Islamic State in Iraq.

The operation has been slowed by concern to avoid casualties among civilians, who have mostly stayed in their homes rather than fleeing as was initially expected.

states." There is broad recognition that there will be no peace agreement without reconciling the basic aspirations of both sides to have capitals there."

'SATISFY ISRAEL'S SECURITY NEEDS'

Israeli forces and residents withdrew from the Gaza Strip in September 2005, but peace did not break out there. Gaza has since fallen under the sway of Hamas, an armed Islamist movement, and is a source of periodic attacks on Israel and a target for harsh retaliation. Kerry's fifth principle stated that the larger West Bank must not become a similar threat, and that Israel must retain a right to intervene. Kerry said that a team led by US General John Allen had worked on "innovative approaches to creating unprecedented, multi-layered border security." This would strengthen Palestinian security forces and provide ways for Israel to defend itself without impinging on the new state of Palestine.

'NORMALISED RELATIONS'

Finally, under Kerry's vision, a final status settlement between Israel and a future Palestine would see an end to outstanding regional issues. "For Israel, this must also bring broader peace with its Arab neighbors," he said, suggesting that peace would allow a "groundbreaking" security partnership.

SOURCE: AFP

UN 'causes problems' Trump issues fresh accusations against the world body

AFP, Palm Beach

US President-elect Donald Trump launched a fresh salvo of accusations against the United Nations Wednesday, saying the world body had not lived up to its potential and failed to solve global problems.

"The UN had such tremendous potential. (It is) not living up to its potential," Trump told reporters at his Florida holiday resort Mar-a-Lago.

"When do you see the United Nations solving problems? They don't. They cause problems."

The international institution, set up amid the ashes of World War II includes the World Health Organization, which helped eradicate small pox, and the Security Council, which was frozen by divisions as Syria plunged into chaos.

"If it lives up to the potential, it's a great thing. If it doesn't, it's a waste of time and money," Trump said.

His comments came as incoming UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he wants to meet Trump "as soon as possible" and is "determined to establish a constructive dialogue with the new US administration."

The former Portuguese prime minister takes over from Ban Ki-moon on January 1. Trump takes office on January 20.

Israel orders criminal probe against PM: TV

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's attorney-general has ordered police to open a criminal investigation in two unspecified matters involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Channel 10 television said on Wednesday.

A Justice Ministry spokeswoman said in a statement that checks in the matter "are still ongoing and this is neither confirmation or denial of what has been alleged".

"The attorney-general, the police and prosecutors are working in close cooperation and a public announcement will be made in due course about the investigation," she said.

There was no immediate response from Netanyahu's office to a Reuters query on



A Syrian child reacts at a makeshift hospital in the rebel-held town of Douma, on the eastern outskirts of Damascus, following reported air strikes yesterday. Russia President Vladimir Putin announced a nationwide ceasefire deal to come into effect across Syria from midnight and that the warring parties had agreed to sit down for peace talks.

Poll shows Obama still most admired by Americans

AFP, Chicago

In a survey released Wednesday, US President Barack Obama beat out Donald Trump as the man most admired by Americans in 2016.

Twenty-two percent of those surveyed by Gallup chose Obama, followed by 15 percent who chose Donald Trump. Pope Francis was a distant third with four percent.

Hillary Clinton topped the list of the most admired women in 2016, with 12 percent of Americans choosing her.

She and Obama have been at the top of the poll every year since 2008.

The survey, which tends to favor current and past presidents and first ladies, was released at an especially sensitive time.

Tensions between Trump and the current White House have been growing for weeks over US foreign and domestic policies.

Over the weekend, Obama suggested he may have won a third term were he not constitutionally barred, to which Trump tweeted, in part: "NO WAY!"



Tensions flared again early Wednesday, when in an unprecedented personal condemnation of his soon-to-be predecessor, Trump tweeted: "Doing my best to disregard the many inflammatory President O statements and roadblocks."

"Thought it was going to be a smooth transition - NOT!"

Trump might take solace in the fact that he has been in the top 10 rankings of the most admired men in America before - five times, in fact, with the most recent being in 2015. He first appeared among the top 10 in 1988.

Among women, Hillary Clinton has now earned the most admired spot 21 times. She first led the poll in 1993 when she was first lady.

The current First Lady Michelle Obama was the second most admired woman in 2016, with eight percent of Americans choosing her.

Also among the top five women, though far behind Obama and Clinton, were German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and talk-show hosts Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres.

Colombia passes Farc rebel's amnesty law

AFP, Bogota

Colombia's Congress on Wednesday passed a law granting amnesty to FARC rebels as part of the country's peace deal, a development the government hailed as "historic."

"Thanks to the Congress which in a historic vote approved the amnesty law, first step toward consolidating peace," President Juan Manuel Santos said on Twitter.

The measure grants special legal treatment, amnesty and pardon to members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) accused of political and related crimes.

The Senate passed the bill 69-0, after the House of Representatives approved it 121-0.

The amnesty bill is part of the November 24 pact aimed at ending five decades of conflict.

Former president Alvaro Uribe spearheaded opposition to the peace deal after nearly four years of negotiations to end more than half a century of armed conflict.

The former president and his allies argue the deal grants impunity to rebels guilty of war crimes, giving them seats in Congress rather than sending them to prison.

After voters rejected the earlier deal by a narrow margin, the government and the FARC renegotiated it, deciding to have it ratified in Congress rather than risk a second referendum.

The conflict has killed more than 260,000 people and left 45,000 missing.

ALLEGED RUSSIAN MEDDLING IN US ELECTION US poised for retaliation

AFP, Washington

President Barack Obama's administration is poised to announce a series of retaliatory measures against Russia over its cyber-meddling in the US election, reports said Wednesday.

Obama has all but accused Russian President Vladimir Putin of personally ordering an audacious cyber hack that many Democrats believe damaged Hillary Clinton's chances in November's closely fought election with Republican foe Donald Trump.

The US intelligence community has concluded that a hack-and-release of Democratic Party and Clinton staff emails was designed to put Trump -- a political neophyte who has praised Putin -- into the Oval Office.

The Washington Post cited officials as saying the steps set to be announced as early as this week include economic sanctions, diplomatic censure and covert action -- likely including cyber

operations.

People tied to a Russian disinformation campaign that US intelligence officials say targeted Clinton's campaign may also be named under the plans, according to CNN.

Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham called for an even

tougher US response to Russian interference in the American election.

The US Congress should "increase the sanctions on Russia for this misbehavior," McCain told Fox News, pressing for a permanent American military presence in the Baltic states, as well as arming Ukraine with weapons.

"You need to hit Russia in a sustained fashion," Graham added, saying that for Obama to act now just before he leaves office on January 20 would "send the wrong signal."

US officials said a key goal of the future steps to be taken against Russia was not just to punish, but to deter.

Prior to November's election, the Obama administration warned Russia via diplomatic channels, according to the Post. Obama also spoke with Putin at a G20 summit in China earlier this year.

And about a week before the election, Washington sent a message to Moscow using a special crisis communication channel for the first time, asking it to stop targeting state voter registration and election systems.

Russia apparently complied, according to US officials.

CNN cited Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying that Moscow will respond to any "hostile steps" from Washington.

Floods in DR Congo kill at least 50

AFP, Kinshasa

Floods triggered by heavy rains and a river bursting its banks have killed at least 50 people and left thousands more homeless in southwestern Congo, a provincial governor said yesterday.

Torrential rains caused the Kalamu river, which flows through the city of Boma into the River Congo, to overflow for two hours before the waters receded, washing some of the victims across the border into Angola.

The waters left parts of the city, Democratic Republic of Congo's sole Atlantic port, covered in up to a metre of mud and a search was under way to dig out more bodies that may be buried.

