



## **STATEMENT ON ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE**

*Approved by the Board of Governors on December 5, 2016*

Since the United Nations in 1947 called for the creation of two sovereign states – one Jewish, one Arab – between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, many have tried to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the Palestinians rejected the 1947 Partition Plan, and have rejected all subsequent genuine efforts to achieve peace by Israeli leaders from across the political spectrum.

Notwithstanding this tragic historical record, AJC continues to believe that a two-state solution is the only realistic resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as established through direct bilateral negotiations between the parties themselves. The objective of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations should be the ultimate fulfillment of the national aspirations of two peoples, as well as an end to all claims and enduring peace. Specifically, we believe it should entail:

- Israel recognized by its neighbors and the international community as the embodiment of the Jewish people’s right to self-determination and statehood in its historic homeland.
- The future state of Palestine – non-militarized and, ideally, democratic – recognized as the embodiment of the right to self-determination and statehood of the Palestinian Arab people.

AJC welcomes Israel’s acceptance of the terms set forth by the Middle East Quartet for resumed negotiations “without delay or preconditions,” and commends the Quartet’s July 2016 call for an end to “incitement to violence.” Moreover, AJC takes note of Prime Minister Netanyahu’s recognition that the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 “includes positive elements that can help revive constructive negotiations.” Similar and unambiguous commitment to reconciliation and a political resolution of this conflict by Palestinian representatives, encouraged by moderate Arab states, would help create conditions for peace, empowering both Israeli and Palestinian leaders. In our view, to help create the necessary environment for successful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the Palestinian leadership should:

- Return to the bargaining table without preconditions;
- Act affirmatively and consistently to prevent and condemn violence;
- Cease its diplomatic end-runs in multinational bodies to avoid face-to-face talks; and
- Put an end to the culture of incitement, negation, and the idealization of violence that has long infected Arab attitudes toward Israel.

Moreover, as an organization deeply committed to a two-state solution, AJC has long recognized that the alternative of a one-state reality is simply untenable and, therefore, a non-starter – an abrogation of the Zionist ideal of a Jewish and democratic state. At the same time, we acknowledge the potential security risks that realization of the two-state vision would pose to Israel, which faces terrorist threats in its midst and on its borders, including from Hamas-ruled Gaza. As such, AJC calls on the international community to:

- Focus now – and in a sustained, systematic manner – on the day after the agreement in an effort to reduce the danger of a failed Palestinian state, which would further destabilize and endanger a region with several other failed and failing states;
- Condemn incitement by the Palestinian leadership; and
- Stand up to those who delegitimize Israel by denying the Jewish people’s historic ties to the land and, specifically, to Jerusalem, such as the 2016 UNESCO Executive Board and World Heritage Committee decisions on the Temple Mount.

In meeting these political and strategic challenges, close cooperation between the United States and Israel, based on shared democratic values and common security concerns, remains essential. AJC will continue to advance the longstanding bipartisan commitment of the United States to Israel’s security and well-being in a region vital to U.S. national interests and global stability, and to the quest for a durable, viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We look forward to:

- Continued U.S. support of responsible parties;
- Principled U.S. opposition to efforts to internationalize the conflict and seek an imposed, rather than negotiated, outcome; and
- Sustained U.S. leadership in resisting campaigns to stigmatize and sanction Israel, which undermine the legitimacy of the Jewish people’s national homeland.

AJC strongly rejects the contention that settlements are the core issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, the core issue remains the rejection by Palestinian leaders and their supporters of the Jewish people’s right to sovereignty in its ancient homeland. However, we have long believed that Israeli settlement expansion is inconsistent with the aim of a two-state accord. In particular, construction and the reclassification of outposts beyond the security barrier, and thus not anticipated to remain with Israel as a result of negotiated “territorial swaps,” are not conducive to advancing prospects for peace. We urge Israel’s leaders to continually reaffirm the country’s commitment to the two-state vision through word and deed, recognizing that settlement expansion fuels a negative counter-narrative about Israel’s quest for an agreement – despite the reality that an enduring peace pact has always been Israel’s foremost goal.

We welcome the recent increase in contacts between Israel and a number of Arab states, and we believe this offers a potentially very important dimension to the peace process, not to mention the tangible benefits that come from increased contact and cooperation. Indeed, it may offer the best pathway to a peace deal. In that spirit, and as we encourage intensified Israeli-Palestinian economic engagement, we continue to urge Arab states to undertake further tangible confidence-building measures, which could materially strengthen Palestinian advocates of reconciliation and weaken Hamas and other rejectionists. Progress between Israel and its Arab neighbors must not depend on, nor will it substitute for, an Israeli-Palestinian accord. However, it could help create a regional environment far more conducive to reaching such an agreement.

While current conditions do not provide grounds for optimism about substantial progress in the near term, AJC strongly encourages policymakers and advocates to make every effort to explore opportunities to ease tensions, build trust, and move forward toward a two-state future.