

Arab-Israeli peace initiative is the only way

Op-ed: There is no way to solve the poverty, education, housing, welfare and health issues other than through a regional peace agreement.

Danny Yatom

Published: 02.11.15, 00:06 / [Israel Opinion](#)

Israel's citizens have been living for decades in an abnormal reality of wars, rounds of fighting and terror attacks. Now we must continue fighting terror and defending the citizens, but at the same time we must also initiate a diplomatic move with the objective of reaching peace, thereby changing the situation from its foundation.

Without a peace initiative, our situation will increasingly deteriorate. The fighting and violence will continue, the international pressure for the establishment of a bi-national state will grow, and our isolation process will deepen. The tensions with the United States and European countries will even reduce our influence on the negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program – the biggest danger we are facing.

The framework for the peace process should be composed of the ["Arab peace initiative"](#) combined with an Israeli peace initiative. According to the Arab initiative, the Arab states will declare that peace is their strategic choice and acknowledge that there is no military solution to the conflict. Israel, on its part, will be required to withdraw to the 1967 lines with agreed upon border amendments. The refugee issue will be solved through an agreement too, and the capital of the Palestinian state will be East Jerusalem.

This is an opportunity we must not miss out on, a development whose importance cannot be overstated. Fifty-seven Muslim states are willing to sign peace agreements with Israel. Regional negotiations in order to solve the conflict are a creative idea which will allow regional cooperation in the fields of economy and security, with the Palestinian

channel being a leading axis. The moderate Arab states will be able to stimulate the Palestinians to adopt a pragmatic approach for solving the disputed issues.



Fifty-seven Muslim states are willing to sign peace agreements with Israel. This is an opportunity we must not miss out on (Photo: AP)

My recommendation is that Israel should launch a diplomatic initiative based on the Israeli Peace Initiative. According to this plan, we accept the Arab initiative as a basis for negotiations and specify the following: Israel will reject the Palestinian demand for a right of return, refugees who decide to return to their homes will only return to Palestinian, and an international foundation will be established for their rehabilitation. The borders will be based on the 1967 lines with agreed upon amendments. The territory under Israel's sovereignty will include the settlement blocs adjacent to the fence, and land swaps will be carried out.

And what about Jerusalem? The Jewish neighborhoods will be under Israel's sovereignty and the Arabs will be under Palestine's sovereignty in the Old City. Arrangements will be applied to guarantee that the Jewish Quarter and the Western Wall will be under Israel's sovereignty. There will be no sovereignty on the Temple Mount or it will be declared as being under God's sovereignty. Islam's holy sites will be managed by the Waqf and Judaism's holy sites will be managed by Israel.

In addition, an economic rehabilitation program will be launch for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and economic development in Judea and Samaria.

An examination of the economic ramifications of a regional agreement shows that there is no way to solve the poverty, education, housing, welfare and health issues other than through a peace agreement. The Arab-Israeli initiative also contains risks, but the chances greatly outweigh them. Not to mention the fact that this peace initiative has partners, including the Arab League states and the rest of the Muslim countries. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has declared that he accepts the initiative and is willing to launch negotiations based on it immediately.

Israel must initiate a resumption of the peace negotiations. We are strong, we must not be scared – and we can't afford to give up on peace. We must separate from the Palestinians based on two states, and it's imperative to try to reach it through regional negotiations combined with negotiations with the Palestinians. The Arab initiative combined with the Israeli initiative is an opportunity we must not miss out on.

Major-General (res.) Danny Yatom, a former Mossad chief, is active in the Israeli Peace Initiative and Commanders for Israel's Security organizations.