

# Deciphering the Concept of a Diplomatic Horizon Towards an Israeli-Palestinian Two-State Solution

What does it actually mean? Why is it needed?  
How can it be formulated and advanced?

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A diplomatic horizon towards an Israeli-Palestinian two-state solution is often mentioned as a prerequisite to any constructive progress that can be made once the war in Gaza ends. It is commonly viewed in pro-peace circles as a necessary component for restoring hope and trust, enhancing security and stability, promoting moderate leaderships, and relaunching peace negotiations.

Previous instances have shown that there is quite a high level of ambiguity regarding what a diplomatic horizon is, the specific benefits of introducing it, and the ways in which the international community can formulate and advance it.

Diplomedes - The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy has convened in November 2023 a group of Mediterranean think tanks leaders and retired senior officials, among them Israelis and Arabs, who sought to provide more clarity on the issue. This document reflects the zone of agreement between workshop participants<sup>1</sup>.

## A. What Is a Diplomatic Horizon?

A diplomatic horizon can be provided by a political statement about the end goal of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It should specify that the objective of any future negotiations is a final-status settlement, resulting in the establishment of **a Palestinian state, alongside Israel**, according to the principles spelled out by major international resolutions, parameters and initiatives (e.g. the Clinton Parameters and the Arab Peace Initiative). Ideally, it should be put forth by the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. Yet, until necessary pro-peace domestic political transformations take place, it is the international community that should take the lead.

The diplomatic horizon will be an **international obligation** that the Palestinian question will be historically resolved with the establishment of an independent state, much like the Jewish question led to the establishment of the State of Israel. It will also be a commitment that Israel's security will be ensured and that none of them would pose a military threat to the other. The diplomatic horizon should seek to support the revitalizing of the Palestinian Authority and the coming to power of moderate leadership in Israel. It should put a focus on the future regional benefits that Israeli-Palestinian peace will generate, while reiterating the proven positive implications of pro-peace steps taken in the past by Israeli and Arab leaders.

<sup>1</sup> The workshop was convened, under Chatham House Rule, in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and PRIO Cyprus Centre.



Beyond the specific commitments, the diplomatic horizon should spell out a **process**, indicate a **timeframe**, define roles for **international actors**, and specify the **endgame**. It should be crafted in a manner that reflects its genuineness, to dismiss concerns that it is merely lip service. When defining a timeframe for negotiations to be concluded, lessons should be learned from diplomatic instances in which timeframes were presented, leading to either constructive (the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, the Israel-Egypt Camp David Summit in 1978) or destructive (the Cyprus Annan Plan referenda in 2004, the Israel-PLO Oslo Accords in 1993) outcomes.

The diplomatic horizon can be presented by **key global actors** under a pro-two-state solution international umbrella. The U.S. and EU are central to this endeavor, but attention should be given to ensure that spoilers do not undermine the diplomatic horizon. Moreover, to project that the international commitment is for real, the diplomatic horizon should be endorsed by stable state institutions (like the U.S. Congress), not just by individual leaders with unclear political trajectories (like an American president running for elections).

## B. Why Is a Diplomatic Horizon Needed?

The introduction of a diplomatic horizon towards a two-state solution can have multifaceted benefits: it can advance peace, support regional stability, empower Palestinian moderates, and serve Israel's national interests.

**Advancing peace** - A diplomatic horizon will assist Israeli-Palestinian and Israel-Arab de-escalation, and will be a positive step towards lasting peace, closure of the decades-old conflict and the pursuit of justice. It will enhance the credibility of negotiations, by clearly specifying their desired end-goal, and will thus help in transforming the negative reputation associated with the term "peace process", due to past failures. As there is no good alternative to the two-state solution, the lack of a diplomatic horizon towards it increases the threat to regional peace and stability, empowers extremists, and enhances the risk of further deterioration.

**Supporting regional stability** - The Israeli-Palestinian issue is the core conflict in the region, and progress towards its resolution is a regional necessity. Therefore, a diplomatic horizon will be welcomed by moderates throughout the region, will provide further incentives to engage with the other side, and will enhance prospects for long-term regional stability. A diplomatic horizon will help weaken revisionists and marginalize radicals. It will weaken the Iran axis, decrease chances for an emergence of another Hamas-like organization, renew the momentum of Israel-Arab cooperation, and accelerate Israel-Saudi Arabia normalization.

**Empowering Palestinian moderates** - A diplomatic horizon will strengthen and give more legitimacy to the Palestinian Authority. It will ease the Palestinian Authority's return to govern the Gaza Strip, without being perceived as catering to Israel's needs and as a traitor. A diplomatic horizon will indicate that fulfilling the Palestinian national aspirations is becoming more feasible, will provide a political lifeline for Palestinian moderates ensuring their survival, and will provide hope to Palestinian refugees worldwide. It will also require the Palestinian leadership to act in a more state-like, accountable and responsible manner.

**Serving Israel's national interests** - Advancement towards a two-state solution, via a diplomatic horizon, will strengthen Israel's security, ensure Israel's Jewish nature for years to come, contribute to internal stability, increase international legitimacy for Israel, and contribute to its acceptance in the region and to its global standing. Thus, it will assist the realization of major goals of the Israeli project.



### C. How Should a Diplomatic Horizon be Formulated and Advanced?

The formulation of the diplomatic horizon and its advancement are tasks that multiple international actors can contribute to, in various ways and scopes of involvement. The U.S., EU, and Arab states are the central actors in this regard.

**The U.S.** should play a leading role in creating a diplomatic horizon and in jump-starting the peace process. As sort of a "Balfour declaration for the Palestinians", the U.S. should be willing to declare the parameters of the two-state solution, based on the 1967 borders, as the endgame to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The U.S. should also commit time and energy during (and beyond) the Biden administration, and engage in sustained mediation rather than in ad-hoc efforts around specific crises or opportunities. It should chart policy pathways towards peace, together with European and regional allies, and convince Israel to be part of the process and implement commitments. This could be done, among the rest, via convening an international peace conference, at an appropriate political timing, to which Israeli and Palestinian leaders will be invited.

An **EU-led multilateral initiative** launched in September 2023 together with Saudi Arabia, the Arab League, Jordan and Egypt, named "Peace Day Effort", should continue. Its aim is to introduce, towards the end of 2024, an international package of peace incentives for both Israelis and Palestinians. This could help in mobilizing societies for peace, by highlighting tangible benefits that will be made possible only after peace is reached. Another means to increase pro-peace attitudes among Israelis and Palestinians is to step up constructive interaction between them, via people-to-people civil society initiatives. European countries can have a significant role to play in fostering this, as they did in the past, and in overcoming obstacles that made such interactions scarcer in recent years.

Efforts should also be made to bring **China and Russia** on board, so international efforts will enjoy greater legitimacy among Palestinians. China and Russia should be participants or observers, without specific authorities or responsibilities. Although the Palestinian leadership has looked to Moscow and Beijing for diplomatic support in recent years, it was done mostly to show dissatisfaction of the U.S. role. Should the U.S. seriously work to advance peace, that will be good enough for the Palestinians.

**Arab countries** also have an important role to play, including in reassuring Palestinians that the Arab world is not abandoning their cause and is willing to take action to advance the two-state solution; and in reassuring Israelis that their security will be guaranteed and their existing and future ties with Arab countries are resilient to crises, and will reach new peaks once progress towards peace is made.

**Egypt** has a tradition of supporting the Palestinians and encouraging them to go the extra mile in negotiations with Israel. It is proud of its peace with Israel and in its sustained commitment to it. As part of creating and implementing a diplomatic horizon, Egypt can assist the Palestinian Authority in undergoing necessary reforms and training, empowering moderate leaders, and providing required equipment. Egyptian companies can take part in reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip, as was done following previous military confrontations in Gaza. Egypt can also play a role in mobilizing public support for peace among Israelis and Palestinians, by highlighting how its peace treaty with Israel has lasted for decades, how security cooperation can reduce terror, and how economic partnerships can provide tangible benefits. Egypt can also showcase effective conflict resolution modalities –



such as leaders' summits (Camp David), phased implementation of security arrangements (Sinai) and international arbitration (Taba).

**Jordan's** traditional roles in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking include enabling direct lines of communication between parties, assisting the sides to reach breakthroughs and overcome impasses in negotiations, and convening and coordinating multinational diplomatic gatherings or actions. These can continue. In addition, Jordan can be part of training the Palestinian police, and enable other countries to do so, on its soil. It can provide logistic support to Palestinian territories, help decrease animosity between Israelis and Palestinians, create and reshape regional partnerships, convene unofficial and covert diplomatic meetings, and encourage Gulf states to support more actively a two-state solution and a negotiations process towards it. While Jordan is currently taking a blunt critical stance towards Israel, once conditions change towards a diplomatic horizon – it could support Israeli moderates, for example by engaging with centrist politicians and carrying out mutual visits (as was done during the Bennett-Lapid government). Jordan can also advance bilateral and minilateral joint projects of win-win nature, such as the Israel-Jordan-United Arab Emirates (UAE) water-electricity project.

**Gulf states** will likely be ready to invest substantial amounts of money for an international Marshall Plan for Palestinian statehood, with a strong regional component. They will also be more inclined than before to include the Palestinians in regional integration endeavors, they will be advancing with Israel and other international actors (such as the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor). Broadly speaking, Gulf states can support the diplomatic horizon by linking the economic component of the Abraham Accords to the political and economic advancement of an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. They can provide the Palestinians with hope by creating new jobs, enhancing health and education services, promoting reconstruction in the Gaza Strip, and increasing prospects for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

**Qatar**, which was already investing in the Gaza Strip before the war, will likely seek to continue, although its ties with Hamas may limit its role. **Kuwait**, which was not previously involved, has recently shown signs of interest to provide aid to the Gaza Strip. The **UAE** can be expected to invest in supporting select Palestinian-related efforts, especially those which will serve Emirati interests and will contribute to shaping the next Palestinian leadership according to the UAE's preference. And, **Saudi Arabia** already has ideas of its own for regional projects that can involve the Gaza Strip – some of which were initiated during Trump's presidency – which it may seek to revive, in parallel to possible advancement of its gradual opening towards Israel.



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