

Intervention by Graham Watson MEP
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MIDDLE EAST DEBATE
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This week we are debating military conflicts in two places: Chechnya and Palestine. Both have worsened since the western world declared war on terrorism. It seems almost as if the dominant power in each conflict has taken advantage of the anti-terrorist cause to enhance its strategic position. The impact on the lives of those caught in the cross-fire, both literally and metaphorically, has been devastating.

For reasons of history, humanity and security, we have a duty to intervene to prevent the fighting. Diplomacy thus far has failed, whether sponsored by the United Nations, the United States of America, the European Union or the neighbouring states. It is probably the Saudi peace plan which currently offers the most promising pointers to peace. The warring parties themselves offer little hope of a solution. Neither Mr Sharon nor Mr Arafat can secure peace, just as certainly as neither can impose it. Mr Arafat's record of involvement in terrorism and his continued acquiescence in abominable Palestinian terrorist acts are at least in part to blame for the current situation.

The best way forward in the view of Liberal Democrats in this House is to establish an immediate embargo on arms exports to Israel and Palestine, and persuade the United Nations to mount an international mission to send troops to the region, to enforce peace. Only then might the extremists be moved aside and the moderates be brought together, by an honest broker, in a political process in which the arguments of force give way to the force of arguments. Reckless military adventurism on one side, and cynical acceptance of terrorism on the other, offer only further bloodshed and misery and the deepening of mutual hatreds, which will delay and render more difficult the achievement of lasting peace.

The recent Israeli military incursions into Palestinian territory have been as shocking as they have been self-defeating. The West has levers of pressure. You, Mr Solana, must employ them. An urgent meeting of the EU-Israel Association Council should be called. On the agenda should be Israel's refusal to allow EU representatives to meet Mr Arafat, its wanton destruction of EU funded infrastructure and its violation of the Human

Rights provisions in Article 2 of the Association Agreement. You might persuade Colin Powell tomorrow to threaten suspension of three billion US dollars of annual American aid to Israel. Human Rights observers should be deployed to document the plight of innocent Palestinian citizens who suffer, daily, disrupted lives, random harassment, gratuitous humiliation and in some cases torture and death.

The international community is clear on where the borders must be drawn to secure the coexistence in two States of six million Israeli and some four million Palestinian citizens. We cannot stand by while United Nations resolutions are flouted by an aggressive policy of settlements and a refusal to seek peace.

When international law is so blatantly ignored, such bloodshed as we have seen is unavoidable. Those responsible must eventually be brought to justice. On Thursday of this week the statute for a permanent international criminal court will enter into force. From Sabra and Chatila 20 years ago to Jenin this afternoon, Mr Sharon should reflect on whether he wishes to be among its first clients.