

## Mideast progress: wishful thinking or real possibility?

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From Mr Alan Rohrbach.

Sir, Brendan Russell (Letters, March 21) asserts that to gain recognition Israel needs to specify borders wholly excluding the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem. Insofar as that is not going to occur, any other proactive Israeli decision on future borders would surely be attacked by allies and adversaries alike as overbearing unilateralism.

Your editorial on the very same page ("An opportunity opens in the Middle East") implies that Israeli rejection of the 2002 Arab League plan on grounds of " 'agreed, just solution' for Palestinian refugees" is disingenuous, because Israel *knows* "what the deal is": compensation rather than repatriation. Informed observers also *know* that definition of borders is *not* the problem in the first instance. Those will only be negotiated after Hamas's confirmation of the right *in principle* of the Jewish state to exist.

The most interesting aspect of the west's return to the bargaining table is whether that foments *de facto* Hamas recognition. The most meaningful form of that would be direct participation in negotiation of borders for Israeli-Palestinian coexistence. Or is this just another wishful thinkers' tail-chasing exercise, ending in radical factions derailing any looming success?

You are very right that an opportunity seems to be opening through the cool-headed efforts of the Saudis and the west. Once again Israel's friends will apply pressure to negotiate in good faith. Yet, also once again, the greater onus is on the Palestinians not to repeat the cycle of snatching defeat from the jaws of victory. Of course, I suppose that rests in large measure with the various factions' definition of "victory".

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