French President Jacque Chirac today called for an international conference to be held on the issue of Middle East peace, in order to provide fresh impetus to achieve a lasting peace agreement in the region. Chirac states that the conference would not lay down pre-conditions to a settlement, but would bring guarantees to those involved. The French President warned that the conflict in the Middle East, including the civil war brewing in Iraq, could explode unless dealt with.

Quote: *""As France feared and warned, the war in Iraq set off upheavals whose effects have not yet been fully played out," he said, adding that conflict in the wider region could produce a confrontation "on an unimaginable scale." "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict crystallises all these resentments," he said.*

France is not the only country that has called for an international conference to be held on the issue of peace in the Middle East. President Vladimir Putin of Russia proposed a similar idea two years ago, many believe in an effort to rebuild Russian dominance in the region. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated that proposal in the same year. President Abbas and Prime Minister Haniyeh of the Palestinian Authority accepted a similar venture proposed by Egypt last year. The Spanish peace initiative which the EU are due to discuss this month - the Declaration of Alicante - also calls for such a conference to be held. Israel has so far rejected the idea of holding any type of international conference, due to the fact they usually end up becoming Israel-bashing sessions.

But clearly the situation in the Middle East could explode at any minute, with Iran implicated in supporting both Shi'ite and Sunni factions in Iraq and Iranian agents arrested in the country, Iran developing nuclear weapons, Syria preparing for war with Israel, Hizbullah readying for a second war, Hamas and Fatah fighting against themselves and Israel, and half a dozen Arab states planning to develop nuclear weapons, something is going to erupt sooner or later.

Source Haaretz , NY Sun , Reuters