

MEMMO

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Israel Pursuing Peace Despite Constant Threats

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told the Knesset in a major address last week that it is important for Israel to take risks for peace and work with the Palestinians toward a “substantive political process” despite ongoing Palestinian terrorist activity and larger regional strategic threats. In the face of daily rocket attacks and a string of attempted suicide bombings, Olmert has met regularly with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to explore the issues at the core of the conflict in preparation for a U.S.-hosted meeting this fall. Israel also continues to take important steps to support Palestinian moderates and help the daily lives of the Palestinians.

Olmert reiterated Israel’s commitment to advancing the peace process with the Palestinians and to making difficult political decisions.

- In his address to the opening of the Knesset’s winter session, Prime Minister Olmert said that while Israel faces continuing Palestinian terrorism and threats from Iran, he has “no intention of seeking excuses to avoid a political process,” stressing that he is “determined ... to create a momentum and provide a chance for the success of a substantive political process.”
- Olmert spoke clearly about the need to seize this opportunity and work with Abbas and Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, saying, “We can ... prolong the process, explaining why all this is not possible ... and ... use many good arguments that justify hesitation, to recheck and even to wait. And what will happen if we lose the chance? What will we say if we miss the opportunity?”
- While Olmert warned that the process would be difficult—especially in light of continuing threats to Israel—he said it will require “determination to accept brave unavoidable decisions, which involve relinquishing the full realization of the dreams that fed our national ethos for many years.”



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has reiterated his desire to reach an agreement with the Palestinians.

Israel is working to bolster the Palestinian government and improve the lives of average Palestinians.

- Despite continuing rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza and attempted suicide bombings stopped by Israeli security forces, Olmert has forged ahead with his talks with Abbas, meeting with him six times since the spring to begin discussions on the essential issues at the core of the conflict.

- Israel is transferring Palestinian tax revenues on a monthly basis, easing trade restrictions in the West Bank, and supporting joint Israel-Palestinian small business initiatives and industrial projects there.
- Israel has released more than 300 Palestinian prisoners and granted amnesty to nearly 200 wanted fugitives in the West Bank.
- Israel has agreed to grant permanent residency to 5,000 Palestinians living illegally in the West Bank, marking the first time in 10 years that such approval has been given.

Israel continues to negotiate and take steps to help the Palestinians in the face of ongoing terror attacks and increasing strategic threats.

- As the talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaders have intensified, Israeli security forces uncovered and prevented seven plots to carry out suicide attacks in the last six weeks alone, while terrorists in Gaza fired nearly 300 rockets and mortars in September, including a longer-range and more sophisticated Katyusha rocket.
- Iran—whose leadership calls for Israel’s destruction and is supporting Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups—is closer than ever to developing a nuclear weapons capability and can deploy a sizable force of increasingly sophisticated Shihab missiles, with ranges that now extend far beyond Israel.
- Hizballah, with the help from Iran and Syria, has replenished its stockpile of rockets to levels that exceed its inventory before last summer’s war—some 20,000 at present and still growing—and is seeking to bring down the pro-Western government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.
- The Syrian military has embarked on a modernization effort and arms-buying spree not seen since the early 1980s. Russia—able to fund its own long-moribund weapons research and development efforts with windfall oil profits—is offering a wide range of new technologies to Syria, which has amassed tens of thousands of long-range and short-range rockets aimed at Israel.

Basic Facts Summary

- Olmert reiterated Israel's strong commitment to advancing the political process with the Palestinians and making difficult decisions.
- Israel is also working to bolster the Palestinian government and improve the lives of average Palestinians.
- Israel continues to negotiate and take steps to help the Palestinians in the face of ongoing terror attacks and increasing strategic threats.