

MEMMO

August 13, 2009

Israel Takes Steps for Peace as Palestinians in Disarray

Israel continues to take significant steps to advance the peace process and improve the Palestinian economy despite the failure of the Palestinian Authority and Arab states to take reciprocal peace gestures. At the recent Fatah General Conference, Palestinian leaders hardened conditions that Israel must meet simply to resume negotiations and refused to renounce “resistance.” At the same time, Arab leaders continue to refuse calls to take steps to normalize relations with Israel. For the peace process to succeed, Israel cannot be the only party to act. The Palestinians and Arab states must begin to take substantive, tangible steps that demonstrate their commitment to peace as called for by the Obama administration.

The Palestinians are damaging peace efforts by setting increasingly tougher preconditions for the resumption of peace negotiations with Israel, by their failure to renounce terror, and through their own internal disarray.

- Instead of improving the environment for peace talks, Fatah passed resolutions blaming Israel for the death of Yasir Arafat and conditioning the resumption of peace talks on the release of prisoners, the unrestricted opening of Gaza crossings, and a freeze on settlement construction.
- President Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party also refused to renounce violence, a key requirement for peace. The Fatah platform passed last week at the party’s Sixth General Conference states, “We believe that all forms of resistance are the legitimate right of all occupied nations...”
- Many individual Palestinian leaders at the Fatah conference continue incitement against Israel, explicitly voicing support for armed attacks on Israel. “It is not possible to rule out or to marginalize the military option,” Fatah spokesman Fahmi Al-Za’arir. “The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are the jewel in Fatah’s crown. We must strengthen their status...”
- This stands in sharp contrast to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s desire for the immediate resumption of negotiations without preconditions. That is the way that negotiations have always been conducted by the parties in the past and has led to significant agreements, including the establishment of the Palestinian Authority itself.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, speaking at the Fatah conference before a photo of the late Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat, said the Palestinians reserved the right to “resistance.”

- Chaos and internal fighting among Palestinian factions also remains a major impediment to negotiations with Israel. The Palestinian Authority has no control over Gaza, where Hamas continues to tighten its control and rebuild its terrorist infrastructure.

Arab states have refused the administration's call to take steps to normalize relations with Israel.

- While the Arab states have said they are prepared to establish normal relations with Israel as part of the Arab Peace Initiative, they are not prepared to take any concrete steps toward Israel unless and until Israel meets their demands.
- "Incrementalism and a step-by-step approach has not and – we believe – will not achieve peace. Temporary security, confidence-building measures will also not bring peace," said Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal on July 31 during a news conference with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.
- The emir of Kuwait, Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, said that steps would not be taken until Israel meets the principles in the Arab Peace Initiative, thus setting preconditions on further peace negotiations.
- After meeting with U.S. Middle East Envoy George Mitchell in July, Amr Moussa, the Arab League secretary-general said, "There will be no Arab steps before Israel stops its policy of settlement building."

Meanwhile, Israel has taken significant steps to show that they are willing to compromise and work toward peace.

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for negotiations with the Palestinians without pre-conditions and urged Arab countries to normalize relations with Israel. "Whoever sets pre-conditions for opening negotiations delays the peace process. We wholeheartedly support President Obama's regional initiative," he said on August 2.
- For the first time in his political career, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in June explicitly accepted a two-state solution to the conflict: a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state of Israel.
- Netanyahu has called for the immediate resumption of peace negotiations with the Arab states without preconditions and said he is ready to travel "to Damascus, to Riyadh, to Beirut, to any place," to meet with Arab leaders to discuss ways to end the conflict.
- Israel is also working with the United States and Palestinian Authority (PA) to enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. Israel has taken a series of steps to improve the day-to-day conditions for Palestinians throughout the West Bank, including substantially reducing the number of checkpoints and roadblocks, greatly easing mobility through the territory.