

MEMMO

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Palestinian Leaders Undermine U.S Peace Efforts

Rejecting U.S. peace efforts, Palestinian Authority (PA) officials have refused to resume negotiations with Israel, posed additional preconditions, and sought to isolate Israel in international organizations. By contrast, Israel has offered to resume talks immediately without preconditions and has taken unprecedented steps to restrain settlement activity. The PA and Arab states should accept the Obama administration's call to begin direct talks with Israel and foster a climate for peaceful reconciliation.

The Palestinians continue to reject U.S. calls to enter talks with Israel without preconditions.

- Despite Israel's efforts to severely limit construction in the West Bank, which Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described as "unprecedented," PA officials are demanding an unequivocal end to all settlement activity before agreeing to sit down with the Israelis.
- Settlements, like other outstanding areas of dispute between Israel and the Palestinians, need to be addressed in the negotiations and cannot be solved before talks begin.
- Despite their differences with Israel, Palestinian leaders in the past were willing to meet with Israelis to negotiate even while the two sides had opposing views of the other's obligations.
- In addition to their ultimatum on settlements, Palestinian leaders are also now demanding as a precondition for talks that Israel agree that the frame of reference for negotiating a final agreement be an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and to start talks where they left off in early 2009.
- At that time, former prime minister Ehud Olmert presented the most far-reaching peace proposal to date (which was rejected by PA leaders). The offer reportedly included 97 percent of the West Bank and a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, among other provisions.



PA President Mahmoud Abbas is rejecting calls by the United States and Israel for immediate talks without preconditions.

Palestinian leaders are pressing the United States to deliver concessions from Israel in advance of negotiations.

- As PA President Mahmoud Abbas told Jackson Diehl of the *Washington Post* in May when asked what concessions he was prepared to make to help peace efforts, "I will wait for Hamas to accept international commitments. I will wait for Israel to freeze settlements. Until then, in the West Bank we have a good reality . . . the people are living a normal life."
- Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat has raised the specter that the Palestinians will push for a one-state solution if the United States fails to force Israel to meet the PA's preconditions, saying, "If

America cannot get Israel to implement a settlement freeze, what chance do Palestinians have of reaching agreement with Israel on permanent status issues?"

- Erekat appears to be delivering a veiled threat to the United States that if it cannot force Israel to stop all construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, it would advocate for a single, binational state, which would effectively entail the dissolution of Israel.

Arab states have also rebuffed the administration's call to take positive steps to improve the climate of peace in the region.

- In his Cairo address in June, President Obama told the Arab states they need to "help the Palestinian people develop the institutions that will sustain their state, to recognize Israel's legitimacy, and to choose progress over a self-defeating focus on the past."
- Seventy-one senators sent a letter President Obama supporting his efforts to encourage Arab states to "take tangible steps to demonstrate their commitment to the peace process."
- Unfortunately, while many Arab states have said they are prepared to live in peace with Israel, they have told the administration that this will only happen after Israel withdraws fully from the West Bank and meets other conditions. Thus far, most of these countries have refused to take any concrete steps to normalize relations with Israel as called for by the president.
- In fact, in recent weeks, Arab governments have pushed the anti-Israel Goldstone report at the U.N., held a meeting to discuss expanding the Arab economic boycott of Israel and supported the Palestinian refusal to resume talks with Israel.

Israel has taken significant steps to demonstrate that it is committed to resuming serious negotiations with the Palestinians and Arab states.

- For the first time in his career, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has explicitly accepted a two-state solution: a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state of Israel.
- Netanyahu has repeatedly called for talks with the Palestinians without preconditions, saying in a Nov. 9 speech in Washington that his "goal is to achieve a permanent peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians" and is prepared to "make great concessions for peace."
- Israel has removed nearly 250 West Bank roadblocks and checkpoints, including two dozen manned barriers, and opened major crossings to spur trade. Because of Israel's easing of restrictions, the IMF is forecasting a seven percent growth rate in the West Bank for 2009.

In spite of their differences, negotiations and cooperation can lead to a better future for both Israel and the Palestinians.

- As a trusted friend to Israel and as a mediator, the United States can and should play a helpful role in bringing all parties together. Ultimately, though, the conflicts must be resolved between the parties themselves through direct negotiations, not through an imposed solution from the outside.
- To complement a negotiating process, Israel and the Palestinians should continue with cooperative efforts to spur economic development, ease movement and access for Palestinians in the West Bank and improve security with the continuing help of U.S. Gen. Keith Dayton and Jordan.
- Palestinian and other Arab leaders should help create a climate of peace. Attempts to further isolate Israel in the international community by pushing anti-Israel measures at the U.N., threatening to expand economic, cultural and political boycotts against Israel, or advocacy of a return to violent resistance against Israel only undermine any prospects for peace.