

MEMMO

Feb. 18, 2010

PA Stance on Talks Obstructs U.S., Israeli Peace Efforts

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas continues to reject U.S. and Israeli entreaties to restart direct peace negotiations. The PA has insisted on a series of unrealistic preconditions and is urging the United States to conduct “shuttle diplomacy” between the two sides instead. By contrast, Israel has taken unprecedented steps for peace and has offered to resume serious, direct talks without preconditions. The PA and Arab states should accept the Obama administration’s call to begin direct talks with Israel immediately and foster a climate for peaceful reconciliation.

The PA will not resume talks unless Israel meets all of its preconditions.

- The PA continues to condition the resumption of negotiations on a total settlement freeze. The PA is shutting off any realistic prospect of resuming talks despite unprecedented steps by the Israeli government to limit construction in the West Bank. Abbas now also is demanding an explicit Israeli commitment to withdraw to the pre-June 1967 lines.
- These are new Palestinian preconditions. Both Yasir Arafat and Abbas himself negotiated with Israel even while building in settlements throughout the West Bank continued and without any Israeli advance commitment regarding borders.
- Abbas also is currently pushing for indirect talks mediated by the United States rather than direct negotiations with Israel—a key tenet of U.S. policy for decades.
- Abbas also has indicated that he would enter negotiations with Israel only if the United States would guarantee “the endgame” regarding final-status issues prior to the talks. Abbas’ statement is not only unreasonable, but it directly counters long-held U.S. policy that the parties themselves must negotiate a final settlement.
- The PA also continues its campaign to delegitimize Israel by pushing the anti-Israel Goldstone report at the United Nations. The report falsely accuses Israel of war crimes in Gaza.



Israel has removed more than 300 West Bank checkpoints and roadblocks since April 2008.

By contrast, Netanyahu has taken bold steps to condition the environment for peace.

- For the first time in his career, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced last June that he accepts, and is prepared to negotiate, a two-state solution to the conflict: a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state of Israel.

- In an address to his Likud party in early January, Netanyahu reiterated that “Israel is prepared to enter into negotiations immediately with the Palestinian Authority without preconditions.”
- Netanyahu announced a 10-month moratorium on the construction of new homes in the West Bank on Nov. 25, calling it a “far-reaching and painful step.” No Israeli prime minister from either side of the political spectrum had ever agreed to such a freeze on settlements.
- Netanyahu called on the Palestinians to match Israel’s efforts, saying, “There is no more time to waste. Israel has taken a far-reaching step toward peace; it is time for the Palestinians to do the same.”
- Israel has removed approximately 330 West Bank checkpoints and roadblocks since April 2008, improving the freedom of movement for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Israel dismantled 185 of those barriers in the past several months alone.
- Israel is working closely with the United States and the PA to enhance the capabilities and effectiveness of PA security forces in the West Bank. Israeli and Palestinian security forces coordinated nearly 1,300 missions in 2009.
- The improvement in the security situation in the West Bank has enabled Israel to allow Israeli Arabs to shop in West Bank cities. This move has significantly boosted the West Bank economy, contributing—along with the removal of the barriers—to an estimated seven percent growth rate in the West Bank.

The United States has praised the measures Israel has made in an effort to restart peace talks.

- The Obama administration has praised Israel’s 10-month moratorium, recognizing that it could lay the groundwork for peace. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Israel’s moratorium “helps move forward toward resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”
- U.S. Middle East peace envoy George Mitchell said the moratorium announced by Netanyahu is “significant and could have substantial impact on the ground.”
- Mitchell also recently discussed Netanyahu’s personal dedication to achieving a peaceful resolution, saying, “I believe the prime minister is definitely committed on this. I believe that he wants to bring this to a conclusion.”

Direct negotiations and cooperation can lead to a better future for both Israel and the Palestinians.

- The United States, as both a trusted friend of Israel and a mediator, can and should play a helpful role in bringing the parties together. Ultimately, though, the conflict must be resolved between the parties themselves through direct negotiations, not through an imposed solution from the outside.
- Clinton clearly made this point, saying on Jan. 21, “The United States, the UK, the EU, the Arab League, everyone can work together to try to create the conditions for a resolution of the outstanding issues between the Israelis and the Palestinians, but at the end of the day, they must make that decision.”
- 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 by ceasing their efforts to isolate Israel in international fora, opposing violence and terrorism against Israel, supporting the PA against Hamas and urging Abbas to resume peace talks without preconditions.