

MEMMO

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U.S., Israel Repeat Calls for Direct Talks with Reluctant PA

The July 6 White House meeting between President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reflects a continuing effort by the two allies to restart serious direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. During the meeting, both the president and the prime minister affirmed the need for the two sides to move quickly from indirect “proximity” talks to direct talks. In an effort to pave the way for such talks, Israel has already taken a series of bold steps to condition the environment for peace. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Arab states continue to insist on unreasonable preconditions that block progress.

The United States and Israel are both calling for direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

- Since May, the United States has been mediating indirect “proximity” talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Both the U.S. and Israel believe that to reach a genuine and lasting peace these indirect talks should lead rapidly and unconditionally to direct, bilateral negotiations.
- During a press conference following his recent meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu, President Obama said, “We expect those proximity talks to lead to direct talks. And I believe that the government of Israel is prepared to engage in such direct talks.”
- Prime Minister Netanyahu echoed his statement, saying, “...we need to begin negotiations in order to end them. ... it’s high time to begin direct talks. I think with the help of President Obama, [Palestinian] President [Mahmoud] Abbas and myself should engage in direct talks to reach a political settlement of peace, coupled with security and prosperity.”
- President Obama also called on the Arab states to play a greater role in pursuing peace, saying, “...the Arab states have to be supportive of peace because, although ultimately this is going to be determined by the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, they can't succeed unless you have the surrounding states having... a greater investment in... the process than we've seen so far.”



The United States and Israel are both urging the PA to resume direct peace talks; it has refused.

Netanyahu has moved boldly to condition the environment for peace.

- For the first time in his career, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in June 2009 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.
- 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.

- As an indication that the moratorium is being strictly applied, there were no housing starts in the West Bank during the first quarter of 2010, according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Israel has removed approximately 409 West Bank checkpoints and roadblocks since April 2008, improving the freedom of movement for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. Israel dismantled 52 of those barriers in the past few weeks 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, which have taken positive steps against terrorists in the West Bank.
- Israeli and Palestinian security forces coordinated nearly 1,300 missions in 2009 and approximately 775 missions have been coordinated so far in 2010.
- The improvement in the security situation in the West Bank has provided concrete economic benefits to West Bank Palestinians, including an influx of Israeli Arab shoppers and a 30 percent increase in housing and business real estate projects during 2009, according to statistics published by the Israeli civil administration in the West Bank.
- In the context of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on the ground, the West Bank's GDP grew last year by more than nine percent and the stock market's al-Quds Index increased by nearly 12 percent.

Unfortunately, the PA and Arab states have yet to take bold diplomatic or political steps, and are refusing to move to direct negotiations.

- The Arab states and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are continuing to demand preconditions for the resumption of direct negotiations. Arab demands such as an Israeli commitment to withdraw to the 1949 Armistice lines undermine the prospect for negotiations and would prejudice their final outcome.
- These preconditions are shutting off any realistic prospect of resuming direct talks. This Palestinian position is unreasonable and strange, as both former PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat and Abbas himself previously negotiated with Israel without raising any preconditions concerning borders or settlements.
- Abbas' calls for the United States to "impose" a solution on the parties are also directly contrary to the long-held U.S. policy that the parties themselves must negotiate a final settlement.
- Instead of promoting the prospect for peace, the PA is continuing its campaign to delegitimize Israel in international institutions by pushing the anti-Israel Goldstone report and by supporting efforts to establish international commissions to investigate Israeli behavior concerning enforcement of its naval blockade of Gaza.
- Unfortunately, most Arab states have done little to promote the prospects for peace with Israel. For example, during his recent meeting with Obama, Saudi King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia failed to take any steps to meet the president's call for the Arab states to normalize relations with Israel.
- 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.