

MEMMO

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Palestinians, Arab States Must Match Israel's Dedication to Peace for Talks to Succeed

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas' decision to resume direct negotiations with Israel is a welcome development since such talks are the only viable path to achieving peace. But Abbas must do more than come to the table. Israeli-Palestinian talks can only succeed now if the PA, with strong support of the Arab states, matches Israel's commitment to conducting peace talks without preconditions or excuses, demonstrates a willingness to make the necessary compromises at the negotiating table, and ceases incitement against Israel. For more than six decades, Israel has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to make heartrending sacrifices—altering borders, relinquishing territory and uprooting entire communities—in the pursuit of peace.

The Palestinians must commit to stay at the negotiating table, and be willing to compromise in the name of peace.

- For 18 months, Abbas refused to enter into direct negotiations with Israel. His decision to sit down with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is welcome, and both sides face hard work and difficult choices. Abbas must drop his threats to withdraw at the first sign of difficulty or to impose preconditions for negotiations.
- The issues to be resolved—borders, settlements, Jerusalem, refugees and security—are difficult and will require sustained effort and compromise.
- Abbas should not be given any cause to think that a Palestinian withdrawal from tough discussions will lead to U.S. pressure on Israel. Instead, the administration must make it crystal clear at the outset that the United States expects the negotiations to continue without threats or walkouts.
- Abbas already is demanding that Israel expand its West Bank construction moratorium to include east Jerusalem if the talks are to continue past September. Israel's 10-month pause in settlement construction—began last November—was a goodwill gesture not required by any prior understandings. Indeed, Israel and the Palestinians have previously agreed that settlements are a final-status issue to be resolved *in* negotiations, not as a precondition to starting them.
- At least twice since the start of the Oslo process, Israel has offered far-reaching proposals to end the conflict, only to have them rejected by the Palestinians.



For talks to succeed, PA President Mahmoud Abbas must commit himself to negotiations and drop threats to withdraw at the first sign of difficulties.

Israel has embraced direct talks and has proved its commitment to reaching a final peace agreement.

- Netanyahu accepted the administration's call to resume talks, saying, "reaching an agreement is a difficult challenge but is possible. We are coming to the talks with a genuine desire to reach a peace agreement between the two peoples that will protect Israel's national security interests."
- Netanyahu has shown his willingness to take bold actions to condition the environment for peace. His moratorium on the construction of new homes in the West Bank was unprecedented.
- In June 2009, Netanyahu announced 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.
- Israel has removed more than 400 West Bank checkpoints and roadblocks since April 2008, improving the freedom of movement for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.
- In 1997, during his first term as prime minister, Netanyahu signed an accord that gave the PA control over most of the city of Hebron, historically a major Jewish religious center. A year later, Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat signed the Wye River Memorandum, under which Israel gave the PA control of large portions of the West Bank.

Arab states must back direct talks by supporting the necessary compromises by the PA and moving toward normal relations with Israel.

- Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, should strengthen Abbas with the political support he needs to fight terrorism, isolate Hamas and make the tough compromises required to reach an agreement.
- If the Arab states are committed to the creation of a Palestinian state, they must provide the PA with financial support to help bolster the economy. Reuters reported that Saudi Arabia's donations to the PA dropped 87 percent during Jan.–Aug. 2010 compared to the same period last year.
- The Arab states can demonstrate their support for the talks by rejecting extremism, ending anti-Israel incitement and preparing their own people to accept peaceful relations with Israel.
- The Arab states should take steps toward normalization with Israel, as called for by President Obama and Congress. Israelis need to know that the Arab world is fully ready to accept the Jewish state as negotiations proceed.

As 76 senators said in a letter to the president in April, talks must be based on key principles that have guided previous U.S.-led negotiations.

- The parties must avoid preconditions. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said that "these negotiations should take place without preconditions, and be characterized by good faith and a commitment to their success."
- The parties must dedicate themselves to direct bilateral negotiations. U.S. special envoy George Mitchell has emphasized this point saying, "This is a direct bilateral negotiation between the parties, with our assistance and with the assistance of our friends and allies."
- Israelis and Palestinians must determine solutions to the final status issues; no outside party can successfully impose peace. As Obama wrote in a letter to the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in April, "In order for any agreement to endure, peace cannot be imposed from the outside; it must be negotiated directly by the leaders."
- The United States must maintain its position as a trusted ally of Israel, providing the support and assurance so vital to Israeli leaders as they consider tough compromises for peace.