

Key Principles of the Peace Process

The United States and Israel have long shared the goal of establishing peace between Israel and all of its Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians. For decades, the United States has engaged in diplomatic efforts to facilitate negotiations between Israelis and Arabs.

Throughout these efforts, successful American diplomacy has been founded on several core principles. These remain key to improving the likelihood for future success in Israeli-Arab talks.

America's approach has been based on the following elements: (1) successful peacemaking requires close U.S.-Israel coordination during all phases; (2) the parties to the Arab-Israeli dispute need to engage in face-to-face, sustained negotiations; (3) no outside party—including the United States—can impose an agreement; (4) Arab parties can play a key positive role by normalizing relations with Israel and backing Palestinians committed to peace with Israel; (5) the United States maintains all elements of its close alliance with Israel even as it attempts to help broker agreements; and (6) the United States will support basic policies that protect the character and security of the Jewish state.



President Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have pledged to work closely on the issues facing both nations, including peace efforts.

Key Principles Vital As Direct Peace Talks Resume

Now that Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) have resumed direct peace talks, these key principles should continue to ground efforts by Washington and Jerusalem as they explore ways to advance Israeli-Palestinian negotiations aimed at solving the conflict.

The U.S. and Israel Should Work Together

The chief guiding principle is that the United States and Israel must always work together, even if they are not in full agreement on every issue. Israel has been able to be more flexible in negotiations with the Arabs when it has great confidence in its relationship with the United States. Efforts to go around or pressure Israel on

issues relating to its security and survival are destined to backfire. When the United States and Israel closely coordinate their approaches to peacemaking and avoid surprises, the chances for success increase, as evidenced by the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan.

The United States promotes negotiations in a variety of critical ways. The United States often hosts talks, and is obviously in close contact with regional and international partners. It can help rally support for negotiations and opposition to parties trying to undermine them. In the case of Israel's negotiations with the Palestinians, the United States can help isolate the terrorist organization Hamas until it forswears terror, accepts Israel's right to exist and accepts prior Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The United States also can help break logjams in the negotiations at key moments by working together with both sides.

An enduring solution to peace talks cannot be imposed by outside parties.

While the United States should be sensitive to the needs of both parties to negotiations, it should not adopt a posture of “evenhandedness” between its ally, Israel, and other parties. The

United States should continue to approach negotiations with an acceptance of Israel's need for secure, recognized and defensible borders, with the understanding that Israel must determine its own security requirements. Negotiations should also be premised on the belief that a final-status agreement between Israel and a Palestinian state would entail the end of all claims between the parties. America's approach—including its special relationship with Israel—is an asset to the negotiations process, and has historically made the United States the only outside party trusted by both sides to be an effective mediator.

The United States can act to help the parties in a fair-minded way, and urge them to maintain their commitments. With respect to the Palestinians, it can support moderate leaders without abandoning its insistence that the Palestinian Authority decisively act to halt violence, incitement and terror. In fact, this continued support is more likely to lead to breakthroughs in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations because Israel will be more willing to take risks for peace when its security requirements are being addressed and when the United States is backing its efforts.

Direct Talks—Not Imposed Solutions—Are Necessary for Success

An enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must arise from the parties themselves, and cannot be imposed by the United States or other outside parties, as President Obama made clear at the outset of the new round of talks. “The United States will put our full weight

behind this effort,” he said. “We will be an active and sustained participant. We will support those who make difficult choices in pursuit of peace. But let me very clear. Ultimately the United States cannot impose a solution, and we cannot want it more than the parties themselves.” A deal can only work if both parties enter into it willingly, feel vested in it and intend to implement it. Without buy-in from the two parties and the publics they represent, no accord will be viable. That is why direct, sustained bilateral negotiations—which can be facilitated by the United States—are still the best way forward.

Arab States Must Play a Role in Supporting Negotiations

The Arab states have a vital role in supporting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. To play a positive role in fostering such efforts, it is critical for the Arab states to accept Israel’s right to exist within secure and recognized boundaries as stipulated by U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, work toward normalizing relations with Israel and support Palestinian leaders committed to peace. The Arab states can also help support negotiations by taking sustained efforts to combat terrorists who are seeking to undermine peace efforts.

The U.S.-Israel Relationship Transcends the Peace Process

Beyond the peace process, the United States and Israel have a deep alliance based on common values that benefits both countries. The two allies share intelligence, have extensive defense

cooperation and work to counter the shared threats of terrorism and proliferation. It is critical that this vital cooperation is maintained irrespective of the daily ups and downs of Israel’s negotiations with its Arab neighbors.



Hamas, which took over Gaza from the PA, is carrying out attacks aimed at scuttling peace talks.

Palestinian Threats to Leave Talks Not Helpful

In November 2007, the Bush administration launched a new diplomatic initiative in

Annapolis, which led to formal negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian officials, with the backing of the Arab states. The goal of the talks was to try to reach a comprehensive peace agreement by the end of 2008.

Throughout the ensuing year, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and PA President Mahmoud Abbas met on a regular basis to hash out the principles and details of a possible peace agreement between the two sides. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni also held regular discussions with former Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei.

When Israel was forced to launch a defensive operation against Hamas rocket attacks at the end of 2008, the PA refused to continue talking even though Olmert had offered an unprecedented peace deal to Abbas, who had refused calls by the United States and Israel to return to the negotiating table until now.

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 conditions 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 his 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.

Critical for Congress to Support Time-Honored Principles

As Israel and the PA pursue these new round of talks, the United States and Israel should continue the close cooperation that has characterized the current diplomatic process thus far. The United States also should remain supportive of moderate Palestinians interested in making peace with Israel and helping their people prosper.

Abbas must drop his threats to leave the talks or impose conditions.

In this context, Congress and the executive branch should continue to closely adhere to the principles outlined above. The United States can maintain its special relationship with Israel while supporting the efforts of moderate Palestinian leaders to combat extremists and build their economy and civil society. An American position consistent with our historic principles offers the best chance of helping both Israelis and Palestinians ultimately achieve peace.