

MEMMO

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Continued U.S. Support for Direct Talks Key to Peace

The only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is through direct negotiations. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in an Oct. 20 speech, “There is no substitute for face-to-face discussion.” While Israel remains committed to direct talks without preconditions, top Palestinian officials have threatened to seek U.N. backing for a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood. The United States must continue its long-standing opposition to such harmful unilateral moves while working with the parties to resume productive direct negotiations.

Direct talks without preconditions—not unilateral steps—are the only way to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- Key Palestinian and Arab League leaders have increasingly threatened to take unilateral actions, including going to the U.N. to obtain recognition of a Palestinian state.
- While there are significant gaps between the parties on fundamental issues, rejecting negotiations and threatening alternative approaches will guarantee failure.
- Face-to-face talks are the only method to reach a sustainable two-state solution—a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state living side-by-side, in peace and security.
- Clinton has repeatedly said that direct talks are the only way to solve the conflict. “Only the parties themselves can take the difficult steps that will lead to peace,” she said in an Oct. 20 speech. “There is no substitute for face-to-face discussion. . . . That is the only path that will lead to the fulfillment of the Palestinian national aspirations and the necessary outcome of two states for two peoples.”
- During the past 19 months, Israel has offered numerous goodwill gestures to woo Palestinians back to direct peace talks: calling for a Palestinian state, reducing barriers to movement in the West Bank and implementing a 10-month West Bank housing construction moratorium.



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is threatening to seek support for a Palestinian state at the U.N. rather than negotiate with Israel.

The United States has long opposed unilateral Palestinian steps to create a Palestinian state outside the scope of negotiations.

- The Palestinians already declared a “state” in 1988, a move that was endorsed by the U.N. General Assembly. The United States voted against the resolution recognizing this declaration.

- In March 1999, with the Palestinians once again threatening to unilaterally declare an independent state, Congress overwhelmingly passed a resolution stating that “any attempt to establish Palestinian statehood outside the negotiating process will invoke the strongest congressional opposition.”
- Then-President Clinton spoke out against such action as well, saying, “I think there should not be a unilateral declaration. And if there is, our entire relationship [with the Palestinians] will be reviewed, not confined to that.”
- When asked about the Palestinian efforts to once again seek U.N. support for a Palestinian state, Mark Toner, a State Department spokesman, responded that a final deal can only be achieved “through direct negotiations, and anything that might affect those direct negotiations we feel is not helpful and not constructive.”

Palestinian efforts to create a state outside talks would only serve to undermine efforts to solve the conflict.

- Since a final agreement cannot be realistically reached without Israel and the backing of the United States, unilateral action by the Palestinians to seek statehood would only serve to undermine their goal of obtaining statehood.
- A unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state would not solve any of the difficult issues at the heart of the dispute: borders, refugees, Jerusalem, security arrangements and water.
- A unilateral declaration of statehood by the Palestinians also would sour an already tense atmosphere and further undermine trust, making an eventual negotiated agreement more remote.

The United States should continue to push the Palestinians to stay in talks and the Arab states to increase support for negotiations.

- In order to ensure that the Palestinians do not take unilateral action, the United States must continue to publically and privately make clear it would oppose such steps and urge the Palestinians to resume direct talks without preconditions.
- The United States also needs to continue pressing the Arab states to do more to back direct Israel-Palestinian peace talks.
- If the Arab states are committed to the creation of a Palestinian state, they must strongly support the resumption of direct negotiations and provide the Palestinian Authority with financial support to help bolster the economy.
- The Palestinians and Arab nations also 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.