

MEMMO

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'Palestine Papers' Show Talks Best Way to Solve Conflict

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have stalled because Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to meet with Israeli leaders since September 2010. Instead, Abbas has traveled the world seeking recognition of a Palestinian state. Abbas' circumventions will bring neither peace nor a Palestinian state; direct talks are needed for that. Indeed, the recently leaked "Palestine Papers" demonstrate conclusively that meaningful conversations can take place when Israelis and Palestinians negotiate intensely and privately. It is high time for Abbas to stop his globetrotting and return to the negotiating table.

The recently released documents, known as the "Palestine Papers," demonstrate that Israel and the Palestinians can make progress in talks.

- The papers—notes taken by Palestinian negotiators during past talks—indicate that the Palestinians were willing to accept Israeli control over nearly all Jewish neighborhoods in eastern Jerusalem as well as some settlements in the West Bank.
- This revelation contradicts the PA's public demand for a halt to all Israeli construction in the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem as a prerequisite for talks.
- If the PA was previously willing to accept Israeli control over certain disputed areas, then the PA should not demand—as a *precondition* for talking—that Israel stop building in those disputed areas.
- This revelation also contradicts the PA's longstanding public demand that Israel—if it really wants peace—must withdraw from all areas that it captured from Jordan in the Six-Day War.
- Furthermore, in August 2008, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made a dramatic offer for peace to Abbas that covered all the major issues, but Abbas never responded to it.
- The documents thus validate Israel's repeated statements that Israeli construction in the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem is not an obstacle to continued talks.



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to talk to Israel since September 2010.

The release of the "Palestine Papers" adds new urgency to the latest U.S. peace initiative to bring the two sides back to the table.

- In December, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced in a major policy speech that the United States aims to "push the parties to lay out their positions on the core issues without delay and with real specificity."
- Clinton expressed hope that U.S.-led talks with both parties would eventually lead to direct talks between them and allow the two sides to negotiate a framework agreement.

- Unfortunately, the PA continues to refuse to hold direct talks with Israel. Abbas has refused to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since Sept. 15, 2010.
- In contrast, Netanyahu immediately welcomed the Obama administration's new plan, saying, "It is good for peace. To reach peace, we have to discuss the issues that are truly delaying peace."
- Netanyahu has taken far-reaching steps to pave the way for substantive talks with the Palestinians—calling for a Palestinian state, reducing barriers to movement in the West Bank and implementing an unprecedented 10-month West Bank housing construction moratorium.
- Just this month, Netanyahu and Quartet Representative Tony Blair announced a series of steps aimed at further boosting the Palestinian economy, including developing new infrastructure and enhancing living standards.

Rather than talking with Israel, the PA is taking unilateral steps that undermine U.S.-backed peace efforts.

- In recent months, the Palestinians have spoken openly about unilaterally declaring a state and have sought recognition from countries around the world. To date, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Guyana, Ecuador, and Peru have announced their recognition of a Palestinian state.
- The Palestinians have also threatened to seek approval for a unilateral declaration of statehood at the United Nations. Currently, they are attempting to advance a resolution at the U.N. Security Council that would condemn Israel for construction in eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank.
- On Dec. 15, the House passed a resolution by voice vote opposing any PA efforts to unilaterally declare statehood or seek recognition for a state outside of talks with Israel.
- The administration also opposes unilateral Palestinian steps. "We continue to believe strongly that the only way that there will be a resolution of the conflict ... is through a negotiated settlement," said Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on January 20. "Therefore, we don't see action in the United Nations or any other forum as being helpful in bringing about that desired outcome."

The United States should continue to push the Palestinians to accept the new U.S. formula and return to the table.

- The United States should press Abbas to embrace the U.S. initiative and enter into negotiations immediately.
- The United States should also continue pressing Arab states to back the resumption of peace talks and to provide political cover and financial aid to the PA.
- The United States must continue to publicly make clear that it opposes unilateral Palestinian steps and that it would veto any effort at the U.N. Security Council to declare a Palestinian state or condemn Israeli construction in the West Bank.