

MEMMO

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Palestinians Must Return to Direct Talks to Achieve Peace

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 and sought to isolate Israel. Abbas' circumventions will bring neither peace nor a Palestinian state; direct talks are needed for that. America should continue its long-standing support for negotiations to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and oppose harmful unilateral efforts.

The Palestinians continue to refuse to talk with their Israeli counterparts and instead have taken unilateral steps that undermine the peace process.

- Despite repeated calls by Israel and the United States to hold serious direct talks, Abbas has refused to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since Sept. 15, 2010.
- Instead, the PA has launched a campaign outside the negotiations process to win international support for the recognition of a Palestinian state. "We have moved into the internationalization stage," senior Palestinian official Nabil Shaath told the *Los Angeles Times* in a recent interview.
- The Palestinians have spoken openly about unilaterally declaring a state and have won recognition from many countries around the world, with the objective of attaining United Nations membership this year.
- The Palestinians have also made it clear that they will continue to use the U.N. and other international fora to press Israel for concessions instead of negotiating peace with Israel.
- Rejecting President Obama's personal request to Abbas urging him to drop the matter, the Palestinians and their allies last month proposed a one-sided U.N. Security Council resolution that would have condemned Israel for construction in eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank. The United States vetoed the measure.
- The United States has repeatedly said it opposes unilateral Palestinian steps at the U.N. "We continue to believe strongly that the only way that there will be a resolution of the conflict ... is through a negotiated settlement," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said earlier this year. "Therefore, we don't see action in the United Nations or any other forum as being helpful in bringing about that desired outcome."



Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas refuses to talk with Israel and is taking steps to isolate Israel.

Israel remains committed to conducting direct peace negotiations in order to reach a lasting peace.

- Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made it clear that Israel remains committed to direct talks. “We are prepared to pursue those peace negotiations vigorously and are eager to get on with the work of achieving a secure peace,” he said recently.
- Israel’s Defense Minister Ehud Barak told the *Wall Street Journal* in an interview on March 8 that Netanyahu will likely announce a new peace plan soon. The new proposal is an effort by Netanyahu to get the stalled talks back on track.
- Netanyahu has already 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 last 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.

The United States should continue to press the Palestinians to return to negotiations with Israel

- 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 will act against any effort at the U.N. that seeks to single out Israel.
- The United States should oppose efforts within the Quartet (the United States, Russia, Britain and the U.N.) to predetermine the terms of reference for negotiations regarding borders. The Palestinians want the group to affirm that the borders should be based on those that existed before the 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel captured the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, among other territory.