

MEMMO

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French Proposal Endangers Prospects for Peace

On Jan. 29, French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that France will attempt to convene an international summit to renew diplomatic efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. But Fabius immediately doomed his proposal by pledging formal French recognition of a Palestinian state if renewed talks do not achieve success by this summer. By promising the Palestinians full recognition—irrespective of their behavior at the negotiating table—the Foreign Minister has removed any incentive for the Palestinians to engage in serious negotiations. The United States should oppose France’s ultimatum and any other international attempts to impose a solution on Israel. Instead, America should encourage the Palestinians to return to direct bilateral negotiations with Israel—the best path to achieve peace.

The French ultimatum reinforces the Palestinian notion that statehood can be attained without negotiating a compromise with Israel.

- On Jan. 29, Fabius announced that France will convene an international summit to renew diplomatic efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. He also stated that if the two parties cannot achieve a negotiated solution by summer 2016, France will formally recognize a Palestinian state.
- By threatening to recognize Palestinian statehood outside of successful negotiations, France has doomed the international peace summit before it begins.
- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu responded to the French initiative, stating “We are prepared to enter direct negotiations without preconditions and without dictated terms.” However, he rejected France’s ultimatum, noting that it “serves as an incentive for the Palestinians to come [to the summit] and not compromise.”
- In contrast, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has set out preconditions for returning to the negotiating table, including an immediate settlement freeze and the release of pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails.
- External measures such as this violate the fundamental principle of the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords, in which both sides agreed to resolve final status issues bilaterally, through direct negotiations.

Direct bilateral talks are the only viable path for achieving an enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

- A deal can only succeed if both parties negotiate and implement a deal willingly and in good faith. Without buy-in from the two parties and the publics they represent, no accord will be viable.
- Outside of a negotiated settlement, international recognition of Palestinian rights at Israel’s expense only encourages Palestinian obstinacy and refusal to return to the negotiating table.

- As President Barack Obama said during his 2013 trip to Israel, “There is no question that the only path to peace is through negotiations – which is why ... the United States will oppose unilateral efforts to bypass negotiations through the United Nations. It has to be done by the parties.”
- In April 2015, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power reiterated this message, stating that the United States opposes “any and all unilateral actions in the international arena, including on Palestinian statehood that circumvent or prejudice the very outcomes that can only come about through a negotiated settlement.”

Israel has made far-reaching offers to end the conflict but the Palestinians have rejected them.

- In December 2000, President Bill Clinton offered his parameters for a deal, which included an Israeli withdrawal from 94 to 96 percent of the West Bank with land swaps to compensate the Palestinians for their four to six percent loss. While both Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat accepted with reservations, Clinton announced in 2001 that Barak’s reservations were within the parameters and Arafat’s were outside of them. In his book, Clinton squarely laid the blame for the failure of the talks on Arafat.
- In September 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered President Abbas 93.5 percent of the West Bank with land swaps. Abbas did not respond to the offer, later writing in *The Washington Post* that “the gaps were too big.” In a recent TV interview, Abbas said that he “rejected it [the offer] out of hand.”
- During the latest round of talks in spring 2014, Abbas failed to respond to a proposed framework for an agreement offered by President Obama, promising that he would reply at a future date—which he has still yet to do. The peace talks dissolved after Fatah signed a unity deal with Hamas.

To enhance the prospects for peace, the United States should remain committed to the principles that guided previous negotiations.

- *International conferences must serve as a catalyst for direct bilateral negotiations:* Conferences meant to pressure one side to make unilateral concessions are unhelpful.
- *A solution cannot be imposed on the parties:* Attempts to pressure Israel and impose terms on it are counterproductive and discourage direct negotiations; they should be opposed.
- *Both sides must be willing to make compromises:* As in past successful Israeli-Arab peace agreements, negotiations will require all parties to make painful concessions.
- *Disagreements should be worked out privately:* Public differences have allowed the Palestinians to stall efforts to get the sides back to the negotiating table.
- *America must support and work closely with Israel:* The United States should assert its position as a trusted ally of Israel, providing the support and assurances essential to Israeli leaders as they negotiate with the Palestinians and consider tough compromises for peace.