

MEMMO

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Support Direct Talks, Not Imposed Terms

In late May, France intends to host a conference to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—but Israeli and Palestinian representatives are not invited to attend. The French approach appears designed to replace U.S. efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians back to the negotiating table and to pressure Israel for unilateral concessions. The French initiative comes on the heels of an unsuccessful Palestinian effort to present a one-sided anti-Israel resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Both the French conference and Palestinian efforts at the U.N. represent harmful distractions that undermine efforts to resume direct Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. The United States must continue to defend the Jewish state in the international arena from one-sided initiatives and press for the Palestinians to return to direct, bilateral negotiations with Israel.

The French peace conference would undermine prospects for peace.

- France has invited dozens of foreign ministers to an international conference to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but no representatives from the Israelis or Palestinians.
- An exclusionary conference without Israeli or Palestinian participation would lack the legitimacy to facilitate meaningful solutions, will fail to elicit buy-in from the parties, and likely lead to one-sided proposals that would only encourage further Palestinian intransigence.
- In response to this conference, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “Israel is ready immediately to begin direct negotiations with the Palestinians without any preconditions. Any other diplomatic initiative distances the Palestinians from the table of direct negotiations.”



On May 9, Secretary of State John Kerry met with French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault.

Efforts to impose solutions at the United Nations are counter-productive

- Efforts at the U.N. Security Council and other international bodies further divide the parties, create an atmosphere of distrust, and undermine the prospects for peace.
- Given its deep, institutional anti-Israel bias, the U.N. is not the proper forum for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- In the past year:
 - The U.N. General Assembly passed 20 resolutions singling out and criticizing Israel—more than the total number of resolutions naming any other country in the world combined.

- The U.N. Human Rights Council called for a blacklist of companies operating in the West Bank and parts of Jerusalem.
- The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization passed resolutions that ignored the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and accused Israel of “planting Jewish fake graves” in Muslim cemeteries in order to wrest control of land from Muslims.
- The U.N. Commission on the Status of Women singled out Israel for condemnation, ignoring Israel's status as a world leader in defending the rights of women.

Direct, bilateral talks are the only viable path to an enduring solution.

- A deal can only work if both parties enter it willingly, feel vested in the talks, and intend to implement the outcome. 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 demands at Israel's expense only encourages Palestinian obstinacy and refusal to return to the negotiating table. It does not hasten achieving real peace; it prolongs the conflict.
- As President Barack Obama said during his March 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.”
- On Dec. 30, 2014, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Samantha Power reiterated this message in her explanation of the United States' opposition to a one-sided, anti-Israel UNSC resolution. Power said, “Peace will come from hard choices and compromises that must be made at the negotiating table.”

The United States should press the Palestinians to return to direct, bilateral negotiations with Israel.

- The United States must press for the Palestinians to return to direct, bilateral negotiations with Israel, as this is the best path to ultimately achieving peace.
- The United States should reinforce long-standing American practice—as it did in 2011—to veto any Security Council resolution that seeks to bypass direct negotiations and impose a solution on the parties.
- The United States should remain committed to the principles that guided previous negotiations.
 - Talks must be direct and bilateral.
 - The U.S. must support and work closely with Israel.
 - A solution cannot be imposed on the parties.
 - Disagreements should be worked out privately.
 - Both sides must be willing to make key compromises.