

Awaiting a Return to the Negotiating Table

A fundamental principle of the 1993 Oslo Accords was a commitment from both Israelis and Palestinians to pursue a two-state solution through direct, bilateral negotiations. More than two decades later, the United States continues to advocate for a peace process that is rooted in direct talks between the parties.

Lately, however, Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has damaged the prospect of peace by breaking off bilateral talks with Israel and taking counterproductive actions.

In April 2014, the PA signed official appeals to join 15 international conventions and treaties. Later that month, Abbas formed a unity government with Hamas. In June, the Gaza-based terror group murdered three Israeli teens and launched a campaign of incessant rocket fire upon Israeli civilians.

In December, Jordan introduced a Palestinian drafted resolution to the United Nations Security Council, which intended to impose a full Israeli withdrawal to pre-1967 lines and establish a Palestinian state with its capital in Jerusalem, without concern for Israeli security needs.

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (U.N.) Samantha Power said the council's resolution was "deeply imbalanced," and did not take into account Israel's security concerns. "Today's staged confrontation in the U.N. Security Council will not bring the parties closer to achieving a two-state solution," Power said on December 30, prior to voting against the measure. "This resolution sets the stage for more division, not for compromise."

The 15-member council rejected the resolution after it received only eight out of the nine requisite votes for passage. The United States and Australia voted against the resolution, while five other nations abstained. The following day, Abbas signed the necessary paperwork to seek membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC). This move was a first step towards potentially investigating Israel for war crimes at the court.

Throughout history, American lawmakers have pressed the Palestinians to engage in bilateral talks with Israel and to avoid taking steps in the international arena to impose a solution. Today, the 114th Congress is reviewing U.S. aid to the PA, with the possibility of suspending all support to the PA in the wake of their recent actions. The decision by U.S. lawmakers to review financial assistance to the PA stems from America's commitment to the vision of two states living peacefully side by side.

While both the U.S. and Israel remain committed to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside a secure state of Israel, direct bilateral talks are the only viable path toward an enduring solution. Negotiations will only succeed if both parties enter them willingly, feel vested in them and intend to implement their results.

Congress has played a vital role in the peace process for decades. We should welcome the efforts of those members seeking to hold the Palestinians accountable for their counterproductive actions, so as to bring Abbas and the PA back to the negotiating table in pursuit of peace.