

Direct, Bilateral Talks are the Only Way to Peace

The only way for Israelis and Palestinians to realize peace is through a two-state solution achieved via direct, bilateral negotiations, as prescribed by the 1993 Oslo Accords. Frustrated by the lack of progress, some nations have begun calling for imposed solutions on the two parties. However, these efforts are misguided. Peace is only possible when the two sides work out their issues directly.

Israel has a proven track record of pursuing peace with its regional neighbors and making difficult sacrifices to achieve this goal. In 1979, Israel withdrew its armed forces and Jewish residents from the Sinai Peninsula in order to make peace with Egypt. In 1994, it came to an agreement with Jordan, which also helped solve long-standing land and water disputes, and paved the way for tourism and trade. And just as it found peace with these neighbors, so too has Israel demonstrated a deep commitment to achieving peace with the Palestinians.

Israel has repeatedly called for negotiations without preconditions. However, the Palestinian leadership has rebuffed this plea. Instead, they have bypassed talks and sought to impose their vision and isolate Israel by turning to international institutions like the United Nations.

On March 24, the United Nation Human Rights Council voted in favor of adopting a draft resolution proposed by the Palestinian Authority to blacklist any companies operating in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. This “blacklist” is designed to add economic heft to the Palestinian hope of steering the international community to impose the Palestinian version of a solution to the conflict without regard for Israeli concerns.

On Jan. 29, former French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius announced that France would attempt to convene an international summit to renew diplomatic efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. He also stated that if the two parties could not achieve a negotiated solution by summer 2016, France would formally recognize a Palestinian state. Today, French diplomats claim that that is not the case. However, the notion of an imposed solution remains. And 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.

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. Any third party initiatives should only serve as a catalyst for direct, bilateral negotiations. Attempts to pressure Israel and impose terms on it are counterproductive and discourage direct negotiations.

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.”