

Peace Deal Possible, Abbas Says

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has voiced optimism regarding peace prospects with Israel following a meeting with President Donald Trump's special representative for international negotiations, Jason Greenblatt.

According to a statement released by Abbas's office after Tuesday's meeting, the PA leader informed Greenblatt that he believes "that under President Trump's leadership a historic peace deal is possible, and that it will enhance security throughout the region. President Abbas said he looked forward to discussing the possibilities for peace directly with President Trump during his upcoming visit to Washington."

The PA's statement also included a commitment by Abbas to prevent "inflammatory rhetoric and incitement," with the goal of de-escalating tension between Israel and the Palestinians. Abbas pledged to increase "outreach efforts to the Israeli public" in order to create an atmosphere that is conducive to peace talks.

Israel's government has often accused PA leaders and official media outlets of incitement that foments violence against Israelis, especially during the wave of Palestinian terrorism that stretched from October 2015 through the first half of 2016. Palestinian Media Watch, an organization that monitors and translates Palestinian news reports and social media content, has long documented this trend of incitement.

Greenblatt's meeting with Abbas followed the Trump adviser's five-hour meeting Monday with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Jerusalem. Greenblatt and Netanyahu discussed a broad range of issues, including Israeli settlement construction and methods for bolstering the Palestinian economy.

Meanwhile, former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon said he believes a final status agreement between the Jewish state and the Palestinians is unlikely in the near future, but that he opposes Israeli annexation of Judea and Samaria.

"We have to make our own decisions about what we want. I am happy that we have political separation from the Palestinians. I am happy that they have their own government, parliament, their own president, that they don't have to go to the Knesset," Ya'alon told a gathering of international reporters, referring to recent discussions in Israel on annexing Judea and Samaria.

"On the one hand, we are not going to reach a final settlement in the coming future, but on the other hand, I don't want to rule them, and I can live with two Palestinian political entities, [including] Hamastan," Ya'alon said, using a nickname for the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip. "That's why I strongly reject the idea to annex now, to annex Area C (which is under full Israeli civil and security control), to settle everywhere. ... Is that in our interest?"

Ya'alon, who was ousted from his defense minister post last May after a fallout with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, recently announced that he will form a new political party to run in future national elections against Netanyahu's ruling Likud party. {eo}

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