

Kerry: Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement 'Achievable'

Efforts to restart peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians continued on Monday, with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry meeting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for dinner in Jerusalem. Kerry and Netanyahu discussed the peace process with the Palestinians as well as other pressing issues.

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, Strategic Affairs, Intelligence and International Relations Minister Yuval Steinitz and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni also took part in the meeting.

Kerry was set to meet with Netanyahu again on Tuesday at the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem.

Kerry said on Monday that an Israel-Palestinian peace agreement is achievable.

"I am intensely focused on this issue and the region because it is vital really to American interests and regional interests to try and advance the peace process and because this festering absence of peace is used by groups everywhere to recruit and encourage extremism," Kerry said.

"Both sides mistrust each other deeply and there are reasons that mistrust has built up. I am convinced that we can break that down."

Before meeting with Israeli leaders on Monday, Kerry visited Ramallah on Sunday and held talks with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and other Palestinian officials.

During a meeting with Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird on Monday, Economy and Trade Minister Naftali Bennett expressed

skepticism about peace talks with the Palestinian Authority.

"The negotiations with the Palestinians should start with the people," Bennett said. "A Palestinian state in the current framework will not be established, and if it is, it would be weak and hostile. It's time to move to Plan B, which will start with the people, not with diplomacy, the main principle being handling the Palestinian way of life and freedom of movement."

Meanwhile, it was revealed on Monday that planned talks between Israel and Turkey on the restoration of ties between the two countries following Israel's apology over the May 2010 Gaza flotilla incident have been pushed back two weeks. The talks were originally set to start on Thursday in Ankara, but they have now been delayed to April 22.

Channel 2 reported on Monday that Israeli officials believe that the conduct of the U.S. on the North Korean issue is conveying a message of weakness toward Iran.

Before meeting with President Shimon Peres on Monday, Kerry reiterated his country's commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons..

"As [U.S. President Barack Obama] has said many times, he doesn't bluff, he is serious. We will stand with Israel against this threat and with the rest of the world, who have underscored that all we are looking for is Iran to live up to its international obligations," Kerry said. "No option is off the table. No option will be taken off the table."

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said on Monday that talks with Iran on its nuclear program had not led to any progress toward solving the issue.