

Kerry: Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations at 'Critical Moment'

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry held separate talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials on Thursday and acknowledged there was considerable skepticism that the two sides would resume peace negotiations.

Kerry met with President Shimon Peres, who wished Kerry success in his mission. Kerry responded by saying success would be a prize for Israel and the Palestinians, not for him.

"You said that 'if you succeed' or 'if you fail'—it's not me, Mr. President," Kerry said. "It really is a question of whether Israel and the Palestinians make the choices."

Kerry added that regional players had reached a "critical moment."

There were no signs of any breakthrough as Kerry visited Israel for the fourth time in his four months in office to try to revive a peace process that has been moribund for more than two years.

Kerry also met with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday.

"I know this region well enough to know that there is skepticism," Kerry said as he and Netanyahu posed for pictures. "In some quarters there is cynicism and there are reasons for it. There have been bitter years of disappointment."

"It is our hope that by being methodical, careful, patient, but detailed and tenacious, that we can lay out a path ahead that can conceivably surprise people but certainly exhaust the

possibilities of peace.”

Kerry met Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas for lunch in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Kerry was also scheduled to see Netanyahu again on Friday for breakfast.

Before his meeting with Kerry on Thursday, Netanyahu said he wanted to restart peace talks.

“It’s something I hope the Palestinians want as well and we ought to be successful for a simple reason—when there’s a will, we’ll find a way,” Netanyahu said.

The two men discussed ways to advance peace, Kerry’s ideas for an economic plan to boost Palestinian growth and the “escalating violence” in neighboring Syria’s civil war, a senior U.S. State Department official told reporters after the meeting.

Netanyahu thanked Kerry for the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee’s approval of legislation to impose tighter sanctions on Iran.

Visiting British Foreign Secretary William Hague also held talks with Netanyahu and Abbas on Thursday.

During his meeting with Hague, Netanyahu said that the most recent International Atomic Energy Agency report clearly showed that Iran was continuing to develop its nuclear program.

On Friday, Hague met with Peres in Jerusalem and expressed support for U.S. efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Peres, in turn, praised Hague’s efforts and positions.

“You have made your position extremely clear on the major issues,” Peres said. “On Iran, on terror, on the need to move forward the peace process and we feel not only your clear positions but also your friendship and understanding.”

Hague told Peres that 70 percent of his work in foreign affairs has to do with the Middle East.

“Taking into account the situation with Iran’s nuclear program and the tragic situation in Syria and, of course, our hopes now are that we can, through supporting Secretary Kerry in his work, really help to make some decisive moves forward for permanent peace,” Hague said, echoing European Union support for U.S. efforts.

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who is in charge of diplomatic negotiations, met with both Kerry and Hague on Thursday. Livni said the coming weeks would be critical to resuming talks with the Palestinians.

“The objective is to restart negotiations and end the conflict,” Livni said. “This is an American goal. It’s in Israel’s interest and I hope the Palestinians understand this.”

In Ramallah on Thursday, dozens of demonstrators greeted Kerry outside of Abbas’ office, protesting “the pro-Israel tendency of the U.S.”

Israel Radio reported on Friday that Palestinian officials said conditions are not yet ripe for the renewal of negotiations with Israel. The officials said the U.S. still does not have a formulated plan to renew Israeli-Palestinian talks.

Abbas is expected to meet with Kerry again on Saturday in Jordan.

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