

Low Expectations for Israel, P.A. Resumed Talks

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators are meeting face-to-face for the first time in 16 months in Amman, Jordan.

But expectations are low for any progress in the talks. Analysts say mistrust runs deep on both sides.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said if the international Quartet—the United States, European Union, United Nations and Russia—doesn't get the two sides back to the negotiating table by Jan. 26, then it will have failed.

"If so, we'll then have our own position, which will be studied and discussed by all the Palestinian institutions of the Palestinian leadership and then we will come up with an answer," Abbas said.

He also said he hoped the United States wouldn't ignore the Middle East during this coming election year.

"We hope that the Americans will not waste the year of 2012 with the issue of elections. I honestly say, 'How can the United States be paralyzed by the elections?'" Abbas said.

"There are regional and international issues in this world that can't be ignored; it's not acceptable to see that the issue of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or the Middle East as a whole will be left without discussion until after the U.S. elections," he said.

The Palestinian Authority has refused to talk to Israel unless Israel halts construction in Jewish communities in the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria—otherwise known as the West Bank—where they want a future Palestinian state.

Israel halted settlement construction of new settlements for

10 months starting in late 2009 in an effort to coax the Palestinians back to the negotiating table.

But the Palestinians waited until the moratorium was nearly finished to decide to talk with Israel. That brief encounter ended when Israel resumed its building.

Now, Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said the ball is in the Palestinian court.

“Israel has repeatedly called for the immediate resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians without any preconditions whatsoever,” Regev said.

“Unfortunately, the Palestinian side was boycotting the peace talks. We remain ready for the immediate resumption of talks with the Palestinians and frankly anywhere, anytime,” he added.

Hamas condemned the Palestinian Authority talks with Israel and claimed the Quartet only serves Israel’s interests.

The talks come as Israeli officials say the Palestinians are planning an all-out diplomatic offensive against Israel in the coming year.

According to an Israeli Foreign Ministry document, Fatah Central committee member, Nabil Sha’ath said 2012 “will be the start of an unprecedented diplomatic campaign on the part of the Palestinian leadership, and it will be a year of pressure on Israel that will put it under a real international siege,” the daily *Ha’aretz* reported.

“The campaign will be similar to the one waged against apartheid in South Africa,” Sha’ath said.

The pressure could include urging the U.N. Security Council to pass a resolution condemning settlement construction. They could also push the International Criminal Court to try Israel for war crimes in connection with Operation Cast Lead—Israel’s

incursion into the Gaza Strip in 2008-2009 to stop rocket and missile fire from Gaza on Israel's civilian population, the paper said.

The Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz *and AP contributed to this report.*