

Naftali Bennett: 'Israel Won't Negotiate With a Gun to Its Head'

The Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams are expected to meet again later this week, after the Passover holiday. Palestinian sources told Israel Hayom over the weekend that although the teams' meeting on Thursday, which included American mediator Martin Indyk, was positive, no significant breakthrough has been achieved at this time.

A senior Ramallah official said that the Palestinian Authority is adamant to see Israel carry out the fourth stage of the Palestinian prisoner release, as pledged ahead of the resumption of the peace talks last July, before it discusses extending the current round of negotiations.

The meeting scheduled for later this week will see the teams discuss a potential nine-month extension of the talks, and according to the Palestinian official, should an agreement to that effect be reached, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas would demand Israel agree to address the issue of the future Palestinian state's borders within the first three months of the talks.

Meanwhile, Abbas had reportedly threatened to dismantle the Palestinian Authority, a move that would potentially dissolve the 1993 Oslo Accords and leave Israel—according to international law—vulnerable to legal action over its settlement activities in Judea and Samaria.

In an interview with Egypt's Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper, Abbas said, "A new generation arrives and asks us: 'What have you done?' I am now 79 years old, I cannot escape from passing off the [PA] flag to someone else."

Abbas further blamed the settlements for the stalemate in the peace talks, saying, "The new generation sees the two-state solution is becoming less and less likely, and that there is no escape from the one-state solution."

Palestinian sources were quoted by media outlets over the weekend as saying that the Palestinian Authority was "seriously considering" declaring itself a "government under occupation."

Habayit Hayehudi Chairman Naftali Bennett commented Sunday on Abbas' threat, saying, "Abu Mazen, as chairman of the PA, is encouraging terror and then he threatens to resign. To this we say, with these kinds of threats—save us from your well-wishing. If he wants to go, we won't stop him. Israel will not negotiate with a gun to its head."

Channel 2 news reported over the weekend that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel (Habayit Hayehudi) had reached an understanding by which should Israel go ahead with the prisoner release and Bennett, who serves as economy and trade minister, resigns from the government, other Habayit Hayehudi ministers would not follow suit. Ariel has denied the report.

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