

Netanyahu Resolves to End Conflict With Palestinians

Will U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's visit help restart peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians? At a meeting with Kerry on Tuesday in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "I am determined not only to resume the peace process with the Palestinians, but to make a serious effort to end this conflict once and for all."

Netanyahu said his talks with Kerry about the peace process dealt with two key matters: Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state and security arrangements. Israel wants to discuss these issues with the Palestinians and is demanding that the Palestinians present their positions on those matters.

Kerry told Netanyahu that the Palestinians want borders to be the first issue discussed and are demanding that Israel present a map of the borders of a future Palestinian state. Netanyahu said the issue must be left for the final stage of negotiations, as there are essential issues that need to be agreed upon first.

Kerry characterized his talks with Netanyahu as "extremely friendly" and "very productive."

"I think it's fair to say that we made progress, that we were pleased with the substance of the discussion and agreed, each of us, to do some homework," Kerry said.

Kerry said he and Netanyahu had discussed an initiative to promote Palestinian economic development, but emphasized that "whatever steps we take with respect to economics are in no way a substitute, but they are in addition to the political track. The political track is first and foremost; other things may happen to supplement it."

Palestinian officials in Ramallah told Israel Hayom on Tuesday that Kerry's meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Sunday had produced positive progress toward the possibility of restarting peace negotiations with Israel. However, the Palestinian officials said that the peace plan that Kerry plans to present in the future is still clouded with uncertainty.

"Kerry came with much determination, willingness and goodwill," a senior official from Abbas' office told Israel Hayom. "He explained in his meeting with Abbas that he does not plan to impose timelines for resuming negotiations on the sides, but rather intends to focus first on building trust between the Israelis and Palestinians."

Netanyahu and Kerry also discussed Iran. Kerry reiterated to Netanyahu that the U.S. will not permit Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon.

"Iran cannot have and will not have a nuclear weapon," Kerry said. "The United States of America has made it clear that we stand not just with Israel, but with the entire international community in making it clear that we are serious. We are open to negotiations, but not open-ended, endless negotiations. It cannot be used as an excuse for other efforts to try to break out with respect to a nuclear weapon. And we are well aware and coordinating very, very closely with respect to all of our assessments regarding that. But President [Barack] Obama doesn't bluff. He's made that very clear to me, and we hope the Iranians will come back to the table with a very serious proposal."

Netanyahu said that Iran must not be allowed to go nuclear.

"I think everybody understands that Iran has been running out the clock, has been using the talks to continue to advance its nuclear program," Netanyahu said. "We've just heard by Iranian state television about a new production facility for nuclear

material and two new extraction sites. I think we also understand what it means for the world to have rogue states with nuclear weapons. Iran cannot be allowed to cross into that world. It cannot be allowed to continue its nuclear weapons program, and we must not allow it to continue to do so in defiance of the entire international community.”

The next high-level American government official to visit Israel will be U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel. Hagel will be in Israel April 21-23 and will hold talks with Defense Minister Moshe (Bogie) Ya’alon.

Ya’alon met with Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird on Tuesday. Ya’alon praised Canada for cutting off its diplomatic ties with Iran and for including Hezbollah on its list of terrorist groups.

President Shimon Peres met with Baird on Tuesday and said that Canada displayed courage by cutting off diplomatic ties with Iran.

Baird also met on Tuesday with Avigdor Lieberman, the chairman of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. Lieberman said that the latest round of talks between world powers and Iran signalled the West’s acceptance of an Iranian nuclear bomb. Lieberman equated this with the West’s past acceptance of both a nuclear North Korea and Adolf Hitler’s 1938 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

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