

Obama Calls for Israel-Palestine Peace Measures

President Barack Obama on Thursday pushed for democracy in the Arab world and offered specific details of how he views the peace process between Israel and Palestine.

Obama made clear that America's friendship with Israel is rooted deeply in shared history and values. He also called the U.S. commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable.

But the president also put plenty of pressure on Israel to drive the peace process forward. As Obama sees it, the international community is tired of an endless process that never produces an outcome.

"The dream of a Jewish and democratic state cannot be fulfilled with permanent occupation. Now, ultimately, it is up to the Israelis and Palestinians to take action. No peace can be imposed upon them—not by the United States; not by anybody else. But endless delay won't make the problem go away," Obama said.

"What America and the international community can do is to state frankly what everyone knows—a lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples: Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people, each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition and peace."

Obama threw down the Palestinian gauntlet, so to speak, saying that a viable Palestine is a must. The U.S., he said, believes that negotiations should result in two states, with permanent Palestinian borders with Israel, Jordan and Egypt, and permanent Israeli borders with Palestine.

"We believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be

based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states," Obama said. "The Palestinian people must have the right to govern themselves, and reach their full potential, in a sovereign and contiguous state."

Prime Minister Netanyahu rejects Obama's notion.

"Israel appreciates President Obama's commitment to peace," a Thursday statement out of the prime minister's office said. "Israel believes that for peace to endure between Israelis and Palestinians, the viability of a Palestinian state cannot come at the expense of the viability of the one and only Jewish state. That is why Prime Minister Netanyahu expects to hear a reaffirmation from President Obama of U.S. commitments made to Israel in 2004. ... Among other things, those commitments relate to Israel not having to withdraw to the 1967 lines."

On the security question, Obama said Israel must be able to defend itself, by itself, against any threat. He accounted for provisions robust enough to prevent a resurgence of terrorism, to stop the infiltration of weapons and to provide effective border security.

"The full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces should be coordinated with the assumption of Palestinian security responsibility in a sovereign, non-militarized state," Obama said. "And the duration of this transition period must be agreed, and the effectiveness of security arrangements must be demonstrated."

Obama isn't pretending these steps will resolve the conflict, but believes moving forward on the basis of territory and security provides a foundation to deal with those issues in a just and fair way.

Obama expressed concern over the recent announcement of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas. Then he asked a tough question: How can one negotiate with a party that has shown

itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? In weeks and months to come, he said, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question.

“I recognize how hard this will be,” Obama said. “Suspicion and hostility has been passed on for generations, and at times it has hardened. But I’m convinced that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians would rather look to the future than be trapped in the past.”