

Obama's Agenda to Visit Israel Stands Firm

U.S. President Barack Obama will visit Israel later this month even if a new Israeli government has not yet been established, an American official in Washington told Israel Hayom on Sunday. The official said this was because Obama's intended audience during his upcoming trip is the Israeli public, not the government.

The American official said that Obama realized that his failure to visit Israel during his first term was not conducive to advancing the peace process.

"The more the (Obama administration) toughened its tone against Israel, the more obstinate the Palestinian Authority became," the American official said. "(The Palestinian Authority) understood it was better to wait and they would get more from this compared to sitting at the negotiating table and compromising. Obama's arrival with a positive attitude toward Israel will encourage the Palestinians to return to the table."

Obama's upcoming visit to Israel was a hot topic for the thousands of delegates at the opening of the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) conference on Sunday in Washington. American Jews, a majority of whom are politically liberal and not religious, are very enthusiastic about Obama's planned trip.

"The visit proves how strong the relationship is between the U.S. and Israel," Daniel, a young lawyer from Florida who came to the AIPAC conference with his wife, told Israel Hayom. "America understands it can rely only on the single stable democracy in the Middle East."

Two former American diplomats, Dennis Ross and Elliott Abrams,

also expressed enthusiasm about Obama's upcoming visit to Israel.

"During the visit, Obama needs to connect with the Israeli public," Ross said.

Obama requires "a delicate operation ... called a kishkes transplant" to convince Israel that his words of support are heartfelt.

Sources in Washington told Israel Hayom on Sunday that the Obama administration is not pleased about the low level of support Obama has among the Israeli public. Obama has been told about the enthusiastic receptions Bill Clinton received during his four visits to Israel as president. But Obama has a very different style from Clinton.

Obama's visit to Israel will last less than 48 hours, including five hours in Ramallah and sleep time. Obama will need to pack in a visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, a wreath-laying ceremony at Theodor Herzl's grave on Mount Herzl, a visit to President Shimon Peres' residence and meetings with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This won't leave Obama much time to woo the Israeli public.

Meanwhile, in a last-minute addition to his schedule, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday as both statesmen were visiting the Saudi capital. Kerry's working lunch with Abbas came two weeks before the secretary is to accompany Obama to Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan.

Kerry said he would talk with Abbas about "all the obvious issues" and that Netanyahu was aware of the meeting, which was being held on the same day that U.S. Vice President Joe Biden was to address the annual policy conference of the pro-Israel American Israel Public Affairs Committee in Washington.

At the AIPAC conference on Sunday, Iran was also at the top of

the agenda. Another American official told Israel Hayom that during Obama's visit to Israel, the president intends "to coordinate positions and expectations, but not to plan any action" regarding Iran.

"Does the (Obama administration) want to attack Iran? The answer is no," the American official, who is very familiar with the Iranian nuclear issue, said. "Obama is a president who came to end wars, not start new ones. But he is capable of (ordering an attack), if he has no choice."

"Obama cannot allow himself to be remembered as a president who on one hand carried the banner of nuclear non-proliferation while on the other hand let Iran, and consequently other nations in the region, go nuclear and thus render the International Atomic Energy Agency useless."

Several dozen anti-Israel protesters demonstrated outside the AIPAC conference on Sunday. They didn't arouse much excitement. AIPAC delegates are accustomed to such protests. This is America. The ratio of protesters to delegates was around 1:700. Not impressive. But among the protesters, there was a Hezbollah flag, as if to remind American Jews why their support of Israel is so important.

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