

Obama Visit Not Expected to Produce Quick Fix

President Barack Obama told American Jewish leaders Thursday that near-term prospects for Middle East peace may be bleak, but a deal with the Palestinians remains the only way for Israel to achieve long-term security.

Obama said he has no intention of delivering a “grand peace plan” when he travels to the Middle East later this month, downplaying expectations for a breakthrough on his highly anticipated visit to Israel, Ramallah and Amman. However, he said that doesn’t preclude him from launching such an effort in the coming months, according to a person who attended the hour-long private White House meeting.

During the meeting, which focused mainly on Obama’s upcoming trip to Israel, Obama said it would be premature for him to make a dramatic diplomatic move at this time, but that it was possible a peace effort could be launched in the “next six, nine or 12 months.”

“The president noted that the trip is not dedicated to resolving a specific policy issue, but is rather an opportunity to consult with the Israeli government about a broad range of issues – including Iran, Syria, the situation in the region, and the peace process,” a source knowledgeable about the meeting told Reuters.

A White House official said that Obama used Thursday’s meeting to reiterate his “unshakable support” for Israel.

Obama told American Jewish leaders that he wanted to speak directly to the Israeli public during his trip. Obama intends to use a major speech to urge Israelis to work for peace with the Palestinians. It appears likely that Obama will deliver the speech at the International Convention Center in Jerusalem

and not at the Knesset.

On Thursday, Obama also expressed to American Jewish leaders his commitment to preventing Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. But he said he wasn't "going to beat my chest to prove my toughness on this."

During his visit to Israel, Obama will likely reiterate that all options, including military force, remain on the table for the U.S. when it comes to dealing with Iran, while also emphasizing that there is still time for diplomacy.

An American official said on Thursday that while Obama doesn't want to start new wars, he also doesn't want Iran to go nuclear on his watch.

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