

## Abbas to U.S.: “Negotiate With Israel on our Behalf”

By [Global Research](#)

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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has proposed that the Obama administration negotiate the final borders of a Palestinian state with Israel, a Palestinian official said Wednesday, as a U.S. envoy headed to the region for another attempt to restart Mideast peace talks.

Such a proxy arrangement could provide a way around the current deadlock over reviving Israeli-Palestinian talks, which broke off more than a year ago. Abbas says he won't return to the table without a complete Israeli settlement freeze, something Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to do.

As an alternative, U.S. officials could replace Palestinian negotiators in border talks with Israel, said an Abbas aide, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the content of internal meetings. The U.S. negotiators would be given clear parameters, the aide said. The state would have to be established in the territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast War - the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem - but the Palestinians would agree to swap up to 3 percent of the territory to accommodate some Israeli settlements, the aide said.

Abbas made the proposal in recent meetings with Egyptian officials who passed the idea along to Washington, the aide said. It was not clear how the Americans reacted.

Officials at the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, which serves the West Bank, had no comment.

Abbas has said much ground has been covered in his talks with Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, and that the time has come for decisions. In those talks, Abbas offered a swap of up to 1.9 percent of West Bank land for Israeli territory, while Olmert proposed 6.5 percent.

Alternately, Abbas could resume negotiations with Netanyahu, provided the Israeli leader agrees to a six-month settlement freeze in the West Bank and east Jerusalem. Netanyahu would not have to announce the freeze, the aide said, presumably to avoid a rebellion in his hardline coalition.

The Palestinians say settlements on lands they claim threatens the prospects for an independent state.

Netanyahu has imposed a 10-month slowdown on West Bank construction, but opposes any freeze on east Jerusalem. The Palestinians seek east Jerusalem as their capital, while Israel considers all of Jerusalem its eternal capital.

An Israeli official dismissed the idea of an undeclared freeze.

“It is not going to happen. This is against everything the prime minister stands for and believes in,” said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because it was not a formal offer.

Abbas is expected to discuss his proposal with Obama’s Mideast envoy, George Mitchell, who was to arrive in Israel later Wednesday. Mitchell is to hold separate talks with Netanyahu and Abbas on Thursday and Friday.

The Obama administration has suggested bypassing the settlement issue by getting the two sides to discuss the borders of a Palestinian state, including a partition of Jerusalem.

However, Abbas aide Nabil Abu Rdeneh said talks cannot resume without a freeze. “This is a test for the U.S. administration and a test of Israel’s seriousness about returning to the negotiations,” he said.

Also Wednesday, several major international aid agencies said the blockade of the Gaza Strip has undermined the territory’s health care system by limiting the entry of medical equipment and the travel of doctors and patients outside for training and treatment.

The agencies, including the World Health Organization and U.N. agencies, called on Israel and Egypt to open their border crossings with Gaza, home to 1.5 million Palestinians.

Max Gaylard, U.N. humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, said Gaza’s health situation is “entirely man-made” and could be fixed only through greater access.

Israel and Egypt first restricted access to Gaza in 2006, after the capture of an Israeli soldier by Hamas-allied militants. They tightened the blockade a year later, after Hamas seized control of the territory.

This has prevented the repair of medical facilities damaged or destroyed in Israel’s military offensive against Hamas a year ago.

Israel says it limits the goods that enter Gaza so they will not benefit Hamas, a group that calls for destruction of the Jewish state.

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor said Israel cooperates with aid agencies and that conditions in Gaza “emanate from the state of war that Hamas has invoked in this territory.”

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