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Peace Talks



Abbas and Netanyahu. New Hope? Photo: AP

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Diplomats: New European peace proposal

Following deadlocked negotiations, Britain, France, Germany ask UN, EU to draft new peace agreement that would lead to establishment of Palestinian state

Associated Press

Britain, France and Germany want the United Nations and the European Union to propose the outlines of a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state, UN diplomats said.

The three European countries, all members of the UN Security Council, are pressing for Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the European Union to propose a settlement text at a meeting in mid-April of the Quartet of Mideast mediators, the diplomats said, speaking on condition of anonymity because talks are taking place in private. The quartet includes the UN, EU, US and Russia.

The aim is to get a basis for direct Israeli-Palestinian talks to resume.

Putting the job in the hands of the EU and the UN would sideline the United States, [Israel's](#) closest ally which has tried unsuccessfully for months to get face-to-face negotiations going, as well as Russia, an ally of the Palestinians.

The big question mark is whether the United States would allow the Europeans and UN to take the lead in trying to resolve the standoff, and that is likely to depend on whether the Israelis give a green light, the diplomats said.

Serious concern over stalemate talks

Israel and the Palestinians have agreed to President Barack Obama's target date of September 2011 for an agreement, but negotiations collapsed weeks after they restarted last September because Israel ended its moratorium on settlement construction.

The Palestinians insist they will not resume peace talks until Israel halts settlement building in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, lands captured in the [Six Day War](#) which the Palestinians want for their future state.

The US [veto](#) on Feb. 18 of a Security Council resolution that would have condemned "illegal" Israeli settlements and demanded an immediate halt to all settlement building spurred Britain, France and Germany, who supported the measure, to issue a joint statement expressing serious concern about the stalemate in the Middle East peace process.

Since the US efforts have been unsuccessful, diplomats said the three European powers decided to try a new approach in hopes of breaking the deadlock.

The diplomats said the three European countries have delivered the message in key capitals –including Washington and Jerusalem – that if the parameters of a final settlement are endorsed, the Palestinians will return to the negotiating table.

In their joint statement of Feb. 18, Britain, France and Germany said their goal "remains an agreement on final status issues and the welcoming of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations by September 2011."

Talks Renewal

Palestinians push for talks renewal / Elior Levy

Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki warns Abbas will resign if negotiations not resumed by September

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'Reace a just solution'

The three countries called for a resumption of direct negotiations between the parties toward a two-state solution "as soon as possible."

For the negotiations to be successful, they said, Israel and the Palestinians must reach agreement on borders of the two states based on lines before the 1967 war "with equivalent land swaps as may be agreed between the parties" and reach "a just, fair and agreed solution to the refugee question."

The two sides also must agree on security arrangements and resolve the status of Jerusalem.

If direct negotiations don't resume and succeed, one diplomat said, the Palestinians are likely to demand UN recognition of a Palestinian state.

The diplomat said the United States will almost certainly never accept a unilateral Palestinian declaration of independence, or any other measure that does not include a negotiated peace agreement.

That's why the three Europeans are pressing for the parameters of a settlement which would hopefully lead to a resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the diplomat said.

Yitzhak Benhorin contributed to this report

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