



Last preparations before restart of Israel-Palestinian talks

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A second triple try for talks

The final touches on US President Barack Obama's push to revive Israel-Palestinian negotiations, stalled for nearly two years, are being put in place by his Middle East advisers David Hale and Dennis Ross and the legal adviser to the National Security Council Jonathan Schwartz who arrived in Israel Tuesday, June 14. After talks in Jerusalem, the group moved to Ramallah to meet Palestinian

Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas and continue working on arrangements for a non-ceremonial, modest triple summit in Washington to kick off the negotiations.

According to debkafile's Washington sources, both Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas have quietly committed to sit down and talk without prior conditions: The Prime Minister has dropped his demand for Abbas to first recognize Israel as the Jewish national state, while the Palestinian leader has abandoned the prior conditions for Israel to accept the 1967 lines as the starting point of the talks and halt settlement construction.

Obama for his part stands by his insistence on the 1967 borders as the basis for negotiations. He has also obtained Abbas' pledge to give face-to-face diplomacy one more chance before addressing a unilateral application to the UN for recognition of Palestinian statehood.

With these obstacles out of the way, Israeli-Palestinian talks are expected to restart within the next six weeks and if they go smoothly to keep going until August.

The plan is for the three leaders to retire to behind closed doors after their initial joint photo op and launch their first round of talks. The exact location is one of the loose ends to be tied up this week. Complete secrecy will be observed. US officials and other authorized spokesmen will issue bulletins when deemed appropriate.

It has also been agreed that if the talks run into an impasse on any issue, the parties will move on to an easier item. This mechanism has been introduced to avoid the breakdown of the last round of talks as soon as they began and keep them afloat well into the US presidential election year of 2012.

Obama is keen to get the Israeli and Palestinian leaders round the peace table in time for his reelection campaign - a diplomatic feat that has eluded him for two years. His administration is also keen to deter the Palestinian leader from going ahead with his quest for UN recognition of a state within the 1967 lines.

debkafile's diplomatic sources report that Washington and Jerusalem have succeeded in quiet diplomatic efforts in recent weeks to bite deep into the automatic UN majority the Palestinians are building on.

The tally includes key governments in the Far East, Europe and Africa – some of them members of the Palestinian Donors' Committee – which have pledged to oppose the Palestinian initiative or abstain.

Among them are Germany, Italy, France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. British Prime Minister David Cameron, who has not yet come around, is expected to

join the opposing votes when the time comes. Pledges have also come in from Canada, Japan, Austria and New Zealand.

More than half of African UN member-states have informed Washington or Paris they will cast their vote against the Palestinian draft.

According to debkafle's Moscow sources, the Russians while declaring themselves in favor have advised Abbas to beware of following a blind alley. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently counseled Fatah representatives visiting the Russian capital to think carefully about the morning after the passage of the Palestinian statehood resolution.

Based on what we know, nothing will happen, said Lavrov. The resolution will never be implemented.

Abbas needs the boost to his prestige and leverage that opening talks with Israel will offer him to drive off a serious challenge to his leadership launched within his own Fatah movement by a member of the PLO council Mohammed Dahlan.

The challenger hopes to bring Abbas down by a smear campaign. He claims he has proof that the Palestinian leader is guilty of the biggest national robbery in modern Arab history, namely the appropriation and transfer to his private accounts of the \$1.4 billion left by Yasser Arafat after his death in 2004.

To promote his campaign to unseat Abbas, which has found some backing in the Fatah leadership in Ramallah, Dahlan has hired public relations consultants. This week, Abbas failed to rally enough support for his demand to expel Dahlan from Fatah leadership bodies.

Fatah-Gaza is solidly behind him, adding to Abbas' difficulties in his dealings with the rival Hamas since they signed a unity pact in April.

The beleaguered Palestinian leader hopes therefore that the revival of US-sponsored negotiations with Israel will occupy the minds of his party associates and distract their attention from the charges hurled by his opponent.

The Israeli prime minister also has good reason to welcome the restart of talks under the US aegis.

For months, his many political, economic and media critics have portrayed him as diplomatically inert and therefore responsible for the cutoff of peace talks with the Palestinians which, they say, has led to Israel being internationally isolated in the face of a major Palestinian UN initiative.

Netanyahu's denial of these charges has had little resonance. However the resumption of talks – especially if Abbas is sidetracked from his UN initiative – will enable him to silence his critics by a successful diplomatic breakthrough.