



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 5, 2014

## Netanyahu, Obama Discuss Israel-Palestine Peace Agreement

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Obama at the White House on March 3 and the main topic on the agenda was the U.S.-drafted framework for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.



Just prior to the meeting, the two leaders made statements that are posted on the White House website.

Obama stated, in part:

It's a pleasure to welcome once again Prime Minister Netanyahu to the Oval Office. There's nobody I've met with more or consulted with more than Bibi. And it's a testimony to the incredible bond between our two nations. I've said before and I will repeat, we do not have a closer friend or ally than Israel and the bond between our two countries and our two peoples is unbreakable.

And Netanyahu replied, in part:

Mr. President, you rightly said that Israel, the Jewish state, is the realization of the Jewish people's self-determination in our ancestral homeland. So the Palestinians expect us to recognize a Palestinian state for the Palestinian people, a nation state for the Palestinian people. I think it's about time they recognize a nation state for the Jewish people. We've only been there for 4,000 years.

Reports from Reuters News, *USA Today*, Fox News, and AP soon after the meeting noted that the president had assured Netanyahu that the United States remains committed to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Obama also asked Israel and the Palestinians to compromise to reach a U.S.-brokered peace framework, stating: "It is still possible to create two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a state of Palestine, with people living side by side in peace and security. But it's difficult. It requires compromise on all sides."

Addressing Netanyahu's concerns that the United States might soften its position on Iran's nuclear fuel enrichments program, Obama pledged "my absolute commitment that Iran does not acquire a nuclear weapon."

Upon arriving in Washington on Sunday, Netanyahu told reporters that he was committed to negotiations for a peace settlement, but he wanted to see proof that the Palestinians were committed as well.

"The tango in the Middle East needs at least three," Netanyahu was quoted as saying in the *Jerusalem Post*. "For years there have been two — Israel and the US. Now it needs to be seen if the Palestinians are also present. In any case, in order for us to have an agreement, we must uphold our vital interests. I have proven that I do so, in the face of all pressures and all the turmoil, and I will continue to do so here as well."



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On February 27, Obama, during a one-hour interview by *Bloomberg View* columnist Jeffrey Goldberg, previewed what he would say to the Israeli prime minister: “If not now, when? And if not you, Mr. Prime Minister, then who?”

Obama told Goldberg that if Netanyahu “does not believe that a peace deal with the Palestinians is the right thing to do for Israel, then he needs to articulate an alternative approach.”

During the interview, made public on the eve of the meeting between the two leaders, Obama praised Secretary of State John Kerry’s lead role in conducting negotiations with the Israelis and Palestinians and quoted Kerry’s statement to the American Jewish Committee: “We’re running out of time. We’re running out of possibilities. And let’s be clear: If we do not succeed now — and I know I’m raising those stakes — but if we do not succeed now, we may not get another chance.”

The president asserted that “the window is closing for a peace deal that both the Israelis can accept and the Palestinians can accept — in part because of changes in demographics; in part because of what’s been happening with settlements; in part because [Palestinian President Mahmoud] Abbas is getting older, and I think nobody would dispute that whatever disagreements you may have with him, he has proven himself to be somebody who has been committed to nonviolence and diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue.”

Goldberg then asked the president: “Do you believe [Abbas is] the most moderate person you’re going to find?”

To which Obama replied: “I believe that President Abbas is sincere about his willingness to recognize Israel and its right to exist, to recognize Israel’s legitimate security needs, to shun violence, to resolve these issues in a diplomatic fashion that meets the concerns of the people of Israel. And I think that this is a rare quality not just within the Palestinian territories, but in the Middle East generally. For us not to seize that opportunity would be a mistake.”

Given the president’s professed confidence in Mahmoud Abbas as a “moderate” Middle East leader, it is worthwhile to consider his background.

As a young man, Abbas engaged in graduate studies at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, then the USSR. He was recruited in 1961 to become a member of Fatah, the largest faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) founded by Yasser Arafat and five other Palestinians in Kuwait in the late 1950s. Abbas is currently the president of both Fatah and the PLO.

Looking at Arafat’s history, after helping to found Fatah, he and his companions moved to Syria in 1962 and recruited militants to engage in armed attacks against neighboring Israel.

Arafat was elected chairman of the PLO on February 4, 1969. At that time, the Palestinian territories were still within the borders of Jordan, but the PLO militants brazenly seized control of much of Jordan’s West Bank. Rather than engage in military action against the PLO, Jordan’s King Hussein attempted to appease the militants and even invited Arafat into his government as Prime Minister. Arafat refused.

The PLO became more militant and one of its most radical factions, the PFLP, hijacked five planes and blew up three of them after the passengers had been removed.

Arafat and Fatah also played an important role in the Lebanese Civil War, during which he aligned the PLO with the Communist and Nasserist Lebanese National Movement.

The PLO increasingly engaged in cross-border raids against Israel during the late 1970s. In the Coastal



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Road massacre on March 11, 1978, a force of nearly a dozen Fatah fighters hijacked a bus in northern Israel and fired wildly, killing 37 civilians.

In 1982, after Arafat was trapped in Beirut by a siege of the city by Israeli forces, incredibly, the U.S. and European governments brokered an agreement guaranteeing Arafat and his PLO safe passage —guarded by a multinational force of 800 U.S. Marines with support from the U.S. Navy — to Tunis, Tunisia, where he went into exile!

Arafat left his place of exile in 1994 and went to Gaza. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* on July 12, 1994 said,

Arafat's fighters have already trailed in from the far corners of the Arab world to take on the new mantle of police in Gaza and Jericho; the PLO staff left behind in Tunis and at embassies around the world is largely unfunded and embittered.... Arafat has pledged to convene the Palestine National Council, the PLO parliament in exile, to rewrite the Palestinian charter on armed struggle.

On March 19, 2003, as a natural consequence of the United States and Israel refusing to negotiate with Yasser Arafat, Arafat appointed Abbas as prime minister of the PLO.

After Arafat's death, Abbas was seen, at least by Fatah, as his natural successor. On November 25, 2004, Fatah's Revolutionary Council endorsed Abbas as its preferred candidate for the PLO presidency. On January 9, 2005, Abbas was elected with 62 percent of the vote and was sworn in on January 15.

Abbas — this successor to Yasser Arafat at the PLO — is scheduled to meet with President Obama at the White House on March 17.

Questions about the meeting between the president and Netanyahu normally would be asked and answered during the White House daily press briefing, but because of the winter storm forecast in Washington on Monday, Press secretary Jay Carney cancelled the media briefing.

*Photo of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Obama: AP Images*

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