



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 6, 2013

Kerry Hopeful on Prospect of Israel-Palestine Peace

During a [press conference](#) at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israel, on December 6, [Secretary of State John Kerry](#) said, having met with both Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu (shown, at right) and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas during the past two days, that he is “encouraged by the continued commitment of both leaders to the pursuit of peace.”



Kerry acknowledged the difficulty the two sides have had in finding a solution to their conflicting interests, but observed, “It is quite clear that both President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu remain as determined as ever to continue down this path and to explore these possibilities. Because both parties have the same endpoint in their sights: Two nations for two peoples living side by side in peace and prosperity.”

However, Kerry continued, “neither peace nor prosperity are possible without security, and the United States will only support a final status agreement that makes both Israelis and Palestinians more secure than they are today.”

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Near the beginning of his statement, Kerry made note of the death of former South African President and African National Congress (ANC) leader Nelson Mandela, stating, “Our hearts are in Johannesburg with all the millions of people who loved Nelson Mandela. Madiba’s long walk to freedom gave new meaning to character and to courage, to forgiveness, and to human dignity.”

Kerry drew a parallel between Mandela’s activism in South Africa and the quest to achieve Middle East peace, saying that “Nelson Mandela is an example that we all need to take to heart as we face the challenge of trying to reach a two-state solution.”

Though Mandela is widely praised for his campaign against South Africa’s previous system of apartheid (racial segregation), less attention is given to the violent methods he advocated prior to the nation’s change of government. He co-founded Umkhonto we Sizwe (“Spear of the Nation” — abbreviated as MK) the ANC’s armed wing that began launching guerilla attacks against government installations on December 16, 1961. Following these attacks, MK was subsequently classified as a terrorist organization by both the South African and U.S. governments.

Kerry also referred to the P5+1 nations’ negotiations with Iran concerning Iran’s nuclear fuel enrichment program, telling his Israeli audience: “Throughout these negotiations, our commitment to Israel’s security is paramount.” He stressed that “both the United States and Israel have the same



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priority with respect to Iran. We are laser-focused on preventing the Iranians from acquiring a nuclear weapon.”

Kerry concluded his remarks by expressing his gratitude “for the courage that both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas both continue to display against naysayers, against opponents, as they pursue a full exploration of the possibilities of peace. I believe we are closer than we have been in years to bringing about the peace and the prosperity and the security that all of the people of this region deserve and yearn for.”

[Netanyahu has expressed criticism](#) of the recent deal that Kerry helped broker between the Western powers and Iran concerning Iran’s nuclear fuel enrichment program, calling it an “historic mistake” that could put Israel in grave danger.

During the [Tel Aviv press conference](#), a reporter asked Kerry whether he had received “any assurances from the Israeli prime minister that he will be quieter or more cooperative on the Iran talks front.”

Kerry replied that “the prime minister has every right in the world to make his views known with respect to his concerns about the security of his country, and we would expect him to do that. But [Netanyahu] has also been extremely constructive in working with us on the next steps and where we need to go now. He understands that we are now in the real negotiation.... I’ll say this again now to the people of Israel and to any interested parties: I am personally convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that Israel is safer today after we have reached this first-step agreement than it was before we did that.”

The previous day, Kerry met with Netanyahu in Jerusalem and the two appeared jointly before the press. Netanyahu stated that the two central issues of their discussion had been Israel’s concern that the since the recent deal reached with Iran in Geneva, the sanctions imposed on Iran “would begin to unravel.”

The second important issue the two discussed, noted Netanyahu, was Israeli-Palestinian peace. “Israel is ready for historic peace, and it’s a peace based on two states for two peoples,” said the prime minister. “It’s a peace that Israel can and must be able to defend itself, by itself, with our own forces against any foreseeable threat.”

Netanyahu continued: “I’m fully committed and Israel is fully committed to [a peace] effort. And I hope the Palestinians are committed to this goal as well.”

On December 5, Kerry met with Palestinian President Abbas in Ramallah, West Bank, the de facto capital of the Palestinian Authority. Following that meeting the U.S. Secretary held [a press conference](#) during which he summarized their discussion:

[Abbas and I] discussed at great length issues of security in the region, security for the state of Israel, security for a future Palestine. And we, I think, made some progress in discussing some of the ideas that are on the table. We are not going to discuss these further publicly, but I will say that the goal here for everybody is a viable Palestinian state with the Palestinian people living side by side in peace with the state of Israel and with the people of Israel.

I think the interests are very similar, but there are questions of sovereignty, questions of respect and dignity which are obviously significant to the Palestinians, and for the Israelis very serious questions of security and also of longer-term issues of how we end this conflict once and for all.

The key areas of disagreement between Israel and the Palestinians center around the construction of



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settlements in West Bank territory that Israel seized during the 1967 war, as well as Jewish construction in predominantly Arab East Jerusalem. Palestinians intend to create their future independent state largely on the West Bank, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

While the aspirations of the indigent Palestinian population to build their own independent state seem quite legitimate, their cause was unfortunately harmed severely when the radically violent Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) took control of the Palestine territories on the West Bank. Eventually, the PLO moderated and in 1993 recognized Israel's right to exist in peace, accepted UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 (advocating the cessation of hostilities), and rejected "violence and terrorism."

In response, Israel officially recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. Palestinian President Abbas is also Chairman of the PLO. On November 29, 2012, the UN General Assembly passed resolution 67/19, upgrading Palestine from an "observer entity" to a "non-member observer state" at the UN.

Photo of Secretary of State John Kerry and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a press conference in Jerusalem: AP Images



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