

What Should President Abbas Say When He Meets Mr. Trump?

Part Two

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Part 1 of this essay suggested that President Abbas detail to President Trump the deal to which he will say, "Yes." Part 2 turns from the specifics of the deal to the nature of the process for getting there. President Abbas might continue as follows:

"So Mr. President, those are the key elements. If you can get the Israelis to accept them, we will have a deal. We will be able to end this terrible conflict. I am however not optimistic. Let me explain.

We have now been negotiating with the Israelis for over a quarter of a century, if you take the Madrid Conference of 1991 as the starting point. But really, there has been a Palestinian peace initiative on the table since 1988. In November and December of 1988, first in our Declaration of Independence and then in Chairman Arafat's address to the United Nations General Assembly, the PLO did what many said was not possible. We reversed our position on the Partition Resolution of 1947 which called for the division of Palestine into two states, one Arab and one Jewish. We recognized Israel's right to live in peace and security. And we accepted UN Security Council Resolution 242 as the basis for the two-state solution, thus giving up as our territorial claim the full area that had been allotted for the Palestinian State in the Partition Resolution.

Mr. President, we did all of this outside of any negotiations. We did it all without any quid pro quo from Israel. Yes, we unilaterally declared the State of Palestine, but we also unilaterally made what we call, The Historic Compromise. We had thought that our steps would produce an end to the conflict, if the Israelis met us halfway. Change did occur, but it came slowly, and required a new Israeli government. Five years later, on the White House lawn, building on what was done in 1988, President Arafat and Prime Minister Rabin signed the Oslo Accord, an agreement that itself had a five-year timetable for resolving the entire conflict.

Perhaps the decisive event that prevented the anticipated end-of-conflict agreement was the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin by a right-wing extremist, following incitement against Rabin by right-wing Israeli politicians. This the historians will have to judge. But what I can tell you is that the negotiations process did not go well following Rabin's death. We have since negotiated with three Israeli Prime Ministers. None resulted in an agreement. But with Prime Minister Barak and Prime Minister Olmert there were serious talks. And if Barak or Olmert had remained in office, perhaps a permanent peace agreement would have been reached.

But we have not had serious negotiations with Prime Minister Netanyahu. We do not believe he sees the importance of concluding an agreement. He does want to be

in negotiations, but he does not wish to reach an agreement. He has been Prime Minister for the last eight years, and he has yet to present us with a map showing the borders he proposes. Indeed, he forbade his negotiating team to even show us a map.

Mr. President, I say this because I believe that if we follow the same kind of process, we will only have another failure. We need a very different approach, one which will emphasize that this is a conflict between two peoples, not just two governments. This year we will mark a half-century of the Israeli occupation. We need a process which will bring these two peoples to a moment of truth. To do this we need an approach that will start from a point more advanced than where we have previously stopped.

Here is what I propose:

1. I have provided you with outline of the deal that we will agree to. It is a balanced proposal. It does not give us all that we would want. And it meets the Israelis halfway. We are prepared to be flexible in meeting Israeli security needs. We are prepared to be creative with respect to the Temple Mount. We agree to the principle of land swaps to allow most of the settlers to remain in their homes. We are open to Israelis living as foreign residents inside our State under Palestinian law. We accept that the right of return will for most refugees not actually be implemented. And we recognize that international legitimacy authorized a Jews state with equal rights for its Palestinian citizens. Mr. Trump, take our proposal and translate it into a fully detailed final status draft treaty. Translate it into an end of conflict, end of claims document, that in principle only needs to be signed.

2. Mr. President, in preparing this draft, do not think primarily about the negotiations positions of the PLO or of this or that Israeli government. Instead, think about the two peoples. Prepare an agreement that in your judgment is most likely to be accepted by majorities of the two peoples. They are the real actors.

3. Then with such a draft treaty as the starting point, call on the Government of Israel and the PLO to begin bilateral negotiations. Nothing will be imposed. Rather set a time limit, perhaps nine months, during which the Israeli government and the PLO will see if we can agree upon mutually acceptable improvements to what you have put on the table. You can assist us during this process.

4. After nine months, with a hopefully improved version of the original draft, we will have to make a decision. Each party will be free to decide. They can say, Yes. They can say No. Or they can agree to put it to a national referendum and allow their own people to decide.

5. For myself, I can promise this: If the starting point is based on the kind of compromise I have detailed, after nine months, I will put the draft treaty to a referendum of my people for a decision. Moreover, if we put it to a referendum, I believe the Israelis will have to do so as well. Thus, on both sides, we will have

reached a moment of truth for the two peoples. We will have presented them with the best that negotiations can produce, and they will have to decide.

Finally, let me add something very important, something that may not be in your briefing book. This idea of ratification by referendum is central to bringing Hamas along. The idea emerged in 2006 in the Document of National Reconciliation developed by Palestinian prisoners representing all of the factions. Subsequently Hamas and Fatah agreed that the PLO would hold the negotiations file and that a negotiated treaty would be binding on all, if it were ratified by a referendum of the full Palestinian people. I believe any agreement approved by a majority of the Palestinian people will bind all of the factions and be the basis for a stable peace that ends this terrible conflict.

So, Mr. President these are my ideas. The Palestinians are prepared to say "Yes" to a deal, and I have outlined the kind of compromise agreement I am prepared to sign. And now I have suggested a new kind of process for getting to this agreement, one that depends importantly on the United States to put on the table, as a starting point, a full draft treaty.

Mr. President, welcome to the peace process. I look forward to working with you. Together, all of us, including my Israeli partner, we can change history."

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