

US to Egypt: Fatah-Hamas deal undermines Israel-PA talks

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The United States sent a message to Egypt stating it does not support the proposed reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas as it would undermine negotiations with Israel, Haaretz has learned

George Mitchell, the U.S. envoy to the Middle East, met on Saturday night in Cairo with the chief of Egyptian intelligence, Gen. Omar Suleiman, and told him the United States would not support an agreement not aligned with the principles of the Quartet.

According to the agreement, which was supposed to have been signed by Thursday, Abbas was to issue a presidential decree no later than October 25, scheduling both parliamentary and presidential elections for June 28. Eighty percent of the delegates to the Palestinian parliament were to be elected by party basis, and 20 percent by constituency.

A special committee with delegates from all factions was supposed to have assumed control of the Gaza Strip, reporting to Abbas. The Strip was also to see a new security force, staffed with members of all Palestinian factions.

Sources told Haaretz that Mitchell made clear to the Egyptians on Saturday the United States expects any Palestinian government to follow the conditions of the Quartet, which include recognition of the State of Israel, acknowledging earlier agreements and renouncing terrorism.

Mitchell also said certain aspects of current agreement were poorly timed as they would undermine relaunching negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The administration official said that the United States would continue to oppose those aspects of the agreement at any time. He noted American views on Palestinian governance have been made clear to the Egyptians several times.

The proposed Hamas and Fatah reconciliation agreement would have ended three years of civil strife and political discordance. The actual reconciliation ceremony between chief of the Hamas political bureau, Khaled Meshal, and Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas, was to be held after the Id al-Adha holiday.

The agreement was authored by the Egyptian mediators, who suggested postponing the formal ceremony as Hamas announced it could not participate in the signing with Abbas after the Palestinian Authority president asked the United Nations to postpone discussion of the Goldstone report.

The mediators then announced they would send the agreement to the principal parties of Fatah and Hamas, expecting them to sign it and return it on October 15 at the latest. All other Palestinian groups are expected to add their signatures by October 20.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said that on October 16 the PA will ask the UN Human Rights Council to forward the Goldstone report either to the UN Security Council or to the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

Abbas received a copy of the Egyptian-drafted agreement on Sunday evening, and Fatah had already said it was in full agreement with the Egyptian document. The Hamas position on the document remained unclear.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said at the meeting of the Likud caucus Monday that American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is expected to visit Israel, perhaps as early as the end of the month. The prime minister said he is "more optimistic than some commentators about relaunching the peace process."

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