

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

**Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Mahmoud Abbas of the
Palestinian Authority**

March 17, 2014

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome President Abbas to the Oval Office. It was a year ago this week that I had the opportunity to visit the Palestinian Territories and very much appreciated the hospitality that President Abbas showed when I was there. I had a wonderful time meeting with a wide range of civil society and officials and business leaders in the Palestinian Territories, including young people who were inspiring and, I think, had great hope for the future.

Today we're going to spend the bulk of our time talking about something that we've been working on for a very long time and obviously President Abbas has been working on a long time, and that is, how do we achieve a comprehensive peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

And I have to commend President Abbas. He has been somebody who has consistently renounced violence, has consistently sought a diplomatic and peaceful solution that allows for two states, side by side, in peace and security: a state that allows for the dignity and sovereignty of the Palestinian people and a state that allows for Israelis to feel secure and at peace with their neighbors.

This is obviously an elusive goal, and there's a reason why it's taken decades for us to even get to the point where we are now. But we remain convinced that there is an opportunity. And I think everybody understands the outlines of what a peace deal would look like, involving a territorial compromise on both sides based on '67 lines with mutually agreed upon swaps that would ensure that Israel was secure, but would also ensure that the Palestinians have a sovereign state in which they can achieve the aspirations that they've held for so long.

Secretary Kerry is here today and has been working diligently with all sides. And as I said to Prime Minister Netanyahu when he was here just a couple of weeks ago, I believe that now is the time for not just the leaders of both sides, but also the peoples of both sides, to embrace this opportunity for peace. But we're going to have a lot of details that we're going to have to discuss. It's very hard; it's very challenging. We're going to have to take some tough political decisions and risks if we're able to move it forward. And my hope is, is that we can continue to see progress in the coming days and weeks.

I also want to point out that the Palestinian Authority has continued to try to build strong institutions in preparation for a day in which the Palestinians have their own state, and I will continue to emphasize the importance of rule of law, transparency, and effective reform so that not only do the Palestinians ultimately have a state on paper, but more importantly, they have one that actually delivers on behalf of their people.

The United States obviously has been a strong supporter of the Palestinian Authority. We're the largest humanitarian donor and continue to help to try to foster economic development and opportunity and prosperity for people, particularly young people like those that I met.

So, Mr. President, welcome. I look forward to a productive discussion and continue to hope that you and Prime Minister Netanyahu, but more importantly, the people of the

Palestinian Territories and Israel, are ready to move forward in a new spirit of cooperation and compromise.

Thank you very much.

President Abbas. Thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you for allowing us this opportunity, which we consider to be historic, for us to come here to the White House so that the efforts that you and Mr. Kerry expend—and these are great efforts—would be successful so that we can also reach a lasting peace to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

And I would like to also seize this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, for the economic and political support that the U.S. is extending to the Palestinian state so that it can stand on its own feet.

I would also like to affirm what you have said, that we are working for a solution that is based on international legitimacy and also the borders—the 1967 borders so that the Palestinians can have their own independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital and so that we can find a fair and lasting solution to the refugee problem.

We don't have any time to waste. Time is not on our side, especially given the very difficult situation that the Middle East is experiencing and the entire region is facing. And we hope that we would be able to seize this opportunity to achieve a lasting peace.

Since 1988 and into 1993, we have been extending our hands to our Israeli neighbors so that we can reach a fair and lasting peace to this problem. Since 1988, we have recognized international legitimacy resolutions, and in—and this was a very courageous step on the part of the Palestinian leadership. And in 1993, we recognized the State of Israel.

Mr. President, we have an agreement with Israel that was brokered by Mr. Kerry concerning the release of the fourth batch of prisoners, and we are hopeful that the last—that the fourth batch would be released by the 29th of March because this will give a very solid impression about the seriousness of these efforts to achieve peace.

Mr. President, I'm aware that you have several international concerns in various places around the world, and we know that you are dedicating your time and effort for peace, and so are the teams that are working on this. We count on these efforts, and we will build on them because we consider this to be a historic opportunity to achieve peace.

President Obama. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:12 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel. President Abbas spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

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