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Comprehensive peace in the Middle East is in the best interests of all of the people of the region. It is also in the national interest of the United States. In pursuit of that goal, it is a matter of urgency that Israelis and Palestinians re-launch negotiations, without delay or pre-conditions. Postponing negotiations will undermine the effort to resolve the conflict and make it more difficult to achieve comprehensive peace in the region. Alongside Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the U.S. intends to also pursue peace between Israel and Syria, Israel and Lebanon and a broader peace between Israel and its many neighbors. The overarching goal of these efforts remains a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The historic Arab Peace Initiative continues to be a constructive step and an important contribution to these efforts.

The U.S. believes that negotiations should proceed on the following basis:

1. The Goal: An outcome that ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable state based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments and meet Israeli security requirements. This outcome would result in two states for two peoples and end the occupation that began in 1967. It would also ensure true security for all Israelis and Palestinians and ensure a just and agreed solution to the refugee issue.

2. The Issues: The negotiations should resolve the permanent status issues: security for Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees, Jerusalem, and other issues of common interest.

3. Jerusalem: The United States recognizes and appreciates that Jerusalem is an important issue for Israelis and Palestinians, and for Jews, Muslims, and Christians around the world. As has been stated by every previous United States Administration which addressed this issue, the status of Jerusalem and all other permanent status issues must be resolved by the parties through negotiations. The United States has not accepted Israel's annexation of Jerusalem and opposes any unilateral action by either party which could have the effect of preempting negotiations.

4. Negotiations: The negotiations should begin as soon as possible and conclude within 24 months. They should bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, resolve all open disputes, end all claims between the parties, and fulfill United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the Madrid Letters of Invitation. This goal should be achieved through direct bilateral negotiations to resolve all the core issues. The parties will decide on the most effective manner for conducting the negotiations and for reaching the necessary solutions to attain mutual reconciliation. The United States will expect both parties to do their utmost to conduct the negotiations in good faith with a problem-solving attitude and a sense of urgency and to promote an atmosphere supportive of the negotiations. Consistent with this principle, neither side should take any actions that could pre-judge the very issues under negotiation nor will unilateral actions dictate the outcome of these negotiations.

The United States is aware of its special responsibility throughout this process to help ensure its success. The United States is committed to playing an active and sustained role in supporting the parties in their negotiating efforts and will offer bridging proposals when necessary. Through this participation, the United States will help ensure both sides adhere to the terms of reference

for negotiations, including, the goals and time-line. The United States will also expect third parties to play a constructive role in supporting this process and will call upon them to provide appropriate incentives for the parties.

5. U.S. Policy: The U.S. fully recognizes concerns by many countries over any level of continued Israeli settlement activity, as well as over Israeli actions in Jerusalem that are seen as prejudicing the permanent status negotiations. United States support for re-launching of negotiations does not disregard these concerns. Israel has unilaterally imposed a 10-month moratorium on settlements on the West Bank in which it will refrain from approving construction for any housing units or related civilian infrastructure, refrain from initiating construction on any new housing construction or related civilian infrastructure (other than 28 public building projects such as schools and synagogues within existing settlements), and refrain from expropriating any Palestinian land for settlements. While Israel's settlement moratorium announcement falls short of a full freeze, it could have substantial impact on the ground if implemented comprehensively and is significant as an effort by Israel to try to contribute to an improvement in the atmosphere and to facilitate a return to permanent status negotiations. The Obama administration opposes Israel's settlement policies and actions, as has every United States administration since settlement activity began forty years ago. The administration will continue to emphasize that America does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. The United States also disagrees with some Israeli actions in Jerusalem affecting Palestinians in areas such as housing, including the continuing pattern of evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes, and will insist that any such actions not prejudice the outcome of negotiations.

6. Previous Agreements and Obligations: These efforts are not intended to modify or displace any of the existing commitments and obligations of the parties, including under the Roadmap. Moreover by agreeing to re-launch negotiations on this basis neither side would be relinquishing its position on what is required of the other party, nor its right to say so.

7. Arab Support for Negotiations: It is essential for Arab governments to support the negotiations now, rather than allowing these problems to fester. Doing so will demonstrate that a new dynamic in the region is possible. Once the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations are underway, participation in a regional dialogue on the provisions of the Arab Peace Initiative as well as on other issues of shared concern, such as water and energy, would complement the renewed bilateral negotiations, as occurred after the Madrid Conference.

Consistent political and financial backing for the legitimate Palestinian government led by President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad are essential to ensuring the viability of credible and productive negotiations and to fulfilling the aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own state. Institution building and economic development should not and will not replace the political track; these are fully integrated efforts.

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