

Last update - 18:53 01/03/2009

Clinton: U.S. firm on commitment to two-state solution

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The visit of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Israel this week may give an early indication of any disagreements on the Palestinian issue between the United States and the next Israeli government. In an interview on Friday with Voice of America, Clinton said she would emphasize her country's commitment to a two-state solution.

Prime Minister-designate Benjamin Netanyahu has been sticking to his ambiguous stance on the Israeli-Palestinian process. In an interview in the Washington Post on Saturday, Netanyahu did not confirm or deny a belief in the two-state solution. "Substantively, there is broad agreement inside Israel and outside that the Palestinians should have the ability to govern their lives but not to threaten ours," he said.

Clinton said the administration wanted to help Israel and the Palestinian Authority work toward a permanent agreement leading to an independent, sustainable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. She said the United States sought internal Palestinian reconciliation, but any national unity government would have to maintain the conditions of the Quartet: recognizing Israel, abiding by previous agreements and forsaking violence.

Netanyahu also told the Washington Post that he will continue talks with the PA, seeking to strengthen the Palestinian security forces and develop the West Bank's economy. He said he would lead a special ministerial committee on the issue, adding that "economic progress is no substitute [to political progress], but in Northern Ireland it was an unbelievable facilitator for the Good Friday agreement and others that followed."

On Friday, a second round of talks between Netanyahu and Kadima leader Tzipi Livni hit a snag as Netanyahu avoided expressing support for a two-state solution. "A final agreement will see the Palestinians having the full authority to run their lives," he reportedly told Livni. "But do you want them to have control of the air space, their own army, the right for them to make alliances with other states like Iran, or control over borders that would allow for weapons imports? I won't stand for it."

According to a source familiar with the situation, Netanyahu said he would "go on and take forward the talks with the Palestinians. But if they get full sovereignty it will pose a risk to the security of the State of Israel."

Sources say Netanyahu was not against the Palestinians having some autonomy in foreign affairs, such as embassies and diplomatic ties with any country in the world. But he deliberately avoided the use of the word "state" because it implied sovereignty and control over military affairs.

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