

Obama Blames Israel, Congress for Slacking Peace Progress

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Arab Americans who met with Obama said he blamed the Israeli government for refusing to make concessions, blamed the U.S. congress for providing cover to the Israeli government, and he planned to bring an additional \$500 million in aid for the PA.

[Lori Lowenthal Marcus](#)



Most reports about the meeting between U.S. President Barack Obama and several representatives of various Arab American organizations which took place on Monday, March 11, have been fairly sketchy.

But at least some participants at that meeting provided three rather startling revelations to an Arabic news source.

First, they said the U.S. president blamed the stalled peace process on the Israeli government for refusing to offer concessions, and second, that he blamed the U.S. congress for providing cover to the Israelis whenever the president tries to apply pressure on the Jewish State. The implication the sources came away with was that Obama said he will get around those problems when he is in Israel by bypassing the Israeli government and going directly to the Israeli people.

The third surprising revelation from the meeting was that President Obama plans to hand over half a billion dollars in additional aid to the PA during his visit.

As with Obama's meeting with representatives of Jewish organizations a week ago, his get together with Arab and Muslim leaders was not part of the president's public

schedule, and participants had been asked not to comment about the confidential conversations which took place.

Most reports about the meeting merely mentioned the names of some of the participating organizations, which included the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee, the American Task Force for Palestine, the Arab American Institute, the Arab Federation of Ramallah, and the Muslim Public Affairs Council.

As was also the case with the Jewish representatives' meeting, there were some Arab American participants who discussed some details of the meetings, a few with attribution and others on condition of anonymity. Several sources at each meeting told members of the media that the president told their group that he was not going to attempt to kickstart a new Arab-Israeli peace initiative.

But one story in an important Arab media outlet quoted participants as having provided a reason for the U.S. president's unwillingness to push a peace initiative during this trip. That anonymous Arab and/or Muslim participant told Al Arabiya.net reporters that Obama said to the group: "since the Israeli government has not been willing to make concessions, there is no point in pushing [for negotiations] right now."

In addition, the U.S. president expressed solidarity with the plight of the Arab Palestinians. "'The only people more frustrated than me,'" Obama was quoted by a source as saying, are the "'Palestinians living in West Bank and Gaza - it's a legitimate frustration,'" Al Arabiya's source said.

The U.S. congress also came in for criticism by the U.S. president. "Every time the pressure gets to the Israelis, they go to Congress."

The message understood by that source who was present at the March 11 meeting was that Obama believed he could get around the interference of the U.S. congress and the obstructionist Israeli government by speaking directly to the Israeli people. The source said, "He wants to find a way around that, that's why he wants to talk to the Israeli public directly."

In other words, the Israeli elected government should be sidelined because President Obama believes he knows what is best for Israel, and he will deal directly with the Israeli people this time, rather than with their elected government. At least that is the message some meeting participants either believed or want others to believe.

There was one additional piece of information in the Al Arabiya article that was not reported elsewhere.

President Obama, who has been railing against what he describes as the Republican-imposed sequester, "will take with him a cash infusion of \$500 million -

which Congress will soon release - of much needed financial aid to the Palestinian Authority.”

A condition-free gift to the PA of half a billion dollars in additional aid from the U.S. is hard to imagine given all the cuts being imposed because of the sequester. For one thing, several hundred million dollars is due to be cut from Israel’s portion of the defense budget, but more importantly, as this is U.S. taxpayer money, are the statements made by the president that the U.S. is reducing naval warpower in the Persian Gulf because of the sequester. This came up recently in the context of a dust-up between the White House and liberal journalist Bob Woodward of the Washington Post.

It is particularly hard to believe that the U.S. congress will “soon release” the half billion dollars, just months after the PA ignored U.S. pleas that they not seek an upgrade in status at the United Nations, and instead remain on the path of bilateral negotiations.

Whether or not President Obama is going to hand over half a billion dollars to the PA during his brief visit - there are many people who would have to sign off on it before it could ever happen - it is extremely alarming - if true - that the U.S. president told Arab American leaders that he plans to bypass the Israeli government and the U.S. congress in order to obtain concessions directly from the Israeli people.

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