

# Kerry places blame on Israel for crisis in peace talks

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*Dans un article du quotidien israélien Haaretz, Barak Ravid revient sur les discussions de paix à l'initiative du secrétaire d'Etat américain John Kerry. Kerry reproche au gouvernement israélien de faire échouer les discussions de paix avec les Palestiniens. Les responsables américains ont ensuite tenté de minorer les propos de Kerry...*

**U.S. officials later try to play down Kerry's comments, saying he did not engage in a blame game and that both sides took 'unhelpful steps.'**



**U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. Photo by AP**

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry placed most of the blame on Israel for the recent crisis in peace talks during a Senate Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on Tuesday.

Kerry said that the United States intends on continuing its efforts to promote a peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, but « in the end the parties are going to have to make that decision. »

Kerry implied that Israel is mostly responsible for the crisis in talks and described the Palestinian application to United Nations institutions as a response to Israeli moves.

« Both sides, whether advertently or inadvertently, wound up in positions where things happened that were unhelpful, » he said, and went on to explain how the current crisis was created. « Clearly, going to these treaties is not helpful, and we have made that crystal-clear, » he said. « Unfortunately, prisoners were not released on the Saturday they were supposed to be released. And so day went by, day two went by, day three went by. And then in the afternoon, when they were about to maybe get there, 700 settlement units were announced in Jerusalem and, poof, that was sort of the moment. We find ourselves where we are. »

Kerry noted that « there are limits to the amount of time the president and myself can put into this, especially if the parties can't commit to being there in a serious way. »

He said that the current disagreements surround matters of process as opposed to substance. « I believe there is a way to get into substantive discussions...I hope the parties will be able to find a way back. »

Meanwhile, senior Israeli officials in Jerusalem denied that Kerry blamed Israel for the crisis in talks. « Kerry's words must be carefully examined. The Americans told us that nothing in Kerry's comments meant to place the blame on one side or the other. »

White House Spokesman Jay Carney also tried to play down Kerry's comments, saying later Tuesday during a daily press briefing that Kerry made clear that both sides made it more difficult to move forward.

U.S. State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki told Haaretz that « as he has been throughout this impasse, today Secretary Kerry was again crystal clear that both sides have taken unhelpful steps and at no point has he engaged in a blame game. »

« Today he even singled out by name Prime Minister Netanyahu for having made courageous decisions to bring the process this far. Now it is up to the parties and their leaders to determine whether we maintain a productive path, » she said.

### **'Recognize reality'**

Kerry was due to meet with U.S. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden in the White House later on Tuesday, in order to update them on the crisis in the peace talks.

At the start of his address to the senate committee, Kerry disputed the criticism in Washington that he had invested too much time in the Middle East peace process, to the detriment of other global issues.

« I read about some who question why the secretary of state is engaged if the parties don't want to do it, » Kerry said. « The parties do want to do it and are talking to each other to go over this hurdle. »

Kerry added that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is of concern to the entire world. « If we are not engaged now, it will not be easier to get a peace deal in the future, » Kerry said. « It has an impact on life here in the U.S. »

Following Kerry's comments, Republican Senator John McCain told him in response : « Israeli-Palestinian talks - even if you might drag them for a while - are finished. »

« It is interesting you declare it dead but Israelis and Palestinians want to continue, » Kerry responded.

« It stopped. Recognize reality, » McCain said.

Israeli lawmakers from both left and right responded to Kerry's accusation. The leftist Meretz party leader Zahava Gal-On said that Kerry's statements are « further proof that the extreme-right coalition of Netanyahu-Bennett-Lapid has no interest in reaching an agreement, but only to draw the negotiations out

and jeopardize Israel's existence. »Instead of making brave decisions, even on the eve of the crisis in talks the government continued to give the Americans the finger, and approved construction beyond the Green Line.« In contrast, Minister Naftali Bennett from the rightist Habayit Hayehudi party said in response that »Israel will never apologize for building in Jerusalem... building in Jerusalem is Zionism."

## Nuclear breakout

Kerry also answered questions regarding Iran's nuclear program as Tehran and six world powers swung into a new round of talks in Vienna. Kerry said that Iran has the ability to produce fissile material for a nuclear bomb in two months, if it so decided.

« I think it's public knowledge today that we're operating with a time period for a so-called 'break-out' of about two months. That's been in the public domain, » Kerry said.

Kerry made his comment in response to a question about whether negotiators over Iran's nuclear program were aiming for a 6- to 12-month « breakout » period, which Kerry declined to confirm as talks are continuing.

Source : <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/.premium-1.584518>

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