

Egypt FM: Arab League will declare Palestinian state if peace talks fail

Top Palestinian negotiator Erekat refutes reports claiming that Abbas had offered Israel a West Bank land swap as part of a final status peace agreement.

By Haaretz Service

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The Arab League will turn to the United Nations Security Council to declare an independent Palestinian state if peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians do not bear fruit by September, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit told the Egyptian daily al-Masry al-Youm on Saturday.

According to the al-Masry al-Youm report, the Arab League decision was based on UNSC resolution 1515, which calls for regional Middle East peace, based on the two-state solution.

The Egyptian FM said in the interview that it was important to establish a Palestinian state at least in principle, while garnering international support for the main elements of a permanence peace deal with Israel.

Earlier, Abul Gheit, speaking to the London-based Arabic newspaper, Asharq Al-Awsat, criticized the United States for failing to advance the Middle East peace process and said that the conduct of Washington's envoy to the region, George Mitchell, would not bring about peace between Israelis and Palestinians even 10 years from now.

Aboul Gheit said that Palestinian Authority President Abbas had delivered a series of written proposals to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including concrete steps to reach final-status agreements on contentious issues such as borders and security arrangements.

On Sunday, chief PA negotiator Saeb Erekat claimed that Abbas did not offer Israel a possible West Bank land swap as part of a final status peace agreement, told Israel Radio on Sunday.

Erekat's comments contradict a report in the London-based Arabic newspaper Al Hayat, according to which Abbas proposed a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with a possible land swap of 2.3 percent of the West Bank to ensure a fair solution for Israeli settlement blocs.

Erekat told Israel Radio that the PA president had not made such an offer, adding that the current US-brokered indirect talks were to remain secret.

Al Hayat reported over the weekend that the Palestinians agreed to leave settlement blocs including Gush Etzion, Pisgat Ze'ev and Modi'in Ilit, along with a swath of land overlooking Ben-Gurion International Airport, in Israeli hands.

In exchange, the PA would receive land of comparable size and quality in the southern West Bank as well as a corridor between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Abbas also reportedly proposed easing Palestinian demands over East Jerusalem to permit the Jewish Quarter of the Old City as well as the Western Wall to remain under Israeli sovereignty.

The remainder of the Old City, he proposed, would become the capital of a Palestinian state but fully open to the adherents of all faiths.

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