

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, November 17, 2010 7:43 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: AP: Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

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From: Shapiro, Daniel B. [redacted]
To: Sullivan, Jacob J
Sent: Wed Nov 17 07:38:40 2010
Subject: Fw: AP: Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

B6

From: Ross, Dennis B.
To: McDonough, Denis R.; Shapiro, Daniel B.; Kumar, Prem G.
Cc: Donilon, Thomas E.; Rhodes, Benjamin J.; Vietor, Tommy
Sent: Wed Nov 17 06:54:42 2010
Subject: Re: AP: Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

[redacted]

1.4(B)
1.4(D)
B1

From: McDonough, Denis R.
To: Shapiro, Daniel B.; Ross, Dennis B.; Kumar, Prem G.
Cc: Donilon, Thomas E.; Rhodes, Benjamin J.; Vietor, Tommy
Sent: Wed Nov 17 05:59:10 2010
Subject: Fw: AP: Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

[redacted]

B5

From: Bates, Andrew J.
To: Lehigh, Matt; Alhassani, Mehdi K.; Burton, William A.; Chang, Benjamin; De, Rajesh; Gibbs, Robert L.; Govashiri, Ferial; Hammer, Michael A.; Inouye, Shin; Jensen, Robert R.; McDonough, Denis R.; Pfeiffer, Dan; Rhodes, Benjamin J.; Spence, Matthew J.; Turner, Shawn; Vietor, Tommy
Sent: Wed Nov 17 05:56:10 2010
Subject: AP: Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

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Analysis: Obama's bid for Mideast peace is risky

By STEVEN R. HURST

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Trying to coax Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a peace deal always has been a political high-wire act for U.S. presidents, but President Barack Obama is performing without a net.

Stretching back decades, all U.S. intervention has failed, but the collapse of those efforts was always blamed on one side or the other or both, not the American leader - even when he was directly involved in negotiations.

The deal that's developing now, however, could backfire on Obama if it fails to produce a treaty.

His administration, according to reports in Israel, has offered an abundant batch of sweeteners to entice Israel to extend for 90 days a freeze on settlements in territories the Palestinians claim for a future state.

The deal reportedly includes a U.S. assurance that it would not request a further extension of the freeze after this one and a pledge to veto any unilateral Palestinian attempt to seek United Nations recognition for a declaration of statehood.

According to these reports, the White House has also pledged to ask Congress for a \$3 billion sale of warplanes to Israel, with wider security guarantees if a peace treaty can be signed.

That seems a heavy price for the administration to pay for winning a renewed three-month freeze on settlements, an Israeli activity that already carries U.N. censure.

The administration appears to be banking on its ability to use those three months to guide the two sides to an agreement on a border separating Israel from a future Palestinian state, a deal that ideally and by definition would erase the dispute over settlements.

Such a plan would incorporate settlements into Israeli territory in return for equivalent amounts of land to the Palestinians.

"This will require toughness and reassurance - not just honey, but vinegar, too," former State Department Mideast negotiator Aaron David Miller wrote in Foreign Policy magazine. "Obama has already received his Nobel Peace Prize; the time to earn it may be just around the corner."

A first hurdle confronting Obama - and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu - is persuading hardline members of the Israeli government coalition to go along with a temporary extension of the settlement freeze, which is not certain and has not come to a vote in Israel's Security Cabinet.

A hoped-for Cabinet vote Wednesday has been postponed with no new date set.

Setting a border, or even creating momentum to keep talks alive beyond the extended freeze, would be a major achievement.

Palestinians insist the border agreement must reflect the frontier that existed before the 1967 war, after which the Israelis occupied the West Bank and annexed east Jerusalem.

Obama first stepped onto the Mideast tightrope in May 2009, declaring that Israeli-Palestinian peace was a top priority for his young administration. At the time, he sternly demanded the Israelis stop settlement building.

"There is a clear understanding that we have to make progress on settlements, that settlements have to be stopped in order for us to move forward," Obama said, referring to past failed negotiations.

Obama was publicly rebuffed by Netanyahu after their first White House meeting and a notably tense encounter with reporters in the Oval Office.

After intense U.S. pressure, the Israelis finally put in place a partial freeze lasting 10 months, but the Palestinians did not agree to resume talks until shortly before the freeze expired on Sept. 26.

The negotiations plunged into a deep freeze before they had barely started. The Palestinians insist that talks are pointless as long as Israel is building settlements.

After watching fellow Democrats suffer bruising defeats in congressional elections, Obama is looking toward his own campaign for re-election in 2012.

He needs a big win on foreign policy, and brokering an Israeli-Palestinian peace that has eluded U.S. leaders for six decades would certainly be that.

To this end, the Obama administration has moved a significant distance from its original demands on Israel and its settlements.

In public, however, there has been little movement by either the Israelis or Palestinians.

With both sides so entrenched, it is impossible to say where the U.S.-brokered talks are headed.

Paradoxically, and as difficult as that would be, "the Israeli-Palestinian issue is probably the least hopeless challenge he faces in the broader Middle East," writes Miller, calling that "a stunning reminder of the cruel and unforgiving world he now inhabits with Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and transnational terrorism all posing serious dangers."

EDITOR'S NOTE - Steven R. Hurst has covered foreign affairs for 30 years.