

Olmert to Haaretz: Two-state solution, or Israel is done for

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WASHINGTON - **"If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished,"** Prime Minister Ehud Olmert told *Haaretz* Wednesday, the day the Annapolis conference ended in an agreement to try to reach a Mideast peace settlement by the end of 2008.

"The Jewish organizations, which were our power base in America, will be the first to come out against us," Olmert said, **"because they will say they cannot support a state that does not support democracy and equal voting rights for all its residents."**

Olmert pointed out that he had said similar things in [an interview he gave four years ago](#), when he was deputy prime minister under Ariel Sharon, in which he revealed for the first time his proposal for a withdrawal from most of the occupied territories.

"Since then, I have systematically repeated those positions," he said, adding that people "will say I'm having problems and that's why I'm trying to do [a peace process], but the facts must be dealt with justly."

Olmert said the Annapolis conference "met more than we could have defined as the Israeli expectations, but that will not absolve us of the difficulties there will be in the negotiations, which will be difficult, complex, and will require a very great deal of patience and sophistication."

According to Olmert, "we now have a partner," in Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. "He is a weak partner, who is not capable, and, as Tony Blair says, has yet to formulate the tools and may not manage to do so. But it is my job to do everything so that he receives the tools, and to reach an understanding on the guidelines for an agreement. Annapolis is not a historic turning point, but it is a point that can be of assistance."

The prime minister said that Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni would continue to head up the Israeli negotiating team.

"There will also be people acting on my behalf, who will have a very significant role in this process, and the ones ultimately who will be in charge of this matter will be the

leaders on both sides. That is why we announced that we will continue to meet regularly."

[General James Jones](#), who was NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe until 2006, has been appointed the U.S.'s new security coordinator in the territories. According to a senior diplomatic source, Jones will determine whether Israel and the Palestinians have met their commitments in accordance with the "road map" plan, and will draw up security plans for transferring responsibility for additional Palestinian cities from the Israel Defense Forces to Abbas' forces.

On Wednesday, Olmert and Abbas met again separately with President George W. Bush, and later joined him, along with their chief negotiators, Livni and Ahmed Qurei, for a brief ceremony in the White House Rose Garden to inaugurate the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"One thing I have assured both gentlemen is that the United States will be actively engaged in the process," Bush said. "We will use our power to help you as you come up with the necessary decisions to lay out a Palestinian state that will live side-by-side in peace with Israel." "Yesterday was an important day, and it was a hopeful beginning," Bush said with the leaders at his side. "No matter how important yesterday was, it's not nearly as important as tomorrow and the days beyond. I appreciate the commitment of these leaders, working hard to achieve peace. I wouldn't be standing here if I didn't believe that peace was possible, and they wouldn't be here either if they didn't think peace was possible." Unlike their three-way handshake on Tuesday, the leaders did not shake hands in the Rose Garden.

Olmert also met Wednesday with China's foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, and spoke by phone with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. He also briefed the cabinet members by phone.

Olmert departed the U.S. Wednesday night and will be arriving in Israel Thursday afternoon, in time for the Knesset's special session marking the 60th anniversary of the UN partition plan that called for the formation of a Jewish homeland.

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Olmert's private conversation with Bush Wednesday centered on blocking the Iranian nuclear threat. Olmert told reporters Wednesday that "there is nowhere I encounter greater understanding for Israel's existential issues than in the Oval Office."

At a meeting earlier this week in Washington, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov informed Defense Minister Ehud Barak that Russia has decided to supply the nuclear fuel rods for Iran's Bushehr power plant.

The fuel will be sent to Iran in special packaging, in keeping with the instruction of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Lavrov told Barak, adding that "it is not so

simple to open these packages without it being discovered."

Lavrov's announcement contradicts Russian President Vladimir Putin's promise, during his meeting with Olmert several weeks ago, not to supply the fuel for the reactor in Bushehr.

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