

# The Voice of Russia

## Palestine: politics should think outside the box

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Oct 3, 2011 22:33 Moscow Time

**Interview with Dr. [Mark Heller](#), Principal Research Associate at the [Institute for National Security Studies](#) in Israel.**

*Yesterday Israel's government said it would welcome parts of international proposals but it said it had concerns about the quoted plan. What kind of concerns?*

I think that the concern that was not stated was basically Provision 2. I think one was part of the preamble which says that one of the bases of renewed negotiations would be the peace idea outlined by President Obama in May. That made a reference to the basis of territorial negotiations, which the Israeli government is ambivalent about. But, frankly, I think that something that can be overcome in any case is the statement from the Israeli government that the reservations it has will be discussed or will be raised during the negotiations and that they are not an obstacle to renewal of negotiations. The second issue – and perhaps more serious from Israel's point of view – is the focus on the question of territory and security and no reference to other issues, which are of an equal or a greater concern to Israel, including the issues such as refugees, and acceptance of the Israel as a state of the Jewish people, and the finality of any agreement. However these are reservations and they are not posed as preconditions. The bottom line is that the Israeli government has said it's prepared to accept the Quartet statement and move ahead.

*Dr. Heller, whom do you see as your partners in those negotiations?*

Obviously, the negotiations, if they resume, will be initiated with the PLO, which has been the interlocutor up until now. But the PLO, or Mahmoud Abbas, and the leadership have so far refused to accept the Quartet statement, particularly the part that refers to the resumption of negotiations without preconditions. The Palestinians have preconditions, which they haven't waved. They still insist on them.

*They still insist on them?*

Yes, that's their position up until now.

*How do you see the issue of Hamas in those negotiations?*

I think Hamas will stand at their side and criticize, if negotiations begin. In a formal sense, Hamas is a substantial body of the Palestinian public opinion and it will act as the further constraint, if any constraint is needed on any flexibility or concession that Mahmoud Abbas might be willing to make.

*When were they stalled?*

They were stalled at the end of 2008, when Olmert was still the prime minister of Israel, because the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank refused to continue negotiations with Israel when Operation Cast Lead in Gaza was going on at the end of 2008. And then it refused to come back to negotiations when that operation ended and indicated that it didn't think there was any point in negotiations because Olmert was about to lose his office anyway. And they refused to negotiate with the Netanyahu government, accepted, as I said, briefly, for two weeks and that was pro forma, mostly, I think, in response to the American pressure.

*The whole process is so much drawn. What do you think needs to be done to get a break through?*

If people want to start thinking outside the box and think about things that haven't been done before, I think there are basically only two possibilities. One of them is to say: look, the purpose of this exercise is not peace, because you cannot force peace on anybody; the purpose of this exercise is to force unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the territories. It's conceivable, although I think only barely, and it's extremely unlikely that the US would resort to brute pressure on Israel to try to make that happen. The other possibility – again an example of trying something which hasn't ever been done before – was for the rest of the world to say to the Palestinians: look, you have a problem with Israel, you work it out with them and leave us alone. That's thinking outside the box. But nobody wants to do either of those things.

*Yes, they do look a little bit too improbable.*

Exactly. So, therefore people just go on doing what they have been doing and nothing really ever changes.

You cannot preclude anything, because lots of surprises happen. And sometimes there are developments which no one expected or predicted. But if you do your analysis based on whatever familiarity you have with the politics and the positions of the parties involved and on the historical record there is not any real reason to believe that anything fundamental will change, unless one or the other of those two things I mentioned happens.

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