

THIRD CONCEPT

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BABUDDIN KHAN

THIRD CONCEPT aims at providing a platform where a meaningful exchange of ideas can take place among the people of the Third World. The attempt will be to communicate, debate and disseminate information, ideas and alternatives for the resolution of the common problems facing humankind. We welcome contributions from academics, journalists and even from those who may never have published anything before. The only requirement is a concern for and desire to understand and take the issue of our time. Contributions may be descriptive, analytical or theoretical. They may be in the form of original articles, reactions to previous contributions, or even a comment on a prevailing situation. All contributions, neatly typed in double space, may be addressed to:

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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Mideast Peace Talks

Approval accorded by the Israeli cabinet on 28 July this year for the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners who had been in jail since before the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 has paved way the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in Washington from 29 July.

The release of the prisoners had been one of the major obstacles to the resumption of peace talks, which were brokered by U.S. secretary of state John Kerry. The resumption of talks represents the first direct dialogue between the two belligerents since the peace process fell apart in September 2010. The Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had initially been showing reluctance to negotiate with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, fearing the hard-line Israeli leader will reject what the Palestinians consider minimal territorial demands. The Palestinians want a state in the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in 1967, but have accepted the principle of limited land swaps to allow Israel to annex some of the dozens of settlements it has built on war-won lands. Abbas had repeatedly said he would only go to talks if Israel either freezes settlement building or recognizes the 1967 lines as a starting point for drawing the border of a state of Palestine. However, some media reports indicate that some Palestinian officials reiterated on 29 July that they received US assurances that Washington considers the 1967 lines the basis for border talks.

Israel is reported to have not signed on to that principle and some senior Israeli officials have also reiterated in recent days that settlement construction would continue. According to some observers, the expected prisoner release went a long way toward persuading Abbas to give negotiations another chance, even without Israel meeting his long-standing demands on the terms of such talks. The Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Washington are currently holding discussions that will not deal with the fundamental issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but rather aim to lay the foundations for full-fledged peace talks later this year.

The U.S. State Department is reportedly trying to establish a work plan for the broader negotiations, which are to last six to nine months. The actual negotiations are to be held in the region. But for these talks to succeed, Israel is called upon make a bold move that would help move negotiations forward, protect Israel's security, and promote stability in the region. Given the upheaval in the contemporary Middle East and Israel's hopes for a secure future, one cannot afford to wait for moves by the Palestinians or see whether negotiations succeed. That's why time is ripe now to make a bold move – one that will increase the chances of the negotiation track succeeding while also providing a fallback plan that will prevent the situation from collapsing into the abyss should negotiations fail. Israeli Prime Minister has already agreed to release dozens of Palestinian prisoners and press reports allege that he implicitly agreed to halt settlement construction outside the major settlement blocks. These are genuine confidence building measures that removed obstacles toward resuming the dialogue.

However, more needs to be done. Israel should further declare that it has no sovereignty claims over West Bank areas east of the security fence, the fence erected by Israel around the main West Bank settlement blocks and Jewish parts of Jerusalem in order to counter the so-called Palestinian suicide bombers, terrorists and hostilities. Then Israel should announce a voluntary evacuation, compensation, and absorption plan for those settlers who live east of the fence and who choose to relocate to Israel proper, thereby allowing for the two-state notion to become reality. These and other constructive independent steps are essential for regional peace and stability. They do not create obstacles to reaching an agreement. To the contrary, they improve the prospects for achieving it. Some experts have opined that at this such a crucial juncture Israel should not have the luxury of waiting to see how these talks turn out.

A peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestinian problem, which has been evading a permanent solution for many decades now is in the interest of international peace and security in general and Israeli and Palestinian security, peace and stability in particular. The Middle East cannot afford to miss this opportunity and both Israelis and the Palestinians are required to show munificence.

—BK