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Dutch, Spanish FMs to arrive in Israel for separate talks

By HERB KEVINSON
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Lieberman scheduled to hold talks; Jerusalem's acceptance of incentives package for Palestinians helps "soften" int'l criticism.

The Dutch and Spanish foreign ministers are scheduled to arrive separately in Israel on Monday for talks, two days after the Quartet met to discuss the Middle East and called on the sides to "urgently" expedite the diplomatic process.

While Spain, which recently upgraded the Palestinian representation in Madrid from delegation to mission status, is widely considered in Israel as one of the European countries most keen on recognizing a Palestinian state, the Dutch parliament passed a resolution earlier this month calling on the government to "encourage the European Union to resist the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state."

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The Dutch motion also called upon the Palestinian leaders "to resume direct negotiations with Israel, in which they make an effort to arrive at a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that does justice to the Palestinian problem and comprises the explicit recognition of a democratic, Jewish state."

Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman is scheduled to meet Dutch Foreign Minister Uri Rosenthal on Monday, and with Spain's Trinidad Jimenez on Tuesday.

Israeli officials, meanwhile, responded to the [Quartet statement](#) on the diplomatic process issued Saturday by saying that "it could have been a lot worse."

The statement, which expressed regret that Israel did not extend a settlement moratorium last September, stopped well short of endorsing a unilateral Palestinian declaration of statehood on all territory beyond the 1967 lines. Instead, the Quartet "reaffirmed that negotiations should lead to an outcome that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent-status issues, in order to end the conflict and achieve a two-state solution."

That wording does not endorse, as the Palestinians would have liked, their claim to a state fully along the 1967 lines, with a land swap for any alteration in the 1967 lines.

The statement also said the Quartet reiterated "its support for concluding these negotiations by September 2011."

One government official quipped, "I hope the negotiations start by 2011."

Israeli officials said that the package of incentives agreed upon by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Quartet envoy Tony Blair helped "soften" the Quartet's statement. Netanyahu met with Blair three times over the last three weeks, and some 10 times over the last three months to hammer out the package, much of which Western officials have been demanding of Israel for months.

The package included the following highlights:
In Gaza:

- Agreement to revive Israeli-Palestinian discussions on the 'Gaza Marine' gas field, with approval in principle

of the supply of Palestinian offshore gas to Gaza power plants and specific project approval to a new power station there.

- Agreement to provide mobile desalination plants in Gaza and approval in principle for construction of a larger permanent desalination plant.
- Full approval for all the sanitation and water treatment plants necessary for Gaza, with Israel agreeing to facilitate and support the entry of construction materials to enable projects to be completed on schedule.
- Further measures to promote Gaza exports, especially in furniture and textiles as well as agriculture.
- A pilot project for allowing the entrance into Gaza of private sector construction materials beginning on April 1.

In the West Bank:

- Extension of Palestinian Authority security presence in Area B –with agreement in principle for the construction or renovation of police stations in seven Palestinian cities.
- The issuance of West Bank ID cards to 5,000 Gaza-registered residents of the West Bank.
- Agreement of the construction of two housing projects in east Jerusalem.



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