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Olmert, Abbas sit down to discuss peace efforts

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On: [Wednesday, September 17, 2008](#) - By: [Israel e News](#)

JERUSALEM - Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas sat down together Tuesday night to discuss their push to forge a peace agreement by the end of the year even as the Israeli leader prepares to leave office.

The talks came a day before Olmert's Kadima Party chooses a new leader in a process that could put peace efforts on hold for months. Olmert says he will resign over corruption allegations after the Wednesday ballot, though he could remain in office until next year if his resignation leads to new national elections.

After the two-hour meeting, Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev said only that the core issues of the conflict were discussed. He did not elaborate, but those issues are known to include borders, Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements and Jerusalem.

Regev said the two would meet again after Abbas returned from the U.N. General Assembly in New York later this month. He said Olmert will continue to press ahead with the talks "as long as he is prime minister." Olmert and Abbas have met regularly since last November, when they renewed peace talks and pledged to try for an accord by this January. Regev said Olmert believed that is still possible.

"What is required is effort, creativity and flexibility," Regev told reporters outside Olmert's residence, where the meeting took place. "We on the Israeli side are committed to that effort."

But other Israeli officials, including Vice Premier Haim Ramon, are pessimistic. Ramon said earlier this week that he did not expect an agreement this year or next year.

Abbas told Olmert there must be agreement on all the core issues, said negotiator Saeb Erekat, who attended the meeting. "President Abbas told Olmert that we would not be a party to any partial accord," Erekat said.

Internal Palestinian violence in Gaza Tuesday between the ruling Islamic



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Hamas and an outlaw clan underlined a basic problem facing Abbas and Olmert — Abbas rules only the West Bank. His Fatah forces were expelled from Gaza by Hamas last year. Israel believes no accord can be implemented until Abbas regains control of Gaza.

The overnight violence, which left 11 dead and more than 40 wounded, showed the extent to which Gaza has become a difficult to rule armed camp of competing forces.

Two bystanders, including a boy, were among the dead in the clash. Machine gun fire and explosions were heard around the Gaza City neighborhood of the Doghmush clan, notorious for links to both militant and criminal groups. Members of the clan were responsible for kidnapping a British Broadcasting Corp. journalist last year.

Two years ago, they were involved in a cross-border raid in which an Israeli soldier was captured and two others killed. The soldier is still being held, and Hamas is demanding release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for him.

The fiercely independent and widely feared Doghmush clan includes gunmen close to Fatah, as well as members of Islamic militias that have been allied with Hamas.

Hamas launched the assault shortly after midnight, hours after a member of the Doghmush clan killed a policeman. The fighting erupted after the clan refused to turn the man over, said Interior Ministry spokesman Ihab Ghussen, and continued for about nine hours.

Eight members of the family and one policeman were killed, along with the two bystanders, he said.

The internal fighting was the deadliest in Gaza since early August, when 11 people were killed in a Hamas-Fatah clash.

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