

[Terrorism & Security](#)

Israel could lease Palestinian lands in exchange for Palestinian statehood: report

In exchange for a state of their own, Palestinians would lease Israel parts of the long-contested lands for the next 40 to 99 years, according to a report today in Al-Sharq al-Awsat.



In this Oct. 5 photo, construction trucks are seen behind a Palestinian flag at the site for the Palestinian urban project Rawabi in the village of Atara, near the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Dan Balilty/AP/File

By [Tom A. Peter](#), Correspondent / October 29, 2010

As international mediators look for a way to restart talks between Israeli and Palestinian officials, a new option wherein [Israel](#) would lease disputed lands from [Palestinians](#) in East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley could help to break the stalemate.

Today, the London-based Arabic newspaper [Al-Sharq al-Awsat](#) reports that Israel has entered into secret talks with the United States to discuss the possibility of creating a Palestinian state. In exchange for the opportunity to create an independent nation, Palestinians would lease Israel parts of the long-contested lands for the next 40 to 99 years.

If this leasing option becomes a serious proposal, in addition to easing tensions over the border dispute, it could provide a way to peacefully resolve the issue of [Israeli settlements](#) inside Palestinian lands. The settlement issue has been one of the most contentious issues in the peace process. On Thursday, Palestinian leader Mahmoud

Abbas said that Israel must freeze construction of settlements before he would resume peace talks, reported the [BBC](#).

US-Israeli talks

The lease proposal is said to be an American initiative. So far discussion of the proposal has only taken place between American and Israeli officials, reports the liberal Israeli newspaper, [Haaretz](#). Palestinian officials have just learned about these talks and are awaiting further details, the paper said.

A similar rental idea was discussed during peace talks in Taba in 2001, but the lease would have covered a period of less than 10 years.

Both the US and Israel have remained quiet about these latest talks. Officials in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office have neither confirmed nor denied reports about the proposal and US State Department officials, according to [The Jerusalem Post](#), have only said current talks between the two nations are "a part of the close relations between the two countries."

The demarcation line between Israel and the Palestinian territories has been at the heart of the half-century old dispute. [YNet News](#) reports that the agreement is being discussed as a means of reaching a "common ground with the Israeli side regarding the borders issue and to reach an agreement on what will remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Controversial settlements

The clock is ticking for the peace talks that began in September at the White House but stalled when Israeli settlement [construction resumed](#) Sept. 26 after a 10-month moratorium. The 22-member Arab League, which [met in early October](#), has given President Obama until the second week of November to broker a compromise that might allow talks to continue.

Palestinian Authority officials have alleged that the construction of settlements is designed to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state, reports Iran's [Press TV](#). Robert Serry, the United Nations Middle East envoy, has called Israel's settlement construction "illegal under international law." Since the freeze on settlement construction expired in September, Israel has begun building at least 544 units within settlements.

Presently, settlements are the source of almost daily clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. During the olive harvest, which is currently taking place across the Palestinian territories, settlers regularly interfere with Palestinians trying to bring in the harvest. The Palestinian mayor of a West Bank town alleges that settlers have cut or burned down more than 16,000 trees over the past five years, reports [TIME](#).

The current harvest is the most violent in years, with attacks by settlers on Palestinian property largely to blame. A senior officer in the command responsible for the West Bank told [TIME](#) more than 50 percent of Israeli forces there are patrolling the groves. The deployment comes on order of the Israeli supreme court, which six years ago instructed the military to safeguard Palestinians as they harvest the berries that have been the mainstay of the West Bank economy for generations.