

# PA minister: Western Wall must be under our rule

Mahmoud al-Habash says 'every inch' of land captured by Israel in 1967 must be part of sovereign Palestine, including 'Buraq' wall

BY ITAMAR SHARON | February 10, 2014, 9:55 pm |

**T**he Palestinian Authority's Religious Affairs Minister said Jerusalem's Western Wall, the holiest site in Judaism outside the Temple Mount, must be brought under Palestinian sovereignty in any peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

In an interview with Channel 10 News, Mahmoud al-Habash said "every inch" of territory captured by Israel in 1967's Six Day War is Palestinian land and must be given to the Palestinians.

"Every piece of land Israel occupied in 1967 belongs to the Palestinian state," al-Habash said. "The Buraq Wall too will be under Palestinian sovereignty," he said, using the Muslim name for the wall.

Al-Habash added that Jewish worshippers would be allowed to pray at the wall without limitations. "No problem," he said. "There will be no restrictions on freedom of religion."

Meanwhile Palestinian officials expressed pessimistic views on the state of peace negotiations, with one unnamed top PA official telling channel 10 "a chasm separates the two sides."

Former PA prime minister Ahmed Qureia told Channel 10 that there was a lack of trust between Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PA President Mahmoud Abbas, and little progress in negotiations. Even a face-to-face meeting between the two, Qureia said, seemed unlikely at this point.

Abbas, he said, "has no problem shaking (Netanyahu's) hand, but what will come of it? He wants to know what such a meeting would yield."

According to Channel 10, Jerusalem is now the main point of contention between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams in the effort to reach a so-called "framework agreement," a nonbinding document which will outline a final-status agreement.

The Palestinians want the document to note that Jerusalem is their intended future capital, while Netanyahu has refused any mention of Palestinian claims to the city at all. A suggestion by US

Secretary of State John Kerry that the document mention Palestinian aspirations in Jerusalem was deemed inadequate by Abbas, the TV report said.

On Sunday Channel 10 reported that Kerry [had tried and failed to get backing from President Barack Obama](#) to impose a binding, detailed framework agreement on the sides, even at the cost of confrontation with Israel. Kerry sought Obama's "political backing for confrontation primarily with Israel," but got the presidential cold-shoulder. It was deemed that now was "not the time for such moves" for the president, the report said.

As a result, the unconfirmed report claimed, Kerry's efforts to reach a substantive framework document have "pretty much collapsed."

Meanwhile Netanyahu's office confirmed [Monday](#) that the prime minister will visit the US in March [and meet with Obama](#); the two are likely to discuss the floundering negotiations, and their differences over how to prevent Iran attaining nuclear weapons capabilities.

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