# Egypt Tells Palestinians: We’ll Work in UN Against Settlements

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Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry told the Palestinians in a televised speech Wednesday night that his country opposes any changes to the Arab Peace Initiative, and would use its power in the United Nations Security Council to force Israel to halt settlement building.

Earlier in June, [Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said](http://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-said-to-call-on-arab-states-to-revise-peace-plan/) Israel would be interested in an altered draft of the initiative, a 2002 proposal that would see all Arab and Muslim states establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel after the successful conclusion of the peace process with the Palestinians.

Netanyahu rejected the clauses in the Saudi-drafted initiative that require a full Israeli withdrawal from all territories captured in the 1967 Six Day War and that set out terms for a resolution of the issue of Palestinian refugees in return for normalized ties with the Arab world.

Shoukry, in his first visit to the Palestinian territories, said that Egypt would not accept any changes to the plan.

“The Arab initiative is stable and supported by the international community through multiple frameworks at the United Nations and other international organizations and it is referred to on a regular basis in documents and events related to the peace process,” he said.

Shoukry pointed out that the initiative had been repeatedly reaffirmed by the Arab League as well.

He attributed the initiative’s sound backing to its handling of all the elements needed for a solution to the conflict that “is consistent with international vision and thought.”

Regarding plans to end Israeli settlement activity through the UN, Shoukry said that Egypt, “as a current member of the United Nations Security Council, is in constant discussion with the PA on what would be a good time and proper framework for moving through the UNSC” in order to compel Israel to cease settlement building.

“Ideas are currently being fleshed out,” he said.

The Egyptian foreign minister was in Ramallah to meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and deliver a message from Egyptian leader Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi.

The message, according to a report by the official PA news agency Wafa, said that Sissi sent full “support to the president and the Palestinian people, and that Egypt will stand alongside their brothers the Palestinian people in order to achieve their legitimate rights and establish a state with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

Shoukry stressed that all Egyptians sympathize “with their Palestinian brothers… sensing their destiny is united.”

He also reiterated Egypt’s support for the [French peace initiative](http://www.timesofisrael.com/to-israels-dismay-eu-ministers-to-meet-on-backing-french-peace-push/) — a new regional approach for a peace plan — and said his country is currently helping France prepare for a special conference on the Palestinian issue.

Not content with relying on the French initiative, Shoukry said his country has been in constant consultation with the US and that he was in talks with Secretary of State John Kerry to search for other ways to advance the peace process.

**Egypt snubs Hamas with unity bid**

In what could be seen as a swipe at Hamas’s authority in the Gaza Strip, Shoukry said a national government must be formed in order to lift the blockade on the enclave and began rebuilding it. The national government, Shoukry added, would be a “legitimate authority” to provide services to citizens in both Gaza and the West Bank.

The minister stressed that a unity government would be taken more seriously in negotiations by the international community as well as Israel.

Israel often argues it cannot make peace with the Palestinians while Gaza and the West Bank are separated politically. However, Jerusalem also opposes reconciliation between Hamas, deemed a terror group, and the internationally backed Fatah.