**Mr. Netanyahu’s Lost Opportunities**

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By The NYT Editorial Board

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The dispute over a White House meeting is the latest evidence of the fraught relationship between [President Obama](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/o/barack_obama/index.html?inline=nyt-per) and Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/n/benjamin_netanyahu/index.html?inline=nyt-per) of [Israel](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/israel/index.html?inline=nyt-geo). It prompted finger-pointing on both sides, but the basic facts are these: Mr. Netanyahu asked to meet with Mr. Obama during a visit to Washington for a conference later this week, the White House agreed and then Mr. Netanyahu canceled.

That Mr. Netanyahu’s government announced this decision in the media rather than to the White House is not a surprise, considering the disrespect the prime minister has shown Mr. Obama in the past. It’s hard to understand how that serves Israel’s interests.

It’s unfortunate that this strange squabble is overshadowing two pressing issues. One involves the new 10-year defense agreement the two governments are negotiating, an anchor of their alliance. The existing [agreement](https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IN10387.pdf), which expires in 2018, provides $3.1 billion a year to Israel, making it the [top recipient of American](https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IN10387.pdf) aid. The even larger issue involves the slow but inexorable death of the two-state solution for peace with the [Palestinians](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/p/palestinians/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier).

When Mr. Obama concluded the nuclear deal with Iran over Mr. Netanyahu’s vehement opposition last year, he promised to further strengthen the security relationship with Israel. That was understood to include even more aid and a renewed commitment to maintain Israel’s “qualitative edge” over other countries by providing it with more advanced weapons, like the [F-35](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/m/military_aircraft/f35_airplane/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier) stealth aircraft, as well as increased cooperation on missile defense and cybersecurity.

But the negotiations have run into problems. One reason Mr. Netanyahu reportedly canceled the meeting with Mr. Obama was that he did not want to visit the Oval Office without having first reached an agreement that he could boast about at home. He has reportedly asked for a big increase in American aid to more than [$4 billion per year](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-israel-defence-idUSKCN0WB1AA), which seems unreasonable. Mr. Netanyahu recently suggested that he may wait until next year to negotiate the package, presumably because he thinks he might strike a better deal with Mr. Obama’s successor.

Military aid alone will never guarantee Israel’s security. For that, there needs to be progress toward a Middle East peace deal. Mr. Netanyahu has never shown a serious willingness on that front, as is made clear by his expansion of Israeli settlements, which reduce the land available for a Palestinian state. His counterpart, the Palestinian president, [Mahmoud Abbas](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/a/mahmoud_abbas/index.html?inline=nyt-per), is a weak and aging leader who has given up on peace. In the meantime, [vicious attacks](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/world/middleeast/biden-israel-violence-abbas.html) by Palestinians on Israelis have surged, and the violence is costing lives on both sides.

Despite his efforts to mediate a deal and the importance he assigned to that task at the start of his administration, President Obama may be presiding over the death of the two-state solution. In a last-ditch effort, administration officials are seeking ways to keep the vision alive.

There are several options, but the best may be a resolution that puts the United Nations Security Council on record supporting the basic principles of a deal covering borders, the future of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees, security and land swaps, but not imposing anything on the two parties.

Before United States-mediated negotiations [fell apart](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/world/mideast-peace-effort-pauses-to-let-failure-sink-in.html) in 2014, Secretary of State John Kerry and his team brought the two sides closer on some issues. The details have been secret, but Mr. Obama needs to make that progress public; it could give future Israeli and Palestinian leaders something to build on.

With less than a year left in office and many other international crises to manage, it is unlikely that Mr. Obama will make another push for negotiations. But his successor must look for new ways help Israel and the Palestinians make peace happen.