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Clinton Meets Israeli, Palestinian Leaders

by Robert Berger

JERUSALEM — U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is wrapping up a 12-day, nine-country tour with a stop in Jerusalem, where on Monday she discussed a broad range of issues with senior Israeli and Palestinian officials.

Secretary Clinton held a day of talks with Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during her first visit to Jerusalem in nearly two years.

Iran's nuclear program was high on the agenda. Israeli officials warned that Iran is using talks with the West to buy time to build a nuclear weapon, which Israel sees as a threat to its existence.

Clinton said Israel and the United States agree on Iran's nuclear program.

"We all prefer a diplomatic resolution, and Iran's leaders still have the opportunity to make the right decision. Our own choice is clear. We will use of all elements of American power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon," Clinton said.

Israel has threatened to attack Iran if diplomacy fails.

Clinton held separate talks with Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad on reviving peace talks with Israel that have been stalled for more than three years. The Palestinians have refused to return to the negotiating table until Israel stops all settlement construction. Israel says peace talks should resume without preconditions.

Speaking at a Jerusalem news conference, Clinton said the United States will continue efforts toward a Mideast peace.

"We remain focused on the resumption of direct negotiations since we believe that is the only route to a lasting, stable peace. The United States can help. We stand ready to do so, but it's up to the parties to do the hard work for peace," Clintons said.

Israeli President Shimon Peres, who also met with Clinton, agreed.

"We should not give up hope. We shouldn't stop. We should be consistent. We should be determined. The Palestinians don't have a better alternative. We don't have a better alternative," Peres said.

Israeli leaders and Secretary Clinton also discussed the election of a president in Egypt who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, a group that has been hostile toward Israel. Clinton vowed to work together with Israel and Egypt to ensure that the 33-year-old peace treaty between the two countries is preserved.