Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert shot down an earlier proposal for an international peace conference on the Middle East, during his visit to the United States today. Hamas had announced it would accept the proposal for a conference, which was put forward by Egypt, and which would have included delegates from the UN, the Arab world and Israel.

Quote: *"The prime minister said that his stance against an international peace convention was backed by the American president. "There will be no international convention on the Palestinian issue which will replace direct negotiations," Olmert said, quoting Bush. "If a situation can be created in which moderate countries will encourage the Palestinians to enter negotiations with Israel, I will view it positively and will be very pleased," he added.*

I half-expected this to happen, as previous peace conventions have ended up becoming slagging matches against Israel. And in any case, it will be the leader of the European Union that will confirm the peace agreement in the Middle East. On that point, Javier Solana, the High Representative for the EU's Common, Foreign and Security Policy, has called for the creation of a " new roadmap " that would enable the EU to negotiate with the Palestinians. Last month Javier Solana's former advisor and Spain's current Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos proposed the creation of a new broader roadmap to peace, which would include countries such as Iran. To which Solana replied that the "roadmap", as far as he was concerned, was still viable.

Quote: *"European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana said Monday he hoped that "there will be a new truth, a new roadmap that will allow the international community to cooperate with the Palestinian authorities." Solana made the comments to reporters as he arrived for a meeting with EU foreign ministers in Brussels.*

Exactly what the goal of this "new roadmap" is, I don't know. Perhaps the EU feels frustrated on the lack of progress on the current roadmap, and hope that negotiations between the Palestinians and the rest of the world might speed the process up a little. That frustration was evident today as European Ministers met in Brussels and urged the creation of a new Palestinian unity government as soon as possible...

Quote: *"Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the EU's external relations commissioner, told reporters the 25-nation bloc was increasingly concerned about the growing number of civilian casualties in Israeli-Palestinian violence. "All sides must exercise maximum*

restraint," she said. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas must be encouraged in his struggle to forge a unity government including members of the Hamas militant group and the more moderate Fatah movement, she said. "Those seeking a new government need our support and a calm environment," said Ferrero-Waldner, adding: "Let's hope they have a good government with which we can work." However, contacts with a new Palestinian Authority would only be established after scrutiny of its political programme, she said.

Source YNet News , IRNA , Expatica