



On Sept. 2, Clinton will bring Abbas and Netanyahu together for the first formal round of direct talks since December 2008. At that point the parties will decide where and when to hold later rounds as well as lay out what is to be discussed. U.S. officials have said following rounds are likely to be held in Egypt.

In a choreographed sequence of events, Clinton's announcement came as the Quartet simultaneously issued a statement backing direct talks and Netanyahu's office quickly accepted the proposal.

"Reaching an agreement is a difficult challenge but is possible," it said. "We are coming to the talks with a genuine desire to reach a peace agreement between the two peoples that will protect Israel's national security interests, foremost of which is security."

It is not clear whether the United States would eventually draft its own peace plan or remain primarily a referee. Also unclear is whether Obama would convene his own high-stakes peace summit, in the mold of Camp David meetings that succeeded, under Jimmy Carter, and failed, under Bill Clinton.

*The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.*