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Peace now

By Haaretz Editorial

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History provides very few opportunities to utterly change political realities. It seems such an opportunity has presented itself. U.S. President Barack Obama's peace plan is giving Israel and the entire region a rare chance for real change; it must not be missed.

In the plan, whose main points were reported by Akiva Eldar in Haaretz on Friday, Israel will hold bilateral talks with the Palestinians and Syrians at the same time. It is based on the Saudi peace plan, which offers Israel normalization with the Arab world in exchange for withdrawing from the territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state. The United States, for its part, will offer Israel a security package to include a demilitarization of the territories and the stationing of a multinational force there for a few years. It is a comprehensive move to bring peace to the region, which for decades has been unable to escape the cycle of violence and bloodshed.

Now is the time for bold moves. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government have been given the chance to surprise the whole world and shake off the meaningless past formulas; to respond to the initiative courageously and enthusiastically. Now that the dream of a Greater Israel has been set aside, even by some people on the right, we must hope Netanyahu will continue what another prime minister from his party started 30 years ago - Menachem Begin.

There is now a president in Advertisement Washington who wants to leave his mark of change on the world. We must hope we have such a statesman in Jerusalem, too. Some Arab regimes want peace and normalization with Israel, and hope to rein in fundamentalism, as does

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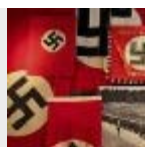
This is Netanyahu's chance to enter the history books; a right-wing prime minister who displays leadership and shows his people and country the way to peace, security and prosperity. We must not fear the plan's great scope and boldness; peace can be achieved with both Syria and the Palestinians. This is not the time to mention the difficulties that could block the path, it is the time to see the opportunities. So next month, when Netanyahu goes to Washington, he will have to join Obama's impressive effort and say to his host clearly: Israel wants peace and is ready for peace now.

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