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Lengthy Clinton, Netanyahu meeting fails to revive Mideast peace talks

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Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton met in New York with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu over a seven-hour period Thursday in an unusually lengthy but apparently unsuccessful attempt to rekindle moribund Middle East peace talks.

No breakthroughs were reported. Clinton and Netanyahu's offices issued a joint statement reiterating the two sides' diplomatic boilerplate on peace efforts.

Direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, launched by President Obama with great fanfare in September, ground to a halt just three weeks later when a partial Israeli moratorium on settlement construction lapsed. The Palestinians have refused to return to the talks unless Israel reinstates the moratorium; Netanyahu has said that is politically impossible unless the Palestinians make their own concessions first.

The joint statement said Clinton and Netanyahu "focused on creating the conditions for the resumption of direct negotiations." The statement described the meeting, which was held in a New York City hotel, as "a good discussion" with "a friendly and productive exchange of views on both sides."

The administration has scrambled to rescue the talks to stave off a major diplomatic embarrassment. Palestinian officials have threatened to seek United Nations recognition of a Palestinian state, a move that Israel says would be unacceptable and kill any possibility for a negotiated solution.

Several weeks ago, administration officials floated the idea of offering Israel a substantial package of military equipment and security guarantees, including a military presence in the

Jordan Valley, in exchange for a 60-day extension of the settlement moratorium. The joint statement underlined that Israel's security requirements "will be fully taken into account in any future peace agreement."

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