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U.S. suggests Mideast deadline may be slipping

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WASHINGTON, Nov 15 (Reuters) - The U.S. target to resolve all major issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by August 2011 may be slipping, the State Department said on Monday. Israel and the Palestinians resumed peace negotiations in Washington on Sept. 2 only to see these unravel within weeks after Israel's 10-month partial moratorium on Jewish settlement construction expired that month.

In her Aug. 20 announcement of the talks' relaunch, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the key issues -- which include borders, settlements, Jerusalem and the fate of Palestinian refugees -- could be resolved within a year.

However, U.S. State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley acknowledged the impasse on settlements could delay any resolution and said that if more time was needed, so be it.

"When the process started we said this could be accomplished within 12 months. Hard to say at this point, you know, given the delay, over the issue of settlements, where we stand on that clock," Crowley told reporters.

"If we get to August 2011 and we need a little more time, you know, to get this done, we'll take that time," he added.

"We're not making progress as we stand here," he said. "We have got to get the parties back into negotiations, then we can see, once again, you know, some forward motion," he said.

Washington wants Israel to renew the freeze on building settlements so that talks can resume with Palestinians, who walked out of negotiations after just a few weeks when Israel refused to extend its self-imposed settlement freeze.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented a U.S. plan to his cabinet on Sunday that would extend the freeze for 90 days in return for diplomatic and security incentives.

Israeli political sources said on Sunday that Netanyahu would probably win narrow approval from his coalition government for the U.S. proposal. It is unclear whether the Palestinians will agree to resume talks.

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