

Palestinian State Backed by Kremlin

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Women greeting Medvedev with traditional Palestinian bread as Abbas, right, looks on in Jericho on Tuesday. **Vladimir Rodionov**

President Dmitry Medvedev said Tuesday that Russia would continue supporting efforts to create a Palestinian state, as he visited his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, in the West Bank.

"Everyone will win from the creation of the Palestinian state," he told journalists there. "This is the goal which is to be tried to achieve."

The Palestinians welcomed Medvedev in Jericho on Tuesday, decking out the ancient city in Russian and Palestinian flags as they seized the high-profile visit as an opportunity to showcase their progress toward building an independent state. Jericho is one of several semiautonomous Palestinian enclaves within the West Bank, where Israel maintains overall control.

Medvedev's visit comes at a time of corrosive deadlock in Middle East peace efforts, with Abbas saying he would not return to U.S.-brokered negotiations unless Israel halts settlement construction on occupied lands sought for a Palestinian state.

Medvedev said Tuesday that Israel should freeze the construction of the settlements.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to stop construction, and U.S. President Barack Obama's administration, which is brokering talks, has not said how it plans to bring the sides together.

It was Medvedev's first visit to the West Bank as president, coming nearly six years after a similar trip by his predecessor, Vladimir Putin. Medvedev and Abbas were to sign several cooperation agreements.

Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Medvedev's visit was a way of telling the world that the Palestinians were ready for statehood. "Look at us. We are ready for independence. That's the message," Erekat said.

Medvedev was not visiting Israel because of a strike by Israeli diplomats.

For Russia, this visit is little more than a showing of the flag in the region and no

breakthroughs should be expected from it, said Yevgeny Satanovsky, president of the Institute of Middle East Studies. "Our participation in the work of the Middle East peace process Quartet is ritual, and we are ready to give way to anyone who wants to run in front," he said. The so-called Quartet consists of the United States, European Union, Russia and the United Nations.

Medvedev on Tuesday also visited a museum in Jericho built on a biblical site that was handed over to Russia by the Abbas administration in 2008. The museum was built by the Russian presidential administration.

Medvedev traveled to Jordan later Tuesday, where he was to meet Jordan's King Abdullah.

(AP, MT)

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