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## US: Iran boosts need for two states

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JPost.com Staff , THE JERUSALEM POST

US President Barack Obama's National Security Adviser, retired general James Jones, on Sunday reiterated remarks recently made by other senior US officials linking the resolution of the Iranian nuclear standoff to progress in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

In an interview with ABC television, Jones said that the US government agrees with Jerusalem that Teheran's nuclear ambitions pose an "existential threat" to Israel.

"We understand Israel's preoccupation with Iran as an existential threat. We agree with that," the senior official said.

However, Jones went on to stress that the Iranian threat only reinforces the need for peace in the region.

"By the same token, there are a lot of things that you can do to diminish that existential threat by working hard towards achieving a two-state solution," he said.

"This is a very strategic issue. It's extremely important. And we're looking forward to having a good, constructive dialogue with our Israeli friends when they visit Washington in the next seven or eight days," Jones said in response to a question about Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's upcoming visit to Washington on May 18.

In a closed meeting with AIPAC's major donors last week, Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emmanuel, reportedly said that America's ability to face Iran depended on Israel's ability to make progress with the Palestinians.

He told them that solving the conflict would enable progress in dealing with the main threat of Iran.

However, senior Israeli officials have rejected linking the Iranian nuclear issue with the Middle East peace process.

"We have to stop the Iranian threat as if there were no conflict with the Palestinians and we have to progress with the Palestinians as if there were no [nuclear] threat from Iran," Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon said on Thursday.

"The Iranian threat is a threat to everyone. The issue has nothing to do with the Palestinians," he explained.

In a press conference in Washington on Tuesday, President Shimon Peres also rejected the idea of "linkage" between the Palestinian and Iranian issues.

However, Peres emphasized that Israel accepted the road map peace plan, which calls for the eventual formation of a Palestinian state, and that the new government intended to adhere to previous governments' decisions.

Netanyahu has so far refused to publicly endorse the two-state solution and has focused on the importance of strengthening the West Bank economy.

But the prime minister noted on Sunday that economic growth and the improved welfare of the West Bank population were not a substitute for peace talks.

*Hilary Leila Krieger contributed to this report.*

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