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Sheerit: Israel must negotiate peace with Arab states on the basis on the Saudi initiative

By [Akiva Eldar](#), Haaretz Correspondent

In an interview with Haaretz published Thursday, senior cabinet minister Meir Sheerit (Kadima) said that Israel should hold permanent peace negotiations with Arab states based on the Saudi initiative.

Sheerit also said that Israel should agree to negotiate over the Golan Heights if Syria halts its support of terrorism.

The 2002 Saudi peace plan spoke of full Arab recognition of Israel in exchange for a full return to the pre-1967 borders.

In the interview, Sheerit outlined his proposal in place of Olmert's convergence plan. Sheerit is Olmert's rival within Kadima, and does not hide his ambition to "be prime minister one day."

"Kadima committed to reaching an arrangement and shaping Israel's borders. We should wait until we have a Palestinian partner, and we will help them establish a stable and thriving state," said Sheerit. "They don't want to? So they'll remain as they are."

"I propose that Olmert initiate a process in collaboration with the Americans and talk to the Arabs about the Saudi initiative," Sheerit added. "I believe he realizes he must embark on a political process. I hope he will work toward achieving permanent peace."

Sheerit said that only when there is peace "will the fig leaf of security cease to hide our nakedness when it comes to social affairs."

Earlier in the month, Sheerit said Israel should invite the Saudis for talks on the initiative, Sheerit said, adding that he had made the suggestion to then-prime minister Ariel Sharon when the Saudi plan

was made public, and that he had told Prime Minister Ehud Olmert "to invite the Saudis to come to Israel" to discuss the peace plan.

"Abu Mazen [Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas] could be invited to this discussion, to have a concrete discussion and finally, once and for all, to finish the matter one way or another. In other words, if you want peace, *ahlan wasahlan* we welcome you, we are prepared to make far-reaching concessions and to fix the permanent borders of the State of Israel."

Asked about earlier Sheetrit's comments, government spokeswoman Miri Eisin told reporters: "These are not the Israeli government's ideas. These are his [Sheetrit's] ideas."

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