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 [Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images](#) President Obama this week will attempt to define the U.S. role in a rapidly transforming Middle East, delivering a "sweeping and comprehensive" address on the Arab Spring and meeting with influential players in stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

The president's speech Thursday at the State Department comes on the heels of the death of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and at a time when the administration is facing questions about its differing response to violence in Syria, where it has maintained a distance, and Libya, in which it is part of a NATO military intervention.

"It's a twofer for the White House," said Christopher Preble, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. "It makes sense to take advantage of the killing of bin Laden and to draw attention to the democracy movement in the Middle East."

Obama will also meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordanian King Abdullah in hopes of jump-starting peace talks that critics have decried as a virtually impossible feat. Those meetings follow the resignation Friday of George Mitchell, Obama's special envoy to the Middle East, who was unable to broker a peace deal despite more than two years of negotiations in the volatile region.

Obama is personally intervening in the talks just as the situation in the Middle East has grown more complicated. In addition to the uncertainty sweeping the Middle East and North Africa, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, one of Israel's only allies in the region, was ousted in February following massive anti-government demonstrations. Israelis have accused Obama of not supporting Mubarak during the public uprising against him.

Further complicating the talks, the Palestinians are calling on the United Nations to vote by September to formally recognize an independent Palestinian state.

As for the role bin Laden's death will play in the speech, White House spokesman Jay Carney said, "The president views al Qaeda and those with similar views about how they would have that part of the world evolve ... [as] fast moving towards the dustbin of history."

A double suicide attack last week that killed dozens of paramilitary police in Pakistan

showcased al Qaeda's continuing influence in the region. Security officials had hoped that bin Laden's death would force the Taliban in Afghanistan to sever ties with al Qaeda, but Taliban leaders suggested the attacks were an understandable response to the death of the al Qaeda leader.

Carney said Obama intends to refine his take on the Arab Spring partially in response to questions about differing strategies the United States has employed in reaction to the violence spreading throughout the Middle East.

"He will call, as he has in the past, on the governments in the region to respond to those demands through peaceful political dialogue -- not just because it's the right thing to do for the people of these countries, but because it is in the interest of stability," Carney said.

Obama expressed confidence that peace talks would continue despite the upheaval and Mitchell's departure.

"We remain committed to peace in the Middle East," Obama vowed, "and to building on [Mitchell's] hard work and progress toward achieving this goal."

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