

Blair seeks to broaden Mideast peace role

by UPI

LONDON -- Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has started diplomatic meetings as the international community's Middle East envoy. Blair met Tuesday in London with senior officials from the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, together known as the Quartet, the Financial Times reported Wednesday. Blair seeks a broader role in peacemaking between Israel and the Palestinians beyond the terms spelled out by the Quartet last month in announcing his position as "representative," the Times reported. Those terms focused on the practicalities of helping the Palestinians build institutions needed for a future state and the permission to "liaise" with other countries in support of Quartet principles, the newspaper said. The role Blair seeks is broader than first envisioned by the U.S. State Department, which Tuesday reacted cautiously to suggestions Blair would take on a wider political role. The United States intends to maintain a dominant role "on pushing forward the political tracks, whether that's between the Israelis and the Palestinians or between the Israelis and the Arabs," said a senior state department official.

Copyright © 2007, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

Blair seeks to broaden Mideast peace role by UPI