

MEMMO

Sept. 15, 2011

PA's U.N. Statehood Bid Threatens Peace Efforts, Israel

The Palestinian effort to secure recognition of statehood at the United Nations is a direct challenge to U.S. interests and could have severe implications for the peace process. Palestinian Authority (PA) leaders have indicated their intention to exploit recognition of Palestinian statehood to isolate Israel and attack her in international fora. The United States must continue to strongly oppose harmful Palestinian efforts at the United Nations—including through the use of its Security Council veto—and warn the Palestinians that their actions can damage U.S.-Palestinian relations and near-term prospects for peace.

An upgrade in Palestinian status at the United Nations outside of talks with Israel could have serious implications for the Jewish state.

- The Palestinians say they intend to have the U.N. Security Council recommend to the General Assembly that Palestine should be accepted as a full member state to the United Nations.
- With the United States signaling that it will veto such a move, the Palestinians could go directly to the U.N. General Assembly, which could recognize Palestine as a non-member observer state, upgrading its status from permanent observer to a stature similar to that of the Vatican.
- This upgrade in status could allow the Palestinians to take more aggressive action against Israel in international legal fora, including at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). By having the ability to directly bring matters to the ICJ, the Palestinians could ask for advisory rulings on final-status issues and statehood, further isolating Israel and politicizing the court.
- The new status could allow the Palestinians to pursue allegations of crimes committed by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza at the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- The Palestinians would also be able to fully participate in U.N. agencies—including the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and U.N. International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The Palestinians could use these committees to isolate and delegitimize Israel for "occupying" a recognized state.
- Recognition of a Palestinian state by the United Nations outside of talks with Israel will not change the situation on the ground. Palestinian actions at the United Nations could increase the potential for violence by raising unrealistic expectations.
- Successful efforts by the Palestinians at the United Nations also would embolden Israel's detractors and legitimize those who seek to isolate and question the legitimacy of the Jewish state. Boycotts of Israel could increase and be adopted more widely.



PA President Mahmoud Abbas is seeking statehood recognition at the U.N. rather than talking to Israel.

PA President Abbas' statehood recognition plan at the United Nations and refusal to talk to Israel are severely undermining U.S. peace efforts.

- Abbas has said that the PA's "priority is negotiations," but he continues to refuse to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- Instead of sitting down with Netanyahu—who has repeatedly called for direct negotiations during the past two years—Abbas has undermined U.S. efforts to restart talks by setting unrealistic preconditions that have never been applied to previous Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.
- The refusal to negotiate and the U.N. statehood bid are direct violations of the Palestinian commitments made in the Oslo peace agreements, which say the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be solved through direct negotiations between the two parties.
- The Palestinian U.N. statehood bid only serves to undermine Israel's confidence in the PA as a legitimate partner for peace and could cause a breakdown in relations between the parties, making it even more difficult to resume negotiations in the future.
- If the U.N. General Assembly recognizes Palestine as a non-member state using the 1949 armistice lines as borders, this may also set back talks for years. The Palestinians will find it difficult to compromise on any terms that have been adopted by the United Nations, while Israel will find it difficult to enter talks when unacceptable results are the baseline.

The United States must continue to oppose Palestinian efforts at the United Nations and urge the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table.

- President Obama said if the Palestinians bring their statehood bid to the Security Council the United States would "object very strongly, precisely because we think it would be counterproductive. We don't think that it would actually lead to the outcome that we want, which is a two-state solution."
- The president added in a Sept. 12 interview with Spanish-language media that the Palestinian effort at the United Nations is a "distraction" that "does not solve the problem." He said the conflict is only going to "resolved by Israelis and Palestinians agreeing to something."
- In addition to working with the Middle East Quartet's Special Envoy Tony Blair to restart talks, the administration, according to *The New York Times*, has urged more than 70 countries to oppose U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state.
- E.U. High Representative Catherine Ashton and U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon have also called for the resumption of talks. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly said he is prepared to meet with Abbas to talk about the key final-status issues.

The Palestinians should face consequences if they continue to defy the United States and press forward with their U.N. statehood bid.

- The administration should make clear to the Palestinians that they will face consequences should they proceed with their statehood bid at the United Nations and refuse to negotiate with Israel.
- The House and Senate have already overwhelmingly passed resolutions (H. Res. 268 and S. Res. 185) warning the Palestinians that there will be serious implications for U.S.-Palestinian relations and continued U.S. aid to the Palestinians if they continue their efforts at the United Nations.
- The fiscal year 2012 foreign aid bill in the House would cut off U.S. economic aid and would make the continued operation of the PLO office in Washington conditional on an end to the PA's efforts at the United Nations and an end to Palestinian incitement.