

MEMMO

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PA Statehood Gambit at U.N. Undermines Peace Efforts

In defiance of the United States, the Palestinians are moving ahead with statehood efforts at the United Nations while refusing to negotiate with Israel. This gambit could severely damage U.S. peace efforts and future Israeli-Palestinian relations. The United States must continue to strongly oppose harmful Palestinian efforts at the United Nations and urge the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table.

The Palestinians are moving ahead with statehood efforts at the United Nations despite strong opposition from the United States.

- The Palestinians have refused to negotiate with Israel since last September and have declared that they are preparing to win admission as a full member of the United Nations this September.
- The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on June 26 officially adopted the U.N. route for recognition of a Palestinian state along the pre-June 1967 borders.
- On July 14, the Arab League formally announced that it will ask the United Nations to recognize a Palestinian state with east Jerusalem as its capital and to upgrade its status to that of a full member state.
- The United States has strongly rejected the Palestinian approach. President Obama said on May 22 that “no vote at the United Nations will ever create an independent Palestinian state.” On May 25, Obama called the Palestinian efforts at the U.N. a “mistake.”
- In response to the Arab League decision to ask for Palestinian statehood, the State Department said: “We do not believe attempts to resolve final status issues in international bodies like the United Nations are able to bring about the enduring peace. ... The Israelis and Palestinians must work out the differences between them in direct negotiations.”
- The U.N. Security Council currently has an open debate on the Middle East scheduled for July 26, during which the council plans deliberations on the prospect of Palestinian statehood.
- With the United States likely to block recognition of a Palestinian state at the U.N. Security Council, the Palestinians could seek to upgrade from their permanent observer mission to a non-member state at the U.N. General Assembly. This might enable the Palestinians to participate in more U.N. bodies and put further pressure on the Security Council to accept Palestine as a full member state.



PA President Mahmoud Abbas is seeking recognition of a Palestinian state at the United Nations outside talks with Israel.

The statehood push by the Palestinians could have severe implications for peace efforts and relations between the parties.

- The Palestinian effort at the United Nations signals the PLO's rejection of the principle of solving the conflict through direct negotiations with Israel. Even "if we succeed in opening the door for negotiations, we're not going to stop from attaining what belongs to us as Palestinians in this General Assembly starting on Sept. 20," said Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian U.N. representative.
- Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas clearly stated in a May 16 *New York Times* op-ed that the admission of a Palestinian state into the United Nations is not part of a strategy to solve the conflict, but a way to perpetuate it.
- Abbas wrote that the recognition of a Palestinian state by the United Nations "would pave the way for the internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one. It would also pave the way for us to pursue claims against Israel at the United Nations, human rights treaty bodies and the International Court of Justice."
- An upgrading of Palestinian status at the United Nations could provide the Palestinians with increased standing at such international fora as the International Criminal Court, where they could pursue allegations of crimes committed by Israel in the West Bank and Gaza.
- Such steps by the Palestinians could destroy prior agreements and cause a breakdown in relations between the parties. Under the Oslo Accords, Israelis and Palestinians developed protocols for security cooperation that could be jeopardized by Palestinian legal and diplomatic efforts to pursue charges against the Israeli army.
- Moreover, the Palestinian actions increase the potential for violence by raising unrealistic expectations. "A symbolic achievement in New York that is not matched by gains toward statehood on the ground may bring Palestinian frustration to the point of violent outburst," Tal Becker, a former Israeli negotiator, writes in a recent analysis of Palestinian statehood efforts.

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

- The Obama administration must make clear to the Palestinians that it will veto any resolution in support of creating a Palestinian state at the U.N. Security Council.
- At the same time, the administration should press the PA to return to the negotiating table with Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly said he is prepared to meet with Abbas to talk about the key final-status issues.
- The House and Senate overwhelmingly passed resolutions (H. Res. 268 and S. Res. 185) that call on the administration to lead opposition to unilateral Palestinian statehood efforts. The measures also warn the Palestinians that there will be serious implications for U.S.-Palestinian relations and U.S. aid to the Palestinians if they continue their efforts at the United Nations.
- The Obama administration also should continue efforts to ensure that international leaders oppose the Palestinian gambit at the United Nations and support direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.