



Unilateralism at the U.N.

It has already been a year since Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas sat down to speak directly with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about a peace deal. For the past several months, in place of negotiations, the Palestinians have been trying to win support for recognition of a Palestinian state at the United Nations in late September.

This effort signals the PLO's rejection of the principle of solving the conflict through direct negotiations with Israel. Moreover, as Abbas clearly stated in a May 16th *New York Times* op-ed, the admission of a Palestinian state into the United Nations is not part of a strategy to solve the conflict, but rather a way to perpetuate it.

According to Abbas, 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."

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.

Furthermore, 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," writes Tal Becker, a former Israeli negotiator. "On the other hand, were the Palestinian U.N. initiative to be thwarted, this might also produce a sense that violence is the only alternative."

The Obama administration has publicly criticized the Palestinian approach. President Obama has called the campaign at the U.N. a "mistake" and said that "no vote at the United Nations will ever create an independent Palestinian state." The administration has also been working to convince the Palestinians to abandon their campaign in favor of direct talks with Israel.

The United States should continue to lead the efforts to get the peace process back on track. After all, progress towards a comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will only be possible once the Palestinians realize the futility of unilateral stunts, and return to the negotiating table without preconditions.