



## Behind the Headlines: The Dangers of Premature Recognition of a Palestinian State

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Agreements should be respected. They certainly should be respected in the United Nations. Yet in just a few months time, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is expected to violate its agreements with Israel and all the international frameworks for Mideast peace by seeking premature recognition of a Palestinian state in the UN in September.

Israel remains dedicated to direct negotiations as the only method of resolving the conflict. Meanwhile, the Palestinian Authority has long abandoned peace negotiations. Instead, the Palestinian leadership has embarked on the path of unilateral action, preferring to attempt to force their will on Israel through international pressure. It has long been the dream of the Palestinians to bypass a negotiated settlement, bypass the need for necessary compromises through the application of international coercion on Israel.

A unilateral declaration harms true peace, challenging the most basic principles of Mideast peacemaking. It undermines all internationally accepted frameworks for peace, including UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1850 and the Roadmap for peace. All call for a mutually-negotiated and agreed resolution of the conflict. All reject unilateral actions.

The declaration of Palestinian statehood outside the context of a negotiated settlement would violate existing bilateral Palestinian-Israeli peace agreements. The important Interim Agreement from 1995, which expressly prohibits unilateral action by either side to change the status of the West Bank and Gaza, would be breached.

A unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood will do nothing to solve the conflict. Indeed, it would intensify rather than end it. The Palestinians would no longer have any incentive to negotiate and compromise. Unilateral measures will not settle any of the key permanent status issues, such as borders, Jerusalem and refugees. As has been agreed previously between the sides - and supported by the international community - these complicated issues can only be resolved in direct negotiations between the parties.

Premature recognition would ignore Israel's legitimate concerns, especially regarding security issues. It would also allow the Palestinians to continue to avoid the important step of mutual recognition, which includes Israel's right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people. This issue lies at the core of the conflict and its avoidance will harm

efforts to reach a genuine peace.

Moreover, recognition of Palestinian statehood at this time is an untenable move as the Palestinian Authority currently fails to meet the established legal tests for statehood. In particular, the PA does not pass the test of effective government: it does not rule the territory in question. According to existing agreements, the PA exercises varying degrees of control only over relatively small areas of the West Bank. Furthermore, the PA does not have effective control over the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, despite the recent reconciliation agreement among Palestinian factions.

Recognition at this time would constitute recognition of a terrorist entity. Hamas seeks Israel's destruction and rejects the most basic conditions of the international community for recognition as a legitimate actor in the region (recognition of Israel's right to exist, acceptance of existing agreements and an end to violence). In preparation for the unilateral declaration of a state, the Palestinian Authority has signed a reconciliation agreement with the Hamas. Supporting this agreement without any change in position by Hamas would serve as de facto international recognition of Hamas' legitimacy. It should be remembered that Hamas continues to be recognized as a terrorist organization, outlawed in numerous states throughout the world, including the UK and the US.

On the other hand, Israel has a long proven track record of making strategic concessions for peace. It has proved its willingness to negotiate land transfers, abandoning Sinai for peace with Egypt and leaving the Gaza Strip and South Lebanon. The fact that Israeli peace steps in the last two instances were answered with rockets and violent attacks should be a sobering warning about the risks Israel takes for peace and the importance of reaching a solution that serves the interest of all sides to the conflict.

Clearly, premature recognition of a Palestinian state would render the negotiating process and the ideals of compromise and dialogue meaningless. All who desire true peace in this region should reject Palestinian efforts to act unilaterally and forsake the negotiating process. Only through direct negotiations can a lasting peace agreement be reached.