

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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17 January 2015

The Palestinian Quest for Statehood

Since the United Nations created the state of Israel in 1947, an offer to create a Palestinian state has been on the table. The proposed partition of Palestine in 1947 involved a state for the Jewish people as their homeland and a state of virtually equal size for the Palestinians. Israel accepted the partition; the Palestinians rejected it, which led to the 1948 war when the infant Jewish state was invaded by Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. There have been three subsequent wars between Israel and these same neighbors (1956, 1967, and 1973). Today, Israel embraces the two-state solution (i.e., a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel). But, Israel has insisted on recognition of Israel as the Jewish homeland and has insisted that Jerusalem remain in Jewish hands. The Palestinians insist on rolling back all territorial boundaries to pre-1967, which Israel refuses to accept without significant concessions and guarantees. In addition to this diplomatic logjam, there are new factors in the realities of the current Middle East, namely, terrorist organizations on Israel's borders (e.g., Hezbollah and Hamas), as well as terrorist threats to Israel's very survival (e.g., the chaos in Syria, Lebanon and the existence of ISIS). Because of these terrorist threats, Israel has insisted on significant security guarantees as a condition for Palestinian statehood on the West Bank. The survival and existence of Israel are at stake in any negotiations where Israel would trade land for peace. As one of my friends in Israel always says, "We are the only nation on earth that wakes up every morning concerned about the very survival of our nation."

This is the historical context for what the Palestinian Authority is doing at the United Nations, namely taking symbolic steps to have the world community recognize Palestinian statehood. To date, 135 countries have recognized the Palestinian state. The Palestinians are in effect establishing a legal state—without recognized international boundaries, without a recognized capital city and without a negotiated agreement with Israel. And they are doing so without making any concessions to Israel and without giving Israel the assurances it needs in terms of security and the recognition of Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people. In addition to these "recognitions" of the state of Palestine, the Palestinian Authority under Mahmoud Abbas has pursued several more recent strategies:

1. In a more recent context, the Palestinians have sought statehood at the United Nations since 2011. In late 2014, they crossed a significant threshold. A resolution introduced by Jordan to the UN Security Council would have required Israel to withdraw (by 2017) from all territory acquired in the 1967 war and would have named Jerusalem as the capital of the state of "Palestine." Three of the five permanent members of the Security Council supported Jordan's resolution (France, China and Russia), the United Kingdom

abstained and the United States vetoed the resolution by voting no. Among the remaining Security Council members only Australia also voted no. Once again we see that if it were not for the United States, Israel would be in a most precarious situation. But this vote on Jordan's resolution also indicates that world opinion is decidedly shifting away from Israel.

2. More significantly, at the very end of 2014, the Palestinians signed the Rome Statute, which in 2002 established the International Criminal Court (ICC). By signing the Rome Statute, the Palestinians are in effect joining the International Criminal Court. After a 60-day waiting period, the Palestinians will be able to bring cases against Israel charging it with war crimes and other crimes against humanity. The ICC defines a war crime as "the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the occupying power, of parts of its own civilian population into territory it occupies." The charge of war crimes against Israel will be based on the fact that nearly 700,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, part of the territory Israel captured from Jordan in the 1967 War. There is also the possibility that Israel will be charged by the ICC with "crimes of aggression" because it annexed the Golan Heights, which it captured from Syria, and because it annexed East Jerusalem, making it the capital of Israel. Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian Observer at the UN, declared, "[This] is an option that we are seeking in order to seek justice for all the victims that have been killed by Israel, the occupying power." He added that the PA is also seeking retroactive ICC jurisdiction "with regard to the crimes committed during the last war in Gaza."
3. Perhaps the most radical option the Palestinian Authority (PA) might pursue is the end of all security coordination with Israel in the West Bank area and then to actually dissolve the PA as a governing authority. As Jodi Rudoren of the *New York Times* shows, without the PA, Israel would then need to provide services and maintain order across the entire West Bank without the help of the PA forces. Without doubt this would be costly for Israel and would create significant chaos, thereby intensifying international condemnation of Israel and its oversight of the West Bank.

How should we think about these statehood strategies that the PA is pursuing or considering pursuing? Several thoughts:

1. It is imperative that we remember the Oslo Accords of 1993. Much of this agreement dealt with the West Bank and in effect created three West Bank zones. Zone A was territory Israel gave to the PA to administer on its own. Thus, Israel withdrew from key cities and areas surrounding those cities (e.g., Bethlehem, Jericho, Hebron, etc.). Zone B was territory to be jointly administered by Israel and the PA. Zone C was territory administered by Israel alone. The goal of the Accords was that over the next five years (i.e., 1993-1998), the Zone C territory was to shrink and become Zone B, which would eventually become Zone A, solely administered by the PA. One of the primary conditions of the Accords regarding the shrinking of Zone C was that the PA under Yasir Arafat would combat terrorism in the West Bank. But Arafat refused to disarm Hamas

and other militant groups, such as Islamic Jihad, as required by the Accords. He also created a far larger Palestinian Army than the Accords permitted. In addition, homicide bombings carried out by militant Palestinians within Israel increased, eventually killing thousands of Israelis. Thus, the Oslo Accords have not been further implemented. With this historic context in mind, one can see why Israel is not going to reach any kind of agreement with the PA on the West Bank that does not provide greater guarantees that the PA will keep its word. The world community continues to ignore these realities.

2. The PA is using international pressure to coerce Israel into surrendering territory without making any concessions to Israel in terms of its security or its right to exist. There is no nation on earth that would agree to something like this, but the world community also continues to ignore this reality.
3. The Gaza situation is evidence of the duplicity and complete dishonesty of the PA and the Palestinians in general. Israel withdrew completely from Gaza in 2005, giving the Palestinians what they wanted—a part of the territory Israel gained after the 1967 War. The Palestinians had the right now to do with Gaza whatever they wanted to do. When elections were held in 2006, Hamas won a resounding victory, such that the PA governs the West Bank area it gained from the Oslo Accords and Hamas governs Gaza. The PA has at least been willing to negotiate with Israel; Hamas refuses to do so and is bent on the total destruction of Israel. Hamas has a vile Charter, with the goal of destroying Israel, and, as several wars with Israel have indicated, is willing to fire rockets into Israeli civilian populations—a war crime in and of itself. Gaza is an unmitigated failure and an illustration of the bankruptcy of the Palestinian cause that refuses to recognize Israel. But the world community continues to ignore this basic reality as well.

There is no nation on this planet that would tolerate what Israel has had to tolerate over its short history since 1948. The nations who are recognizing the state of Palestine betray a shocking ignorance of history and a thoroughgoing hypocrisy and inconsistency. They demand of Israel what they would not demand of themselves. The intellectual dishonesty of the world community is mind boggling! My prayer is that the United States will remain Israel's loyal friend, for there is really no other nation willing to do so. May God protect His people Israel as He is re-gathering them to their land in fulfillment of Ezekiel 36-37.

See the two articles by Jodi Rudoren in the *New York Times* (2 and 5 January 2015); an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* (3-4 January 2015); and James P. Eckman, *A Covenant People: Israel from Abraham to the Present*, pp. 322-326.