

A Palestinian road to constant conflict: Unilateral recognition of a new state would be a disaster

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Secretary of State Clinton noted during a speech in Washington last month that "neither Israel's future as a Jewish democratic state nor the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians can be secured without a negotiated two-state solution."

Clinton is right. Peace cannot be attained by one side's unilateral action or imposed by the international community. Nor can Israel's capital of Jerusalem be divided like a pizza with olives on one half and anchovies on the other. Jerusalem, as its late Mayor Teddy Kollek used to say, is a mosaic. It has shared water, sewage, power systems - and a population interspersed with Christians, Muslims and Jews.

Israelis and Palestinians must settle their differences together with mutual respect, dignity and an eye for a better future for both sides. Regrettably, the Palestinians have lately embarked on a different path that could make lasting peace impossible.

After Israel froze settlement construction for 10 months, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas quit the peace talks last September, only three weeks after negotiations resumed after a long hiatus. The Palestinians, convinced that President Obama promised them a permanent construction freeze in the territories, including East Jerusalem, refuse to be less pro-Palestinian than the White House. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has since repeatedly urged the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table, to no avail.

This month, Netanyahu will give a major address to a joint meeting of Congress. There, he is expected to again offer to restart peace talks. Yet talks can only happen if a precondition is now met on the Palestinian side: Namely, the new partnership of Hamas and Fatah, announced on Wednesday, must renounce violence, accept Israel's right to exist and commit to abiding by previous agreements with Israel. Those are not simply Israel's conditions; they are the conditions set by the international Quartet.

Iran-backed Hamas, whose official charter says Palestinians must destroy Israel and "kill Jews," would today only be willing to speak to Netanyahu about the terms of his own funeral.

Meanwhile, instead of pursuing negotiations with Israel, the Palestinians have launched a campaign to seek international support for unilateral declaration of statehood and United Nations recognition of a Palestinian state. Abbas said last month, "We have more than 130 nations set to recognize the Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and even if we make no further efforts, that number could be increased to 140 or 150."

In light of the new Hamas-Fatah accord, how many would now be ready for that state to be "Hamastan"?

The United States, rightfully recognizing that a UN declaration won't achieve anything, has already said it will veto recognition of a Palestinian state in the UN Security Council. The Palestinians respond that they will go to the General Assembly, where Washington has no veto.

Let us be clear before this process advances: A UN declaration will only strengthen extremists on both sides and make future talks more difficult. While plotting empty declarations of Palestinian statehood, the UN ignored the 45 rockets and mortars fired at Israeli towns from Gaza recently on the same afternoon that a missile struck a school bus, killing a student. The UN also paid no attention to a terrorist bombing near Jerusalem's central bus station last month that killed one woman.

Many diplomats continue uttering the mantra, "We all know what peace will look like." But those same diplomats offer no practical solutions as to how to get the rockets to stop raining on Israel from Gaza - despite the fact that there is not one Israeli soldier or settler in Gaza today.

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