

# Is a UN Imposed Palestinian State Wise?

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by Charles Strohmer

In September, the United Nations will vote on whether to grant statehood to Palestine. Unless something profoundly changes in Israel or Palestine before that day, almost certainly the vote in the General Assembly will be overwhelmingly 'Yes.' This will seem like imposing a bridge too far for Israel to cross. What will occur afterwards is anyone's guess. Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations, isn't hopeful. He believes it sets the stage for a calamity. He's expecting Palestinian riots to fully claim their state followed by tough Israeli crackdowns.

The road to Palestinian statehood is of course not new. It traces back to 1948. Here are the historical brush strokes. In 1947, after decades of trying to resolve the Arab-Jewish question in Palestine, the British gave up and handed the problem over to a fledgling United Nations. On November 29, 1947, the UN (Resolution 181) adopted a plan that would establish a Jewish and an Arab state in Palestine on October 1, 1948, if certain stipulations were met. On May 14, 1948, however, the same day the British Mandate over Palestine expired, Israel unilaterally declared its formal establishment as an independent state.

Forty years later the Palestinian National Council unilaterally presented its Declaration of Independence (November 15, 1988), which was similar in context, meaning, and reasoning to Israel's 1948 declaration. The UN General Assembly, by a large majority, then adopted a resolution acknowledging the PNC declaration and stated that the designation 'Palestine' should now be used in place of 'Palestinian Liberation Organization' in the UN system. The international community, sans Israel, the US, and several other nations, had recognized that the PNC declaration satisfied the criterion for statehood under customary international rules, as had the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence.

In 1993, the Palestinian (National) Authority was created by the Oslo Peace Accords as a provisional government of Gaza and the West Bank that would eventually be replaced by a sovereign Palestinian state. Today, the Palestinian state is recognized as such by over half the world's states. The PNA is legally recognized by international law as representing whatever territory the entire state of Palestine will eventually include; it has international relations with many states and its passports are recognized around the world.

Will the up-coming UN vote in September result in a reverse effect to 1948? In 1948, Israel's Arab neighbors resisted the new state of Israel, which it saw as being imposed on them; in September, Israel most likely will resist this next formal phase on the Palestinian path to statehood. Political imposition is rarely a good strategy. The war about Iraq is only the most recent poignant example. Let us hope and pray that this time the better angels of everyone's nature instead prevail.

It's too bad that the UN vote comes now. Relative to previous Palestinian norms, and as a remarkable example of what remains possible in Gaza, the West Bank under Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's leadership is experiencing an economic boom, much greater security, more accountable state institutions, the dismantling of illegal militias, and jail terms for members of Hamas for crimes of aggression and money laundering. But more than that, Palestinians in the West Bank have been making normative 'nonviolent methods' as 'the preferred means ... to achieve the final goal of ending the occupation and establishing the Palestinian state.' [Natalia Simanovsky](#) calls this the Palestinian secret that the mainstream media doesn't cover, and as a result, 'principles of nonviolence' have taken 'firm hold in the collective Palestinian psyche' in the West Bank. (See the full article at [Common Ground News Service](#), a site I highly recommend.)

Of course, if only one side is trending toward non-violence, it's not enough. But, as discussed in a recent article in *The Nation*, an increasing number of Israelis in recent years have been building relationships with Palestinians and joining with them in non-violent struggles in support of Palestinian causes. Also, large percentages of both populations still support a peaceable two-state solution, and the examples Tunisia and Tahrir Square have inspired many Palestinians about what it is peaceably possible to obtain, politically.

All of this makes me question the wisdom of the UN vote at this time. Would it not be wiser to allow time for more cooperative,

peaceable relations to develop between larger constituencies of Palestinians and Israelis. Why impose a state now? Why potentially undo all the emerging goodwill?