

Obama opposes Palestinian bid for U.N. Recognition

By [Richard Becker](#)

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Palestinians demonstrate in front of U.N. headquarters in Ramallah, Sept. 8.

(This text was adapted from a presentation at a Party for Socialism and Liberation public forum in San Francisco on Sept. 23)

End to U.S. aid to Israel, support Palestinian self-determination

On Sept. 23, the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, in his capacity as chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, submitted an application to the United Nations for the recognition of the State of Palestine as the 194th country in the U.N. The U.S. and Israeli governments – both of which officially claim to be in favor of a Palestinian state – denounced the application, threatening multiple retaliation if the PA sought membership in the UN as an independent state.

In a classic example of double-speak, U.S. President Barack Obama said that if Palestinian statehood “comes to the Security Council, we would object very strongly, precisely because we think it would be counterproductive. We don’t think it would actually lead to the outcome that we want, which is a two-state solution.” In other words, if the U.N. actually accepted Palestine as a state – with Israel having long been recognized as such – that would be “counterproductive” to “the outcome that we want, which is a two-state solution.”

CNN’s Wolf Blitzer, echoing countless other corporate media commentators and U.S. officials, said on September 19: “At issue for the United States and much of the world this week, a showdown over the Middle East. The Palestinian Authority president, Mahmoud Abbas is vowing to submit a formal application for statehood to the United Nations’ Security Council, a move that *could send shockwaves through the peace process* [our emphasis] and have serious implications for the U.S. relationships with Israel and the Arab world. “

Blitzer wasn’t trying to be funny when he talked about this step sending “shockwaves through the peace process.” But the reality is that the negotiations between U.S., Israeli and Palestinian leaders over the past two decades have amounted to little more than a prolonged bad joke for the Palestinians.

A “Peace Process” that is neither

The negotiations were never really about “peace” and there hasn’t been even the pretense of a “process” for more than two years. Conditions for Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza have sharply deteriorated over the past 20 years. During the same time, the number of Israeli settlers living on stolen Palestinian land in the West Bank has tripled, from 200,000 to 600,000.

Negotiations broke off due to Israel's refusal to halt settlement building. Israel continually seizes more Palestinian land to build and expand settlements in the West Bank. All the while, Israeli leaders cynically repeat the tired refrain, "Israel wants peace but cannot find a partner for peace." Only if you change the spelling from "peace" to "piece" can you get a true picture of what the Israeli leaders really mean. They want this piece, then that piece and then another piece of Palestinian land.

Even former president Bill Clinton, no friend of the Palestinian people, felt compelled to say after the Sept. 23 UN speeches: "Netanyahu does not want negotiations... he's just not going to give up the West Bank'.

The "Palestine Papers," leaked by the Al-Jazeera network in January proved the real outlook of the Israeli leaders beyond any doubt. The "Papers" were mainly record of talks between U.S., Israeli and PA negotiators in 2008.

At one point, the PA negotiators expressed willingness to capitulate on virtually every issue – Israeli control of borders, water resources and airspace, retention of settlement blocs in the West Bank, no right of return for refugees, no Jerusalem as the capital – really a surrender from the Palestinian point of view. And what was the Israeli government's response? Then Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni replied to the PA negotiators' offer of surrender on all major points: "We do not like this suggestion because it does not meet our demands." In typical condescending colonialist fashion, she added, "Probably it was not easy for you to think about it, but I really appreciate it."

Describing the reality of the "peace process," former PLO adviser, Michael Tarazy said: "We are negotiating about sharing a pizza and in the meantime Israel is eating it."

The deep frustration of Palestinians over two decades of going backwards, and the humiliating details revealed in the Palestine Papers were clearly factors in the PA's decision to make its bid for UN recognition now.

A long struggle for recognition

Palestine was incorporated into the British Empire following the end of World War I in 1918. The British colony of Palestine was partitioned by a vote of the UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947. Fifty-five percent was awarded to what was to become the State of Israel, and 44 percent to what was supposedly to become a Palestinian Arab state. In the war that followed the Palestinian and other Arab forces were defeated by the better-armed, financed and more numerous Zionist military.

By the Fall of 1948, Israel controlled 78 percent of Palestine, the West Bank had been annexed by Jordan through a secret deal with the Zionist leaders, and Gaza was under Egyptian administration. More than 750,000 Palestinians had been driven out by means of terror to make way for an exclusivist Israeli state, and Palestine seemed to have disappeared from the map.

In the 1967 Six Day War, Israel conquered the remaining 22 percent of Palestine and parts of Syria and Egypt as well. Instead of ending the Palestinian struggle, however, the 1967 war spurred the creation of a mass-based Palestinian resistance, and the transformation of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The 1974 Arab League summit designated the PLO as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and reaffirmed their right to establish an independent state.” The PLO has had observer status at the United Nations as a “non-state entity” since 22 November 1974, which entitles it to speak in the UN General Assembly but not to vote.

The State of Palestine was proclaimed in exile in Algiers on 15 November 1988, when the PLO National Council adopted the Palestinian Declaration of Independence. At the time of the 1988 declaration, the PLO did not exercise control over any territory. The declaration in 1988 came in the midst of the massive Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, that lasted from late in 1987 until 1991.

After the Declaration of Independence, the United Nations General Assembly officially “acknowledged” the proclamation and voted to use the designation “Palestine” instead of “Palestine Liberation Organization” when referring to the Palestinian permanent observer.

In 1993, the Palestinian National Authority was created as an outcome of the Oslo “Peace” Accords, orchestrated by the Clinton administration. The PA came to administer parts of the West Bank and Gaza, but Israeli occupation and control has continued down to the present.

Palestine and the upheavals in the Arab World

That the U.S. response to the application for statehood could have “serious implications” for its relations with the Arab world points to the main reason why the Obama administration and its allies have brought such enormous pressure to bear on the PA and Abbas not to go through with its application.

The bid for recognition as a state by the U.N. comes in a year of mass upheavals across the Arab World. Washington is deeply worried about how a veto of the Palestinian application will impact U.S. attempts to “manage” the crisis there.

The Palestinian struggle is deeply felt by people across the region and throughout most of the world, especially in the oppressed countries which suffered under colonialism and see Israel as a blatant example of the continuation of European colonialist rule.

The standing ovations and cheers were not so much for Abbas as an individual, but an expression of the broad and deep international support for the Palestinian people.

Did the U.S. corporate media respond to this outpouring of support by reporting that the international community stands with the Palestinian people? Not a chance. “International community” has a particular meaning in mass media here: It is the U.S., its allies and whatever puppet governments that can be lined up against whatever country is currently being targeted, whether it’s Iraq, Iran, Yugoslavia, Libya or Afghanistan .

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu followed with a speech which he started by saying, “I’m not here for applause” which was a good move since he didn’t get anything like the reception Abbas had received less than an hour earlier. He said that he was “here to speak the truth,” then proceeded with a speech in which virtually every sentence was a blatant lie, starting with his portrayal of Israel – which has been in state of perpetual offensive war since its founding in 1948 – as simply wanting peace.

First there must be peace, Netanyahu demanded, then there could be a Palestinian state. In other words, the Palestinians must first surrender, then negotiations could supposedly

begin. He finished by calling on the U.N, not to grant recognition to a Palestinian state.

Just a few weeks earlier, the U.N. accepted the state of South Sudan within a few days of its independence, a step which fit in with the U.S./British strategy of breaking up the Sudan into more digestible pieces.

In his equally dishonest General Assembly speech the previous day, Obama , too, called for the U.N. not to accept the State of Palestine application. But this is nothing new for U.S. governments.

Until 1991, the U.S. refused any and all negotiations with the Palestinians. And since the negotiations began, the U.S. has never functioned as the “honest broker,” but instead has been Israel’s prime funder and supplier of weapons, as it seized more and more West Bank territory, and made war against the people of Lebanon and Gaza. It is well-documented that the U.S. has not been any kind of neutral party but instead a partner with Israel in the negotiations.

The current frontrunner among 2012 Republican presidential candidates, Rick Perry tried to one-up Obama with a blatantly racist statement in support of the Israeli position: “The Obama policy of moral equivalency, which gives equal standing to the grievances of Israelis and Palestinians, including the orchestrators of terrorism, is a dangerous insult.”

Palestinian controversy over statehood application

There has been a debate within the Palestinian community over the application for statehood. This mainly revolved around the borders of the state proposed by Abbas in his speech today: A West Bank/Gaza state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

All the main parties, or factions as they are sometimes called, who are members of the PLO supported this initiative, but not all with the same motivations. These include Fatah (the governing party of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank,) the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front and the Palestine People’s Party (formerly the Communist Party), as well as the Palestinian National Initiative, led by Mustafa Barghouti. There were numerous large demonstrations of support across the West Bank on September 23.

Hamas, the governing party in Gaza, made statements opposing the UN bid: “We have reservations about the United Nations because we feel the institution is controlled by the Americans and others.” Hamas representatives stated that they had not been consulted, and that a West Bank/Gaza state did not represent justice for the Palestinian people.

This is also the view of a number of other organization, many of them part of the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions movement, inside and outside of Palestine. Those in opposition argued that the “two-state solution” is neither just nor viable for the Palestinians, and that U.N. acceptance of Palestinian statehood could be seen as entrenching this “solution,” and negating the right of return for the 6 million plus Palestinian refugees.

Kayid al-Ghoul, a leader of the PFLP, which has long stood for the right of return as the most fundamental and anchoring demand of the Palestinian struggle, said on Sept. 18: “We support the Palestinian leadership’s plan to go to the U.N .because it’s a natural right of the Palestinians and part of the political battle against Israel. Regardless of the outcome, this step should be part of the political battle we fight against occupation. It will also be an

opportunity to enlarge the circle of solidarity with the Palestinian people's rights, and to expose Israel's policies and the supportive U.S. policy."

There are different ways to view the potential achievement of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza – which all the PLO parties and Hamas support. One is to see it as the final goal — that is clearly the perspective of the Fatah leadership.

Another perspective, taken by the more progressive forces in the Palestinian movement is that it could be a step toward the liberation of Palestine as a whole, and the establishment of a democratic state with equal rights for all, in place of the present racist and exclusionary Zionist state.

Palestinian nationalist, Islamic and left forces have argued against the negotiations that the U.S. and Israel have been calling for in recent years. They have argued that under the present conditions such talks could lead only to the creation of Palestinian bantustans on pieces of the West Bank instead of an independent state.

The role of international solidarity

We in the Party for Socialism and Liberation and the ANSWER Coalition stand for the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people who have suffered so much for so long.

Our task is not to take sides in the debate over the tactic of going to the U.N. seeking recognition at this time. Our responsibility is to demand an end to U.S. aid and support that has made Israel into the military power that it is today and made its occupation of Palestine possible.

We demand a halt to the billions of dollars of military aid that flow to Israel every year. We know that nothing that U.S. imperialism does in the Middle East serves any purpose other than profit and empire. And we stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for true self-determination, including the right of return.

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