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Buying Into Palestinian Statehood

By YOSSE ALPHER, COLETTE AVITAL, SHLOMO GAZIT, and MARK HELLER

TEL AVIV — Instead of wasting time and energy trying to revive a moribund Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the United States and European Union should take another look at the Palestinian initiative to seek U.N. recognition in September. What is described in some quarters as a recipe for new strife and confrontation can actually be leveraged into a win-win situation for Israelis, Palestinians and the world.

The Palestinians under Mahmoud Abbas want the United Nations to grant them a sovereign state based on the 1967 boundaries with East Jerusalem as its capital. That's all. It is not asking the U.N. to solve the refugee /right-of-return issue or to determine who owns the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It is opting to convert an intractable conflict between a state and a liberation movement into a state-to-state conflict with manageable parameters.

Why not offer the Palestinians what they want, but add elements that could render the resolution acceptable to a majority of Israelis?

Israel wants acceptance as a Jewish state with its recognized capital in Jerusalem. It needs assurances regarding the nature and priorities of future negotiations, with the truly intractable issues postponed to a later phase. It needs solid security arrangements, understandings regarding Hamas rule in Gaza, and a viable incentive from an Arab world that has long offered to reward it for moving forward with the Palestinians.

Here are the components of a possible "win-win" U.N. resolution regarding Palestinian statehood:

- Reaffirm support for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of two states for two peoples and the right of the Jewish and Palestinian peoples to self-determination, without prejudice to the rights of all citizens and minority groups. Recall, in this context, U.N. General Assembly resolution 181 of 1947 that called for the establishment

of a Jewish state and an Arab state.

- Acknowledge institutional and security reform, economic development and state-building efforts — especially in the West Bank, under the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, which have helped lay the foundations for Palestinian statehood — and endorse the position articulated by the World Bank and the United Nations that the Palestinian Authority is “well positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future.”

- Accordingly, support the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 lines with its capital in East Jerusalem in parallel with Israel’s recognized capital in West Jerusalem, and with mutually agreed territorial swaps and modifications, subject to negotiation — a state that will live side by side with Israel in peace and security.

- Recognize that extending the authority of a Palestinian state to the Gaza Strip will depend on effective control there by a legitimate Palestinian government that exercises authority in the West Bank, is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

- Call for both states to engage in good faith negotiations on the basis of this and previous relevant resolutions and agreements in order to resolve all outstanding issues between them, beginning with the issues of borders, settlements, water and security arrangements. Specifically, security arrangements — including multi-layered international, regional and bilateral guarantees — should confront and neutralize threats and enable the phased withdrawal of Israeli forces from a demilitarized Palestinian state with an effective internal security force and without compromising Israeli security.

- Note the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed by the Arab League in 2002, and call for regional states to assist in creating an atmosphere conducive to negotiation and agreement, including by intensifying efforts to advance coexistence and normalization of relations between Arab League members and Israel.

A creative and courageous approach to leveraging the Palestinian initiative will not end the conflict. But it could make it far more manageable.

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