



Israel Debates No. 9

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The Proclamation of a Palestinian State: Threat or Opportunity for Israel?

The annual United Nations General Assembly opens in New York on 20 September this year. The most important item on the agenda is without a doubt the plan by the Palestinian leadership under Mahmud Abbas to request international recognition of the Palestinian state in the 1967 borders. Referring to the many years of standstill in the negotiation process with Israel and fruitless attempts to restart bilateral talks, the Palestinians emphasize that this political move is a last resort. If bilateral talks are not resumed – and there is nothing to show that they will – Mahmud Abbas is certain to take that step. Nor does he have any other options, having pursued the plan with great determination in the past few months. Back-peddalling now, without there being credible negotiations to underscore that move, would mean his political end.

Israel rejects the Palestinians' project. In May this year, in his speech before the American Congress, Prime Minister Netanyahu had emphatically rejected a solution to the conflict on the basis of the 1967 borders. The Israeli government's central argument is that Palestinians taking the case for statehood to the UN would be a unilateral action, an infringement of the Oslo-agreements and an attempt to delegitimize Israel. The government argues that such a move is not the right way to achieve peace, since without the consent and collaboration of Israel nothing materially changes the facts. Instead, frustrated hopes and expectations on the Palestinian side might lead to violent provocations and the outbreak of a third Intifada. Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned that the Palestinians were planning bloodshed in the West Bank for the day following the vote. He demanded the annulment of the Oslo-agreements and called for the termination of relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA). Other government ministers too called for drastic measures. The left-liberal daily Haaretz in an editorial attested growing signs of hysteria to the Israeli leadership.

The Palestinians can only attain full membership of the UN upon the recommendation of the UN Security Council. Since the US has already announced its veto, Palestine will not become a full-fledged member; the 194th UN member state after South Sudan. That explains why the Palestinian leadership have instead opted to request the recognition of the Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders by the General Assembly. They will need a two-thirds majority vote or 129 out of 193 member states of the UN. This would merely be a political recognition and not be binding under international law. Observers take the view that the Palestinians are likely to win at least 130 votes.

With regard to the Palestinian state recognition, the EU is politically divided. While all member states agree that bilateral negotiations are the best way to resolve the conflict, there is no common position beyond that. Four EU states (Denmark, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands) have already spoken out against the recognition of a Palestinian state, at present 11 are in favour and the other member states have not yet adopted a position. Germany set out its position as early as April this year. On the occasion of a visit of Netanyahu to Berlin, Chancellor Angela Merkel said that Germany would not support Palestinian unilateralism.

Israel looks upon the development with great concern. What it finds particularly worrying is that apart from the Arab, Muslim and non-aligned states, a number of European countries are also likely to vote against Israel. Defence Minister Ehud Barak described the international wave of recognition of a Palestinian state as a "political tsunami" heading for Israel. This description has since then regularly come up in the Israeli debate. The majority of Israelis and the political commentators reject the Palestinian state recognition. They fear the outbreak of more violence, a new Intifada or even war. Those who do not see the entire process as a threat to Israel and those who even see it as an opportunity for real progress in the peace process remain in the minority. In the present issue of *Israel Debates* two key actors in the debate present their analyses and share their views on this issue.

Dr. Zvi Bar'el, Middle East correspondent of the daily Haaretz, views the Palestinian initiative to have their own state not only as a chance for the Palestinians but also as an opportunity for Israel to finally determine its borders and define its identity. He runs through various scenarios following the proclamation of a Palestinian state and points out that, should the process of acknowledging the state fail, this might spark violence and lead to a third Intifada. Israel might then use this response as a means to vilify the PA and discredit it as violent and terrorist. He believes that the basic course for the creation of a Palestinian state has been set, since the international community acknowledged its justification. In practice, he believes, there no longer is a status quo. He warns that the day will come when Israel can no longer avoid negotiations with a then acknowledged Palestinian State, adding that Israel will then have far less leeway than today.

Dr. Yoaz Hendel of the Bar-Ilan University, who in August this year was appointed Director of Prime Minister Netanyahu's Media and Information office, believes – contrary to Zvi Bar'el – that it is the proclamation of a Palestinian state that is likely to trigger a third Intifada. In his opinion, the proclamation of a state isn't worth a penny because it wouldn't contribute to solving any of the issues. Instead it is more likely to raise the tensions, and the prospect of a solution to the conflict would move even further away. If it should come to an outburst of uncontrolled violence, Abbas, Fayyad and the PA would have a lot to lose: economic growth, political calm, a stable flow of funds, investments, security cooperation with Israel against Hamas. He claims that Abbas would then, if he could, prefer to abandon the demands to which he was encouraged by Obama's Middle East policy and the latter's unsparing position towards Israel, and return to the status quo. This, according to Dr. Hendel, is also in the interest of Israel. From there, the author believes, one could slowly and calmly work towards progress in the peace process.

Dr. Ralf Hexel, Director FES Office Israel
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The Status Quo – the best option at this stage

By Dr.Yoaz Hendel

On November 15, 1988 the Palestinian National Council issued the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in Algiers. This mainly symbolic declaration was immediately recognized by the Arab League. Exactly a month later, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed Resolution 43/177 recognizing Yassir Arafat's "proclamation of the State of Palestine" in Algiers. One hundred and four nations voted for the resolution, thirty-six abstained and only two voted against it (Israel and the United States). Ostensibly, this was a significant break-through for the Palestinians: world-wide recognition of their rights to a state and a concrete step towards realizing the dream.

And now, twenty-three years later, we are on the eve of an additional United Nations declaration regarding the Palestinians. There is still no Palestinian state despite widespread support of the Arab bloc—and an additional declaration is in the offing for discussion by the international community. Throughout the period that has transpired ever since the Algiers declaration, many attempts have been made to advance the peace process. Some of these attempts were based on wishful thinking rather than political logic. All have failed.

The Palestinian identity has been consolidated; governmental autonomy has been created in the Judea-Samaria region; economic and semi-military power hubs have been formed—yet all these trends were reversed due to violent outbreaks. The al-Aqsa intifada that began in 2000 by conscious decision of Yasser Arafat symbolized the dream and its demise. The current Palestinian reality was not formed by the United Nations declaration of 1988, nor by the Oslo Agreements of the 1990s and not even by the Israeli willingness for compromises—instead, it was created by the

Palestinian choice to go for broke, all or nothing. The violent struggle of the al-Aqsa intifada and its brutal suicide-bomber terrorist attacks led to cutbacks in the international credit extended to the Palestinians, curtailing of the PA's very ability to govern, and finally—to dissolution and schism within Palestinian society itself, between Gaza and Judea-Samaria.

We must examine the present Palestinian declaration on the background of changes that have taken place since the conclusion of the Second Intifada (al-Aqsa Intifada). The Israeli defense system succeeded in vanquishing suicide-bomber terror and bringing the Palestinian leadership to the conclusion that the use of terror could not cause real progress.

At the beginning of 2009, the IDF Central Command (whose jurisdiction includes Judea and Samaria) decided to add the following words to their list of military objectives: "strengthening of the Palestinian Authority." According to the military arrangement, this goal became the objective of the military ranks under the Central Command and especially for the Judea-Samaria Division. This decision was the result of the relative quiet created on the ground. Many in the IDF spoke highly of the reform programs of the Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad. One highly placed intelligence man said that "He [Fayyad] sees himself as a Ben Gurion." Ben Gurion first created state institutions, and only afterwards declared the establishment of a state. Fayyad has carried out reforms in government ministries and municipal systems and, with the help of the Americans, he also tried to organize the security apparatus. Entire battalions were trained by Lieutenant General [Keith] Dayton, the US Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, five hundred soldiers in each battalion. One of the battalions was deployed in Jenin, another in Nablus—a city that was once an embattled terror stronghold

has been developing in recent years at an exponential rate.

Investments in infrastructure are also clearly evident: educational systems, schools, roads, and sophisticated water systems that we have not seen in the mountainous region for years. Renewed prosperity is evident in the authority's territories. From the internal Palestinian viewpoint, these are assets that are likely to disappear as a result of the declaration process. In order to understand the potential for damage, we have to understand the political approach of the heads of the Palestinian Authority.

Abu Mazen and Fayyad, regarded as proponents of a political solution, argued on behalf of achieving a state via positive persuasion of the world even in the bad old days of Arafat who talked peace but used terror. However, this was not their only path; throughout the entire rehabilitation period, both leaders preserved the option of popular resistance. In a kind of strange *mélange*, youths were sent to "non-violent demonstrations" and among the demonstrators-- many of whom were paid for their participation—were radical far-left activists from Israel and around the world. The IDF called these "violent demonstrations" and viewed it as a Palestinian strategy of scattering their eggs among several baskets: instead of creating only quiet and advancing the state under construction, the Palestinians created an apparatus of deterrence against Israel and maintained a youth militia—stone throwers for a possible day of judgment in the future.

Israel decided to tolerate this double-sided approach of the Palestinian Authority and judge the process by its results. Recent years have seen significant, strong cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Both sides shared the same interest: fighting the Hamas. Abu Mazen and his people feared a fighting opposition that would take over the Palestinian Authority at a moment of weakness, as had

taken place in Gaza. Israel wanted to strengthen Abu Mazen to secure relative quiet. The only way to enjoy the best of both possible worlds was to assist the Palestinians in strengthening their security battalions, supporting them economically with the help of donations from around the world, and most important of all—striking at the terror infrastructures and Hamas financing in Judea and Samaria.

The status quo did not have a clear prognosis for a declared Palestinian state, but did spell progress and development for the Palestinian Authority and its citizens. It should be noted in this context that during Ehud Olmert's office as Prime Minister, a far-reaching agreement was extended to Abu Mazen to resolve the conflict (according to Olmert's recollections). Abu Mazen never returned with a positive answer. From Mazen's point of view, core issues such as Jerusalem and [Palestinian] refugees were too far-reaching—a Rubicon that he could never cross. Instead Abu Mazen worked on making headway in constructing a state from the bottom up.

The great change in Palestinian policy can be traced to Obama's rise to power. The automatic backing that the State of Israel had always received, dissipated all at once. The Cairo Address and the coldness exhibited by Obama to Netanyahu's government expressed a new world-view and the message was quickly assimilated by the Palestinians. The construction freeze even in settlement blocs that had been authorized by Bush's government was the last nail in this coffin. With the termination of the freeze and Obama's weakening, Abu Mazen called the freeze "climbing up a tall tree." Abu Mazen claimed that "Obama put me up there but didn't leave a ladder [to get down]."

The change in the Palestinian approach led to a hardening of their positions, to raising the level of their demands and distancing themselves from any practical proposal for

conducting negotiations. With the lack of dialog, the connection to Israel became a struggle in the diplomatic arena whose culmination is marked by a declaration of independence in September.

In Israel's eyes, the declaration itself lacks all meaning. General Yaakov Amidror, head of the National Security Council (NSC), has stated that the United Nations can pass a resolution tomorrow that the sun rises in the West and sets in the East as long as enough countries are willing to go along. The United Nations has always exhibited a one-sided bias against Israel, thus any resolution opposed by Israel will pass in the United Nations—no matter what the content of the resolution. The Palestinian state will be declared with a large majority, as happened in 1988—even if that means additional damage to the chances for a political solution. While Israel has some ability to influence the numbers of opposers and abstainers to the proposal, it is clear that with the link of the Arab States to the unaffiliated nations and automatic voting, chances are very high that a Palestinian state will be declared. Thus we reach the final question: What happens on the day after?

Declaration of a state, without a real agreement and partition of additional territory, will not change a single fact on the ground. Even the Palestinian Authority itself has no real interests in fanning the fires, as explained above. The reality—that the large cities are developing, contributions are flowing and investors are investing—this suits the world-view of Abu Mazen and Fayyad.

Thus the first, most convenient possibility for the Palestinians (and also Israel) is to put an end to the conflict with the very act of declaration. In other words, to supply a ladder to both sides on which to descend from the September tree and thus dissipate the current tension. Theoretically, if international and internal Palestinian responses to the declaration of independence will remain only

symbolic (similar to what took place in 1988), then we will be able to return to the familiar status quo: security cooperation, economic Palestinian prosperity and slow, quiet progress on the negotiation axis. Abu Mazen will have gone through the motions in his determination to declare a state and the Israelis will go through the motions of opposing that same state.

Yet there is a second option—one that is worst of all for both sides: transforming the declaration into a match that sets the territories on fire. The Palestinian Authority has no interest in finding itself conducting a third intifada and losing its many achievements since the conclusion of the Second Intifada. But unfortunately, they are not the deciding factor in the reality of the Middle East today. The revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria have proved that political interests and governmental rationale carry only partial weight in upheavals.

When Abu Mazen chose the path of frontal diplomatic attack and de-legitimization campaigns against Israel, he chose a dangerous rhetoric. The two-headed sword that chips away at the Israeli image can do the same to the one holding the weapon. The Palestinian public, like the Israeli public, is well connected to the media and to Facebook. The same means that led to revolutions in the Arab world are also likely to lead to an uprising of youths who expect the declaration of a Palestinian state to contain functional aspects as well. If nothing happens in the short-term after the declaration, disappointment is likely to take the masses out to the streets. The fact that the social protest movement has even taken root in Israel only strengthens this hypothesis.

While Abu Mazen and Fayyad may emphatically resist transforming words to actions, this may not be true of the Palestinian public. In this age of the Arab Spring, we have no way of knowing whether Mazen and

Fayyad's opposition can prevent what they would consider a disaster.

A number of attempts have been made to date by civilian bodies in the Palestinian Authority to drag the masses to the streets via social networks on the internet, with only partial success. Only few emerged to demonstrate, and initially shrill war-cries faded into silence.

One could argue that the low turnouts show that Abu Mazen's political interests are clear to the street protestors. However, we must remember that the events behind the cries to take to the streets, were memorial days. Let us take the example of the events related to the recent Nakba Day (literally day of catastrophe), the day that symbolizes the establishment of the State of Israel. Initially (a few weeks into 2011) Abu Mazen favorably viewed the internet-based call for popular revolution against Israel on Nakba Day; this suited his political world-view—to maintain security and ties to Israel while fighting Israel in the realm of international public opinion. But then, the Israeli and global media began to evince interest in this call to arms; almost half a million people signed the internet-based petition. The Israeli defense system estimated that at least a hundred thousand of the signers were from the Palestinian Authority.

In response, IDF's Central Command--responsible for the territories of Judea and Samaria-- recruited large forces that were similar to deployments during the intifada days of the suicide bombers. The fear was of human masses overrunning isolated settlements.

Abu Mazen saw the numbers and deployment of forces, and was concerned. He transmitted a message to Israel via the Palestinian security apparatus that he intended to maintain tight control over the protests and ensure that the protestors would not leave the territories of the PA. The end result was that the number of protestors was small and the demonstrations ended quickly. But we are left with the

question: Would Mazen have been able to squash a larger number of leaderless protestors, if their war-cry had been heard?

In contrast to Nakba Day that takes place every year (though this year it held additional meaning due to the Arab Spring), an event such as the declaration of Palestinian independence takes place only once every generation. The first time was in 1988 when the PLO still resided outside the territories of Judea and Samaria; this time, there is a close connection between territory under control of the Palestinian Authority and the declaration.

Israel keenly remembers the events leading up to the eruption of the two intifadas in the 1980s and 2000s. Minor events, ostensibly controllable, turned into long-term wars of attrition. Popular uprisings or, alternately, violence in the age of social networks and protests in the Arab world have generally bypassed traditional leadership channels. While we can analyze and evaluate the intentions of the Palestinian Authority, we have no way of understanding or predicting the trends of the masses.

In addition to the possibility of unplanned violence we must take into account the strained relations between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. Although a Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation Agreement was signed between the sides a number of weeks ago, it failed before the ink dried on the paper. Abu Mazen has been waging an all-out war against Hamas ever since the revolution was carried out in Gaza; he has acted resolutely against [Hamas'] economic infrastructure and activists. Meanwhile, Fatah loyalists in the Gaza Strip have been subjected to great violence under Hamas rule. Abu Mazen was dragged into the Reconciliation Agreement out of his desire to present a united front before the Palestinian declaration of independence. But the fact is that despite the agreement, the disputes between the sides have not been resolved. This means that mass protests and even

governmental anarchy can be in the interests of the Hamas movement.

Another possible scenario that the State of Israel must take into consideration is the possibility of a diplomatic-legal onslaught that might accompany the declaration of Palestinian independence. Although such a declaration has no legal validity as cited above, the assertion of rights over Judea and Samaria may turn into diplomatic and legal lawsuits. Even if their legal basis is extremely flimsy at best, such proceedings can have an adverse effect on the Israeli image.

Israel faces three disparate diplomatic frontlines: the United States, Europe and the Arab world. On the first front, the relationship between Israel and the United States is strong despite past friction. Obama's government is turning increasingly inward to domestic concerns while foreign affairs issues such as upheavals in the Arab world and Israeli-Palestinian relations remain outside the American sphere of interest. The United States will continue to support Israel and even announced that it will oppose a unilateral Palestinian declaration of statehood.

The European diplomatic front features countries with clear positions both for and against Israel, without connection to the Palestinian declaration. True, the anti-Israeli trend within some European countries is likely to receive tail-wind backing from the United Nations declaration but this does not signal a significant change for the worse. Regarding the Arab world in Israel's immediate vicinity, the Arab States are likely to maintain their tradition of flexing their muscles in vehement declarations against Israel without resorting to actual deeds. The Palestinians never interested the Arab States except as a political weapon with which to further their domestic interests. And in the current environment of actual threats to local rulers in an era of revolution, these rulers are not likely to take real risks.

In summary we can characterize the anticipated declaration in September as another step in the Israeli-Arab struggle for world opinion. Abu Mazen does not want to realize a state because he knows that the political process involved would force him to wrestle with painful core issues. From his point of view, it would be best to wrap up everything in token, hollow statements. The State of Israel also has no real interest in escalating the tension with the Palestinians. Thus, the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seems as remote as ever.

Peace initiatives are not realistic so long as there is no attempt to educate the masses toward peace and compromise on the Palestinian side as well. Behind the declarations and proclamations, both sides are interested in managing the conflict—improving quality of life without searching for magic solutions of peace now.

Nevertheless the potential for conflagration exists, if only due to Abu Mazen's inflammatory rhetoric and the self-imposed constraints of the Palestinians that do not allow them to backtrack from the rhetoric. Thus, the fate of peace is sealed; the only question is how the disappointed masses will determine the fate of war on the Day After.

Dr. Yoaz Hendel is a columnist for the daily newspapers Yedioth Ahronoth and Makor Rishon. He is also a researcher and a lecturer at the Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies at the Bar Ilan University. Hendel is co-author of two books: *Let the IDF Win: The Self-Fulfilling Slogan* (Hebrew, Yedioth Ahronoth, 2010) and of *Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War* (English version, Potomac Books, November 2011).

A State for Negotiations

By Dr. Zvi Bar'el

In 1980, thirteen years into the occupation, MP Moshe Dayan had promulgated his plan for a Palestinian autonomy. It was a unilateral proposal, which aimed at transferring civil authorities to the Palestinians as an introduction for further negotiations with Jordan. "The Palestinians in the occupied territories would not need to announce publicly their acceptance of the plan," wrote Dayan and the "sovereignty will stay with Israel". The plan, had it been accepted by the Israeli government, meant to last for five years after which, new negotiations will start.

Twenty-one years later, it is the Palestinians' turn to promote their unilateral plan: an internationally recognized independent state "one that the Israelis will not need to announce their acceptance", to paraphrase on Dayan's suggestion. It is not known yet if and how the plan is going to play out, how many states will indeed grant their recognition and, most importantly, will it go through the Security Council for voting.

The Palestinian Authority, lead by its President Mahmud Abbas is adamant to proceed with the initiative, whatever may be the results. So far, Israel and the United States are vehemently against it, and the obvious dilemma is what will be the implications once a resolution to recognize a Palestinian state will have. The other important question is what will be the implications if such a resolution is denied.

Between the US and a Palestinian State

"The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with the other states.

...The political existence of the state is independent of recognition by the other states.

Even before recognition the state has the right to defend its integrity and independence, to provide for its conservation and prosperity, and consequently to organize itself as it sees fit, to legislate upon its interests, administer its services, and to define the jurisdiction and competence of its courts.

The exercise of these rights has no other limitation than the exercise of the rights of other states according to international law".

Such is the language of articles 1 and 3 of the Montevideo Declarations of 1933, which phrases the declarative theory of statehood. Neither the Palestinians nor Israel have to dig that far in history in order to acknowledge the Palestinians' right for their own state. Suffice is to recall Obama's speech from June 2009 which was followed by Netanyahu's speech only some days later to realize that the mutually accepted solution by the two antagonists of the current Palestinian initiative is a "two states for two people" solution. The combination of the Montevideo declaration with Obama's vision laid the basis for the Palestinian claim.

Nevertheless, the legitimacy of an independent Palestinian state is not only, and not even primarily about its legality nor about its viability. It is about feasibility. Can it overcome the American and the Israeli objection?

While the American position that demands a "negotiated solution" has merit, it is not clear yet how Obama is going to face an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly that may support the Palestinians' initiative. For an administration that has already been internationally criticized for its veto vote on the anti-settlements resolution, and for a president that faces now a new reality in the Middle East, one that empowers peoples' call for democracy and self determination, it looks almost impossible to reject the Palestinians' call. A call that is supported by all Arab regimes and peoples. It is not just a moral question; it

affects the US' status in the evolving Middle East and its ability to maintain its influential position in an area that is already suspicious of the American intentions.

Hence, Israel's attitude may put the US in a difficult corner where it will have to choose sides. This is a dangerous bet for both Israel and the US. This is why it is imperative to weigh Israel's objection against the possibility that it may remain alone in the international arena.

Negotiating with a State

Prior to any analysis it is necessary to remember that the Palestinian initiative stemmed from the paralyzed negotiations with Israel. Farther, the Palestinians have realized that Israel regards the negotiations as a substitute for a solution, thus, negotiations have become a permanent state of affairs, "negotiations for the sake of negotiations" with no tangible solution in the horizon.

Can a new status change that equation for the Palestinians?

Given that the political scene in Israel will not change soon, it is conceivable that Israel will try to toughen its position towards the Palestinian authority if statehood is recognized. Most probably, it may expand building plans in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. It can also bloc money transfer to and from the PA. If Hamas will be part of the PA, Israel can also tag it as a "terrorist authority" like it did at the time of the second Intifada, and impose partial siege on cities and areas in order to disrupt its functions as a state. In other words, Israel will have to turn to sanctions policy against the PA.

However, these measures could instigate a third Intifada which Israel would want to prevent, since this time the Intifada may involve active interference of those states who had supported the Palestinian statehood. Israel may find itself confronting not only a lame Arab League, but also direct pressure from Russia,

China and friendly European countries. Moreover, Israeli sanctions on the PA may entail sanctions on Israel by those countries who would support an independent Palestinian state.

Palestinian statehood may mean also that states will establish official representation in East Jerusalem, thus recognizing de-facto the status of the city as the Palestinian capital. Israel will be put then in a difficult position where it will have to decide how to handle those states that on one hand have friendly and strategic relations with Israel while on the other hand undermine its Policy towards the Palestinians.

A Palestinian state will also have a formal status in international forums and organizations, and it will be able to join the international criminal court in The Hague, and file suits against alleged Israeli 'war crimes', it could ask Israelis on occupied land to become Palestinian citizens or leave and it could seek extra rights as 'prisoners of war' Palestinians currently in Israeli jails.

In short, a Palestinian State may have more power to persuade Israel to accept what the US failed to convince it to do.

Ostensibly these are bad news for an Israeli government that has no "peace policy" and that managed to evade meaningful negotiations. However, eventually, Israel might find itself isolated from the rest of the world and forced to conduct negotiations with a recognized state with a much narrower maneuvering space.

A State of Two Organizations?

Should the PA proceed with its initiative it will have first to put its own house in order. The biggest challenge is to translate the reconciliation agreement with Hamas into practice. Although an international recognition is not about granting it to the political body that runs the Occupied Territories, but to a state, the PA cannot afford to appear on the

international stage as two rival entities. One that recognizes Israel and strives to have a peace treaty with it, and another entity, Hamas, that does not recognize Israel and has not denounced terror as a means to achieve its goals. This divide plays not only into the hands of the Israeli argument; it serves also the American and the European opposing approach. The PA may certainly argue that the US and the EU are having normal relations with Lebanon in spite of Hezbollah's participation in its government, and that they recognize Syria and Iran in spite of their abhorring policies. However, there is a fundamental difference between states that are already recognized and a state-candidate, which has to prove its good intentions in order to be recognized.

Abba's initiative puts Hamas in a chalking dilemma. Recognizing Israel may entail its adoption as a legitimate organization and a political partner by the international community, however such recognition will undermine its ideological foundation and grant Abbas a huge political victory. However, Hamas, one has to notice, is not entirely ideological, after all it had participated in the general elections in 2006 which were based on the Oslo Agreements. As an off spring of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, it may find the adequate interpretation that will allow it to imitate its mother-movement and to participate in the political scene. In fact, it was Khaled Mashaal, who had suggested, "giving negotiations between the PA and Israel another chance", a statement which infuriated Mahmoud al-Zahar, Hamas' "foreign minister" of Gaza's government.

While it is difficult to guess what will be Hamas' position, some similar cases teach us that in time of historic opportunities, rivals tend to unite even if they may split later. Such was the case of the Kurdish rival clans in Kurdistan, the Muslim Brotherhood and the secular movements on the eve of the revolution, or the

Shiite rivals in Iraq. Will Hamas and the PA act differently? It seems unlikely given the situation in Syria that may leave Hamas without an Arab custodian.

Towards a Third Intifada?

Israeli scenarios, especially those that are marketed by the right wing, prophecy a violent outburst of the Palestinians' streets, leading to a third Intifada. It is not entirely a wild guess; however, one should also consider the logic behind such an intifada. If it aims at convincing the international community to recognize the Palestinian state, this support had been already granted even without any violent acts on the part of the Palestinians. If it aims at pressuring Israel to adopt the Palestinian initiative, it may well achieve the contrary. Israel will use the third intifada as evidence to the righteousness of its policy. Once again, Israel will use the intifada to tarnish the PA as a violent and even a terrorist gang, and it will serve as an excuse to claim that not only statehood for such "bandits" is out of question; even negotiations should not start before the PA imposes calm in the streets. And, if negotiations are to take place, it is the intifada, and not the peace process, that should be the focus of those negotiations.

This Israeli "logic" is no secret and the Palestinians are very well aware of it. Accordingly, while a new intifada may push indecisive states to support the Palestinian initiative, it may as well have some bad implications. It may have its effect on the Israeli public who still lives through the horrors of the second intifada, and it may even anger the Arab publics who are struggling now to establish new futures for themselves, and would not like a Palestinian intifada to draw their attention to the old Palestinian cause. A Palestinian intifada will have to compete with the situation in Syria, Yemen and Libya, while in 1987 and 2000 they had all the Arab attentions for themselves. In addition to these arguments, one should not ignore the

economic situation in the West Bank that, although far from being satisfying, it is still better than the traumatic years of the intifada. Hopefully this factor will play a role in the Palestinians' considerations whether or not to start an intifada.

While the Palestinians' struggle to achieve international recognition in their state may restrain plans for a third intifada and promote peace negotiations, failing to achieve such recognition may ignite a new violent round of clashes. Unfortunately, this scenario is widely ignored by Israel and the US who assume that lack of recognition will not change the state status quo, and that the Palestinians will return humbly to the negotiating table.

An Inevitable State

In conclusion, I would argue that a Palestinian state is not a matter of choice anymore. The international community has already adopted the idea that a Palestinian state is inevitable. If there are hesitations concerning its materialization, they refer to the appropriate way to achieve it, not about its validity. Israel must also realize that there is no status quo anymore. That the change in the international community's approach, the American pressure and the isolation that Israel is experiencing now, are part of a dynamism that Israel cannot control any longer. Although experience teaches us that Israel had declined any suggestion to initiate new policies, it would be wise on her part not to adhere to that *modus operandi*. Israel, who is in a permanent search to define its identity, must define its borders and to adopt the Palestinian state initiative is an opportunity for herself and her identity as much as it is for the Palestinians.

Dr. Zvi Bar'el is *Haaretz'* analyst for Middle Eastern Affairs, a member of its editorial board and previously its managing editor. He is a senior fellow at the Center of Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University and a lecturer at Sapir Academic College.

Responsible:

Dr. Ralf Hexel,
Head of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Israel

Authors:

Dr. Yoaz Hendel
Dr. Zvi Bar'el

Homepage: www.fes.org.il

Email: fes@fes.org.il

