



PERSPECTIVES

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President Trump, Tell the Palestinians: No Negotiations Without Recognition of Jewish Self-Determination

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: While President Donald Trump was right to reiterate the American commitment to a “future of peace and stability in the region, including peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians” when he addressed the UN General Assembly on September 25, this is not enough. He should demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel’s right to exist in peace and security *as a Jewish state* and insist that the US will not press Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians unless and until that happens.

The great promise of the letters exchanged between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat in September 1993 was that Israel and the Palestinians (and the Arab world more generally) seemed on the cusp of peace.

After all, Israel recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. And the PLO, for its part, formally renounced violence, agreed to negotiate with Israel and accept relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and recognized the “right of the state of Israel to exist in peace and security.”

Yet, while the “peace process” has frozen the conflict, a final agreement seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. A return to first principles is needed.

Rather than endlessly focus on renewing negotiations, an alternative paradigm should be applied. The onus must shift to the Palestinians to demonstrate their acceptance of Jewish self-determination. The Middle East Forum’s Israel Victory Project, which has received bipartisan support in the US Congress and

both coalition and opposition support in the Israeli Knesset, is spearheading such an initiative. Its fresh perspective should be supported.

While President Donald Trump was right to reiterate the American commitment to a “future of peace and stability in the region, including peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians,” when he addressed the UN General Assembly on September 25, this is not enough. He should demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel’s right to exist in peace and security *as a Jewish state* and insist that the US will not press Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians unless and until that happens.

A Jewish state for the Jewish people, after all, was exactly what the General Assembly intended in November 1947 when it called for the partition of the Palestine Mandate into “the Arab State, the Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem.”

Although the legitimacy of Israel as a Jewish state does not stand or fall on this resolution – in declaring the independence of Israel on the eve of the Sabbath on May 14, 1948, the Jewish People’s Council also stressed the Jewish people’s natural and historic rights – it reaffirms the legitimacy of Jewish national rights in (what was to become) the state of Israel.

The Palestinians have steadfastly refused to recognize Jewish self-determination. To be clear, in recognizing Israel’s right to exist in peace and security in September 1993, the PLO was not, as might have been thought, accepting Jewish national rights. It was playing a double game. Chairman Arafat made this clear in a leaked speech delivered in a Johannesburg mosque in May 1994 when he called upon the *umma*, the Islamic nation, to “fight, to begin the jihad to liberate Jerusalem.”

It is not simply that the PLO supported the General Assembly’s determination in 1975, rescinded in 1991, that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” It is that the PLO leadership continues to speak of Jews as a religious community rather than a People, and of Zionism as a colonial usurper rather than the national-liberation movement that it is. And this is to say nothing of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, which controls the Gaza Strip.

More troubling still is that the “State of Palestine” is party to the Arab Charter on Human Rights (2004), which describes Zionism as a “violation of human rights,” a “threat to international peace and security,” and a “fundamental obstacle to the realization of the basic rights of peoples.” This treaty goes on to require its adherents to “condemn and endeavor to eliminate” Zionism. (Sadly,

the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights [1981] also calls for the elimination of Zionism.)

A plausible reading of the Arab human rights treaty would commit the Palestinians to the destruction of Israel. What else can be meant by calling for the condemnation and elimination of Zionism? This is unacceptable, and irreconcilable with the idea of good faith peacemaking with the Jewish state.

Any peace reached between Israel and the Palestinians, as remote as it may seem, would surely be a hollow "peace in our time" without the recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security as a Jewish state. The US should not expect Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians absent this recognition.

Almost more than anything else, President Trump values loyalty. He knows that Israel, often beleaguered and abused in the international arena, is one of the US's strongest allies because Washington and Jerusalem share both strategic interests and liberal democratic values.

To his credit, Trump has spoken some hard truths in defense of these shared interests and values. He has wisely withdrawn the US from the UN Human Rights Council, a bastion of anti-Israel vitriol that rivals the now defunct UN Human Rights Commission. He moved the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, cut funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, and ordered the PLO's Washington office closed.

These and other measures further the Israel Victory Project's mission to bolster Israel on its path to victory over Palestinian rejectionism. They are a step in the right direction.

Israel without Zionism is not Israel. Israel without Zionism loses its purpose and *raison d'être*. Israel, with a new Basic Law describing it as the "nation state of the Jewish People, in which it realizes its natural, cultural, religious, and historical right to self-determination," is inconceivable without Zionism. That PLO leader Mahmoud Abbas recently denounced this new law in the General Assembly as a "gross breach and real danger, both politically and legally, and reminds us of the apartheid state that existed in South Africa" and, on behalf of the "State of Palestine," filed a lawsuit against the US in the International Court of Justice over the embassy move shows that he just does not get it.

President Trump should make all of this clear to the Palestinians, Israel, and the world.

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