

Why Palestinians need the UN

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President Obama gave a rousing call to action in his [controversial speech last month](#), admonishing Arab governments to embrace democracy and provide freedom to their populations. We in Saudi Arabia, although not cited, took his call seriously. We noted, however, that he conspicuously failed to demand the same rights to self-determination for Palestinians — despite the occupation of their territory by the region’s strongest military power.

Soon after, Obama again called into question America’s claim to be a beacon of human rights by allowing [Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu](#) to set the terms of the agenda on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Even more depressing than the sight of Congress applauding the denial of basic human rights to the Palestinian people was America turning its back on its stated ideals.

Despite the [consternation and criticism](#) that greeted the president’s words about the 1967 borders, he offered no substantive change to U.S. policy. America’s bottom line is still that negotiations should take place with the aim of reaching a two-state solution, with the starting point for the division of Israeli and Palestinian territory at the borders in existence before the 1967 Six-Day War.

Obama is correct that the 1967 lines are the only realistic starting point for talks and, thus, for achieving peace. The notion that Palestinians would accept any other terms is simply unrealistic. Although [Netanyahu rejected the suggestions](#), stating “We can’t go back to those indefensible lines, and we’re going to have a long-term military presence along the Jordan [River],” both sides have long accepted the 1967 lines as a starting point. In 2008, Ehud Olmert, then Israeli prime minister, told the Knesset: “We must give up Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem and return to the core of the territory that is the State of Israel prior to 1967, with minor corrections dictated by the reality created since then.” Last November, Secretary of State

Hillary Clinton and Netanyahu declared in a joint statement that “the United States believes that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree on an outcome which ends the conflict and reconciles the Palestinian goal of an independent and viable state, based on the 1967 lines, with agreed swaps, and the Israeli goal of a Jewish state with secure and recognized borders that reflect subsequent developments and meet Israeli security requirements.”

One conclusion can be drawn from recent events: that any peace plans co-authored by the United States and Israel would be untenable and that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remain intractable as long as U.S. policy is unduly beholden to Israel. Despite his differences with Netanyahu, Obama is stymied in his efforts to play a constructive role. On the eve of an election year, his administration will no doubt bow to pressure from special interests and a Republican-dominated Congress, and back away from forcing Israel to accept concrete terms that would bring Palestinians to the negotiating table.

But U.S. domestic politics and Israeli intransigence cannot be allowed to stand in the way of Palestinians’ right to a future with a decent quality of life and opportunities similar to those living in unoccupied countries. Thus, in the absence of productive negotiations, the time has come for Palestinians to bypass the United States and Israel and to seek direct international endorsement of statehood at the United Nations. They will be fully supported in doing so by Saudi Arabia, other Arab nations and the vast majority of the international community — all those who favor a just outcome to this stalemate and a stable Middle East.

Obama has criticized this plan as Palestinian “efforts to delegitimize Israel” and suggested that these “symbolic actions to isolate” Israel would end in failure. But why should Palestinians not be granted the same rights the United Nations accorded to the state of Israel at its creation in 1947? The president must realize that the Arab world will no longer allow Palestinians to be delegitimized by Israeli actions to restrict their movements, choke off their economy and destroy their homes. Saudi Arabia will not stand by while Washington and Israel bicker endlessly about their intentions, fail to advance their plans and then seek to undermine a legitimate Palestinian presence on the international stage.

As the main political and financial supporter of the Palestinian quest for self-determination, Saudi Arabia holds an especially strong position. The kingdom's wealth, steady growth and stability have made it the bulwark of the Middle East. As the cradle of Islam, it is able to symbolically unite most Muslims worldwide. In September, the kingdom will use its considerable diplomatic might to support the Palestinians in their quest for international recognition. American leaders have long called Israel an "indispensable" ally. They will soon learn that there are other players in the region — not least the Arab street — who are as, if not more, "indispensable." The game of favoritism toward Israel has not proven wise for Washington, and soon it will be shown to be an even greater folly.

Commentators have long speculated about the demise of Saudi Arabia as a regional powerhouse. They have been sorely disappointed. Similarly, history will prove wrong those who imagine that the future of Palestine will be determined by the United States and Israel. There will be disastrous consequences for U.S.-Saudi relations if the United States vetoes U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state. It would mark a nadir in the decades-long relationship as well as irrevocably damage the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and America's reputation among Arab nations. The ideological distance between the Muslim world and the West in general would widen — and opportunities for friendship and cooperation between the two could vanish.

We Arabs used to say no to peace, and we got our comeuppance in 1967. In 2002 King Abdullah offered what has become the Arab Peace Initiative. Based on U.N. Security Council Resolution 242, it calls for an end to the conflict based on land for peace. The Israelis withdraw from all occupied lands, including East Jerusalem, reach a mutually agreed solution to the Palestinian refugees and recognize the Palestinian state. In return, they will get full diplomatic recognition from the Arab world and all the Muslim states, an end to hostilities and normal relations with all these states.

Now, it is the Israelis who are saying no. I'd hate to be around when they face their comeuppance.

